

11:45 a.m. on Tuesday, December 17, all postclosure time be considered expired on the conference report to accompany S. 1790 and that the Senate vote on the pending motion to waive the budget act, if applicable, prior to a vote on adoption of the conference report.

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

MORNING BUSINESS

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

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

DEBBIE SMITH ACT OF 2019

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I have long maintained that rape victims shouldn't have to wait years for justice, and that is why I supported the original version of the Debbie Smith Act when the Senate Judiciary Committee originated it more than 15 years ago. I am delighted that we last week reached a compromise enabling Congress to send another 5-year reauthorization of the Debbie Smith Act to the President's desk this year.

Congress has generously funded the program authorized by this statute at roughly \$100 million annually since its inception. Unfortunately, however, we have seen repeated media reports that a backlog of untested sexual assault evidence persists in many States, and the Justice Department, which administers this formula grant program, has not done enough to tackle persistent issues with the program's implementation.

These reports concerned me, and at a 2016 meeting of the Judiciary Committee, I began voicing questions about whether rape victims were truly the top priority under our DNA Capacity and Backlog Enhancement Program. I also questioned whether additional oversight was needed. I insisted at this time that transparency requirements be added to the Justice for All Act reauthorization prior to its passage by the full Senate. These changes, which I later offered as a floor amendment and which the Senate accepted by voice vote in 2016, ensure that the Justice Department collects and reports more data about how Federal grant funds are being spent.

In 2017, I also called on a government watchdog agency to assess the progress we have made in reducing backlogs of untested DNA evidence in sexual assault kits since the enactment of the Debbie Smith Act grant program. Last year, as chairman of the Judiciary Committee, I also convened an oversight hearing to review Congress' billion-dollar investment in the DNA backlog program, which makes Federal resources available each year for crime laboratories across the country to analyze untested DNA evidence collected

from crime scenes and convicted offenders.

The Government Accountability Office, or GAO, testified at last year's congressional hearing that we still don't know with certainty that this program is working. GAO explained—and this year reconfirmed in the final report prepared by GAO at my request—that the Justice Department has yet to articulate measurable program-wide goals for the grant program authorized by the Debbie Smith Act, making it difficult to assess and verify State grantees' performance. GAO raised similar concerns in a 2013 report on this national program. GAO also suggested the need for the Justice Department to implement additional steps to prevent lobbying-related conflicts of interest.

This year, I developed additional proposed reforms in response to the issues that GAO and others raised. I want to thank Penny Nance of Concerned Women for America, who testified at my invitation at last year's Judiciary Committee hearing, for suggesting certain changes to ensure that the analysis of sexual assault evidence is accorded a higher priority by grantees. This statutory reform is essential, because most States impose a statutory deadline by which crimes of sexual violence must be prosecuted. Changes suggested by her organization, for which I have advocated since 2016, were incorporated into the Debbie Smith Act reauthorization bill by the Senate sponsor, Senator CORNYN, with my support. The House of Representatives also accepted these changes this year.

Additional reforms I proposed to the program this year, based on GAO's findings and suggestions, cleared the Judiciary Committee as an amendment to the Debbie Smith Act during our committee's consideration of the 2019 reauthorization. The full Senate later approved the reauthorization, including these reforms, by voice vote, but the House of Representatives declined to accept all of them. If enacted, the changes opposed by the House would require both that the Justice Department articulate measurable, program-wide goals and that the National Institute of Justice take additional steps to prevent lobbying-related conflicts of interest. They would not resolve every issue with the DNA backlog program, but I believe their enactment would substantially strengthen the program.

Because the House of Representatives dropped the GAO-backed reforms that the Senate approved by voice vote, I imposed a hold on the other Chamber's reauthorization measure this month. I then called on the Attorney General to implement my proposed reforms through administrative action. I thank the Attorney General for almost immediately agreeing to do so. Rather than indefinitely hold up the extension of the Debbie Smith Act, I lifted my hold on the bill last week, and I will continue to conduct oversight to ensure that these reforms are implemented as promised by the executive branch.

At this time, I want to thank Senator CORNYN for his efforts to advance the 2019 reauthorization, which I co-sponsored, and for cosigning my December 2019 letter to the Attorney General.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that this letter and Attorney General's response be included in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD. I am hopeful that this bipartisan measure can be approved today by voice vote and sent to President Trump's desk this week for signature.

BATTLE OF THE BULGE

Mr. CRAMER. Mr. President, today's 75th anniversary of the beginning of the Battle of the Bulge presents an opportunity to honor the heroism of the Allied forces who fought in this last major German offensive in Western Europe during World War II. More than 650,000 troops from the United States, Great Britain, Belgium, Canada, and other countries fought in this battle to defeat Nazi Germany. These soldiers bravely fought for 38 days from December 16, 1944, to January 25, 1945, and their victory made possible the final defeat and surrender of Germany in May 1945.

More than 40 Senate colleagues joined in cosponsoring S. Con Res. 23, which my West Virginia colleague, Mr. MANCHIN, and I introduced and the Senate passed last week to remember the significance of this historic battle.

The Battle of the Bulge was an attempt by the Germans to split the Allied forces and pressure them to seek a negotiated peace. These troops, located in the Ardennes region of Belgium and Luxembourg, were greatly outnumbered by the German Army as they faced harsh weather conditions and treacherous and unknown terrain.

It is difficult to comprehend the massive losses incurred from this one battle—including 89,000 American casualties. Nineteen thousand American soldiers made the ultimate sacrifice, with another 47,500 wounded and more than 23,000 captured or missing in action. Other nations suffered great losses as well. Belgium lost more than 74,000 civilians, in addition to many more who suffered through other atrocities that came with war. They persevered through this dark time and rebuilt their lives the best way they could after the war ended.

In the decades since, the citizens of Belgium and Luxembourg have generously hosted thousands of U.S. veterans as they have kept the memory of the Battle of the Bulge alive through numerous memorials and museums. Among them has been one of North Dakota's most distinguished World War II veterans, Lynn Aas of Minot.

Mr. Aas enlisted in the U.S. Army in August 1942 at the age of 21 and was called into service in March 1943. He was assigned to the 193rd Glider Regiment in the 17th Airborne Division. Arriving in England in August 1944, he

mastered glider-use techniques and was deployed in France on December 24. He first went to Camp Mourmelon, followed by Charleville-Mézières, where his division was attached to George Patton's U.S. Third Army. There, he was among those ordered to defend a 30-mile defensive position along the Meuse River whose mission was to prevent the German advance in the Belgian Ardennes area.

On January 5, 1945, Private First Class Aas crossed the Belgian border and settled in a wooded area near Bastogne. Combat ensued 2 days later as the Battle of the Bulge was raging. The fighting was so intense the area became forever known as Dead Man's Ridge. As he and his unit continued to advance toward Luxembourg, they pushed enemy lines back towards the Siegfried Line.

In February, after the battle had ended and after weeks of combat in exceptionally harsh conditions, he returned to France to Camp Châlons-sur-Marne. He was reassigned to the 194th Glider Infantry after his regiment disbanded because of heavy casualties. Private First Class Aas helped prepare for the airborne operation Varsity. On March 24, he left Coulommiers and landed in Germany near Wesel to help capture Rhine bridges and secure towns to protect Allied ground forces. The following day he was wounded by shrapnel and was hospitalized in Belgium and then Paris, where he spent several weeks recovering.

Private First Class Aas returned to North Dakota following the war, earned his law degree from the University of North Dakota, and served in the State legislature for four sessions. To this day, he remains a community leader in Minot. He is one of the best examples of the thousands of World War II veterans we proudly call "the greatest generation."

For his valorous conduct in action, Mr. Aas has received prestigious distinctions, including the Purple Heart Medal, the Bronze Star Medal for heroic and meritorious service in Belgium, as well as the Luxembourg Medal of Honor and the honorific diploma of Citizen of Utah Beach—Sainte-Marie-du-Mont / Citoyen d'Utah Beach—Sainte-Marie-du-Mont. It was my honor in October 2017 to join French Consul General Lacroix, who made a special trip to Minot to present France's highest military recognition, the Legion of Honor, to Mr. Aas, who was then 96 years old.

Mr. President, as we remember this 75th anniversary of the Battle of the Bulge, let us once again remember and honor the heroism and sacrifices of our American soldiers, who paved the way for victory in World War II and for our freedom today.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

90TH ANNIVERSARY OF HAWAIIAN AIRLINES

- Mr. SCHATZ. Mr. President, 90 years ago, Inter-Island Airways launched the first scheduled commercial passenger air service in Hawaii. Now known as Hawaiian Airlines, it is our State's largest and longest serving airline. Its fleet of 67 aircrafts flies between our islands and connects Hawaii to the mainland and around the world.

As a State comprised of islands, safe, reliable air service is critical to the movement of people and goods. Whether it is transporting people and cargo for leisure, medical appointments, business, cultural and sports events or carrying fresh produce, equipment, or other supplies, Hawaiian has and will continue to be a major part of our highways in the sky.

From its modest beginnings—a \$3-per-person sightseeing tour on a five-passenger plane—Hawaiian transported 11.8 million passengers and 92,000 tons of cargo last year alone. Today, Hawaiian is one of the largest employers in the State, with more than 7,300 employees across its network, including some 6,600 who live in Hawaii.

Its impact is felt beyond jobs. Every year, Hawaiian and its employees partner with and help support hundreds of nonprofit organizations. As one example, Hawaiian leads a mentorship program that promotes aviation careers and provides students with hands-on learning about all aspects of the industry.

I am particularly proud of the steps Hawaiian has taken to adopt eco-friendlier practices throughout its operations to improve fuel efficiency, reduce carbon emissions, and cut waste. In 2018, despite continuing to grow, Hawaiian lowered annual jet fuel burn by 7 million gallons and reduced annual carbon output by 86,300 metric tons. It is also contributing toward climate research by collecting air samples over the Pacific Ocean. The data is used as part of an international effort to measure climate change and air quality.

On behalf of the Hawaii congressional delegation, I wish to congratulate Hawaiian Airlines on its 90th anniversary and wish them continued success in serving the travel needs of our residents and introducing Hawaii to the world.●

TRIBUTE TO WALTER GRAFF

- Mrs. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, I rise today to salute Walter Graff for his many years of dedicated service and forward-looking leadership at the Appalachian Mountain Club, AMC. Walter will soon retire from his role as senior vice president, the capstone to a career at AMC that began 45 years ago as a program manager in the mountains of northern New Hampshire. He leaves a legacy worthy of our praise and our gratitude.

The Appalachian Mountain Club is a nearly century-and-a-half old organization with a mission of connecting people to the outdoors. Its staff and many supporters not only encourage people to explore the natural world through activities like hiking, paddling, cycling, and skiing. They are also at the forefront of conservation efforts that seek to protect our forests, mountains, rivers, and trails for future generations to enjoy and cherish.

When Walter Graff was hired by the AMC in July of 1974, he spent his first months on the job screening environmental films for guests at what was then called Pinkham Notch Camp. The AMC was a much smaller organization back then with a few professional positions in New Hampshire and administrative services in Boston. But Walter had big dreams and an ambitious vision for the organization. He approached the Pinkham hutmaster at the end of the summer with the hope of developing a workshop program. He got signoff, as well as an excuse to venture outdoors. What began as a couple classes on topics like equipment maintenance and snowshoeing has since blossomed into one of the largest outdoor education programs in New England.

Walter has held many titles within AMC since that summer 45 years ago. His colleagues note that his leadership has touched every facet of AMC's mission. As director of education, he was influential in launching the group's renowned outdoor skills and leadership training program. As head of the AMC's Maine Woods Initiative, he was responsible for developing a program that promotes outdoor recreation, protects natural resources, encourages responsible forestry and deepens community partnerships. To date, the program is responsible for purchasing and permanently conserving 70,000 acres of forestland and creating over 120 miles of recreational trails.

As he nears his retirement, Walter is fond of looking to the past to see how much AMC has grown and how accessible our mountains, rivers, and lakes are to people across the region. He drives through the White Mountains and sees once-empty parking lots now full of people exploring the richness of the natural world. Yet Walter is also looking to the future as he approaches his final day as an AMC employee. He knows he will remain connected to the outdoors and will continue caring for the planet.

On behalf of the people of New Hampshire, I ask my colleagues and all Americans to join me in thanking Walter Graff for his years of service and wishing him all the best in the years ahead.●

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

A message from the President of the United States was communicated to the Senate by Mr. Kalbaugh, one of his secretaries.