

polls. I am not preventing access to tools everyone else has because that is not even what my colleagues are asking for. Not only do I realize that Puerto Ricans are American citizens, I believe the people of Puerto Rico are valuable and cherished fellow Americans, not political pawns.

In closing, while others may wish to engage in political dart-throwing exercises, I am not interested, and I believe it is a disservice to the people of Puerto Rico, who deserve our continued efforts. I intend to continue working with anyone who wants to work with me to arrive at tools, support, and assistance that will help the people of Puerto Rico—not particular politicians or interest groups here or on the island. My goal, and the goal of anyone who wants to keep working with me or join me anew, is simple: help the people of Puerto Rico and help get Puerto Rico on a path to fiscal sustainability, economic growth and stability, and greater efficiency in government.

We can do it. I am dedicated to doing it, and we have given them the benefits so they can carry this over until the end of February, maybe into March, while we try to work on what it really should be, a very good resolution of these problems. In the meantime, I hope Puerto Rico will get us their financials—their audited financials. That would be of great help to us. We have given some time here now because it was impossible to put together a major bill on this matter and have everybody support it. So we have given time, we think we can get this done, and I intend to get it done one way or another the best we possibly can so Puerto Rico isn't just helped, it will be helped to go into the future, and Puerto Ricans who have had to leave that territory for jobs will want to return and be members of the citizenry of Puerto Rico again.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PERDUE). The Senator from Maryland.

THANKING SENATOR HATCH

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, while Senator HATCH is still on the floor, I thank and congratulate him on his work with regard to the tax provisions we just voted on. I am a proud member of the Senate Finance Committee. Senator WYDEN and Senator HATCH, working together in the best tradition of the Senate, were able to bring out an incredibly important bill that will add predictability to our Tax Code and to provide, I think, the right incentives for growth.

I thank the Senator for the work, and I am proud to serve on the Finance Committee.

Mr. HATCH. If the Senator will yield for a comment.

Mr. CARDIN. I am pleased to yield to my friend.

Mr. HATCH. I thank the Senator. He is one of the really good people in this body. I am so grateful he is on the Sen-

ate Finance Committee. We have a lot of good people in this body, but the Senator from Maryland is one of my favorite people. He works hard, he is very articulate, he is very intelligent, and although he is too liberal for me, he works hand-in-glove with the rest of us on the committee to make things work. Frankly, if I were from Maryland, I would probably be as liberal as he is. All I can say is that he is a great man to work with, he is a great man in the Senate, and I happen to care a great deal for him.

Mr. CARDIN. Once again, I thank my friend from Utah. We share a lot of the same objectives for a strong nation and moving our country forward. I think that is reflected in the bill we just voted on, the Omnibus appropriations bill.

150TH ANNIVERSARY OF TOWSON UNIVERSITY

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, before I talk about the Omnibus appropriations, I note that just a few minutes ago the Senate approved the resolution for the 150th anniversary of Towson University. I must admit I have a direct interest in Towson. My mother graduated from Towson University. My wife Myrna graduated from Towson University, and Myrna today is the chair of the board of visitors of Towson University.

It is a great institution. It started as the primary institution for educating our teachers and now has expanded to be one of the great universities in our State, attracting students from the entire university in a variety of programs.

We are very proud of its 150-year history and we know it has a very bright future.

OMNIBUS LEGISLATION

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, I wish to talk for a few minutes about the Omnibus appropriations bill and tax bills that we just passed. I am very proud to have supported it. We have finally passed a budget for this year, giving predictability to our agencies and providing predictability for those who depend upon the government as a partner or for services.

The alternative would have been another continuing resolution, which freezes in last year's priorities at last year's level. Now we have elevated appropriations with this year's priorities. The other alternative could have been sequestration, which is mindless, across-the-board cuts, saying that every priority in government is the same—when it is not.

We have avoided the worst consequence, that is, a government shutdown that we have seen happen in the past. So we should be very pleased the political system has worked and we have been able to pass a full-year appropriations bill with current priorities at a reasonable level.

I am also pleased we were able to pass the tax legislation Chairman HATCH talked about. The alternative to that would have been another short-term extension of the expiring tax provisions. We saw last year that we did that with 2 weeks remaining in the year, and it expired on December 31, 2 weeks later. Now we have given—many of the permanent provisions give long-term predictability, and we have even approved the tax provisions to make them more efficient. That is good news.

Then we have acted on many important issues from dealing with the extension of benefits to the first responders, to the attack on our country on September 11, to the extension of reform of the IMF—International Monetary Fund—to authorizing some very important programs, including the Land and Water Conservation Fund, a 3-year authorization that provides \$450 million in this year, \$144 million above current appropriations. That is all good news, and we list many more important accomplishments in this important legislation.

I must tell you there are some disappointments. One of the major disappointments is that we didn't follow regular order. It would have been much better to pass each of the appropriations bills, to have the tax bill considered as an independent bill, and have these other issues—and to have done it in an orderly way rather than looking at it December 18. So I would hope that in the future we will return to regular order, where we have, I think, a better chance of improving legislation with participation from all Members.

Secondly, I was very disappointed that included in this legislation was the lifting of the ban on oil exports, energy exports. The reason I am so upset about that is I think that should have been a separate issue. It should have been taken up in consideration with the energy policies of America, our environmental policies of America, our environmental policies, the economic impact, and the security impact. We should have had a chance to debate that issue as a separate issue. It is far too important to our energy security and our energy policy in this country.

Another concern I have—and let me point this out—I supported the package. I supported the tax provisions. The tax provisions will be scored as losing \$680 billion over the next 10 years. I think that is somewhat misleading. I am going to be perfectly blunt about it. If you take out existing policy—this is the current policy in our Tax Code—that actually costs us about 10 percent of that \$680 billion, but that is still a substantial amount of money. I think it would have been far better to deal with these issues in a long-term budget agreement that dealt with the revenue needs of our country, dealt with our discretionary spending targets moving forward, as well as mandatory spending. That is what we should do rather than taking this up in piecemeal and now making it a little more difficult

because the revenue projections are going to be less than they were before.

On the Omnibus Appropriations Act, on the Democratic side, I thank my colleague from Maryland, Senator MIKULSKI. What a great job she did on our side; THAD COCHRAN on the Republican side. Senator MIKULSKI is my seat mate. She is my colleague from Maryland. We are so proud that we have given you one of the great leaders in the Senate, and that was demonstrated on the Omnibus appropriations bill that we voted on just a little while ago.

From my State of Maryland, we are particularly pleased that so many of the military installations and Federal agencies that are in our State will get the resources—the predictable resources—to carry out their very important mission. We are proud of the role Maryland plays in our national defense with military installations such as from Fort Meade to Fort Detrick, from Aberdeen Proving Ground to Patuxent River, Andrews to Indian Head, Walter Reed naval. We have major facilities located in our State and now they will have a predictable budget to carry out their critically important mission of national defense.

On the civilian side, we have many important agencies located in our State that now will have the resources they need in order to carry out their mission. I could mention so many, but if I might, the Census Bureau will get a \$282 million increase in their budget to start planning for the next census. NIH will get a \$2 billion increase. That is the largest increase they have received since 2003. The work they do is lifesaving. The appropriations bill will save lives in the United States and around the world and will create jobs because, as we know, the basic research done at NIH is so critically important to our economic growth.

I am pleased that in Woodlawn, in Baltimore, the Social Security Administration will get \$150 million for badly needed renovations of their facilities. That is important for them to carry out their critical role of providing the administration of the Social Security Act for our seniors, for our disabled, and for those who depend upon the Social Security Administration.

There are so many areas I could talk about. The victims of domestic violence will receive the resources they need to carry out our commitment of the law we passed. There are certain challenges we have in our community. The heroin epidemic is affecting every State in our country, and this appropriations act will provide resources to deal with that. I am particularly pleased that in dealing with drug issues, the high-intensity drug-trafficking area, the Baltimore-Washington corridor will receive the resources they need in order to deal with the challenges.

Our Nation's infrastructure benefits from this legislation. I am particularly pleased that Metro in the Washington area will receive the next installment

of the \$150 million that is a part of the \$1.5 billion commitment, legislation I authored with the help of our regional colleagues. That commitment will stand firm.

We know the Washington metropolitan transit system is the Nation's transit system, and so many of our Federal workers depend upon it in order to be able to get to work. Amtrak, \$1.4 billion, is critically important to the entire country. We are particularly dependent upon Amtrak in the Northeast. The Baltimore Harbor will receive significant support. Those are jobs maintaining our harbor. Poplar Island, which is one of the environmentally friendly dredge sites, will get \$26.5 million.

I have spoken on the floor many times to talk about the Chesapeake Bay and the Federal partnership with the Chesapeake Bay. I was in the State legislature when we started their program, and \$73 million is going to be directly appropriated as the Federal portion for the Chesapeake Bay Program. There are additional funds, such as \$2.2 million, for the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail.

There is \$1.97 million for Chesapeake Bay oyster recovery, \$2 million for the Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Watertrails Network. So there are resources here that carry out the Federal Government's commitment. Every President in recent times has acknowledged that the Chesapeake Bay is a national treasure, the largest estuary in our hemisphere, and these funds will help live up to the commitment.

I am particularly pleased that under agriculture, the Regional Conservation Partnership Program that we started last year under the leadership of Senator STABENOW is funded. The Chesapeake Bay region will receive funds under that program to help in our efforts for preserving the Chesapeake Bay.

In the western part of my State, the Appalachian Regional Commission is critically important for economic growth. They receive an additional \$56 million of funds. To me, that is extremely important for the development in the rural part of my State in western Maryland.

During the passage of the Affordable Care Act, I authored and was pleased to see that we established a National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities at NIH. It acknowledged the fact that we have not done historically everything we need to do to deal with the disparities in our health care system. This year we are appropriating an additional \$9 million to the Institute. I think that continues our commitment to make sure that we deal with all Americans' health needs.

Last year, I brought before the Congress a request that we do something to deal with the Holocaust survivors who are still alive and in the United States. They are at a very delicate age and very fearful of being institutionalized. This budget provides \$2.5 million

to deal with that vulnerable population.

I have been a strong supporter of—and at one time I chaired—the Maryland Legal Services Corporation. I have been urging us to try to stop falling behind in our commitment for the Legal Services Corporation. More and more people are being denied access to our legal system because of the failure of Congress to appropriate adequate funds. I am very pleased that in this budget an extra \$10 million is appropriated to the Legal Services Corporation.

I think my colleagues are aware of the challenges we have had in Baltimore. I am very pleased that the Obama administration, through its agencies, has made resources available to Baltimore and other urban centers to deal with opportunity for all communities and to restore the confidence between law enforcement and community. This budget moves forward on those commitments—from body cameras for police to helping law enforcement deal with ending racial profiling, to the Byrne grant funds—and over \$476 million is available. And community and youth opportunities are in this budget as well. The Byrne grant was one-half billion dollars. As to community youth opportunities, this is a budget that will help us deal with the problems in our urban centers.

I have taken the floor on several occasions to talk about our Federal workforce and how our Federal workforce has made incredible sacrifices during these tough budget years. Although they didn't cause the deficit, they have been called upon over and over to contribute by being denied pay raises, by being asked to pay more for their pension, by being asked to carry on more responsibilities with less personnel.

This budget is a reprieve from the past budgets. There is no punitive action against our Federal workforce, and I am pleased for that. It provides a modest pay adjustment of 1.3 percent. It provides protection on the data breach that occurred under the cyber attack that affected our Federal workforce—protection for 10 years with a \$5 million protection. That is within this budget act as well. And we give them more resources and more personnel to support and carry out their mission.

On the national security front, I have already talked about the support for our military installations. I am particularly pleased that the FBI will receive a \$390 million downpayment on a consolidated facility. The FBI today is located in 30 different facilities, and their main headquarters, the Hoover Building, is not adequate to meet the challenges they have today. All of us have expressed our concern about homeland security, about homegrown radicalization of our population. The FBI needs the facilities in order to keep the homeland safe and keep us safe. This is a \$390 million downpayment on a fully consolidated facility for the FBI.

A few weeks ago I wrote a letter with 27 of our colleagues to our leadership, urging them that this Omnibus appropriations bill should not be the place for so-called policy riders. I heard Senator MIKULSKI talk about it during her comments. We were concerned that we were trying to legislate on an appropriation bill without the authorizing committees doing the work they are supposed to do. I am very pleased that most of these riders were excluded. So we are not going to be talking about potentially damaging provisions that could have been included in here—from restricting Planned Parenthood to affecting the clean water of this Nation, to affecting the ability of America to respond to the challenges of climate change, to dealing with protection of our workforce through labor laws, to public safety with restrictions that could have been put on gun safety legislation, to dealing with our refugees. All those areas and many more were subject to policy riders that could have been included in this omnibus budget but were not.

On the tax front, I have already thanked Senator WYDEN and Senator HATCH. I am very pleased that we were able to do some very important things in the tax provisions. We got renewable fuels for wind and solar extended and improved, particularly for solar. I think this will make a huge difference. But let me just quote from the Bloomberg New Energy Finance, or BNEF, report.

In the short term, the deal will speed up the shift from fossil fuels more than the global climate deal struck this month in Paris, and more than [the] Clean Power Plan that regulates coal plants. . . . This is exactly the sort of bridge the industry needed. The costs of installing wind and solar power have dropped precipitously. . . . By the time the new tax credit expires, solar and wind will be the cheapest forms of new electricity in many States across the U.S.

So these are significant. Am I satisfied? No. I would like to see them stronger, particularly wind. I thought wind could have been stronger. But I think we have made significant progress in dealing with renewables, which is what we have to do from the point of energy security, as well as our environment and as well as our economy. Having a more diversified energy portfolio and being more energy secure will help our environment, will help our economy, and will help our national security.

On the tax side, I was very pleased that we were able to make permanent several of the tax provisions that are critically important to families in the United States. We were able to make the child tax credit permanent, the earned-income tax credit permanent, and the American opportunity tax credit for higher education costs permanent.

Transit parity. Transit parity is where those—particularly Federal workers—who use the transit system to come to work don't bring their cars. We subsidize greatly the parking lots

and the ability of people to bring cars to work. When they take transit, they are helping us, and we have now made permanent the full limit on deductibility of the transit benefits. So that is a major step forward. I am very pleased that we were able to make that permanent. I thank Senator SCHUMER who took the lead on that, and I was proud to work with him on that.

The low-income housing tax credit improvements that allow it to be more effective in its use were made permanent. Conservation needs were made permanent, and the S corporation improvements, which help small businesses, were made permanent. There is a lot here that we don't have to worry about this next December or two Decembers from now or even five Decembers from now, saying: Gee, are they going to expire?

Now, we do have some success from 5-year reauthorizations. That does give us predictability and allows us to move forward. The new markets tax credits are extended for 5 years. The new market tax credits have been critically important for development in my State of Maryland. I could take you to East Baltimore where you see redevelopment occurring. The new markets tax credits are responsible for that. I could take you to Maryland, close to here, in Prince George's County and Montgomery County, and to the work they are doing there. So these are very important tools that help create jobs, and we now have more predictability.

Then we have the 2-year extenders, including the energy efficiency that I led the effort on.

So the bottom line is we now have much greater predictability.

Let me comment just very briefly as the ranking member on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. I am certainly pleased, when we look at the budget that has been brought forward and passed now, for our foreign development assistance. I am pleased that we have the support for Israel included in this package and the economic aid for Ukraine.

As to refugee assistance, one of the great humanitarian crises of our time, funds are in here for the United States to work with our international partners to provide for refugee assistance.

There are many anti-corruption initiatives. There is \$2.5 billion in this budget for good governance and to advance human rights globally—a high priority of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, working with Senator CORKER. The two of us are working very closely together to make it clear that we won't tolerate corruption and that we will continue to work as countries develop good governance and respect for human rights.

As I said earlier, on the overall plan there are a couple issues in this budget that I am very disappointed about. One is the Visa Waiver Program, the discriminatory provisions against dual citizens. I don't think it has anything to do with safety. I don't think we are

safer because we are going to make dual citizens go through a separate process. And it will cause, I think, actions by our allies that will be counterproductive to Americans and could have some unintended consequences. That shouldn't have been in this legislation.

I also think the restrictions on the closing of Guantanamo Bay are misguided. Guantanamo Bay should have been closed a long time ago, and I regret that those restrictions are continuing in place.

The bottom line is that I am very proud that we passed the omnibus bill. I supported it enthusiastically. I think it represents a compromise of the political balance of our Nation. We have resolved many policy challenges. We provided predictability to our agencies and predictability to policies that help private investment and our economy grow. It advances a cleaner environment, security of our homeland, education and welfare of our citizens, Americans' ability to compete globally.

It deserves our support, and I am glad to see that it was passed. Shortly, it will be signed by the President and will be the law of this land.

I note there are other colleagues here. So let me just very briefly ask to speak on a different issue.

NOMINATIONS

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, earlier today I took the floor. Senator CRUZ was here, and he raised an objection to a unanimous consent request that I had not yet made. I am not going to make that unanimous consent request, but I am going to mention, as the ranking member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee—and our Presiding Officer is one of the distinguished members of the committee—that there are 14 nominations that have been approved by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, some a long time ago, by unanimous vote. These are not controversial nominations. Each of the individuals is well qualified for the position. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee, under the leadership of Senator CORKER, reported these nominations out in a very timely way. Each of those in their own position is critically important to our national security. Having a confirmed ambassador in a country is critically important to our national security. Having the No. 4 person at the State Department confirmed is critically important in negotiating security issues.

It is our responsibility to take these nominees up and to act on them and to confirm them so that we can have confirmed positions.

I will just mention a few. As I said, I had given notice that I would ask unanimous consent, and Senator CRUZ indicated that he would object and actually came to the floor to object. But we have to get this done. The reason we are not voting has nothing to do