

waiting hours on the phone or in line hoping to speak with someone at the State Department about passport delays that are causing vacation cancellations.

Our seniors are calling the Social Security Administration and are increasingly being greeted with busy messages, waiting longer to speak to a representative, or having their calls go unanswered altogether as the Agency shifts toward remote work. Frustrated Americans are being put on hold while too many Federal employees are phoning it in.

A manager of a VA medical center responsible for overseeing the scheduling of veterans' care appointments actually—get this, folks. This is no joke. This is no joke. An overseer for scheduling of veterans' care appointments called into a meeting from a bubble bath and even posted a selfie of it on social media with the caption “my office for the next hour.”

Another VA staffer lamented: It is almost as if this employee is making a mockery of all veterans. I can sit here in my bathtub and relax, and you just have to wait.

And that is exactly what is happening. The VA is still providing misleading wait times to hide the problem, but the heartbreaking stories of veterans continuing to go without urgent, medically necessary care—sometimes for months—tells the whole story.

Taxpayers are also picking up the cost of maintaining mostly empty buildings in Washington, as 75 percent or more of the office space at the headquarters of most of our Federal Agencies is not being used. The vacant offices beg the question: Where are all of the Federal employees? Only one out of every three bureaucrats is fully back in the office—one out of every three—according to a recent Office of Personnel Management survey. Some said they never report to a physical office.

The work locations of over 281,000 employees were redacted from data provided in response to a Freedom of Information request filed by the non-profit group Open the Books—281,000 employees.

Well, I have some questions. Who are these folks, and what exactly are they doing? Has the Biden administration been bamboozled into thinking these bureaucrats are operating out of some secret cave like Batman? I am working to find these secret locations, which are more likely to turn out to be man caves than bat caves.

In his 2022 State of the Union Address, President Biden pledged that “the vast majority of Federal workers will once again work in person.”

Well, here we are a year and a half later, and the Nation's Capital remains a ghost town, and government employee unions are fighting efforts to bring bureaucrats back.

Folks, I am all for moving Federal Agencies out of Washington. That is exactly what my bill, the SWAMP Act, would do. The intent is to make those

creating the rules more accountable to the hard-working Iowans and Americans who have to live under them. But letting Federal employees work when and where and even if they want to is having the exact opposite effect.

Consider, as many as 30 percent of Department of Health and Human Services remote employees did not appear to be working on any given day during the pandemic. And, again, these are Health and Human Services remote employees. During a pandemic, you would think they would be working. They did not appear to be working, according to an internal review of employee logins to the Agency's email and file systems. So hello, Federal employees, we actually can see when you are working and when you are not.

Folks, remote work should not be confused with flipping through channels with a TV remote. This, folks, is not remote work.

Growing up on a farm, I know what working from home really means. And it ain't easy. It is not fair to let the responsibilities of running a Federal Agency—and the country—fall on the shoulders of hard-working public servants who are showing up while others are out golfing on the taxpayers' dime.

That is why I have asked the inspector general of every single Federal Department and Agency to determine, first, the impact of telework on the delivery and response times of services and, second, how much taxpayer money could be saved by consolidating unused office space and adjusting government salaries for those who have relocated and chosen to remain out of the office.

Most of America is back to work, and it is time for burrowed bureaucrats in Washington to answer the call of duty on behalf of taxpayers, veterans, seniors, and our great Nation.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. CORTEZ MASTO). The Senator from Iowa.

IOWA

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, ladies and gentlemen of the Senate, I come to report to you on some of the activities I did during the August break and what Iowans were telling me.

On August 29, I completed my annual 99 county meetings for the 43rd year in a row. My decades-long practice is a part of my commitment to the people of Iowa to keep in touch with them because representative government is a two-way street. Those of us elected to the Senate and the House are one-half of the process, and my constituents are the other half of that process.

Holding at least one Q&A in every county every year is one way that I foster dialogue. No matter the setting, the format is the same: My Iowa constituents set the agenda.

I have spent the last 5 weeks, while the Senate was not in session, convening with Iowans in every corner of the State with nearly 40 Q&As that I had with those constituents in those counties. From factory floors and rural

hospitals to town meetings, Iowans shared their point of view with me. Now, I am bringing their concerns to my colleagues here in the Congress. Even though you don't represent Iowans, you need to know what they are telling me.

One consistent theme that I gathered from my meetings: Iowans are fed up with soaring inflation and high interest rates. The Biden economy is not working for Iowans. Contrary to the sales pitch parroted by this administration, Iowans aren't buying the Biden economy.

From the feedback I got at my county meetings, the so-called Bidenomics “rebuilding our economy from the bottom up and the middle out” is not working as Iowans see it. Iowans are emptying their pocketbooks just to make ends meet.

I heard from Iowa families about the high cost of groceries at their supermarkets and the pain that they are feeling each time they fill up their gas tank.

The administration's assault on fossil fuels and lackluster support for homegrown biofuels isn't helping. Young Americans, as well as young Iowans, in particular, are concerned about the record high mortgage rates hindering homeownership. Iowans work hard, but the Biden economy is hardly working for them.

Another issue that Iowans are especially attuned to, as you would expect because we are a great agricultural State, is the timing of the upcoming farm bill. I held a meeting with Lamoni Food Pantry to learn about their nutrition services there in Decatur County. And they were also concerned about the SNAP program within the farm bill.

I also met with egg producers, pork producers, dairy producers, and cattlemen at the Iowa State Fair, and their message was very clear: Farmers need certainty and a farm bill should be passed as soon as possible.

I look forward to working in a bipartisan way to deliver a farm bill to the American people. After my 99th county meeting, I celebrated, as usually I do, with a Snickers Blizzard at the Dairy Queen in Onawa, IA. All this doesn't mean that my work is over because I am going to continue, between now and the end of the year, to hold more Q&As throughout this period of time. And I hope to see my fellow Iowans soon at football games, businesses large and small, or a Dairy Queen near any one of them.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic whip.

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, what is the Senator from Iowa going to do when they close the Dairy Queens?

Mr. GRASSLEY. What am I doing?

Mr. DURBIN. When they close the Dairy Queens.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Well, so far I have been lucky enough to keep them open. As far as I know, there is only one that closed in the last 12 months in Iowa.

Mr. DURBIN. Thank you for filling me in on that. I appreciate it very much.

STUDENT LOANS

Madam President, it is that time of year again when students come back from their summer vacations to go to school. This year, some students are breathing easier. They were the victims of a for-profit university—so-called university—Ashford University.

I have come to the floor so many times to state the obvious: These for-profit universities are generally a terrific waste of taxpayers' dollars and students' time.

There are going to be two questions on the final, and the answers I am going to give you ahead of time are: 8 and 30. And the first question is: What percentage of high school kids go to for-profit universities? Eight percent. That is one of the questions.

The second is: What percentage of student loan defaults involves students who went to for-profit colleges and universities? The answer is 30 percent. Eight percent of the students, 30 percent of the defaults. Why? Because they overcharge these students; they lie to them; pile them up with debt and turn them loose.

Now, there comes a point when the students, burdened with debt, petition the government and say: We were defrauded and deceived. In Ashford University's case, that is exactly what happened.

Last week, the Department of Education announced it is canceling \$72 million in student loan debt for more than 2,300 victims of Ashford University.

Ashford is a prime example of the pervasive rot and abuse that exists in the for-profit college industry. An industry that enrolls 8 percent of the students, with 30 percent of the defaults tells the story. In investigating it, the Department of Education found that Ashford just lied to students about the cost of attendance by promising they wouldn't have any out-of-pocket costs when they graduate. Not only was this a lie, but many students reached their lifetime loan limits attending Ashford. And some students were forced to drop out, leaving them with debt and no degree.

Ashford consistently misrepresented the ability to transfer credits from their worthless university to any other school. They misled students about accreditation and licensure status and lied about the length of its bachelor's degree program. It was all a disaster from start to finish for these kids fresh out of high school who thought they were going to college—a real college.

Now listen to this. Ashford isn't disappearing. This is great. Despite Ashford's record of deceitful behavior, the University of Arizona acquired it in 2020, renamed it as the University of Arizona's Global Campus. But even with its shiny new name, this Global Campus was still the same predatory, low-life Ashford that focused on stu-

dent recruitment and enrollment over students' success and outcome. In fact, Ashford brought over the same key staffers who perpetrated their deceit on these students for so many years.

I urge the Department to do its job: discharge the student loans and recoup the funds from Ashford. For-profit colleges have been taking advantage of vulnerable students for far too long. It is time that these fraudulent institutions, not the taxpayers, be financially on the hook.

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

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

Mr. DURBIN. I ask unanimous consent that the vote begin.

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

VOTE ON COOK NOMINATION

The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Cook nomination?

Mr. DURBIN. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from New Jersey (Mr. BOOKER) is necessarily absent.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Arkansas (Mr. COTTON).

The result was announced—yeas 51, nays 47, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 218 Ex.]

YEAS—51

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

NAYS—47

Barraso	Ernst	McConnell
Blackburn	Fischer	Moran
Boozman	Graham	Mullin
Braun	Grassley	Murkowski
Britt	Hagerty	Paul
Budd	Hawley	Ricketts
Capito	Hoeven	Risch
Cassidy	Hyde-Smith	Romney
Collins	Johnson	Rubio
Cornyn	Kennedy	Schmitt
Cramer	Lankford	Scott (FL)
Crapo	Lee	Scott (SC)
Cruz	Lummis	Sullivan
Daines	Marshall	

Thune	Tuberville	Wicker
Tillis	Vance	Young

NOT VOTING—2

Booker	Cotton
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The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. OSSOFF). Under the previous order, the motion to reconsider is considered made and laid upon the table, and the President will be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

CLOTURE MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Pursuant to rule XXII, the Chair lays before the Senate the pending cloture motion, which the clerk will state.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Executive Calendar No. 257, Adriana Debora Kugler, of Maryland, to be a Member of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System for the unexpired term of fourteen years from February 1, 2012.

Charles E. Schumer, Sherrod Brown, Margaret Wood Hassan, Mark Kelly, Jack Reed, John W. Hickenlooper, Elizabeth Warren, Tammy Duckworth, Jeff Merkley, Richard J. Durbin, Jeanne Shaheen, Benjamin L. Cardin, Mazie Hirono, Tina Smith, Edward J. Markey, Tim Kaine, Tammy Baldwin.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the nomination of Adriana Debora Kugler, of Maryland, to be a Member of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System for the unexpired term of fourteen years from February 1, 2012, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from New Jersey (Mr. BOOKER) and the Senator from Maryland (Mr. CARDIN) are necessarily absent.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Arkansas (Mr. COTTON).

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 52, nays 45, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 219 Ex.]

YEAS—52

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