

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, if I may just finish.

We are here again. I will come back again to the floor to seek this Iron Dome money.

Many of us are absolutely determined that the United States fulfill this moral, humanitarian, and foreign policy obligation. It is in our strategic interest.

This obligation is paid for; it is not debt; and it will incur no obligations that are unpaid for. So I regret that my colleague, again, has blocked this from proceeding.

I yield the floor.

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. WYDEN. 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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.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 MARIA L. PAGAN

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, in a few minutes, I will be putting forward a unanimous consent request asking the Senate to take up and approve a highly qualified and noncontroversial nominee.

I will just take a couple of minutes to talk about Maria Pagan, nominated to be the next Deputy U.S. Trade Representative in Geneva. There are a few key points to make about the nominee, as well as the critical role she will serve representing the United States at the World Trade Organization to get a better deal for American workers, farmers, and businesses.

To start, Ms. Pagan isn't new to high-pressure, high-profile negotiations. She is currently deputy general counsel at the U.S. Trade Representative's Office, the person called in when issues are particularly challenging. She has taken on these difficult issues during numerous trade agreement negotiations, including the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement. She was in lockstep with Members of Congress who pushed hard to guarantee that the commitments laid out in the USMCA were fully and quickly enforceable, a key priority for protecting American jobs.

She has been a longtime public servant, spending 30 years in government. She has served both Republican and Democratic administrations at the Department of Commerce and at USTR. She is an expert on a host of issues from trade in services to government procurement, and she has litigated several disputes before the WTO.

She is highly qualified. She is a nominee who brings the two sides of the Senate together. The Finance Committee vote on her nomination was 27 to 1.

I would just say, at this point in time, that is about as good as it gets.

Colleagues, I have said before that it is crucial to get qualified people to the office representing the United States

around the world. It is important to have these skilled individuals working on behalf of our workers, our businesses, and our interests. This nomination is particularly important to me.

It is no secret that the World Trade Organization, which can be a valuable institution, is not today functioning as it needs to. The rules that underpin the WTO were crafted more than two decades ago. These 20th century rules have simply not kept up with 21st century technology.

Meanwhile, the Chinese Government has learned to game the system. It does so routinely at the expense of hard-working American families.

As a result, the process of leveling the playing field with trade rules based on fairness have been overtaken by the exploitation of loopholes and rip-offs. In many cases, that comes at the direct expense of American workers and American businesses.

With her decades of experience, Ms. Pagan understands these challenges as well as anyone. From day one after her confirmation, she will hit the ground running to lead our allies in fighting back.

For example, one area that I feel particularly strongly about is that new rules are desperately needed to deal with subsidized fisheries. Harmful subsidies are allowing fleets to reach distant shores of less developed countries like Ecuador and Ghana. They are stripping the ocean of fish without regard to species or regulations or basic decency. These highly subsidized, poorly regulated fleets rely on abhorrent labor practices—including forced labor. Worst of all, their catch ends up in American supermarkets and on American tables.

Oregon fishing families who trade in fairly and sustainably caught U.S. salmon, pollack, and other fish simply should not be asked to compete against that kind of horrendous cheating.

Negotiations on this issue have been dragging on for over 20 years, and I can tell you, the 20 years have not improved the situation for our oceans and for our families.

The 12th Ministerial Conference, which was delayed last week due to the new COVID variant, is another really important chance to get these negotiations finally done. The outcome has to be strong. It can't open, once again, harmful new loopholes.

These meetings have been rescheduled to the spring. The United States needs tough, smart leadership at the table. Ms. Pagan, with her years of negotiation, is just the closer, just the kind of person the United States needs.

There are no shortages of other issues that Ms. Pagan will have to tackle at the World Trade Organization, from institutional reform to dispute settlement, to e-commerce. The United States needs a leader who can work with our allies to get it all done. She is the right woman for the job.

Maria Pagan is a highly qualified, experienced nominee. She is a proven ne-

gotiator, a strong advocate for workers, farmers, and businesses. She comes, as I have indicated, with strong, 27-to-1, bipartisan support in the Senate Finance Committee. There is just no justification for any delay in moving this nomination forward.

I will have more to say when I ask unanimous consent, briefly, in a bit.

And, at this moment, 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. DURBIN. Mr. 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 DR. FRANCIS COLLINS

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, it is a curious thing about tipping points in the quest for progress. Very often, the events that cleave history into "before" and "after" can seem insignificant when they happen. That might have been true 29 years ago, when the National Institutes of Health named a 42-year-old professor from the University of Michigan to direct one of NIH's newest cutting-edge institutes.

The professor's name was Francis Collins. The New York Times' account of his arrival ran 117 words.

His mission at NIH was to lead what we called then the Human Genome Project, an international quest to discover the genetic blueprint for human life. It was the scientific equivalent of the search for the Holy Grail. There were just as many skeptics as believers in that undertaking.

But less than 6 years later, in June 2000, the first mapping of the human genome was complete. Overnight, that obscure professor from Michigan, Francis Collins, became one of the most famous scientists in the world.

The decoding of the human genome was the achievement of a historic public-private partnership between the NIH's genome lab, headed by Dr. Collins and a private firm—a rival turned partner—founded by the genetic pioneer, Craig Venter. It involved hundreds of scientists from six nations. It remains one of the greatest advances in scientific knowledge in all of recorded history.

In a White House ceremony announcing the first sequencing of the human genome, Dr. Collins said he was humbled and awed by the discovery. In his words: "We have caught the first glimpses of our instruction book, previously known only to God."

Cracking the genetic code of human life has revolutionized science and medicine. It continues to yield profound medical discoveries all the time.

That historic discovery could have been the capstone of any career in science, but for Francis Collins, there was an amazing second act to follow.

In 2009, President Obama chose Francis Collins to lead the entire National Institutes of Health, the largest

biomedical research agency in the world. In that capacity, Dr. Collins routinely works 100-hour weeks, oversees 18,000 Federal employees spread across 27 Institutes and Centers in 75 buildings—mainly in Bethesda, MD, but also in Baltimore, North Carolina, Arizona, and Montana.

Those numbers only quantify the NIH infrastructure. Their actual work is even more impressive. In fiscal year 2020, the NIH awarded more than 50,000 grants to more than 300,000 researchers working in universities and laboratories outside the NIH—in Illinois, in Minnesota, in Colorado, and virtually every State in the Nation.

At the end of this month, after 12 years, Francis Collins is stepping down as NIH Director. Thankfully, he is not stepping away from science. In a signature Collins move, the doctor is going back to his research roots, back to head a laboratory at the NIH's Human Genome Institute, where he hopes to find treatments and cures for cystic fibrosis, diabetes, and other devastating illnesses.

He has led NIH for 12 years under three Presidents, Democrat and Republican, making him the longest tenured head of the Agency since Presidents began selecting NIH heads 50 years ago.

What distinguishes Francis Collins' tenure as NIH Director, however, is not its length but his extraordinary ambition and record of achievement. My friend former Senator Barbara Mikulski, who chaired once the Senate Appropriations Committee, famously said that the initials NIH should stand for the "National Institutes of Hope."

As NIH Director, Francis Collins has worked tirelessly to live up to that ideal.

As the Washington Post wrote, "He brought together scientists across disciplines and championed the hunt for biomedical advances in troves of data. He gave meaning to the promise of big science."

He embraced ambitious projects such as the BRAIN Initiative, a collaborative effort to map the most complex organism on Earth, the human brain. It engaged engineers who had never worked on life sciences before, and it just might help unlock the mysteries of ALS, Alzheimer's, and other diseases of the brain.

He launched the Cancer Moonshot with then-Vice President Joe Biden and played an integral role in helping to make now-President Joe Biden's dream of an Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health a reality.

He created the "All of Us" Research Program, an effort to collect data about the genomic basis of disease from 1 million volunteers to advance our knowledge on how to cure it.

He has been equally passionate about supporting the work of young scientists, including women and scientists of color. The absence of women researchers used to jokingly be referred to on research panels as "manels." In 2017, Francis Collins said that he would

no longer speak at any conference in which women researchers were not featured.

He made it a priority to minority scientists and to make sure NIH-funded research addressed the health needs and historic concerns of communities of color.

Nearly 7 years ago, I asked Dr. Collins: "What does NIH need from Congress to continue to achieve breakthroughs you envision?"

At that point, the NIH had seen flat funding for several years. Inflation had eroded the number of research ideas they could support, and many young researchers were really questioning whether they had any future at the Institution.

Dr. Collins said simply: "If you can provide steady, predictable increases to our budget of 5 percent real growth each year, we can light up the scoreboard."

I thought that sounded like a worthy goal so I enlisted my Senate friends ROY BLUNT of Missouri, PATTY MURRAY of Washington, and Lamar Alexander of Tennessee as partners. Senator LINDSEY GRAHAM and I came together and formed the bipartisan Senate NIH Caucus.

With the determined leadership of Francis Collins and support of Senators from both sides of the aisle—listen to this—we have been able to increase funding for NIH by more than 40 percent over the last 6 years.

Some people say: Why should the taxpayers be paying for this research? Why not leave it to the free market; they make the money out of it.

The answer is: The NIH funds the kinds of basic science that costs too much and takes too long for private companies driven by need for quarterly profits.

One timely example: Years ago, a Hungarian-born American biochemist named Katalin Kariko had a hunch that messenger RNA—mRNA—could be used to instruct cells to make their own medicines or vaccines. The NIH funded this early research of this immigrant superstar when nobody else would. Last year, that research became the backbone of the Pfizer and Moderna COVID vaccines.

One year ago yesterday, the first vaccine was administered, and more than 450 million shots have followed in America since then. The majority were mRNA vaccines.

According to a new study released by the Commonwealth Fund, the American vaccination program prevented 1.1 million COVID deaths and prevented 10.3 million COVID hospitalizations last year. Vaccines save lives, and NIH taxpayer-funded research made these vaccines possible.

There are millions of people who have never heard of Francis Collins, but they are alive and healthy today because of the Human Genome Project and his ambitious agenda at NIH as well as the talented scientists he nurtured.

He is an American treasure, one of the most important scientists of our time. As Dr. Collins prepares to end his historic tenure as NIH Director and return to his lab, I want to thank him for his tireless work, his good humor, his good advice, and great friendship.

I also want to thank his family, especially his wife Diane Baker, a genetic counselor herself, who volunteers at the NIH Children's Inn, where families stay while their sick kids are participating in clinical trials.

And thanks to the thousands and thousands of dedicated researchers who have worked with Dr. Collins to realize his noble ambitions.

Dr. Francis Collins, America is a better place thanks to your singular contribution to spare suffering and to cure the illnesses we face. I wish you many more happy years of discovery.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. SMITH). The Senator from Utah.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. LEE. If confirmed as Deputy U.S. Trade Representative, Maria Pagan would be responsible for negotiating details of any waiver of the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights agreement, also known as the TRIPS Agreement.

I have concerns with Ms. Pagan's nomination. Therefore, I intend to object to that until the Biden administration has given me some basic commitments regarding the administration's position on waiving the TRIPS Agreement, particularly related to some of the proposals being pushed by various countries.

As a quick recap, the TRIPS Agreement represents a vital element of international trade law protecting the intellectual property rights of U.S. businesses, individuals, and entrepreneurs. Waiving the protection of these rights for COVID-19 drugs, vaccines, and treatments under the notion of some sense of international altruism will not advance a universal solution to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Instead, any proposal to waive IP protections would create a disincentive for continued research, development, and distribution of the COVID-19 treatments or drugs. That could mean fewer healthcare options and advancements as the virus continues to mutate into new variants with degrees of resistance to existing remedies.

As always, anytime you weaken one property right, it spills over into other areas. We wouldn't expect this to become contained to the COVID-19 universe.

Additionally, U.S. companies would be less likely to introduce their product to WTO-member countries not enforcing IP protections. That could mean fewer options and less access for our neighbors, not more.

Intellectual property rights provide the grounds for businesses to take risks in turning novel ideas into concrete goods and services. A business