

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

funding to States through block grants. So this bill is both counter-productive and unnecessary.

For these reasons, I would urge my colleagues to vote no.

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

The amendment was ordered to be engrossed and the bill to be read a third time.

The bill was read the third time.

VOTE ON H.R. 662

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

Mr. SCOTT of Florida. Mr. President, 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 executive clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from West Virginia (Mr. MANCHIN) is necessarily absent.

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 43, nays 53, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 285 Leg.]

YEAS—43

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

NAYS—53

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

NOT VOTING—4

Lee	Scott (SC)
Manchin	Tillis

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. OSSOFF). On this vote, the yeas are 43, the nays 53.

The 60-vote threshold having not been achieved, the bill, as amended, fails passage.

The bill (H.R. 662), as amended, was rejected.

The Senator from New Mexico.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. LUJÁN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

The Senator from Alaska.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUESTS—EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, I want to thank my colleagues for coming down here tonight. It is a very important issue that we are getting ready to talk about.

We are in a very dangerous world right now. Our country is being challenged on multiple fronts across the globe. We literally have American troops under attack in the Middle East.

As a member of the Armed Services Committee, as a U.S. Marine Corps colonel, I know—we all know here in the Senate—that America needs to have our best players, our most combat-capable leaders on the field, and, right now, that is not happening. It needs to change.

I just want to begin by saying something very clear. You are going to hear this a lot. I am as pro-life as they come. I strongly disagree with what Secretary Austin and President Biden have done with their politicization of the military on a whole host of fronts, including the abortion policy, which I think is illegal and violates the Hyde amendment.

And I have been working with many colleagues, but especially Senator TUBERVILLE from Alabama, side by side, for months, trying to get this reversed, trying to get compromises. At the same time, we have been telling the majority leader: Do your job. Do your job. Bring up nominees so we can vote on them.

Now, we have had to force them to do it. Tomorrow, we are going to be voting on the CNO of the Navy, a member of the Joint Chiefs; the Chief of Staff of the Air Force; the Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps—not because the majority leader brought them up, but because we forced them to. He needs to do his job.

But I also firmly believe that one of our most core basic principles—certainly, as Republicans—which I think in many ways distinguishes us from our colleagues on the other side of the aisle, is our serious focus on national security, readiness, a strong military, and taking care of our troops and their families.

We all know there are current holds on our military. I want the American people to know right now, 376 promotions to one-, two-, three-, and four-star generals and admirals are being held. It is estimated that, by the end of this year, 89 percent of all general offi-

cer positions in the U.S. military will be affected by the current holds from Senator TUBERVILLE. Either the members have to be forced to retire, positions not filled, in acting capacity, or will be unable to retire—this is pretty much the entire officer corps. This is hugely disruptive to readiness.

A couple of examples: 288 one- and two-star generals are being held. These are the men and women who run the military right now. We are going to talk about other places. The First Marine Expeditionary Force, the Third Marine Expeditionary Force—these are the war fighting organizations of the Marine Corps—the Seventh Fleet, which is our fighting naval force in the Taiwan Strait; the Fifth Fleet, the fighting naval force in the Middle East. It goes on and on. NATO Deputy Chairman, a three-star job, empty; Deputy U.S. CENTCOM Commander, empty. The head of the Navy nuclear program, the head of missile defense—all non-confirmed.

We have a big challenge right now. Let me be a bit more blunt on the issue of morale. The military has a huge readiness and retention problem. These holds are not helping.

As I mentioned, I am a senior colonel in the Marines. Many of the one-star and two-star who are being held right now are in my peer group. I have known these men and women for 30 years. There is growing bitterness within the ranks of our military, driven by this fact, and I want people to understand this. The men and women in the military who served our country so well for decades—probably the most combat-experienced generation since World War II—have made huge sacrifices, multiple deployments, and now their careers are being punished over a policy dispute they had nothing to do with and no power to resolve.

That is what is happening right now, and the idea that some of these officers are supposedly woke or desk jockeys is ridiculous. These are some of the most combat-experienced generals and admirals we have ever had in our country.

Finally, these holds also pose strategic risks to our force. What does that mean? We are starting to see military officers saying: Admirals and generals, I am getting out. Or they have to get out if they are going to be timed out.

We had a scandal in the U.S. Navy several years ago called the “Fat Leonard” scandal. It literally wiped out a generation of Navy officers who had Pacific experience. We do not want to be responsible for a Senate-inflicted hollowing out of our most experienced military officers, especially given how dangerous the world is right now.

So I have mentioned this before. I have worked closely with Senator TUBERVILLE for months, always defending his holds, always looking for compromise. The one we are working on now: Lift the hold on the military officers who have nothing to do with this dispute and can't resolve it anyway, and put a hold on the Under Secretary