

denuclearization. We don't even have details on the agreement. Secretary Pompeo went over there and was just given the cold shoulder. Kim wouldn't meet with him and said nasty things about him. Still, the President claims—I think he is alone here—that the North Korean summit was a huge success.

Certainly, the world is a safer place without President Trump and Chairman Kim trading barbs on social media. Those tactics make America weaker. We all want diplomacy to succeed. We all want a strong deal with North Korea, but the cessation of rhetorical hostilities is no replacement for concrete, verifiable steps toward denuclearization.

The same holds true for Iran. I hope the President isn't reaching into the same old social media playbook, using rhetoric as a replacement for the hard work of diplomacy.

I yield the floor.

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

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

The senior assistant legislative 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.

Pending:

Shelby amendment No. 3399, in the nature of a substitute.

Murkowski amendment No. 3400 (to amend amendment No. 3399), of a perfecting nature.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alabama.

Mr. SHELBY. Madam President, this week the Senate takes another step toward regular order in the appropriations process in the Senate.

The package before the Senate today contains the fiscal year 2019 appropriations bills for the Subcommittees on Interior; Financial Services; Agriculture; and Transportation, Housing and Urban Development. We have not debated an interior appropriations bill on the floor of the U.S. Senate in nearly 10 years.

The Financial Services appropriations bill has not seen floor action in several years either. Why? Because year after year, party-line votes in committees represented the end of the line in the legislative process. Yet here we are today debating both of these appropriations bills and more on the Senate floor.

So what changed? What changed was the mindset of appropriators on both sides of the aisle who embraced a willingness to sacrifice partisan riders and priorities outside the committee's jurisdiction for the good of the process. Together we have committed to do

what is good for the process because we want to do what is right by the American people.

This approach is yielding meaningful results thus far. The Interior and Financial Services bills in this package both won the unanimous approval of the Appropriations Committee, which is generally unheard of—unanimous, Madam President. We haven't seen that level of support for these bills in quite some time around here.

The Agriculture and Transportation, Housing and Urban Development bills also garnered unanimous support of the Appropriations Committee.

I want to take a minute to commend the chairmen of these subcommittees—Senator MURKOWSKI, Senator COLLINS, Senator HOEVEN, and Senator LANKFORD—for their leadership in the process. I also, again, thank Vice Chairman LEAHY and the ranking members of these subcommittees for their hard work. These Senators have worked together to produce strong and, I believe, bipartisan bills.

This broad bipartisan support paved the way for the full Senate's consideration of these bills, and I thank Leaders MCCONNELL and SCHUMER for agreeing to bring this package to the floor.

As we begin debate this week, we can leverage our recent success in passing appropriations bills. Just last month, the Senate passed a package of three fiscal year 2019 appropriations bills with overwhelming support. This support was facilitated by an open amendment process and a willingness to work together to address legitimate Member concerns. As a result, the process was both open and, I believe, disciplined.

More importantly, it was successful, passing by a vote of 86 to 5—yes, 86 to 5.

The bill managers on both sides of the aisle will seek to replicate this process and success with the package now before the Senate. We ask for the continued cooperation of all Senators in this effort.

Critical mass, that is what we are building in the Senate—critical mass for returning to regular order in the appropriations process.

By completing our work in a deliberate and timely manner on this package, we can turn next to the Defense and Labor-HHS-Education package. While completion of our work on the current package will mean we have passed more than half of the 2019 appropriations bills, the lion's share of discretionary spending, as my colleagues know, is contained in the Defense and Labor-HHS bills. That is very important to all of us here, very important to our constituents, and very important to our country.

Again, I encourage our colleagues to participate in this process and help sustain the momentum we have generated thus far. We have a lot of work to do, but we are making real progress. I hope my colleagues find this encouraging. I certainly do.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. LEAHY. Madam President, I am pleased to join my friend, the senior Senator from Alabama, Chairman SHELBY, as we prepare to debate the second set of appropriations bills to reach the Senate floor this session. Senator SHELBY has noted that this is a change in recent years. I commend him, and I commend both Republicans and Democrats who have worked together in the way we used to and now are again. This minibus contains four important bills for fiscal year 2019: the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies bill; the Financial Services and General Government bill; the Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies bill; and the Transportation, Housing, and Urban Development and Related Agencies bills.

Now, that was something significant to be on the Senate floor in past years. What is even more significant—and Chairman SHELBY would agree with me—each of these bills was reported by the Appropriations Committee unanimously. Every Republican, every Democrat voted for them. They fund programs that provide important services to the American people across the country. They invest in the future of this country.

Let me take one example, the Agriculture appropriations bill. This bill is a win for farmers, for families, and for rural communities through its investments in rural development, housing, food, nutrition, agriculture, research, and clean water programs. Every State in this Nation—yours, Chairman SHELBY's, and everybody else's, and of course my own State of Vermont—has rural communities and farm economies that benefit from these important programs, every one of us does.

The Transportation, Housing, and Urban Development bill will make critical infrastructure investments across the country and, of course, also in my home State of Vermont. It includes \$10 billion in new funds—new funds—to help address our crumbling bridges and railways and roads. Let me just say, if I might be parochial for a moment, what that means in Vermont. It will help invest in safety improvements on Amtrak's Vermonter and Ethan Allen lines but also will make much needed repairs to our railroads and bridges. These increases in every one of our States are a direct result of the bipartisan budget deal reached earlier this year, and they are critically needed.

I have been here for over 40 years. What Senator SHELBY and I have done is we have brought the Senate back to the way it used to be to actually get things done with Republicans and Democrats working together.

Improving the Nation's infrastructure was one of President Trump's key campaign promises. Unfortunately, he criticized the very budget deal that made these increases possible. He proposed cutting—not increasing—funding

for infrastructure programs that this bill supports. I am glad to say, again, that Republicans and Democrats came together on appropriations and took a different path. This bill also protects key investments in affordable housing and community development programs, such as HOME and CDBG. That is crucial funding that communities leverage to construct, rehabilitate, and maintain affordable housing. This is housing that is desperately needed across America—certainly in my State of Vermont—to shelter families, but it also promotes economic mobility and stability.

The Interior bill makes critical investments in programs to help ensure we have clean water to drink and clean air to breathe. I can't think of any State in the country that doesn't want clean water and doesn't want clean air.

It also supports important conservation programs, including support for our national parks. Our national parks attract millions of visitors each year. What a treasure, allowing families to come and see such an important part of America. I think it is quite in the tradition of Teddy Roosevelt and others who had supported such parks, but it also has the Forest Legacy Program and the Land and Water Conservation Fund. The Land and Water Conservation Fund is going to be beneficial for Vermont, New York, and, truly, the whole northeast region. The bill continues our commitment to regional efforts to protect, restore, and preserve Lake Champlain, the largest body of fresh water in the United States outside of the Great Lakes.

I am pleased to report that the committee rejected the misguided cuts to the Environmental Protection Agency proposed by the administration that would have set back the progress we have made in recent decades to preserve our environment not just for ourselves but for future generations.

Finally, the Financial Services bill helps to support small businesses and local economies through the Small Business Development Centers Program and other related programs. Every one of us knows that small businesses and local economies make up the strength of our States.

It also funds regulatory agencies that U.S. citizens rely on to protect them from unfair, unsafe, or fraudulent business practices, like the Consumer Product Safety Commission and the Federal Trade Commission, which protect consumers. Yet we were able to reach consent to consider such a broad package of bills in the Senate.

This is a broad cross section of issues, and every one of us had different views. With the vast array of issues here, every one of the 100 Senators here, if writing this legislation by himself or herself, may include something different or something else, and, then, of course, we would have nothing. Instead, Republicans and Democrats came together. I think a lot of this comes from the direct result of

the Shelby-Leahy-McConnell-Schumer commitment to move forward on a bipartisan basis.

Senator SHELBY and I met with the two leaders and said we wanted to do that. We wanted to actually show the Nation that the Senate can work, and we did it at spending levels agreed to in the bipartisan budget deal. We rejected new poison pill riders from the right and the left or controversial authorizing legislation.

We will all have issues about which we care deeply, but we had to come together on what is in the best interests of the country, and, frankly, as a Senator for almost 44 years, it was in the best interests of the Senate.

I think Senator SHELBY would agree with me that achieving this goal of reporting strong, bipartisan bills took considerable restraint on both sides of the aisle, but that restraint is what is required to get these bills through the Senate. But I worry that the House is proceeding on a different path. They have passed partisan bills filled with poison pill riders that cannot and will not pass the Senate.

Funding the government is one of our most basic constitutional responsibilities. If you go across this country, you will find that the American people expect us to work together. They expect us to reach across the aisle and to reach agreement on these bills. The programs funded in these bills make a real difference in the American people's lives, and they shouldn't be held hostage to unrelated partisan policy fights. So I hope that when we get to conference on these bills, the House will reverse and do their work in a bipartisan fashion for the benefit of all Americans—not just Republicans, not just Democrats, but all Americans.

I especially want to thank Chairman SHELBY for his partnership on these bills. I also thank the chairs and ranking members of each of the subcommittees. If they hadn't been willing to work and cooperate together, we wouldn't have these four bills before us. Again, I note that they went through unanimously. We had reached a point where some thought that we couldn't get unanimous agreement in the Senate that the sun rises in the east. Maybe we couldn't, but we did get unanimous agreement here, and thank goodness.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

Ms. COLLINS. Madam President, I am pleased to begin the Senate debate on the fiscal year 2019 appropriations bill for Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies. Our bill has been included in the appropriations package now before this Chamber.

Let me begin my remarks this morning by thanking Chairman SHELBY and Vice Chairman LEAHY for their leadership in advancing these appropriations bills in record time. It is great to see the Senate getting back to regular

order in moving the appropriations bills across the Senate floor, allowing for robust debate and amendment, and then bringing those bills to conference with our House counterparts. That is the way the system should work, as opposed to all of these bills being bundled together in an enormous, many thousand-page omnibus appropriations bill. I am very pleased to see the progress that we are making.

I also want to acknowledge the hard work and commitment of my friend and colleague Senator JACK REED, who serves as the ranking member of the T-HUD Subcommittee. I have worked very closely with Senator REED in drafting this bill. We have also received input from more than 70 Senators, with in excess of 800 requests, each of which we very carefully evaluated. So I can assure this Chamber that this legislation is truly bipartisan.

The T-HUD bill provides \$71.4 billion for our Nation's critical infrastructure and housing programs. This bill continues the significant infrastructure investments provided in fiscal year 2018 for our Nation's highways, bridges, airports, transit, and rail networks. As a result, communities across this country will be able to improve their transportation infrastructure to enable more efficient and safer movement of people and goods. Improving our infrastructure is essential for our continued economic growth as well as for personal mobility.

The fiscal year 2019 T-HUD bill continues the increases for infrastructure programs resulting from the 2-year budget agreement that was reached by Congress and the administration. I would note, however, that the budget agreement does not provide for the long-term funding structure necessary for our Nation's transportation infrastructure. I want to strongly encourage the administration to work with the authorizing committees to provide that long-term, sustainable funding for transportation before the FAST Act expires at the end of fiscal year 2020.

Our bill provides \$1 billion for BUILD grants, previously known as the popular TIGER grants program. These grants have supported not only much needed infrastructure projects but also jobs and economic growth in each and every one of our home States. I want to provide my colleagues with an indication of just how popular this program is and how strong the demand is.

In the 2017 round of TIGER grant applications, the Department of Transportation received 452 applications requesting more than \$6 billion, well above the \$500 million provided last year, which could fund only 41 projects. You can see that the demand far exceeds the amount of funding. So we are taking action in this bill to double the funding for BUILD grants. That will help many more projects become a reality. I have seen in my own State the investments in bridges, ports, and transportation projects that have made such a difference.

I would now like to turn to the aviation provisions in our bill. We provide \$17.7 billion in budgetary resources for the Federal Aviation Administration, or the FAA, which fully funds air traffic control personnel, including more than 14,000 air traffic controllers and more than 25,000 engineers, maintenance technicians, safety inspectors, and operational support personnel. The bill also provides \$1 billion for the FAA Next Generation Air Transportation Systems Program, also known as NextGen, and \$168 million for the popular Contract Towers Program. The NextGen Program is so important to the modernization of our air traffic control system, and we have consistently funded that program, and it is being implemented in a way that is going to make a real difference.

Consistent with the FAST Act, \$46 billion is made available for the Federal-Aid Highway Program from the highway trust fund. In addition, the bill provides \$3.3 billion from the general fund for our Nation's highways, of which \$800 million is for bridge replacement and rehabilitation in rural areas of our country.

The American Society of Civil Engineers conducts a comprehensive assessment of our Nation's infrastructure every 4 years. Its most recent report card from 2017 shows that America's infrastructure remains poor and in desperate need of investment. In fact, the engineers award a grade of only D-plus for our Nation's infrastructure.

To give you some statistics to emphasize why we are receiving such a low grade, let me talk about our Nation's bridges. One in nine of our Nation's bridges is rated as structurally deficient, and the average age of our country's more than 600,000 bridges is 42 years old. Our national highway system contains infrastructure that is now well past its useful life. Some bridges are more than 100 years old, and many are unable to accommodate today's traffic volumes.

I was recently in Piscataquis County, where a TIGER Grant Program was allowing the replacement of some very old rural bridges. The amount of rust on these bridges and the narrow width made them extraordinarily dangerous. They were at risk of being posted so that traffic could go across only in one direction. When you looked up at the trusses, you could see where trucks loaded with lumber had dented the trusses because they were far too low. They were built for a different era. It is important for safety reasons—as we have seen with bridges collapsing in this country or having to be posted—that we make this kind of investment.

Our bill also invests in our Nation's rail infrastructure by providing \$2.8 billion for the Federal Railroad Administration. This includes \$1.9 billion to Amtrak for the Northeast Corridor and National Network, continuing service for all current routes.

In May, our subcommittee held a hearing in response to serious rail acci-

dents, such as the tragic derailment last December in Washington State. Our bill continues to fund positive train control implementation to improve the safety of our trains. In addition, the bill provides \$255 million for the Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvement Grants Program and \$300 million for the Federal-State partnership for the State of Good Repair Grants Program. These investments in rail will help ensure that both passengers and freight move more safely and efficiently throughout our country.

The State maritime academies play a critical role in training the next generation of U.S. mariners. Our bill provides \$40 million for the maritime academies as well as an additional \$300 million for a special purpose vessel to be used as a training school ship.

In accordance with MARAD's guidance, the new training ships will go to replace existing training ships in the order in which these ships are expected to reach the end of their useful life. That is the only logical way for us to proceed.

Last year, we appropriated funds to replace the 57-year-old ship used by the New York State maritime academy, and this year's funding will go to replace the Massachusetts Maritime Academy's aging vessel. Again, we are going in the order that the Maritime Administration tells us these ships will be at the end of their useful life.

It would be great to be able to replace all of the ships at the same time, but we simply can't afford to do that, and that is where prioritizing the ships as the agency recommends comes in. Replacing these ships is, however, important to providing training capacity for all six of the State maritime academies, including the one that I am very proud of, the Maine Maritime Academy in Castine, Maine. It will ensure that cadets receive the training hours they need to graduate on time and join the workforce.

In the area of housing, our priority is to ensure that our Nation's most vulnerable families and individuals do not lose the assistance they are now receiving, which prevents many of them from being at risk of homelessness. Therefore, the bill provides the necessary funding to keep pace with the rising costs of housing these families in order to avoid their becoming homeless. Much of the increased funding covers the higher costs of rental assistance for the most vulnerable among us, including our homeless veterans, our youth, our disabled citizens, and low-income seniors.

Senator REED and I share a strong commitment to reducing, and someday ending, homelessness. We have therefore included \$2.6 billion for homeless assistance grants. We have also made critical investments to reduce homelessness among our veterans, our youth, and survivors of domestic violence. Specifically, to assist our homeless youth, we have provided \$80 mil-

lion for grants targeting this underserved population.

I visited a wonderful youth shelter in Lewiston, ME, called New Beginnings. I was so impressed with the work they were doing with teenagers, in particular, many of whom had been exiled from their homes—as much as I hate to say it—or abused or otherwise found themselves homeless. Because of the safety of this shelter, they were continuing their schooling, they were learning life skills, and they were safe. Yet, I will tell you, this is the only shelter in the State of Maine that is devoted solely to the needs of homeless youth.

There is such a need in this country. There are other shelters that try to accommodate young people in the State of Maine and are doing their best, but this is an area where we need to provide more assistance.

To better support youth who are exiting the foster care system, the bill includes \$20 million for family unification vouchers. That is the real gap in our system. What happens—and I know that many Members share my concern—is young people “age out” of the foster care program, and they may have nowhere safe to go.

For our Nation's senior population, many of our seniors receive section 8 housing, but our bill also includes \$678 million for housing for older Americans. Of this amount, \$10 million will provide grants to nonprofit and State and local entities to do home modifications for low-income seniors, enabling them to stay in their own homes and to age in place.

I am very excited about this program because of hearings I have held in the Senate Aging Committee, which I am privileged to chair. What we have learned is, oftentimes, upgrading and putting grab bars in a bathroom, widening door openings, putting sensors on the refrigerator door—doing modifications like that can allow our seniors to stay where they want to be, in the comfort, security, and privacy of their own homes. Not only will these low-cost home modifications enable seniors to remain in their homes, but they also reduce the need for more costly nursing homes and other assisted housing options.

For our Nation's homeless veterans, the bill provides \$45 million for the highly successful HUD-VASH Program, including \$5 million to serve our Native American veterans living on Tribal lands. Despite the administration, once again, proposing to eliminate this effective program, the subcommittee continues to provide adequate funding.

This program is a real success story. Since we initiated it in 2010, veterans homelessness has fallen by 46 percent. Let's continue our work to reach the goal of ending homelessness altogether among our veterans.

Another important issue—and a passion of our ranking member, Senator REED, and I—that is addressed by the bill is lead paint in homes, which is of

particular concern to families with children under the age of 6. Our bill provides \$260 million to combat lead hazards. These grants will help communities protect children from the harmful effects of lead poisoning.

Again, I have seen this in my home State. Lewiston, ME, our second largest city, has very old housing stock, and it has a great deal of lead paint. Grants are helping this city deal with this problem, thus improving the health and safety of pregnant women and young children and avoiding disability and developmental problems for those young children.

These grants will help communities across America protect children from the harmful effects of lead poisoning. While our bill certainly helps vulnerable families, it also recognizes the challenges facing local communities. Boosting local communities is critical to job creation and helping our community neighborhoods thrive and our families obtain financial security.

The bill supports local development efforts by providing \$3.3 billion through the Community Development Block Grant Program. That is one of the most popular programs we provide. If you talk to any mayor or town council, they will tell you how flexible the CDBG Program is and how, as the mayor in Maine with whom I recently met told me, it helps them customize the funding to meet the program needs of their communities. It may be infrastructure. It may be affordable housing. It may be sprucing up the downtown. It may be supporting local businesses. This is a great program. It is not a Washington dictated program. It is one that responds to local needs.

We also provide \$1.4 billion for the HOME Program. The CDBG and the HOME Program support the development of infrastructure projects, community development, affordable housing, economic development, and job creation.

I appreciate the opportunity to present this legislation to the Chamber. As we begin debate on the Transportation-HUD bill, I urge my colleagues to support the investments in this bill, which will pay dividends to our communities, our veterans, our children, our low-income families, and our seniors. Our bill was unanimously reported by the Senate Appropriations Committee. We are certainly open for business for amendments.

I commend my friend and colleague Senator REED for his hard work and for that of our staffs on both sides of the aisle in crafting this bill.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. YOUNG). The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I rise in support of H.R. 6147, the so-called appropriations "minibus," which includes the fiscal year 2019 Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill, as well as three other bills.

I am certainly proud to have worked with Chairman COLLINS. She has put together a thoughtful, bipartisan T-HUD Appropriations bill that reflects the priorities of more than 70 Senators, who provided more than 800 funding or language recommendations. Her leadership and her commitment to fairness and to ensuring that all of our colleagues had the opportunity to help make investments in their States are remarkable and deeply appreciated.

We looked at all of our colleagues' suggestions and recommendations. We also received guidance from Chairman SHELBY and Vice Chairman LEAHY, and I appreciate their creative and constructive role. As a result, we were able to produce legislation I am remarkably proud of, and I again thank the chairman for her great work.

The bill does not include any poison pill riders, which follows the principle established by Chairman SHELBY and Vice Chairman LEAHY.

This agreement has given the committee space to evaluate the requests of the administration and Congress and to provide funding levels that support national priorities. I strongly urge my colleagues to maintain this effort and not get diverted by very peripheral and narrow interests in the form of what is frequently referred to as "poison pills."

Having said that, as the chairman indicated, we welcome amendments and encourage Senators to file them as soon as possible so we can begin to work through them. We have already heard from a few colleagues, and we have several amendments we are preparing to move forward.

Substantively, let me share some of the significant accomplishments in this year's T-HUD bill. Consistent with the budget agreement, the bill includes \$10.9 billion in budgetary resources above fiscal year 2017 levels to improve our Nation's infrastructure, grow our economy, and spur job creation.

The bills include \$3.3 billion above the levels provided in the FAST Act for highway programs, including \$800 million for a bridge repair and replacement program.

On rail and transit, we have maintained Amtrak's funding level from fiscal year 2018, including \$650 million for the Northeast Corridor, to make meaningful state of good repair and safety improvements. We have also fully funded the need for Capital Investment Grants and have increased transit formula and competitive grant programs above FAST Act levels. These modes of transportation are essential to reducing congestion, driving economic growth, and improving quality of life throughout the country.

I am also pleased that we have a bill before us that protects rental assistance for more than 5 million low-income individuals and families, over half of whom are elderly or disabled, and rejects the administration's harmful proposals to increase rent burdens and work requirements for many of our assisted households, who are already struggling to make ends meet.

The bill also provides \$285 million for programs that remediate lead-based paint hazards in low-income and assisted housing. This includes \$25 million to address lead-based paint hazards in public housing and \$45 million for a new Lead Safe Communities Demonstration Program, which has the potential to reduce the cost of remediating lead-based paint hazards in homes.

For our Nation's seniors, the bill includes more than \$50 million to develop new senior housing and \$10 million to modify low-income seniors' homes to make them more accessible. In Rhode Island—and we are not unique—nearly half of our senior households lack an affordable housing option. This funding will be used to develop innovative housing strategies and ensure that our Nation's seniors are able to remain in their communities. It is remarkable. Half of our seniors are without affordable housing, and that number is only going to grow as the demographics of this country continue on their present course.

Again, in terms of housing, let me single out an issue where the chairman has been extraordinarily not only conscientious but also courageous. That is homelessness among youth, veterans, and survivors of domestic violence. Chairman COLLINS has done remarkable work. She has been building on the work we did together on the HEARTH Act to develop innovative, targeted ways to comprehensively address homelessness nationally. I am pleased we are able to include more than \$2.6 billion in assistance for communities to continue to provide emergency and community-driven solutions to prevent and end homelessness.

Let me also say a few words about the other bills that are part of this minibuss package—the Agriculture Appropriations bill, the Interior Appropriations bill, and the Financial Services-General Government Appropriations bill. Each of these bills includes important funding for key programs, and each has steered away from the kind of controversial legislative provisions that would prevent them from moving to the floor.

I am pleased the Agriculture bill includes critical funding for nutrition, conservation, and research, including additional funding to help foster the growth of shellfish aquaculture.

The Interior bill continues to make important investments in infrastructure through the State Revolving Loan Fund programs for clean water and drinking water, which Senator CRAPO and I have championed on a bipartisan basis for many years.

The bill highlights the need to establish a maximum contaminant level for PFAS, a category of chemicals that has been used in a wide variety of products, including firefighting foam. Frankly, as Ranking Member of the Armed Services Committee, I have been told of numerous military facilities across the country where this firefighting foam has been used for 30 or 40

years, and now we are beginning to recognize the potential environmental effects. Dealing with this issue now, or beginning to deal with it, is a very thoughtful approach.

In addition to providing critical dollars for our national parks, wildlife refuges, and cultural institutions, this bill also funds the Southeast New England Program for Coastal Watershed Restoration to support collaborative and science-based projects that improve the health of Narragansett Bay and other coastal watersheds in Rhode Island and Massachusetts.

Finally, the Financial Services-General Government bill makes important investments in our leading financial regulators—the SEC and the CFTC—as well as provides funding for the Community Development Financial Institutions program, the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas program, and the SBA's State Trade Expansion Promotion program.

I commend the chair and ranking member of each of these subcommittees for their hard work on these bills.

Before I conclude, I note that these smart investments and well-crafted bills would not have been possible without the passage of the 2-year Bipartisan Budget Act, which provided much needed relief from sequester-level budget caps, but that is only a 2-year deal, which expires at the end of fiscal year 2019. With the return of harmful sequester cuts looming in 2020, this bill should serve as a reminder of why we must pursue another bipartisan agreement to provide relief on both the defense and nondefense sides of the ledger. Without such a deal, we will not be able to continue our infrastructure and other investments that make a positive difference in communities across America.

Again, let me conclude by thanking, recognizing, and deeply appreciating the chairman for her extraordinary vision and her commitment to those values and those issues that are remarkably demonstrated in this bill: affordable housing for seniors, assistance for the homeless, and ensuring that we have money for infrastructure.

This bill shows a remarkable commitment to infrastructure across the country. When the President was campaigning, he talked about a trillion-dollar infrastructure bill. That has not materialized. What has materialized is robust funding for infrastructure in this bill, and that is a direct contribution of the chairman.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota.

Mr. HOEVEN. Mr. President, I am pleased to introduce the fiscal year 2019 appropriations bill for Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies. I am glad we are considering appropriations bills on the floor in a manner that allows us to fully debate amendments.

I am pleased also to join my colleagues from the Subcommittees on In-

terior; Transportation, Housing and Urban Development; and also Financial Services in putting together this legislation.

For now, I am going to limit my comments to the ag provisions. I will defer to my colleagues on their provisions, but I look forward to our partnership in moving these bills across the floor.

The activities funded by the Agriculture bill touch the lives of every American every day. I like to talk about how important good farm policy is because good farm policy benefits every single American every single day with the highest quality, lowest cost food supply.

As we move this Agriculture appropriations bill, that is what it is about. It is about our farmers and ranchers, no doubt about that, but it is something that benefits every single American every single day.

These activities include ag research, conservation activities, housing and business loan programs for rural communities, domestic and international nutrition programs, and food safety and drug safety.

Funding for each of these deserves thorough and thoughtful consideration. The subcommittee has made difficult decisions in drafting this bill. We had to choose and we had to prioritize in terms of putting this legislation together, but I think we brought forward a bill that works. It is one that got broad-based bipartisan support from the Appropriations Committee.

It is written to our allocation of just over \$23 billion. That is about \$200 million above the current enacted level. We worked hard to invest taxpayer dollars responsibly, funding programs that provide direct benefits to our farmers, our ranchers, and rural communities, supporting programs that provide direct health and safety benefits, again, to every single American every single day.

Ag supports more than 16 million jobs nationwide. It forms the backbone of our rural communities. Our agricultural producers are the best in the world at what they do, and we have to work hard to give them a level playing field because they produce food, fuel, and fiber for this country but also for countries around the world. We really do feed the world, so we need access to those markets to do so.

This is, of course, in part, the result of smart investment in America's ag research infrastructure, something that truly helps our farmers and ranchers, our producers do what they do every day. Ag research helps us do it better, more cost-effectively, with higher quality, and more productivity.

That is why I am pleased this bill puts significant emphasis on maintaining research programs at our land-grant schools, colleges and universities, across this Nation and funding for competitive research programs such as the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative.

These programs are critical to helping our farmers increase production, and they expand our Nation's economic growth. As I say, they feed not only this country but really the world. Not only does every dollar spent on ag research result in a \$20 return on investment to the U.S. economy, research investment also results in a food supply that is safe, abundant, and affordable.

I am also glad the agriculture bill prioritizes funding for rural infrastructure. Included is \$425 million for rural broadband grants and loans, putting our 2-year investment in rural broadband at over \$1 billion. Through fiscal year 2018-fiscal year 2019, we will put over a billion dollars into rural broadband, making sure all Americans, wherever they may live—whether they are in an urban area or out in the most rural part of our country—have the opportunity to access the world wide web and be part of the innovation and technology that goes with it. With this funding, we will make tremendous strides in bridging the digital divide in urban and rural communities.

Broadband availability remains a challenge for States like mine, a rural State, and other rural States. Farmers need access to new precision technologies to help their operations run more efficiently. It is also essential for rural communities to have sufficient broadband if they hope to attract new businesses and grow their local economies. I am proud to say that we put funding in this bill to help to do just that.

I thank Senator MERKLEY, our ranking member, for the bipartisan working relationship that we have on the Agriculture Subcommittee. I also want to applaud and express my appreciation to Chairman SHELBY for working to return our Appropriations Committee to regular order. I think this ag bill that we are presenting today reflects a well-balanced compromise, and it illustrates that the Senate can work together on important issues like this one.

I certainly hope that my colleagues will join me in supporting this legislation. With that, I turn to our ranking member, Senator MERKLEY.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, as ranking member of the Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee, I rise today to discuss the Agriculture appropriations bill. This is a good bill that was drafted in a bipartisan manner and passed out of committee unanimously.

A big thanks goes to Chairman HOEVEN for his hard work on the bill, as well to members of his team who worked closely with members of my team throughout this process and considered requests and concerns from Senators on both sides of the aisle.

In his budget request, President Trump proposed more than a 25-percent cut to USDA's funding. He also zeroed out a number of very important programs, including programs that benefit

rural America, along with research programs and domestic and international nutrition programs. The bill that came out of the Appropriations Committee rejects those devastating cuts that were presented in the President's budget request.

This bill, which is within the subcommittee's discretionary allocation of \$23.2 billion, makes smart, targeted investments in programs that are important to the American people while keeping out controversial policy riders. In this bill we maintain funding for important rural development programs while building on the increases provided last year for rural infrastructure initiatives, including rural water and waste programs and a broadband pilot program. These programs are vital in providing rural communities the ability to support entrepreneurs to be able to grow their businesses, creating much needed jobs in the community.

The bill protects vital research programs and makes important new investments for the organic industry. The Organic Transitions Program is funded at \$6 million. The National Organic Program is funded at \$15 million. The Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program is funded at \$37 million. All of these are historic funding levels that demonstrate the commitment to a vital and rapidly growing industry.

What else does this committee bill do?

It supports funding for farm ownership and farm operating loans. With farm incomes on the decline, access to credit is crucial for farmers to stay in business. Farm loans will serve the most disadvantaged in the farming sector, including farmers who are just starting out, as well as ranchers, minorities, women, and veterans.

I am also pleased that we were able to include \$150 million in funding for the Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations Program to protect our watersheds and help to prevent floods, reduce erosion, and protect wildlife habitats. With a backlog of \$850 million for projects that have already been authorized, this funding is much needed.

For domestic nutrition programs, our bill maintains funding for the Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer for Children Program, which provides access to food for low-income children during the summer months when schools are out of session. Beyond that, the bill provides for \$30 million for school meal equipment grants, \$18 million for the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program, and \$238 million for the Commodity Supplemental Food Program. This bill also protects SNAP, or the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, which 42 million Americans rely on. It does not provide provisions that would eliminate benefits to those who qualify.

On the international front, the bill maintains strong funding for nutrition programs such as Food for Peace and McGovern-Dole. Since its inception,

Food for Peace has reached over 3 billion people in 150 countries and more than 32 million people last year alone.

I have been in the field to see the impact of this program for communities that rely on it in some of the hardest hit parts of the world affected by conflict and climate chaos and corruption. This support is a considerable feature of what people around the world see in terms of the United States reaching out to assistant communities in need worldwide.

Meanwhile, in 2017, the McGovern-Dole Program fed 4.5 million children, and it helps to support education and food security for low-income countries, as well as increasing school attendance. This program supports good health and better education for children around the world, with a particular emphasis on girls. In the state of the world today, we need programs like Food for Peace and McGovern-Dole, which have a proven track record. I am pleased that we have worked in a bipartisan to ensure that these programs are funded.

The bill in front of us supports the important work of the FDA, or the Food and Drug Administration, through a \$159 million increase in the agency's funding. Included in that funding increase, among other things, is full funding for the Oncology Center of Excellence, modernizing the generic drug review process, investment and innovation for rare diseases, and the continuation of last year's work on opioid prevention activities. I know, and my fellow Senators understand, just how important that opioid addiction prevention program is.

TRIBUTE TO JESSICA SCHULKEN

Mr. President, before I conclude, I wish to take a moment to recognize an outstanding member of the Agriculture Subcommittee team.

Jessica Schulken will be leaving us in the next few weeks after almost 19 years on the Appropriations Committee. Her accomplishments are numerous. During her years on the committee, she has been a tireless advocate for our Nation's farmers and ranchers, a fierce protector for rural America, a staunch advocate for ensuring that the Food and Drug Administration has all the resources it needs, and a defender of transparency who has worked hard to ensure that these agencies are answerable to Congress.

I cannot begin to adequately express the tremendous work that she has done on this committee as clerk. I speak for many who know how sorely she will be missed. Here is a big thanks to Jessica Schulken for her years of service and dedication, and I wish her well in her new chapter of life.

The process on this agriculture appropriations subcommittee bill has been emblematic of the type of good, strong bipartisan work that we would like to see much more often here in the Senate—bipartisan work that has assisted our ranchers, bipartisan work to assist our farming communities, bipar-

tisan work to support rural communities and rural infrastructure. So I look forward to getting this bill passed, getting it through conference, and getting it to the Oval Office.

Thank you, Mr. President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

Ms. COLLINS. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. President, I rise today to discuss the Financial Services and General Government appropriations bill for 2019. As chairman of the subcommittee, I have really enjoyed working with the ranking member, Senator COONS, and all of the members of the Appropriations Committee.

However, for many Members of this Chamber who are not on the Appropriations Committee, today will be their first close look at an appropriations bill from our subcommittee. It has been months in process, with many oversight hearings, a lot of debate, a lot of amendments, a lot of back and forth with a tremendous amount of input from Members of this body, and it is finally actually on the floor.

It has been nearly 7 years since the Financial Services and General Government appropriations bill has actually been considered on the Senate floor. In November of 2011, the Senate began consideration of the combined appropriations package for Energy and Water, Financial Services, and State and Foreign Operations. Unfortunately, the floor consideration of that bill was halted shortly after it began, and Members were not able to offer amendments or have their voices heard. We are looking forward to that changing today.

This week's debate will subject the Financial Services and General Government appropriations bill to public scrutiny and an open amendment process on the Senate floor for the first time since the subcommittee was established in 2007. It is too long in coming. I applaud the leadership of Chairman SHELBY and Ranking Member LEAHY, who were determined to see the committee return to regular order.

A little bit of sunshine will help us in this process. I am a firm believer that openness and transparency result in a better legislative product. It is my hope that today starts a trend where the appropriations bills that are seldom seen outside the committee, such as the Financial Services and Interior appropriations bills, can be debated openly and amended on the Senate floor.

We have made a concerted effort to make responsible decisions in allocating resources and to be responsive

to the requests we have received from Members of both sides of the aisle, and we welcome continued input and proposed amendments from other Members.

This Financial Services and General Government bill totals \$23,688,000,000. It includes funding for a diverse group of 27 different independent agencies. It includes the Executive Office of the President, the Department of the Treasury, the Federal Judiciary, and the District of Columbia. The bill does not include any budget gimmicks or empty CHIMPS, or changes in mandatory program spending, which are often used as a gimmick by appropriations. It does not include those.

The bill provides targeted funding increases for the Treasury Department to combat terrorism financing, for the Federal courts to support their administration of justice, and for the GSA's Federal Buildings Fund, including the acquisition of the headquarters building for the Department of Transportation, rather than continuing to pay \$49.4 million in annual rental payments for a building that is their headquarters. We will move back to actually owning that building to save the taxpayers that money.

This bill also fully funds GSA's request for basic repairs and major repairs. Basic and major repairs are not glamorous appropriations accounts, but they are exceptionally important to maintain and protect the taxpayers' dollars.

The bill also makes critical investments in our Nation's financial markets, by providing targeted increases for the Securities and Exchange Commission and the Commodity Futures Trading Commission.

After years of flat funding for the CFTC, or the Commodity Futures Trading Commission, including a \$1 million cut last year, this bill provides an increase to the CFTC in recognition of their critical role overseeing our swaps, futures, and options markets. Support for the CFTC was a priority for a number of Senators in this Chamber on both sides of the aisle, and I am pleased that we were able to accommodate it this year.

The bill provides \$11.26 billion to the Internal Revenue Service for the administration of our Nation's tax laws. Of this amount, \$77 million is dedicated to implementing the new Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. That bill has been enormously successful in helping to turn around our economy, wherein our GDP growth has grown exponentially over the last year. Yet we have to fully implement that bill, and the additional \$77 million is dedicated to that.

Aside from tax reform, we are able to provide an increase of \$75 million in base funding for the IRS. This increase to the Operations Support account over the fiscal year 2018 enacted level will provide for investments in information technology infrastructure to reduce reliance on legacy systems. The total amount for the IRS includes \$2.5 billion

for Taxpayer Services and \$4.86 billion for Enforcement.

We have two critical goals for the IRS—improving taxpayers' access to quality customer service and addressing the tax gap, which is the amount owed but actually not paid.

The IRS needs help in the customer service area. It has asked for additional funding, and we have asked it for additional focus on customer service. We have given that this time. We have also asked the IRS to deal with the tax gap, which are taxes owed that individuals do not pay. This is not a change in tax law; it is enforcing existing tax law. Our current tax gap is right at \$400 billion a year. Addressing this tax gap is critical to reducing the deficit and restoring our Nation's fiscal health.

The bill prioritizes the Federal Government's response to the opioid crisis. Our bill keeps our Nation's focus on the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas Program, with there being \$280 million allocated, and on the Drug-Free Communities Program, with there being \$99 million allocated through the Office of National Drug Control Policy.

The bill provides a funding increase to the U.S. Postal Service Inspector General to address the growing concern of narcotics trafficking through the mail system. We have to pay attention to that. The bill includes \$2 million in new funding for the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency for improvements to the website oversight.gov. If folks have not already gone to oversight.gov to see the work of our inspectors general, I would encourage them to do that if they need some additional help. Their work needs to be highlighted, and we need to actually implement those recommendations.

IGs are on the frontlines of efforts to reduce waste, fraud, and abuse in the Federal Government, and their recommendations produce billions of dollars in cost savings. We need to actually see those cost savings and implement them. Oversight.gov has improved the accessibility and prominence of their work, and I am confident this effort will produce even greater savings in the future by maintaining a database of open IG recommendations at oversight.gov.

Again, I thank my friend Senator COONS and express my appreciation for the way he and his staff have worked with us this year.

As this bill moves forward, I look forward to hearing from all of our colleagues about how we can further address their priorities through the amendment process. We look forward to doing something historic—of actually passing an FSGG bill on the floor of the Senate and of working through this process in an open and transparent way.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Delaware.

Mr. COONS. Mr. President, I am proud to join my colleague, Senator

LANKFORD of Oklahoma, in bringing our committee bill—the Financial Services and General Government appropriations bill—to the floor.

I thank the full committee chair and the vice chairman, Senators SHELBY and LEAHY, for their leadership and their bipartisan work that has laid out the process we are now following to make real progress on our appropriations process.

I thank Chairman LANKFORD for working with me on this bill, and to my colleague Senator LANKFORD, of Oklahoma, I express my appreciation for his being a great partner, for our positive experience in working together, and for how much I value our collegial relationship.

I also thank the key staff of this subcommittee—Andy Newton, Lauren Comeau, and Brian Daner—as well as my own staff—Ellen Murray, Diana Hamilton, and Reeves Hart. These six folks are, I think, exemplars of the people who work here year in and year out, week in and week out and who help make it possible for us to craft large and complicated, bipartisan compromise bills like this one. We are grateful for the positive working experience they have had together and for the spirit with which they have worked to make this bill possible.

I am confident this bill fairly allocates funding among many competing priorities, given the subcommittee's allocation and its broad jurisdiction. Senator LANKFORD and I have followed the guidance of the full committee chair and vice chair and have kept this bill free of new controversial riders. Overall, this bill appropriates \$23.688 billion, which is a small increase over that in the fiscal year 2018 omnibus bill that was enacted earlier this year.

I would like to take this opportunity to briefly highlight how this bill will impact both Delawareans, whom I represent, and Americans across our whole country.

The bill provides \$250 million for the Community Development Financial Institutions Fund, which supports development in some of America's poorest communities. The President's budget had recommended cutting this vital program down to just \$14 million, which would have completely eliminated any new grant funding, but I am proud this bipartisan Senate bill restores all of the funding for this effective and vital program.

This bill rejects the transfer of two vital anti-drug programs—the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas Program, known by its acronym HIDTA, and the Drug-Free Communities—from the Office of National Drug Control Policy to the Justice Department.

I am grateful that at this time when opioids are a crisis of academic proportions, which I hear about week in and week out in my home State of Delaware, that we have rejected an ill-conceived proposal to move these programs to other agencies, where I have been concerned they would receive reduced funding and scant attention. I

am pleased, instead, that they will stay with the Office of National Drug Control Policy.

This bill provides \$281.5 million for the CFTC, the Commodity Futures Trading Commission. This is an increase of \$32.5 million. It is critical the CFTC is able to keep pace with the dramatic changes in the marketplace as it regulates, particularly with the emergence of cryptocurrencies and complex financial products and international trading platforms. I think it is critical that the CFTC be able to modernize its investments, as this is what it is responsible for.

The Federal judiciary will receive \$7.251 billion in funding, an increase of \$140 million over the fiscal year 2018 enacted level. In particular, the defender services and court security accounts, which I have long been attentive to, will receive robust funding.

This bill vitally increases funding for the basic operations of the Internal Revenue Service. The IRS may not be the most popular of Federal agencies, but it touches almost every American and is central to the legal and appropriate and efficient collection of revenue and for being responsive to constituents and customers. This bill increases funding for the basic operations of the IRS, and it fully funds the request for the cost of implementing the comprehensive new tax law.

I hope we continue to work to increase funding for this vital agency in conference because the IRS has IT systems that are out of date, and customer service can still improve. As the chairman and I have both commented in previous hearings, we need to continue to make progress in closing the \$400 billion tax gap—the gap between what is owed and what is collected in tax revenues every year.

This bill includes \$1.66 billion for the Securities and Exchange Commission, the SEC. Given the number of publicly traded firms that have an incorporation footprint in my home State of Delaware, I am particularly interested in making sure the SEC has the resources it needs and is investing those funds efficiently and effectively, as it is the watchdog that helps to make sure our securities are being exchanged in ways that are transparent and legal and appropriate.

There is a provision within the Department of the Treasury that I want to highlight briefly of \$159 million being appropriated specifically for the Office of Terrorism and Financial Intelligence. It is an increase of \$17 million over last year, just over 10 percent. This office has the responsibility of enforcing economic sanctions across the globe.

It also has a very broad and very important responsibility, and it is key that we have been able to work on a bipartisan basis to ensure funding is adequate not only to continue the implementation of sanctions against North Korea and Iran but also to make sure we are fully enforcing the Global

Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act and that we are enforcing sanctions in other places in the world—Africa, for example—where we have longstanding sanctions that need more thorough enforcement.

This bill provides funding for the Small Business Administration—a remarkably effective Federal agency that punches above its weight. This bill rejects the President's proposed cuts to the SBA's grant programs by either restoring or increasing funding to virtually every initiative within the SBA.

These grants are essential to the SBA's mission of supporting small businesses so local communities across our country have greater economic opportunity. I am particularly pleased, within the suite of SBA-related services, to support the SCORE Program, which has one of the highest ratios of volunteers and civic outreach and impact to Federal investment. Groups of volunteers all over the country offer business tools, workshops, and mentoring to dedicated entrepreneurs and small business owners. SCORE was initially founded in my home State of Delaware, in the city of Wilmington. So I have enjoyed working in a bipartisan way to reauthorize it during this Congress.

This bill also includes a well-deserved pay adjustment for Federal civilian workers. Last year, Federal employees received a cost-of-living increase of 1.9 percent. The cost of living is growing at a faster rate than that. So, this year, the bill includes that same level, which, I think, is an important bipartisan compromise to ensure that our civilian workforce receives the support it has earned.

Lastly, we did include, last year, election security grants of about \$380 million in the fiscal year 2018 omnibus to help protect States and their voting systems from cyber attacks. The chairman is the cosponsor of an authorizing bill that is critical we take up and move independent of the appropriations process. I also do think, this year, we should have provided more for appropriations to our States to make sure they are strengthening their cyber security as we are just 4 months from a general election.

In closing, let me again thank the staff members of the subcommittee who worked so well together.

Let me thank Senator LANKFORD, my colleague from Oklahoma, for his great and positive attitude and for his determination in making sure these dollars are spent wisely. We may not agree on everything, but we have been able to agree on this thing, which is significant and historic progress, as the very first ever floor markup of the FSGG bill now begins.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

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

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

NOMINATION OF BRETT KAVANAUGH

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, this week, we will continue the confirmation process for Judge Brett Kavanaugh, who, as we all know, has been nominated by President Trump to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court. I say we will continue the confirmation process because there has already been a questionnaire issued by the Judiciary Committee to which the nominee has responded. I know White House Counsel and others are already trying to put their heads together with the George W. Bush Presidential Library, down in Dallas, as well as with the National Archives, to be responsive to the document requests that have been made for the judge.

As the author of more than 300 published opinions, Judge Kavanaugh is a well-known judicial nominee. I think his experience from the last 12 years on the DC Court of Appeals has clearly demonstrated he has the experience that the job on the Supreme Court requires.

He is also enormously well respected among the legal community. We have seen op-eds written by professors—all of them scholars—who say that Judge Kavanaugh can more than hold his own when it comes to legal analysis. We have heard this from people who share his judicial philosophy and those who do not share his judicial philosophy. They have a broad mutual respect for his intellect and his integrity.

We have heard about his mentorship of law clerks, both men and women, liberals and conservatives. As I say, we have received testimonials from professionals across the ideological spectrum. Last week, a group of 80 former students from Harvard Law School, where Judge Kavanaugh taught, sent a letter to the Senate Judiciary Committee. As you might imagine, they have a variety of perspectives on judicial philosophy and a wide range of political views, but they all agreed that Judge Kavanaugh is a rigorous thinker, a devoted teacher, and a gracious person.

Lastly, we have heard from the nominee himself. On the night President Trump announced his choice, Judge Kavanaugh said that he believes an independent judiciary is the crown jewel of our constitutional Republic. He promised to keep an open mind in every case, as a judge should, to uphold the Constitution of the United States, and to preserve the rule of law. Those words and the opinions from his many supporters demonstrate that Judge Kavanaugh is the right person to replace Justice Kennedy on the Supreme Court. Most people agree that it is the Supreme Court's job to fairly interpret the law, not to substitute their own

judgment—political, ideological, or personal—for that of Congress's when Congress has spoken, and I believe Judge Kavanaugh understands that deeply.

A number of our colleagues across the aisle have been left grasping at straws given his outstanding qualifications and the fact that he was confirmed back in 2006 to the second most powerful court in the Nation, the DC Circuit Court of Appeals.

Judge Kavanaugh is a well-known nominee both to the Senate Judiciary Committee and to the Senate itself, but some have recently criticized Judge Kavanaugh for expressing opposition to the independent counsel statute even though, once upon a time, they supported ending that very same statute themselves. There was bipartisan consensus to essentially let that statute lapse. So it is ironic that some are now using that as a point of criticism.

For example, in 1999, my colleague, the senior Senator from Illinois, called for getting rid of the statute, claiming that it allowed independent counsels to be unchecked, unbridled, unrestrained, and unaccountable. That just goes to show you—if you are in the Senate long enough, you are likely to find yourself on both sides of an argument. But in this case, there is no merit to any criticism of Judge Kavanaugh for something that Democrats and Republicans both agreed to do, which is to let the independent counsel statute lapse.

Another weakness in their argument is that there is a real difference between special counsels, such as Robert Mueller, and independent counsels under the old statute. They are not the same thing.

When Judge Kavanaugh spoke years ago about the independent counsel statute, he was referring to a law that Congress ultimately agreed in a bipartisan fashion to let expire and not renew because it was felt that independent counsels—particularly the last independent counsel, Ken Starr—had too much autonomy to investigate and prosecute any misconduct without clear rules and guidance and without clear oversight by Congress and the Department of Justice. We know that special counsels are different. They are constrained by regulations and are overseen by senior lawyers at the Department of Justice, and in the case of Director Mueller, by the Deputy Attorney General himself. It would be useful if our friends across the aisle would acknowledge this difference and this history.

A new poll has shown that significant majorities of voters in States such as North Dakota, West Virginia, and Indiana all want to see Judge Kavanaugh confirmed. Support is even stronger among Independents. I expect that as more Americans get to know him in the weeks ahead, those numbers will rise.

This nomination for a vacancy on the Supreme Court is Chairman GRASS-

LEY's 15th Supreme Court confirmation hearing, and I have no doubt that when he says this one will be the most searching and thorough of all of them, he means it.

I look forward to working with all of our colleagues on the Judiciary Committee to ensure that Judge Kavanaugh has a full and fair hearing, and not pull any punches whatsoever, but if the object is to delay for delay's sake or to criticize for criticism's sake, we intend to call that out during this process.

Based on what I have read and seen so far, I believe Judge Kavanaugh will ultimately be confirmed.

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN INVESTMENT IN THE UNITED STATES

Mr. President, there is one other item of business I want to mention, and it is some very good news we received yesterday. The House and Senate conferees announced an agreement on the National Defense Authorization Act, the NDAA. I am glad to hear that the final version included legislation I sponsored called FIRRMA, the Foreign Investment Risk Review Modernization Act. The senior Senator from California, Mrs. FEINSTEIN, was my bipartisan cosponsor.

I thank Senator CRAPO, the chairman of the Banking Committee, who ushered this legislation through that committee, where it passed unanimously, and Senator INHOFE for leading the conference here on the Senate side and seeing that this important piece of legislation was included.

In June, President Trump called on Congress to pass a strong piece of legislation to modernize what is known as the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States, or CFIUS. Now we are going to do exactly that. The Senate version of the bill updates CFIUS so we can guard against attempts—primarily by China but not only by China—to acquire sensitive dual-use technology and know-how by exploiting gaps in the U.S. rules on foreign investments.

This legislation takes a carefully tailored approach to updating the review process without hamstringing our ability to meaningfully engage in trade with partners around the world. It is not anti-foreign investment—just the opposite is true—but it is all about protecting our crown jewels when it comes to leading-edge technology that can be easily acquired through creative investment strategies, and then, along with the intellectual property and know-how, our competitors, such as China, can gain tremendous advantage.

I appreciate the support we have gotten from Secretary Mnuchin, our Treasury Secretary; Secretary Mattis, the Secretary of Defense; and many others. I again thank Senator FEINSTEIN for being the chief Democratic cosponsor. This has been a bipartisan effort from day one.

The message is, we simply can't let China erode our national security advantage by circumventing our laws and

exploiting investment opportunities for nefarious purposes. The backdoor transfer of technology, know-how, and industrial capabilities has gone unchecked for too long. That is why I am glad that once our bill becomes law, a newer, stronger CFIUS process will better protect us from evolving, investment-driven threats to our national security.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

TABLE ROCK LAKE BOAT TRAGEDY

Mr. BLUNT. Mr. President, I am here today to remember the 17 victims who lost their lives last week in the tragic boat accident on Table Rock Lake in Missouri.

At one time, I lived in Branson. Our home is now in Springfield, MO. It is a community that I represented in the Congress for 14 years before having the chance to represent them in the Senate.

Of course, the community has responded. But one of the reasons the community has responded in the way that it has is the truly tragic loss of life. There were 31 people on the boat that was overwhelmed by the water. Of those 31 people, 17 died. Of the 17 that died, 9 of the victims were members of the Coleman family from Indianapolis, IN.

Tia Coleman lost her husband, Glenn, and all three of their children.

On Saturday, Tia asked that her family members be remembered as they were. She said that her daughter, 1-year-old Arya, was a little fireball with 1,000 different personalities. Her 7-year-old son, Evan, according to his mom, was a great brother who was extremely smart and witty and loved life. Her 9-year-old son Reese, according to his mom, was the happiest little boy and made every day worth living.

Tia's nephew, Donovan Hall, who was the other surviving member of that family, lost his mother Angela and his brother Maxwell. Tia described her sister-in-law Angela as a loving mother who would do anything for her family, and 2-year-old Max loved big hugs.

Tia was laughing through her tears as she remembered her Uncle Ray as a man who liked to laugh and have a good time.

Tia's father-in-law, Horace "Butch" Coleman, is being remembered in Indianapolis as a legend in the community, having volunteered for more than four decades as a youth football coach. He and his wife, Belinda Coleman, were involved in the community. Belinda was described as a loving mom, a loving grandmother, and as a leader in their church.

Tia asked that all of us keep the Coleman family in our prayers as they adjust to this terrible tragedy.

Rosemarie Hamann and William Asher, from the St. Louis area, had just celebrated Rosemarie's 68th birthday. Their friends say they loved to dance and live life to the fullest. They both gave back to their community through local veterans organizations.

William and Janice Bright, from Higginsville, MO, were in Branson celebrating their 45th wedding anniversary. They are survived by their 3 children and 16 grandchildren, with another grandchild on the way, who will never get a chance to see their grandparents.

The Smith family of Osceola, AR, is mourning the loss of 53-year-old Steve Smith, a retired educator, and his 15-year-old son Lance. The Smiths were very active in their church. Steve was a deacon and Lance felt the call to the ministry at 15. He had just recently delivered his first sermon.

Leslie Dennison from Illinois died a hero. This 64-year-old grandmother pushed her 12-year-old granddaughter to the surface of the water, helping save that girl's life before she was overwhelmed by the water.

Former church pastor Bob Williams, who was driving the boat, was remembered by the Branson mayor, Karen Best, as "a great ambassador for Branson" and an active member of the community.

Certainly in the coming days we will learn more about these men and women and children and the lives they led and the lives that were ended tragically. We will also learn about the accident itself.

Senator McCASKILL and I were both there on the day after the accident as Federal officials arrived—the Coast Guard, responsible for certifying equipment like the boat that sank, and the National Travel Safety Board, which has the responsibility to investigate the accident and tell us what happened. Senator McCASKILL met with them early in the day. I met with them exactly 24 hours after the boat sank.

As we were finished with that meeting and looking out at the placid Table Rock Lake, it was impossible to imagine that was the same lake that was in videos of what had happened the day before.

Certainly Senator McCASKILL and I were also thinking of the first responders, the medical staff, looking at what mental health care was available not only for people who survived the accident but also for the people who responded.

There were people who were on a nearby showboat, the Branson Belle, who dove off the boat and immediately swam out to do what they could to help the people who were trying to save their own lives. One boat dock sent three or four different boats with basically high school guys who are working at that boat dock in the summer. I am sure if you are a 16, 17, 18-year-old young man, you think everything is OK, but we were both insistent that they try to have the kind of mental health counseling they needed, along

with the families and the survivors who were there, and certainly the community, with services that reacted in the right way.

It is unfortunate that we don't think as much as we should about the NTSB and their efforts. One of the things that certainly they will be looking at is their investigation of a similar accident almost 20 years ago in Arkansas on Lake Hamilton. The questions would be, I think, Did the Coast Guard do what they were supposed to do? Did the operators do what they were supposed to do? Did the equipment do what it was supposed to do? Certainly we will be looking carefully at the report to decide what needs to happen as a result of that report. Certainly this is an accident we wouldn't want to see happen ever again.

Since its inception, the NTSB has investigated thousands of aviation and surface transportation accidents. They are busy right now investigating what happened in Branson, MO. Other examples are the Southwest Airlines engine incident in April, the autonomous vehicle crash in Tempe, AZ, and the collision of the Amtrak train and the CSX freight train in South Carolina. That is what they do. Its staff and leadership are on call 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Unfortunately, we have had two nominees for the National Transportation Safety Board who have been pending for consideration for many months—one a Democrat, another a Republican. The confirmation of those two people would ensure that the NTSB has a full board to fulfill its critical mission.

I have been assured that we are going to move forward with those confirmations later today. I can also assure my colleagues that Senator McCASKILL and I and Congressman LONG will be closely monitoring the investigation as we learn what happened and do what we need to do to make sure it never happens again.

So with gratitude to the first responders, the medical staff, and the members of the Branson community who stepped forward to assist in this tragedy, I close my remarks and turn to Senator McCASKILL for whatever she may have to say about this event.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri.

Mrs. McCASKILL. Mr. President, I would like to thank my colleague. He and I were both in Branson last Friday. We didn't have a chance to see each other, but we were both there for the same reason; that is, an unspeakable tragedy in our State that has Federal involvement because the investigations will occur jointly with the Coast Guard and the NTSB.

I would echo many of the remarks that my colleague made. I particularly was struck when I was there—the highway patrol divers had just finished their work. They had the worst job maybe in the country last Friday, but certainly in Missouri. Their job was to

go to the bottom of the lake and find the bodies that had been trapped in this amphibious vehicle at the bottom of one of the most beautiful lakes in the world.

We never want a tragedy like this to strike in our State. I will tell my colleagues that the only silver lining I can find is that it happened in a part of our State where there is a great deal of love. There is a lot of openness in Branson, MO, for the travelers who come through, for all the tourists who come to Branson. We are very proud of that area of our State. The Ozarks have some of the most beautiful terrain God has created. These lakes that we have, both in the central part of our State and in the southwest part of our State, we are very proud of. They turned ugly and deadly last Thursday, and we have had a tremendous loss of life.

This investigation will take a year or more. I join my colleague in urging the Senate to approve these two nominees that have been pending for too long. It is my understanding we have gotten movement on that today. It is sad that it would take a tragedy like this to get this moving, but I believe that by the end of the day—I am at least optimistic at this point; I don't know what my colleague Senator BLUNT has learned, but I have learned that it appears that these nominees will be approved by the end of the day.

There were incredibly difficult weather conditions, but there are inherent dangers in these amphibious vehicles. We know this. How do we know this? Because it has been investigated before. We have had 40 deaths associated with duck boats since 1999, yet there has been little done to address the inherent danger of these amphibious vehicles. We had 13 deaths in Arkansas in Lake Hamilton in 1999, 4 deaths in the Ottawa River in Ontario, Canada in 2002, 2 in the Delaware River in Philadelphia in 2010, and then the 17 deaths that occurred last week. Additionally, we had five deaths when a vehicle collided, when it had an on-land collision in Seattle in 2015.

Back when the NTSB investigated the incident in Arkansas, which is about 200 miles south of Branson, they found contributing factors to that accident to be the lack of adequate buoyancy that would have allowed the vehicle to remain afloat in a flooded condition, the lack of adequate oversight by the Coast Guard, and, importantly, also the canopy. When these vehicles are on water, the canopy serves as a trap if they take on water and are sinking. People who are trying to get out have no easy way to escape this sinking vehicle because the canopy traps them within the vehicle.

It also is a problem in terms of wearing life jackets because if someone has a life jacket on and one of these vehicles goes down in the water, they get trapped against the roof even more because the buoyancy of the life jacket holds them against the roof and makes

it even more difficult for them to get to some point of ingress or egress.

These are not open vehicles. When they are in the water, it is almost like an enclosed bus. It is almost like—imagine if you are on an airplane in the water or on a bus in the matter. It is not a boat; it is a vehicle. So the NTSB recommendations were pretty straightforward. Unfortunately, nothing happened as a result of those recommendations.

I am in the early stages of drafting legislation with input from the NTSB and the Coast Guard to require that the design issues with these passenger vessels be addressed and that the boats that are not compliant be taken out of service until they can be compliant. We think that their past recommendations are reasonable and common sense. We really think the biggest problem that has to be addressed is this reserve buoyancy that has been pointed out in the past as part of the significant problem. If they can't do the buoyancy on a really timely basis, at a minimum, remove the canopies if they are going on the water so there is an opportunity for people to escape what is a sinking coffin, which it was; it was a sinking coffin for way too many people last Thursday.

As always, I want this to be done in a way that makes sense, but I don't think it makes sense for us to wait another year to address some of these glaring issues in terms of passenger safety.

I also would like to take a moment to recognize the victims in this tragedy. We had five victims who were from Missouri: William Asher, 69, and Rose Marie Hamann, 68, who both lived in St. Louis; Janice Bright and her husband, William Bright, 63 and 65, from Higginsville, MO, closer to Kansas City; Bob Williams, the driver, not the captain of the vessel, 73 years old, who lived in Branson.

From Arkansas, Steve Smith was 53, and Lance Smith was 15 years old.

From Illinois, Leslie Dennison was 64 years old.

Maybe the most heartbreaking, in some ways, was the large family who lost so many members as a result of this vehicle sinking in the Table Rock Lake: Angela, 45; Belinda, 69; Ervin, 76; Glenn, 40; Horace, 70; and then the Coleman children, including Reece, who was 9; Evan, who was 7; Maxwell, who was 2; and Arya, who was only 1 year old.

We mourn their deaths. I do think this is a situation where you do feel helpless. On the other hand, I do think there are steps we can take so that these particular amphibious vehicles are addressed in terms of passenger safety so that there is never again a feeling of helplessness when one of these boats finds itself in a situation where it is taking on water but the people in the vehicle cannot get out of the vehicle in order to save themselves and can't even avail themselves of life preservers in a way that would protect

them if for any reason they were not capable swimmers.

I am very proud of both NTSB and the Coast Guard, who were working well together when I was down there. Mayor Best was doing a terrific job. The Red Cross was there in full display in terms of providing services. The people of Branson were in the midst of an outpouring of love, affection, respect, and sympathy—and the entire State. Our Governor has done a good job.

Frankly, it is the silly season for me. This is the time when there are relatively few weeks until an election, and the fur is flying, and the politics go back and forth. It was like an oasis on Friday in terms of everyone coming together, setting their politics on the side of the road, and trying to work together to find answers to these difficult questions and come together as we should and find a way to protect the traveling public and the people.

The saddest thing about this is the people who went on this vehicle went because they were there having a great time. That is probably a cruel irony of this situation. They weren't taking a bus on the way to work. They weren't taking a plane on a business trip. They were enjoying a beautiful location with their family in the middle of what should have been a carefree moment, and it turned deadly and tragic. We do need to come together and try to make sure this doesn't happen in the future.

With a respectful nod to all the first responders and the people of the Branson community who have been so supportive, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, before the two Senators from Missouri leave the floor, let me express my personal condolences to them, which I know are shared by each and every Member of this body. The tragedy in Missouri is absolutely heartbreaking for the families, for the community, and for the State, and I want our two colleagues from Missouri to know that we stand with them during this very difficult time.

AMENDMENTS NOS. 3405 AND 3422 TO AMENDMENT NO. 3399

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the following amendments be called up en bloc: Heller amendment No. 3405 and Durbin amendment No. 3422. I further ask consent that at 2:15 p.m. today, there be 5 minutes of debate, equally divided in the usual form, and that following the use or yielding back of that time, the Senate vote in relation to the Heller and Durbin amendments in the order listed and that there be no second-degree amendments in order to the amendments prior to the votes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The clerk will report the amendments by number.

The bill clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Maine [Ms. COLLINS], for others, proposes amendments numbered 3405 and 3422 en bloc to amendment No. 3399.

The amendments are as follows:

AMENDMENT NO. 3405

(Purpose: To increase the amount available for a Community Volunteer Income Tax Assistance matching grants program for tax return preparation assistance)

On page 154, line 14, strike "\$15,000,000" and insert "\$20,000,000".

AMENDMENT NO. 3422

(Purpose: To require the Inspector General to update an audit report concerning on-time performance of Amtrak)

In the matter under the heading "SALARIES AND EXPENSES" under the heading "OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL" under the heading "NATIONAL RAILROAD PASSENGER CORPORATION" in title III oCf division D, in the fourth proviso, strike "Government." and insert the following: "Government: *Provided further*, That not later than 240 days after the date of enactment of this Act, the Inspector General shall update the report entitled 'Effects of Amtrak's Poor On-Time Performance', numbered CR-2008-047, and dated March 28, 2008, and make the updated report publicly available."

RECESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands in recess until 2:15 p.m.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 12:35 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. PERDUE).

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nevada.

AMENDMENT NO. 3405

Mr. HELLER. Mr. President, I rise today in support of my amendment, Heller-Brown amendment No. 3405. This bipartisan amendment increases funding for the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program, better known as VITA, by \$5 million for the next fiscal year.

Building upon the success of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, it is important that we take additional steps to ensure that Nevada families are fully able to realize the benefits of the new tax laws and maximize their returns. The VITA Program is one way to do that.

The VITA Program offers free tax help to lower income and middle-income taxpayers—those who often need it the most—by helping them to prepare and file their income tax returns.

Every year, VITA programs help tens of thousands of Nevadans and millions of taxpayers nationwide keep more of their hard-earned money. As a statistic, in 2015, VITA sites helped nearly 23,000 Nevadans file their returns and processed refunds that exceeded \$25 million.

That is why I urge all of my colleagues to join me and Senator BROWN in supporting hard-working American taxpayers and voting yes on this bipartisan amendment, Heller-Brown amendment No. 3405.