

VA, our 10th most recent VA appointee, and to give him a unanimous vote today, which is the kind of support he needs to move forward in the 21st century.

God bless all for being here today. I thank the Senators for their votes. I thank Senator TESTER for his support as ranking member, and I thank the Senator from Kansas for his support throughout the year.

I yield here to the Senator from North Carolina.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Carolina.

Mr. TILLIS. Mr. President, I thank the chair for the kind words about the nominee, Robert Wilkie, for the Veterans Health Administration.

I am here to proudly discuss his record. Actually, until about 6 months ago, he was the military affairs adviser in my office and was my adviser on the VA. He has done an extraordinary job.

He is the child of a gravely wounded veteran from the Vietnam war. He grew up on Fort Bragg. He is from Fayetteville, NC. He has done an extraordinary job in serving our office, in mentoring my staff, and in working for Senate leaders and leaders in the White House—Secretary Gates, Secretary Rumsfeld, Condoleezza Rice, and now General Mattis.

Robert Wilkie is going to do an extraordinary job because he understands what it is like to be the son of a veteran and to be a member of the armed services himself. He serves in the Air Force to this day. He previously served in the Navy. He has attended the U.S. Army War College. He has a law degree and a keen understanding of how this governing body works. He also has great relationships with people across the political spectrum. He has worked very closely in committee work with the committee staff. He just has an extraordinary reputation. He has an extraordinary sense of history. He has a great dedication to our veterans, and he understands the intrinsic link between Active Duty and reservists and, ultimately, with veterans.

I believe that he is going to go in and move forward with the transformation and do great things for our veterans who need the help today. He will do an even more outstanding job of understanding how we can better prepare the men and women who are serving today to go into veteran status—to help them find jobs, to provide them with healthcare, to make sure they get the most out of their veterans' benefits. I know that Robert Wilkie will do an extraordinary job.

I appreciate Chairman ISAKSON's leadership on the committee. I think, with a strong Secretary like Robert Wilkie in Veterans Affairs, we will finally start making progress in repaying the debt that we can never fully repay to the men and women in uniform. I strongly support this vote, and I look forward to having a very strong confirmation vote this afternoon.

I thank the Presiding Officer.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia.

Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, I yield back all time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. All time is yielded back.

The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Wilkie nomination?

Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from North Carolina (Mr. BURR), the Senator from Tennessee (Mr. CORKER), the Senator from Louisiana (Mr. KENNEDY), and the Senator from Arizona (Mr. MCCAIN).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Ohio (Mr. BROWN), is necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LANKFORD). Are there any other Senators in the chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 86, nays 9, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 163 Ex.]

YEAS—86

Alexander	Graham	Paul
Baldwin	Grassley	Perdue
Barrasso	Hassan	Peters
Bennet	Hatch	Portman
Blumenthal	Heinrich	Reed
Blunt	Heitkamp	Risch
Boozman	Heller	Roberts
Cantwell	Hirono	Rounds
Capito	Hoeven	Rubio
Cardin	Hyde-Smith	Sasse
Carper	Inhofe	Schatz
Casey	Isakson	Schumer
Cassidy	Johnson	Scott
Collins	Jones	Shaheen
Coons	Kaine	Shelby
Cornyn	King	Smith
Cortez Masto	Klobuchar	Stabenow
Cotton	Lankford	Sullivan
Crapo	Leahy	Tester
Cruz	Lee	Thune
Daines	Manchin	Tillis
Donnelly	McCaskill	Toomey
Duckworth	McConnell	Udall
Durbin	Menendez	Van Hollen
Enzi	Moran	Warner
Ernst	Murkowski	Whitehouse
Fischer	Murphy	Wicker
Flake	Murray	Young
Gardner	Nelson	

NAYS—9

Booker	Harris	Sanders
Feinstein	Markey	Warren
Gillibrand	Merkley	Wyden

NOT VOTING—5

Brown	Corker	MCCain
Burr	Kennedy	

The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the motion to reconsider is considered made and laid upon the table and the President will be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, FINANCIAL SERVICES, AND GENERAL GOVERNMENT APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2019

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume legislative session and proceed to the consideration of H.R. 6147, which the clerk will report.

The bill clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 6147) making appropriations for the Department of the Interior, environment, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2019, and for other purposes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alabama.

Mr. SHELBY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that for the purpose of rule XVI in relation to the substitute amendment No. 3399, division A of H.R. 6147 serve as the basis for defense of germaneness for division A of the amendment; that division B of H.R. 6147 serve as the basis for defense of germaneness for division B of the amendment; that H.R. 5961, as reported by the House Appropriations Committee, serve as the basis for defense of germaneness for division C of the amendment; and that H.R. 6072, as reported by the House Appropriations Committee, serve as the basis for defense of germaneness for division D of the amendment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

AMENDMENT NO. 3399

(Purpose: In the nature of a substitute.)

Mr. SHELBY. Mr. President, I now call up the substitute amendment No. 3399.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The bill clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Alabama [Mr. SHELBY] proposes an amendment numbered 3399.

Mr. SHELBY. Mr. President, 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 printed in today's RECORD under "Text of Amendments.")

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

AMENDMENT NO. 3400 TO AMENDMENT NO. 3399

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I call up my amendment No. 3400.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The bill clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Alaska [Ms. MURKOWSKI] proposes an amendment numbered 3400 to amendment No. 3399.

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, 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:

(Purpose: To make a technical correction)

On page 95, line 6, strike "\$5,000,000" and insert "\$5,250,000".

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I am most pleased to be here today to manage consideration of this appropriations bill package. This includes the fiscal year 2019 bills for the Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies; Financial Services and General Government; Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies; as well as Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies.

To distill it down, this evening we are taking up Interior, Financial Services, Ag, and THUD—or Transportation Housing Development. The opportunity to move forward with a package of appropriations bills, all of which have moved through our committee with strong support, is a good place to be.

I have long believed that a return to regular order, where we vote these appropriations bills out of committee with bipartisan support, and then bring them to the floor, as we are doing this evening, is important for our process.

I think all Members of the Senate should have an opportunity to debate appropriations bills and offer amendments. We haven't had this opportunity for some years prior to this. The occupant of the Chair, a member of the Appropriations Committee, knows we have been without process when it comes to our appropriations bills. It is now time for us not only to return to regular order but to allow other Members of this body who do not sit on the Appropriations Committee the opportunity to weigh in on these priorities.

I am particularly pleased, as chairman of the Interior Appropriations Subcommittee, to be on the floor today. This is actually the first time the Interior bill has been before the full Senate since fiscal year 2010. Fiscal year 2010 was the last time we saw an interior bill on the floor, so this is kind of a significant day for us. If this weren't such a dignified setting, I would say that deserves a round of applause. But we don't want to get ahead of ourselves.

It is an important example of the commitment both sides have made to create an environment where we can work through the tough issues on a bipartisan basis. That was exactly what we saw within the full committee—working through the subcommittee, working through the full committee, and now being able to bring these measures to the floor.

I will defer to the chairmen of the relevant subcommittees to discuss the specifics of each of their bills as we move through consideration of this appropriations package. But I wanted to take a little bit of time this evening to share some information about the Interior appropriations bill for my colleagues.

I also want to thank and acknowledge the good work of my ranking member on the committee, Senator UDALL. He has been a good partner to work with. Both of us recognize this is

not everything we would have wanted it to be, but it was a good, collaborative, well-worked process.

Within Interior, we have a very broad scope of responsibilities. We have the oversight for all of the major Federal land management agencies. We have the National Park Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Forest Service, the Environmental Protection Agency—all very significant accounts. We also have a side in Interior that many of my colleagues forget but that rests within Interior, and that is the oversight for our budget for our Native peoples, our American Indians, and Alaskan Natives. We provide funding in this measure for essential Indian health, education, and resource management programs through the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Indian Health Service.

There is funding for cultural institutions. Again, this is an area that people don't necessarily think that Interior has our role here, but we have oversight of the budgets for the Smithsonian Institution, the National Gallery of Art, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the National Endowment for the Humanities. It is a pretty broad spectrum here.

The Interior appropriations bill provides \$35.85 billion for fiscal year 2019. This is \$600 million more than last year. I wish to thank Chairman SHELBY and Vice Chairman LEAHY. The increased allocation that we saw for the Interior bill was really important as we assembled this bipartisan bill. This additional funding allowed us to provide program increases that were necessary. In fact, they were absolutely necessary.

There are fire suppression accounts. We know we are in the midst of fire season. It is bad and most likely getting worse. We have been able to provide an additional \$500 million for fire suppression.

We also provide an additional \$109 million for contract support costs in Indian Country. These are obligated expenses from the Federal Government to those who provide for those services in Indian Country.

We also provide \$115 million for staffing costs that are associated with new healthcare facilities that are operated by IHS or by Tribes. Again, it is under compact agreements.

Some would look and say that this is a significant bump, but I would direct colleagues' attention to how we allocated that. Again, it is in accounts where we are obligated either by compact or, in the instance of fire suppression funding, it recognizes that we are dealing with the inherent unpredictability and the dangers of fire.

The fiscal year 2019 Interior bill adopts a similar approach to the enacted fiscal year 2018 Interior bill. We rejected what we felt were unwarranted decreases that had been proposed in the budget, and we make investments. We make investments in the highest priorities, particularly infrastructure im-

provements and investments for our land management agencies and within Indian Country and also infrastructure investments in wastewater and drinking water improvements.

We have recently celebrated the 100th anniversary of our National Park Service. Last year, we provided a significant increase for our national parks construction program. It was the largest percentage increase ever, but we build on that in this measure, recognizing the significant work, the significant maintenance, and the backlog that our National Park Service faces. We have an obligation. So addressing it has been a priority in this bill.

In the two main agencies that deliver services for the Indian community—this is the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Indian Health Service—we restored proposed cuts in critical program funding. We increase funding for the IHS facilities program for construction, maintenance, and sanitation facilities improvement. We provide substantial funding for the BIA to help with the construction of Indian schools, irrigation systems, and public safety facilities.

For both accounts, we provide fully estimated levels of contract support costs, and we maintain an indefinite appropriations account structure so that if the costs are higher than estimated, we are not in a situation where we are robbing Peter to pay Paul—taking from one account within IHS to fund the other. We are addressing that bad practice that we have seen previously.

Also, within Indian Health Service, we provide additional resources for grants to Tribes for combating the opioid crisis. We know full well that we are facing a crisis throughout the country, but in so many of our Native communities on our reservations, the situation is particularly dire.

We had a lot of conversation on this floor about wildland fire management and how we end the practice of what we call "wildfire borrowing," which is, effectively, waiting to see how much fire suppression costs are going to impact us. If it was a particularly bad year, you would take funding from other accounts within the Forest Service, whether it was prescriptive management programs or whether it was recreational permits. We know that we needed to end this practice of fire borrowing, and we have worked to do that previously.

Within our appropriations bill, on the wildfire management programs, we provided a total of \$4.35 billion for the Department of Interior and the Forest Service. We fully fund the 10-year average for firefighting costs, and we provide \$900 million in additional suppression funds above the 10-year average, based on the recent catastrophic seasons and our latest forecasting models. You hope to get that number right, but this new path that we are on for how we deal with wildfire suppression cost is an important one.

A big priority in this body is for conservation and making sure that we are doing right by our lands, and we have included \$425 million for the Land and Water Conservation Fund. This is equal to the enacted level.

Within that account, we are generous to the stateside program. We have, in my view, tended toward greater acquisition on the Federal side over the years. I think that is a direction that was not what LWCF was intended to do. We have been working to make sure that we don't have the inequity and the disparity between the State side and Federal side.

We also provide additional funding for recreational access and the American Battlefield Protection Program. I think we took a very commonsense approach to the EPA's budget. We focused resources on programs that do very specific and concrete things to help with that mission set, if you will, of the EPA, and that is, basically, to improve the quality of the environment for the public—clean water and clean water.

The bill does provide additional funding to States that have delegated responsibility for environmental programs through State-specific grants. It provides an increase above last year's level for the Clean Water State Revolving Fund and the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund. These are the SRF funds. They help to facilitate the critical water infrastructure in communities across the country. I think there is great recognition that this is an area where we can always do more.

The WIFIA Program, which leverages Federal funds for water infrastructure projects, receives \$63 million. When you take the WIFIA funds and you combine this with the SRS, the bill really does give the EPA a very strong suite of tools to improve the quality of life for people around the country.

We provide for additional funding for PILT funding, and \$500 million is the fully estimated amount needed for this program in 2019. We maintain the subcommittee's commitment to help local communities improve county roads, maintain public safety, and provide funding for schools using funding from the PILT Program.

As I mentioned at the beginning of my comments, when we think about all of the things that are under the purview of Interior appropriations, we also did right by our "Smithsonians" by ensuring that our arts are appropriately funded as well.

I will stand before you and tell you that there are a lot of things that I wish we could have included in this measure, but we have stood down, if you will, as appropriators, working with my colleague and friend the ranking member. We do not include new policy provisions that were not in the fiscal year 2018 enacted bill. We didn't do it. Members know that because they came to us asking if we could include things, but we said it is important to our process going forward.

Working with Chairman SHELBY and Vice Chairman LEAHY and, again, my ranking member, Senator UDALL, we assembled a package that advanced unanimously out of the committee. I think that is also historic. To have an Interior appropriations bill move unanimously through the full committee is pretty significant. I suggest to you all that this package that we have assembled warrants the support of the full Senate.

I wish to express again my appreciation for the good working relationship that I have with Senator UDALL. He has a great team. Rachael, Ryan, and Melissa have been great. We have fabulous folks on my side, with Leif, Nona, Emy, and Chris. They work hard. They work very hard. I think they have done a good job in helping to shape this bill so that it reflects priorities of Members on both sides of the aisle.

Again, I am very pleased to be on the floor to consider these important bills. I look forward to working through this process with all of my colleagues. I think the leader has made it clear that he wants to complete action on this package expeditiously. So I ask colleagues to review the bills that we have in front of us, not just the Interior bill but the full package as well. Get on it, and get us your amendments. The quicker we can process amendments, the quicker we can clear them on both sides and arrange for the votes that they may require.

CONFIRMATION OF ROBERT WILKIE

Mr. President, if I may, I know my colleague and my ranking member is here to say just a few words. He can say as many words as he would like, and I welcome that. But if I may beg the Senator's indulgence and ask for just a few more moments, I wish to comment on the nomination of Robert Wilkie, if I may.

About an hour ago or half an hour ago, the Senate confirmed Robert Wilkie of North Carolina as our Nation's 10th Secretary of Veterans Affairs. He comes to this position after having served with great distinction as a Senate staffer. He was on the National Security Council and was Assistant Secretary of Defense, as well as Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness and interim Secretary of the VA. His father, who passed away last year, was a U.S. Army veteran, and Mr. Wilkie has served as a U.S. Naval Reserve intelligence officer. He has great qualifications and strong qualifications for the position that Mr. Wilkie will soon assume.

I am sure that he has no illusions about it. We certainly don't. This is a hard job that he has in front of him—a very hard job. The VA has yet to fully recover from the series of events that are collectively known as the Phoenix scandal. The Choice Program has been a mess from its very inception, in my view. It continues to frustrate so many veterans.

Yes, we all acknowledge that there have been improvements in the Vet-

erans Benefits Administration, but claims processing still takes way too long, and proving a claim remains a sore point. Then, to make matters worse, our veterans and the field staff are stressed by persistent reports of fatigue and infighting within the VA central office. Some of these reports are as current, as fresh as last week.

You think about the folks out there. When you are in the field, really nothing good comes out of dysfunction from the central office. The media accounts that are out there are suggesting that the dysfunction is, unfortunately, reaching new heights.

This is a tough time for our new Secretary to enter. He comes into this position with a mess of old baggage to deal with, and that is before he even begins to implement new initiatives like the VA MISSION Act and the modernization of VA's IT infrastructure.

I am sure it is fair to say we want this Secretary to succeed. Alaskan veterans certainly want the Secretary to succeed. I imagine we all want the new VA Secretary to succeed.

I think success at the VA means one thing, and that is how we serve our veterans. We know the sacrifices they have made to our Nation. They deserve timely, high-quality, caring service.

They do not deserve to fall victim to the kind of internal infighting that has plagued the VA, and, by all accounts, continues to plague the VA.

I think that as I look to how success will be achieved for Mr. Wilkie in his new position, it is going to be all hands on deck; everyone committed to the mission, ready to get to work to get the VA back on track. That is really job No. 1.

That, to Mr. Wilkie, I would suggest, means working with your career staff to achieve the mission. We have been doing that in Alaska. Now, it has not always been good. There was a time when Alaskan veterans wanted a card that would allow them to get their care anywhere. They wanted to get out of the system.

Now I hear all the time, in Alaska, that our veterans want to get their care from the VA. We all know not all VAs around the country are equally situated. Perhaps the Alaska VA works better than some, and there may be reasons for that.

I think one of the reasons is, we are seeing that the career staff in Alaska cares about our veterans. We have had our problems. We have had some significant problems at the top. There have been changes in the VA's senior leadership in Alaska, but we called the problems out. We brought attention to them, we demanded change, and change occurred.

Today, we have a leadership team that, by all accounts, is doing some pretty strong work for Alaska's vets. One of the reasons that I think we are doing well is our senior leadership team works in close collaboration with the career staff. They are represented by the American Federation of Government Employees Local 3028. I know

this because my staff and I meet with management and labor periodically throughout the year. Management knows I am going to get the straight scoop from labor, and labor knows that, in my view, it is all about service to the veterans. No exceptions, no excuses, I just want it straight. Both sides know I expect them to be collaborating, to be working together. Both know I measure the quality and the quantity of collaboration in the oversight of VA's service delivery in Alaska.

That is why I have been especially disturbed by the VA's recent order restricting the amount of official time the duly elected representatives of the VA's workforce can spend on collaboration. They call this official time. I would suggest, this is that time working with management to make the VA more effective. I would suggest this is a shortsighted decision. I am especially concerned that it is being implemented by acting personnel on the very eve of our new Secretary's swearing in.

We also learned this morning, Government Executive magazine reports that there is chaos on how this is going to be implemented. When you think about the things this new Secretary needs, or our veterans need, they don't need more chaos. We don't need more chaos in an organization as complex as the VA.

Working to ensure that there is a level of flexibility in operations, our managers have a certain amount of freedom to keep a system if it is working. If it is not working, we have got you, but if you think about how important this is, especially in the VA where labor is defined to include the physicians, the nurses, the highly trained technologists, we know full well that these are professionals with very portable skill sets who can take their experience elsewhere at a moment's notice. We certainly see that in my State where those skill sets are in high demand.

We recognize Mr. Wilkie will inherit enough problems on day one. He has to come into the Department; he needs to win the hearts and the minds of those who do the work; and a workforce that is upset, in my judgment, is the last thing he needs.

Now, some may remember that I was skeptical about the VA Accountability Act, which short-circuited the process for terminating underperforming VA personnel.

We were told, at the time, this would enable the VA to replace underperforming managers. Instead, it seems we are seeing some pretty strong evidence that it is being used to terminate individuals at the very lowest level. I am concerned that what we may also be seeing is this is an effort to terminate whistleblowers and others who challenge the bureaucracy in service to our veterans. I am concerned about that. I have raised that before; I will raise it again.

I think we all agree it is time to bring the VA into the 21st century. Col-

laborating with labor on the quality of product is a whole lot better than maintaining the contentious top-down, by-the-book, litigious workplace.

I sincerely hope our new, and I hope transformative, Veterans Affairs Secretary will take a lesson from the best labor management relationship practices in the private sector; seek them out, put them to work on day one, even if that might mean reversing some of the well-meaning or maybe not so well-meaning reforms that have been undertaken on the eve of his confirmation.

The VA is a people-oriented business. The VA is nothing without its people. I give my free advice to our Secretary-designate. Your career people work at the VA to serve our veterans first. Sadly, I think many are confused about whether they enjoy the support of their senior leaders in Washington.

These are some sobering words to greet our new Secretary as he takes on a very important responsibility, but I hope we are all working together, all working forward to ensure that Mr. Wilkie goes down in the VA's history as a good, strong leader. I offer my best to him as he moves forward.

I am pleased again to begin the kickoff for this appropriations package, and I look forward to engaging in debate of good issues and a good, positive result at the end.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Mexico.

Mr. UDALL. Mr. President, I rise to speak in support of the Interior Department appropriations bill, which the Senate is currently debating.

Before Senator MURKOWSKI leaves the floor, I want to thank her so much. It has been such a pleasure working with her on this and doing it in a bipartisan way, and I am going to talk a little bit about the historic nature of this; that we have accomplished something that hasn't been done in 10 years. This is something I think we are both very proud of and that I think the Appropriations Committee members are very proud of. I begin by thanking her for the important work she has undertaken to ensure that this bill arrived on the Senate floor with strong bipartisan support.

We all know the Interior bill is not an easy bill, and there is no doubt we faced contentious issues putting it together. It is extraordinary that working together under her leadership, we have produced a bill that was unanimously reported by the Appropriations Committee.

I also recognize Chairman SHELBY and Vice Chairman LEAHY for clearing the path for us to bring this bill to the floor. Their shared commitment to reestablishing regular order for the Appropriations Committee is why the Interior bill is on the floor of the U.S. Senate today. For the first time in nearly a decade, I salute them as well on this.

The bill funds the Indian Health Service and Bureau of Indian Affairs

and provides resources for new healthcare facilities in schools for Tribes across the country that are working to improve health and education outcomes. This funding helps fulfill our trust and treaty responsibilities to American Indians and Alaska Natives.

This bill includes strong levels of funding for conservation programs that preserve and protect our Nation's most special places, including our public lands. It fully funds wildfire suppression needs, providing more than \$2 billion to protect communities and natural resources in New Mexico and across the West.

The Interior bill supports our Nation's arts and culture programs from national institutions here in Washington, from the Smithsonian Institution, the Kennedy Center, and the National Gallery of Art to local arts and humanities and programs in small towns across the United States. This funding creates jobs and supports economic vitality in our communities.

Over the last week, we have seen the administration claim that the legislation sent over by the House has too much funding for these and other priorities. I strongly disagree. It is Congress's responsibility to safeguard the environment, protect our air and water, fulfill our trust and treaty responsibilities, and conserve public lands the Federal Government holds on behalf of the American people.

These responsibilities require a reliable stream of resources to carry that out. This Senate bill accomplishes those goals and, in doing so, remains faithful to the bipartisan budget agreement this Congress passed and the President signed early this year.

We reject the shameful and inexcusable cuts proposed by the Trump administration to the Environmental Protection Agency, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Bureau of Indian Education, and to most Federal land management agencies, cuts that would put our environment at risk and prevent us from providing core services to Tribal communities.

In addition to rejecting these cuts, Senator MURKOWSKI and I worked together to satisfy requests from our colleagues to increase funding levels where we could, given our allocation. We also followed the chairman and vice chairman's direction to keep out extraneous authorizing matters and any item considered a poison pill. We all know one Senator's poison pill is another Senator's antidote. We couldn't please everyone because the tough issues that have impeded this bill from floor consideration in the last decade have not gone away, but we did the best we could.

Now, this bill is not perfect. It includes several troubling provisions rolling over from prior years, including provisions relating to the listing status of the sage grouse, the lead content of ammunition, biomass energy policy, and certain Clean Air Act exemptions.

While I cannot endorse these provisions individually, they are ones we have carried previously to move this bill across the finish line.

What the Appropriations Committee has brought to the full Senate is an Interior Department appropriations bill that is almost exclusively appropriations.

I am proud that we propose for fiscal year 2020, proud that we propose for fiscal year 2019. In addition to the programs I have already highlighted, let me tell you about a few more accomplishments in this bill.

This bill rejects the administration's elimination of the Land and Water Conservation Fund and instead provides \$425 million equal to the enacted level. These funds will improve recreational access through our Federal lands, protect iconic landscapes, deliver grants to States and local governments to create and protect urban parks and open spaces, preserve the battlefields of the Revolutionary and Civil Wars, and give farmers and ranchers easements so they can steward their private lands in the face of development pressures.

Rather than following the administration's misguided proposal to eliminate funding for the National Endowment of the Arts and Humanities, this bill actually provides an increase of \$2 million for each endowment, bringing the total to \$155 million for each. I am particularly proud that these funds will expand arts and humanities programs, create jobs, and support cultural institutions in every State.

The bill includes a 4-percent increase for the Indian Health Service and includes \$10 million in new grant funds to help Tribes address opioid addiction and substance abuse challenges in Indian Country, as Chairman MURKOWSKI talked about a little bit in her speech.

This bill fully funds the Payment in Lieu of Taxes Program to assist local governments to improve their schools and roads and pay for public safety and law enforcement.

This bill maintains funding for the EPA at the fiscal year 2018-enacted level to protect our environment and public health. We have taken a strong position rejecting the devastating cuts the President has proposed for the third year in a row. Our bipartisan track record on EPA funding makes it loud and clear that such extreme proposals will continue to be viewed in Congress as dead on arrival.

Now, I feel strongly that keeping EPA funding flat year after year is insufficient to meet the true needs of EPA's clean water programs, clean air programs, State and Tribal assistance grants, environmental enforcement, and a score of other critical public health and environmental programs. While I recognize the bill before us is a compromise, I will continue to pursue increased funding for these critical EPA programs in future years.

I recognize there is always room for improvement, and I welcome all of our

colleagues to speak with me or Chairman MURKOWSKI if you have an idea on how to improve funding in this bill.

As I conclude, I want to emphasize how tremendous it has been to work with Chairman MURKOWSKI on this bipartisan bill. Even when we disagree, we have open discussions and listen to one another. That is the way Congress is supposed to work, and I am proud to be Senator MURKOWSKI's partner on this bill.

I look forward to working with our colleagues on this bill over this week so we can pass an interior appropriations bill that the American people can be proud of.

As Chairman MURKOWSKI talked about, we have had the assistance of a very able staff on both sides—on the minority side, headed up by Rachael Taylor. The whole staff on both sides is very capable and very able. My side was headed up by Rachael Taylor, Ryan Hunt, Melissa Zimmerman, and Teri Curtin. Over on the majority side, we thank Leif Fønnesbeck, Emy Lesofski, Nona McCoy, Chris Tomassi, and LaShawnda Smith.

They work night and day, and when we run into problems, as we know, they can be invaluable in helping us find the solutions to the problems we all face when we get into some of the contentious issues.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I thank my colleague, the ranking member on the Appropriations Committee again. We don't get to the place where we are today or to a level of consensus without getting a lot of good, hard work done. I appreciate his commitment in working through it and the relationship we have built. So thank you. Thank you very much.

MORNING BUSINESS

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

ONE-YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF NORTHERN ILLINOIS FLOODING

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, last July, heavy rain in Illinois caused severe flooding that led the Governor to declare disaster areas in Lake, McHenry, Kane, and Cook Counties. Thousands of buildings, including homes, businesses, and schools, were damaged by floodwaters. Thankfully, there were no fatalities as a result of this historic flooding.

Lake County was one of the areas most impacted by the flooding. When I visited two towns in this area—Libertyville and Gurnee—I saw street after street of flood damage to homes and businesses. It was heartbreaking.

I spoke with residents who were concerned about being able to recover from the flood and resulting damages and who voiced the need to find long-term solutions that will mitigate the impact of future flood events.

One year later, I am still awed by the dedication of the local first responders and county officials. State and local employees and volunteers came out to help at every level, from county emergency management agencies to the American Red Cross. Representatives from the Illinois Emergency Management Agency worked closely with local officials to make sure communities had the resources needed to protect critical infrastructure and clean up when the water began to recede.

People from all around the region pitched in to help their neighbors and even strangers protect property and get back on their feet.

It has been challenging for Illinois to receive Federal aid after a disaster occurs. I led the Illinois delegation in supporting the Governor's request for a Federal disaster declaration for the four impacted counties, but unfortunately, the State did not receive aid after the flooding last July.

Currently, FEMA considers State population when reviewing States' requests for Federal assistance following a disaster. This puts highly populous States like Illinois at a disadvantage, relying on the premise that they can absorb more recovery costs after a disaster. Despite that, my colleagues in Congress and I will always stand ready to do whatever we can to provide Federal assistance to assist Illinois communities.

I introduced a bill to fix FEMA's disaster declaration formula—the Fairness in Federal Disaster Declarations Acts—and I will continue to push this bill to try and help States, both small and large, in times of need. Families in Illinois deserve a fair and transparent disaster declaration process that allows them to access Federal resources when they are needed most.

I want to thank everyone who was engaged in the response and mitigation efforts, and all those who were part of the recovery efforts since last July. Illinoisans always come together and rebuild, as we have done, and we are stronger for it.

REMEMBERING TEDDY DRAPER, SR.

Mr. UDALL. Mr. President, today I wish to pay tribute to Teddy Draper, Sr.—a brave Navajo code talker and a beloved teacher who has helped keep the Navajo language alive.

Mr. Draper was born in Canyon del Muerto—a beautiful and ancient canyon within the Canyon del Chelly National Monument—near Chinle, AZ. Mr. Draper was a longtime and popular Chinle resident and passed away December 14, 2017, at age 96. He was one of the last Navajo code talker survivors.

As a young boy, Mr. Draper grew up speaking Navajo and helping his family