

they turned their energy to and they put their hearts and their passion into working around the State and now at the Federal level to ensure that education is provided to teens to prevent future tragedies. So Bree's Law drives education initiatives to enable youth, parents, and advocates to recognize, prevent, and mitigate teen dating violence.

Another provision addresses support services for victims. We know it is difficult to access the necessary medical forensic services in Alaska. These allow for evidence collection and aid in a survivor's journey to justice.

While we have very troubling statistics on sexual assault and domestic violence, Alaskans have also been on the frontlines of innovation, offering solutions. The Alaska Comprehensive Training Forensic Academy, which is a pilot program run through the University of Alaska Anchorage, is making a difference in the lives of Alaskans who have experienced interpersonal violence.

Built on the belief that all victims of violence deserve evaluation and care from forensically trained healthcare providers, I have been able to secure some provisions in our VAWA proposal that will allow other universities and States to model the successful program and expand access to trauma-informed care.

There is clearly a public safety crisis that we are dealing with in rural Alaska and across Indian Country, but we have an opportunity in this Congress to work together across the aisle to find solutions and to restore justice. I look forward to building strong, bipartisan support for VAWA reauthorization that will make a positive difference in the safety of Native communities and for victims of domestic violence and entire communities in Alaska and, of course, across the country.

We must let our women, children, and families who have been affected by devastating violence know that you are here and that we stand with you.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois recognized.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I just want to join the comments of Senator MURKOWSKI and Senator ERNST and Senator FEINSTEIN. I want to thank them for allowing me to join a pretty power-packed team working on the Violence Against Women Act.

Senator FEINSTEIN is our lead sponsor on the Democratic side. I am happy to work with her all the time. I want to especially thank Senator ERNST on the Republican side, who has been designated as the official negotiator on the reauthorization of VAWA for the last 3 years, and, as you have just heard, a passionate supporter of our efforts, Senator LISA MURKOWSKI of Alaska—we worked closely together on other legislation, and this one is extremely important.

This afternoon, Senators ERNST, FEINSTEIN, MURKOWSKI, and myself

have announced that we have reached a bipartisan agreement and that we will be introducing an updated version of VAWA next month when we return. We are coming together in supporting the simple premise that VAWA will save lives. We need to ensure every survivor, whether they live in rural Alaska or urban Illinois, can reach out for a lifeline in a moment of crisis.

We still have work to do. We still need cosponsors. We are going to be working individually, Member to Member, to make sure this important legislation passes.

It is a statistic that should shock us all: Nearly one in three women living today—nearly one in three—has experienced some form of physical or sexual violence. That finding came from the WHO, surveying women in more than 160 countries across the globe. It proves that this crisis of sexual and domestic violence touches every community in the world. But our responsibility, first, is here at home, in all of the 50 States, to make sure that we are doing everything we can to protect women who are vulnerable.

Let me tell you about one of those survivors; her name is Meaghan. And she reached out to my office to share her story. Five years ago, Meaghan was brutally assaulted by her ex-husband. The beating was so violent that, today, she is still suffering from hearing loss.

While Meaghan was being attacked, her 2-and-half-year-old son—who is on the autism spectrum—ran over to help her. Her ex-husband responded by throwing the child through a closet. Meaghan says the experience was so traumatizing that her son didn't speak for a full year after the attack.

When Meaghan finally broke free from her ex-husband, she packed her bags, buckled her two children into the car, and fled for her life. But he continued tracking her, requiring Meaghan and her children to move 10 times in the last few years.

As Meaghan and her family have begun to heal from this horrifying ordeal, she says they have found much-needed compassion and support in the detectives and social workers that came to their aid.

She wrote that service providers "were patient with me and didn't push me, [they] only showed me they cared, and most of all didn't give up . . . with their support and guidance I found the light at the end of the tunnel and I fought my way out of the darkness that my ex-husband had cast . . . on my life."

Meaghan's story illustrates how laws like VAWA have the potential to change—and even save—lives. In her case, VAWA provided critical resources to law enforcement and social service agencies that helped her and her family escape a perilous situation.

And today, at a moment when sexual and domestic violence are on the rise in America, we need to do more than reauthorize VAWA. We need to build on its achievements—and we need to do it on a bipartisan basis.

I thank the group for allowing me to join them.

We have work to do, and I am looking forward to doing it with you.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for up to 10 minutes prior to the vote.

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

NOMINATION OF HOLLY A. THOMAS

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, the next vote is going to be a motion to discharge from the Judiciary Committee Judge Holly Thomas for the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. I am going to vote no because I have not had the opportunity to actually meet Judge Thomas.

In a remarkable undermining of senatorial tradition, the Biden administration White House is now saying that no Senator is allowed to meet a circuit court judge prior to the confirmation vote of that judge.

The Presiding Officer might be tilting his head at me like that seems crazy. Well, it is crazy. Every Ninth Circuit judge—a court of appeals that has enormous power over my State—who has been nominated by any President since I have been a U.S. Senator, I have met with to discuss issues. This is part of our advice-and-consent role. Yet this White House is now saying no Senator can meet with a circuit court judge, even for an hour, prior to the vote despite the fact that they are getting ready to have life tenure.

This is in line with this administration and with, unfortunately, some of my Democratic colleagues who are just smashing institutional norms in this body that have significant bipartisan support.

We saw the junior Senator from Massachusetts yesterday saying she wants to pack the Supreme Court. I am sure that is going to lead to a charge of other Democrat Senators. My colleagues are all very focused on getting rid of the filibuster despite the fact that more than half the Democratic conference, in April of 2017, wrote a letter to the majority and minority leaders of the Senate, saying: Don't get rid of the filibuster. Now only JOE MANCHIN and KYRSTEN SINEMA seem to be the ones defending it. I would love it if the press asked questions of the other 26 of my Democratic colleagues who, just 4 years ago, said: Don't do this. But this norm that is being undermined right now—of Senators being able to meet with nominees to circuit courts—is a new low.

I raised this with senior Biden administration White House officials just last week, and they said they would look into it. They seemed a little confused. The White House Counsel for the President finally called me back after I had been trying to get a hold of her because I had heard it was her idea. Then I asked her "Why are you doing this?"

By the way, the Trump administration didn't do this. To the contrary,

their White House Counsel actually tried to get Republican and Democrat Senators to meet with circuit court nominees to help maybe get bipartisan votes. So it wasn't the precedent of the previous administration.

The White House Counsel actually told me—she used this language: “We are doing it to protect the judges”—“to protect the judges.” From what—Senators doing their constitutional duty? What are they hiding? Are they really that unimpressive that they have to have their own nominees being protected from us here in the Senate?

So the bottom line is that all of this is patently absurd, and I think many of my Democratic colleagues actually agree with me. I have talked to a number of them, and I don't think this is a precedent that anyone who is a U.S. Senator should want, whether you are a Democrat or a Republican.

Remember, these judges are going to have enormous power over the people we represent, and they are going to have life tenure. It is not like voting for an Assistant Secretary who will be 2, 3, 4 years on the job. This is life tenure, and they can't take an hour out of their time prior to the vote to meet with Senators.

I asked these judges in a speech just last week: Hey, give me a call. You don't have to get permission from the White House. This is actually a first test of your judicial independence. Call me. I want to talk to you.

We didn't hear back from any judges, and the White House is still blocking it.

What is really surprising is that the current President is the former chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee. I wonder if he actually knows what is going on with his senior staff of his White House Counsel where, right now, no Member of the U.S. Senate who is trying to do his advice-and-consent constitutional role can even meet—can even meet—with a circuit court judge. I am pretty sure most of my colleagues don't agree with this.

What I am hoping for is to get the White House to change its outlook on this, to follow the example of the Trump administration—I know that might be a hard swallow—and have these judges meet with us.

When I meet with them, I talk about Alaska legal issues, and if you are a judge who grew up in L.A. and you are an L.A. judge, you don't know anything about Alaska, but you will have an enormous impact on the people I represent.

So I think what you are going to see until we get some cooperation with the White House is that I hope most of my colleagues, Republican colleagues, whether they think these nominees are qualified or not, are going to vote no. They are going to vote no, and the reason is a core principle: We should be able to do advice and consent.

If there were a Republican President in the White House and if some of my Democratic colleagues said “Hey, can

you help me get a meeting with a circuit court nominee who is going to have big impacts on my State?” I would certainly do it. Like I said, we didn't have to do it the last time because that was the Trump administration's standard operating procedure.

I hope we can get to an agreement on this, and I hope all Senators can agree with this. I am hopeful that you are going to see, at least with my colleagues, that there are going to be no “yes” votes on any of these nominees, and that is not good. These circuit court judges want a bipartisan confirmation. Well, they are not going to get it until we are able to do our constitutional duty of advice and consent for judges, life-tenured judges, who have enormous power over the people we represent.

I am hopeful that every Member of this body can work with us, work with me, work with the White House, maybe even call the President and say: Do you know what? This is probably a standard principle that you guys want to get rid of. Making sure U.S. Senators cannot meet with judges who are going to have lifetime tenure is smashing a bipartisan institutional norm. That is not going to serve this body well at all.

I yield the floor, and I encourage my colleagues to all vote no in the upcoming vote to discharge this nominee until we can actually talk to her and see what kind of judge she would be. This is a very, very reasonable position, so I strongly urge a “no” vote from all of my colleagues.

**THE PRESIDING OFFICER.** The Senator from Illinois.

**Mr. DURBIN.** Mr. President, Judge Holly Thomas is a nominee for the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. She went through the Senate Judiciary Committee. It is a bipartisan committee of 11 to 11. She was before the committee, available for questions and available for written questions soon afterward.

If the Senator from Alaska or any other Senator has a grievance with the White House's procedure on how to handle his nominees, so be it, but is she going to be punished because that decision was made at the White House level? She went through the committee, as we asked her to, and made herself available. She has an extraordinary record as a jurist, and to dismiss her because of a disagreement with the White House on the procedure on his nominees, I don't think it is fair. I think she deserves to be judged on her merits, and on her merits, she should be sitting on the Ninth Circuit.

**Mr. President,** today, the Senate will consider the nomination of Judge Holly Thomas for the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit.

Judge Thomas is a highly qualified nominee. Her extensive experience as an appellate litigator and a California State court judge will serve her well on the Ninth Circuit.

And, if confirmed, she would be the first Black woman from California to serve on that court.

A San Diego native, Judge Thomas was drawn to a career in law at a young age. Her mother—a bookkeeper—used to take her to the San Diego courthouse to watch the proceedings. That experience inspired her to pursue a law degree at Yale Law School—which she did after receiving her undergraduate degree from Stanford University with Honors and Distinction.

After law school, Judge Thomas began her legal career as a clerk for Judge Kim McLane Wardlaw on the Ninth Circuit.

She then began an expansive appellate litigation career, initially working at the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, where she focused on education and issues related to criminal justice.

In 2010, Judge Thomas joined the Justice Department, where she worked as a Senior Attorney in the Appellate Section of the Civil Rights Division. In this role, she argued appeals on behalf of the United States before multiple U.S. Courts of Appeals—including the First, Second, Fourth, Fifth, and Ninth Circuits.

After 5 years at the Justice Department, Judge Thomas went on to work for the Office of the New York Solicitor General, where she served as special counsel. In this role, Judge Thomas argued multiple cases before the Second Circuit and in the State courts of New York.

In 2016, Judge Thomas became the deputy director of the California Department of Fair Employment and Housing, where she helped enforce State and Federal civil rights laws.

Since 2018, she has served on the Los Angeles County Superior Court—with the exception of this past summer. In May, the chief justice of the California Supreme Court chose Judge Thomas to serve as judge pro tem on the California Court of Appeals. And she returned to the LA County Superior Court earlier this year.

During her time on the bench, Judge Thomas has handled hundreds of cases that have gone to verdict or judgment, and she has presided over thousands of hearings. As judge pro tem on the California Court of Appeals, she sat on numerous appellate court panels and authored seven opinions, all of which were unanimous.

In short, Judge Thomas has demonstrated that she is a fair, impartial, and evenhanded jurist.

She has extensive experience as a both a trial and appellate court judge. And before her appointment to the bench, she represented a wide range of litigants.

The American Bar Association unanimously rated Judge Thomas as “Qualified” to sit on the Ninth Circuit.

And she has the strong support of her home State senators—Senators FEINSTEIN and PADILLA.

Additionally, as only the second Black woman to ever serve on the Ninth Circuit, Judge Thomas will help

bring much needed diversity to our Federal judiciary.

Given her varied professional background, years of appellate experience, and her accomplishments on the bench, Judge Thomas will be an excellent addition to the Ninth Circuit. I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting her nomination.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, I ask my friend and colleague from Illinois, who is the chairman of the Judiciary Committee, if he could actually work with us—I have already reached out to him and some other Democrat Senators—on this very reasonable request. He has been here a lot longer than I have. But every time there is a Ninth Circuit judge who has been nominated, I have met with him because it is so important to my State. Alaska has 1 Ninth Circuit judge, and there are 29 judges on the court.

So I would ask, respectfully, the chairman of the Judiciary Committee to work with me because this is a precedent that I don't think any Senator, Democrat or Republican, wants.

Literally, you are going to have the White House saying "You know what? You are not on the Judiciary Committee, so your advice-and-consent role under article II, section 2, is null and void" because the White House Counsel wants to "protect the judges"? Protect them from what?

So I want to work with my colleagues—all of them—particularly the chairman of the Judiciary Committee, as he has a lot of influence, I am sure, with the White House and the White House Counsel's Office, but, again, I encourage my colleagues to vote no until we start getting meetings and are able to do our duty. This is going to benefit my colleagues on both sides of the aisle over the long term, and it will strengthen this body, not weaken it, which is what is happening right now.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, let me in closing say: I think we should be respectful and try to work with one another and cooperate. That also includes the over 100 nominees sitting on this calendar who have been obstructed by two or three Republican Members for weeks, if not months. If there is going to be fairness, let's make sure that the road travels in both directions.

I yield back all remaining time.

#### VOTE ON MOTION TO DISCHARGE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. All time is yielded back.

The question is on agreeing to the motion to discharge the nomination of Holly A. Thomas, of California, to be United States Circuit Judge for the Ninth Circuit.

The yeas and nays have been previously ordered.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Louisiana (Mr. CASSIDY), the Senator from North Dakota (Mr. CRAMER), the Senator from Wyoming (Ms. LUMMIS), and the Senator from South Dakota (Mr. ROUNDS).

The result was announced—yeas 50, nays 46, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 502 Ex.]

#### YEAS—50

Baldwin	Hickenlooper	Reed
Bennet	Hirono	Rosen
Blumenthal	Kaine	Sanders
Booker	Kelly	Schatz
Brown	King	Schumer
Cantwell	Klobuchar	Shaheen
Cardin	Leahy	Sinema
Carper	Lujan	Smith
Casey	Manchin	Stabenow
Coons	Markey	Tester
Cortez Masto	Menendez	Van Hollen
Duckworth	Merkley	Warner
Durbin	Murphy	Warnock
Feinstein	Murray	Warren
Gillibrand	Ossoff	Whitehouse
Hassan	Padilla	Wyden
Heinrich	Peters	

#### NAYS—46

Barrasso	Grassley	Risch
Blackburn	Hagerty	Romney
Blunt	Hawley	Rubio
Boozman	Hoeven	Sasse
Braun	Hyde-Smith	Scott (FL)
Burr	Inhofe	Scott (SC)
Capito	Johnson	Shelby
Collins	Kennedy	Sullivan
Cornyn	Lankford	Thune
Cotton	Lee	Tillis
Crapo	Marshall	Toomey
Cruz	McConnell	Tuberville
Daines	Moran	Wicker
Ernst	Murkowski	Young
Fischer	Paul	
Graham	Portman	

#### NOT VOTING—4

Cassidy	Lummis
Cramer	Rounds

The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. CORTEZ MASTO). The nomination is discharged and will be placed on the calendar.

The Senator from Minnesota is recognized.

#### FREEDOM TO VOTE ACT

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Madam President, I come to the floor to speak in support of legislation that is critical to our democracy—the Freedom to Vote Act. And this is a bill that was the product of work by many, many Senators from across the country with different views but all committed to one thing: our democracy.

And I want to thank Senator SCHUMER for bringing the group together as well as the other Senators: Senator MANCHIN, whose name is on the bill, whose experience as secretary of state really was so helpful to us in forming this bill and also realizing the differences between so many jurisdictions, including world jurisdictions, that have different staffing levels and different needs; Senator MERKLEY, an expert on election law; Senator PADILLA, also a former secretary of state; Senator KING, bringing his independent spirit from the State of Maine; Senator KAINE, former civil rights lawyer; Senator TESTER, who sees this and understands all of this firsthand in the

State of Montana, where, by the way, for decades they have had same-day registration, which when you look at the States, whether they are red or blue—States that have same-day registration, like my State—tend to have some of the highest voter turnouts in the country, and, sadly, they have disposed of that in the State of Montana recently; and Senator WARNOCK, from the great State of Georgia, who was the host, along with Senator OSSOFF, of a Rules Committee field hearing we recently held in Georgia, where we saw firsthand why so many leaders in the business community across the country and in Georgia have voiced their concern about a bill that recently passed there that would literally say that you cannot vote on weekends during the runoff period, during a critical period of votes in Georgia.

That was a group that came together, different views, different levels of experience, but all committed to one idea: that democracy will prevail.

The freedom to vote is fundamental to all of our freedoms. That is why this bill is called the Freedom to Vote Act. It ensures that people are part of the franchise and that government is accountable to the people, but this fundamental right that is the very foundation of our system of government is under attack.

Since the 2020 election, we have seen a persistent and coordinated assault on the freedom to vote in States across the country. These attacks on our democracy demand a Federal response. The Constitution anticipated that perhaps we would need a Federal response when, in the words of the Constitution, as written by our Founding Fathers, that Congress can make or alter the rules regarding Federal elections.

The need for action could not be more serious. It has been almost a year since the violent mob of insurrectionists stormed into this Chamber and desecrated our Capitol. They came into this very room, rifled through the desks, were up there right on the dais where the Presiding Officer now presides. They came here, but what they did was not just an attack on a building, it was an attack on our Republic—an attack on our Republic.

I still can picture it like it just happened. Senator BLUNT and I were the last two remaining Senators in the Chamber at 3:30 in the morning, along with the incredible staff from the Parliamentarian's office, with the pages, along with Vice President Pence, and the two young women with that mahogany box filled with the remaining electoral ballots. We made our way over to the House of Representatives, where glass was smashed against the sides, where there was still spray paint on statues and on columns, and we finished our job.

Two weeks later, as we stood on that inaugural stage—Democrat and Republican leaders from both parties from this Chamber, all the Senators from this Chamber, leaders nationally—Republicans, Democrats stood on that