

otherwise do the people's business. Instead, we had to stop to debate the merits of protecting threatened and endangered species from extinction. That is not a joke—for the folks watching at home—and this is not an exaggeration either.

Let's review. It was a half a century ago that Congress acknowledged the reality of habitat destruction and the threats to America's unique biodiversity. And, yes, Congress gave the Fish and Wildlife Service the power to administer a process for designating and protecting newly endangered species. Congress intentionally and purposefully handed the power over to experts in habitat loss and wildlife biologists—who are actually educated and trained—to determine which species are most at risk and what we need to do to protect them.

It is no different than how we regulate prescription drugs, for example. We rely on the FDA and their experts and their scientists to protect the American people rather than trying to individually legislate every single medication. Imagine trying to legislate every single medication in this body.

So the real effect of these CRAs is to set a precedent for personal grievances and for the folks who deny the science and prefer gridlock to prevail. Passage of these CRAs is the equivalent of saying that, whenever a powerful industry or a lone Member of Congress dislikes a rule that scientists at the Fish and Wildlife Service issue in the future, they are entitled to a vote to second-guess and overturn the actual experts.

I may be wrong, but I am not aware of any wildlife biologists currently serving in this Senate. At a time when more and more wildlife species are at risk of extinction, we can't constrain the ability of the Fish and Wildlife Service from following the science and issuing rules to protect them or, in the case of the critical habitat designation CRA, my colleagues are blatantly ignoring the realities of climate change and limiting our Nation's ability to react and respond in the years ahead.

I suggest that, rather than grinding Congress to a halt, those of us who voted to follow the process that Congress itself created is the responsible way to allow the scientists and experts to do their job. Rather than ignore the science of the climate crisis, I voted to live up to the responsibilities that we have as stewards of this great land.

And while this last week Senate Republicans got their way, I am proud to have a President in the White House who takes seriously our sacred responsibility to our planet and who refuses to overrule the experts and the scientists. But I also know that this is not the end of the CRAs and that our Republican colleagues will attempt to overrule the Fish and Wildlife Service and choose to put their personal grievances over progress in Congress.

So when that day comes again—because there will be future attempts—I will proudly, once again, stand with the experts and vote no.

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

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

NATIONAL POLICE WEEK

Mrs. FISCHER. Mr. President, this week is National Police Week. It is an opportunity to show our gratitude to the men and women in blue who risk their lives every day for our safety, as well as honor those who have lost their lives in the line of duty.

This Police Week I want to tell a story of a police chief in my home State of Nebraska.

Local broadcast outlet KETV recently interviewed the new police chief of Ashland, a city of about 3,000 on the eastern side of the State. According to KETV, Chief Ryan Brady worked 19 days in a row at one point last year. He logged over 170 hours in a 2-week period. Chief Brady clocked more than 800 overtime hours last year. But he is on salary. So he is not paid for any of it.

I am amazed at Chief Brady's dedication to the job. He works day shifts, night shifts, and picks up his partners' shifts when they get sick.

But why does he have to do all that work? Why does he have to do so much? Well, because his department has encountered a staffing crisis. Between retirements and trouble recruiting, the Ashland Police Department has dwindled down to only a handful of officers.

Chief Brady told KETV:

Somebody's got to work. So the buck stops here. So, you know, if no one else can work, I work.

I have spoken with police officers and sheriffs all over my State, and I can tell you this is not a problem that is unique to Ashland. No, it is not even a problem unique to Nebraska. Severe police staffing shortages are affecting departments all across our country.

The Police Executive Research Forum found that agencies are losing officers faster than they can hire new ones. There were 47 percent more resignations in 2022 than in 2019, in addition to 19 percent more retirements over the same time period. That means that large groups of officers are leaving the force while few are trickling in. Understaffed staffs are doing their best to keep up with these changes, but there are also roadblocks we can help them remove when it comes to hiring.

Over the past year, I have worked with police departments across Nebraska, as well as national law enforcement groups representing departments across this country. From these conversations, I introduced the Recruit and Retain Act, which would help police departments tackle these staffing roadblocks.

This bipartisan bill would boost officer recruitment opportunities through the Justice Department's Community Oriented Policing Services hiring grants. These grants can keep departments afloat. But recruitment expenses like background checks, psychological evaluations, and other tests are not currently included in the eligible expenses. So this bill would allow COPS grants to cover these specific costs and make it easier to onboard new officers. Reducing the cost of hiring would go a long way in helping law enforcement raise staffing levels.

My bill would also establish the Pipeline Partnership Program, a new initiative aimed at fostering youth interest in law enforcement careers. Departments and local schools would work together to launch mentorship opportunities, job fairs, and other activities that give young people better insight into law enforcement work. This program would bolster community relationships. It would help to open up stronger local hiring pipelines for police departments too.

Finally, the bill would direct the Government Accountability Office to study both the causes of this latest recruitment and retention challenge as well as the effects they have on public safety.

I would like to thank Senator COONS for working with me on this bill for many months, as well as Senators CORNYN and KLOBUCHAR. It was great that we saw the Judiciary Committee pass this bill by voice vote today, and I look forward to its advancement.

I was also glad to join my colleague Senator CORNYN to help introduce two bills that further support law enforcement's tireless work. The Project Safe Neighborhoods Act of 2023 would reauthorize the Project Safe Neighborhoods program through fiscal year 2026. The PSN program is an effective bipartisan solution to violent crime that has been working since 2001.

In Nebraska, PSN coordinates enforcement and prosecution partnerships among Federal, State, and local law enforcement, in addition to involvement with Nebraska communities to bring violent offenders to justice.

The second bill, the Back the Blue Act, would protect police officers by creating new Federal criminal penalties for attacking law enforcement officers. Too often police officers are harmed rather than honored in our country, and it is time that we make a Federal statement that attackers will be punished.

Another vital area to continue addressing is the mental health of our police officers, who face daily strains from the intensity of their jobs. I am planning to reintroduce a bill that would direct the Department of Health and Human Services to create a publicly accessible online dashboard so that organizations, including law enforcement groups, can easily search for Federal funding opportunities that support mental health. Potential applicants would be able to search for the

right mental health grants and track the status of those grants. This bill could truly be a lifeline to officers reeling from staffing issues or difficult cases.

In his interview, Ashland Police Chief Brady said:

I love this community. The hours that I'm putting in are because of my care for the people.

That dedication is what we honor during National Police Week, but let's not leave our appreciation for our selfless hard-working police officers behind on Saturday when Police Week ends. I urge my colleagues to continue backing the blue throughout the year and, especially, to pass these very critical bills.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. RICKETTS. 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 NANCY G. ABUDU

Mr. RICKETTS. Mr. President, I rise today in opposition to the nomination of Nancy Abudu to the U.S. Court of Appeals.

I served as Governor for 8 years, and, in that time, I had the great privilege of appointing dozens of judicial appointments to Nebraska courts. I appointed four of the current Nebraska Supreme Court justices and many more to lower courts.

When I considered a prospective nominee, I was often reminded of our State's motto: "Equality Before the law." That motto reflects a common-sense American principle that all people should receive equal treatment and equal opportunity, regardless of one's race or background. The women and men who serve in our courts should reflect this motto.

When I considered nominees, I looked at a few things. I looked at whether they were leaders with high integrity and character. I looked at their experience, and I looked at how they understood their role as a judge. Did they think the job of a judge was to make the law or to interpret the law?

I looked at if they had a respect for the law and whether they had the temperament to bring a thoughtful and fairminded approach to each case they would have at hand. I looked at whether they were respected by their peers. And I am proud of the appointments that I made.

Nancy Abudu is not someone I would have considered for a judgeship. Ms. Abudu is the kind of soft-on-crime, anti-police, activist we actually must keep off of the bench. And I want to take a moment to go over her record.

Ms. Abudu has argued publicly and repeatedly that American voting laws and the criminal justice system are racist and discriminatory. She has spe-

cifically maligned the three States that comprise the Eleventh Circuit that she is being considered for. In Alabama, she said that Jim Crow continues to cast a long shadow on the State's elections.

She said that Florida is engaged in a "war to strip poor and low-income people of all political power." And she accused Georgia State legislators of "punishing voters and undermining democracy" and said that the State is a "bad actor" and "simply cannot be trusted to protect the rights of voters."

At a time when Americans require certainty and security of our elections, Ms. Abudu has consistently argued dangerous and misleading positions, trying to undermine the public's trust of our elections and our voting rights. She has argued that prohibiting felons from voting is "practically the same system as during slavery." She argued that requiring voters to present identification is voter suppression.

My colleague, Ranking Member GRASSLEY, described Abudu as one of the "most activist judicial nominees we've ever seen." During her confirmation hearing, the Judiciary Committee heard Abudu double down in defense of her work in 2018 to challenge a Miami ordinance that banned sex offenders from living within 2,500 feet of a school.

Senator GRASSLEY questioned Abudu about a 2016 article where she advocated for laws that "would allow non-citizens to vote in local elections" and suggested that opponents of such legislation are "trying to incite hysteria that undocumented immigrants are also taking over the ballot box in addition to our country."

When asked which election she thought noncitizens should be permitted to vote in, Abudu declined to substantively respond, saying:

In the article, I noted that some cities allow noncitizens to vote in local elections.

Republican members of the Senate Judiciary Committee questioned Abudu about numerous partisan and inflammatory statements she has also made, including:

Systemic racism [is] embedded in the criminal justice system and other parts of our society.

That the "problem" with southern States when it comes to voting laws "is they're not always doing the right thing and the resentment they feel is that historically, the Federal Government has not allowed them to get away with it."

Governor DeSantis is digging his heels in to ensure poor people in his State are blocked from voting.

With respect to the privatization of schools, she said:

[W]e are not in an environment or a culture where we want to rely on our State legislators to do the right thing by our children, especially if they are Black or Brown.

Nancy Abudu's work at the Southern Poverty Law Center, SPLC, since 2019 and currently as the Strategic Litiga-

tion Director are also extremely concerning positions. For those unfamiliar, the Southern Poverty Law Center is a far-left activist organization that only targets conservatives whom they disagree with politically. The SPLC is well-known for, unapologetically and often without any justification, labeling conservative and religious organizations and individuals as "hate groups" or "extremists."

As a Federal judge recently found that the SPLC hate list does not "depend upon objective data or evidence" and its application of the "hate group" designation is "entirely subjective."

Another Federal judge ruled that SPLC's "representation or description" of a nonprofit organization as a hate group "is not one 'of fact.'"

SPLC's Hate Map, as they call it, is "outright fraud" and "a willful deception designed to scare older liberals into writing checks to the SPLC."

Their misinformation has real-world implications ranging from careless to incendiary and deadly. Floyd Lee Corkins entered the Family Research Council's headquarters with a 9-millimeter pistol, multiple ammunition clips, and a box of extra rounds, and the intent to "kill as many people as possible." Fortunately, Corkins was stopped by the building manager from carrying out this mass shooting.

Under FBI interrogation, Corkins said he chose to carry out the attack on FRC after it was labeled a "hate group" on the Southern Poverty Law Center's website.

In 2018, the SPLC paid \$3.375 million in damages after brandishing British Muslim reformer Maajid Nawaz as an anti-Muslim extremist.

Similarly, the SPLC was compelled to issue an official apology for placing Dr. Ben Carson under their extremist watchlist back in 2014.

In 2021, in Nebraska, we saw the Southern Poverty Law Center's reckless and misguided definition of "hate groups" used against University of Nebraska-Lincoln students. A Christian student organization called Ratio Christi filed a lawsuit alleging the University discriminated against the organization's conservative and Christian views when it denied funds for a speaker.

I spoke out at the time urging the University to support speakers from a wide variety of viewpoints on campus, including Christian speakers. The group of students had secured legal defense from the Alliance Defending Freedom, a religious freedom organization. The Southern Poverty Law Center's designation of ADF as a hate group was then used against the students in media reports across the State.

Fortunately, justice prevailed; and in a victory for free speech at public universities, a Federal court entered a partial judgment against the University of Nebraska-Lincoln officials who discriminated against Christian student organizations. The University revised its funding policies to provide