

# THE GREAT AMERICAN OUTDOORS ACT

Mr. ALEXANDER. Madam President, this morning, I had the privilege of attending the President's signing of the Great American Outdoors Act.

Now, this is a town, Washington, DC, that is accustomed to hyperbole—that is exaggeration—and excessive partisanship. Yet, today, we had neither. As the Secretary of the Interior said, the bill the President signed is, clearly, the most important conservation and outdoor recreation legislation that has passed in this Congress and become law in at least a half century. It may only be exceeded by the actual funding of the National Park System itself as it was gradually created, over time, to become an agency with 419 properties.

This legislation does two things.

One, it tackles the deferred maintenance backlogs in the Park System. By that I mean, look at our campground in the Great Smokies, which normally has 5,000 families camping there, but it has been closed for a number of years because the sewage system doesn't work. There are examples all across this country, from the Pearl Harbor Visitor Center to the National Mall, of worn-out trails, of roads with holes in them, of roofs that leak, and of sewage systems that don't work. As a result, campgrounds are closed because bathrooms don't operate.

All of these are our national parks and our public lands, which is where we want to go and where we especially want to go right now because what all of us want is to get out. We want to get outdoors. We want some fresh, clean air that we can breathe.

The head of Bass Pro Shops was telling me at the White House this morning that, at first, COVID really hurt Bass Pro Shops and that they had to close a lot of stores. Guess what is happening now. The purchasing of fishing licenses is going up at a record level. People are taking their sons and daughters and grandsons and granddaughters fishing and hunting—outdoors and to the parks. This is something that everyone who cares about the outdoors has been worried about since the last generation—that young people were not going out to the parks. They are going today because they want to get outside.

So today was a wonderful day, and everyone agreed that this was the most important bill for conservation and the outdoors in at least a half century. The Republicans agree with that. The Democrats agree with that. Hundreds of conservation groups agree with that. The President of the United States also agrees with that. It is no exaggeration to say that something remarkable and historic happened today when the President signed the Great American Outdoors Act. It is also accurate to say it was wholly bipartisan because it never would have passed if it had not been, and it barely passed even though it was. It took a Herculean effort. So I come to the floor briefly today to talk

about some of those persons who made a difference in this historic event.

There were many marchers in this parade. There always are when something passes in the U.S. Senate. One Senator never really does anything. It takes a parade of Senators—almost always of both parties—and it takes the House of Representatives. It also takes the President of the United States.

Because Presidents don't always get the credit they deserve, I want to say that there were many marchers in this parade—there were Democrats and Republicans, and there were hundreds of outdoors groups—but this historic conservation legislation would not have happened had it not been for President Trump. Here is why.

He is the first President of the United States to allow and support the use of money derived from energy exploration on Federal lands for deferred maintenance in our national parks, and if the President and the Office of Management and Budget don't support that, it is not going to happen, which is one reason this bill hasn't happened even though people have been trying to do it for years.

I mentioned the history of this and the deferred maintenance. As the Secretary of the Interior pointed out, it was in the Eisenhower years when we had the last big investment in our National Park System. I know for a fact that the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which was the other important part of this legislation—\$900 million a year permanently for the Land and Water Conservation Fund—was a recommendation of the Rockefeller Commission in the Lyndon Johnson administration, which Congress enacted in 1964.

I spent some time on that myself when I was Chairman of the President's Commission on Americans Outdoors in 1985 and 1986. It was our No. 1 recommendation that Congress should do what had been recommended in 1964, and now we are in 2020.

So good people have been working since 1964 to make the Land and Water Conservation Fund permanent, and it was signed into law today. Good people have been working since the Eisenhower years to deal with the deferred maintenance backlog—the potholes, the roofs, the sewage systems, the visitor centers, and the malls—in our national parks. That bill was signed today. It is historic. If the President had not allowed the money to be used in that way and had not supported it strongly in the Republican caucus, where we had some trouble getting enough votes until we got plenty of votes, it wouldn't have happened.

He did one other thing which people don't know about. Our bipartisan group of Senators asked me if I would ask him, when he visited Tennessee in early March, if he would add to the bill or if he would support adding to the bill the national forests and the national wildlife refuges in the Bureau of Land Management and the Indian

schools, which are in disrepair, so that the deferred maintenance of all of those would be added to this.

He said: Yes, let's do it.

I called that information back to the bipartisan group of managers, and the group was excited. It was added to the bill, and that became law today as well.

Take the Cherokee National Forest, which is adjacent to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. We hear more about the Smokies, for 10 million, 11 million, 12 million people go there every year. It has a \$224 million maintenance backlog. This will cut that in half over 5 years. The Cherokee National Forest is right next to the Smokies and has 3 million visitors a year, which is more than most national parks. It has a \$27 million backlog, and this will cut that in half. The Indian schools will get hundreds of millions of dollars in order to build them back up, and they are in bad shape.

So the President deserves credit for that. There were many important marchers in that parade, but it would not have happened without President Trump.

Let me just mention some of the other marchers, and let's talk about the ones in the U.S. Senate. I will not go on at great length about them, but I do want to acknowledge them.

Let's start with Senator WARNER, of Virginia, and Senator PORTMAN, of Ohio. They, in working with the National Parks Conservation Association and others, introduced the bill to reduce the maintenance backlog in the parks. Secretary Zinke came to Tennessee 3 years ago and asked me to do a similar thing, and I worked with Senator KING of Maine. We introduced a bill. Then we put those bills together. So Senator WARNER, Senator KING, and Senator PORTMAN deserve a lot of credit for the work they have done on that part of the bill.

Then we have the Land and Water Conservation Fund. I mentioned how long that work had been going on. Senator BURR of North Carolina has been an advocate of that for many years. Senator CANTWELL, a Democrat from Washington State, has been as well. More recently, Senator MANCHIN, who is the ranking Democrat on the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, has taken a major leadership role in the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

Then there were Senators GARDNER and DAINES. If there were a parade, you would have to say they were the drum majors. They were out front. They helped to work with the President. They helped to work with this group. So you can see what kind of parade we are talking about.

Senator HEINRICH of New Mexico—a strong, progressive Democrat, with great respect in his caucus—made sure that we kept the thing on balance and brought a real conservationist zeal to this effort.

We take him for granted, but let us give Senator MCCONNELL, the majority

leader, some credit. In the middle of COVID, he agreed, at our request, to give us 2 weeks to debate this bill and try to pass it—2 weeks of Senate floor time. If MITCH MCCONNELL had not put the bill on the floor, the bill would never have had a chance to pass.

I thank the Democratic leader, as well, for creating an environment within his caucus wherein we could work through the difficult issues that arose.

Now, that is just part of the honor roll of U.S. Senators who were involved in all of this, but it is an important honor roll.

I should add Senator COLLINS, of Maine, who, from the beginning, was a strong supporter of both the Land and Water Conservation Fund and of the Restore Our Parks Act.

So, when I say “parade,” that is what I am talking about. There are many marchers in this parade, and every single one of those U.S. Senators—both Democrats and Republicans—was essential to the passage of this bill.

The final group was made up of outside groups. Some people said there were more than 800 conservation and outdoor groups in support of this. That sounds a little bit like hyperbole to me, but I think it might have been true. I mean, this is something that organizations have worked on for decades—literally decades. Some of the people I saw at the White House today were the same people I met in the mid-1980s when I was the Chairman of President Reagan’s Commission on Americans Outdoors. Most of the people involved with the Rockefeller Commission are gone now, which was in 1963 and 1964, but people for decades have worked on this. I couldn’t begin to mention all of them, but The Nature Conservancy would be one. Pew would be another. Then there is the National Wildlife Federation, the Congressional Sportsmen’s Foundation, the National Parks Conservation Association, and the National Park Foundation. Sally Jewell, the former Secretary of the Interior in the last administration, helped to organize and lead many of these folks.

So you can see, with that sort of breadth and every Interior Secretary from Babbitt to Zinke, we had quite a parade of Americans who wanted to celebrate the great American outdoors.

People say that Italy has its art, that England has its history, that Egypt has its pyramids, but that the United States has the great American outdoors. We celebrated that today, and I was proud to be one marcher in that parade.

As the President signed the legislation, I was thinking of some gesture I could make to him or gift I could give him that would be appropriate so as to recognize, of all of the marchers in the parade, that he was the most consequential because, if he had not supported it, it wouldn’t have happened. So I took with me a walking stick that was as tall as I am—about his size—that was given to me in 1978 when I was

walking across Tennessee in my campaign for the Governor of Tennessee. I walked in a red and black shirt—a lot like the mask I wear today. People would give me walking sticks, and this was a walking stick that was carved by a Smoky Mountain craftsman. It is a mountain man walking stick. It is, really, a beautiful stick.

I gave it to the President. He looked a little surprised, and then he took it and walked away with it.

I said: Mr. President, you may find this will come in handy during the rest of the year.

He said: I think it will.

So that was a heartfelt gesture to the President. I am glad he liked it. I know the people in the Great Smoky Mountains like this piece of legislation and are grateful for his work on it. I hope he keeps that walking stick as a token of respect for his support and appreciation for what he has done to help this whole parade of Senators on both sides of the aisle create this new law.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, the last 6 months have been among our country’s most trying and pain-filled in recent history. Nearly 160,000 Americans have lost their lives—that is more than enough people to fill Seattle’s CenturyLink stadium twice—and 4.7 million Americans have been infected. Everywhere, nationwide, we see the economic consequences of this virus—millions of people losing their jobs and their healthcare; millions more at risk of losing their homes; food lines a mile long. All of this as our country begins long-overdue work to grapple not just with police brutality against Black people and communities of color but also with the racial injustice imbedded in our laws and policies, which has caused COVID-19 to have vastly disproportionate impacts on those very same communities.

Since my home State of Washington was hit hard early back in February, I have been ringing alarm bells every day, day in and day out, about the need for the Trump administration and this Republican-controlled Senate to act with urgency, to listen to public health experts, and to follow the science and put the health and safety of workers and families above any political consideration. So you can imagine my frustration that for months, as Democrats urged Republicans to work with us on additional relief and pass legislation to do just that in the House, Republicans have refused.

As we got closer and closer to laid-off workers seeing dramatic cuts in unemployment benefits, as we got closer to the expiration of the eviction moratorium, we heard the Senate Republican leader was “in favor of States just going bankrupt.” That was April. We heard that Senate Republicans didn’t feel any urgency to act. That was May. Now it is August, and with this virus still raging, Senate Republican leaders

finally produced a so-called relief package that actually grants corporations a “get out of jail free” card if their employees or customers get sick. It guts jobless benefits. It rolls back critical civil rights protections for workers, including communities of color, LGBTQIA and other people, women, older Americans, and people with disabilities.

It is a package that fails to keep our childcare sector stabilized for more than a month; to provide the significant funding we need to finally make testing and contact tracing fast, free, and everywhere; and to require the type of end-to-end, comprehensive plan that we need to make sure safe, effective vaccines are cost-free and widely available.

Their package will not help the millions who have lost health insurance coverage during this crisis or help people suffering from the virus afford treatment. It does nothing to address the impact of this virus on Black, Latinx, Tribal communities, and other communities of color, and it provides zero relief for State, local, and Tribal governments, which is an absolute necessity for my State and so many others.

If that is not enough, one of the centerpieces of this bill is a demand, tweeted out by the President of the United States, which I, as a former preschool teacher and a mom and a grandmother, find especially insidious and harmful. This is the Republican policy to try to force schools to reopen for in-person learning, regardless of what the public health experts recommend. This policy is a lose, lose, lose. It threatens the health and safety of students and families, educators and communities. It would in particular pressure high-need school districts to reopen in person despite the risk, and it could spread this virus further and longer.

Many school districts are already rejecting that policy and planning for distance learning this fall for every student because, let me be clear, no student’s education, regardless of where it takes place, should falter because the President wants to pretend this virus has gone away or because Republicans in the Senate are unwilling to stand up to him.

If a school cannot safely reopen in person, they need the resources to ensure that every student and educator has access to a computer, to the internet, and to other equipment necessary to learn outside of a traditional classroom. So what we need to do is pass the Coronavirus Child Care and Education Relief Act, which provides K-12 schools with \$175 billion to make sure schools can continue to educate students in whatever way is safest.

It makes addition investments in stabilizing our childcare and higher education systems, which are facing financial crisis, and it helps ensure that students of all ages, who are disproportionately impacted by this virus, are supported through all they are facing.

I know there are some who say the investments we are proposing are too much. Well, what I would say to them, as a former chair of the Budget Committee in the Senate, is that budgets are statements of our values and our priorities, and I believe that one of our top priorities at all times, but especially in a pandemic, should be making sure that students and families and educators do not have to choose between safety and quality public education.

The parents and families I am hearing from are under such immense pressure right now. My question to Republican leaders is, why, when things are already so hard, are you determined to make them harder for people who are already struggling so much?

This question is personal for me for a lot of reasons, one of which is because, when I was growing up, my family fell on hard times. My dad, who was a World War II veteran, was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, and he couldn't work any longer. That meant that my mom, who had stayed home to raise our family, had to take care of him while also working to support our family. Her job didn't pay enough to support me and my six brothers and sisters or cover the growing medical bills. For several months, we had to rely on food stamps, and then my mom got Federal support to go back to school, and she got a better job. My brothers and sisters and I got grants and student loans to go to college.

The point is, I know things could have gone a far different way for us had the government just said: Sorry; you are on your own.

Well, right now, families across the country have fallen on incredibly hard times. They are worried and scared because, so far, "You are on your own" is largely what this Republican-controlled Senate and administration have told them.

We owe every worker and family, including immigrant families—so many of whom are on the frontlines of this fight—relief that reflects the depth of this crisis and helps them get back on their feet, just like mine was able to; relief that helps kids learn safely and keeps families in their homes, with food on the table, until we can get through this; relief that helps us come back stronger as a nation. It is not too much to ask. In fact, it is what we are supposed to be here to do, and it is what I and Democrats are going to keep fighting for.

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

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

#### TRIBUTE TO JOE BARKSDALE

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, for the benefit of my colleagues who want to speak next, I have a 1-minute remark and approximately 5 minutes of remarks.

Today is National Chocolate Chip Cookie Day. It is a perfect day to salute an Iowa entrepreneur who built a cookie empire at the Iowa State Fair. Last year, his business sold 2 million chocolate chip cookies during the 11 days of the fair.

A lifelong salesperson and legendary concessionaire, this 92-year-old Iowan is in a league of his own. After more than a quarter century rolling cookie dough at the State fair, Joe Barksdale decided it was time to hang up his apron. However, his legacy will continue for generations to come. He is paying it forward by giving back to the people of Iowa. Joe gifted his legendary cookie recipe to the Iowa State Fair so that its profits could be reinvested for years to come.

As of today, Barksdale's State Fair Cookies has a brand new home. The permanent cookie building will shorten customer wait times with a dozen sales windows. For anyone who hasn't tasted this State delicacy, I suggest you put it on your bucket list.

#### CATTLE SPOT PRICING

Mr. GRASSLEY. On another matter, Madam President, Iowa is home to 86,000 family farms and leads the Nation in the production of commodities, such as corn, where we are No. 1; soybeans, No. 2; pork, and eggs, No. 1. Iowa also ranks in the top 10 in cattle production, as many family farms raise livestock alongside their corn and soybeans.

The 2017 USDA Census of Agriculture showed over 23,000 farms in Iowa that raise cattle or calves, with annual sales of \$4.7 billion. Caring for livestock takes a spirit of commitment, selflessness, and, of course, hard work. These farmers get up very, very early in the morning, work on their farms all day, and are active members of their communities. These families and their values form the foundation of what makes up our rural communities across Iowa.

However, over the years, the consolidation of the beef industry has threatened the very livelihood of these families and rural communities where they reside. From the 2012 USDA Agriculture Census to the 2017 Agriculture Census, Iowa lost nearly 1,500 cattle producers. This is not a new issue to the beef industry. The concern of fair and transparent cattle pricing has seen increased attention due to disruptions in our food supply chain. It has been very obvious during this period of the virus pandemic.

For background, the U.S. Department of Agriculture mandates price reporting for live cattle and tracks the spread between fed cattle prices—what the producer gets paid—and the boxed

beef values, which is what the packing company gets paid.

For the years 2016 to 2018, this spread averaged about \$21 per hundredweight. Soon I will be comparing that to a very, very big increase from that \$21. However, during April and May, there were major beef supply disruptions, as large numbers of plant workers contracted COVID-19. Because there are only four companies that slaughter 80-percent of the cattle, companies have the advantage of purchasing cattle from thousands of producers, acting as a chokepoint for the entire industry. These packers dominate the marketplace and limit opportunities for price negotiation.

During this time, in these recent months, packer profit margins topped out at a spread of \$279 per hundredweight compared to the \$21 that I previously mentioned. This was the largest spread between the price of fed cattle and the price of boxed beef since the inception of the mandatory price reporting law of 2001. So while all the packers were making record profits, the independent producer had nowhere even to market his livestock.

It is important to note that the impact of consolidation doesn't just hurt producers. It hurts consumers. We have seen the price of ground beef and steaks—a staple in many American diets—double or triple recently. Grocery stores also limited the amount of meat that families could buy. All this has made it very clear that the cattle market is broken and real action is needed to fix it.

Thankfully, the Trump administration stepped up to this cause. It has responded with two decisive actions to address the country's cattle market. First, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Department of Justice are both investigating the practices of these packing companies, particularly the four that dominate the market. While this will take time, President Trump has personally asked for these investigations and said he did it because he wants to protect the family farmer.

Second, on July 22, the USDA issued a significant report that lays out a roadmap to fix the cattle marketplace. The U.S. Department of Agriculture mentions 12 different ways to create additional price discovery, increase marketplace competition, and have a more transparent relationship between the price of live cattle and the beef products that the consumer buys.

This investigation and report are very much a breath of fresh air, particularly for this Senator who has been bringing this issue to the attention of Agriculture Department and Justice Departments under both Republican and Democratic administrations for a long period of time. We have had multiple administrations from Democrats to Republicans ignoring independent cattle producers and the broken cattle market. So I am very grateful that President Trump and Secretary Perdue