

2019 crop prices have improved, millions of acres of cropland will go unplanted and leave many farmers with no crops to market this year.

Farmers and ranchers have a tough job. Feeding our Nation and the world is tough, backbreaking work. Farmers and ranchers put in long days that start before the Sun rises and often end long after the Sun sets. Yet, no matter how hard they work, all of their labor can be undone by one devastating storm or flood. For most Americans, a bad storm might mean a wet or a delayed commute. For farmers and ranchers, it can literally mean the loss of substantial parts of their livelihoods.

I am proud to represent South Dakota's hard-working farmers and ranchers in the Senate, and addressing their needs is one of my biggest priorities here in Washington. Right now, I am working on several fronts to expand economic opportunity for farmers and ranchers and help them access the support they need.

I recently requested a meeting with the Department of Agriculture to discuss cover crop harvest flexibility on prevent plant acres, Market Facilitation Program payments, and Conservation Reserve Program signups. Last Thursday, the Deputy Agriculture Secretary—the second highest ranking official at the Department of Agriculture—and the USDA Under Secretary for Farm Production and Conservation came to my office to meet with me on these issues.

One important topic of discussion was of moving up the November 1 date for haying or grazing cover crops planted on prevented plant acres. South Dakota's farmers and ranchers are currently facing the fallout from severe winter storms, heavy rainfall, bomb cyclones, and spring flooding. Planting is behind schedule, and some farmers' fields are so flooded that they won't be able to plant at all this year. The situation is similar throughout the entire Midwest. As a result, many farmers are thinking about planting quick-growing cover crops on their prevent plant acres for feed and grazing, once their fields finally dry out, in order to protect the soil from erosion.

Yet there is a problem. Right now, the Department of Agriculture doesn't allow farmers to harvest or graze cover crops on prevent plant acres or to use them for pasture until November 1. Farmers who hay or graze before this date face a reduction in their prevent plant payments, which is crop insurance to help them cover their income losses when fields can't be planted due to flooding or other issues. November 1 is generally a pretty reasonable date for farmers in Southern States, but in Northern States like South Dakota, November 1 is too late for harvesting thanks to the risk of snow and other late fall or early winter storms.

It is also too late to maximize the use of cover crops for pasture since the ground can freeze before cover crops

are fully grazed. Due to last year's severe and lengthy winter, feed supplies have disappeared and have left no reserves. Corn stalks, which are a source of grazing and bedding, will be in short supply this year, which will result in severe feed shortages and a need for additional roughage. That is why I have been pressing the Department of Agriculture to move this date up for farmers in the Northern States. Cover crops are a win-win situation and can reduce feed shortages for many livestock producers. They help the environment by preventing soil erosion, which can pollute streams and rivers and worsen flooding, and they benefit farmers by improving soil health, which improves future crop yields.

It is important that we don't discourage farmers from planting cover crops by insisting on the November 1 harvest date, and I emphasized that point to the Deputy Secretary and the Under Secretary. I know the Department of Agriculture is looking at this issue right now, and I will continue to encourage the Department to reach a decision that addresses the reality that is faced by northern farmers.

Another subject I raised at the meeting last week was of the Conservation Reserve Program signups. All farmers are familiar with the Conservation Reserve Program, or CRP, as we refer to it, which provides incentives for farmers to take environmentally sensitive land out of production for 10 to 15 years.

The Conservation Reserve Program helps the environment by improving soil health and water quality and by providing habitat for wildlife, including endangered and threatened species. It also helps farmers by reducing their crop insurance costs and providing them with an annual payment for the land they have taken out of production.

I have spent years pushing for an increase in the Conservation Reserve Program's acreage cap, and we finally got a substantial increase in last year's farm bill. Yet the Department of Agriculture needs to expedite both general and continuous CRP signups to allow farmers to take full advantage of the cap increase. Taking millions of acres of land out of crop production in the next year could have a big impact on the farm economy by driving up commodity prices, which will boost farms' incomes. In order for this to happen, we need to make sure that farmers can get their less productive land enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program and out of crop production by next year. That is why I have been urging the Department of Agriculture to make sure farmers can sign up in a timely manner.

I also urged the Department to expedite signups for the Soil Health and Income Protection Program. I introduced the Soil Health and Income Protection Program, which became law as part of last year's farm bill, in order to address the concerns of farmers who were

interested in the Conservation Reserve Program but didn't want to take portions of their land out of production for a decade or more. The Soil Health and Income Protection Program, or SHIPP, provides a new, short-term option for farmers that will allow them to take their worst performing cropland out of production for 3 to 5 years instead of the 10 to 15 years that is required by the CRP's rules. Like the CRP, it will protect our environment while it will improve the bottom line for farmers. The sooner we get this program implemented, the sooner farmers and the environment will see the benefits.

I have also been pressing the USDA to issue guidelines for the second round of Market Facilitation Program payments, and I emphasized this point again at last Thursday's meeting. While I know our farmers would rather receive a check from the marketplace than from the government, we have safety net programs in place to help in exactly the kinds of situations our farmers find themselves in today.

I continue to press the administration on when the government will wrap up negotiations on the various trade deals that are under consideration. I strongly support the administration's goal of strengthening market access for our Nation's farmers and ranchers, and we have made real progress in those negotiations. Now it is time to push for a conclusion to these deals.

In addition to increased market access, farmers and ranchers need certainty about what international markets will look like. I am also pushing for the congressional consideration of one already concluded trade agreement—the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement—in the near future. This agreement will preserve and expand farmers' and ranchers' market access to Canada and Mexico, and Congress should take it up and pass it as soon as possible.

To all of South Dakota's farmers and ranchers, I know you all have had a very tough few years. I am working hard here in Washington to do whatever I can to support you, and I will keep fighting every day to get our agriculture economy thriving again.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

MOTION TO DISCHARGE—S.J. RES.

36

Mr. MENENDEZ. Madam President, pursuant to the Arms Export Control Act of 1976, I move to discharge the Foreign Relations Committee from further consideration of S.J. Res. 36, relating to the disapproval of the proposed transfer to the Kingdom of Saudi

Arabia, the United Kingdom of Great Britain, and Northern Ireland, the Kingdom of Spain, and the Italian Republic of certain defense articles and services.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The motion is pending and debatable for up to 1 hour.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Madam President, the resolution I have just asked for the discharge of would disapprove the administration's sale of precision-guided munitions to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia—weapons they have used in the killing of an untold number of innocent civilians in their ongoing campaign in Yemen.

This resolution is 1 of 22 that I have filed with a bipartisan group of Senators in response to the administration's flagrant disregard for congressional oversight over arms sales.

On May 24, the Secretary of State attempted to bypass this body in order to push through 22 separate arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, claiming an ill-defined emergency regarding Iran.

Now, while Iran is a threat to the interests of the United States and the Middle East, I think no one in this body has been stronger on our sanctions efforts and in other legislation that I have been the architect of on sanctioning Iran. The question before us is whether these arms sales are specifically meant to be a response to that.

These arms sales are a critical national security tool in terms of reviewing and approving them as a core function of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. We are responsible for considering how each proposed sale fits into the broader foreign policy goals and our national security interests, including the capacity and interoperability of our partners.

The congressional review of arms sales is mandated for a reason: so the Secretary of State explicitly cannot do what he tried to do last month with these 22 sales to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

The suggestion that this is an emergency, I think, was shown to be totally hollow when we had the testimony of the Assistant Secretary of State, Clarke Cooper, who admitted in an open House hearing that the decision to make the emergency determination was in the works for months—months.

It doesn't take months to deal with an emergency.

When pressed on how an emergency declaration could be in the works for months, he tried to argue that the emergency showed up sometime between the 2 days that the Secretary briefed Members and then made the notification.

The Secretary of State was before this body briefing Members, and at that time, 3 days before this emergency was declared, he said absolutely nothing—nothing—about any pending emergency, even though Assistant Secretary Cooper said it had been in the

works for months. So how can it be in the works for months, you are before this body, and you say nothing 3 days before you actually declare an emergency? So on the process itself, it is just false.

Secondly, what is happening in Yemen is a humanitarian disaster that has been exacerbated by the very weapons we have been giving the Saudis in order to fight this conflict in Yemen and has created untold humanitarian disaster.

These precision-guided missiles were meant to avoid civilian casualties, but they are not going to avoid civilian casualties when you aim them with precision at civilian targets. I will have a lot more to say about that when my colleagues who are joining with me, on a bipartisan basis, come to the floor. We hope to have a colloquy with all of our colleagues in this regard.

The other point is, these weapons will not counter Iranian threats. This is all about using them in Yemen, and the Assistant Secretary of State, Clarke Cooper, admitted as much in a hearing before the House last week.

Lastly, as a major point, which I will expound upon, this particular transfer is a transfer not only of sensitive technology but of American jobs to the Saudis. This export license will allow Saudi workers to begin to manufacture part of the electronic guidance system for these precision-guided munitions—work that has been done and should continue to be done by American workers in the United States. I don't think the transfer of those sensitive technologies and the creation of its components is something that is in the national interest, both economically or in terms of our security.

Lastly, this is about this institution standing up for its congressional prerogatives to ensure that regardless of who the President is in the White House, arms sales are subject to review of the Congress. The day we give that up is the day we go down a dangerous path.

This is the beginning of a process. I want to say that I appreciate the willingness and efforts of my cosponsor, Senator GRAHAM, and of the majority leader, as well as their staffs, to chart an acceptable path forward on these resolutions and on the Saudi sanctions bill in the SAFE Act, which we also seek to have an opportunity on. I will have a lot more to say about these arms sales, but to start this process, I wanted to outline why we find ourselves here today.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri.

ST. LOUIS BLUES

Mr. BLUNT. Madam President, I want to talk about good news for two of our major cities in Missouri. I will start with the sporting news, which would be the July 12 victory of the St. Louis Blues, when they earned their spot in the history books when they defeated the Boston Bruins in game 7 of the Stanley Cup finals.

For the first time in franchise history, the Blues brought the Stanley Cup trophy to Missouri to celebrate their incredible achievement and to share it with some of the best sports fans in America.

Senator HAWLEY and I look forward to a chance, before too long, to host the Stanley Cup here at the Senate so all my colleagues will get to see the joy we have in seeing that come to our State.

It is hard to imagine that just 6 months ago, the Blues were the lowest ranked team in the NHL. I think at the first of the season the odds were 60 to 1 that the Blues would win the Stanley Cup. Those were the highest odds any team faced.

As it turned out, the odds aren't always what counts. What counts is how you play the season. So they got off to a rough start, changed their coach in January, and then as the season progressed, at the end of the regular season, they won 11 straight games.

A rookie, Jordan Binnington, led the team to an incredibly successful second half. His goalie performance in the second half of the season, and particularly in the Stanley Cup games, was extraordinary, especially in that last game.

The Blues eventually moved on to get the third seed in the Western Conference playoffs. They won their series against Winnipeg in four games to two in the first round. They advanced to the second round to defeat the Dallas Stars in a really dramatic double overtime victory in game seven. They continued their historic run, defeating the San Jose Sharks in round three, and then the Blues made it all the way to the Stanley Cup final and ended the season with a decisive 4-to-1 victory in game seven and at Boston.

I think, if you look back at the record on this, the Blues had clearly learned to win away from home, and they proved that in the Stanley Cup.

They played as one team, they played as one unit, but they had lots of people helping. Ryan O'Reilly set a franchise record with 23 points in the playoffs. He ultimately went on to win the Conn Smythe Award as the postseason MVP. Jordan Binnington, whom I mentioned before, became the first and only rookie goalie to win 16 games in the Stanley Cup playoffs. Patrick Maroon, a Missouri native, scored a heroic goal in the double overtime of game seven against the Dallas Stars.

There was another individual who was reflective of just lots of the fans whom the Blues had with them. This superfan, Laila Anderson, 11 years old, didn't let her battle with a rare, life-threatening disease prevent her from cheering on the team she loved.

At the beginning of game three in the Stanley finals, she took to the ice before the puck dropped and fired up the team and the nearly 20,000 fans who filled the Enterprise Center.

Laila became such an important factor to the Blues' victories that they flew this 11-year-old to Boston to make

sure their No. 1 fan would be there to cheer them on in game seven.

Shortly after the Blues were presented with the Stanley Cup, she celebrated with the players on the ice as they passed around that iconic trophy.

Her inspirational story is just another example of why this was a season right out of the storybooks. The city of St. Louis and our State will never forget the Blues' incredible achievement this year.

I would like to congratulate Tom Stillman, the general manager; Doug Armstrong, the head coach; Craig Berube; and all the coaches, the players, the fans, and the staff who brought this incredible victory home to St. Louis.

I look forward to hearing our fans sing "Gloria" many more times next year when the team defends its title as Stanley Cup champions.

USDA

Mr. BLUNT. Madam President, as the St. Louisans were celebrating the Stanley Cup, people on the other side of our State in Kansas City received some great news—this time great news from the Federal Government, when the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, Sonny Perdue, announced on Thursday that two Federal ag research agencies would be moving their headquarters to the Kansas City region from Washington, DC.

The Economic Research Service and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture together will bring more than 500 jobs to the Kansas City area. It is fantastic news for our State, for our region, I think also for the workers at those two agencies and their families.

The point of the move is to get these important government offices closer to the customers they serve and to save the taxpayers money. Kansas City will be a great place to do both of those things.

Missouri is already home to more than 5,000 U.S. Department of Agriculture employees and contractors working for a dozen different Department offices in the Department of Agriculture, but bringing these two agency headquarters to the State will put them right in the middle of some of the most exciting and cutting-edge innovation happening in the ag industry.

Talk about being closer to your customers, the farmers of America, and closer to examples of innovation, I think this move and Secretary Perdue's decision is clearly going to show that is the case.

Kansas City is close to at least a dozen land-grant universities in our State. Two of those would be the University of Missouri in Columbia and Lincoln University in Jefferson City. These institutions, along with the other land-grant institutions in the region, are preparing for the next generation of ag leaders to meet maybe the greatest challenge of all time as world food demand moves toward doubling between now and 2050 and world food need doubles between now and 2060. A

lot more food is going to have to be grown on the same land with fewer inputs, to meet our environmental concerns, our climate concerns, our other concerns, but still feed the world in a way that we are uniquely positioned to be a lead partner in that partnership of feeding the world.

The move the USDA has made will give them the opportunity to strengthen partnerships they already have and have even greater impact as they work to improve crop yields and develop risk management strategies.

Our State is also a big part of the Kansas City Animal Health Corridor, which extends from Manhattan, KS, to Columbia, MO. That corridor is home to more than 300 animal health companies. It is the largest concentration in the world of that business and includes five of the world's largest animal health companies.

Relocating these agencies will save taxpayers a lot of money. Secretary Perdue anticipates that almost \$300 million will be saved over the next 15 years and all the moving costs will be earned back within 12 months of the move. It is hard to imagine an investment you make where you have 100 percent payback in 12 months, but that is going to happen with this one.

That frees up more resources to go toward grants and research instead of being paid to the Department's landlords.

(Mr. SCOTT of Florida assumed the Chair.)

I think it will also be a huge upgrade for the lives of people who will be Federal employees living outside of Washington and in the middle of the country. Last month, the average house in Washington cost more than \$600,000. In Kansas City, the average price was about a quarter of that. Now, you can find the \$600,000 house in Kansas City, but it is not the average house being sold like it is here. I know local banks and mortgage companies are standing ready to help those Federal families as they move to Kansas City.

Also—now that we have gone from Madam President to Mr. President, as the Senator from Florida has taken the seat and is in charge of the Senate here for a while—you are making that decision with the current employees in mind, but I think you are also making that decision, more importantly, with future employees. Where will be the best place to recruit? Where will be the best place to encourage people to do graduate work and other things that allow them to do their jobs better? I think there were other choices, but I certainly think the choice of Kansas City was a good one. There is a thriving economy right now, with lots of job opportunities. Like the rest of the country, there are more jobs available than people looking for work. Missouri added 8,200 jobs last year, and we continue to see that happen.

Our new neighbors will also find that Kansas City is home to limitless cultural, educational, and recreational op-

portunities—very appropriate to mention with my native Missouri and now the Senator from Florida here in the Chair. We have major league sports teams, like the Royals, the Chiefs, and Sporting Kansas City. We have a thriving theater culture, a world-class museum at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum, Science City at Union Station, and that names just a few.

The motto of USDA is "Do Right and Feed Everyone." By the way, we were doing research at the Federal level before there was a USDA. In the 1850s, ag research was going on right here in Washington sponsored by the Federal Government. In 1862, when the USDA was formed, one of the principle reasons was research. These two facilities will be an important part of that. When the people at ERS and NIFA join the many USDA colleagues they already have in our State, we think they will find their mission easier and more rewarding than ever.

It is a great time to look forward toward the future of agriculture. Certainly Missouri and Kansas City and Kansas and that entire region that hubs around Kansas City, MO, are excited to be a bigger part of that. Congratulations to those employees, and congratulations to the decision Secretary Perdue has made to relocate those two Washington-based organizations to a place where they are going to be closer to the work they do.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mrs. BLACKBURN. I ask that I be permitted to speak for up to 7 minutes as in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. President, as we move toward debate over the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020, I wanted to remind my colleagues that while we stand prepared to negotiate its various provisions, our military men and women stand at the ready. They stand at the ready every single day. It is a 24/7 business for them for a much more serious task, and that is the defense of this great Nation.

As we consider this year's NDAA, we must do so with the understanding that our Nation is faced with new, sophisticated threats to our way of life and to the world order.

Two emerging warfighting domains—cyber and space—are capturing much of the attention of this body and our allies and, I will also add, capturing the attention of our enemies, of those who do not wish us well.

It is these two domains—cyber and space—that pose increased threats to our national infrastructure and our way of engaging with both those allies and our adversaries. Debating defense spending means thinking beyond helicopters and submarines or equipment and artillery and viewing this authorization in the larger context of multi and unseen domain warfare. That is why my colleagues and I on the Senate Armed Services Committee have come to the table with a bill that shores up funding for these legacy programs and devotes new funding to address these emerging threats.

First and foremost, this bill authorizes a 3.1-percent pay increase for the Members of our Armed Forces. That is so vitally important for the men and women at Fort Campbell, which is located right there on the Tennessee and Kentucky border. That is a post where I have spent much of my legislative career involved with those men and women and with the command team.

This is a justified and well-earned raise that recognizes their commitment to defending against unfamiliar threats that rise above and beyond the everyday servicemember's scope of duty.

We have found ourselves once more in the midst of great power competition. America will always have rivals on the world stage. Over the past decade, we have seen countries like China and Russia pursuing increasingly sophisticated and lethal weapons systems.

We have no choice but to recognize this emerging reality and give our military men and women the tools they need to combat developing threats and preserve U.S. preeminence across all warfighting domains.

With this funding, we will prioritize more sophisticated cyber security and space-based strategies, artificial intelligence, and other emerging technologies. We will take steps to protect the integrity of our supply chain so we can be confident the microelectronics we depend on have not been corrupted by foreign spyware.

A good defense is only as strong as its weakest link, and this bill will allow us to shore up our relationship with the defense industrial base and ensure that contractors are not under the undue influence of foreign actors. This is all in addition to readiness projects here at home.

Our mark includes full funding for the National Nuclear Security Administration, which is critical to our nuclear modernization program.

I think it is worth noting that our friends in the House cut over \$70 million from infrastructure and facility operations, which goes toward rebuilding crumbling buildings at the NNSA plants and labs. That is funding that should be restored. Modern and responsive nuclear infrastructure is an essential part of credible deterrence, which is a critical concern in great power competition. Funding for these

projects must not end up as a casualty of budget negotiations.

Now, it is true that this is a massive authorization and that much of the funding we authorize will not manifest itself in visible hardware, but I encourage my friends in this body, do not let this deter you from seeing the big picture. National defense is no longer limited to the tools and infrastructure we can see. It includes an enormous covering that is needed by our Nation and our allies in this virtual space.

We must focus our defense budget on future threats, not those of the past, in order to not repeat the mistakes of the past. I believe that this year's NDAA accomplishes just that.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The assistant Democratic leader.

NOMINATION OF MATTHEW J. KACSMARYK

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, if you study the recent course of American history, you can note there has been the emergence of opportunity and debates on freedom many times during the last 50 years.

I think back to my time, my early years of education in high school and college, when America was in the midst of debate about the rights of African Americans—the civil rights movements in the 1960s.

We have also had debates as well on the question of liberty and freedom—freedom from discrimination for women in America and for those who are disabled. It really is the hallmark of this democracy that we continue to expand opportunity and continue to question our own beliefs when it comes to the freedom which each of us cherishes.

We are now in the midst of an interesting transformation in this country on the issue of rights of people with different sexual orientation. We have seen some dramatic changes in just the last few years as we find more and more people speaking out against discrimination against those of a different sexual orientation, and, of course, the landmark decision in Obergefell, where the U.S. Supreme Court recognized the right for same-sex marriage. This is not without controversy and not without dissenters, but the mainstream of America, the vast majority of Americans believe we are moving along the same path we did when we talked about the rights of those who are minorities, women, and the disabled, when we say people should be free of discrimination because of their own sexual orientation.

That is why it strikes me as unusual, more than coincidental, that in June—the LGBTQ Pride Month—our Republican colleagues decided to bring to the floor the nomination of Texas district court nominee Matthew Kacsmaryk, who has repeatedly written in his personal capacity about his opposition to LGBTQ rights and the Obergefell decision.

Mr. Kacsmaryk's nomination was reported out of the Senate Judiciary

Committee on a party-line vote in February, but for some reason, the Republican leadership decided to wait and force a vote on the floor of the Senate during Pride Month. Now they are calling for a vote this week.

Mr. Kacsmaryk has not been shy about his hostility to marriage equality in transgender Americans. On June 24, 2015, he wrote an article in which he noted that the Supreme Court would decide the Obergefell case in the next few weeks and speculated whether five Justices would, in his words, “invent a constitutional right to same-sex marriage.”

After the decision, Mr. Kacsmaryk wrote a disparaging summary—which I will not quote into the RECORD—but it certainly shows his opposition to the fundamental premise behind that decision. He was quoted in the Liberty Institute blog of October 16, 2014 saying “the pro-marriage movement must prepare for the long war.”

He signed a letter in 2016 relating to transgender Americans, calling them “a delusion.” Last December, the parents of 300 transgender children—including 39 from my State of Illinois—wrote the Senate in opposition to Mr. Kacsmaryk's nomination and said: “Our children are not a delusion, and neither is our love and support for them.”

Even though Mr. Kacsmaryk has expressed strident personal views opposing LGBTQ rights, and even though he has litigated frequently in cases involving these matters, he would not commit to recuse himself from cases involving this issue if he were to be confirmed by the Senate.

I oppose the Kacsmaryk nomination. This is yet another extreme nominee outside the mainstream of American thinking who does not deserve to be rubberstamped for a lifetime appointment by the U.S. Senate.

THE KOVLER CENTER AND CAMEROON

Mr. President, just 2 weeks ago, I had a meeting in Chicago with my colleague Congresswoman JAN SCHA-KOWSKY. We were at Heartland Alliance's Marjorie Kovler Center. What happens at this center is truly remarkable and a reflection of America's long history of welcoming those who are fleeing political violence.

The Kovler Center is home to one of our Nation's oldest and most respected facilities, helping those recovering from complex consequences of politically sanctioned torture. This is its 32nd year in operation. More than 3,000 torture survivors from 80 different countries have received assistance and counsel at the Kovler Center in Chicago.

The problem of torture among refugees is significant.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator's time has expired.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for an additional 2 minutes.

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

Mr. DURBIN. The problem of torture among refugees is significant, with an estimated 44 percent of refugees in the United States having been victims of such horrors. Those from Bosnia, Cambodia, and many other places all receive free treatment at the Kovler Center to recover from their trauma.

During my visit I had the privilege of meeting refugees who had fled the mounting violence in Cameroon. Cameroon is a West African nation that is dealing with a complicated colonial legacy. Following World War I, the League of Nations appointed France and Great Britain as joint trustees to what was previously a German colony. Not surprisingly, the two colonial powers imposed their own cultures on the new Cameroon.

Tragically, following the country's independence in the 1960s, Cameroonian strongman President Paul Biya, one of the world's longest serving leaders—now almost 40 years in office—further favored the French-speaking population over its Anglophone regions.

The results were not surprising. The mounting resentment and calls for greater autonomy within the Anglophone population caused ensuing violent suppression from the Biya regime. The refugees I met with told harrowing stories of this crackdown and violence.

I was pleased to join Senator VAN HOLLEN last year in a letter urging Secretary Pompeo to focus attention on the unrest in Cameroon, and I was equally pleased when the administration scaled back U.S. military assistance to Cameroon due to this government's violent repression. As a Member of the Appropriations Committee, I will be watching carefully the level of violence in Cameroon and, when the day comes, when we consider any foreign aid to this Nation.

The work of the Kovler Center is a reminder that if we are going to stand up for human rights we must be willing to be vigilant at all times, even for small countries as far away as Cameroon.

I yield the floor.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of Sean Cairncross, of Minnesota, to be Chief Executive Officer, Millennium Challenge Corporation.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

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

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

TRIBUTE TO ALANA PETERSEN

Ms. SMITH. Mr. President, I rise today to pay tribute and express my

gratitude to Alana Petersen, my deputy chief of staff and long time staff leader for the Minnesota congressional delegation. Alana is retiring from her official role after serving the Minnesota delegation since 1993.

During her public service, Alana worked for Congressman Dave Minge, from Minnesota's First Congressional District; Congressman John Oberstar, from Minnesota's Eighth Congressional District; Senator Al Franken; and now for me. In all of those roles, she has served the people of Minnesota first and especially those who most needed an ally and a voice in the halls of power here in Washington: farmers and rural families, new immigrants, Minnesota's Tribal communities, and Minnesota's diverse communities of color.

For those of you who don't know Alana, let me tell you a little bit about her. Alana was born in Minnesota and, like me, spent part of her childhood in New Mexico. In fact, she and I went to the same elementary school, although Alana is younger than me and had the benefit of a new building.

Alana headed Al Franken's Minnesota Senate office beginning when he was sworn in 2009. Before joining Franken's staff, she worked in the office of Congressman Jim Oberstar for 5 years as deputy district director, and she worked for Congressman Dave Minge for 6 years in several capacities.

Alana also served as executive director of Target Market, a statewide nonprofit organization that promoted an anti-tobacco message to teens, and she held a position at Grassroots Solutions, a political consulting firm where she worked with national labor unions, congressional candidates, and pro-choice organizations.

As if her official work weren't enough, Alana has long been a go-to volunteer for her community, where she has served as chair of the East Central Regional Arts Council and board chair for Women Winning, a bipartisan group dedicated to electing more women to public office.

Alana is married to Thom Petersen, who is the Minnesota commissioner of agriculture for Governor Tim Walz, and she is mom to Waylon and Dylan. Alana and her family live on a working farm in Pine County, MN, an hour north of the Twin Cities. The Petersens raise and show miniature horses at county fairs all across Minnesota and at the Minnesota State Fair, earning blue ribbons, not only because of the amazing minis but also thanks to the amazing costumes sewn by Alana.

To Thom, Waylon, and Dylan, thank you for sharing your mom and wife with us and with Minnesota all of these years.

So I can't tell you when I first met Alana, but we have been good friends and allies for decades. As in all great friendships born from working together, we are connected by a sense of shared purpose, a sense of humor, and a complete trust that, when in doubt, we can call the other one. Each of us, in

turn, has been a shoulder to lean on, a strategic adviser, a gut check, and a great excuse for a good laugh when either of us needs it.

This has been true for both of us for years, but never more so than in this last year when I became an accidental Senator and called on my old friend to jump in one more time to help me become a Senator and win a Senate seat, all in 10 months. Alana helped me to see that I could do this job and also win an election in such a short time. It is no exaggeration to say that I couldn't have done any of this without her.

Alana has the heart of an organizer. In fact, she tells the story that she first canvassed her neighborhood as a fifth-grader, knocking on doors for the father of a friend of hers who was running for office. She has been organizing and engaging people in the democratic process ever since.

As an organizer Alana knows that the best ideas come from the ground up, not the top down. She understands that the best work happens when you build relationships with people at the grassroots. She has mentored and taught generations of campaign and congressional office staffers that teamwork based on mutual respect, high expectations, and clear goals makes progress for people possible, and that it can be joyful work.

For years Alana has been the go-to person for young candidates just starting out—and a lot of us seasoned politicians too. The political offices, campaigns, and nonprofits of Minnesota are powered by the people Alana has taught and mentored.

As an organizer, she is rooted in the value that Paul Wellstone best expressed when he said that politics shouldn't be about money and power; it should be about improving people's lives.

It means more to me than I can express that Minnesotans elected me to serve in this seat once held by Hubert Humphrey, Walter Mondale, and Paul Wellstone.

On October 25, 2002, we lost Paul in a terrible plane crash, along with Paul's wife Sheila, his daughter Marsha, and staffers Will, Tom, and Mary Mac, Alana's mentor. In the fall of 2002, Alana had quit her regular job in Duluth to join the campaign for Paul's reelection because she knew she wanted to contribute to the grassroots movement that Paul was building. The plane crash and the loss of our friends was heartbreaking to all of us.

Last year, on October 25, Alana shared a letter her father wrote to the Wellstone campaign team in the days after the crash. It is particularly touching because her father, Thomas Christiansen, passed away on October 25, 2009, 7 years after we lost Paul.

Here is part of what Alana's father said: "For some, public service is the dedication of one's life to the community. I have come to realize that my daughter Alana is one of those elite few."