



United States  
of America

# Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 118<sup>th</sup> CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 169

WASHINGTON, WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 1, 2023

No. 180

## Senate

### LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mrs. MURRAY).

#### PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Merciful God, the fountain of wisdom, as we witnessed what is euphemistically called collateral damage, we wrestled with what our eyes have seen, ears have heard, and hearts have felt.

Lord, some of us asked the question, When does the end justify the means? We reflected on Gandhi's words that "the end is inherent in the means."

Lord, across time, You have shown us how peace following a war can be jeopardized because of the long-term consequences of how the war was fought. Give our lawmakers the faith, wisdom, and courage for the living of these turbulent days.

We pray in Your merciful Name. Amen.

#### PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

#### RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

#### CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

#### MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, VETERANS AFFAIRS, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2024—Resumed

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of H.R. 4366, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 4366) making appropriations for military construction, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2024, and for other purposes.

#### Pending:

Schumer (for Murray-Collins) amendment No. 1092, in the nature of a substitute.

#### RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. WELCH). The majority leader is recognized.

#### MILITARY APPOINTMENTS

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, so last night, I filed cloture on President Biden's nominees to serve as Chief of Naval Operations and Chief of Staff to the Air Force, the remaining vacancies on the Joint Chiefs of Staff which we said we would fill. We will move on these critical military appointments soon here on the floor.

I also filed on the nomination of Lieutenant General Mahoney to be second in command of the U.S. Marine Corps. His appointment has become urgent because this weekend the Commandant of the Marines, Gen. Eric Smith, was unexpectedly hospitalized after a serious medical emergency. Now, normally, Lieutenant General Mahoney would have been able to immediately step in to temporarily serve as Commandant. But, unfortunately, because of the blanket holds of just one Senator, Senator TUBERVILLE, that cannot happen. The situation at the Marine Corps is precisely the kind of avoidable emergency that Senator

TUBERVILLE has provoked through his reckless holds. Lieutenant General Mahoney is one of more than 300 nominees Senator TUBERVILLE is currently blocking. So while the Senate will proceed quickly to vote on Lieutenant General Mahoney's nomination, these holds cannot and must not continue.

Yesterday, my colleague Senator REED, the chairman of the Armed Services Committee, introduced a resolution that will allow the Senate to quickly confirm the nominations that are currently being blocked by the Senator from Alabama. The resolution will be referred to the Rules Committee; and when the time comes, I will bring it to the floor of the Senate for consideration.

We must—we absolutely must—ensure that our military is fully staffed and fully equipped to defend the American people, and it begins by confirming these vital nominations that are currently on hold. Every day that Senator TUBERVILLE continues his blanket holds, our military preparedness is degraded. Our military families—most of whom have served decades in the Armed Forces—suffer. Our military appointments risk being further ensnared in partisan politics. These nominees must be confirmed, and both parties should work together to make sure we fulfill our obligation to America's servicemembers.

#### GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. President, now on the minibus, for the information of Senators, today we will pass the first of three bipartisan appropriations bills: Agriculture, MILCON-VA, and T-HUD.

When these bills pass, they will be the only—I underscore—the only bipartisan appropriations bills that have passed either Chamber. These bills will make a huge difference for America's farmers, for our infrastructure, for housing on our military bases, and for veterans. Bipartisanship isn't easy. On the contrary, it is very difficult. But here in the Senate, we are making sure

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



Printed on recycled paper.

S5269

that the appropriations process is succeeding. I want to thank the good work of Chair MURRAY, Vice Chair COLLINS, and all the appropriators. Passing these appropriations bills today is not just terrific news for the country, but an affirmation of what I have said since the start of the year: The only way to get things done in a divided government is bipartisanship.

The House is going through a futile exercise in passing partisan appropriations bills that have no input or support from Democrats. They are going nowhere. The House ought to learn its lesson. The Speaker ought to understand that the 30 hard-right people should not be dictating what the entire House or the entire country does. Those bills are filled with poison pills. They break the agreement and cut below the agreement that we made when we wanted to avoid the debt from being not fulfilled, and they are nowhere.

On the other hand, the Senate has bipartisan bills. And that is the real difference here. Sooner or later, the House and the new Speaker will learn the lesson: If you don't do it bipartisan, it ain't getting done. The Senate has been a strong model for how bipartisanship can work, even amidst the deep disagreement, and I thank my colleagues on both sides for their work on these bills.

#### ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Mr. President, now, we continue on our AI Insight Forums. Today, as leaders gather in London for the first AI summit, the Senate will hold our third and fourth bipartisan AI Insight Forums. This morning will be focused on the intersection of AI in the workforce. We will hear from a balanced group of leaders in labor, tech, civil rights, and business about both the opportunities and risks that AI presents to the American worker and to our economy.

People are worried. Many people worry, Will I still have my job as AI kicks in? We want to make sure that we have guardrails that protect workers, not make the mistake that was done with globalization, where so many were thrown out of work through no fault of their own.

And then this afternoon, we will discuss AI's use in high-impact areas like finance, healthcare, law enforcement. We will focus especially on the potential bias in AI technologies in these high-impact areas and how Congress can create guardrails to protect our civil rights in the age of AI.

The Senate is continuing to be all hands on deck when it comes to trying to pass AI legislation. Yesterday our bipartisan AI gang—Senators ROUNDS, HEINRICH, YOUNG, and I—had a great meeting with President Biden at the White House on AI. So we are making good progress, but we still have more to learn about AI as we work to develop bipartisan legislation. And the world is paying attention. There is a forum in London today where the Vice President will attend. And, inevitably,

they will be looking. The whole world will be looking to the Senate to see whether and what kind of legislation we can pass. We will work hard to get the best possible bipartisan legislation done.

#### GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. President, about the supplemental, on Monday, Speaker JOHNSON and House Republicans released a totally unserious and woefully inadequate package that omitted aid to Ukraine, omitted humanitarian assistance to Gaza, had no funding for the Indo-Pacific, and made funding for Israel conditional on hard-right, never-going-to-pass proposals. What a joke.

Yesterday afternoon, President Biden issued a veto threat on the GOP proposal, and it is no wonder why: It needlessly politicizes aid to Israel. It balloons the Federal deficit. Here the House is talking about we need to pay for, to reduce the deficit, and they put in a provision that actually increases the deficit. Why? Because they don't want their superrich, megawealthy friends to be audited by the IRS like every other citizen is.

As we know, when Trump was President, he almost exempted them from auditing. Someone making \$40,000 a year had a greater chance of being audited than someone making \$4 million a year.

It is amazing that the main focus as the world is in crisis—in the Middle East, in Ukraine, in the Indo-Pacific—our House Republicans are spending more time trying to further reduce taxes of those who don't pay much tax at all. So I am so glad that President Biden issued a strong veto message. I would urge every House Republican, every House Democrat, every Senate Member to read the President's veto message. It is strong and well thought out. He talks about it politicizing aid to Israel, it ballooning the Federal deficit, and it failing to address the national security threats America faces around the globe—particularly our need to help Ukraine, provide humanitarian aid to Gaza, and help in the Indo-Pacific.

So the House GOP proposal is not going anywhere. It is dead before it even is voted on. The Speaker should start over—this time without terrible, partisan poison pills; this time sitting down with Democrats and working this issue through.

Israel has suffered the worst terrorist attack in its history. It needs help. But House Republicans are asking a price for helping them by cutting off funding that holds rich tax cheats accountable. That ain't happening, House. It ain't happening.

Now, Speaker JOHNSON says that this supposed pay is needed because of his concern about the national debt; but as I mentioned, every independent estimate shows this partisan bill raises the deficit by billions of dollars. So, what hypocrisy. It is not responsible. It is reckless. It is utterly baffling—baffling—that at a moment that demands

maximum bipartisanship, when the country is in crisis and our friends in Israel and Ukraine are in crisis, that the House GOP is, instead, trying to pick an egregiously partisan fight over wealthy tax cheats.

Years back, both parties would have come together for the good of the country and the good of security in the world when crises like these happen. But the House GOP—continuing the kind of recklessness, the kind of inability to get their act together—continues to do these kinds of things.

Their proposal is simply not a serious one. And, worse, it still wastes precious time at a moment when we need to help Israel, Ukraine, and send humanitarian aid to Gaza ASAP.

All friends of Israel should loudly and clearly say that any move to make the United States-Israel relationship a partisan one, as the House is doing, is a move that hurts Israel. That is what they do, unfortunately: harming our partnership with Israel by politicizing their aid package. I urge Speaker JOHNSON: Quickly change course, Speaker JOHNSON, because this stunningly unserious proposal is not going to be the answer. It is not going anywhere. As I said: It is dead almost before it is born.

#### OIL INDUSTRY MERGERS

Mr. President, the FTC letter that we sent this morning—and I think people should pay attention to this because this is a very serious issue. Last month, America's two largest oil companies, ExxonMobil and Chevron, announced two of the largest oil acquisitions of the 21st century—in fact, some of the largest mergers in the history—in the whole history—of the United States. And where are these mergers occurring? In the heavily concentrated oil industry where the consumer has almost no say whatsoever.

These deals have all the hallmarks of harmful, anticompetitive effect. And if they are allowed to happen, Americans could see the consequences through higher prices at the pump. People are complaining, justifiably, that gas prices are too high, and these mergers inevitably will make the price even higher.

So today, I am leading a group of 22 Senators calling on the Federal Trade Commission to use the full powers of the FTC to investigate these mergers. In our letter, we say that if any antitrust laws may be violated, the FTC should step in and oppose the mergers.

We broke up Standard Oil's illegal monopoly in 1911. We are quickly getting back to that place. The FTC should also investigate whether it is time to break up today's anticompetitive oil conglomerates. When America's largest oil companies can just buy some of their largest competitors—here we have Exxon, the biggest oil company in America, buying the largest oil driller in the Permian Basin, which is the biggest U.S. oil field—it is outrageous. When the largest companies can control the lion's share of the supply chain, when they are able to act

with little accountability, the result is a raw deal for American consumers, American workers, and the American economy.

And this isn't speculation. We have seen this happen before. In the 1990s, there were over 2,600 mergers across the petroleum industry. The number of major oil companies was cut in half.

I will never forget the day. This was a Democratic President. President Clinton, unfortunately, allowed the merger between Exxon and Mobil—two of the biggest oil companies. I opposed it at the time. The result of these mergers and lax accountability was market manipulation, an unstable supply, and, ultimately, price hikes for Americans.

Well, why repeat that mistake? We cannot allow it.

With ExxonMobil's merger with Pioneer and Chevron's merger with Hess, we are seeing history repeat itself. More consolidation and less competition may be good for the shareholders and the big oil company execs, but it ain't good for America, and it certainly ain't good for the consumer, who will inevitably pay more for gas, oil, and so many other things.

There is something deeply wrong about seeing the largest oil and gas companies in the world manipulate their way to higher profits as Americans are struggling at the pump. Last year alone, the world's five largest oil companies saw record profits—\$219 billion—more than double the profits of 2021.

And where did the profits go? Did they translate to lower prices for Americans? Did the companies invest in worker productivity or in finding new, clean energy sources? No. The soaring profits fueled soaring stock buybacks. Americans, meanwhile, saw higher prices every time they filled up the tank.

And one other point about these mergers: At one point, the big oil companies said: Hmm, we understand that the world is moving in a direction of clean energy. We are going to move that way, too.

These mergers show they are not. They are not. They are simply investing in the old carbon resources that we know, in the long run, will do such damage to our world and our world economy. Yet they are just moving headlong in that direction—short-term gain, long-term loss.

Mergers will accelerate these disturbing trends of high gas prices and less competition. So we are calling on the FTC to look into the announcements made by ExxonMobil and Chevron and step in if necessary.

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

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The Republican leader is recognized.

SUPPLEMENTAL FUNDING

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I have spoken frequently about the clear links between the biggest national security challenges facing our country and about what we need to do to address them, but let's not lose sight of a few overarching points.

America's adversaries don't ease up when we lose our resolve. In fact, they press their advantage. How many of our colleagues would disagree that withdrawing from Afghanistan caused America's friends and foes to question the credibility of our commitments?

How many would disagree that failing to respond decisively to hundreds of terrorist attacks against U.S. forces in Syria and Iraq has weakened our deterrence against Iran?

How many Senators would disagree that the Biden administration shouldn't have withheld lethal assistance to Ukraine in the summer of 2021 or that they should have shipped lethal weapons more quickly as Russia's preparations became glaringly obvious that fall and winter?

How many would disagree that the President's caution and hesitation to provide critical weapons—like HIMARS, Patriots, tanks, and ATACMs—has prolonged the conflict in Ukraine?

Over and over again, history has taught us that the costs of disengaging from the world are far higher than the costs of engaging. And just as the threats we face aren't isolated, neither are the benefits of investing in American leadership.

So here is the plain truth: The overwhelming majority of the resources approved by the Senate as security assistance for Ukraine has, in fact, gone directly—directly—to American manufacturers, supporting American jobs, expanding the American industrial base, and producing new weapons for America's military, with almost \$70 billion in investments spread across at least 38 different States. The production of artillery rounds alone has distributed multiple billions into facilities from Arkansas to Virginia and Texas to Ohio—all to improve our ability to equip the United States and our allies for the growing challenges we face.

These investments are not just replacing what is being used to destroy Russia's military strength; they are expanding production capacity to meet the soaring demand from allies. NATO countries have invested \$90 billion in capabilities produced here in America since last February, and they are helping equip U.S. forces for our own long-term competition with China.

Take the Patriot interceptor. This air defense system is arguably the most in-demand weapon in the United States' arsenal. It has saved thousands of American and allied lives. It is de-

ployed across Europe, the Middle East, and the Indo-Pacific. It is produced in Tucson, AZ, with components coming from all over our country; and the supplemental resources we are working on could expand production capacity by nearly 20 percent.

Or take the 155-millimeter round. It is relevant in nearly every conflict imaginable. More than 75 percent of our investments marked for this munition has gone toward capacity expansion. Today, U.S. manufacturers are able to produce double what they could before our response to the Russian aggression last year. With the further investment of so-called Ukraine spending, American production would reach 1 million rounds per year.

The notion that this money is distracting from America's other security priorities is nonsense. Anyone making this claim doesn't understand how critical production lines work. The truth is the investments we have made in expanding production capacity to respond to Putin's escalation are helping American manufacturers produce more of the weapons Israel and Taiwan need.

I have spoken at length about America's clear national security interest in helping Ukraine demolish Russian military strength and in a secure and peaceful Europe. I have spelled out the glaring and immediate threats we face from Iran-backed terror and of the importance of supporting our closest ally in the Middle East. I have emphasized the gravity of strategic competition with China and the urgency of the threat facing our friends out in the Indo-Pacific.

But, as foolish as it is to deny the clear link between America's adversaries and the threats we face, it is every bit as dangerous to pretend that, as a global superpower, our Nation cannot or should not face each of them down. We have the means to lead the free world and ensure our own security. In the face of coordinated aggression from our adversaries, we have the clearest possible objective: We win. They lose.

BORDER SECURITY

Now, Mr. President, on a related matter, as I mentioned last week, illegal crossings at our southern border are setting alltime records. In just 3 years, under the Biden administration, the CBP has recorded 6 million border encounters—6 million. And yet, in the face of these astonishing statistics, the Secretary of Homeland Security continues to say: "Our approach to managing the border . . . is working."

The White House Press Secretary has reiterated this insanity, saying:

It's not like someone walks over [the border]. . . . That's not how it works.

Well, of course, we know that is exactly—exactly—how it works. The Border Patrol has been tracking 1,000 known "got-aways" per day—1,000 "got-aways" per day.

The facts on the ground send a clear message: The Biden administration's handling of the border crisis is a complete and utter failure.

Yesterday, Senator CRUZ and Senator BARRASSO both shared an encounter they witnessed on the border, over the weekend, of a 10-year-old girl and a man claiming to be her father. They described the terror on the girl's face as the man attempted to use the Biden administration's family unit loophole to cut the line at the border. As Senator CRUZ put it, "the cartels are renting children to grown men."

The crisis that has unfolded on President Biden's watch is inhumane and dangerous. Fiscal year 2022 was the deadliest year on record at the southern border, and fiscal year 2023 set an alltime record for terror watchlist encounters. We are watching a humanitarian crisis that has become a glaring national security vulnerability.

The solution is pretty clear. The solution isn't billions of dollars to make it easier and faster to process illegal immigrants or "money for a welcome wagon," as Senator BARRASSO put it yesterday. The solution is a clear and commonsense policy that forces the Biden administration to enforce the law and treat the border with the legal consequences that it demands.

So I am grateful to my Republican colleagues who are working hard on a policy proposal to deliver actual border security and drawing on ideas put forward by Senator LANKFORD, Senator CRUZ, Senator GRASSLEY, and others.

Washington Democrats have proved that their border security approach is simply not working. President Biden's border supplemental request is just more of the same. It is time to wake up and embrace policy changes that will keep Americans safe.

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

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

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, we recently learned that fiscal year 2023 set a new record for the number of illegal immigrants apprehended at the southern border—the third recordbreaking year of illegal immigration under the Biden administration.

First, fiscal year 2021 set an alltime record. Then, fiscal year 2022 broke that record. And, now, fiscal 2023 has broken that record. In other words, we have had 3 straight years of the Biden border crisis getting worse and worse and worse.

Since the President took office, more than 6.2 million individuals have been caught attempting to illegally cross our southern border—6.2 million. If every one of those individuals lived in one city, it would be the second largest in the country.

I don't need to tell anyone that the kind of unchecked illegal immigration we are experiencing represents a serious security threat.

The Department of Homeland Security recently noted in its 2024 threat assessment:

Terrorists and criminal actors may exploit the elevated flow [of migration] and increasingly complex security environment to enter the United States.

And by all indications, bad actors are, in fact, taking advantage of the chaos at the border to try and enter the United States. During fiscal year 2023 alone, 169 individuals on the Terrorist Watchlist were caught attempting to illegally cross our southern border—169 on the Terrorist Watchlist. Those are the ones they apprehended. That is more than in the previous 6 years combined.

The head of the Border Patrol recently said that his Agency is arresting an average of more than 47 people per day who have "serious criminal histories"—more than 47 people per day with serious criminal histories. Those are just the individuals who are being caught.

Since January 2021, when President Biden took office, there have been more than 1.7 million known "got-aways." Those are individuals the Border Patrol saw but was unable to apprehend. We can only imagine the number of unknown "got-aways" who have sneaked into the country.

How many of those individuals have "serious criminal histories" or hail from hostile countries? We just don't know, but we can be pretty confident that among those "got-aways" are dangerous individuals who should not be entering our country.

This is a serious issue, and we need a serious course correction from this administration.

Vice President HARRIS, who is in charge of overseeing border policies for this administration, recently told "60 Minutes" that "we need a safe, orderly, and humane border policy." This has been the purported goal of the Biden administration for almost 3 years now, but the administration has been failing on all three counts.

The current crisis we are experiencing is a predictable result of the Biden administration's decisions. Before the President took office, his team was warned of the possibility of a migrant surge. Yet the moment the President took office, he set about dismantling the immigration policies of his predecessor and weakening our border's security, and the result has been, as I said, 3 successive years of record-breaking illegal immigration.

While the Biden administration has finally started to, at least halfheartedly, acknowledge our Nation's border crisis and put in place policies attempting to encourage legal migration and penalize illegal border crossings, the changes are insufficient—far too little, far too late—or, as one columnist recently put it in the Washington Post, "The Biden administration's various efforts have amounted to Band-Aids on a massive, open wound."

The President's recent supplemental funding request has not left me hopeful that the administration is suddenly going to become more effective. Potentially billions of dollars in reimbursement for blue States struggling to house illegal immigrants won't do a single thing to solve the crisis we are facing at the border.

While the President's proposal does include some funding that would actually go toward security, funding alone is simply not enough. We need meaningful policy changes that will, for starters, end the rampant abuse of our asylum system and sweeping parole designations.

Senators GRAHAM, LANKFORD, and COTTON, among several others, are working hard to craft a set of changes to our asylum and parole policies that would stem the flow at our southern border. These changes would address obvious flaws in President Biden's immigration policies and make tangible progress toward getting our border crisis under control.

Recent events have underscored the importance of national security, and a porous southern border is a huge—huge—vulnerability when it comes to our national security. We need to use every tool we can to secure the border and keep terrorists and criminals out of the United States.

Senate Republicans are committed to putting policies in place at the border that keep Americans safe, and I hope that, in the days and weeks to come, Senate Democrats will join us to make securing our border a priority.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HICKENLOOPER). Without objection, it is so ordered.

ISRAEL

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, the situation in Gaza today is a disaster. Congress must take action. The administration must take action. The world must take action.

Today, 3 weeks after Hamas's barbaric attack against civilians in Israel, which began this war, many hundreds of thousands of innocent men, women, and children in Gaza are on the brink. Over the past 3 weeks, it is estimated that some 8,000 people in Gaza have been killed in bombings, including more than 3,000 children, and far more have been wounded.

More than a million people in Gaza have been displaced from their homes, and some 670,000 are sheltering in U.N. installations, where they are down to 1 liter of water per person per day. They lack sufficient food, water, medical supplies, or fuel. The hospitals and medical facilities there are in nightmarish conditions, with hundreds of

babies in incubators and patients on life support at risk of death should the generators that sustain them run out of fuel. Corridors are lined with injured and displaced people, and overwhelmed doctors must turn patients away or operate without anesthesia or antibiotics.

The humanitarian crisis is dire and getting worse by the minute. There must be a humanitarian pause now so that sufficient supplies—food, water, medicine, fuel—can reach the people of Gaza. If not, thousands more will die needlessly. We cannot allow that to happen. A stop to the bombing is critical to save innocent lives and secure the safe return of hostages.

Let us never forget the lives of all children—all people—are sacred, whether they are Palestinian children, Israeli children, or American children, and we must do everything we can to protect them. But if we are going to make any real progress in addressing this never-ending conflict between Israel and Hamas—there have been five wars in the last 15 years—we need to understand somewhat as to how we got to where we are today. If peace is to come to that troubled region and if the Palestinian people are ever going to be able to enjoy lives of security and dignity, there must be a vision of where we go in the future.

So, let us be clear, the living conditions in Gaza before October 7 were horrific and inhumane, and that is before Hamas ignited the latest war. Before this conflict, in Gaza, nearly 80 percent of people there lived in poverty, and two-thirds were reliant on humanitarian assistance. Almost half the population and over 70 percent of young people were unemployed in Gaza. What kind of life could they look forward to? Electricity there was intermittent, with 11- to 12-hour blackouts every day. Water and sanitation systems were inadequate, and there were constant shortages of all basic necessities.

Gaza was mostly cut off from the world, with Israel and Egypt severely limiting the number of people and types of goods that could go in or out. In fact, many observers described Gaza as “an open-air prison”—and all of that is before October 7.

If we are serious about bringing freedom and dignity to the Palestinian people, that is a situation that can never be allowed to be returned to. The Palestinian people are entitled to much more than that.

In Gaza, Hamas, an authoritarian terrorist organization, ruled by force, stockpiling arms and war materiel, taxing the desperately poor population, and stealing resources to build tunnels and rockets. Make no mistake about it, Hamas is a terrorist organization bent on the destruction of Israel, and long before this horrific attack, they had killed countless innocent people, including Americans. They advance a fundamentalist ideology which treats women as inferior, second-class citi-

zens and which threatens to kill people who are gay.

Hamas is an authoritarian nightmare, repressing dissent and stealing from Gazans not just many materials of life but the dream of a better future. And that was the situation before October 7.

And what was going on in Israel before Hamas's terrorist attack? What was going on there? That country had the most rightwing government in its history, a Cabinet that included outright racist Ministers who consistently dehumanized the Palestinian population. Benjamin Netanyahu, the Prime Minister, was under indictment for a litany of corruption charges, and many believe that Israel's intelligence—or lack of intelligence—on October 7 had everything to do with his government's preoccupation with his political problems.

Before the war, this rightwing Israeli Government had systematically undermined the prospects of peace. Netanyahu and his extreme partners in the Cabinet had worked to marginalize Palestinian voices committed to peace, pursued settlement policies designed to foreclose the possibility of a two-state solution, stymied economic development in Palestinian areas, and passed laws that entrenched systemic inequality between Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel.

This last year saw record Israeli settlement growth in the West Bank, where more than 700,000 Israelis now live in areas the United Nations and United States agree are occupied territories. Despite that, the Israeli Government authorized thousands of new homes for settlers and opened up new areas to construction, while bulldozing thousands of Palestinian homes and schools and further restricting Palestinian movement.

Legal experts agree, these policies constituted nothing less than illegal annexation. All of these policies and more greatly increased tension in the West Bank. Before October 7, 179 Palestinians had been killed in 2023—179 Palestinians in the West Bank—which made it the deadliest year in two decades. Since October 7, 121 more Palestinians have been killed in the West Bank, including some by settlers.

These tensions were part of why so much of the IDF, the Israel Defense Forces, was deployed in the West Bank rather than the border with Gaza.

And then came October 7 and Hamas's atrocities that began this latest and horrific war. The Hamas attack was unspeakable. Over 1,300 innocent men, women, and children in Israel were killed; over 200 Israelis and Americans taken hostage, including young children and grandparents. Young people were gunned down in cold blood at a music festival, babies and older people brutally murdered in their homes.

And let's remember that Hamas did not primarily target the military—no. They intentionally targeted civilians. Their goal was to kill civilians. Their

attack was designed to provoke a response, and in that they succeeded.

Many Israelis are now understandably furious, and they want to strike back forcefully. I think we can all understand that. But rage and revenge do not make useful policy. And here in the United States, after the attack on 9/11 in this country, we acted with rage and revenge, and I think many people now understand that that was a horrific mistake.

Killing innocent Palestinian women and children in Gaza will not bring back to life the innocent Israeli women and children who have been killed by Hamas. Like any other country, Israel has the right to defend itself and destroy Hamas terrorism, but it does not have the right to kill thousands of innocent men, women, and children in Gaza.

Israel does not have the right to endanger the lives of millions of Palestinians—half of whom are children—by shutting off water, food, fuel, and electricity. That type of action against a helpless and impoverished population is morally unacceptable and in violation of international law.

Israel does not have the right to bomb an entire neighborhood to target one Hamas leader or installation, but that is what the Israeli Government is doing. One need only look at the satellite imagery and photography of Gaza to see that this is not a carefully calibrated campaign. These are not surgical strikes.

Yesterday, Israel struck the densely populated Jabalia refugee camp and killed a Hamas commander, but they also killed some 50 other people and injured hundreds more, although the exact toll is not yet known. That was actually the fourth airstrike on that community. An October 9 airstrike killed 60, an October 19 airstrike killed 18, and an October 22 airstrike killed 30, according to outside researchers.

UNRWA reported yesterday that their head of security—that is the United Nations Relief Agency—their head of security was killed, along with his wife and eight children. In total, 67 United Nations Relief Agency workers have been killed, and 44 United Nations facilities have been damaged since October 7.

The current Israeli strategy must end. Israel must begin the process of restoring water and electrical services to areas where they are still operable. The international community must also rush generators and solar capacity to Gazan medical facilities to address acute needs and reduce Israeli fears of diversion to Hamas.

Israel will not stop going after Hamas, but it must do it in a very, very different way, and additional pauses will be needed.

Let me conclude by saying that Israel must also begin the process of laying out a political strategy. It cannot bomb its way to a solution. Such a strategy must include as minimum first steps a clear promise that Palestinians displaced in the fighting will

have the absolute right to safely return to their homes; a commitment to broader peace talks to advance a two-state solution in the wake of this war; an abandonment of Israeli efforts to carve up and annex the West Bank; and a commitment to work with the Palestinian Authority to build genuine governing capacity.

The United States must make it clear that these are the conditions of our solidarity. Just as we want justice for the Israelis murdered by Hamas, we also want justice for the Palestinian people, and that is not going to happen with Hamas. Palestinians need a state of their own, contiguous, with the freedom of movement and access that can sustain a vibrant economy.

This will be a long and difficult road. It will take concerted U.S. and international support and a doubling down of our political commitment to a two-state solution. But the first step right now must be to stop the bombing and bring in as much humanitarian aid as possible.

I think Secretary Blinken said it well when he said:

Providing immediate aid and protection for Palestinian civilians in the conflict is a necessary foundation for finding partners in Gaza who have a different vision for the future than Hamas—and who are willing to help make it real.

This is a dreadful situation. It is part of a very, very long-term conflict between Israel and its neighbors. But the immediate crisis is to save lives, to stop the bombing, to bring forth a humanitarian pause, and then to go forward to bring peace and stability to the region.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Massachusetts.

S.J. RES 42

Ms. WARREN. Mr. President, I rise today about a resolution to make it harder for students—all students—to have access to school meals. I am referring to S.J. Res. 42. We deal with a lot of complex issues here every day. This is not a complex issue.

First, the Federal policy: the USDA memo clarifying that State agencies and programs participating in Federal school meal programs are required to abide by our Nation's anti-discrimination laws. This means that they cannot deny access to kids on the basis of their gender identity or sexual orientation. In other words, schools may not deny lunch to LGBTQ+ kids.

Now, this isn't some strange, new interpretation of the law that USDA came up with and announced out of the blue; this is the USDA implementing anti-discrimination laws that apply across government, in line with the Supreme Court's reading. This is what the Republicans attempted to overturn with S.J. Res. 42.

Of course, S.J. Res. 42 was never really just about school lunches. The goal was to send a message to LGBTQ+ kids that they are not welcome, to send a message that it is OK to discriminate

against these kids because of who they are. I want to be very clear. That is wrong. We proudly stand with LGBTQ+ kids.

Your rights matter. You are welcome at school.

The USDA guidance will help kids. It will also reduce discrimination and bring Agency guidance in line with Supreme Court precedent.

The USDA policy will also ensure that hungry kids get the food they need to grow and to do well in school. According to census data, LGBTQ+ individuals are almost twice as likely to live in a household that experiences food insecurity, and trans individuals are almost three times more likely not to have enough food to eat, as compared to cisgender individuals.

The last thing our kids need is adults behaving like classroom bullies and trying to justify taking away their lunches. I am glad the Senate rejected this resolution.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota.

AMENDMENT NO. 1241

Mr. CRAMER. Mr. President, I call up my amendment No. 1241 and ask that it be reported by number, as I intend to withdraw the amendment shortly due to majority party mischief.

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

The clerk will report by number.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from North Dakota [Mr. CRAMER], for himself and Mr. MANCHIN, proposes an amendment numbered 1241 to amendment No. 1092.

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: To prohibit the use of funds to finalize, implement, administer, or enforce the proposed rule of the Federal Highway Administration relating to greenhouse gas emissions performance measures)

In title I of division C, insert after section 127 the following:

SEC. 128. None of the funds made available by this Act may be used to finalize, implement, administer, or enforce the proposed rulemaking entitled "National Performance Management Measures; Assessing Performance of the National Highway System, Greenhouse Gas Emissions Measure" (87 Fed. Reg. 42401 (July 15, 2022)) or a successor regulation.

Mr. CRAMER. Mr. President, the Senate has been preaching regular order for some time, and I have been cheering them on. I have been a strong advocate for regular order because we need a process that engages all of the Members of this body. But one has to ask why my bipartisan, germane amendment is deemed a "poison pill" and now needs 60 votes to pass. Well, I know the answer. It is simple. Because it was going to pass. That is why. That is why suddenly it is a "poison pill." Senate Democrats would rather provide the Biden administration cover by taking a show vote designed to fail than follow real regular order. The will of the Senate should prevail here, but they are not going to let it.

This appropriation limitation amendment would prevent the U.S. Depart-

ment of Transportation from finalizing their illegal rule requiring States to measure CO<sub>2</sub> tailpipe emissions and then set declining targets for individual States on their roadways.

Congress has not provided any authority for the Department of Transportation to dictate CO<sub>2</sub> performance requirements. They can't do what they don't have the authority to do. And even if we had, it is not a workable solution. It may be hard for bureaucrats in Washington, DC, to imagine this, but you cannot tell States like North Dakota and Montana that to reduce tailpipe emissions is easy. Just build a subway. Build a subway or dedicate bus lanes on your gravel roads. That is why a majority of the States in this country have submitted comments expressing their concern and opposing—out-right opposing—this rule.

When the Environment and Public Works Committee negotiated the last highway bill, we expressly left this authority out. We made the decision to not give this authority to the Department of Transportation.

I would note that that bill moved out of committee unanimously and then became the cornerstone of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. Ironically, the Biden administration created the "poison pill" that this amendment is meant to address.

I am not interested in show votes, so I am going to withdraw the amendment.

The administration should scrap this rule, but if they finalize it, I will be back. I will be back with a CRA resolution, and then Senate Democrats can't force a 60-vote majority on that one, and I will lead an amicus brief pointing to the major questions doctrine, which the Department of Transportation clearly violates with their rule.

With that, I yield.

AMENDMENT NO. 1241 WITHDRAWN

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to withdraw the amendment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The amendment is withdrawn.

The amendment (No. 1241) was withdrawn.

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

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

Mr. PAUL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that there be up to 4 minutes of debate equally divided on Senate amendments Nos. 1217 and 1347.

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

AMENDMENT NO. 1217

Mr. PAUL. Mr. President, I call up my amendment No. 1217 and ask that it be reported by number.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report by number.



The legislative clerk read as follows:  
The Senator from Kentucky [Mr. PAUL] proposes an amendment numbered 1217 to amendment No. 1092.

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: To require a full audit of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System and the Federal reserve banks by the Comptroller General of the United States)

At the appropriate place, insert the following:

**SEC. \_\_\_\_\_ . AUDIT REFORM AND TRANSPARENCY FOR THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS OF THE FEDERAL RESERVE SYSTEM.**

(a) IN GENERAL.—Notwithstanding section 714 of title 31, United States Code, or any other provision of law, the Comptroller General of the United States shall complete an audit of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System and the Federal reserve banks under subsection (b) of that section not later than 12 months after the date of enactment of this Act.

(b) REPORT.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 90 days after the date on which the audit required pursuant to subsection (a) is completed, the Comptroller General of the United States—

(A) shall submit to Congress a report on the audit; and

(B) shall make the report described in subparagraph (A) available to the Speaker of the House, the majority and minority leaders of the House of Representatives, the majority and minority leaders of the Senate, the Chair and Ranking Member of the committee and each subcommittee of jurisdiction in the House of Representatives and the Senate, and any other Member of Congress who requests the report.

(2) CONTENTS.—The report required under paragraph (1) shall include a detailed description of the findings and conclusion of the Comptroller General of the United States with respect to the audit that is the subject of the report, together with such recommendations for legislative or administrative action as the Comptroller General of the United States may determine to be appropriate.

(c) REPEAL OF CERTAIN LIMITATIONS.—Subsection (b) of section 714 of title 31, United States Code, is amended by striking the second sentence.

(d) TECHNICAL AND CONFORMING AMENDMENTS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Section 714 of title 31, United States Code, is amended—

(A) in subsection (d)(3), by striking “or (f)” each place the term appears;

(B) in subsection (e), by striking “the third undesignated paragraph of section 13” and inserting “section 13(3)”; and

(C) by striking subsection (f).

(2) FEDERAL RESERVE ACT.—Subsection (s) (relating to “Federal Reserve Transparency and Release of Information”) of section 11 of the Federal Reserve Act (12 U.S.C. 248) is amended—

(A) in paragraph (4)(A), by striking “has the same meaning as in section 714(f)(1)(A) of title 31, United States Code” and inserting “means a program or facility, including any special purpose vehicle or other entity established by or on behalf of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System or a Federal reserve bank, authorized by the Board of Governors under section 13(3), that is not subject to audit under section 714(e) of title 31, United States Code”;

(B) in paragraph (6), by striking “or in section 714(f)(3)(C) of title 31, United States Code, the information described in paragraph (1) and information concerning the transactions described in section 714(f) of such title,” and inserting “the information described in paragraph (1)”; and

(C) in paragraph (7), by striking “and section 13(3)(C), section 714(f)(3)(C) of title 31, United States Code, and” and inserting “, section 13(3)(C), and”.

Mr. PAUL. The Federal Reserve effectively controls the economy but without scrutiny. No other institution has so much unchecked power.

The Fed demonstrated its unlimited authority during the pandemic. The Fed printed money, purchased government-backed securities, and doled out massive amounts of money to favorite industries. The result added almost \$5 trillion to the Fed’s balance sheet, the largest in our history.

When Dodd-Frank ordered a limited, one-time audit of Fed actions, the Government Accountability Office uncovered that during the financial crisis, the Fed doled out over \$16 trillion to domestic and foreign banks. This kind of inflationary bailout should not be kept secret from the public.

While the Fed’s easy money policies make the rich richer, the side effect is high inflation. As Milton Friedman famously explained, “Inflation is taxation without legislation.”

Congress cannot control the Fed’s actions, but Fed actions can cost Americans dearly. Just ask any parent who has to feed his or her family during historically high inflation rates.

My amendment would require a full audit of the Fed within 1 year. It is time for the Federal Reserve to operate in a manner that is transparent and accountable to the taxpayers. I ask for a “yes” vote.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, I rise today to speak in opposition to the Paul amendment.

Members of both parties have always agreed an independent—underscore independent—central bank is critical to a functioning economy. Congress put in place restrictions to shield the Fed’s monetary policy from political influence. This longstanding restriction ensures that the Fed isn’t subject to the whims of Congress, to the partisanship, to the nihilism—if I could use another word—of, too often, people in this body.

Whether it is threatening a default or a government shutdown, all too common because of dysfunction and chaos in the House of Representatives—whether it is threatening a default or government shutdown, we have already seen how partisanship so negatively impacts people’s pocketbooks in the broader economy. We don’t need it here too.

This amendment would make the Fed less effective. It would open it up to all kinds of nefarious political pressure. Congress already requires that the Fed undergo regular review of their operations, of their programs, of their balance sheet, of their financial statements. These are some of the ways Congress holds the Fed accountable while avoiding dangerous political interference.

This amendment is irrelevant to what we are voting on today. It is yet another impeding to keeping our government open. It shouldn’t be partisan. It shouldn’t be political. Those antics should stay out of this debate.

I urge my colleagues to vote no on the Paul amendment.

I yield the floor.

VOTE ON AMENDMENT NO. 1217

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the amendment.

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. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Utah (Mr. LEE), the Senator from South Carolina (Mr. SCOTT), and the Senator from North Carolina (Mr. TILLIS).

The result was announced—yeas 46, nays 51, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 280 Leg.]

YEAS—46

Baldwin	Ernst	Murkowski
Barrasso	Fischer	Paul
Blackburn	Graham	Risch
Boozman	Grassley	Rubio
Braun	Hagerty	Sanders
Britt	Hawley	Schmitt
Budd	Hoeben	Scott (FL)
Capito	Hyde-Smith	Sinema
Cassidy	Johnson	Sullivan
Collins	Kennedy	Thune
Cornyn	Lankford	Tuberville
Cotton	Lummis	Vance
Cramer	Marshall	Wicker
Crapo	McConnell	Young
Cruz	Moran	
Daines	Mullin	

NAYS—51

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

NOT VOTING—3

Lee	Scott (SC)	Tillis
-----	------------	--------

The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 46, the nays are 51.

Under the previous order requiring 60 votes for the adoption of this amendment, the amendment is not agreed to.

The amendment (No. 1217) was rejected.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, for the information of the Senate, starting at 2:30 p.m. today, the following amendments are expected to be called up and made pending: Cruz No. 1249 and Lee No. 1121. Upon disposition of the amendments, the Senate will vote on

adoption of the substitute amendment No. 1092, as amended, and on passage of H.R. 4366, as amended; further, that upon disposition of H.R. 4366, the Senate will vote on passage of H.R. 662, as amended, and that all previous provisions of the order from October 24 remain in effect.

So for the information of all Senators, there will be four rollcall votes beginning at 2:30 p.m. today.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kentucky.

AMENDMENT NO. 1347 TO AMENDMENT NO. 1092

(Purpose: To reduce the amounts appropriated in divisions B and C and to rescind amounts appropriated to the Internal Revenue Service.)

Mr. PAUL. Mr. President, I call up my amendment No. 1347 and ask that it be reported by number.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Kentucky [Mr. PAUL] proposes an amendment numbered 1347 to amendment No. 1092.

(The amendment is printed in today's RECORD under "Text of Amendments.")

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there will now be up to 4 minutes of debate, equally divided.

The Senator from Kentucky.

Mr. PAUL. Mr. President, the national debt just recently surpassed \$33 trillion. That is \$280,000 per household. Unless we change course, the debt only increases.

CBO predicts trillion-dollar deficits as far as the eye can see. We borrow over \$176,000,000 every hour, \$3,000,000 is borrowed every minute, and \$50,000 every second. It is out of control.

Net interest payments are anticipated to double, from \$475 billion to a trillion dollars by fiscal year 2028. Interest will be the largest item of expenditure for the Federal Government.

Americans could pay dearly for Congress's inability to say no to the welfare and warfare state. It could mean confiscatory tax rates, high inflation, and a weak economy. But it doesn't have to be this way.

My amendment begins the path toward fiscal health by saving the taxpayers \$30 billion. My amendment also cuts \$25 billion that the Biden administration wants to use to sic the IRS on taxpayers to squeeze them for even more money. That is a reduction of \$55 billion for what the government is on track to spend.

I urge a "yes" vote on my amendment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, we have a bipartisan package before us. This amendment that is being offered would slash funding supported unanimously in our committee in the Ag and T-HUD bills—kicking women and kids off of WIC or gutting funding for our farmers and agricultural research, making our food supplies less safe; lay-

ing off air traffic controllers, leading to flight delays and cancellations; booting people from their homes as housing assistance would be cut off; eliminating resources for communities to invest in important local infrastructure needs and a lot more. This would be catastrophic.

The bills we are considering today have been carefully drafted. They are written to the spending levels that were set by the debt ceiling agreement that the House Republicans and the President agreed on. Congress passed it in July, so I urge my colleagues to vote no.

VOTE ON AMENDMENT NO. 1347

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the amendment.

Mr. PAUL. 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 senior assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Utah (Mr. LEE), the Senator from South Carolina (Mr. SCOTT), and the Senator from North Carolina (Mr. TILLIS).

Further, if present and voting: the Senator from North Carolina (Mr. TILLIS) would have voted "nay."

The result was announced—yeas 23, nays 74, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 281 Leg.]

YEAS—23

Barrasso	Grassley	Risch
Blackburn	Hawley	Rubio
Braun	Johnson	Schmitt
Budd	Kennedy	Scott (FL)
Cornyn	Lummis	Sullivan
Cotton	Mullin	Tuberville
Crapo	Paul	Vance
Cruz	Ricketts	

NAYS—74

Baldwin	Graham	Padilla
Bennet	Hagerty	Peters
Blumenthal	Hassan	Reed
Booker	Heinrich	Romney
Boozman	Hickenlooper	Rosen
Britt	Hirono	Rounds
Brown	Hoeven	Sanders
Butler	Hyde-Smith	Schatz
Cantwell	Kaine	Schumer
Capito	Kelly	Shaheen
Cardin	King	Sinema
Carper	Klobuchar	Smith
Casey	Lankford	Stabenow
Cassidy	Lujan	Tester
Collins	Manchin	Thune
Coons	Markey	Van Hollen
Cortez Masto	Marshall	Warner
Cramer	McConnell	Warnock
Daines	Menendez	Warren
Duckworth	Merkley	Welch
Durbin	Moran	Whitehouse
Ernst	Murkowski	Wicker
Fetterman	Murphy	Wyden
Fischer	Murray	Young
Gillibrand	Ossoff	

NOT VOTING—3

Lee	Scott (SC)	Tillis
-----	------------	--------

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. CORTEZ MASTO). On this vote, the yeas are 23, the nays are 74.

Under the previous order requiring 60 votes for the adoption of this amendment, the amendment is not agreed to.

The amendment (No. 1347) was rejected.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from West Virginia.

SUPPLEMENTAL FUNDING

Mrs. CAPITO. Madam President, I rise today to address this Chamber at an increasingly important moment in our Nation's history, to discuss the national security issues that we are currently facing and the ways in which the U.S. Senate can address them.

On the floor, over the past several weeks, I have repeatedly called for American leadership in support of our allies abroad and in support of the many challenges that we face here at home. Again, today, I renew that call for American leadership and continue to stress the urgency created by the trials at hand: from the vicious, horrific attacks on our allies in Israel by Hamas to Putin's aggression we see in Europe; from North Korea's brazen nuclear posturing to Iranian militias attacking our men and women overseas in uniform; and, of course, the increasing tensions that we see in the Indo-Pacific, where China continues to threaten stability and to pursue the largest military buildup since World War II.

We are currently living in times and are tasked in making decisions that will greatly shape the world in which we and the young people here today will be living in. Our Nation is being tested. Our resolve is being tested. And a country as powerful as ours needs to show strength, clarity, and control that only the United States of America can generate.

This is something I have addressed repeatedly with my constituents across West Virginia and something that I am confident they understand and agree with. The Mountain State is incredibly patriotic. We are very proud Americans. Pride in our country and a steadfast belief in the ideals and values that we stand for are invaluable, both now and in our future. I agree with my fellow patriotic West Virginians that this is the greatest country on Earth and that the title requires us to make critical investments in both our own national security and in the security of our allies, before it is too late.

It is imperative that Americans across this country recognize this and that we come together as our adversaries attempt to turn us against one another.

I am appreciative of the Biden administration for proposing a supplemental appropriations package that addresses key areas of concern that I have talked to, but those key areas of concern that we see across our country and the world. That being said, the administration's supplemental request needs to be recognized for what it is—a request. The Senate must and will have a say in how this is formulated. The Biden administration has not shown the strength it needs to during these challenging times.

We need to unabashedly stand with Israel. We need to responsibly support



Ukraine as they further deteriorate Putin's military. They are getting back land that they lost. They are regaining it. We need to strengthen our allies and our own defense capabilities in the Indo-Pacific. And we may need to make strong changes to policies that have allowed our southern border to remain in chaos for years now. Any response from the Senate must reflect these four categories because they are directly tied to what is in the best interest of our country and our national security.

Yesterday, I participated in a Senate Appropriations hearing to examine President Biden's request. This was an important step. It allowed us to grow consensus as we move toward a supplemental that will be crafted by the Senate. I firmly believe that this was one of our most important Appropriations Committee hearings, and I congratulate the chair and the vice chair. This hearing highlighted how investments into the defense of Israel and Ukraine go a long way to strengthening our own defense capabilities and how the lack of deterrence and enforcement at our southern border is creating elevated threats to our national security.

This further underscores the importance of responsible relief efforts that need to be included in a response from the Senate. It is critical that a Senate-crafted supplemental address all four areas that I have mentioned and that we provide the tools needed for our allies to win and to strengthen our own defense capabilities, at the same time, in the process.

Israel is currently under attack by Hamas and Hezbollah and terrorists who are supported by America's most evil adversaries. American lives have been lost, and far too many innocent families have been left without a home and without their loved ones.

Ukraine is facing an unjust and unprovoked ground war, the likes of which we have not seen in generations—nor did we think we would see in this generation. Putin's aggression creates dangers all around the globe. The Ukrainian military is decimating Russia's military strength without putting one American troop in harm's way.

Additionally, funding toward Ukraine goes straight into replenishing our own stockpiles with new and more advanced weapons. These are weapons that are made in the U.S.A., for the U.S.A., some of which are made in my home State of West Virginia.

Our Indo-Pacific allies remain on heightened alert. I saw this directly when I visited the region last summer. It is irresponsible to neglect the tie between the attacks on Israel, the war in Ukraine, and the security of Taiwan and the increasing aggression from China—and on our southern border, which remains in chaos.

President Biden's policies have led to record after record of illegal crossings, with an alarming amount of encounters with individuals on our own country's Terrorist Watch List. I saw where

Secretary Mayorkas testified yesterday that 600,000 "got-aways"—we don't even count them in the over 2 million who were apprehended. This is 600,000 people who are believed to have entered our country without any interdiction at all. We don't know who these people are.

We do not just need funding for a border wall; we need substantial changes in policy, as I said earlier, that will strengthen our security and protect our homeland, which has been left under siege for far too long.

It is important that Congress and the American public recognize the importance of support across those four categories. The investments will support our own defense industrial base. It will increase the security of the United States. We will support our allies in their time of need, and, most importantly, we will keep U.S. servicemembers from fighting in these battles. Each of these categories is in the direct and best interest of the United States and the security of our homeland and the security of our allies.

There is no doubt that now is the time to act. If we fail to meet our obligations in any of the four areas, we weaken the overall impact of all of them. I am confident in the ability of this Chamber to craft a supplemental that meets the growing and urgent national security needs of our country and our world.

The time for American leadership is now.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nebraska.

ISRAEL

Mrs. FISCHER. Madam President, we have heard story after story this past month about Hamas's brutal ground attacks on Israel. Hamas militants murdered Israelis and Americans alike as they stormed places, from border towns to music festivals. Hamas didn't just attack from the ground; they continue to rain rockets on Israel. These rockets have destroyed people's homes, ruptured their livelihoods, and taken their lives.

Throughout this conflict, Israel's Iron Dome defense system has played a crucial role. The Iron Dome acts as a shield, detecting rockets and firing missiles to intercept them before they hit the ground.

The United States has stood by Israel—our closest ally in the Middle East—since the country's inception. We have always pledged our support in times of crisis. So it is critical that my colleagues and I on the Senate Appropriations Committee work together to ensure that Israel receives the defensive and offensive capabilities that it has requested from the United States. That includes replenishing the Iron Dome system so that Israel is able to protect its people from rocket attacks by terrorist groups. It includes replenishing Israel's David's Sling system and investing in the development of the Iron Beam system. These defensive systems set Israel up for an effective

response to the havoc that Hamas and Hezbollah continue to wreak.

We must provide Israel with the time and resources its government needs to eliminate those threats. But as we consider the aid we will provide to Israel, we also need to consider the question, how do we better position the United States to support our allies as well as bolster our own defense systems amid the escalating global threats?

A few days after the heinous attacks on Israel, a bipartisan, bicameral congressional commission released its report on the strategic posture of the United States. This report, based on the consensus of respected national security experts from across the political spectrum, concluded that the United States will be woefully underprepared for the threats we are facing.

Our two peer nuclear adversaries, Russia and China, have dramatically expanded their nuclear forces over the decades. They continue to develop novel nuclear weapons and delivery systems. Meanwhile, the United States is barely keeping up with modernizing our nuclear forces.

The report emphasized the need to grow our nuclear and conventional forces and, above all else, to expand our production capability, including our workforce, supply chain, and infrastructure.

As Senators, we regularly receive briefings and intelligence reports that clearly outline the threats we face from actors like Russia and China. I have often said that if the American people had access to more of this information themselves, they would better understand the nature and the severity of the threats we face. Investment in national security would move to the top of their priority list.

These events—the release of a disquieting defense report and the assault against our ally Israel—should serve as a wake-up call for the United States of America. We must expand our production capacity to meet the needs of our country. If we don't expand our production capacity, we also won't be able to support our allies and our partners or supply them with the lethal aid they desperately need.

Building out our capacity so we can meet future threats—that is going to take time, and it is going to take resources. But we can start now, and we can start by making targeted investments in munitions production.

The administration's supplemental request includes \$25 billion just to replenish our own weapons stockpiles and expand the critical munition production capacity—initiatives that, frankly, should have already begun. Including this funding in the supplemental will be a step in the right direction.

The supplemental request must bring together our goals of strengthening our own military readiness, supporting our troops in Europe and the Middle East, and providing our allies and our partners with lethal aid. I look forward to

working with my colleagues to ensure that the supplemental includes these priorities.

We have been asleep to changes in the global threat environment for too long, and now is the time to wake up.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota.

SUPPLEMENTAL FUNDING

Mr. HOEVEN. Madam President, yesterday, the Senate Appropriations Committee heard from the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of State about the administration's request for supplemental appropriations. We heard about a wide range of threats to the national security and the national interests of the American people.

Now, I believe that we need to support Israel, our staunch ally. We see the Israelis fighting for their very existence. They need our help, and they need it now. I believe this includes not only military assistance but also standing against Iran. Various attacks have been launched at U.S. forces across the Middle East since October 7, and they have been launched at the behest of Iran—we know that—and we must make it clear to Iran that there are consequences for attacking U.S. forces.

In addition to support for Israel, I also recognize that we need to support Ukraine. We know from history that tyrants like Putin do not stop. They must be stopped. And as we support Ukraine, we need a strategy for victory to end this war, not to have a continued stalemate. Ukraine does not want the war to drag on, and neither do we. So I will continue to press the Defense Department, as I did yesterday with the Secretary of Defense, to ensure that we are on a path to win, that Ukraine is on a path to win and end the conflict, not to have an ongoing war.

So we need to support Israel, and we need to support Ukraine. But, at the same time, enhancing our national security means we also need to secure the homeland, and that means securing our southern border.

Border security is national security—I will repeat that: Border security is national security. But this administration, the Biden administration, does not have a plan in place to secure the border. They are doing just the opposite. We have an open border—an open border at a time when we are concerned about attacks from terrorists.

Last month, we had a record 270,000 illegal encounters at the southern border. Last year, we had 2.5 million illegal encounters—also a record. That includes 169 individuals who are on the Terrorist Watchlist. I am sure our adversaries are very much aware of this vulnerability.

The supplemental calls for funding to support “border security.” This administration's definition of “border security” is processing migrants who illegally come across the southern border and then providing them with housing, transportation, and other services once

they enter the United States. That will only encourage more illegal immigration when we should be making every effort to get the border under control.

The keys to securing the border and stopping the illegal crossings at our southern border are simple, and we know what they are. The solutions are there, but the administration won't apply them. And we know—we are not guessing at this—because the last administration put these in place, and they worked. They are reinstating the Migrant Protection Protocols, meaning the “Remain in Mexico” policy, and enforcing the safe third country agreements. They work. We know they work. We have seen them work. The Biden administration has those tools, but they won't use them. They won't enforce the law. As a result, we have an open border, with 270,000 illegal encounters last month, 2.5 million last year, and 169 people encountered who are on the Terrorist Watchlist.

How many came across who are on the Terrorist Watchlist whom we don't know about—the “got-aways”—at a time when we are worried about the possibility of there being a terrorist attack in our country? What is going on?

We need to also recontinue the construction of the border wall so that the CBP can truly control this border. It is way past time to get this done. These are the things that, I think, must be included as we consider this funding. We need to secure our border as well. If we are talking national security, we have to recognize that border security is a vital part of national security, and that must be part of what we include as we consider this funding. Again, I emphasize that border security is national security.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. ROSEN). The Senator from Alaska.

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Madam President, we just heard from the Senator of North Dakota talking about the imperative of ensuring that our borders are secure, particularly at the southern border.

We had an opportunity yesterday in the Senate Appropriations Committee to hear from Secretary Austin and Secretary Blinken about the administration's supplemental funding request. If there were one common thread there that was underscored over and over, it was the dire need—the immediate need—of support for our allies, our allies who are locked, really, in two existential wars that threaten both their sovereignties and their people. So the support for Israel and the support for Ukraine, in my view, is one that I shared with the two Secretaries: that they are inextricably linked and our support for both must be inextricably linked.

We have all watched with horror as Hamas has unleashed this terrorist attack on civilians, killing more than 1,400 Israelites and taking at least 240 Israelites hostage; then in Ukraine, with Russia's brutal invasion of

Ukraine homeland killing over 70,000 Ukrainians in just a hellbent mission to reclaim their old Soviet territory.

It is times like this when I think we look to the role that the United States should be playing. We are not—no, we are not—the police force for the world. We are not there to fight the wars for others. But when the world is watching democracy face direct assaults from terrorists and from authoritarian regimes, this is the time that the United States must be leading from the front. We have a responsibility to our allies, and we have a responsibility to the world at large, whether that is providing humanitarian aid, promoting stability, or lending support through the most powerful military in the world.

This is the United States. These are responsibilities that, I think, are significant, and, again, others from around the world look to us for that leadership.

Now, there are some who would suggest that we have supported Ukraine enough; that we should move and direct our attention only to our own borders; that the situation in Israel is such that we should focus exclusively there. As we heard yesterday in the Appropriations hearing, we do not have the luxury of dealing with one crisis at a time. That would certainly make things easier, but we do not have that.

So to those who would suggest that we must abandon our allies in their most desperate hour, I would remind them that this defense spending comes right back to the United States through our own defense industrial base, providing an opportunity to refresh outdated war-readiness items, making the United States stronger in return as well as providing jobs to Americans. So this is not just about providing aid to others outside our borders. This is also helping to strengthen us.

There was a comment that I had read: The United States can lead through the power of example; but in order to be most effective, we need the example of our power.

It is that industrial base that we know we have work to do there.

Then, to those who say we need to be looking at home—again, as the Senator from North Dakota mentioned—we do. We must pay attention to those who are coming across our border illegally, those who would threaten us from within. We cannot ever, ever lose sight of that obligation and the responsibility; but I think it is important to recognize that this supplemental request does include support for our Department of Homeland Security to strengthen our border. It also provides over \$1 billion toward combating fentanyl—just the devastating drug that has taken the lives of far, far, far too many Americans. So that also must be part of this.

What we are talking about with this supplemental is, effectively, four legs of a chair. Think about what makes

that chair that you are sitting in stable. You have got four pillars here. One essential imperative: We must be there to support our friends in Israel. We must be there. An imperative is to continue our support for Ukraine. We must address our southern border—an absolute imperative. Then that fourth underpinning that provides for that greater stability is the threat from the Indo-Pacific.

So I think we know that, within the contours of this package that the President has sent to us, there is room to move things around; there is room to subtract or add. But I think it is these four fundamental pillars here that are so inextricably linked that we cannot lose sight of what it means and what our role here in the United States is.

The violence that we see may be across the globe, but the eyes of the world are squarely on us. Our enemies are probing. They are waiting for our response. They want to see what the United States is capable of. Can they only do one thing at a time? Can they only do one thing? And, if they can only do one thing, who are they going to choose? Are they going to be there for their allies in words only or, when things get hot over here, are they going to walk away over there? We have seen how that failure in Afghanistan has reverberated around the world and what it has meant to our friends and allies.

I would suggest that this supplemental package is measured, and it is necessary as a strategic response. I will tell you, our opponents are praying that we fail to take this up—as, again, that balance. So we will and we should discuss and debate the contours within, but I would hope that we would stand together and unite on a package that is good, that is solid, and that is stable for our country and for our friends and allies.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Mississippi.

Mr. WICKER. Madam President, let me say that I associate myself with the remarks that were just made by the previous two speakers—the senior Senator from the State of North Dakota and the distinguished Senator from Alaska.

I rise today to follow on with the importance of national defense and, in that regard, to speak specifically about the historic Australia, United Kingdom, United States agreement known as AUKUS.

This pact, AUKUS, builds upon a bond forged during the First World War between the United States and Australia and made unshakable in the second. That bond remains strong today as we face the greatest challenge of our lifetime—the Chinese Communist Party.

The Senator from Alaska just spoke about the importance of building our defenses in the Indo-Pacific, and that is exactly what the AUKUS agreement is designed to address.

Our military leadership has made the stakes clear. The Secretary of the Air Force, Frank Kendall, recently said:

The intelligence couldn't be clearer. . . . China is preparing for a war and specifically for a war with the United States.

Now is the time for free nations across the Pacific to prepare for this sobering possibility. The AUKUS deal will help prevent that war from happening. Indeed, the AUKUS agreement is vital, but there is more work to do beyond that. We have yet to take the actions necessary to ensure that our industrial base can support both the United States and Australia.

The basic fact is this: Our defense industrial base is not where it needs to be. Workforce shortages, a shrinking base of contractors, and insufficient resources have damaged our military readiness. Year after year, we have deferred maintenance on our surface ships, even as these ships are spending more days deployed and the fleet continues to shrink. Our capabilities are stalling as we hurtle toward a window of maximum danger with the Chinese Communist Party.

The story for our submarines is no better. We are not prepared to fulfill our Navy's submarine construction and maintenance needs, let alone fulfill the prospective commitments in the critical AUKUS agreement.

Our Navy's requirement is to have 66 attack submarines at 80 percent readiness. We currently have 49 attack submarines at 67 percent readiness. Let me say that again. We need 66 attack submarines. We have only 49. They need to be at 80 percent readiness. They are only at 67 percent.

We should be building two attack submarines per year, but we are really building 1.2 attack submarines per year. The demands of the AUKUS agreement would push this requirement higher to above 2.3 attack submarines per year. We should do that, but we can't meet that challenge right now. To meet this challenge, our defense industry will need to handle more demand than ever before.

To handle this demand, our defense industry will need to reverse its current trajectory. Since the so-called peace dividend of the 1990s, we have closed two nuclear submarine repair yards and one construction yard. COVID-19 took a sledgehammer to an already declining workforce, and our government is expecting that same inexperienced workforce to meet deadlines not just on our *Virginia*-class submarines but also the critically important, nuclear-armed *Columbia*-class.

Our submarine fleet, just like our surface fleet, is still living off the Reagan-era defense buildup. Many vessels are in a deteriorating state and will soon need to be retired, but replacements are not waiting in the wings. The remaining ships will face longer deployments and fewer opportunities for maintenance. This is not a blueprint for American command of the seas, nor does it put us in a posi-

tion to provide our Australian friends the submarines which they need.

These cascading problems create what some have called a debt spiral of submarine construction and readiness. This spiral keeps us from hitting our shipbuilding targets. Moreover, today's threats mean the current targets are actually too small. China's navy is now the world's largest navy. Russia is increasing its nuclear submarine activity in the Atlantic. Keeping up with these challenges means raising our shipbuilding goals in the first place, then expanding our industrial capacity to meet them.

According to our Acting Chief of Naval Operations, *Virginia*-class construction needs to nearly double. This is the man whom we have put in charge and confirmed to let us know about the readiness of our Navy.

I am grateful for past congressional and executive branch efforts to fund this work; otherwise, we would construct fewer than one *Virginia*-class submarine each year. But even those funding increases have not matched our need. At the current rate, we will be at least nine submarines short by 2030.

Our defense policy cannot continue to hinge upon a hope and a prayer. To make good on AUKUS and stand by our friends in Australia, the administration and Congress need to make the investments necessary to improve submarine construction.

Our first step is clear. We must enact into law the nearly \$3.4 billion in submarine funding, including in the defense supplemental Congress is considering. We need every bit of this funding increased and more.

These funds will be spread throughout our industrial base in the United States—inside the United States, employing American workers. It will modernize our shipyards, accelerate maintenance on our existing submarine fleet, and put capital investments in place for future submarine components to be built in our country. They will put Americans to work, showing that economic development and national security go hand in hand.

This additional funding is a welcome first step, but we must do more to show our allies and the U.S. industry and our adversaries that we can meet the obligations of the AUKUS agreement without putting our own submarine fleet in jeopardy. We should sustain investments in our shipbuilders, public shipyards, and the nearly 16,000 suppliers across the Nation, many of them—most of them—small businesses around the Nation. This industry network supports American undersea supremacy and prevents conflicts on the seas, but it needs more long-term investment to stay afloat.

We already have some sense of what this investment should look like. I want to emphasize this. The Biden administration commissioned the "Submarine Industrial Base 2025" study to examine the best way to execute

AUKUS. From what I understand, the study will document what we already know: We need significant additional funding to fulfill Australia's needs alongside those of our fleet. But here is the problem: We commissioned the study. Inexplicably, the Biden administration has yet to let Congress actually see the specifics of the study—not Members of the Democratic leadership, not Members of the Republican leadership. Until the elected Members of the U.S. Senate and the House see this study, Congress cannot make its strongest argument for submarine investment.

I led a letter, signed by a bipartisan group of defense leaders, asking the administration to send us the study without delay. This was a bipartisan letter. Friends from both sides of the aisle joined me on that. We are an equal part of the government. We have authorized this study, and, for heaven's sake, the elected Senators and Representatives of the people need to see this.

If the President desires the same success for the AUKUS deal that many of us in Congress desire—and I believe he does, given the funding request included in the supplemental—then the administration ought to release the study promptly. They ought to release the study to us today.

This study is just one element of strengthening AUKUS. Of course, the most crucial element is increasing overall American sea power. For years, I have cast a vision for restoring American maritime supremacy, following President Reagan's own defense buildup. Again, this is not something that sprung from the brow of Senator WICKER. These are requirements given to us by the top military Navy and Marine leadership, in particular, across the Nation. AUKUS ought to be part of that buildup.

This vision will require historic investment to ensure we have the necessary shipbuilding capacity. It is not an easy task, but history suggests it would underwrite and protect American security for decades.

It will also include strengthening the U.S.-Australian alliance throughout the 21st century. This alliance is symbolized by Australian Prime Minister Albanese's travel to Washington last week. I was honored to meet with him and his team several times during that visit.

The bond between our two nations is deep and abiding. It stood the test of World War II, and it will continue to stand as we confront the challenge of Xi Jinping's communist Chinese fleet.

I can think of no action more emblematic of our bond than the AUKUS agreement, which, again, I fully support. I know the Australians do. They told me last week. They show this also by committing \$3 billion to our industrial base. The best way to honor our special relationship would be to back AUKUS with funds of our own. Australia's economy is a tenth the size of ours, and the United States should

commit a proportional investment. The current plan doesn't get us there.

We have never pursued a defense technology partnership at this scale and level of sophistication, but we have moments in our history to draw upon that inform our path forward. Since its invention in the American midcentury, our nuclear Navy has been second to none because we have never accepted anything less.

Our adversaries knew this. When Admiral Rickover, the founding father of our nuclear Navy, traveled to discuss nuclear submarines with Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev and his aides, Admiral Rickover boasted:

Although the United States is a democracy, it can act fast. . . . Can't Russia act as fast as the United States?

The answer was that Russia could not act as fast as we could. The strength of our free enterprise system, the clarity of our mission set by our Federal leaders, and our collective appreciation of the Soviet threat gave us a focus, a singular focus, and it allowed the American system to unleash our arsenal of democracy, and we prevented war with the Soviet Union by maintaining our naval supremacy. We need to unleash that arsenal again.

In the words of Admiral Rickover, "We shall let nothing deter us from building a nuclear Navy in the shortest possible time."

Once more, we cannot let anything deter our skilled shipbuilders from cutting the steel and constructing the fleet that will safeguard America for a generation to come.

We have submarines to build. Let's get to work.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic whip.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I rise to discuss the Senate's urgent need to confirm nominations of Rebecca Lutzko to be U.S. attorney for the Northern District of Ohio and April Perry to serve as U.S. attorney for the Northern District of Illinois.

On five previous occasions, I have come to the floor of the Senate to request unanimous consent to move these nominees forward. Each time, the junior Senator from Ohio has objected. He campaigned for the Senate, claiming he would be tough on crime, but now that he is here, he proudly brags that he wants to "grind the Department of Justice to a halt."

These communities desperately need these nominees in place. There are 85 U.S. attorneys across the United States. Under President Donald Trump, we approved all 85 without a record rollcall—voice vote. It was the understanding that we would voice—we would debate the issue of an attorney general. When it came to the U.S. attorneys in individual cities and States, it was too important for us to slow these down with additional procedural requirements on the floor. And so we

do background checks on these U.S. attorney nominees on a bipartisan basis. And once they clear, we add them to the calendar. That is when the junior Senator from Ohio stepped in and decided he would try to stop the process.

How important is the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Ohio that he is holding up? The entire Nation has been impacted by the opioid epidemic, but Ohio has been especially hard-hit.

In recent years, fentanyl has been involved in 80 percent of unintentional drug overdose deaths within the State of Ohio. Last year, Federal law enforcement officials and local partners in Ohio seized over 87,000 fentanyl-laced tablets in a span of less than 4 months. And over the course of 1 year, from April 2022 to April 2023, more than 5,000 Ohioans lost their lives to drug overdoses—5,000. Let that sink in.

On average, every day, 14 Ohio families lose a loved one to drugs. How important is it to have a U.S. attorney in Ohio—and in Illinois—working on this drug crisis that claims so many lives every single day? Can we really make an excuse that we have some political petulance at work on the floor of the Senate that stops us from putting a prosecutor in place to stop this drug trafficking?

The U.S. attorney for the Northern District of Ohio plays a significant role in holding drug traffickers accountable. Last month, the office secured a 320-month sentence for a Toledo-based man who was a local drug distributor for the Sinaloa Cartel and had helped traffic fentanyl, heroin, cocaine, and methamphetamine into the State of Ohio. In addition, Federal prosecutors found this defendant engaged in sex trafficking and secured a 140-month sentence after he was convicted.

Notably, the U.S. Attorney's Office coordinated this with both the Toledo Metro Drug Task Force and the Toledo Human Trafficking and Child Exploitation Task Force. That is what an efficient U.S. Attorney's Office does to keep the people of Ohio and Illinois safe.

Why in the world would any Senator stand up and object to a U.S. attorney prosecutor who is working to stop this drug trafficking across his State?

Well, the Senator from Ohio explained it. He is upset, Madam President. He is upset that the U.S. Department of Justice, through a special counsel, would actually consider indicting the former President of the United States. And because he is upset—and he calls it weaponization—he is going to make sure that, in his own State, there is not a Federal prosecutor doing the job that should be done to stop the sale of narcotics and, in my State of Illinois, the same thing.

This is unprecedented. It has not happened in the history of the Senate. You can be upset, petulant, worried, hate it that a friend of yours in politics has been indicted, but to hold that against the people of Ohio and the families who are dying on such a regular

basis from these narcotics—that is shortsighted. That does not really reach the level that we, as Senators, should aspire to.

So, Madam President, I make the following request: I ask unanimous consent that at a time to be determined by the majority leader, with the Republican leader's consultation, the Senate proceed to executive session to consider the following nominations: Calendar Nos. 314 and 315; that there be 2 minutes for debate, equally divided in the usual form, on each nomination; that following the use or yielding back of time, the Senate proceed to vote without intervening action or debate on the nominations in the order listed; that the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate; that no further motions be in order; that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action and the Senate then resume legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Ohio.

Mr. VANCE. Madam President, reserving the right to object, the Senator from Illinois has made two comments that I would like to respond to.

First of all, I think it takes a special amount of gall to be from Joe Biden's political party and to complain about the fentanyl crisis that is ravaging not just Ohio but the entire country, because it is Joe Biden's border policies that have invited this fentanyl into our country at record levels. I heard a briefing from the Department of Homeland Security and Customs and Border Protection today that confirmed that very fact.

Second of all, the Senator said something I actually agree with: that this whole policy that I have implemented on Department of Justice nominees is unprecedented. He mentions that we have in the past in this body, before I got here, approved a number of Department of Justice nominees through unanimous consent.

What the Senator from Illinois doesn't mention is that, in that time, when these nominations sailed through unanimous consent, the Department of Justice was not trying to throw the political rival of the President of the United States in prison.

I object to this because we are living in a banana republic where the President is using his Department of Justice to go after his chief political rival, the person he will appear on the ballot with in about a year.

If the Department of Justice will use these nominations for law instead of politics, I am happy to end this whole policy. But so long as the Department of Justice uses its nominations and uses its personnel to go after its political opponents—from the President of the United States on down—I will object. And, because of that, Madam President, I do object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, so, on average, every day, 14 Ohio families lose a loved one to drugs.

The explanation: We want to send a message to the Department of Justice. We want to keep the U.S. attorney off the job who would try to attack this narcotics epidemic.

It just doesn't make sense. How can you explain to the people of Ohio and Illinois that you are trying to get some way to make it even on political grounds at their expense? For goodness' sake, for the sake of families in your own home State, give these U.S. attorneys a chance to fight to make life safer for these families.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

AMENDMENT NO. 1249 TO AMENDMENT NO. 1092

Mr. CRUZ. Madam President, I call up my amendment No. 1249 and ask that it be reported by number.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Texas [Mr. CRUZ], for himself and Mr. CORNYN, proposes an amendment numbered 1249 to amendment No. 1092.

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: To ensure that United States diplomats and officials of the U.S. Section of the International Boundary and Water Commission are able to advance efforts seeking compliance by the United Mexican States with the 1944 Treaty on Utilization of Waters of the Colorado and Tijuana Rivers and of the Rio Grande)

At the appropriate place, insert the following:

**SEC. \_\_\_\_ . ADVANCING EFFORTS SEEKING COMPLIANCE BY MEXICO WITH TREATY ON UTILIZATION OF WATERS OF THE COLORADO AND TIJUANA RIVERS AND OF THE RIO GRANDE.**

The Secretary of State shall use the voice, vote, diplomatic capital, and resources of the United States to ensure that United States diplomats and officials of the U.S. Section of the International Boundary and Water Commission are able to advance efforts seeking compliance by the United Mexican States with the Treaty on Utilization of Waters of the Colorado and Tijuana Rivers and of the Rio Grande, signed at Washington February 3, 1944, and to establish understandings to provide predictable and reliable future deliveries of water by the United Mexican States.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there will now be up to 2 minutes of debate, equally divided.

Mr. CRUZ. Madam President, this is an amendment that should be a simple and bipartisan, commonsense amendment.

Under a treaty in 1944, Mexico is obliged to provide 350,000 acre-feet of water per year to the Rio Grande Valley. Farmers in the Rio Grande Valley are facing drought right now, and Mexico has been slow in meeting its treaty commitments. This amendment simply instructs the water negotiators to press Mexico to meet its treaty agreements and provide the water that is owed.

I would note that the language of this amendment was worked out in a

bipartisan manner and was cleared by both Democrats and Republicans on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. This language was also worked out directly with the negotiators of the International Boundary and Water Commission. It is designed not to negatively impact any other State but to instruct States to urge Mexico to meet its treaty commitments so that farmers who need water can get the water they need.

I urge Members on both sides of the aisle to support the amendment.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. We yield back our time.

VOTE ON AMENDMENT NO. 1249

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the amendment.

Mr. CRUZ. 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 senior assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Utah (Mr. LEE), the Senator from South Carolina (Mr. SCOTT), and the Senator from North Carolina (Mr. TILLIS).

Further, if present and voting: the Senator from North Carolina (Mr. TILLIS) would have voted "yea."

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. BALDWIN). Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote or change their vote?

The result was announced—yeas 52, nays 45, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 282 Leg.]

**YEAS—52**

Barrasso	Grassley	Paul
Blackburn	Hagerty	Ricketts
Boozman	Hawley	Risch
Braun	Hoeben	Romney
Britt	Hyde-Smith	Rounds
Budd	Johnson	Rubio
Capito	Kaine	Schmitt
Cassidy	Kennedy	Scott (FL)
Collins	King	Sinema
Cornyn	Lankford	Sullivan
Cotton	Lummis	Tester
Cramer	Manchin	Thune
Crapo	Marshall	Tuberville
Cruz	McConnell	Vance
Daines	Moran	Wicker
Ernst	Mullin	Young
Fischer	Murkowski	
Graham	Osoff	

**NAYS—45**

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

**NOT VOTING—3**

Lee	Scott (SC)	Tillis
-----	------------	--------

The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 52, the nays are 45.



Under the previous order requiring 60 votes for the adoption of this amendment, the amendment is not agreed to.

The amendment (No. 1249) was rejected.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The junior Senator from Kentucky.

AMENDMENT NO. 1121 TO AMENDMENT NO. 1092.  
(Purpose: To require congressional review of certain agency rulemaking)

Mr. PAUL. Madam President, I call up my amendment, No. 1121, and ask that it be reported by number.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:  
The Senator from Kentucky [Mr. PAUL], for Mr. LEE, proposes an amendment numbered 1121 to amendment No. 1092.

(The amendment is printed in the RECORD of September 12, 2023, under "Text of Amendments.")

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there will now be up to 2 minutes of debate equally divided.

The junior Senator from Kentucky.

Mr. PAUL. Madam President, our Declaration of Independence asserts that governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed. While voters may elect Members of Congress, Americans are increasingly governed by bureaucrats they do not know, will never meet, and cannot hold accountable.

In 2022, the Biden administration imposed \$117.1 billion in regulatory costs on the American people. Unelected, unknown, and unaccountable bureaucrats should not unilaterally develop the most significant public policies that impose costly burdens on American families and businesses.

To restore republican accountability to our government, Senator LEE and I propose that we adopt as an amendment a bill that I have introduced for several years called the REINS Act. The REINS Act would require Congress to affirmatively approve every new major rule proposed by the executive branch before it is permitted to become effective.

By passing the REINS Act, the American people, through their elected officials, will reclaim the ability to prevent unnecessary government interference in everyday life.

I ask for a "yes" vote.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The junior Senator from Michigan.

Mr. PETERS. Madam President, this amendment would prevent Federal Agencies from effectively serving the American people. It would weaken the government's ability to enact key health and safety standards. It would endanger a range of public protections for the environment, American workers, and people with disabilities. It would stifle innovation for emerging technologies, such as self-driving cars, artificial intelligence, and other tools that will help carry our country forward.

I urge my colleagues to join me in voting no on this amendment.

VOTE ON AMENDMENT NO. 1121

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question now occurs on agreeing to amendment No. 1121.

Mrs. FISCHER. 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. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Utah (Mr. LEE), the Senator from South Carolina (Mr. SCOTT), and the Senator from North Carolina (Mr. TILLIS).

Further, if present and voting: the Senator from North Carolina (Mr. TILLIS) would have voted "nay" and the Senator from Utah (Mr. LEE) would have voted "yea."

The result was announced—yeas 46, nays 51, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 283 Leg.]

YEAS—46

Barrasso	Fischer	Paul
Blackburn	Graham	Ricketts
Boozman	Grassley	Risch
Braun	Hagerty	Romney
Britt	Hawley	Rounds
Budd	Hoeven	Rubio
Capito	Hyde-Smith	Schmitt
Cassidy	Johnson	Scott (FL)
Collins	Kennedy	Sullivan
Cornyn	Lankford	Thune
Cotton	Lummis	Tuberville
Cramer	Marshall	Vance
Crapo	McConnell	Wicker
Cruz	Moran	Young
Daines	Mullin	
Ernst	Murkowski	

NAYS—51

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

NOT VOTING—3

Lee Scott (SC) Tillis

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. BUTLER). On this vote, the yeas are 46, the nays are 51.

Under the previous order requiring 60 votes for the adoption of this amendment, the amendment is not agreed to.

The amendment (No. 1121) was rejected.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the 60-affirmative vote threshold for the adoption of the substitute amendment, No. 1092, as amended, be withdrawn.

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

Mr. SCHUMER. I know of no further debate on the substitute amendment.

VOTE ON AMENDMENT NO. 1092

The PRESIDING OFFICER. If there is no further debate, the question is on

agreeing to the amendment, No. 1092, as amended.

The amendment (No. 1092) in the nature of a substitute, as amended, was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I am proud to say that today the Senate becomes the first Chamber in Congress to pass bipartisan, responsible appropriations bills: MILCON-VA, Agriculture, and Transportation-HUD. These bipartisan bills deliver big wins for America's farmers, for our infrastructure, for housing, and for our military bases and veterans and more. And passing these bills affirms what I have said all year long: The only way—the only way—to get things done in divided government is bipartisanship.

I hope the Senate's success today shows Speaker JOHNSON and House Republicans that bipartisanship is the way to go. The American people won't support futile exercise of passing partisan, extremist legislation that has no chance of becoming law, which is what the House is doing right now. Their appropriations bills, A, are loaded with poison pills that they know are not going to be accepted in this Chamber or by Democrats in their Chamber, and they make cuts in the budget that go against the agreement we made during the debt ceiling.

I told Speaker JOHNSON last week that if we can figure out how to work on appropriations together, we can get good things done for the country, which is what both sides, I am proud to say, in the Senate want to do. I urged Speaker JOHNSON not to repeat the mistakes of Speaker MCCARTHY's team, who pushed party-line funding bills that went way below the agreement from June, without input from Democrats. Only—only—bipartisan appropriation bills will be able to fully fund the government.

I want to recognize my colleague. Chair PATTY MURRAY has done excellent work in her first year as chair of the Appropriations Committee. She has been outstanding. I also wish to thank Vice Chair SUSAN COLLINS for her terrific work, as well as all the appropriators on both sides of the aisle.

Pursuing bipartisanship isn't always easy. Most of the time, it is difficult—more difficult now than ever. But if you stick with it, we can do it. And we have stuck with it, and we have done it. Thanks to both sides, we are reaching a good outcome for the country.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, I want to thank everyone who has worked with me and the senior Senator from Maine to get our bipartisan spending package here.

Over the last few days, we have had a truly robust amendment process and considered 40 amendments, and this vote is now our chance to get Congress back on track so that we can fund our



government in a bipartisan way, avoid another massive, end-of-the-year omnibus, and address pressing issues like aid to our allies, disaster relief, childcare prices, and more.

By passing this bill today, we can send a crucial message to the American people and the world that, yes, Democrats and Republicans can work together; and, yes, the United States is still strong and still responsive to the challenges before us.

So I urge everyone who wants to avoid another year-end omnibus, everyone who has worked with us to put this package together, to vote with us to pass it. Let's get the job done.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

Ms. COLLINS. Madam President, the Senate is about to cast its vote—a key vote—on passage of the first package of fiscal year 2024 appropriations bills. They include the Military Construction-VA bill, the Agriculture and FDA legislation, and the Transportation and Housing and Urban Development appropriations.

I want to thank everyone involved for their cooperation for getting us to the point of passing this significant package.

First, let me thank Chair MURRAY for her strong, persistent, and dedicated leadership.

The support of Leaders MCCONNELL and THUNE and Leader SCHUMER were also absolutely essential.

I want to express my thanks to our hard-working staff, led by Betsy McDonnell and Evan Schatz.

We have a great Republican team on the Appropriations Committee. And I want to thank all of them for working with their Democratic counterparts to bring about truly bipartisan bills. Particularly, I want to thank on the Agriculture Subcommittee, the chairman, Senator HEINRICH, and the ranking member, Senator HOEVEN.

I want to thank my Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Committee, Senator MURRAY, for playing a double role there, as well as Senator BOOZMAN.

And on the Transportation-HUD Subcommittee—a subcommittee I chaired for many years and was ranking member on—I want to thank Senator SCHATZ and Senator HYDE-SMITH. They all worked incredibly hard.

After working for weeks with our colleagues, we considered 40 amendments to these three bills. All three of these bills passed the Appropriations Committee unanimously this past summer. And I appreciate the hard work of every single one of our members.

Giving Senators a voice in funding decisions through a robust committee and floor process was an early goal that Chair MURRAY and I established. It guided our process as the committee approved all 12 of the appropriations bills by the end of July for the first time in 5 years. It also has guided our process on the Senate floor. Well, it

was certainly not easy and certainly took far longer than either the chair or I would have liked. The amendment process allowed for Senators of both parties to fully debate these bills and be heard.

I look forward to working with Chair MURRAY and her colleagues to build on this progress by continuing to process our committee-approved appropriations bills on the Senate floor.

I urge my colleagues to join me in voting for this important legislative package that honors and serves our Nation's veterans, supports our farmers, ranchers, and rural communities, and improves transportation infrastructure and housing opportunities all across our great country.

I urge a ye vote on the bill.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will read the title of the bill for the third time.

The amendments were ordered to be engrossed and the bill to be read a third time.

The bill was read the third time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The bill having been read the third time, the question is, Shall the bill, as amended, pass?

Mrs. MURRAY. 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 bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Utah (Mr. LEE), the Senator from South Carolina (Mr. SCOTT), and the Senator from North Carolina (Mr. TILLIS).

Further, if present and voting: the Senator from North Carolina (Mr. TILLIS) would have voted "yea" and the Senator from Utah (Mr. LEE) would have voted "nay."

The result was announced—yeas 82, nays 15, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 284 Leg.]

YEAS—82

Baldwin	Grassley	Peters
Bennet	Hagerty	Reed
Blackburn	Hassan	Romney
Blumenthal	Heinrich	Rosen
Booker	Hickenlooper	Rounds
Boozman	Hirono	Rubio
Britt	Hoeven	Sanders
Brown	Hyde-Smith	Schatz
Butler	Kaine	Schumer
Cantwell	Kelly	Shaheen
Capito	Kennedy	Sinema
Cardin	King	Smith
Carper	Klobuchar	Stabenow
Casey	Lankford	Sullivan
Cassidy	Lujan	Tester
Collins	Manchin	Thune
Coons	Markey	Van Hollen
Cornyn	Marshall	Vance
Cortez Masto	McConnell	Warner
Cotton	Menendez	Warnock
Cramer	Merkley	Warren
Daines	Moran	Welch
Duckworth	Mullin	Whitehouse
Durbin	Murkowski	Wicker
Fetterman	Murphy	Wyden
Fischer	Murray	Young
Gillibrand	Ossoff	
Graham	Padilla	

NAYS—15

Barrasso	Ernst	Ricketts
Braun	Hawley	Risch
Budd	Johnson	Schmitt
Crapo	Lummis	Scott (FL)
Cruz	Paul	Tuberville

NOT VOTING—3

Lee	Scott (SC)	Tillis
-----	------------	--------

The bill (H.R. 4366), as amended, was passed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. KAINE). The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, what we have just done is really important, and I want to thank everyone who helped us get here: my vice chair, the senior Senator from Maine; our subcommittee leaders, the Senators from Arkansas, New Mexico, North Dakota, Hawaii, and Mississippi; and all of our colleagues—all of our colleagues—who worked hard to craft and strengthen these bills. I want to thank Senate leadership and, of course, all of our tireless staff who have met every challenge this process has thrown at us.

Today, months of hard work paid off. We just passed a strong bipartisan spending package—the only bipartisan spending bills in Congress, by the way—and we did it with an 82-to-15 vote.

So let us be crystal clear about what that means. Unlike the funding measures we have seen pushed through the House, these are serious and reasonable bipartisan bills that can actually be signed into law.

They are the product of months of hard work, careful negotiation, and thoughtful input from Members on both sides of the aisle.

They stick to the spending levels that House Republicans and President Biden signed and negotiated and that we all passed into law this past spring.

And despite the tough funding constraints, these bills move our country forward, not back, with important investments to keep our promise to our Nation's veterans, to get Americans where they need to go safely, to increase our housing supply, address the homelessness crisis, support our farmers, our ranchers, and keep American families healthy and safe and more.

What we have done here—finding common ground to produce reasonable, bipartisan bills—is not just a template; it is the only way to get our jobs done in a divided government. There is a clear lesson from the last few months here in Congress, and it is that we must work together, not retreat to extreme partisan corners.

So let us be clear to my colleagues. We have a lot more work to do. Our mission here isn't just to send a message or pass a bill through the Senate. We have to work to get these bills signed into law. And I don't just mean these investments but crucial funding in all of our bipartisan appropriations bills.

While we may need another CR before our work is done, we absolutely have to remember: Long-term CRs are no way to govern, and they certainly

are no way to lead. When we operate under long-term CRs, our Agencies are stuck in neutral. They cannot plan for the future. They have to delay initiatives and investments. They are far less equipped to meet the pressing challenges we face. Governing by CRs hurts families who need a government that works reliably, seriously stunts our economy and American innovation, and dangerously impedes our national security.

I think we all know that our competitors across the world are not putting their budgets on autopilot. They are doing everything they can to get ahead, and they are hoping that we fall behind into the chaos of partisan infighting. We cannot let that happen. We need to pass full-year funding with the investments we need to keep the United States strong and safe and competitive—especially in a moment that truly calls for American leadership.

There is no question we have got our work cut out for us, but today, we have shown a clear roadmap for how we can get our work done. So I am talking with my vice chair about the next set of bills we will work to move in the Senate and continuing work to move a comprehensive, bipartisan supplemental funding package.

We need to start confereing our appropriations bills. That will require House Republicans to get serious about governing, to get back to the spending agreement that they negotiated and work with us to finalize these bipartisan bills. It is critical that happens.

We do not have time to waste. The clock is ticking. The American people are tired of watching Congress wait until the last second before kicking the can down the road. Our constituents do not want to see chaos. They do not want to see shutdowns or threats, and they don't want to see our country's future limited by CRs. They do want to see their elected officials roll up their sleeves, sit down at the table, and do the hard work of governing to help people and solve problems. That is what we have done today. So let's get to it, and let's get our work done.

I yield the floor.

#### BLOCK GRANT ASSISTANCE ACT OF 2023

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Committee on Appropriations is discharged from further consideration of H.R. 662, and the Senate will proceed to consideration of the bill, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 662) to amend the Disaster Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2023 to improve disaster relief funding for agricultural producers, and for other purposes.

AMENDMENT NO. 1357

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, substitute amendment No. 1357 is considered and agreed to.

The amendment (No. 1357) was agreed to.

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: In the nature of a substitute)

Strike all after the enacting clause and insert the following:

#### SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Block Grant Assistance Act of 2023”.

#### SEC. 2. DISASTER RELIEF SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2023, AMENDMENT.

Title I of the Disaster Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2023 (division N of Public Law 117-328; 136 Stat. 5201), is amended, in the matter under the heading “DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE—AGRICULTURAL PROGRAMS—PROCESSING, RESEARCH AND MARKETING—OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY”, by inserting “: *Provided further*, That the Secretary of Agriculture may provide assistance for losses described under this heading in this Act in the form of block grants to eligible States and territories” before the period at the end.

#### SEC. 3. EMERGENCY DESIGNATION.

Amounts repurposed under the amendment made by section 2 that were previously designated by the Congress as an emergency requirement pursuant to section 4001(a)(1) of S. Con. Res. 14 (117th Congress), the concurrent resolution on the budget for fiscal year 2022, and section 1(e) of H. Res. 1151 (117th Congress), as engrossed in the House of Representatives on June 8, 2022, are designated by the Congress as being for an emergency requirement pursuant to section 251(b)(2)(A)(i) of the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985 (2 U.S.C. 901(b)(2)(A)(i)).

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida.

Mr. SCOTT of Florida. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent for 4 minutes of debate, equally divided, prior to the next rollcall vote.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. SCOTT of Florida. Mr. President, as we work to get the agriculture community back on their feet, I won't stop fighting to make sure the Federal Government keeps showing up.

Following natural disasters in prior years, USDA has administered block grants to many of our States. The Block Grant Assistance Act would explicitly give USDA the authority to provide block grants as an option to States and territories to assist agricultural producers with losses due to natural disasters occurring in calendar year 2022.

Importantly, it provides streamlined relief to growers by freeing up USDA resources at State FSA offices; allowing States to allocate funds directly to growers impacted most by covered disasters; and allowing farmers to perform necessary and time-sensitive tasks on their farms without the danger of forgoing disaster aid.

This bill does not mandate States to request disaster funding through State block grants; it only opens up this option.

I have talked to many of you about this bill in the last few days, and I understand that some of my Democrat colleagues have concerns about this legislation. I want to address those concerns directly and why we are even talking about this right now.

First, this bill doesn't take anything away from anyone's State. It creates an option for block grants that help our growers and ranchers who have been impacted by disasters. Again, this bill will not negatively impact any State. I want to make sure that is clear.

I have also heard some of my colleagues say that this isn't needed because just this week, after refusing to take action for 14 months, Biden's Ag Department finally opened up the ERP portal for growers and ranchers to apply for assistance just as this was to come to a vote. Our farmers have still not received a dime.

Here is the deal: I don't trust this process—I know my constituents sure don't—and I don't think the assistance being offered is anything close to what is needed for our farmers to actually recover.

This bill helps farmers all across the country, but let me speak for Florida. We have been waiting for more than a year—14 months to be exact—and nothing was done by the Biden administration until they knew that the Senate would be voting on my bill, and it is still just an application process. I don't think anyone can blame us for feeling uneasy about this process.

If we pass this bill today, we can give certainty to growers and ranchers in all of our States that they have a reliable partner in the Federal Government to make sure they can recover from natural disasters. That seems like something we can support.

Folks across the country who put food on our tables and create jobs in our States are hurting. I have been clear to the ag community in Florida: I won't stop fighting to make sure the Federal Government keeps showing up.

This is a good bill that helps hard-working people. It has already unanimously passed in the House, and I urge all of my colleagues to support it in the Senate today.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Mexico.

Mr. HEINRICH. Mr. President, our Nation has experienced a series of recent natural disasters: the tragic Maui wildfires, flooding in Vermont and California, and the damage caused by Hurricane Idalia. Communities in my home State of New Mexico have been impacted by destructive floods and mudslides following last year's historic wildfire season.

We must get these Americans the help they need during these difficult times, and we must do it as quickly as possible. Unfortunately, this bill would do the opposite.

On Friday, the Biden administration announced that producers impacted by disasters last year are now eligible to apply for critical emergency assistance. H.R. 662 would delay that funding, essentially stopping the application process that the U.S. Department of Agriculture just got underway. In addition, the administration already has the authority under law to provide