

I look forward to its passing in the House as part of the funding bill, and I hope the Senate will do the same before the end of the week.

TRIBUTE TO THAD COCHRAN

Madam President, I close by saying a few words about our friend and trusted colleague, the senior Senator from Mississippi, THAD COCHRAN, who has announced his retirement from the Senate. I know the real tributes are about to kick off in a minute when the majority leader comes out, but since I am up here, I thought I would take the opportunity to say a few words.

Senator COCHRAN has represented the State of Mississippi in the U.S. Senate since 1978. He is one of the longest serving Members of Congress in the history of the United States. His career and his life speak for themselves.

He is the son of a school principal and math teacher. Not surprisingly, he was a gifted high school athlete. He is a piano player and a former college yell leader. Yes, even like me, he is a recovering lawyer, but we will not hold that against him.

Before he joined Congress, he served in the U.S. Navy because he loves this country and the opportunities it has afforded him and his family. He is a man with a strong sense of duty and gratitude for the opportunities he has been given in life. After ROTC at the University of Mississippi, he received orders to join the USS *Macon*, and after that he joined the staff of the Navy commandant in New Orleans. Later, he ran for public office. He first served in the House of Representatives. He then, of course, came here to the Senate, where he quickly established himself as a cordial but formidable presence.

Before I came to the Senate, Senator COCHRAN was chairman of the Senate Republican Conference. He has chaired the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee too. Most recently, he has alternated between serving as ranking member and chairman of the all-powerful Appropriations Committee.

Throughout his 45 years in Congress, he has participated in crafting and enacting historic legislation, but his main focus has always been on the people of Mississippi. His highest priority has always been on the men and women he was elected to represent in places like Jackson, Gulfport, Greenville, Starkville, and Hattiesburg. One example is when he fought so hard for recovery funding after Hurricane Katrina had destroyed large swaths of the southern part of Mississippi. Many people forget that that awful storm was much bigger than New Orleans'. Mississippi was hit almost equally as hard, and Senator COCHRAN made sure his State got the help it needed to get back on its feet.

His storied career is one of service and collegiality even amidst the fractious debates. He treats friends and political adversaries with respect. He listens to what people have to say. We need more people like that in public life.

The majority leader has called him the "quiet persuader," one who knows "there's a big difference between making a fuss and making a difference."

Judge E. Grady Jolly, of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, who has known Senator COCHRAN as long as anyone, said that back home, he is known for his "modesty and his retiring nature"—not attributes you would normally associate with somebody in politics, but he is a class act. He is also known for the consistent attention he has paid to the Mississippi Delta—one of the poorest regions in the Nation's poorest State. The judge calls Senator COCHRAN the "ultimate model of sincerity," one who "never engages in ad hominem or personal attacks" and always "keeps a sense of humor about himself."

My office spoke to one Mississippi resident this week because we wanted to learn a little bit more about what Senator COCHRAN has meant to her. That woman, who had met Senator COCHRAN only a handful of times, said she had always respected and admired Senator COCHRAN's statesmanship and the dignity with which he represented Mississippi. Her comments are a good note to end on—statesmanship and dignity. Those traits never go out of style.

I know I speak for my other colleagues—and they will speak for themselves—when we all say thank you to THAD COCHRAN for setting a higher standard for the Members of this body. The U.S. Senate will not be the same without him.

KENNEDY-KING NATIONAL
COMMEMORATIVE SITE ACT

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of H.R. 4851, which was received from the House.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The bill clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 4851) to establish the Kennedy-King National Commemorative Site in the State of Indiana, and for other purposes.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Young amendment at the desk be agreed to; the bill, as amended, be considered read a third time and passed; and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The amendment (No. 2215) was agreed to, as follows:

(Purpose: To strike a provision relating to a special resource study)

In section 3, strike subsection (d).

The amendment was ordered to be engrossed and the bill to be read a third time.

The bill was read the third time.

The bill (H.R. 4851), as amended, was passed.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2018—MOTION TO PROCEED—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

TRIBUTES TO THAD COCHRAN

Mr. ALEXANDER. Madam President, I rise to say a word about my friend THAD COCHRAN, who is retiring from the U.S. Senate.

In 1968, I had the job of recruiting State chairman for Citizens for Nixon-Agnew. I was a very young, wet-behind-the-ears former legislative assistant to Senator Howard Baker. We were working in the Willard Hotel in the fall of 1968. The idea was to try to find outstanding citizens who weren't necessarily Republicans because in the southern part of our country, there weren't a lot of Republicans, especially in the State of Mississippi.

So I called around the State of Mississippi to find out who might be willing to head up this Nixon-Agnew campaign. Everybody I called said: Well, there are two young men here who are just the most outstanding young men, both are cheerleaders at Ole Miss, or had been, and both are going to grow up to be the Governor of Mississippi, which was, at that time, I guess, the nicest thing one could say about some aspiring young man because nobody thought the two U.S. Senators, Eastland and Stennis, would ever retire. So growing up to be the Governor of Mississippi was really a great compliment to a young man in Mississippi at the time. One of those young men was named Trent Lott, and one of those young men was named THAD COCHRAN.

I telephoned THAD COCHRAN, and I invited him to become chairman of the Citizens for Nixon-Agnew. He was a Democrat, but he agreed to do that. We met in October of that year in Indianapolis. The mayor of Indianapolis then was Richard Lugar, a young mayor at that time and later a Member of this body. That was the beginning of THAD COCHRAN's Republican Party activity.

He and that other young man—who were so promising—both ran for U.S. Congress in 1972, and to the surprise of a great many people, they were elected, the first Republicans since Reconstruction, I suppose, from Mississippi—THAD COCHRAN and Trent Lott.

In 1978, THAD COCHRAN did something nobody had done from his State since the Reconstruction; he became a Republican who was elected to the U.S. Senate, and he has been here ever since.

The reason he was able to be successful is not surprising. THAD was and is an engaging, pleasant person. His parents were educators. He learned to play the piano. He was a terrific baseball player—good enough to play professional baseball. He joined the Navy. He was, in every respect, an outstanding young man, just as he has been a distinguished public servant throughout his life.

He has been widely respected here by his colleagues, elected to be chairman of the Republican conference, and most recently he has been chairman of the Appropriations Committee, which is as important as any position in this body.

In an era where not everybody seems to think it is important to act like a gentleman, THAD COCHRAN is a gentleman, and we respect that and the example he has set.

So he has been a pioneer for the Republican Party, he has been a good example for young people, and for all of us, really, in terms of what we should expect and try to emulate in public life, and, to me, he has been a great friend.

So my wife Honey and I would like to say to him and to Kay, his wife, that we respect him, we look forward to the next chapter in his life, and we honor his service to this country.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Mississippi.

Mr. WICKER. Madam President, I, too, wish to join my colleagues in a tribute to our retiring statesman, Senator THAD COCHRAN.

First of all, I have been asked by Phyllis J. Anderson, Tribal Chief of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, to have printed in the RECORD a proclamation that was adopted only recently about Senator COCHRAN in appreciation for his 46 years of public service as a Member of the House and of the Senate, and I ask unanimous consent that the proclamation be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

MISSISSIPPI BAND OF CHOCTAW INDIANS

A TRIBAL PROCLAMATION IN RECOGNITION AND APPRECIATION OF THE HONORABLE THAD COCHRAN—MARCH 2018

WHEREAS, the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians recognizes and honors The Honorable Thad Cochran for his 46 years of dedicated public service as a Member of the U.S. House of Representatives and distinguished U.S. Senator representing the State of Mississippi, including Choctaw citizens of our great Tribe; and,

WHEREAS, Senator Cochran has faithfully served, as both Chairman and Member, on Committees important to Mississippi and to the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, including the Committees on Appropriations, Indian Affairs, Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry, Judiciary, Rules and Administration, Ethics and the Labor and Human Resources; and,

WHEREAS, Senator Cochran has achieved a wide-ranging legislative record and valuable legacy that reflects the needs of Mississippi, the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, and the nation.

WHEREAS, Senator Cochran's work has helped to create jobs and spur economic growth in Mississippi and has continuously supported tribal sovereignty and self-determination which has contributed to the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians being one of the largest employers in our State; and,

WHEREAS, Senator Cochran's work has also promoted progress in our nation's rural communities, including on our nation's Indian reservations, through various programs for economic and educational development teacher training, vocational education, li-

braries, university-based research and development, conservation of the environment and our wetlands, forestry, health care and criminal justice; and,

WHEREAS, Senator Cochran, who also served in the U.S. Navy, has worked to protect the U.S. Armed Forces and our men and women in uniform, as well the Navy's ship-building programs and military bases and installations in Mississippi. Now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that I, Phyllis J. Anderson, by the authority vested in me as Tribal Chief, do hereby honor the legacy of the Honorable Thad Cochran and extend the sincere gratitude, appreciation, and many blessings of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians to Senator Cochran upon his retirement after five decades of public service in the U.S. Navy, U.S. House of Representatives and U.S. Senate.

PHYLLIS J. ANDERSON,
Tribal Chief, Mississippi Band
of Choctaw Indians.

Mr. WICKER. Madam President, I would note that the last paragraph of this document says: "Resolved, that I, Phyllis J. Anderson, by the authority vested in me as Tribal Chief, do hereby honor the legacy of the Honorable THAD COCHRAN and extend sincere gratitude, appreciation, and many blessings of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians to Senator COCHRAN upon his retirement after five decades of public service in the U.S. Navy, U.S. House of Representatives and U.S. Senate.

Signed by Phyllis J. Anderson, Tribal Chief.

Back in December of 1937, THAD COCHRAN was born in the little town of Pontotoc, MS, population 1,832. He was born in the delivery room of the Rayburn Clinic. Some 13½ years later, I was born in the delivery room of the Rayburn Clinic in Pontotoc, MS.

During the campaign, some years later in 1994, when I was first trying to be a Member of the House of Representatives, Senator THAD COCHRAN and I went around the northern part of the State and told many people that he and I were born not only in the same town and not only in the same clinic but born in the same room, the delivery room of the Rayburn Clinic. We thought that was the truth. As it turned out, we found out later from our moms, the Rayburn Clinic had moved down the street; so while we were both born in the delivery room of Rayburn Clinic, that clinic itself had moved. It just points out how long Senator THAD COCHRAN and I have been friends and how long our families have been friends and how well associated we have been down through the years.

Senator ALEXANDER mentioned that campaign in 1968, and then he mentioned that he was a candidate for Congress successfully in 1972. I was honored, as a college student, to go door-to-door for Senator COCHRAN during that 1972 campaign.

Yesterday was National Poetry Day. Perhaps it is appropriate for me, today, to quote a couple of poets, the first being Henry Wadsworth Longfellow who said:

Lives of great men all remind us

We can make our lives sublime;
And departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time.

As THAD COCHRAN departs the Senate in a few days, I think it is appropriate for us to reflect, as my friend from Tennessee and my friend from Texas have already done, and as others will do, about the great footprints Senator THAD COCHRAN will have left in the sands of time for our Nation.

Because of THAD COCHRAN, our Nation's defense is stronger today.

Because of the efforts of our colleague from Mississippi, my senior Senator, Americans are healthier today and will continue to be healthier.

American agriculture is stronger today because of the efforts of this "quiet persuader" in the field of agriculture; and our economy, as a whole, is stronger because of the many efforts of Senator THAD COCHRAN and before that, Representative THAD COCHRAN in the U.S. House.

I am just very grateful. We are all grateful for all he has done.

Senator COCHRAN acknowledged in his statement about his impending retirement that health had become an issue for him, and it was time to move on.

I told reporters and I told Members who asked me—I said it is a bitter-sweet moment, it is a poignant moment for me to hear such things. These sorts of things happen, and we all face health issues at some point.

Alfred Lord Tennyson, in his magnificent poem "Ulysses," said:

Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'
We are not now that strength which in old
days

Moved earth and heaven; that which we are,
we are;

One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in
will

To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

I say to my friend THAD that we appreciate the fact that he has been strong in will and, though time and fate have happened to THAD COCHRAN and will happen to me and to all of us, what abides is the legacy he has left of being a "quiet persuader," of being a person of accomplishment, of being a gentleman who has made this country and its citizens better off, and I thank him.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SULLIVAN). The majority leader.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, when I learned that our distinguished colleague from Mississippi would be retiring this month, I found it difficult to imagine the Senate without him.

That is for good reason. THAD COCHRAN arrived here in 1978. Two hundred and fifty-four Senators have since followed in his footsteps. Of those currently serving, 97 of us are newer at this than THAD is, and every single one of us has been treated to a first-rate example of honorable service, a master class in the art of legislation, and living proof that unwavering principle

and unflappable collegiality can and should coexist.

We all know THAD has a knack for making things look easy. So many graces and talents seem second nature to him, but appearances can be deceiving.

Take the start of his political career. When we think about it, it is only natural that Senator COCHRAN liked to work on conservation issues. I expect his adventures as a Mississippi Republican in the early 1970s helped him understand just what it feels like to be an endangered species.

In 1972, THAD was a rising-star attorney when he was asked to try and become just the second GOP Congressman from his State since Reconstruction. The possibility seemed so remote that when he asked Rose how she would like being married to a Congressman, she replied, "I don't know—which one?"

Long odds, indeed.

But true to form, THAD won in the end—and again and again—and then he became the first Republican Senator from Mississippi in a century.

It is safe to say service is in THAD's DNA. Both his parents were devoted educators. His father, W.H., served as superintendent of a large, rural public school district. His mother Emma was a pioneering mathematics teacher who wrote new curricula.

In Pontotoc, MS, their two boys grew up with a healthy appreciation for the power of good schooling.

THAD graduated as high school valedictorian, then came a naval commission, and then law school, where he graduated at the top of his class, but no amount of success can take the kindness and courtesy out of this quintessentially southern gentleman. A deep respect for others is THAD's calling card.

Just a few weeks after he arrived in Washington, he brought his staff together and he said:

We're going to treat everyone the same. We're here to find answers for everyone, even if they disagree with us. We're here to serve the people of Mississippi.

Even at a time when the wounds of segregation were still raw, he made it clear this meant all—all—Mississippians. In fact, he hired the first African-American congressional staffer to work in a Mississippi office since reconstruction—Nehemiah Flowers. And for all his staff, THAD took the time to pen a detailed memo laying out high expectations for serving constituents and treating everyone with dignity. That temperament led to a litany of accomplishments.

Mississippians knew that in THAD they had a quiet persuader, a steady workhorse, and a dogged advocate who almost never made a fuss but almost always made a difference. Indeed, the policy achievements of this mighty Appropriations chairman are so numerous as to defy easy summary.

I know this schoolteacher's son is particularly proud of his work on edu-

cation. Senator COCHRAN carried the banner for research partnerships that raised the profile of historically Black colleges and universities. He delivered critical funding to expand scholarship access. He spearheaded the Delta Education Initiative. He inspired the Cochran Fellowship Program, which has changed the lives of more than 17,000 agriculture professionals from around the world.

It is no exaggeration to say that THAD COCHRAN's work has broadened the horizons of millions, but it didn't stop there. There were the landmark bipartisan bills, like the Cochran-Inouye National Missile Defense Act. There is his partnership with his dear friend, Senator LEAHY, on the Farm to School Program. The list just keeps growing.

When he first ran for the Senate in 1978, THAD's stump speech included a line that Mississippians deserved a Senator who would work full-time for them. They certainly got one. THAD didn't come to Washington to curry favor, win praise, or hog the limelight. When I say he preferred making a difference to making a fuss, I really mean it. This man served in the Senate for seven terms and only appeared on Meet the Press twice.

No, THAD had other business to attend to. He spent his 39 years in this body working full-time for students and educators, full-time for farmers and ranchers, full-time to deliver funding for our brave servicemembers and our veterans who returned home.

It is rare, even in the halls of Government, to meet someone as influential as Senator THAD COCHRAN. It is even rarer to meet someone as kind, as even tempered, and as concerned for the welfare of others. It is almost unheard of that this same man would be both. That is just who THAD is.

He wrote the book on composure under pressure. He served as the careful custodian of billions of taxpayer dollars without losing an ounce of humility. On the Senate floor and in committee, he tackled heated debates and complicated legislative challenges with true servant leadership. On the tennis court, by all accounts, he offered his colleagues a different and altogether less hospitable sort of service. But true to form, I hear THAD always combined winning and graciousness. He has certainly had enough practice at both.

From Pontotoc, MS, to the Senate floor, THAD COCHRAN's story has grown but it hasn't changed. It is a story about putting others first. It is about doing the right thing every step of the way. It is a story that will continue to teach and inspire those of us who now must carry on our work without him.

I know that THAD's devoted staff are sorry to see him go. Their allegiance to him, famous throughout the Senate, is further testimony to his own principled professionalism. This is exemplified by nobody quite so well as Doris Wagley, Senator COCHRAN's personal secretary, who has served THAD ever since 1973,

when he was first sworn in as a Congressman. She planned to take the job for just a year or so and then reassess—enough said. She, along with all of Senator COCHRAN's excellent staff, has our admiration and our gratitude.

I would particularly like to thank two men who have led teams in service to Mississippi and Senator COCHRAN so well—Brad White, his chief of staff, and Bruce Evans, his longtime staff director on the Appropriations Committee. I am grateful for their hard work on behalf of the Senate. I know the early mornings and late nights were many, including just these last few weeks.

THAD's friends know that retirement will allow him more happy times with his wife Kay, his beloved children, Clayton and Kate, and the three grandchildren he adores. He departs with our warmest wishes.

We will miss our great persuader. We will miss our loyal friend. We stand with Mississippians and a grateful nation in honoring the service of Senator THAD COCHRAN.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I thank the distinguished majority leader and the distinguished other Senator from Mississippi for their comments.

I have often thought that THAD COCHRAN and I would serve here together straight through whatever time we have in the Senate. Because he is such a dear friend, I have often felt that Senator THAD COCHRAN was plucked from a central casting to fill the role of a devoted public servant. More than most of us, he looks the part, but more than most of us, he embodies the best of what the Senate can be. Currently, in this body, I have served longer here than anybody else, but I have never felt closer to a Senator than I do to THAD COCHRAN, my dear friend.

Our country needs more public servants like THAD. As Congress has become more partisan in recent years, THAD has stood by his values. He brings substance, not sound-bites, to the upper Chamber. His leadership, as has been described, as "the quiet persuader" is going to be missed.

They talk about his being the son of a schoolteacher. So it is no shock that he devoted his life to public service. He joined the Navy after graduating from Ole Miss. He went on to earn a law degree from the University of Mississippi and then became engaged in Mississippi politics, often traveling with his father to help with voter registrations in campaigns around the State. He worked on campaigns from county sheriff to the Governor's race.

THAD then went to the House in 1972—here to Washington, a couple years ahead of me—and then we became Senate partners in 1978.

He and I both became chairmen of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry. Today in the committee's hearings room, our official portraits hang together. It is easy to tell them apart. He is the one with the hair and better looking.

Marcelle and I have joined THAD in Mississippi to visit sprawling cotton farms and fish farms, and twice THAD joined me in Vermont to visit small family dairy farmers. I even introduced him to my mother in Montpelier.

Now, I have to make a confession here, and I hope this doesn't go out of this room. It was during one of those trips to Vermont—to St. Johnsbury, VT—in 1985 that I had extolled the beauty of Vermont in the wintertime. When we arrived, I think the southern gentleman was not ready for temperatures that dipped down to around 20 below zero. That is cold weather even by Vermont standards. This wonderful southern gentleman turned to me and he said: PAT, this is not Mississippi weather. Then, he made a few other suggestions of what I was trying to do to him, but we had a wonderful visit just the same. We stayed in what is called the Rabbit Inn, with fireplaces going. The next day at our meetings, I think Vermont was ready to elect THAD COCHRAN as its third Senator, because he was so impressive.

We also traveled beyond Vermont and Mississippi. We met with leaders around the world. As senior Members of the Senate, we could go in a bipartisan way to see what they thought about the United States and to answer their questions. We and our wives became closer in these fact-finding visits. No matter how long the trip was—and some were to the other side of the Earth—THAD, through his conversation and his friendship, made even the longest trip seem short.

In our travels, one of the things I could always count on was that THAD would always check in on the Cochran fellows in whatever country we were in. Starting in 1984, the Cochran Fellowship Program has provided training for more than 17,500 people from 125 different countries to develop agricultural systems and to strengthen trade between our countries. The program also strengthens understanding between the United States and other countries.

THAD is leaving a legacy that is tied to our Nation's agricultural development. When he was chair of the Agriculture Committee, he left his fingerprints on the farm bill, which are still there today. More recently, we championed the reauthorization of the Farm to School Program, which provides Federal resources to bring fresh and nutritious local food from local farmers to more than 40,000 schools across the country, including 83 percent of the schools in Vermont—what a legacy, as the son of a teacher and a great advocate for Mississippi farmers. THAD knows how important this program is to strengthening local farm economies and educating young kids and their families about the importance of eating locally grown and nutritionally dense food. This picture was taken as we were visiting a farm—obviously not when it was 25 below zero. It was probably a warm summer day. So that is why we only have on light sweaters.

Even though we are on the opposite ends of the political spectrum, THAD and I have crossed the aisle to work hand-in-hand for the American people—from our work in the Senate to our work for years as regents at the Smithsonian. In every bill and program on which we have worked, he has been a Senator with integrity, decency, civility, and, most importantly, a dear and cherished friend. THAD will always keep his word, and I tell that to the Senate because that is a quality that is becoming too rare sometimes in both parties. He is old school. Many of us would say the best school.

When I became vice chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, I knew I would have a steadfast partner in Senator COCHRAN. He has earned the moniker of “the quiet persuader.” He was also referred to by one of the members of the Appropriations Committee once—a moniker that should be appreciated—as a workhorse, not a show horse. That is why he has been so successful—the quiet persuader. Well, the quiet persuader, when Hurricane Katrina struck, used his leadership to direct nearly \$100 billion to communities on the gulf coast to rebuild.

THAD will leave this Chamber having cast more than 13,000 votes and becoming the 10th longest serving Senator in the history of our country. A constant champion of Mississippi and the American people, I don't think many people truly understand how much Senator COCHRAN has accomplished for his State and his country.

Marcelle and I count THAD and Kay among our dearest friends. His leadership on the Appropriations Committee in the Senate will be sorely missed. Our country needs more devoted public servants like THAD COCHRAN, and I am sad to see my dear friend leave. But I know his legacy is a presence that will be felt in this Chamber, in Mississippi, and across the country for generations to come. I will enjoy looking at the photographs of my dear friend taken in Vermont, Mississippi, and around the world. He is one of my heroes.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alabama.

Mr. SHELBY. Mr. President, I, too, would like to start by thanking my good friend, Senator THAD COCHRAN, for the tireless dedication and public service he has brought forth here throughout some 40-something years—45 years.

As has been said, he was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives over 45 years ago, and he was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1978. As all of us know, THAD was a practicing attorney in Jackson, MS, and a graduate of the University of Mississippi School of Law. He also studied abroad at Trinity College in Dublin, Ireland, where we visited one time.

We have served together in the U.S. Senate for over 30 years. He has been an excellent colleague, and I have been honored to have worked with him. We represent neighboring States, Mis-

issippi and Alabama, and we have both worked on some of the same priorities. But, mainly, he has served Mississippi with the utmost dignity and respect.

He has an excellent staff. We are all grateful for their hard work, their help, and their coordination with all of us.

As chairman of the Appropriations Committee, he has been a remarkable negotiator. As the majority leader will tell you—he is one himself—we need those traits at this point in time.

THAD has provided critical funding for various Mississippi priorities over the years. He hasn't forgotten where he is from. Right here, with a lot of help, he led the restoration of the gulf coast after Hurricane Katrina. As I have understood them, his major priorities have always been the defense of this Nation; education, as Senator LEAHY talked about; agriculture, where he served as the chairman of the Ag Committee for a long time; rural issues, not only in Mississippi but all over America. THAD also spent many years serving on the Rules Committee, where I now chair.

I believe history will reflect THAD COCHRAN's long legacy of strong leadership, and I, myself, believe that he has made an extraordinary impact here in the U.S. Senate.

THAD, as we all know, is very courteous, well-mannered, and has a low-key demeanor most of the time. He is quiet, he is patient, and he has built seniority through power and perseverance.

Some people say that THAD COCHRAN is the last true southern gentleman, and I think there is a lot of truth to that. Some people say that he represents the lost art of being nice; we all need to work on that. He always has been and will be a hero both here and back home in Mississippi.

THAD, I wish you and your wonderful wife, Kay, well. I think all of us should strive to continue on the wise path that you have paved for us here in the Senate.

I believe we are all grateful for his service to Mississippi and our Nation. We wish him God's speed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I have known and admired THAD COCHRAN for 40 years—since he first came to the Senate. At the time, I was a young staffer for Senator Bill Cohen, who also was elected to the Senate that same year.

I saw from the start that this gentleman from Mississippi was so bright, insightful, and creative yet also humble, kind, and devoted to helping others. He treated everyone with such dignity. He was nice to everyone, from the elevator operators to the highest officials around the world. He truly is one who leads by example.

Those qualities are his legacy, and I have seen them time and again as a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee when THAD was an important member and, of course, when he became the chairman.

Last year was the 150th anniversary of the creation of the Appropriations Committee, and THAD marked that occasion by reminding all of us of our great responsibility to make thoughtful and informed decisions in the allocation of public funds. In managing appropriations bills, he was always so inclusive, willing to incorporate ideas and priorities from everyone who could make a persuasive case. The fact is, THAD has always placed careful consideration and compromise above partisan politics. That really reflects how THAD has led his life.

He has excelled at everything he has ever undertaken. When he joined the Boy Scouts, he became an Eagle Scout. In his high school, he was valedictorian. In college, he had the highest scholastic achievements. He excelled in serving in the Navy, and, of course, we know how much he has accomplished as our esteemed and dear colleague here in the Senate.

When THAD served as chairman of the Appropriations Agriculture Subcommittee, he traveled to the State of Maine with me, and we met with Maine's potato farmers and blueberry growers—not exactly staple crops of Mississippi. THAD listened intently to these farmers and growers. It was clear that he cared about them and that he valued our family farms and our rural communities.

That night, we had a lovely Maine lobster dinner at an inn on the coast. During that dinner, THAD shared with me his passion for good literature, his love of music, and his passion for education that had been instilled in him by his parents.

Of course, another issue that brought THAD and me together was making sure that our naval fleet was strong. As a U.S. Navy veteran who served for a time in Boston, MA, THAD has always been a dedicated advocate for his shipyard in Mississippi, as I am for Bath Iron Works in the State of Maine. THAD has twice visited BIW with me to see the great work done there.

In 2013, THAD received the Navy's Distinguished Public Service Award in recognition of his longstanding commitment to American sea power.

Through four decades in the Senate, plus three terms in the House of Representatives, THAD has compiled an admirable legislative record on issues ranging from education to libraries, the arts, our national defense, scientific and biomedical research, conservation initiatives, and civil rights. But perhaps his greatest legacy is that he taught us how a Senator should act, and that legacy will live on forever.

THAD, our Nation is so grateful for your service, and I, personally, am so appreciative of your friendship. I offer my best wishes to you and to Kay. You will be greatly missed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The minority leader.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I had the privilege to speak at some length about THAD in leader remarks, but I

wanted to add one point. I know my colleagues are waiting.

Another trait of THAD's, which has made him so successful, is that he has a long memory and knows how to work the legislative process. I remember, after the devastation of Katrina, THAD came over to me and talked to me about the need for so much, including a rail line that was somewhat controversial in the southern part of the State. He convinced me that it was desperately needed, and I voted for it.

Well, the wheel always turns, and 6 years later, we were devastated by Sandy. We needed all the help we could get, and I went to THAD. I didn't have to say a thing. He said: I remember what you did for me. I am going to help you all the way with Sandy, and he did.

This is just one of many great traits about this man and why he was so amazingly successful for the country and, most of all, for his beloved State of Mississippi. He made people want to help him and help his State, even though we don't have—as the Senator from Maine has said, our States are so different. We wanted to help each other, and we are bound by it.

THAD, you are a great man and a great example to all of us on how to conduct ourselves. We will miss you here in the Senate but wish you God's speed in whatever else you do.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The President pro tempore.

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, I rise today to pay tribute to a long-time friend, a revered public servant, and a true southern gentleman, Senator THAD COCHRAN.

THAD COCHRAN will be retiring at the end of this month, bringing an end to more than 40 years of exemplary service to Mississippi and our Nation.

Senator COCHRAN is a Mississippi man through and through. He was born in Pontotoc to a mother who was a school teacher and a father who was a principal. After graduating as valedictorian at his high school, THAD attended Ole Miss, where he earned both his bachelor's and juris doctor degrees. After serving in the Navy, he practiced private law in Mississippi for several years, but it wasn't long before he entered politics.

After serving in the House of Representatives, THAD first came to the Senate in 1978, just 2 years after my own election. The truth is, I hardly know this place without him, and I can hardly imagine what things will be like when THAD is no longer sitting here.

It is difficult to describe the special bond you share with someone who has been your close friend and partner here on the floor and colleague for more than four decades. THAD and I have been here through some of the most formative events in modern history, including the fall of the Soviet Union, the rise of American hegemony, the creation of the internet, and the coming of the digital age. As Members of this body, we have had the privilege not only to witness history but also to help shape it.

Whether as chairman of the Senate Republican Conference, the Agriculture Committee, or the Appropriations Committee, Senator COCHRAN has spearheaded some of the most significant policy initiatives of the last several decades. With an equal mix of healthy persistence and pure southern charm, he quickly earned his reputation as the "quiet persuader." I know I speak for all of my colleagues when I say he will be sorely missed.

THAD COCHRAN is so much more than the senior Senator from Mississippi. He is so much more than the legislation he has passed and the titles he has held and the awards he has received. THAD COCHRAN is a fixture of American politics, a man synonymous with the Senate, who embodies in every way all that is right and good about this body—a commitment to comity, character, and respect.

I think my colleague Senator LEAHY put it best when he said that Senator COCHRAN represents the old school. He personifies a generation of lawmakers brought up on the principles of bipartisanship and compromise, and I believe that these very virtues have been the keys to his success as a legislator.

Even in recent years, as our politics grew ever more divisive, THAD reminded us that in the era of endless gridlock and perpetual polarization, there is no alternative to civility and healthy debate. THAD is always someone you could trust to put the good of others above self, someone you could count on to reach across the aisle even when the political risks were great. In so doing, THAD gave all of us a template for effective legislating, and he followed the model for decades for the betterment of Mississippi and the Nation.

I consider myself lucky to know THAD and even luckier to call him friend. It is true that this body will not be the same without him, but I hope we can honor his service by recommitting ourselves to the virtues of civility and respect every day.

Today, I want to thank my colleague from Mississippi for his example and his many years of friendship. I wish him and his family the very best.

THAD, I want you to know that not only will we miss you, we will not get along as well without you. I think the world of you. It has been a pleasure for me to sit right by you on the floor for all of these years, and it has been a pleasure to learn from you. God bless you, and just know that a lot of us are pulling for you in every way.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri.

Mr. BLUNT. Mr. President, everybody doesn't just come up with the same description of someone they have worked with every day by accident. When we think about everything that has been said and everyone independently setting down what we remember about Senator COCHRAN, what we think about when we think about Senator

COCHRAN—he is a gentleman. He is a quiet persuader. He gets things done in a way that makes things that would otherwise seem hard for other people seem easy for him.

The true, groundbreaking politician came to the Congress in 1972, but in 1978, he was the first Republican elected statewide in Mississippi in over 100 years.

He gave evidence to that willingness to serve everybody in the direction he gave his staff. Nobody ever talks about Senator COCHRAN without talking about his staff. It doesn't take long into that conversation to talk about his staff. Just as THAD COCHRAN encouraged them to do on day one, they always tried to solve everybody's problem they worked for, no matter what that past relationship might have been or how they disagreed on other things.

The first time I got a chance to work with Senator COCHRAN, I was the chief deputy whip in the House, and we were in a leadership meeting trying to bring some things to a conclusion. I think the majority leader in the Senate at the time was THAD's colleague from Mississippi. Trent Lott turned to THAD and me—I was the junior person at the table. My mom and dad were dairy farmers, and maybe that is why Senator Lott thought I would understand this. It was a dairy issue, as I recall, and he said: Why don't you and Senator COCHRAN work this out? I think it was something on milk marketing orders, which almost nobody understood. It was a problem that nobody thought they could solve. I had been here about 25 months, and Senator COCHRAN had been here 25 years, and what I got was the great gift of watching him work out that problem, and it got to the conclusion that, for whatever reason, everybody was happy with.

His leadership, for States like Missouri and Mississippi with large rural populations—I think we have a bigger urban population than Mississippi, but we both have big rural populations. Whether it was agricultural issues or flood insurance or rural economic development, THAD COCHRAN was always there—at one time, not just as the chairman of the Agriculture Committee but also the chairman of the agriculture appropriating committee, and anybody who has worked around here very long knows it doesn't get much more powerful than that when it comes time to solve problems.

There have been mentions of Hurricane Katrina and stepping up, along with Haley Barbour, the Governor of Mississippi, coming together, convincing the Congress of things that needed to be done, and a few things that got done in Mississippi that didn't get done anywhere else.

I was presiding this morning when Senator SCHUMER spoke. He mentioned—he didn't mention it is his comments a few minutes ago, but he mentioned this morning—and this is an important view of both of them—he said that he remembered THAD saying

one time: I don't call a lot of press conferences; I don't think it is part of my responsibility. Senator SCHUMER quickly pointed out that was not his view of press conferences, but it was THAD's view of press conferences or "Meet the Press" or anything else that didn't focus on his job of getting things done.

The bill we will vote on today does things for members of the Active Armed Forces and veterans that we haven't done in a long time. It is a fitting conclusion to the service of THAD COCHRAN, who in 2013 received the Navy Distinguished Public Service Award. He was stationed in Boston for part of his service in the Navy, where nobody could understand what he said, but they wanted to do whatever it was that THAD COCHRAN wanted to do.

I liked the term that Senator SHELBY used, that THAD COCHRAN is one of the last practitioners of the lost art of being nice—the lost art of being nice.

I talked to my 13-year-old son Charlie just this morning, and I said: You know, Charlie, it is actually easier to be thoughtful than to be thoughtless. So many of us don't mature much beyond the 13-year-old understanding of that. We would be better off to watch and learn from what THAD COCHRAN did so well while he served in this body.

THAD and Kay will be missed in the daily Senate family, but they will always be an important part of the Senate family.

It is an exciting time when you get to go home to Mississippi and don't immediately understand that you very quickly have to turn around and come back to Washington to do what THAD did so well for so long, representing the people he worked for, the people he loved. At least two generations of Mississippians don't remember when THAD COCHRAN wasn't their Senator, and only when this time in the Senate ends will people fully begin to realize how much he did, how much they appreciate what he did, and how much has happened because THAD COCHRAN was here.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia.

Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, it is an honor for me to come to the floor of the Senate and talk for a minute about my friend THAD COCHRAN. I know everybody has probably said everything that needs to be said; just everybody hasn't said it yet. Kind of in the vein of what Senator BLUNT said, everybody says the same thing about Senator COCHRAN: He is gracious, smart, gentle, effective, and a great colleague.

I want to tell my colleagues about THAD COCHRAN. When I came to the Senate 14 years ago, I had served in every legislative body I could be elected to where I live. I served in the Georgia House, the Georgia Senate, the U.S. House, the U.S. Senate—all representative legislative bodies. In each one of them, I got some advice.

My first year in the Georgia House, 41 years ago, I got some very good advice. A good friend of mine said: JOHN-

NY, I will tell you what you do. The first year you are here, don't say a word. Just watch everybody talk. Watch what everybody else does. Look at people you would like to be like, and for the remainder of your career, be like that person, because in the end, this business is about relationships and effectiveness, not about bluster and bragging.

I did pick out a guy; his name was Carl Harrison. Carl Harrison has since passed away, but he was one of the best friends I have ever had in life. I watched him in the Georgia Legislature, and I patterned myself after Carl Harrison, and the success I had was because I followed a great leader like him.

When I got to the U.S. Senate, I knew I needed leadership. I knew I needed to find a book or something to tell me how to be a good Senator. I remembered Carl. I said: You know, I am going to sit in this body. I have 6 years in this term. Surely I can take a few months for the first year and kind of figure things out.

So I started watching. I could see the characteristics and the quality of each and every individual in the Senate, and everybody offers unique gifts that they have given to this body. I kept watching THAD COCHRAN. He was respected. He always had time for you. He never let you know he had been here a lot longer than you ever thought about being here, maybe even longer than you had been born. He listened to you, and if you asked him a question, he gave you an answer.

So I called my wife and I said: Sweetheart, when we come back to Washington next week, I want to take THAD COCHRAN to dinner because I have decided he is the guy I would like to be most like.

I am not making this up; this is exactly what happened.

So we went to Ocean Air. THAD, I don't know if you remember that night. It was pretty crowded. THAD is not a loud guy, but when THAD walks in a room, it gets a little bit quieter because everybody knows wisdom has arrived. My wife and I enjoyed that dinner that night, and we became great friends.

We had a number of issues on which we engaged each other over the course of the years, and on all of them, I think we were on the same side—except catfish. I think I got it wrong on catfish, and I apologize for that, but I tried to redeem myself.

The highest compliment I can pay is to say that I wanted to be just like THAD COCHRAN. So in the 13 years since that dinner at Ocean Air and in everything I have done and tried to do in the Senate, I have tried to be like THAD COCHRAN.

Mark Twain once wrote: When confronted with a difficult decision, do what is right. You will surprise a few, but you will amaze the rest.

When we have tough decisions to make, when somebody has to cut to the

chase and point you in the right direction to get the job done, it is THAD COCHRAN whom you want in your foxhole. He is the perfect example for me of a noble life and a noble leader.

I have a favorite poem. It is in a book called "Leaves of Gold" from the Methodist Church. I think that poem applies to THAD COCHRAN better than any words I can say. The poem goes like this:

I'd rather see a good person
Than hear about one any day.
I'd rather have a good person walk with me
Than merely show the way.
For my eyes are better pupils
And more willing than my ear.
And fine counsel is confusing
But example is always clear.
And the best of all the people
Are the ones that live their creeds.
For to see the good in action
Is what everybody needs.
While I'll be very glad to do it
If you'll let me see it done;
But I can watch your hands in action,
But your tongue too fast may run.
But the lectures you deliver
May be very wise and very true;
But I'd rather get my lecture
By observing what you do.
For I may misunderstand you
And the high advice you give;
But there's no misunderstanding
The way you act and the way you live.

THAD, you have blessed us all by the way you act, the way you live, and by the example you set. May God bless you and your family. I wish you the best. And may you always come back, because if you ever need me, I will be right here for you because you have always been there for me. God bless you.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, I wish to thank the Senator from Georgia for those comments, and I would like to associate myself with all of them. We should have saved it for the concluding speech, I think.

I rise today to also honor a man who has spent the last 46 years faithfully serving the State of Mississippi in Congress.

THAD, you are the longest currently serving Member of Congress, and we are going to miss your experience and your leadership. You have left a mark on Congress that won't soon be forgotten. You have served with great distinction and made a difference in the Senate. Your time in Washington began when the people of Mississippi voted to send you to the House of Representatives, and you represented their interests in that Chamber from 1972 to 1978. Then you ran for and won the noble Senate seat.

THAD and I have found ourselves on two sides of the U.S. coin. He chairs the Appropriations Committee; I chair the Budget Committee. Even though he does the detail of spending the money and I work to set the parameters, I have always respected him and enjoyed working with him.

Former Senators have spoken highly of Senator COCHRAN. In fact, in 2007,

while congratulating THAD on his 10,000th vote, our good friend, the late Senator Ted Kennedy, said:

THAD and I don't always agree on policy matters—and more often than not we find ourselves on opposite sides of the issues—but those disagreements never diminished my respect for his thoughtfulness and nor do they diminish the friendship I feel toward him.

I think that is a pretty common refrain for somebody who is quiet and effective and perseveres through everything.

THAD is known to hold strong opinions, but that has never stopped him from developing a close working relationship with Members of both parties. Throughout his career, he has used his experience and mastery of the issues to persuade his colleagues, but he has done so privately rather than bashing in the media. This determined, yet respectful, approach to negotiations and his passion to find solutions to the problems and concerns of the people of Wyoming and America have led to his nickname, the "quiet persuader." He has been a great mentor to me. THAD has had a remarkable career, and his leadership will be dearly missed. He has inspired future leaders from his State, and in that way and so many others he has made a difference.

Diana joins me in sending our best wishes to you, to your wife Kay, and to the rest of your family, and our appreciation for your willingness to serve Mississippi and the Nation so faithfully and so long.

There are countless sayings about how politics isn't for anyone but the brave and the resilient. I think your experience, especially this past year, has shown that there is no challenge too large for you to overcome, and clearly you specialize in making the world a better place—and that is a win-win for us all, especially our children and our grandchildren.

I am sad to see you leave the Senate at the end of this month, but I wish you a well-deserved retirement and other adventures.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic whip.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I rise today, on this side of the aisle, to thank my friend Senator COCHRAN.

Yesterday, I made a longer speech in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD, but I didn't want this moment to go by without tributes from both sides of the aisle while you are personally present on the floor.

My relationship with Senator COCHRAN was fortuitous. There used to be two giants in the Senate—Ted Stevens and Danny Inouye—and forever and ever they were the two, a Democrat and Republican—who were in charge of the Department of Defense Appropriations bill, and we bowed to their knowledge and wisdom. Then the day came when they were both gone, and the new people stepping in were THAD COCHRAN and DICK DURBIN.

I felt totally undeserving to be given that responsibility, and certainly could

never follow the act of Danny Inouye, as great as he was in serving our country, both in the military and the U.S. Senate, and THAD had the responsibility of following Ted Stevens as the Defense Committee chair.

While we both knew we were being held to high standards as people compared us, as they inevitably would, the thing we decided to do from the beginning was to do it together—to learn on the job and to work together. It really hearkens back to a Senate that I remember—and I am sure Senator SHELBY and others remember—when we first got here, when the Appropriations Committee assignments were really bipartisan assignments, start to finish.

My work on the Defense Subcommittee with THAD COCHRAN was bipartisan from the start. It always was. There was mutual respect. If I ever had an issue, I could go to him. He knew the same thing was true, if there was an issue related to his concerns or the State of Mississippi, he could come to me. We never ever set out to trouble or embarrass one another publicly. We tried to always have a good, positive working relationship. The very few disagreements we had were behind closed doors and usually resolved behind closed doors. It really was the Senate I was elected to and the one I miss today. We need more of it.

THAD COCHRAN, you made it easy when you were chairman of the Defense Committee for this ranking Democrat to be an active partner of yours in doing some important things. I think we accepted our responsibility and did our level best; I think our American national defense is stronger today because of it; and I am lucky because I had a good friend, good mentor, and good colleague by my side.

I wish you the very best. If you want a longer version of this speech, it was given in the RECORD yesterday, so you could take it home and read it, if you would like.

I thank you again for being such a great Senator, a great representative of your State of Mississippi, and a great colleague when it came to our appropriations work.

Mr. SHELBY. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

FAREWELL TO THE SENATE

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, I appreciate the opportunity to express my deep gratitude for the honor given to me by the people of Mississippi to represent them in Washington.

I leave the Senate with confidence that our enduring Constitution guards our country from human error, empowers our citizens to achieve greatness, and shines as a beacon of freedom and liberty for the world.

I am optimistic about the future of our great Nation and in the U.S. Senate's role in determining that future.

While in Congress, I have served with nine Presidents during times of conflict and peace. We have debated policies from trade to terrorism. We have engaged in heated arguments. But even in full disagreement, I believe all our motivations begin at the same point: the sincere desire to serve our States and country.

No one remains in the House or Senate who was here when I first took office in January 1973, but I am particularly thankful for the friendship and leadership of the senior Senator from Vermont, Mr. LEAHY. He and I have fought side by side with each other and sometimes face to face against each other, always with friendship and respect.

I am also grateful to have served with honorable Senators from my State. My colleague, Senator WICKER, has been a friend and a strong and effective advocate for our State. We have worked together not only in the Senate, but also when he served as a U.S. Representative. Former Majority Leader Trent Lott continues to be a voice in our national conversation. And the late John C. Stennis provided a witness to integrity when I first joined this body. His signature is above my signature at this desk.

It is a tradition in the Senate, like schoolchildren used to do, to sign the drawers of our desks. Senator Stennis signed this desk drawer. He noted the beginning of his service in 1947 and added a dash. He never filled in the date signifying the end of his Senate service in 1989. Perhaps there is symbolism there, that our service does not end when we depart this Chamber.

I have been honored by this body to serve as chairman both of the Appropriations and Agriculture Committees. I am thankful to my colleagues, past and present, and to the committee staff for assisting in crafting responsible funding priorities for our country and for developing strategic agriculture policy to ensure the best use of our natural resources to provide affordable and healthy food for our citizens and people around the world.

I thank my talented and dedicated staff, many of whom have worked for many years in service to our country. All of us in this body know we could not achieve our priorities without exceptional staff. I have staff members who have served the Senate since my first term. I have one staff member, Doris Wagley, who was already in the office working the very first day I showed up for work in the House of Representatives in 1973. Whether they have been here for 45 years or a shorter tenure, I am grateful for their good assistance.

I ran my first Senate reelection campaign in 1984, largely on constituent service. I will always be proud of my State staff for their work on behalf of Mississippians. State staff help us keep

our promises to our veterans, find opportunities for small businesses, ensure the elderly or infirmed receive care, and cut through bureaucracy. I am sure members of your State staffs, like my staff, have hearts for their fellow citizens, regardless of their political affiliation.

All our citizens have the right to be heard and to have a voice in their government. I believe our job as their servants is not to tell others what to think or tell others what to do. Our job is to represent them. I have endeavored to do that the best way I possibly could; and now the time has come for me to pass the power granted by the people of Mississippi, the power of service, to someone else.

When John Sharp Williams of Mississippi left the Senate, he delivered a farewell speech at a dinner organized by the Mississippi Society of Washington. It is sometimes called the "Mockingbird Speech." While I do not share some of the cynicism of that speech, there are sentiments I can appreciate. Here is an excerpt of that speech given March 3, 1923:

I am going back to Yazoo City and to my old home on a rural free-delivery route. I want to get up again each morning as I hear the rooster's crow . . . and as night and the time for bed approaches, I will listen to the greatest chorus of voices that man ever heard, music that will charm me and make me ready for repose, the voices of my mockingbirds trilling in the trees. And in that way I want to live the rest of my life, and when the end comes, I hope to be carried out of the house by my neighbors and laid to rest among my people. Now, some may say that is not a very wonderful future, all of this I have mapped out for myself, but I say there is merit in calm retirement . . . Perhaps it is a sign that I ought to retire, for retirement brings repose, and repose allows a kindly judgment of all things.

I will now return to my beloved Mississippi and my family and friends there. I will miss this stately Chamber and this city. I will not miss this power or politics. I will miss people: you, my colleagues. I will treasure your courtesy and kindness. I trust, if your travels bring you to Oxford, MS, you will not hesitate to visit and join me for a refreshment on the porch. We can listen to the mockingbirds together.

Thank you.

Mr. SHELBY. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SASSE). The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

TRIBUTE TO THAD COCHRAN

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, I wish to add my words to what we saw on the Senate floor here a couple of minutes ago. I had the honor of presiding over much of the ceremony recognizing Senator THAD COCHRAN's incredible service to Mississippi and to America. You

heard a lot. It was really remarkable—45 years in the Congress and four decades as a U.S. Senator. I think Senator LEAHY, from Vermont, said it best when he talked about THAD COCHRAN's integrity—a man who will always keep his word.

As Alaska's Senator, I also want to mention what a great friend he was to our State and to our Senators. Senator COCHRAN was very close to Senator Ted Stevens—the late Senator Ted Stevens—and to Frank Murkowski. He really supported our State—my State—and I want to thank him for that.

He has this great nickname that I think was given to him in 2006, when Time Magazine said he was one of the best U.S. Senators and called him the "quiet persuader." You heard that term a lot just a few minutes ago. In that article, they said that he had gained the trust of the administration and on Capitol Hill for his quiet, courtly manner, using his experience and mastery of the issues to persuade his colleagues privately rather than making demands of them in public.

It is a great example we can all learn from. I was proud to have been able to serve and learn from THAD COCHRAN for the last 3 years.

TRIBUTE TO CARLOS GOMEZ

Mr. President, one of the things I enjoy doing in my duties in the Senate is to come down each week to recognize somebody special in my State—somebody who has made a difference for their community, somebody who might not get the attention that people get in the press or in other areas but someone who has really made an impact. I like to call that person our Alaskan of the Week.

Right now what has been happening in Alaska is a very special time. Our State, in many ways, is shrouded with myth and mystique. We certainly have, I believe, the most beautiful State in the country. There is a lot of excitement that happens, a lot of special things. Just last week, we had 60 mushers who were being pulled by dog teams, dozens of dogs—these great athletes, as we call them—nearly 1,000 miles through some of the harshest landscapes and some of the harshest climates. We just finished the Iditarod, the last great race. We want to encourage people watching on TV and people in the Galleries to come on up to Alaska. You will love it. It will be the trip of a lifetime. Come see the Iditarod next year, the last great race. We just finished that.

It is a great time to be in Alaska. It is still winter, of course. It is time to ski and for snow machines. It is still cold, and there is lots of snow, but the sun is now coming out high in the sky. Of course, in Alaska, there is hockey. We love hockey. We all know it is a tough and competitive sport, but it certainly fits into the ethos of my State. All across the State, kids and adults play hockey—boys, girls, men, and women, in indoor and outdoor rinks, ponds, and lakes—and skate up and take to the ice.

However, as many parents who are involved in hockey know, gear can be very expensive. Actually, hockey can be very expensive. Many kids and adults can miss out on this great, great sport—a great sport in my State—because of the cost.

I would like to introduce you to Anchorage resident Carlos Gomez, who is our Alaskan of the Week. He has dedicated an extraordinary amount of his time and his life to try to make sure that all kids in my State—boys and girls from all walks of life—get to play hockey, like so many others do in Alaska, no matter if they can afford it or not.

Let me tell you about Mr. Carlos Gomez, because he is not one to brag about himself. Like most Alaskans of the Week, he is an unsung hero, doing so much for the community. His impact on hockey—particularly, for the youth of Alaska—is remarkable. In many ways, his story is truly a classic story of the American dream.

Carlos was born in California. When he was 10, he and his brother went to live with an aunt in San Diego. His wife Dalia was born in Colombia and then moved to Alaska, also with an aunt, when she was just 7 years old. Carlos received a scholarship from the University of California San Diego but had to drop out and cut his studies short because the strain of both going to school and providing for his family and contributing enough for his family was very difficult.

He ended up in Alaska in 1972 to work as an ironworker, where he helped to build our State. He built the Alaska pipeline during that time. It was a huge and exciting time in the State. He met his wife Dalia, as I mentioned, and they settled down in a modest home in Airport Heights, AK, and began to raise a family.

They had three wonderful kids. His daughters are Monica and Natalie, and his son is Scott. All of them are great, bright kids. One of them, Scott, who we in Alaska simply call Scotty—and I will get to that—had amazing athletic talents. When Scotty was just 4 years old, Carlos took him to his first hockey game. Scotty wanted to try it himself. Soon the young boy was hooked and wanted to play hockey as often as he could, and he was good. The problem was that although they weren't poor as a family, they didn't have the extra money for all the equipment and the expense that hockey requires. The Anchorage Boys & Girls Club had a program that loaned out hockey equipment and hockey gear. They helped to utilize that. As Scotty grew, he needed more equipment, and he stayed focused on hockey. Soon Carlos, our Alaskan of the Week, became so involved in youth hockey and had such a heart for the youth who wanted to play hockey in Alaska but had difficulty affording it that he became this master fundraiser throughout Alaska for the sport, not only for his son but for all the kids in the community who wanted to play hockey across the city.

Fast forward to 1998, and Scotty, his son, a 4-year-old playing hockey on ponds in Anchorage, is selected by the New Jersey Devils as their first-round draft choice—the first Latino ever drafted to be in the first round of the NHL draft. Scotty went on to become an all-star, Stanley Cup winner and a recipient of the Calder Memorial Trophy as the league's rookie of the year—all in his first NHL season. That is not bad for a little kid from Anchorage—all before he turned 21. He went on to win another Stanley Cup and later played for the New York Rangers, the Montreal Canadiens, the San Jose Sharks, the Florida Panthers, and the St. Louis Blues. He even chose to return home to Anchorage during the NHL lockout to play briefly for our very own Alaska Aces.

As you can imagine, Scotty is quite popular and well-known in Anchorage. He is admired by so many, and his father is as well. He could have stopped championing, as he has done for so many years, the sport of hockey at any point along the way, but what he did was that he kept doing this. He kept working. He kept encouraging young kids in Alaska to get on the ice to achieve their goals, just like his son did. So Carlos, Scotty, and the rest of the family set up the Scotty Gomez Foundation, which is devoted to that cause, and Carlos Gomez is still running it today. There are more kids like Scotty out there, Carlos said, and “we're going to give that kid an opportunity,” like my son had.

The foundation has done so much for youth hockey in Alaska. Thousands of kids across the State have access to gear and the ability to play this great sport that they otherwise wouldn't be able to afford. Around Anchorage's rinks, you will find the dark blue and gold gear—just like our Alaska flag—with a ram. It is the Gomez ram, and it helps kids, no matter their backgrounds or experience, get on the ice and play this great sport.

The foundation has put money into rehabbing rinks, like the one in East Anchorage, which is the neighborhood outdoor rink where Scotty learned to play hockey. When the Anchorage School District dropped the girls' high school hockey in the spring of 2013, the Scotty Gomez Foundation, under Carlos's leadership, stepped up, picked up the sport for 3 years, and redeveloped it into cooperatives across Anchorage's eight public high schools. Girls' hockey in Anchorage is alive today because of Carlos Gomez and his family. Also, in his never forgetting the generosity given to Scotty in his start in hockey, the foundation sponsors youth hockey events and grants for the Boys & Girls Club of Anchorage. That is really giving back to the community.

One of the Scotty Gomez Foundation's biggest events every year is the Last Frontier Pond Hockey Classic, which is organized by Carlos and his partner, Mike Davenport, in Big Lake. The event took place just two week-

ends ago, and it was quite an event. More than 600 hockey players showed up—kids, lawyers, doctors, slope workers, former pro and college players—men and women. Counting everybody, more than 1,000 people, from all walks of life, went to the event to raise money for youth hockey in Alaska.

It is amazing what one family can do to touch so many, led by Mr. Carlos Gomez. As Scotty said, “It was my father's dream to give back. This is all him. He always just wants to help others.”

If you are a kid in Alaska who wants to play hockey, Carlos Gomez will egg you on and make sure nothing, especially the cost of equipment, will stop you.

Scotty said:

When I was growing up, he was like a father to all of the neighborhood kids who needed one. My dad's a true hero.

I thank Mr. Carlos Gomez for all he has done for Alaska's youth and youth hockey throughout our great State. We are honored to call him our Alaskan of the Week.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

MARCH FOR OUR LIVES

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, this weekend, Americans around the country and at, at least, a dozen places in my State of Ohio will hold peaceful marches in their communities to demand that we in this body—the people who represent them—actually do something to protect them from gun violence, not just state that my thoughts and prayers are with the victims and the families but to actually do something.

That sort of activism is so important to our democracy. Change never starts in Washington. We make progress because of the grassroots movements of Americans across our country who demand action. For too long, Congress has ignored millions of Americans who want reasonable gun safety measures. Instead, this Congress continues to do the bidding of the gun lobbyists.

We already see activism making a difference. It is a minor step, but this week, in the bipartisan budget deal, we will vote to loosen government regulations that severely limit research on gun safety. It is an important first step, but we have a long way to go. We can't say we are doing what it takes to keep our country safe until we are finally willing to pass commonsense laws that protect all Americans from gun violence. Many of us have tried.

I supported the original Federal assault weapons ban in 1994 during my first term in Congress. I joined with many of my colleagues to vote to

renew it after the shooting at Sandy Hook. Weapons of war don't belong on our streets or in our classrooms.

We have tried to pass legislation to close loopholes in our background check system so the people who buy guns on the internet or at gun shows have to go through the same background checks as law-abiding gun owners who buy their guns at stores in Ohio.

After the tragedy at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, we tried to pass legislation to prevent people on the terrorist watch list from buying guns. People can't believe the law in this country; that if you are on the government's terrorist watch list, you can't go to the Cleveland Hopkins International Airport in Cleveland, to the John Glenn Columbus International Airport in Columbus, or to the Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport in Washington and get on an airplane, which is the right thing, but that you can go out and buy a gun.

We know what happened each and every time. The gun lobby stood in the way. It stands in the way, despite the fact that the laws we are talking about will not undermine the rules and rights of law-abiding gun owners. I have always respected the rights of hunters and collectors and other law-abiding gun owners. No one is trying to take away their guns. Yet, when our students aren't safe in school, it is clear something has to be done. We will not give up on making our country safer. We will keep fighting until we get weapons of war out of our schools and off our streets.

Creating change in our country is not easy. It requires often going up against powerful special interests. It is how things happen in this country. It is how women got the right to vote. It is how we passed civil rights. It is how we passed workers' compensation. It is how we passed Medicare. It is how we got Social Security. People banded together—activists—around the country. They pushed their country and pushed their government at the State level, at the county level, at the courthouse, at the Capitol in Washington. They stood against powerful special interests and won on behalf of the public. From the Women's March to airport rallies, to the activism around the Affordable Care Act, last year, Americans proved over and over the power of activism.

The people I will be with on Saturday—my daughters, my wife, and probably three of our grandchildren—will join hundreds of thousands all over this country in fighting for these issues. The people who will be marching on Saturday are the ones we were elected to serve. We were not elected to serve special interest gun lobbyists. These activists give me hope for the future. I hope my colleagues in this body will listen to the activists, not to the lobbyists.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SASSE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PERDUE). Without objection, it is so ordered.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to executive session for the consideration of the following nomination: Executive Calendar No. 619, the nomination of Richard Grenell to be Ambassador to Germany. I ask unanimous consent that the Senate vote on the nomination with no intervening action or debate; that if confirmed, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table; that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action; that no further motions be in order; and that any statements relating to the nomination be printed in the RECORD.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, I cannot in good faith support a nominee who has a lengthy track record of tweets attacking both prominent Democratic women and prominent Republican women. Since his nomination, these tweets have continued, showing a complete disregard for the Senate confirmation process and a disregard for the seriousness of the position for which he has been nominated.

At the same time, Mr. Grenell has been dismissive of the importance of the threat Russia poses to U.S. democracy, and we certainly need to have U.S. Ambassadors who can work with our European allies and partners, now more than ever, to reinforce the strength of the institutions we have built to protect the rule of law and democracy and to defend our western democracies against Russian interference.

So with that, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Pennsylvania.

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

GUN VIOLENCE

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I rise this afternoon to talk about an issue we have talked about a lot in Washington but frankly haven't done enough about, and that is gun violence. In the next number of hours—certainly all day Saturday—we are going have demonstrations across the country. Young people will be going into local communities, as well as coming to Washington, to march on behalf of those whose lives have been lost and to urge

us to take action. The exact name of the effort being undertaken is March for Our Lives. We have never seen on this issue—and maybe any other issue—this kind of intense activism that young people have undertaken across the country.

This march on Saturday, March for Our Lives, will be unprecedented in recent American history. I am going to be in the city of Philadelphia, and I know some people will be marching in Washington, as well as in communities across the country.

The focus of the work of young people across the country—starting with the students in Parkland, FL, but growing all across the country in these many weeks—will be taking action, demanding that the U.S. Senate, the U.S. House, and any other legislative body that can have an impact on this should take action. That is what they are demanding. I think there are a number of folks in Washington who have wanted to take action for years.

I hope, in response to that activism, in response to those marches, when we come back after our break—and I hope days and weeks after that—that there will be a response here in the Senate and that we will debate the issue or debate one amendment or one bill and then vote on it, and then take the next bill and vote on that, and keep going until we have a number of votes. It doesn't mean that we can be certain of the outcome. In my judgment, the reason to have a vote is to make sure that the American people see us debating this issue and voting on it.

Otherwise, to take no action, to simply say that there is nothing we can do about a uniquely American problem—the other option of course is to surrender, to say that gun violence is just part of American life, we have to get used to it, there is nothing we can do about it, and surrender to the problem. I think most Americans don't want to keep reading that number of deaths that pile up every year. At last count, there were 33,000 gun deaths in 1 year. I don't think many Americans want to settle for that. That is not the America I know. That is not the America most people know.

In America, we take action on tough issues. We tackle them or try to tackle them. We don't surrender to the problem. We don't surrender to one political point of view and say that paralysis leads to no solution. That is not American.

Back in December of 2012, when Sandy Hook Elementary School was the scene of the kind of horror and carnage that we have rarely seen in American history, there also was that predisposition to just move on and do nothing, to say there is nothing we can do. I was confronted with those questions that same weekend because I knew, in the months ahead, there would be a series of votes. There turned out to be a vote on background checks, a vote on the limitation of high-capacity magazines—in essence, how many

bullets can an individual shoot at any one time. That is the reason for the mass casualties. That is the reason we have so many people who die in school shootings or in movie theaters or in nightclubs or in so many other settings, and, most recently, in yet another school. The third vote, of course, was a vote to ban military-style assault weapons.

Knowing I would be facing those votes, which turned out to be in the early part of 2013, I had to ask myself a basic question, and I think this is a question a lot of Americans are asking at times like this: Is there nothing the most powerful country in the world, the most powerful country in the history of the human race, could do to at least reduce the likelihood that we will not have more mass shootings, we will not have more school shootings, we will not go year after year, after 33,000 people lost their lives from gunshot wounds—a number that is likely to grow if we don't take action. That is the choice: Do almost nothing, nothing itself, or take action. That is the fundamental choice we face. That is why we need votes and debates preceding those votes.

It is hard to comprehend that it has been half a decade—5 years—since we had a sustained debate on the floor of the U.S. Senate on gun violence. We have had intermittent debates. We have had limited discussions. We have had some speeches. I guess all of that is helpful, but we have had no sustained debate on one of the major issues facing the American people.

They don't expect us to solve this problem in a couple of days or weeks, but they do expect us to vote, and they expect us to debate. After 5 years, it is about time we had a sustained debate.

Many of us receive letters on a range of issues, depending on what the issue of the week is or the issue of the month is. I recently received mail in a form we don't see enough of anymore—postcards. These were written by students and individuals too young to even be referred to as students. Here is one that is only age 5. His name is Corey. He said in his note to me that he doesn't want to have guns in his school, and he wants me to do something about it. It goes on from there in the short note, and he attached some artwork in the back. That is what Corey said; he doesn't want to have guns in school.

Then there is Mason, who wrote to me and said:

I want to feel safe in school. There should not be guns in my school.

He goes on to talk about what he is worried about. He said: "I want to feel safe in school."

Then, finally, probably the one who summed up these issues the best was a young man by the name of Hayden. He wrote to me and said:

I am a 5th grader and I don't feel safe because it is too easy to get a gun permit. I should not know about this stuff. I don't feel safe.

Then he ended with this question: "Am I worth it?" Then Hayden asked again: "Am I worth it?" He asked that twice in a postcard where he is just writing a few sentences. Then he put a heart on the other side. In a few sentences, Hayden is summing up the challenge we face in the Senate and across the country. He said twice in the same letter: "I do not feel safe. . . . I don't feel safe"—something probably most people my age or in my generation, so to speak, never had to worry about.

We didn't think of going to school and being threatened by gun violence. There might have been anxiety in school, there might have been things we were worried about, but this wasn't one of them. This is new, and this was a uniquely American problem. No other country in the world faces this kind of a problem.

We have to ask ourselves if a young person in fifth grade doesn't feel safe because of these mass shootings, and mass shootings in school, and then asks us, "Am I worth it," every one of us in both parties should say: Of course, you are worth it, Hayden. Hayden is worth the effort to try to keep him safe in school.

If the answer to that question is yes, that he is worth us doing something about it, then you have to ask the question, What am I going to do about it? Are we just going to do what we usually do around here, just don't vote, don't have any sustained debate, and pretend it is not happening because there are forces out there that have a stranglehold on the process that say: You are not even allowed to vote, let alone debate and pass a bill.

There are forces out there that don't even want us to debate the issue, but I think we can do more to respond to Hayden's request and, of course, respond to what young people across the country are demanding.

You have young people who are not old enough to vote yet—and I am not just talking about Hayden and his postcard but all those young people who are coming to Washington and going to town squares in small towns and big cities to march for their lives. Many of them are not 18 years old yet. They can't vote, and they are leading the country, suggesting to us how to vote, demanding that we take action. It is rather ironic that this problem has gotten so bad that young people who still cannot cast a vote are asking us to do our jobs and to vote.

It is not difficult to vote in the U.S. Senate. Usually, you just have to be standing and put your hand up or thumb up or some indication to the individuals in the Senate who record those votes. It is not that difficult. It doesn't require a lot of exertion. It doesn't require a lot of energy. You just have to be on the floor, be standing, and say yes or no. If someone wants to vote against all these gun measures, if they want to vote against background checks and limitation on

the high-capacity magazines and still let what we have in American law now, which is a terrorist can get a gun in America—if you want to continue that, fine. That is your choice. That is your choice, but at least vote. At least have the sense of responsibility to vote on a tough issue.

We will have an opportunity to answer the postcard and answer the question Hayden asked—is he worth it? I think he is, and I think we ought to vote.

DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES AWARENESS MONTH

Mr. President, I will be brief. I just want to note one of the recognitions of this month. I want to take a moment and remind everyone that March is Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month.

In 2011, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimated that 14 percent of children in the United States have a developmental disability; that is, almost 10 million children. Developmental disabilities include autism, Down syndrome, cerebral palsy, learning disabilities, and many other congenital disabilities.

In the past, we took a rather paternalistic point of view with regard to people with developmental disabilities—taking care of them but not raising them up and fostering their skills and abilities. This was shortsighted on our part.

Today, with the help of such laws as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act—we heard a lot about that referred to by its acronym, IDEA—the Americans with Disabilities Act, so-called ADA, and then my legislation from a couple of years ago, the ABLE Act, each of these pieces of legislation are breaking down barriers to encourage and support people with developmental and all types of disabilities.

People with developmental disabilities contribute numerous benefits to our society. In Pennsylvania, thousands of people with developmental disabilities are working in competitive, integrated jobs at such places as SAP, FedEx Ground, PNC Bank, Giant Eagle grocery stores, and many small businesses throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

People with developmental disabilities make our lives richer and fuller. As we celebrate them, I pledge—I know this is a pledge many in the Senate make—to protect their rights and the rights of all people with disabilities to have equal access to all of our society.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

NOMINATIONS

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, earlier this week, the Senate voted to confirm Kevin McAleenan to be the Commissioner of U.S. Customs and Border Protection. This is a national security job. It is the person in charge of making sure America has secure borders. He was approved unanimously by the Senate Finance Committee that voted on it before it came to the floor.

In spite of that unanimous vote, the Democrats in this body still delayed this nominee from taking office for as long as they could. They forced the majority to file cloture on it. We had the vote last week, then we had to wait to do it, spend the time, and in the end, 30 Democrats—the Democrats who demanded we hold a cloture vote, delay the vote—voted in favor of his confirmation. This had nothing to do with his qualifications for the office. They just wanted to delay and obstruct. That is what we are dealing with here.

Forcing a cloture vote on a non-controversial executive nominee used to be extremely rare—hardly ever happened. There were 15 people confirmed after a cloture vote at this point for the previous four Presidents combined. So if you take a look at the previous four Presidents—Obama, Clinton, both Bushes—a total of 15 votes were taken, requiring cloture in each of those Presidencies, total.

What about President Trump? Fifty people—50, 5-0—have been confirmed only after deliberate delay by the Democrats, forcing us to waste time on cloture votes. That doesn't even count people who were nominated to be judges. We are just talking about Presidential appointments in the executive branch. This delay is unproductive, and it is unprecedented.

Democrats are insisting on cloture votes because there is a Senate rule that allows for up to 30 hours of debate on Presidential nominees after we have had that vote. In reality, very little of this time is actually spent on debating the nominees or their credentials to serve in the office for which they have been nominated.

It is a pattern of ongoing obstruction the Democrats have been following since the very first day of the Trump administration. That is right. Since the very first day, Inauguration Day last year, Republicans wanted to vote on Mike Pompeo's nomination to be head of the Central Intelligence Agency, an important key position in any President's Cabinet, but we already had the debate in the Foreign Relations Committee. We could have had a debate on the floor that evening, but no. A small number of Democrats blocked it and forced us to have first a cloture vote and delay moving forward, delaying the process from day one—Inauguration Day—of the administration.

How much of the 30 hours did the Democrats actually spend debating this person's qualifications to be head of the CIA? Less than 2 hours. They wasted 30 hours of the whole time; only 2 hours was used in debate. That is how long the Democrats spent on this floor giving their reasons why they wanted to vote against the nominee. It had nothing to do with Mr. Pompeo; it was just so Democrats could waste 3 more days, allowing nothing else to happen, blocking other activities in the Senate. The rules allow the Democrats to stall, and they took full advantage of the rules.

It is time, in my opinion, to end this partisan spectacle. We have 78 more nominees for various jobs who have made it through their committee hearings and are waiting for a vote on this floor. Most of these people have bipartisan support. They can be and will be confirmed easily. The administration has to waste time to get their team in place. Democrats aren't using the rules for debate. They are not using the rules for deliberation. It is only for delay.

It wasn't and hasn't always been this way, and there is no reason it should continue this way. The Senate had a different standard for executive branch nominations a few years ago. In 2013 and 2014, the rules said that we would have a full 30 hours of debate only for Cabinet Secretaries; for all other executive branch Presidential appointees, only 8 hours of debate. But today we allow 30 hours on every nomination, and Democrats have shown that, in most cases, it is far too much time.

We need a fair debate on every nomination. The procedure from 2013 and 2014 was fair. The way Democrats are wasting time today to keep us from doing work is not fair. It is time to return to the rules for debating nominations that the Senate used 4 years ago.

The rules that we used in 2013 and 2014 were the result of a compromise. Democrats controlled the Senate at the time, and a Democrat was making the nominations; that was President Obama. Republicans agreed to a fair time limit on the amount of debate. There was a bipartisan group who worked on this compromise—four Republicans, four Democrats—and I was one of the four Republicans who were part of that group. Senator SCHUMER, who is now the Democratic leader, was part of that group as well. There was overwhelming support for these changes on both sides of the aisle. It is time to change the Senate rules and go back to that process that Senator SCHUMER supported in 2013 and in 2014 when Democrats were in the majority.

Today, Democrats deliberately delay in ways that limit us to a couple of nominations in a typical week. If we go back to the 2014 standard, we could clear multiple nominations in a single day.

We should have this process back in place by the time we take up Mike Pompeo's nomination to be Secretary of State when we get back in April.

The world is a dangerous place. We have serious concerns about Russia, Iran, China, and important trade issues that we need to be working on. The President will be meeting with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. America needs to have a full slate of people helping the President on these issues, and we need them to be the correct, very talented people that a President needs.

We are fortunate to have Mike Pompeo as the likely nominee to be Secretary of State. He is the right person for the job. He knows the issues. He knows the people. He has the intel-

ligence. He has the integrity. He has the experience for the job.

We will be having confirmation hearings in the Foreign Relations Committee in April. Let's have a hearing, a fair debate, and then let's vote. Let's not have any of these continued stalling tactics and this pointless obstruction that Democrats have engaged in ever since the first day President Trump took office.

Mike Pompeo's nomination to be Secretary of State will still get 30 hours of debate, and after that, we will need to confirm a new CIA Director. Last year, we allowed 30 hours of debate on that nomination, and Democrats used only 2 of the 30. Under the compromise rules that I think we should return to, we would allow up to 8 hours of debate. It is clearly enough—more than most people would think would be needed.

We have more than 100 other qualified people who have been voted on and approved by the appropriate Senate committee, and they are waiting to do important jobs. With all of the threats that our country is facing around the world, it is time for Democrats in the Senate to stop wasting time and stop abusing the rules. It is time for Democrats to join Republicans and the President to do all we can to keep America prosperous, safe, and secure.

Thank you, Mr. President.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

OMNIBUS APPROPRIATIONS BILL

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, I come to the floor to talk about H.R. 4851, legislation that just recently passed the Senate in the last hour or so. Hopefully it is on its way to final reconciliation with the House and hopefully will become law later today.

Before I talk about that, I want to take a second to recognize some provisions that are in the omnibus that we also are going to be voting on in the next few hours, two provisions that are very important to the Pacific Northwest—one, finally a fix on fire borrowing, which is so important to the entire Northwest but particularly in the State of Washington, which has seen the great impact of forest fires in the last several years. This will end the fire borrowing that we have seen that has prevented us from doing the kind of fuel reduction that we would like to see to protect our communities, and it will help us better manage with stewardship contracts and release the funds that should be going to recreation management within our forests.

This fire funding fix has been long in the making. I thank my colleagues, Senators WYDEN, RISCH, and CRAPO, for their hard work, and I thank Bryan Petit from my office, who has worked tirelessly on this as well. We are starting a new day in how we treat our forests and hopefully one that will reduce the risks to many communities.

I thank our colleagues for working so diligently on including a provision on

affordable housing. This is the first affordable housing increase in a decade. I want to thank specifically Senator SCHUMER and Senator MCCONNELL and Senator HATCH, my cosponsor on this legislation, for helping us get this done. This is not everything we would like to see in affordable housing, but certainly it is starting to point in the right direction.

I also thank Anna Taylor, Artie Mandel, Lara Muldoon, and Jay Khosla for working so diligently on trying to make the housing crisis something that we have to deal with here in the U.S. Senate. For us in the Pacific Northwest, the homelessness crisis, our returning veterans, our aging population, and workforce housing have become the No. 1 issue. For Seattle and the whole Northwest, starting to put more resources on the table to build affordable housing is the right direction, and we need it desperately now, and this legislation will help us.

KENNEDY-KING NATIONAL COMMEMORATIVE SITE
BILL

Now, Mr. President, I come with my colleague Senator YOUNG—and I know Senator DONNELLY wishes he could join us—to talk about the legislation that Representative ANDRÉ CARSON has sent to the Senate and we just recently passed back to the House. This bill designates the Landmark for Peace Memorial, which is located in the Martin Luther King Jr. Park in Indianapolis, and it designates it as the Kennedy-King National Commemorative Site.

This legislation provides that this commemorative site shall be part of the African American Civil Rights Network that Congress established last December, and it will be only the second commemorative site in our beloved National Park System. The other designation went to Charleston, AR, the location of the first public school in the South to be fully integrated.

This national commemorative site, which will remain as part of a city park, is not going to be part of the National Park System, although I am happy to discuss that with my colleagues moving forward. The National Park Service is authorized to enter into cooperative agreements to help provide for education and interpretation of this site.

The Young-Donnelly amendment removes language in the bill authorizing the Park Service to conduct a special resource study and assess its potential for inclusion in the National Park System. I know my colleague Senator YOUNG is here on the floor, and I thank him for his leadership. I hope that some day he and I can continue, with Senator DONNELLY, to expand on this and revisit this issue. The original legislation passed unanimously out of the House of Representatives, and I know Senator YOUNG worked hard to clear the one objection, but I don't think that one objection should delay us from furthering our interest in this issue.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD the

full text of Robert F. Kennedy's speech in Indianapolis on April 4, 1968, the 50th anniversary coming up next week.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

FULL TEXT OF ROBERT F. KENNEDY'S SPEECH:
INDIANAPOLIS, APRIL 4, 1968

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I'm only going to talk to you just for a minute or so this evening, because I have some very sad news for all of you. Could you lower those signs, please? I have some very sad news for all of you, and, I think, sad news for all of our fellow citizens, and people who love peace all over the world; and that is that Martin Luther King was shot and was killed tonight in Memphis, Tennessee.

Martin Luther King dedicated his life to love and to justice between fellow human beings. He died in the cause of that effort. In this difficult day, in this difficult time for the United States, it's perhaps well to ask what kind of a nation we are and what direction we want to move in.

For those of you who are black considering the evidence evidently is that there were white people who were responsible you can be filled with bitterness, and with hatred, and a desire for revenge.

We can move in that direction as a country, in greater polarization black people amongst blacks, and white amongst whites, filled with hatred toward one another.

Or we can make an effort, as Martin Luther King did, to understand, and to comprehend, and replace that violence, that stain of bloodshed that has spread across our land, with an effort to understand, compassion, and love.

For those of you who are black and are tempted to fill with hatred and mistrust of the injustice of such an act, against all white people, I would only say that I can also feel in my own heart the same kind of feeling. I had a member of my family killed, but he was killed by a white man.

But we have to make an effort in the United States. We have to make an effort to understand, to get beyond, or go beyond these rather difficult times.

My favorite poet was Aeschylus. And he once wrote:

Even in our sleep, pain which cannot forget falls drop by drop upon the heart, until, in our own despair, against our will, comes wisdom through the awful grace of God.

What we need in the United States is not division;

what we need in the United States is not hatred;

what we need in the United States is not violence and lawlessness, but is love, and wisdom, and compassion toward one another, and a feeling of justice toward those who still suffer within our country, whether they be white or whether they be black.

So I ask you tonight to return home, to say a prayer for the family of Martin Luther King, yeah, it's true but more importantly to say a prayer for our own country, which all of us love a prayer for understanding and that compassion of which I spoke.

We can do well in this country. We will have difficult times. We've had difficult times in the past, but we and we will have difficult times in the future. It is not the end of violence; it is not the end of lawlessness; and it's not the end of disorder.

But the vast majority of white people and the vast majority of black people in this country want to live together, want to improve the quality of our life, and want justice for all human beings that abide in our land.

And let's dedicate ourselves to what the Greeks wrote so many years ago: to tame the savageness of man and make gentle the life of this world. Let us dedicate ourselves to that, and say a prayer for our country and for our people.

Thank you very much.

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, some days we need a reminder of what perspective in the face of crisis really accomplishes. We know that 50 years after this historic speech, we have an understanding about how incredibly magnificent this moment was, so I am so glad to join my colleague in commemorating it. It was about holding the consciousness of a society and how to respond to an unbelievable, tragic, violent event and to hold the consciousness of a society with words—just words. And that is the point—that words matter; that words matter to a society. They are what holds us together. They are what creates unity. They are what creates perspective. In this case, they also created history.

Senator Kennedy spoke to a crowd in Indianapolis and announced the death of Martin Luther King—an unbelievable responsibility. If you watch now in videos of the speech, you will hear the gasps of the audience, who was unaware that that event, in that moment, had taken place. Yet he spoke to the crowd about why violence and retribution should not be pursued. He created calm among chaos. He created a moment where everybody realized that they were commemorating the life of Dr. Martin Luther King, that his life had been about a nonviolent response to tragedy and to the challenges we face.

When we commemorate this moment with this designation, we are commemorating a moment, in my opinion, of the human spirit. We are commemorating a moment—the incredible pain Robert Kennedy must have felt, knowing that Martin Luther King had just been assassinated. Yet he spoke to the crowd about keeping the peace and remembering the lessons of Dr. King.

We will never know what kind of Presidency RFK might have given our Nation, but we know this from his speech: We know what kind of man he was, and we know what kind of human spirit and soul can communicate, in that moment of tragedy, the direction of a nation.

It is so important at this moment in our history that we reflect on this 50th anniversary. At a time when it is better to use words to speak calmly and competently in the face of tragedy, I hope that here in Washington, we will remember one of the greatest political speeches of all time.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Indiana.

Mr. YOUNG. Mr. President, earlier today, the Senate passed the Kennedy-King National Commemorative Site Act—an effort that I was pleased to lead here in the Senate, alongside my colleague Senator DONNELLY. This important legislation commemorates the

Landmark for Peace Memorial in Indianapolis and establishes the site as part of the African American Civil Rights Network. The act would not have passed without the support of both Chairman MURKOWSKI and Ranking Member CANTWELL, and I thank both of them and their hard-working staffs for their assistance in this effort.

I also extend my sincere gratitude to Representative BROOKS, Senator DONNELLY, and Representative CARSON for working with me to pass this measure that recognizes a significant moment in Indiana's and our Nation's history.

Two weeks from now, on April 4, the city of Indianapolis will commemorate the 50th anniversary of Senator Robert F. Kennedy's timeless speech in the Circle City. On that fateful evening in 1968, Senator Kennedy was scheduled to be in Indianapolis for a campaign event. As Senator Kennedy arrived in Indianapolis late that evening, he learned of the tragic death of Martin Luther King, Jr., in Memphis, TN. Senator Kennedy decided to speak to the assembled Hoosiers who had come to see him and inform them of the tragic news of King's death. He confirmed the terrible rumors that many were beginning to hear that evening in the course of his words.

Cities throughout America were erupting in riots, in many instances, as they learned of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination. However, in Indianapolis, Senator Kennedy spoke to the grief-stricken crowd, and he inspired them. He inspired them to replace the hatred they felt with compassion and love. To this day, Hoosiers warmly remember Senator Kennedy's moving speech, and we recognize his heartfelt words as a reason why Indianapolis remained calm and peaceful while riots swept much of the Nation.

I wish to close today with a quote from Senator Kennedy's speech—powerful words that still ring true 50 years after he uttered them. These words will forever mark Senator Kennedy's grave in Arlington National Cemetery:

What we need in the United States is not division; what we need in the United States is not hatred; what we need in the United States is not violence and lawlessness; but love and wisdom, and compassion toward one another, and a feeling of justice toward those who still suffer within our country, whether they be white or whether they be black.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, the Senator from Maine will arrive in just a moment, and I ask unanimous consent for up to an hour for us and Senator GRAHAM and Senator ROUNDS to address the Senate within that hour—the four of us, and others who wish—to speak on the health insurance issue within that hour.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

HEALTH INSURANCE

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I am here today to talk about the

plumber making \$60,000 whose health insurance is \$20,000 and he pays for all of it and about the fact that the bill we are about to vote on today could have had in it bipartisan legislation—supported by the President of the United States, the majority leader, and the Speaker of the House—that would have reduced that plumber's health insurance bill from \$12,000 to \$8,000, according to the Oliver Wyman health consulting experts, who have evaluated the bipartisan legislation that we have proposed.

The only reason it doesn't have that in there is because Democrats have objected to putting on this bill we are voting on today the traditional Hyde amendment that governs how dollars are spent when an abortion is involved. The traditional Hyde amendment is a compromise that has been on every appropriations bill—and this is an appropriations bill—since 1976 and that Democrats have voted for hundreds of times and Republicans have voted for hundreds of times. On this very bill that we are voting on today, more than 100 times the Hyde language applies to other programs.

So Democrats are scrambling and embarrassed, coming up with excuse after excuse, trying to explain to the self-employed businessperson—the farmer, the songwriter, the plumber—who might be making \$60,000 or \$70,000 and paying \$20,000 for their insurance, and paying it all, with no government subsidy—why they are blocking a 40-percent reduction in their health insurance and why they will not apply the Hyde language to the health insurance rate reduction and they will apply it to 100 other programs. Not just in past voting but today, every single Democrat today who votes for the omnibus bill will be voting to apply the Hyde language restricting abortion to at least 100 other programs.

For example, how will they explain this to the plumber, the farmer, and the self-employed businesswoman: I will apply the Hyde language and restrict Federal funding for abortions to the National Institutes of Health but not to reduce your health insurance rates by 40 percent. I will apply the Hyde language to community health centers today, but I am going to block the bipartisan proposal to reduce your health insurance by 40 percent that is supported by the President, the majority leader, and the Speaker of the House. I will vote today to apply the Hyde language to the Federal Employment Health Benefits Program, which provides health insurance to 3 million or so employees, but I will not vote for a health insurance program to reduce your rates by 40 percent because I will not apply the Hyde language to it?

How are they going to explain today and next October, when the insurance rates are announced for 2019, 2020, and 2021, that they had an opportunity in March of this year to reduce rates in 2019, 2020, and 2021 by 40 percent and they refused to do it because they said:

We will not apply the traditional Hyde language to health insurance, even though we are going to apply it to the Indian health programs, to the VA, to women's medical care, to global health programs, to the Ryan White HIV/AIDS program—to 100 programs that Democrats will be voting on today to apply the Hyde language to. They will do that, but they are going to block bipartisan legislation—supported by the President, the majority leader, and the Speaker—that will reduce the health insurance rates of the plumber making \$60,000 from \$20,000 to \$12,000?

I want to speak about that plumber. I want to speak ahead to October 1, when the rates for 2019 are announced. I want to talk about Marty, the farmer in Tennessee who I met at the Chick-fil-A, who came up to me and said: I was paying \$300 a month for my health insurance, and over the last 5 years it has gone up to \$1,300, and I can't afford it.

I said: I have a Christmas present for you. Then, I thought I had a Valentine card for it. Then, I thought I had an Easter present for it, because we got bipartisan legislation, supported by the President, the majority leader, and the Speaker. I said: We can put that in the omnibus bill, we can pass it by the end of March, and we can reduce your rates.

There are 9 million Americans who don't get insurance on the job. They don't get insurance from the government. They buy it themselves. They are hardworking Americans. They are the plumber, the farmer, the small businessperson. They are making \$60,000, \$70,000, \$80,000, \$90,000 a year. Their insurance bills are \$15,000, \$20,000, \$25,000 a year. They are rapidly approaching a point, if they haven't already, that they have to go without insurance because they can't afford it, and we have a way to do something about that.

It is happening in my State of Tennessee. Rates went up another 57 percent last year for those people. That is thousands of dollars. Yet we could have today reduced their rates by thousands of dollars. Here is how:

We have developed two bipartisan bills, beginning in the fall. Our committee—the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee—held four hearings. We had roundtables to which we invited all the Senators. Senator MURRAY, the ranking Democrat, and I presided over this.

We talked about all of the issues and tried to see what we could do, and we came up with what we call the Alexander-Murray bill. It had two parts to it. The first part was regulatory reform. We took something already in the Affordable Care Act—the 1332 innovation waivers—and we made it possible for States to streamline it and use it.

We also added a few other things. We changed the law so that Minnesota and New York could use the basic health plan and could tap into the subsidies in the way that those States wanted to do

it. That is \$130 million a year in Minnesota and \$1 billion in New York. Democrats are blocking that today—\$130 million in Minnesota and \$1 billion in New York, and Democrats are saying no to that today. Why? Because they will not apply the Hyde language to the health insurance rate decrease, even though they are going to vote to apply it to 100 other pieces of legislation in this very bill.

We did the regulatory reform, and then we did something many Republicans didn't want to do and the President didn't want to do to start with. We extended the cost-sharing subsidy payments for 3 more years. These are payments to reduce rates for low-income people on their copays and deductibles. We agreed to do that.

Then, Senator COLLINS and Senator NELSON, a Republican and a Democrat, came up with a plan—the House did, too, with Representative COSTELLO—to add reinsurance. Reinsurance is something about which, in our hearings and in our meetings, virtually every Senator in both parties said: We really need to do that, because the reason the individual market is in such trouble is that it has so many of the sickest Americans in it and they are soaking up all the money.

The reinsurance program that we suggested and have in Senator COLLINS and Senator NELSON's bill—3 years, \$10 billion a year—would give States funds as well as planning money to set up those invisible risk pools, those reinsurance programs, that were meant for the sickest Americans to have their needs taken care of, and you lower the rates for everybody else.

So we have regulatory reform, 3 years of cost-sharing subsidies, 3 years of reinsurance, \$10 billion a year. The Congressional Budget Office says: If you score it based on real spending, it actually saves the government money by reducing the premiums that taxpayers have to pay for—a \$1 billion advantage for New York for each of the next 3 years, \$130 million for Minnesota for each of the next 3 years. We fix the problem in New Hampshire, to allow both Democratic Senators and the Republican Governor to say: Please do this; we want to be able to mix our ObamaCare and Medicaid savings.

We said: Yes, you can do that, and so can every State.

Within the Affordable Care Act, we did what Democrats have been saying to do ever since we couldn't repeal and replace it last August and said: We will work with you to fix it.

The part that needs fixing is the part causing the plumber who makes \$60,000 to pay \$20,000 for his health insurance, and we have a way to fix it—to reduce it by 40 percent, according to Oliver Wyman consulting; by 20 percent, according to the Congressional Budget Office. Yet the Democrats are blocking it today because they will not apply the traditional Hyde language that they voted for every single year since 1976 in the omnibus bill and that they

will be voting on today for 100-plus times.

How do you explain that to the plumber? How do you explain that to the farmer? How do you explain that to the 9 million Americans who see their health insurance rates going through the roof?

Let's not make any mistake about who is doing this. We are big boys and girls in the Senate. When we take a stand, we ought to admit it. What the Democrats are doing is they are blocking a 40-percent rate decrease for one single reason—one single reason. The President of the United States supports it, the Speaker supports it, the majority leader supports it, and we are ready to put it in the bill, and they say no.

Let's look down the road to October. All of the insurance companies will announce their rates for 2019, and we will be looking ahead to 2020 and 2021. Rates will be going up instead of going down. The farmer, the self-employed person, the songwriter are going to be saying: How am I going to be able to afford this?

Nothing is more important to Americans than healthcare. Nothing is more frightening to Americans than the prospect of not being able to afford to buy healthcare. That is what we are doing here.

I am disappointed by this. I have spent hundreds of hours on this since September. We had a piece of legislation introduced on this floor by 12 Republicans and 12 Democrats that the Democratic leader said every single Democrat would vote for and the national Democratic chairman said was great bipartisan legislation. That is two-thirds of our bill.

What is the other third? The other third is the Collins-Nelson bill, which adds \$10 billion a year for reinsurance. The Governors like this. The State insurance commissioners like this. The plumber and the songwriter like it. Who doesn't like it? A few Democrats who are saying that the Hyde language, which says—let's be specific about what it says—you can't use Federal funds for elective abortions, but you may use any other funds. That is exactly the law that we have in our bill.

The Hyde language is in the bill we are going to be voting on later today. It was put there in 1976. It is adopted year after year. It is on page 1036, if anybody wants to look it up. Then, there is language in the bill that we are going to be voting on today restricting Federal employee health benefits with Hyde-like language, which is on page 588. You will be voting for it today. Then, there is the title X family planning legislation. That is in the bill you are going to be voting for, as well, today. That is Hyde language. Then, there is the Mexico City legislation. You are going to vote for that today.

But you are going to tell the farmer, the songwriter, and the employer that they are not allowed to have a 40-percent health insurance decrease. They

are going to have to not be able to afford health insurance for their family. As to Federal funding for the DC government, you are going to vote for that today. Using funds for elective abortions is restricted in the bill that we are voting on today.

Senator COLLINS from Maine is here, and the Senator from South Carolina is here. They have worked hard on this. We are a group of Senators who I think are fairly, usually seen as trying to get results around here. We are greatly disappointed by this—not just for this institution but for the people we serve because the hard, simple fact is that we have legislation that could be in this bill that will reduce your health insurance rates by 40 percent starting in 2019 and continuing for the next 2 years, until it gets up to 40.

We have the support of the President. We have the support of the Speaker. We have the support of the majority leader. But the Democratic leader says: You can't have it in the bill. We are going to vote 100 times to apply the Hyde language to everything from the National Institutes of Health to community health centers, but we are not going to let you reduce healthcare rates.

That is why Democrats are scrambling, coming up with excuse after excuse. They are going to have to really come up with scrambling and excuse after excuse on October 1, when the rates are announced.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CASIDY). The Senator from South Carolina.

Mr. GRAHAM. Mr. President, I will be very brief. The first thing I want to do is to thank Senators ALEXANDER and COLLINS for trying to work very hard to solve a problem that we can fix. There are a lot of things about healthcare that I don't see us fixing between now and tomorrow. This is not one of them. Healthcare is very complex. It is one-fifth of the economy. I think there is a better way to do healthcare than ObamaCare. Most Republicans want to replace it. Most Democrats want to repair it.

We are not talking about that. We are talking about an island of agreement that will matter between now and October—what Senator ALEXANDER and MURRAY came up with. You had bipartisan support. There are two provisions that allow flexibility in terms of the 1332 regulations and to continue payments to make sure that person who makes too much for a subsidy but not enough to be self-sufficient when it comes to healthcare gets a little bit of help. That is the plumber and the other people that Senator ALEXANDER described.

President Obama took care of these people through Executive action. That has been found to be unconstitutional by our courts. Legislatively, we are trying to continue this program to help somebody whose premiums are going

through the roof but who are not eligible for the statutory subsidies and create a new level of help that will keep their premiums from skyrocketing and actually decrease their premiums in October by 40 percent.

There are a lot of things we can agree on, and there are a lot of things we can accomplish when it comes to healthcare, but this is not one of them. I can only imagine how these two Senators feel.

Senator COLLINS, working with Senator NELSON from Florida, added a third provision to the Alexander-Murray concept that makes eminent sense. I doubt if there is one Governor in the country who would oppose what Senator COLLINS is trying to do—to allow States to petition for Federal funding to help the States deal with the sickest people in that State by coming up with innovative, high-risk pools and allowing States to experiment with what works best for the sickest people in their State by accessing Federal funding. You can't spend it on roads and bridges, but you can use it for the high-risk population, the people who drive the most cost. I doubt if there is any Governor in the country who would say that this is a bad idea.

Senator NELSON thinks it is a good idea. Our most conservative Members in the House think it is a good idea. We have taken Alexander-Murray and added a third component that I think is an excellent idea. When you combine the three things, you can lower the cost by 40 percent for that self-insured person who makes over \$45,000 and lower their premiums by 40 percent by October.

It matters a lot to the people described, and there are millions of these people who will not get a 40-percent reduction. They are going to get a 10-percent or a 20-percent increase, and already they are paying about 25 to 30 percent of their income just for healthcare. It is mind-boggling that we are where we are.

I will just add this and turn it over to Senator ROUNDS. How did we get here? I think the desire to control the House and take back the Senate is overwhelmingly good policy. Somebody on the other side believes that if we can block this proposal—the Collins-Nelson-proposal, the Alexander-Murray proposal—if we can keep that from becoming law, these premium increases that are surely to come will fall upon the Republican Party and will give us yet another tool to take back the House and regain the majority in the Senate. The reason I say that is because I have come to believe that there is no other explanation, and that is sad. That to me is a real dropping of the Democratic Party in terms of the role they play around here.

We work together where we can. Sometimes we are wrong; sometimes they are right. Sometimes it is the other way around. But this is the one occasion where we seem to have been right up until now.

Why is it not in the omnibus bill? Because of Democratic objections. Last Saturday, we spent an hour on the phone with the President of the United States—Senator COLLINS, Senator ALEXANDER, myself, and Congressman WALDEN—talking about this proposal, about how it would lower premiums, how it is good policy, and how this is the right way to continue to help the people in question. At the end of the hour discussion, the President said: Count me in. I want to help. I agree to the concept. What would you like me to do?

It never crossed our minds to call a Democrat. Our concern was the House. We needed the President to call Speaker RYAN. Senator MCCONNELL was enthusiastic for this. We honestly believed that the problem would be in the House, with our Freedom Caucus friends. We asked the President to call the Speaker of the House, and KEVIN MCCARTHY, and he did. The Speaker told him: We are for it.

I thought: home run.

Between last Saturday and now, what happened is that NANCY PELOSI, the minority leader in the House, and Senate Democrats have objected to this proposal, and the rationale is abortion. The language that is in law is exactly the same language that would apply to this legislation. The Stupak language applying to the Affordable Care Act, dealing with Federal funds and abortion, is still the law of the land. But under the omnibus approach, we are going to run the subsidies through the Labor-HHS bill, where Hyde protection would apply—no more, no less than any other Federal dollar dealing with healthcare.

Senator ALEXANDER has done a very good service to the body. In the bill that we will vote on soon, there are over 100 applications of the Hyde language to healthcare spending at the Federal level. Apparently, these dollars don't make the cut. Why? They know that if we don't get this relief in March, in October premiums are going to go up, and they are literally making up a phony excuse based on Hyde protections. The reason I know it is phony is that, if they really believe what they are saying about Hyde language, they wouldn't vote for this bill at all because every other Federal dollar runs through the same system we are proposing this go through. If you really cared about the abortion issue the way you claim, you could not support this bill or any other piece of legislation that has been around since 1976.

Clearly, the Hyde problem is not much of a problem when it comes to every other Federal healthcare dollar. It is only a problem here. The only reason it is a problem here is that you don't want us, as Republicans, working with you to fix a problem that needs to be fixed because you are thinking of October in terms of your political future. You are not thinking of October in terms of people.

Here is what I hope happens to you. I hope you lose votes. We have our prob-

lems on our side. We will probably pay a price come November about some of the things we have done wrong. All I can say to my Democratic colleagues is this: The reason you are stopping this provision from becoming law is that you think it gives you a political advantage in November because of premium increases in October. This is exactly why the American people hate politics so much.

I want to be on record in March as being a Member of the Senate who works with the other side when I can, surrounded by people on my side of the aisle who are historically seen as centrists when it comes to trying to solve problems. There is nobody on this floor who has a reputation of being an ideologue. Senator COLLINS is a pro-choice Republican, and she is OK with sending these dollars through Hyde protections because they have been around so long. LISA MURKOWSKI is a pro-choice Republican. She was with us yesterday, saying that she is dumbfounded about this argument about abortion.

So play the tape later on. When the premiums go up 10 to 20 percent for hard-working people and there is a debate about why that happened, I want somebody to play this tape, because we have 24 hours to stop that.

Every expert who has looked at this says the following: If you do Alexander-Murray-Collins-Nelson, you will prevent a premium increase of 10 to 20 percent, and you will lower premiums in the next couple of years by up to 40 percent. I don't know what the day is. It is some day in March, but I have lost track of what day it is. Yet I am here to say, when that debate comes about in October, I want you to play this tape. We had a chance today to fix this problem, and the only reason we are not going to do it is due to our Democratic colleagues' decision to play politics with this issue rather than to solve the problem.

The President of the United States is for this. The majority leader of the U.S. Senate is for this. The Speaker of the House is for this. Every Republican leader is for this. The Senators on the floor who work with Democrats are for this. We are urging our colleagues, before it is too late, to change their minds and get this into an omnibus in a fashion so as to lower premiums, not to sit on the sidelines and watch them go up. So, when the debate happens in October, play this tape.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota.

Mr. ROUNDS. Mr. President, first of all, let me offer my thanks to Senator ALEXANDER and Senator COLLINS, and let me add my support for what Senator GRAHAM has just indicated in terms of the importance of this particular amendment to the omnibus bill.

Look, I am a pro-life Republican. By allowing the Hyde amendment to prevail in this particular case, as it does with all of the other funding that we send back to the States so that it cannot be used to fund abortions—and that

is what this is all about—it allows us to still continue to provide, with clear consciences, the dollars necessary to provide healthcare for individuals who otherwise may not get it.

This particular proposal allows for States to, once again, take charge of part of the healthcare that we want to see delivered at the local level. By taking section 1332 and expanding what States can do, we actually provide more local control, which is a conservative approach. It is also one more opportunity to reduce the impact of what many of us have said was a mistake with ObamaCare in the first place.

For conservatives, a lot of us campaigned on the fact that we wanted to repeal and replace ObamaCare. To repeal it and replace it, you have to have 60 votes here. In this particular case, what we have said is: Let's take those parts that are the most onerous and those parts that are adding to the cost of healthcare and take those out, but let's provide and continue to provide the protections that some people feel ObamaCare was responsible for, such as guaranteed renewable products, which were included in South Dakota's law before ObamaCare ever came along, and the opportunity for everybody to apply for a policy and to be accepted one way or another.

This particular piece of legislation allows for, perhaps, as many as 3.2 million Americans to actually be able to afford the policies that, today, they can't afford. I believe Senator ALEXANDER used the example of someone who is making \$60,000 a year and has a bill of \$20,000 for his healthcare. The reality is that that person is not buying healthcare. So let's allow those folks the opportunity to have a reduction in the premiums that they otherwise could not afford to pay.

This allows for the States, on a very responsible basis, to do what Senator COLLINS, as a former insurance commissioner, understands so clearly. What we have done with ObamaCare is to force individuals who have no place else to go into what we call the individual market. When we force all—or the vast majority—of the individuals who have health problems into the individual market to get coverage, it artificially drives up the cost of that individual policy. That individual market makes up 6 percent of the total number of the people who are covered, but that 6 percent of the premium going in picks up an unfairly large number of individuals who have no place else to go to get insurance. That drives the cost of the premiums up for those individuals and makes it, in many cases, more costly than they could ever afford.

With a reinsurance provision for the States, it allows for a State to say: Look, issue the policies, but then allow us to expand the base over which we spread those losses. Let those States do that. This worked successfully before ObamaCare was ever a bad dream. This allows for us to take a larger base of

people to share and to spread that risk. When you do that, you make that market more stable, and you start to invite carriers to step back into the market. That is what this is all about.

I am not going to try to assign the intention of our colleagues who are on the other side of the aisle. I am a pragmatist. I really do believe that we have some very sincere colleagues on the other side of the aisle who understand how important this is.

What I would invite is this: I am a conservative Republican. I want to see this move forward. I think, for the good of the American people, this is the right move to make. I would ask our colleagues on the other side of the aisle to consider the good this would do for people across this entire country and to find a way to work through this process in such a fashion that they could comfortably come forward and help us to get this to the finish line.

If we can do this, we will make things better not just for those 3.2 million Americans who would be able to qualify for insurance once again and be able to pay for it, but we honestly believe—and it is the Congressional Budget Office that has suggested this—that somewhere between 20 percent of the premiums they would otherwise pay would solidly be reduced. In some cases, according to healthcare professionals in the private market—these are the people who actually suggest and work with the insurance companies—as much as 40 percent of that total cost could be reduced.

This is not a partisan issue. This is a matter of trying to actually make an impact on the lives of real Americans who need our help. Remember that the American people did not ask for ObamaCare, but they are the ones who are suffering because of the premium increases that have been caused by this law in the first place.

What we are trying to do in what is, hopefully, an acceptable fashion is to find colleagues on the other side of the aisle who will once again join us in this legislation that they had previously supported—for them to find a way to step forward—and actually help fix a problem for real Americans.

Once again, I thank the Senator from Tennessee for all of the hard work he has done. As a former Governor, he understands that, once in a while, you reach across the aisle, and you find ways to get things done. In the Senate, it requires 60 votes to make this happen.

I thank Senator COLLINS for her work. She is a former insurance commissioner. She gets it. She understands it.

We want to find the common ground that it takes to actually fix a problem for the American people. This is not and should not be a partisan issue—fixing a problem that we all agree exists today.

I thank the Presiding Officer. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be permitted to speak for up to 30 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, we have the opportunity today to take immediate action to lower the cost of health insurance by as much as 40 percent and to increase the affordability of insurance for millions of Americans who purchase plans in the individual market.

I commend Senator ALEXANDER, the chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, for his extraordinary leadership and hard work in this area.

I am also very pleased with the work that has been done by Representative GREG WALDEN, the chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, and Representative COSTELLO.

We have come together, along with a substantial number of our colleagues, including Senators GRAHAM, ROUNDS, ISAKSON, and MURKOWSKI, among many others, on this very important insurance stabilization and rate reduction package.

Let me begin by outlining the major provisions of what it is that we are proposing, because there has been, unfortunately, a lot of misunderstanding and, dare I say, misinformation.

First, our legislation, based on the Alexander-Murray bill, would fund the cost-sharing reduction subsidies for 3 years. These are vital for Americans who have incomes that are below 250 percent of the poverty level. CSRs provide government assistance to help them pay for their deductibles and their copays.

Second, our proposal also improves the ability of the States to take further steps to lower insurance premiums for their citizens. We provide meaningful flexibility for States by revising section 1332 of the Affordable Care Act, which authorizes State innovation waivers.

Third, based on a bill that I authored with Senator BILL NELSON, our proposal provides a total of \$30 billion over 3 years for States to have reinsurance, or invisible high-risk pools, by applying for a waiver under the section 1332 program I just mentioned.

As I know the Presiding Officer well knows, reinsurance is a proven method for dealing with high-risk, expensive claims. It reduces uncertainty and has benefits not only for those who have preexisting conditions and need expensive healthcare but for the entire individual market, and it has been proven to work in States like Maine and Alaska.

We have also included \$500 million to assist States with the planning of the designs of their own reinsurance, or invisible high-risk pools. In the House, the Costello bill also had a Federal fallback in recognizing that we were late in the year and that we wanted to provide help immediately, which we have included for 2019, to give States

time to apply for waivers under section 1332.

What does our bill not do?

Our proposal does not change the Affordable Care Act's essential benefit requirements. It does not change the guarantee that an individual will be able to buy insurance. It does not change the protections for people with preexisting conditions. Yet it ensures that the Federal funding directly benefits consumers and not insurance companies.

In considering this plan, Congress faces a fundamental question: Do we want to take action to significantly reduce the cost of health insurance for millions of Americans or are we just going to sit back, say no, and let this opportunity pass us by?

Time is short. If Congress fails to act, insurance rates in the individual market will skyrocket this fall. This will directly harm the 9 million Americans who pay for their own insurance without government or employer assistance. That is, for example, the fisherman in my State who is self-employed, the electrician, the plumber, the carpenter—there are so many—the hair stylist. They are already paying far too much for their healthcare costs. Well, all of them will be facing another double-digit premium increase if they are to be insured, and rates can only be expected to continue to climb.

Healthcare premiums are already too expensive under the Affordable Care Act. That is one of the problems with the Affordable Care Act that I have been committed to fixing. Last year, the average price of the Affordable Care Act silver plans, which are the most popular plans, increased on average by 34 percent. A growing number of counties in our country are at risk of having no insurers or only one insurer, leaving hard-working individuals with few or no choices for health insurance coverage. Inaction will only exacerbate the premium spikes and the market instability we have already experienced.

When our country is confronted with such a serious problem—I mean, what is more important to people than healthcare?—Americans expect us to come together. They expect us to work constructively. They expect us to provide real relief from the rising cost of health insurance, which makes health insurance unaffordable for far too many Americans, and that is precisely what our plan would do.

Let me be crystal clear. Our proposal is the last opportunity—the last opportunity—to prevent these rate increases that will go into effect, which will be announced on October 1. Our package will help to stabilize the insurance markets and make them more competitive.

Every study has shown that our bill would make health insurance more affordable. According to the leading healthcare experts at Oliver Wyman, our bill would lower individual health insurance premiums in the individual market by as much as 40 percent com-

pared to what people will otherwise pay if Congress fails to act. According to Oliver Wyman, it would also expand coverage to an additional 3.2 million Americans.

I want to touch on a complicated but important issue that some of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle have raised as a reason not to pass this bill. There have been two reasons. One is the application of the Hyde amendment, which has been law for decades, which I will talk about subsequently, but the first has to do with what is referred to as silver-loading and zero-premium bronze plans.

First a little background. The Affordable Care Act was designed to provide two key subsidies for enrollees who purchased coverage on the exchange and qualified from an income standpoint. The first are premium tax credits to help cover the cost of premiums for individuals earning between 100 and 400 percent of the Federal poverty level. The second are cost-sharing subsidies, or CSRs, to help cover the cost of deductibles and copays and other out-of-pocket expenses for individuals who are very low-income—earning between 100 and 250 percent of the Federal poverty level.

Despite the fact that Congress never appropriated the funds to pay for the cost-sharing reductions, the Obama administration paid them anyway. The House sued to block this strategy and won in Federal district court.

Lacking an appropriation from Congress, President Trump stopped making these payments last year. That concerned many of us, but let me make clear—he was following the court's decision. In response, insurance companies came up with the silver-loading strategy, under which they increased the price of their silver plans to compensate for the cost-sharing reduction payments they were no longer receiving. In essence, insurers have created silver plans that mimic CSRs for low-income enrollees. Because the ACA's tax credits are tied to the silver plan premium, the tax credits ballooned in size, producing credits so large that they are often sufficient to fully cover the premiums on the bronze plans for lower income enrollees and, by the way, greatly increased the cost to Federal taxpayers, which is why the bill we put together, by right-sizing the market and avoiding the games that were played, actually pays for itself.

We all remember the old saying that “if something sounds too good to be true, it probably is.” Well, free bronze plans for low-income individuals sounded too good to be true, and they are. I hope my colleagues on the other side of the aisle are listening to this explanation. The fact is that free bronze plans are only a good deal for low-income Americans who never get sick, who never get hurt, who never need to use their insurance. If they do, they will pay hundreds or even thousands of dollars more out of pocket.

While these plans might have lower monthly payments or even be free,

they have much higher deductibles and copays. Based on publicly available data pulled from the exchanges, I am going to describe an example illustrating that individuals with free bronze plans will face much steeper costs when they try to access care than if they paid the small premium for the silver plan.

Let's take the example of Chris and Caroline, ages 34 and 32, who live in Portland, ME. They bought coverage on the exchange for themselves and their two young children for 2018. They make about \$34,500 a year, which is about 140 percent of the Federal poverty level. They saw that they could get a “free” bronze plan, or they could choose to buy the cheapest silver plan for \$54.83 a month. They chose the free bronze plan, not realizing that the silver plan would have given them access to subsidies, which provide lower deductibles and copays to low-income people. If Caroline gets pregnant this year and they are under the free bronze plan, they are going to have to pay out of pocket \$7,350—and they make \$34,500 a year. Had they picked the least expensive silver plan, they would have had to pay \$500.

Consider a hypothetical couple in their early thirties, Jacob and Emma, with two young children, living in Seattle, WA. They are making just under \$35,000 a year. When they went shopping for coverage on the exchange, they, too, saw that they could get a free bronze plan, or they could buy the least expensive silver plan for about \$84 a month. Jacob and Emma chose the free bronze plan, which doesn't come with the subsidies included in the silver plan to help low-income families with deductibles and copays. If someone in this young family faces a serious illness this year, the silver plan in Washington State would have capped Emma and Jacob's additional expenses at \$660. Unfortunately, they have the so-called free bronze plan that some of my colleagues have been touting. They would face up to \$7,210 in out-of-pocket expenses—hardly an affordable option for this low-income family.

It used to be well understood by the affordability advocates in and out of the Senate that low-income Americans struggled to meet deductibles and out-of-pocket expenses. Just 1 year ago today, the Kaiser Family Foundation issued a report arguing against the House reform bill because it did not contain CSRs, noting that “cost-sharing reductions are a key part of the financial support currently provided to [low-income] enrollees” and that without such support, deductibles “are often out of reach for people with lower and modest income.”

A prior Kaiser Family Foundation report from 2015 showed that only 1 in 10 individuals earning between 100 and 250 percent of the Federal poverty level—those are the individuals who would be eligible for CSRs under our bill—has savings or other assets large enough to cover a \$6,000 deductible. In other

words, without CSRs, 90 percent of these individuals will have to wipe out their savings to cover their medical expenses before they even meet their deductible. Those who can't meet their deductible won't get reimbursed. For these Americans, a zero-premium plan will really mean a zero-benefit plan.

I cannot believe that silver-loading and free bronze plans is a credible long-term strategy. First, I would note, in addition to the examples I have given, that CBO assessments from last year were that the silver-loading strategy would cost the Federal taxpayers \$194 billion over the budget window. Second, because low-income individuals will struggle to meet their deductibles, they will be unable to secure reimbursement of expenses. Sooner or later, taxpayers are going to be asking why they are paying nearly \$200 billion more to subsidize policies that deliver such poor benefits.

To be clear, the amendment we are offering prevents this strategy, protecting lower and modest-income enrollees, low-income families and individuals and the taxpayers.

Now, let me discuss the Hyde amendment. I am disappointed, to say the least, that Democrats, who ought to have embraced this proposal, have instead rejected it because its funding is subject to the Hyde amendment. As a pro-choice Republican, I must say this puzzles me. The Hyde amendment has prohibited the use of taxpayer dollars to pay for elective abortions for more than 40 years. It is not new policy. The entire Labor-HHS title of the omnibus before us today is subject to the Hyde amendment.

There are variations of the Hyde amendment in other titles of the omnibus spending bill. It applies to a long list of Federal programs, including Medicare, Medicaid, CHIP, TRICARE, Veterans Affairs, Indian Health Service, the Peace Corps, the Bureau of Prisons, Immigration and Customs Enforcement. I have heard it said that it doesn't apply to commercial insurance that is offered by the Federal Government—that is just not true. It applies to the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program, through which 8.3 million employees, retirees, and their families get their health insurance coverage. I have not seen my Democratic friends make any effort to change the applicability of Hyde to that insurance program.

Together, these programs account for more than \$1 trillion in government spending each year—all of which is covered by the Hyde amendment. That is 100 times the amount of reinsurance we are proposing in our amendment. A trillion dollars of Federal healthcare funding is already covered by the Hyde amendment, which has been policy for 40 years. So how is this, in any way, a radical departure from current policy?

I find it frustrating that some on the other side of the aisle are choosing to block this important package that will provide relief to those who need it

most because of the application of the Hyde amendment. Let me say, they cite the Stupak amendment, which is section 1303 of the Affordable Care Act. We leave that in place, we don't touch it, and we do not change the Hyde amendment's exemptions found in section 507, which allow private entities, State governments, or individuals to use their own funds to provide coverage for abortion. In other words, this is nothing radical or new, and it is baffling and gravely disappointing that this should be used to block this package.

Dozens of healthcare consumer and business groups, as well as the National Association of Insurance Commissioners—those State commissioners whose job it is to look out for consumers—have called upon Congress to take action to lower premiums for millions of Americans and their families. These groups include the American Hospital Association, Blue Cross Blue Shield, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the American Medical Association, the American Cancer Society, the American Academy of Family Physicians, the Federation of American Hospitals, and there are a wide range of groups representing people with diseases, such as arthritis, cancer, epilepsy. The United Way has called for action, the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, the American Lung Association. Just yesterday, the National Association of Insurance Commissioners put out a new letter in support of market stabilization.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that these three letters be printed in the RECORD at the conclusion of my remarks.

Mr. President, how incredibly disappointing it would be if some Members derailed this serious effort to reduce the cost of health insurance for millions of Americans. While Members may disagree with certain provisions, the time has come for each and every Senator to decide: Are you for lower rates and more affordable coverage for the 18 million Americans who get their insurance from the individual market or are you content to just sit back and let their insurance rates soar once again this fall, making health insurance even less affordable than it already is?

In my view, the answer is clear and obvious. We must not lose sight of our goal, and that is making health insurance more affordable for millions of Americans. Including our insurance package in the omnibus funding bill is the right thing to do, and it is urgent that we do it now.

Thank you.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF INSURANCE COMMISSIONERS & THE CENTER FOR INSURANCE POLICY AND RESEARCH,

March 21, 2018.

Hon. LAMAR ALEXANDER,
Chair, Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, U.S. Senate, Washington, DC.

Hon. PATTY MURRAY,
Ranking Member, Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, U.S. Senate, Washington, DC.

Hon. SUSAN COLLINS,
U.S. Senate, Washington, DC.

DEAR CHAIRMAN ALEXANDER, RANKING MEMBER MURRAY, AND SENATOR COLLINS: Members of the National Association of Insurance Commissioners (NAIC) continue to urge congressional support for health insurance market stabilization reforms and applaud the Senate leaders who have worked across the political aisle to advance them. If Congress does not act to stabilize health insurance markets, continued uncertainty regarding federal funding, the health of the risk pool, and regulatory requirements will result in even higher premiums and, possibly, fewer carriers participating on the exchange—perhaps even bare counties.

This is why commissioners from across the political spectrum have contacted their congressional delegations, testified before House and Senate committees, and urged federal policymakers to take immediate action to stabilize the health insurance markets.

Specifically, state regulators support market stabilization reforms that would:

Provide federal funding for reinsurance programs to address the deteriorating risk pools;

Fully fund cost-sharing reduction (CSR) payments that are owed to insurance carriers that provide low-cost sharing plans to lower-income enrollees; and,

Make the Section 1332 waiver process more streamlined and predictable for states.

These concepts have received bipartisan support and, contrary to some rhetoric, are in no way a “bailout” of the insurance industry. They directly benefit consumers and help stabilize the risk pool. CSR payments reimburse carriers for providing a lower cost version of their Silver plans to eligible consumers, and establishing reinsurance funding acknowledges that the risk pools in many states are much sicker than anticipated and help is needed to backstop markets that might otherwise cease to exist in some counties. Section 1332 waiver flexibility will provide states clearer guidance and quicker action to address their market realities, while preserving guardrails to protect consumers. And finally, the Senate rightly acknowledges that “sales across state lines” are best left to the states in the form of interstate compacts.

As insurance commissioners, we attempt to assess these reforms with an apolitical perspective, but we recognize that the political process in Washington does not always allow for a perfect result. What is clear, however, is that without these reforms markets across the country will continue to deteriorate, and consumers will pay the price for this inaction. We applaud Senators who have worked to advance these reforms and we urge all Members of Congress to support them and stabilize health insurance markets for our nation's consumers.

Sincerely,

JULIE MIX MCPHEAK,
NAIC President, Commissioner, Tennessee Department of Commerce & Insurance.

RAYMOND G. FARMER,
NAIC Vice President, Director, South

Carolina Department of Insurance.
 ERIC A. CIOPPA,
NAIC President-Elect, Superintendent, Maine Bureau of Insurance.
 GORDON I. ITO,
NAIC Secretary-Treasurer, Commissioner, Insurance Division, Hawaii Department of Commerce and Consumer Affairs.

CONGRESS MUST ACT NOW TO PREVENT PREMIUM SPIKES AND COVERAGE LOSSES FOR MILLIONS OF AMERICANS, SAY 20 PATIENT AND CONSUMER GROUPS

WASHINGTON, D.C., Mar. 13, 2018.—20 patient and consumer groups issued the following statement urging Congress to include legislation in the forthcoming omnibus spending bill to steady the health insurance market:

“Congressional leaders must include provisions to stabilize the health insurance market in the March 23rd omnibus government funding bill to prevent millions of Americans from losing health insurance coverage. In the coming months, insurers will set plan rates for 2019 and a shaky marketplace will likely result in premium spikes—putting health insurance out of reach for many patients and families.

Several bipartisan proposals under consideration could preserve and even expand access to affordable health insurance for middle class families. They include cost-sharing reduction policies that could improve affordability for low-income Americans and the creation of a reinsurance program to help keep premiums stable for those with pre-existing conditions. We urge Congress to move swiftly, so that plans on state exchanges can stabilize, and perhaps lower, premiums for the millions of Americans who will turn to the marketplace for coverage next year.

Both parties in Congress have pledged to protect people with pre-existing conditions, but recent regulatory actions taken by the Trump administration to expand association and short-term health plans could undermine existing protections.

Recent data indicates that the number of Americans who are uninsured is on the rise again for the first time since 2008. At the end of 2017, 12.2 percent of U.S. adults lacked health insurance—up from 10.9 percent at the end of 2016, an increase of 3.2 million people.

Quality insurance coverage improves patient outcomes and allows Americans to stay healthy and remain financially secure. The vulnerable communities we represent simply cannot afford to lose access to health insurance that protects their livelihood and wellbeing.”

American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network; American Heart Association; American Lung Association; Arthritis Foundation; Autism Speaks; Crohn’s & Colitis Foundation; Cystic Fibrosis Foundation; Epilepsy Foundation; Family Voices; Futures Without Violence.

Leukemia & Lymphoma Society; Lutheran Services in America; March of Dimes; National Alliance on Mental Illness; National Health Council; National Multiple Sclerosis Society; National Organization for Rare Disorders; National Patient Advocate Foundation; United Way Worldwide; Volunteers of America.

DEAR LEADERS MCCONNELL AND SCHUMER, SPEAKER RYAN, AND LEADER PELOSI: Americans need action now.

We came together earlier this month to stress the importance of congressional ac-

tion to lower healthcare premiums. Time is running out.

In the next few weeks, health insurance providers will begin to file premium rates for 2019 in the individual market. In October, individuals and families who buy their own coverage will review their options, see their premiums, and make their choices. Without Congressional action now, the plans offered to Americans will be nearly 30 percent more expensive than they would be otherwise.

Congress is working on an omnibus appropriations bill that it must act on by March 23. As providers of health care and coverage to hundreds of millions of Americans, we urge you to ensure that bill includes elements that will reduce premiums, improve affordability, and improve the individual market for 2019 and beyond:

Establish a premium reduction/reinsurance program to help cover the costs of people with significant health care needs.

Provide multi-year funding for cost-sharing reduction (CSR) benefits.

According to independent analyses by Avalere Health and Oliver Wyman, enacting both legislative provisions could lower premiums by up to 21% in 2019 and increase enrollment and expand coverage to over 1.5 million Americans. By 2020, premiums could be 40% lower with an additional 2.1 million Americans enrolled and covered. Moreover, this legislation will help physicians and hospitals better serve the health care needs of patients in their community and lower costs for businesses that provide coverage to their employees.

Time is running short. We urge you to deliver on the promise to reduce premiums for millions of Americans and their families.

Sincerely,

AMERICA’S HEALTH
 INSURANCE PLANS;
 AMERICAN ACADEMY OF
 FAMILY PHYSICIANS;
 AMERICAN BENEFITS
 COUNCIL;
 AMERICAN HOSPITAL
 ASSOCIATION;
 AMERICAN MEDICAL
 ASSOCIATION;
 BLUE CROSS BLUE SHIELD
 ASSOCIATION;
 FEDERATION OF AMERICAN
 HOSPITALS;
 U.S. CHAMBER OF
 COMMERCE.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I want to thank the Senator from Maine for her lucid and heartfelt description of what is before us. She has been an exceptional leader, and she continues to be. She looks for ways to get results.

She sees people—the plumber I talked about making \$60,000, the stylist, a farmer—the person who is working and paying all of his or her insurance with no subsidy help and who sees the real prospect coming that when the rates are announced October 1, they may not be able to afford any insurance, and they can see we have a solution for that.

Now, this isn’t a Republican solution or a Democratic solution. This is a solution that began to be developed almost the day Republicans failed to repeal and replace ObamaCare. I walked across the aisle to see if we could do what the Democrats were asking. Let’s fix what we have temporarily so nobody is hurt. As we have explained this afternoon, we did that.

We have a proposal that is the original Alexander-Murray proposal, devel-

oped in four hearings, in which more than half the Senate participated, which at one point the Democratic leader said every single Democrat would vote for. It takes an existing part of the Affordable Care Act and makes it work—that is the innovation waiver—gives States more flexibility to create more choices and lower cost choices without changing the essential health benefits, without changing the guarantee for preexisting conditions. It is really a modest change, but it is a significant change. Then it has 3 years of cost-sharing subsidies—remember, the President said he did not want to pay those, but he supports this—and then 3 years of reinsurance so we can help the sickest people who are in the individual market, take them out, pay their needs, and reduce rates for everybody else. These are the best Republican and Democratic ideas that have been put together in a package and, as Senator COLLINS has said, virtually everyone who has looked at this—starting with the Oliver Wyman Health consultants who say it reduces rates up to 40 percent, the Congressional Budget Office says 20. That is thousands of dollars.

If you are paying \$20,000 for your insurance, if we do nothing, you might be paying \$24,000. If we do this, you might be paying \$16,000. That is a lot of money. If we do this, you might be paying \$12,000. That is thousands of dollars less. That is a big tax cut for you, and it is a big tax increase. Why are we not doing this?

Let’s not kid ourselves. There is a lot of scrambling and embarrassed running around over on the other side of the aisle to come up with an excuse for this, but let’s be honest about it. The Democrats are blocking this for one reason. They have convinced themselves they do not want to apply to the health insurance rate reduction in the omnibus bill the same law that applies to more than 100 other programs in this omnibus bill. So every single Democrat over here who says: I can’t vote for a 40-percent rate reduction for you, Mr. Plumber or Ms. Hairstylist or Ms. Farmer. I can’t do that because I can’t put the Hyde amendment on it, but I am going to vote to put the Hyde amendment on the National Institutes of Health, I am going to vote to put the Hyde amendment on community health centers, I am going to vote today to put it on Federal employee health benefits and family planning grants under title X and 100 other programs Democrats are going to vote to put the Hyde language on—yet they say we can’t put the same language on a 40-percent health insurance reduction that is composed of three sections of bipartisan legislation that the Democratic leader has said, at least on two-thirds of it, that every single Democrat supported. Now, what is that? What is that?

I mean, this should not be a partisan issue. I am not surprised there is

scrambling and embarrassment on the other side of the aisle. I don't know how they are going to explain this to the American people. I know a lot of people in Tennessee are desperately hoping we succeed. I hear it every time I go home.

Health insurance is the No. 1 concern of the people in my State, and the most frightening prospect is, if they can't pay their bills, then they can't buy insurance. They might get sick and have no way to take care of it.

Mr. President, I will ask consent to put into the RECORD a few items. The first is a list of 20 programs that are included in the omnibus bill we are likely to vote on today that have Hyde protection.

Now, remember what the Hyde protection is. It is a compromise that was created in 1976 that said Federal funds may not be used for elective abortions, but basically you may use any other funds, and you may create a contract or arrangement to do that. So that is what we do with Medicare. That is what we do with Medicaid. That is what we are voting today to do at the National Institutes of Health, in the community health centers, voting today for the Federal Employee Health Benefits Program, for family planning grants, for the Indian health programs, for the VA women's health medical care, for global health programs, for the Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program, and school-based health centers. We are voting to put the Hyde protection on area health education centers, on maternal and childcare block grants, on the National Health Service Corps, but we can't put Hyde protection on health insurance—a 40-percent rate reduction on health insurance, a bipartisan proposal that has the support of the President, the majority leader, and the Speaker. They are all willing to put it in this bill, but you say no. You say no, and there is no good reason for that. There is no good reason whatsoever.

We are going to vote to put the Hyde amendment on childcare community development block grants.

I ask unanimous consent that a list of 20 of those programs be printed in the RECORD, although, there are more than 100 we will be voting on today.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

20 PROGRAMS HAVE HYDE PROTECTIONS IN THE OMNIBUS

1. National Institutes of Health
2. Community health centers
3. Federal Employee Health Benefits Program
4. Family Planning Grants under Title X
5. Indian Health Programs
6. VA women's health medical care
7. Global health programs at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
8. Ryan white HIV/AIDS Program
9. School based health centers
10. Area Health Education Centers
11. Maternal and child health block grant
12. National Health Service Corps
13. Bureau of Prisons health programs

14. Childcare Community Development Block Grants

15. Community Mental Health Services Block Grant

16. Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant

17. State Grants to Respond to the Opioid Crisis

18. Rural Outreach Grants

19. Domestic trafficking victim's fund

20. Garrett Lee Smith youth suicide and early intervention strategies

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent also to have printed in the RECORD a short summary of the three-part, bipartisan proposal that will produce the 40-percent rate decreases in the individual market, according to Oliver Wyman, and up to 20 percent, according to the Congressional Budget Office, over the next 3 years.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

LOWER PREMIUMS, MORE STATE FLEXIBILITY, AVOID CHAOS IN 2019, 2020 AND 2021

President Trump, Majority Leader McConnell, and Speaker Ryan support this proposal.

Premium Reduction through State-based Reinsurance Program

Adds funding for 1332 reinsurance and invisible high risk pool programs at \$10 billion a year for 2019, 2020, and 2021, with a federal fallback in the first year.

Oliver Wyman projected premium decreases and coverage increases:

2019, 2020, and 2021: 40% lower premiums in states that receive a 1332 waiver than what people in the individual market would pay if Congress doesn't act.

Will provide insurance coverage to an additional 3.2 million individuals.

An alternate analysis by the Congressional Budget Office, based on real spending on Obamacare subsidies, indicates that the proposal would save over \$9 billion over 10 years.

Make Section 1332 State Innovation Waivers Work

More flexibility for health plan designs

Example: Iowa waiver proposal

Example: higher co-pay opioids, lower co-pay statins

"Alaska for All" (Maine, Minnesota)

State-based program to help cover costs of the very sick 20% premium decrease for everyone

Streamline approval process

Let Governors apply for waiver

Cut federal waiver approval time from 180 days to 120

Create fast-track approval for emergency situations

Create fast-track approval for "copycat" waivers

Make the waiver last longer

Make it harder for a waiver to be cancelled, giving states certainty

Create model waivers to help states get approved faster

NEW COPPER PLAN: CATASTROPHIC INSURANCE REGARDLESS OF AGE

INTERSTATE HEALTH INSURANCE COMPACTS

Consumer Notification

Directs state insurance commissioners to require short-term, limited duration insurance display prominently in marketing materials, the contract, and application materials a notice to inform consumers that coverage and benefits differ from coverage offered on the exchanges.

Consumer Outreach, Education, and Assistance

Allows HHS to contract with states to conduct outreach and enrollment activities

funded by existing user fees designated for these activities.

NO BAILOUT, ENDS "SILVER-LOADING" GIMMICK Funds Cost-Sharing Reduction Subsidies

October through December of 2017, for 2018 for plans that did not silver load and Basic Health Plans.

Helps those who are below 250% of the poverty level who receive government assistance to help them pay for their deductibles and co-pays.

All plans for 2019, 2020, and 2021.

Standard Hyde Protections:

Includes the same Hyde protections that already apply to Medicaid, Medicare, Children's Health Insurance Program, TRICARE, Indian Health Service, Federal Employees Health Benefits Program, Veterans Affairs, and the Labor-HHS appropriations bill. Clarifies that Hyde exemptions and effect on non-federal funding remain the same.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD the Oliver Wyman analysis entitled "A Proposal to Lower ACA Premiums by More than 40% and Cover 3.2 Million More" Americans.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[March 12, 2018]

A PROPOSAL TO LOWER ACA PREMIUMS BY MORE THAN 40% AND COVER 3.2 MILLION MORE (By Tammy Tomczyk, FSA, FCA, MAAA and Kurt Giesa, FSA, MAAA)

In our December 9, 2017 article, we analyzed the effects of a proposal the US Senate was considering to fund cost-sharing reduction (CSR) payments and appropriate \$5 billion in 2019 and 2020 for states to establish reinsurance programs to stabilize their individual insurance markets. We discussed how pass-through savings could provide reinsurance coverage equal to roughly \$15 billion in protection for high-cost claimants, and how this protection, combined with CSR funding, would bring more people into the individual market and lower premiums by over 20 percent.

More recent congressional attention is focusing on a proposal that includes an extension of CSRs and a reinsurance program in 2019, 2020, and 2021, funded with a \$10 billion appropriation in each year, with a federal fallback option available to states in 2019. The federal fallback option would likely be based on—and use the federal infrastructure built to administer—the Transitional Reinsurance Program in place from 2014 through 2016.

Our healthcare microsimulation model, used to understand this package's likely effects on the market, assumed states would use federal pass-through savings under Section 1332 of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) to supplement and leverage the \$10 billion the considered legislation would authorize and appropriate each year. Pass-through savings result from the fact that the premium subsidies available under the ACA cover the difference between the second lowest cost silver plan available in a rating area and a fixed percentage of a household's income, varying only by federal poverty level (FPL). Lower premiums result directly in lower premium subsidies, and under a Section 1332 waiver, these savings from lower premiums may be used to provide additional reinsurance.

In our modeling, we are presuming that states will take advantage of these pass-through savings in 2019. In reality, states that have not already begun working on a waiver will be challenged to get a 1332 waiver

filed and approved under the current regulatory regime in time to impact 2019 premiums. The current regulatory regime includes a requirement that a state enact enabling legislation, develop an application, hold public hearings during a 30-day public comment period, and submit the application to the US Health and Human Services (HHS). HHS then undertakes a two-step review process that can span up to 225 days—up to 45 days for a completeness determination followed by up to 180 days for review. But even those states unable to get a waiver in place for 2019 would still benefit from that year's federal fallback program.

Therefore, we estimate, under the assumptions described above, that an additional 3.2 million people will be covered in the non-group market, and the proposal would result in premiums that are at least 40 percent lower than they would have been without the proposal in place, across all metal levels. In those states that are not able to obtain a 1332 waiver and take advantage of pass-through savings for 2019, we estimate that premium would decline by more than 20 percent across all metal levels. Those estimates include an average 10 percent reduction due to the funding of CSRs, with the remaining reduction coming from the reinsurance program.

As a note, our modeling reflects elimination of the mandate penalty, but does not consider the proposed regulation's likely effects on association health plans or on short-term, limited duration coverage.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, the Congressional Budget Office estimate looks at this proposal two different ways, but it says that if we base it on real spending—that is, as if Congress actually passed this bill—the Alexander-Murray-Collins-Nelson proposal that reduces insurance rates 40 percent saves the Federal taxpayer money. In other words, it doesn't cost anything.

As a U.S. Senator who came here to get results, who enjoys more than anything working across party lines to cause that to happen—because it takes 60 to get a result—who admires Senators like Senator COLLINS, who spends her time doing that, I am very disappointed, not just for me, not just for Senator COLLINS, who has spent hundreds of hours on this, not just for the Senate as an institution, but I think of people who come up to me like Marty at the Chick-fil-A, who said: I was paying \$300 a month, and now I am paying \$1,300 a month. I can't afford it; I am a farmer.

I said: I have a Christmas present for you. And then I thought, well, I have a Valentine's present for you, and then I thought maybe I could say I have an Easter present for you, and now I can say I can't do it because the Democratic Party voted to put the Hyde protection on more than 100 programs today—as it has done every year since 1976—but it refused to put the Hyde protection on a 40-percent rate decrease that was developed across party lines, in long hearings that were attended by more than half the Senators—all of them coming in and saying: Oh, this is a wonderful thing.

They came up to me and said: Chairman ALEXANDER, this is so good. We wish the Senate would act like this more. We like the fact that you are

having open hearings. Democrats are coming. You are letting us all come without being a member of the committee.

Why are we not doing more of this? This is why we don't do more of it. We come to a result. We come up to a partisan end that hurts people.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

OMNIBUS APPROPRIATIONS BILL

Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. President, I wish to talk a little bit about election security, but on a day like today, I have to at least mention where we are with the giant omnibus bill that got dropped on us last night at about 8:30—about 2,300 pages of legislative text—to try to deal with all of government spending, all of discretionary spending.

If people don't know what an omnibus is, it is where we are supposed to pass 12 individuals bills dealing with 12 different topics of our spending. An omnibus is when you take all 12 of those and just do it at once. It is supposed to be the exception to the rule, but for the last 17 years, we have done some version of an omnibus. Today's vote will be the 18th.

We have 2,300 pages with technical legislative language and less than 24 hours to be able to go through it. There is no way to be able to discover what all is in it.

There is another historic event that has happened this past week, as well, which I think connects to this omnibus. Last Friday, the Treasury Department announced that we just crossed over \$21 trillion in total debt—\$21 trillion.

I have had some folks who have caught me and said: Now that we have gone over \$21 trillion and it looks like we could be rapidly approaching \$1 trillion of deficit this year alone—which would mean that in the next 12 to 14 months, we will go from \$21 trillion to \$22 trillion in total debt—gosh, that looks terrible. It has to be this Republican tax plan that is causing it. Well, there will probably be some deficit spending with the Republican tax plan that went in because it will take a couple of years for the income to be able to accelerate with it, but this omnibus alone is \$300 billion of additional spending—just this, \$300 billion.

So we go up to over \$600 billion in deficit spending this past year, and this omnibus will add another \$300 billion to that. The disaster relief funding that was done this year was \$140 billion on top of that, and the interest payment increase—just the increase—from last year to this year was \$54 billion.

It is not just some Republican tax plan that made this change. This is a very rapid acceleration in overspending that is happening right in front of our eyes, and the omnibus is not slowing it down. It is accelerating it. We have to change how we are doing budgeting and the trajectory that we face.

There are 16 of us who have started meeting last month—8 Democrats and

8 Republicans, half from the House and half from the Senate—to evaluate how we do budgeting.

The 1974 Congressional Budget Act that we are currently operating under created this incredibly complicated system that has not worked in a decade. Every year we come up and try to do it again, and every year we end up with some omnibus package, and none of us has an amendment. None of us has an opportunity to be able to see it, read it, or go through it. It is just this: Here is the number. There it is. Vote for it or not.

We have to be able to fix that process. There is no long-term strategy. There is no regular order. There is no opportunity to be able to make changes. There is no plan.

My hope is that by the end of the year, this bipartisan group will have the opportunity to be able to present a different way of doing budgeting. That is not trying to be partisan but just to be able to put a neutral process in place in which we can actually be strategic about where we are going, because we are accidentally stumbling into more and more debt every single month, and it will happen again today.

ELECTION SECURITY

Mr. President, I wish to chat with this body a little bit about election security. Just to give a quick update, as many of you know, the Department of Homeland Security has been actively engaged in trying to fix what they can on election security leading up to the 2018 time period.

I have absolutely zero doubt that the Russians tried to meddle in our elections in 2016. They started in 2014 trying to strategically plan for how they were going to try to interfere in our elections—the social media, the false news, and as many different ways as they can to be able to get out information and misinformation. They started the process early. Quite frankly, they planned and executed well. They exposed a weakness in our system.

We are an open society that is exceptionally trusting of each other, and we are not used to having a foreign entity try to reach in and try to influence us like that.

What the Russians exposed in 2016, we should be well able to push back against in 2018 and 2020 and not be caught off guard again. The Russians reached in and scammed multiple States in their election systems. They were looking at voter rolls, trying to figure out if they could get access to those. Now, they can't change votes by just looking at voter registrations, but if they could look at and download those files, they could also change those files, edit names, edit addresses, and then, suddenly, when people show up to vote, they are not really registered anymore or they are registered at a different precinct. They could create chaos on election day just by going in and editing those names. They could go into the unofficial results websites of secretaries of State and during the

day of the election actually start putting up false election results or changing algorithms and numbers, so that when numbers are added, they are actually counted wrong, just to create uncertainty in the process. So when the actual election day comes, the unofficial results come out, and they are not reliable and everyone doubts the system itself.

Again, that doesn't change votes, and it doesn't change outcomes, but it certainly destabilizes the system. We should be aware of that.

We have multiple States—there are not many, but there are around 10 to 12 States—that cannot audit their elections when Election Day comes and goes. That means that they are completely counting on the machine to be able to keep an accurate count. Now, that machine is not attached to the internet. In fact, there is no State that has their election equipment attached to the internet on the day of the election, but for almost every one of them, there is a software update right before the election. If any entity were to be able to get into any one of the third-party software companies when the update is done and just put a bit of software in there that just messes with the machine, you would literally not know if that election result was reliable or not.

Did that happen last time? No. Were the Russians looking to try to find different software companies and the different makes and models of those companies that make our election machines? Yes, and we should take that as a warning sign. Last time they were looking, and next time they may be looking to mess with it and change it. We should be well prepared for that.

We have a piece of legislation. It is a very straightforward piece of legislation about secure elections. Myself, AMY KLOBUCHAR, KAMALA HARRIS, LINDSEY GRAHAM, and SUSAN COLLINS, and most of us who are all engaged in this one simple issue say: How do we stabilize our elections system?

Elections are run by States and should be run by States. There is no reason for us to federalize elections, but the Federal Government should walk alongside States and say some simple things: We are going to have quick communication between the States and the Federal Government. So if a foreign entity is trying to reach into your State to mess with your system, we can quickly let you know about it, and we can help you in the process of protecting your State.

The last time this occurred in 2016, it was months before the Department of Homeland Security was able to actually engage with those States to let them know that what was really happening was a foreign actor and to be able to help them with their security. We have to be faster on that.

We want to be able to streamline that communication. We want to encourage States, when they buy election equipment or they get election equip-

ment, that they be able to audit their results on the day of the elections. The Federal Government should not pick their equipment. Those States should because it is a State responsibility. But we should incentivize them to actually lean in and make sure their equipment is good, because at the end of the day, in a Presidential election, we are all counting on every other State to make sure their election system is good. If it is not, it is a problem for all of us.

We want to make sure that there is not only streamlined communication and that there is not only good and auditable equipment, but that we actually give classification to individuals so that they can deal with classified information. That didn't happen last time, and so, again, it was months before there was any contact back and forth, because the Federal Government wanted to notify the States of what was happening, but no one had the clearance to be able to get the information. Let's fix that.

DHS is in the process of fixing that, but we would like to put in legislation that just remains, so that in the future, we don't lull ourselves to sleep again. Last time, it was the Russians. Next time, it could be the North Koreans. Next time, it could be the Iranians. Next time, it could be a domestic activist group that is just mad at somebody for something, and they have learned the vulnerabilities that the Russians pointed out.

In the days ahead, we need to secure our system for our election. It is not a partisan issue. It shouldn't be a partisan issue, but it should be something we learn the lesson on.

We are quickly learning the lessons about our vulnerabilities—cyber vulnerabilities in our pipelines, in our electric grids, in our phone systems, in internet fibers, in our election systems, in our banking systems, and in multiple other areas. We should learn this lesson and learn it well.

There are people who mean to do us harm. They are not necessarily going to attack us bodily, but they don't like our growing economy, they don't like our values, they don't like our openness, and they want to use our openness against us. We can't imagine doing that to someone else. They practice doing that to us.

We need to put up a basic guard, and we need to communicate to nations and nation-states around the world: If you come and attack us, this is going to be our response, so that they clearly know what they are facing when they come after us next time.

It happened once. It will happen again. Let's make sure that we are ready. Let's pass this bill about safe elections and get our elections secure so that we can trust the results year after year after year, as we have in the past.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

SELF-INITIATION TRADE ENFORCEMENT ACT

Mr. PETERS. Mr. President, my home State of Michigan has the best and most productive workers in the world. Michigan workers built the American auto industry and the American middle class, and they continue to roll out cutting edge innovations.

Our farmers and agricultural producers deliver an incredible diversity of fresh products to American families day in and day out. Our cars, trucks, crops, timber, furniture, and more are shipped across the United States and exported all across the globe.

In America, we believe that if you work hard and you play by the rules, you will be able to support yourself and your family and prosper. Unfortunately, our Nation's workers and businesses are too often facing unfair competition from foreign competitors.

Our businesses, which play by the rules and pay their workers a fair wage for a hard day's work, too often lose business to foreign competitors who cheat. It is one thing to lose a sale to a competitor that has the right product at the right time or is better positioned in the market—that certainly happens—but it is another thing altogether to lose because an international competitor is being subsidized by a foreign government or deliberately dumping goods below cost to drive American companies out of business. This needs to stop, and it needs to stop now.

Large companies are able to directly combat these practices by hiring teams of lawyers to enforce international trade rules, but what about family farms, small auto parts suppliers, and other small manufacturers that don't keep international trade lawyers on their payroll? American small businesses, family farms, and the workers who show up every morning can outcompete anyone on this planet if they are given a level playing field. It is time to give them that level playing field. We should be using the expertise and the strength of the Federal Government to stick up for these small businesses and give them a fair fight.

Under current law, the Commerce Department has the authority to start their own trade investigation into these harmful trade practices, but they barely ever use it. That is why I have introduced the Self-Initiation Trade Enforcement Act with my colleague Senator BURR.

This bipartisan legislation will strengthen protections for small businesses and their workers by creating a permanent task force within the Commerce Department to support proactive investigations into unfair trade practices by foreign competitors. This task force will research trade data, spot abusive, unfair trade practices, and start formal investigations. This task force will also focus on cases impacting small- and medium-sized businesses—the exact businesses that need the support but may not even know how to ask for it.

Additionally, putting the weight of the Commerce Department behind

these efforts shields these businesses from foreign retaliation. If a small business is able to track international trade data and if they are then able to hire a legal team necessary to successfully prosecute their claims—and believe me, these are two big ifs—they could still face retaliation from foreign governments that could make it harder for them to export after they win their case. An individual cherry grower in northern Michigan, for example, faces nearly impossible hurdles in taking on a foreign government, but the Commerce Department can look out for these small growers across the Nation and be their champion.

At a recent bipartisan trade policy meeting that I attended, I was able to speak with President Trump and Commerce Secretary Ross about this bipartisan legislation. They both expressed their strong support, and I will continue working with them and my colleagues in Congress until this legislation is signed into law. Michigan workers and businesses just want a fair chance to compete, and I will never stop fighting for them so they can compete fairly and so they can win.

I urge my colleagues to support the Self-Initiation Trade Enforcement Act that will help small businesses and family farms all across Michigan and all across the United States.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from West Virginia.

JESSIE'S LAW

Mr. MANCHIN. Mr. President, after 2 years of hard work and because of the determination and strength of David and Kate Grubb of Charleston, WV, Jessie's Law was finally passed by Congress and signed into law, and I thank each and every one of my colleagues for their support.

Jessie's Law is different from other pieces of legislation. Jessie's Law will actually save lives and prevent parents from experiencing the heartbreak of losing a child.

Jessie Grubb's story is known to many of you already, but for those of you who haven't heard it and for those of you who don't know it, I want to go over some of the highlights.

After years of struggling with heroin addiction, Jessie had been doing very well. She had been sober for 6 months. She was focusing on making a life for herself in Michigan and was training for a marathon. She had surgery for an infection related to her running injury and died the day after leaving the hospital. All of her hard work was ruined because of a careless mistake.

Jessie's death is particularly heartbreaking because it was 100 percent preventable. Her parents, David and Kate, traveled to Michigan for Jessie's surgery. Both Jesse and her parents told her doctors and hospital personnel that she was a recovering addict. It was reflected in her medical records in eight different places. However, it was not highlighted the same as it would be when you have any type of an allergy

or if you go in and they ask—the question is usually asked—are you allergic to penicillin? Then it is very much highlighted, to the point that a mistake would not be made. This was not done.

After Jessie's surgery, the discharging doctor said he didn't know she was a recovering addict and sent her home with a prescription for 50 oxycodone pills. She should never have been given a description for opioid medication in the first place, as she had asked when she entered the hospital.

With the passage of Jessie's Law, we have taken the critical step toward saying that this will never happen again. Jessie's Law will establish new standards for healthcare providers to ensure that when a patient provides information about their opiate addiction, that information is shared with their doctors and nurses and is flagged just like we would flag a drug allergy. Having this critical information will help ensure that healthcare providers can make medically appropriate decisions about pain management for recovering opiate addicts. This simple step could have saved Jessie's life, and we owe it to her memory to make the change and keep other families from experiencing the same pain.

It has been over 2 years. You would have thought this would have been done within 2 weeks. It is such common sense. I don't think anyone realized before that they could not or did not or were not responsible for or were not by law supposed to basically make sure that every record—every transcript that she had in that hospital should have been marked and highlighted so nobody could have missed it.

Jessie's story and her family's pain are all too common in West Virginia and throughout this Nation. In 2016, 884 West Virginians lost their lives due to overdose. We have the highest loss of life per capita in the Nation—the highest in the Nation. Every hour, five people die from an opiate overdose. With continued support and tireless work from everyone, we can beat this epidemic once and for all. Jessie's legacy will save people's lives and will prevent parents and families from dealing with the pain and tragedy of losing a child.

David and Kate, Jessie's parents, have been determined from day one to make sure Jessie's death wasn't meaningless, and I am honored to say that Jessie's legacy will live on for a long, long time—long after we are gone. I talked to David and Kate today, and I can't tell you how elated they were to know that it will finally pass in a piece of legislation we will be voting on shortly. It is going to save a lot of heartache and a lot of pain and the tragedy that families suffer.

This was a beautiful young lady, as you can see. She was very intelligent, very athletic. She just happened to fall into the pits of this horrible epidemic we have.

We thought when we first heard it that it was just an oversight, but there

are the HIPAA laws and all the different concerns that people have for privacy, and we weren't able to change it. The Presiding Officer, being a physician, knows how hospitals work and how the information is treasured and guarded. But this was one where we thought, my goodness, if there is an allergy, if you are allergic to penicillin—if I come into the hospital as a patient and tell you that I am a recovering addict, so please make sure that everyone in this hospital knows that I have had an addiction and that I still have addiction problems that I will have all my life, but I am recovering—Jessie was 6 months sober, and for some reason, it was not identified.

Jessie's legacy will live on and the courage her parents have had to fight this fight so that we all can share it with the rest of the country, and maybe save countless lives throughout the country and each one of our States, and all the parents who suffer through this.

The lives of David and Kate will be forever changed, but they have the beautiful memory of this beautiful young lady, 30 years of age, Jessie Grubb.

Thank you, Mr. President.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

DACA

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, we are in the process of considering an omnibus budget bill. It is over 2,000 pages long. In fairness, it includes many provisions of legislation that has been worked on by many of us for months, so it isn't a surprise package, by and large. There are elements in it that are new and that have been recently negotiated, but the underlying bill—the appropriations bills included in it—has been the subject of committee hearings and negotiations literally for months. I know that because since last year, we have been working on the Defense Department appropriations, which is included in the bill.

My reason for coming to the floor, though, is to address an issue that is not included in the omnibus bill—one that I believe should be and one that is timely and compelling—and there is no reason why it is not included. It relates to those young people who were brought to the United States by their parents when they were infants, toddlers, children, and ended up in undocumented status in this country.

Some of them—a very small number of them—may have been smuggled across the border into the United States. More likely, a common situation is that they came here on a visitor's visa with their parents, the visa

expired, and they stayed. That accounts for almost half of those who are currently undocumented in the United States.

The difference is obvious. We are talking about children who really had no voice in their parents' decision about coming to this country and who literally grew up here, many times believing they were legal in the United States. It wasn't until later in life, usually when they were 10 or 12 years old, that their mothers and fathers sat down and said to them: We never filed the appropriate papers. You are undocumented in America. It means that your life is different from the lives of all the other kids you go to school with.

These kids may be worried about making the football team or getting an A in math, but then their parents say: You also have to be worried about somebody knocking on our front door and deporting our family back to some other country.

Your life in the United States could end at any moment. Be careful. Be careful not to violate the law. Be careful to keep your head down. Whatever you do, don't tell people that you are undocumented because it could subject you and members of your family to automatic deportation.

That is what they grew up with. Through no fault of their own, they were brought to the United States. They are living in this country. They are standing in classrooms in our schools, pledging allegiance to that flag every single day, yet not legal, not documented in the United States. They are undocumented.

Sixteen or seventeen years ago, I introduced a bill called the DREAM Act, which said that those young kids deserve a chance—a chance to earn their way to legal status, earn their way to citizenship. If they become part of drug gangs or criminal enterprises, so be it—they will forfeit any right to become any part of America's future; if not, if they are prepared to finish school and prepared to either continue their education, enlist in our military, or get a good job, we will give them a chance. That is what the DREAM Act said, and for 17 years, I have been trying to make it the law of the land, and I have fallen short.

President Obama, when he was a Senator here from Illinois, was my colleague, and he was my cosponsor on the DREAM Act. So when he became President and it was clear that we couldn't pass the DREAM Act in Congress, I asked him: As President, can you do something to help? And he did. He created the DACA Program.

Under the DACA Program, these young people could come forward, pay about a \$500 filing fee, and go through a criminal background check to make sure they were no danger to this country. If they passed it, they would be given permission under President Obama's Executive order—under the DACA order—to live in the United

States for 2 years at a time and then to renew their status. During that 2 years, they couldn't be deported, and they could legally work.

It was a big decision for a lot of these young people. Remember what I said earlier—that their parents had warned them: Don't tell the government who you are. Don't tell them where you live. They could use that information against you.

But 780,000 young people came forward, trusting this government—trusting that if we invited them to be a part of the United States on a renewable, temporary basis, it would not ultimately hurt them—780,000.

What did they end up doing? Most of them went to school, but going to school as an undocumented person in America is a different challenge. You don't qualify for one penny of Federal assistance—no Pell grants, no government loans—so getting through college under those circumstances means borrowing money from some other source or working jobs to pay for your education, which many of them did.

Over the years, these DACA recipients ended up graduating from school. There are 20,000 of them teaching in schools across America. They are the teachers in the grade school and middle school and high school classes, and they have DACA protection. Nine hundred of them volunteered to serve in our military. Think about that for a moment. They stood up and took an oath to serve the United States in the military and to literally risk their lives for a country that does not recognize their legal status. Nine hundred of them are in that circumstance.

Many of them have done amazing things in their lives. I have come to the floor and told maybe 100, 110 stories of these Dreamers. They are amazing young people. They are resilient; they are talented; they are promising; they are exciting. Yet they are not legal in the eyes of the law in America.

So we tried. We tried to make sure there was a way to protect them when the new President came into office. President Trump had said very clearly in his campaign that immigration was a big issue. He said a lot of things. Some of them were inflammatory, but, interestingly enough, he said several times that Dreamers are different. These young people are different.

He told me personally: Senator, don't worry about it; we are going to take care of those kids. I believed him. I was hoping he would find a way to either embrace the Dream Act or extend DACA so that these young people would have their chance.

But on September 5 of last year, President Trump made an announcement with Attorney General Sessions. He said: This is the end of DACA. This is the end of protection for these young people. By March 5 of this year, 2018, the program will no longer exist. He said to Congress: Do something about it. He challenged us to pass a law.

The March 5 deadline was looming. Young people were falling out of the

protection of DACA status, and their lives were uncertain. Some of them had quit school. They just didn't think there was any future or hope for them. Some of them faced the prospect of losing their job when they lost DACA protection. That was the reality.

So there we sat, with that March 5 deadline looming—a deadline we knew was important because that was when all protection and all renewals would end for many, many thousands of these young people. A number of us took it up as a challenge, six of us—three Democrats and three Republicans. We sat down for months to try to write a new DACA law—and then there was a breakthrough.

On January 9 of this year, President Trump called about 24 or 25 Democrats and Republicans, House and Senate Members, to actually come to a meeting at the White House in the Cabinet room. It was an interesting meeting. It was the fourth time I had ever spoken to President Trump, and he invited me to sit right next to him. It was a little surprising that a Democratic Senator would be allowed to do that, but he invited me to, and we spent an hour, with the television coverage constant, discussing this issue. The President said some things that were encouraging about what we could do to solve this problem—a problem he had created when he eliminated the DACA Program.

He said many things during the course of that meeting. He said: "We're going to do DACA, and then we can start immediately on . . . phase two, which would be comprehensive." He was referring to other immigration measures. Then he said: "We do a phase one, which is DACA and security, and we do phase two, which is comprehensive immigration."

The President added that as part of any immigration deal, he wanted to end the diversity visa lottery—a separate issue—and change our longstanding laws that have allowed families to stay together and eventually be reunited as Americans. He referred to this as chain migration.

When the President made that offer to solve the problem, which he had created when he eliminated DACA, several of us came back to Capitol Hill and said: We have to get this done.

We labored quickly and made some tough decisions, Democrats giving on some issues, Republicans giving on others. We came up with a bipartisan bill—just what the President had asked for.

We called him. It was 2 days later—January 11. I know; I made the call. I said: Mr. President, we have a bill. Senator GRAHAM, a Republican of South Carolina, and I, as well as four other Senators, have come up with a bipartisan bill.

He said: Bring it to the White House. Don't waste any time. I want to get this done.

That was at 10 in the morning. We were scheduled and went to the White

House at noon. By the time we arrived, it was pretty clear that something dramatic had happened in the meantime, because someone in the White House had invited five other Members of Congress from the Republican Party, all of whom opposed our effort. The meeting was pretty well stacked against us. I will not get into the detail of the meeting. It has been widely reported. But at the end of it, President Trump rejected a bipartisan approach to solving this problem.

It wasn't the only time he rejected a bipartisan approach. Senator SCHUMER and Leader PELOSI had offered him a similar approach before, saying: We can work together. It appeared they had an agreement, but it evaporated in a matter of hours.

We know, as well, that there were offers made of bipartisan approaches. Senator MCCAIN and Senator COONS offered a bill on the floor of the Senate. It was a good bill—not exactly what I wanted by any means, but at least it solved the problem. It was vehemently rejected by the Trump administration.

All in all, there were six different bipartisan proposals offered to President Trump to solve the problem he had created by eliminating DACA. He rejected every single one of them.

He sent to the floor of the Senate a bill offered by Senator GRASSLEY of Iowa. Senator GRASSLEY's bill embodied the President's approach to this. Now, understand the Senate's scorecard here. There are 51 Republican Senators and 49 Democratic Senators. So when the President called his own bill, one of our Senators, Senator MCCAIN, was away ill, but there were 50 Republican Senators and 49 Democrats who voted on that day.

How many votes did the President's immigration proposal get? Thirty-nine. The President got 39 votes. It was kind of a shock that the President's own party didn't support the President's bill—at least not all of them.

When we offered the one I supported, the plan offered by Senator ROUNDS and Senator KING, it ended up with 54 votes. Eight Republicans joined to have a bipartisan measure. But it wasn't enough; 54 votes will not do it. On an issue like this, it takes 60. So we have nothing—nothing. What that means is, in the eyes of the law, for the time being, these DACA-protected young people have no legal protection—save one other element.

While we were debating, the courts were also involved. Two different Federal courts issued an order to the Trump administration and said: Stop. Don't do another thing; don't deport these kids. In fact, allow them to renew their DACA status.

Former Senator Sessions, now the Attorney General, filed an emergency effort before the U.S. Supreme Court to stop that decision, and the U.S. Supreme Court rejected it. So now, today, there at least has been a postponement of deporting the young DACA kids. We don't know if that postponement will

last a week, a month, a year. There is no telling. It is a pending court case. That is the only thing that is stopping the deportation of these 780,000 young people. That is it.

The obvious question is, Well, why did you stop? If you failed to meet the March 5 deadline, why didn't the Congress—why didn't the Senate, why didn't the House—continue the effort to try to solve this problem? Isn't that what you were elected to do, Mr. Senator?

The answer, obviously, is: Yes, we should. But we haven't.

That is why I have come to the floor today. We have this 2,000-page bill that does not solve the DACA problem. We have this 2,000-page bill that addresses every subject imaginable but doesn't address the looming deadline we face in America. We are one court decision away from hundreds of thousands of young people being deported.

What do the American people think of this idea of undocumented people, here but not recognized by law? I will tell you what they think. Eighty-five percent of the American people believe we ought to do what is right and fair for these young people. They support the Dreamers, and they support giving DACA protection. Eighty-five percent—60 percent of those who voted for President Trump—say that we should fix the DACA Program.

But we have failed again. We have failed to do what the President challenged us to do, as he continues to reject every bipartisan proposal that has been brought before him—every one of them.

I am going to be making a unanimous consent request when this is over. I think I know how it will end. Any single Senator can object and stop the protection of these DACA young people, and one is prepared to do it. It is my understanding that he is going to demand that we instead pass the President's immigration plan, which received—remember—39 votes. Not even all of the Republican Senators supported it. It wasn't bipartisan in any way. There are provisions in the President's plan that are just plain wrong, and even 14 Republicans realize that and voted against it.

So here we are at this moment, with an important bill with many positive aspects in it for all of America, including my State of Illinois. Yet there is one critical element still missing. We have failed to include a provision to solve the DACA problem created by President Trump. His refusal to accept any bipartisan compromise leaves us emptyhanded and these poor young people struggling to figure out what their lives will be.

Last week, I was in the Chicago for what I refer to as high holy days in Chicago—the St. Patrick's Day weekend, with parades and parties and breakfasts and lunches. I skipped one of the traditional breakfasts to go out to Loyola University's school of medicine. The reason I went there is called

Match Day at medical schools. It is when graduates of medical schools apply for their residencies. Residency, of course, is a continuation of their education, leading up to their becoming actual practicing physicians. It is a huge day in each of their lives. They have gone through college; they have finished medical school; and now they wait for that letter that gives them a chance to finish their medical education.

I wanted to be there because six of the graduates of the Loyola University Chicago Stritch College of Medicine were protected by DACA. They are young people who are extraordinarily talented from all over the United States. They were given a chance to go to medical school, and here they were in a situation, waiting to see if they could become doctors. It turned out that because of our failure—because of the President's removing the DACA Program and our failure to pass a replacement, two of them have their residencies in doubt. A residency is a job. It is a big job. You don't just work 40 hours a week. It is sometimes 60 to 80 hours a week. It is a big undertaking. These young people, without DACA protection, cannot legally work in America and, therefore, found it next to impossible to find hospitals and universities that would take them and allow them to complete their medical education. That is the real-life consequence of our failure to act.

That is the real-life consequence of our failure to include in this omnibus bill—or any bill to this point—a solution to the problem created by President Trump. That is why I am going to make this unanimous consent request that will, in fact, pass the Dream Act, solve this once and for all, and create a law that protects these young people and others in similar categories—one that has been offered on a bipartisan basis in the Senate and one that I believe should be passed immediately.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 1615

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on the Judiciary be discharged from further consideration of S. 1615 and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration. I further ask consent that the bill be considered read a third time and passed and the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from North Carolina.

Mr. TILLIS. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, first, I thank Senator DURBIN for 17 years of work on this issue and for highlighting the reality that there are so many people who came here through the decisions of their parents—not decisions of their own. I, for one, believe they deserve a path to citizenship.

I felt so strongly about it that I did something I don't believe any Republican-only bill has ever done before. I filed a bill, along with Senator

LANKFORD, to do just that—to provide a path to citizenship not only to the 690,000 who had enrolled in the DACA Program but to some 1.2 million.

I believe we need to come up with a solution to this problem, and I thank Senator DURBIN for his dogged tenacity on this issue. I believe that if we continue to focus on it, we will succeed.

I just need to set a few facts straight. I know the majority leader is in the Chamber, and I will keep my comments brief.

I was in that January 9 meeting as well. In the January 9 meeting, we had an extraordinary meeting, and most of it was on tape. But the reality is, in the January 9 meeting, we walked away with an understanding that there were four pillars on which we were going to build a bipartisan bill. The President looked to the whips in the minority and the majority, and he said: You guys get together, produce a bipartisan bill, and I will support it.

The goal was to go out and have everybody get together with the diverse interests that were represented in the room and come up with that bipartisan bill. We have to talk about “bipartisan.” A bipartisan bill is not a bill that gets just Republicans and Democrats on it. A bipartisan bill is a bill that gets up to 60—at least 60—Republicans and Democrats on it. About a month ago, we came to the floor and had four bills. There was no open debate. It was just an up-or-down vote. That is why it failed. It also failed when there were supermajorities, when President Obama was in place, when not a single Republican vote was necessary. That is why President Obama issued the DACA Executive order.

President Trump did not create this problem. It was the inaction of Congress and even a Democratic-controlled Presidency and supermajority-controlled Congress that couldn't solve this problem for whatever reason.

On the bill that we had, we had three Democrats vote. I guess I could argue that 39 votes were Democrats. That was a bipartisan bill, but it was a bill that didn't get 60 votes.

I hope we will continue to work on this issue so that we can provide certainty to the DACA population. It is not too late to do it. I think about the Dreamers every single day. They deserve a path to citizenship. The President deserves to be able to look the American people in the face and say he secured the border and made the homeland safer. I think we can work on some of the legal immigration issues that can actually get this solved.

Senator DURBIN, I look forward to working with you, and let this be the Congress where we actually solve the problem.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—H.R. 2579

Mr. President, at this time, I ask unanimous consent that the Senator modify his request and the Senate resume consideration of H.R. 2579; I further ask that the pending amendments be withdrawn with the exception of the

Grassley amendment No. 1959; and, finally, I ask that the Grassley amendment be agreed to, the bill, as amended, be considered read a third time and passed, and the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection to the modification?

Mr. DURBIN. Reserving the right to object, Mr. President, I thank the Senator from North Carolina, and I believe he does have a genuine interest in this issue. I attended several of our meetings to discuss a bipartisan compromise, and I hope we can continue to do that. In the meantime, though, what he has offered is the Grassley approach, which was President Trump's immigration approach, which limited legal migration to the United States and members of families who wanted to be reunified, some of whom have waited 10 or 20 years to rejoin their families in the United States. Unfortunately, it also included the \$25 billion wall, which may be the price that has to be paid to spare these young DACA Dreamers, but I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Is there objection to the original request?

Mr. TILLIS. I object, Mr. President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Maine.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—H.R. 1625

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that when the Senate proceeds to the consideration of the House message to accompany H.R. 1625, the omnibus appropriations bill, the Collins-Alexander amendment at the desk be considered and agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, I want to take a moment to talk about how we got to this point and why I am hopeful that, despite the Republican leader's decision to once again scuttle bipartisan negotiations on health stabilization, we can return to the table and work together to do what patients and families want; that is, to strengthen healthcare and lower the premiums next year.

Chairman ALEXANDER had said that in September every Democrat in the Senate was ready to pass the original Alexander-Murray legislation, and he is right. We wanted to work with Republicans to undo as much of President Trump's healthcare sabotage as possible because of how it is hurting families and forcing them to pay more for care. Unfortunately, Senator MCCONNELL blocked our bipartisan agreement because he wanted to pressure his caucus into supporting yet another harmful Republican repeal bill. That TrumpCare bill failed, and I was again hopeful that after it did, we could make progress on our bipartisan legis-

lation. Instead, Senate Republican leaders opted to do the exact opposite. They jammed through a terrible tax bill that actually raises families' premiums to pay for tax cuts for massive corporations. Even after that, I and Democrats were still at the table and ready to do what we could to stabilize markets and lower families' healthcare costs.

Imagine my frustration when, at the very last minute—just days ago—Republicans leaders once again made clear that they didn't want to lower families' premiums. They didn't want to stabilize a healthcare system that, as one House Republican said, they never supported anyway. Senate Republicans opted, instead, to surprise Democrats with a new, last-minute partisan proposal, the so-called stabilization bill, which included poison pills that Republicans knew Democrats would never agree to.

The partisan bill that Republicans surprised us with would undermine access to care for people with preexisting conditions by writing President Trump's junk plans rule into law and by taking away protections included in our original agreement with Chairman ALEXANDER to make sure that the sickest patients don't find themselves in a dramatically more expensive market.

This partisan bill also pulled the most worn page out of the Republicans' ideological playbook—making extreme, political attacks on women's healthcare. This partisan bill would take huge steps beyond current law, making it so women can't even buy abortion coverage using their own money.

From the start of negotiations last fall, I made it abundantly clear I will not allow women's reproductive freedoms to become a political football in these conversations. I also made clear that I understood, like it or not, that current prohibitions on taxpayer funding for abortion services would apply to our agreement. But that is not what this is—not at all.

I think that was made pretty clear when Republicans surprised us with this last-minute change in a press release without inviting any Democrats to join. I believe, and I think most people would agree, that the massive expansion of restrictions on women's access to safe, legal abortion we see in this partisan bill has nothing to do with lowering families' premiums or making healthcare work better in our country. That is not something that was in our original deal that had bipartisan support, and it is not something that should be in this bill now.

I am extremely disappointed that we have reached this point, but it does not mean I am giving up on getting this done. I know many Republicans have said that this is the end of the road for bipartisan negotiations on healthcare, but it is only if they choose that route.

Today I am laying out what I hope Republicans and Democrats will ultimately be able to agree on. This is legislation that includes current law prohibitions on taxpayer funding for abortion—what Senate Democrats and Republicans agreed was acceptable months ago. It would take strong steps to lower premiums and make healthcare more affordable for patients. It would hold protections for people with preexisting conditions, as so many Republicans and Democrats have said we need to do.

We are frustratingly close to an agreement, and I still do believe we can get there. This shouldn't be about the blame game. It should not be about pointing fingers. This has to be about getting results.

I hope Republicans and Democrats will join me in supporting the amendment I am offering today, and even if they don't, I hope we can get back to the table and resume talks. I truly believe there are Republicans who want to do the right thing for patients and families, even if their leadership is determined to avoid a real debate and vote on the so-called ObamaCare bailout. Our work last fall showed that we can reach an agreement when we put aside partisan politics and focus on what is best for our families. I am ready to get back to work to get that done.

I object to the pending unanimous consent request.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—H.R. 1625

I ask unanimous consent that when the Senate proceeds to the consideration of the House message to accompany H.R. 1625, the omnibus appropriations bill, the Murray amendment that is now at the desk be considered and agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard to the first request.

Is there objection to the request from the Senator from Washington?

Mr. MCCONNELL. I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Kentucky.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, this has been a very disappointing moment. Senator COLLINS is asking to pass an amendment that would not seem to be terribly controversial. As we have heard my colleagues state this afternoon, the Alexander-Murray-Collins-Nelson proposal would lower health insurance premiums—dramatically, in some cases—for American individuals and families. This assistance would be especially helpful to the middle-class families whom ObamaCare has hit the hardest.

How do my colleagues propose accomplishing this worthy goal? Through another top-down, one-size-fits-all scheme cooked up here in Washington? No, their legislation is designed to encourage new thinking and creative policymaking at the State level, through the expansion of section 1332 State innovation waivers and high-risk pools. It would end the practice of silver-load-

ing, which unnecessarily costs the taxpayers tens of billions of dollars. It includes Hyde amendment language that has been commonplace for decades, going back to the 1970s, preventing taxpayer dollars from funding abortions. Apparently, that commonsense provision is suddenly just a bridge too far for some of our friends across the aisle.

For months, my colleague from Maine has led a bipartisan effort to bring common sense back to Americans' healthcare. Along with Senator ALEXANDER, she has brought together Senators with different viewpoints and made real progress toward fixing the glaring failures of the current system. It is especially disappointing that their efforts are being blocked precisely when they stand the greatest chance of helping millions of Americans. It is not entirely surprising that my colleagues across the aisle are happy to talk the talk about lowering premiums for working families, but they refuse to actually walk the walk when given a golden opportunity. But it sure is disappointing.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be added as a cosponsor to the Collins-Alexander amendment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

TARGETED REWARDS FOR THE GLOBAL ERADICATION OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I understand that the Senate has received a message from the House to accompany H.R. 1625.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is correct.

Mr. MCCONNELL. I ask that the Chair lay before the Senate the message to accompany H.R. 1625.

The Presiding Officer laid before the Senate the following message from the House of Representatives:

Resolved, That the House agree to the amendment of the Senate to the bill (H.R. 1625) entitled "An Act to amend the State Department Basic Authorities Act of 1956 to include severe forms of trafficking in persons within the definition of transnational organized crime for purposes of the rewards program of the Department of State, and for other purposes.", with an amendment.

MOTION TO CONCUR

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I move to concur in the House amendment to H.R. 1625.

CLOTURE MOTION

I send a cloture motion to the desk on the motion to concur.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the motion to concur in the House amendment to the Senate amendment to H.R. 1625.

Mitch McConnell, John Cornyn, Susan M. Collins, Lamar Alexander, Pat Roberts, Orrin G. Hatch, David Perdue, Lindsey Graham, Thom Tillis, Lisa Murkowski, Shelley Moore Capito, Richard Burr, Mike Rounds, John Hoeven, Rob Portman, John Boozman.

MOTION TO CONCUR WITH AMENDMENT NO. 2217

Mr. MCCONNELL. I move to concur in the House amendment to H.R. 1625, with a further amendment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the motion.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Kentucky [Mr. MCCONNELL] moves to concur in the House amendment to the Senate amendment to H.R. 1625, with an amendment numbered 2217.

Mr. MCCONNELL. I ask unanimous consent that the reading of the amendment be dispensed with.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The amendment is as follows:

At the end add the following.

"This Act shall take effect 1 day after the date of enactment."

Mr. MCCONNELL. I ask for the yeas and nays on the motion to concur with amendment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

AMENDMENT NO. 2218 TO AMENDMENT NO. 2217

Mr. MCCONNELL. I have a second-degree amendment at the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Kentucky [Mr. MCCONNELL] proposes an amendment numbered 2218 to amendment No. 2217.

Mr. MCCONNELL. I ask unanimous consent that the reading of the amendment be dispensed with.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The amendment is as follows:

Strike "1 day" and insert "2 days"

MOTION TO REFER WITH AMENDMENT NO. 2219

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I move to refer the House message on H.R. 1625 to the Committee on Appropriations with instructions to report back forthwith.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the motion.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Kentucky [Mr. MCCONNELL] moves to refer the House message on H.R. 1625 to the Committee on Appropriations to report back forthwith with instructions, being amendment numbered 2219.

The amendment is as follows:

At the end add the following.

"This Act shall take effect 3 days after the date of enactment."

Mr. MCCONNELL. I ask for the yeas and nays on my motion.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.