

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the Oler nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Katherine E. Oler, of the District of Columbia, to be an Associate Judge of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia for the term of fifteen years.

Mr. MCCONNELL. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY ACT

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I rise today to talk about why the funding decisions we make here in this building matter and how the Fiscal Responsibility Act spending caps will continue to hold America back, undercutting our economy, competitiveness, and future, unless the Senate can come together and take action.

The Appropriations Committee has now held nearly 40 hearings on the resources that we will need in fiscal year 2025. We have discussed exactly what our Nation needs to stay strong, safe, and competitive, and there is a big, obvious takeaway from those hearings: The FRA caps for fiscal year 2024 are already causing serious pain and serious challenges, and the caps for fiscal year 2025 are grossly inadequate.

In fiscal year 2024, the FRA froze nondefense funding while increasing defense funding by nearly 30 billion more, to say nothing of the billions in the supplemental. In fiscal year 2025, the caps mean just a 1-percent increase for nondefense and defense alike. Needless to say, that does not begin to keep pace with inflation or other rising expenses. That means net cuts in terms of real resources across the government.

Let's all remember why we have these caps in the first place. House Republicans took the debt ceiling hostage and demanded funding caps and cuts in exchange for not destroying our Nation's credit. I warned at the time that we passed the FRA—and I have warned repeatedly since—that these caps undermine our country's future in a really serious way. That is not speculation. I am speaking from experience.

Back in 2011, the last time a large group of Republicans leveraged the full faith and credit of the United States to extract spending caps under a Democratic President, we got sequestration, which both parties quickly recognized was a disaster, and we got a decade of harmful caps. The effects of that still echo today.

Nondefense funding, except veterans' medical care, is down 6 percent from 2010 when you adjust for inflation and down 14 percent when you adjust for inflation and population growth. That is not just a number on a page. That is less support for families, fewer research grants to keep us on the cutting edge, fewer officers cracking down on crime in neighborhoods. It is just so many opportunities lost, and I can't, for the life of me, understand why we would want to go through something like that again.

Now, I am glad so many of my Republican colleagues are in strong agreement, at least when it comes to defense, but every Senator calling to boost defense spending alone is seriously missing the point. And any Senator who thinks I will let us leave non-defense spending behind is seriously misreading the situation. There is a simple reason I pushed for the principle of parity when I struck the budget deal that ended the worst of sequestration with Paul Ryan in 2013, and it still applies today.

Nondefense investments matter to families. They matter to our economy, our competitiveness, our future, and, yes, it matters to national security. I can't emphasize that enough.

Here in Washington, DC, we call it nondefense discretionary spending, or NDD—very wonky. Back home, we call it making sure parents have childcare, helping families put food on the table, supporting quality affordable healthcare in our communities, fixing our roads. Back home, we call it clean water, safe food, fresh air, affordable housing.

When air traffic controllers keep our planes operating safely, that is NDD. When the FDA pulls an unsafe product off the shelf, that is NDD. When kids go to a public school or get a Pell grant that makes college possible for them, that is NDD. NIH researchers working to cure cancer, weather forecasters warning us of a disaster, agents cracking down on the flow of fentanyl and going after criminal organizations, fighting wildfires, enforcing sanctions against Russia, negotiating tough agreements with allies and adversaries alike—that is NDD.

So I hope I have made my point. What we are talking about here is spending that is, by no stretch of the imagination, the largest portion of our budget—just about one-eighth of our total budget. But that makes a real tangible difference in family's lives and our country's safety and success every single day.

We are also talking about things Americans overwhelmingly support.

Seriously, I encourage my colleagues to go ask your constituents in any part of this country—conservative, liberal, Washington to Kentucky: Do you care if you have clean water? Do you care if your kids get sick from foodborne illness? Do you want to wait longer when you call the Social Security office, if you can reach anyone at all? Do you want someone making sure that the bridges that you drive across are safe? Do you want to stall our progress on cures and treatments for cancer or Alzheimer's or other deadly diseases?

And yet NDD has been consistently underfunded, and it is a constant target for cuts by House Republicans, as we are now seeing.

I am here to say: Enough is enough. If we keep cutting and stretching and shortchanging those programs, something is going to snap—something important.

But more cuts are exactly what a 1-percent cap actually means—not treading water, not keeping up. A 1-percent cap means pain.

If we let families down, that means we let our competitors get ahead. It means we leave our Nation vulnerable. That is not politics; it is cold, hard math. One percent is not enough to keep up with rising costs, growing needs, and new challenges.

The issue here isn't whether we can make more tough choices. It is whether we are going to be honest about the tough realities of a 1-percent cap. There are so many priorities lawmakers on both sides of the aisle care about that just can't happen with a 1-percent increase.

Here is what 1 percent means in practice: 1 percent means letting families go hungry. WIC, a literal lifeline for nearly 7 million mothers and babies is going to need a nearly 10-percent increase next year. Anything less will force us to choose which moms, which babies are getting the food they need and which are getting put on a wait list. Think about that.

One percent means we are letting rural families lose their homes. We need a 5-percent increase for rural rental assistance alone. Falling short means thousands of rural families will lose assistance and may face eviction.

How is that right?

One percent means losing law enforcement. The FBI already can't fill about a thousand open positions because of what happened in fiscal year 2024. At 1 percent, in fiscal year 2025, it would have to trim another 1,300 positions. That is far fewer agents going after transnational criminal organizations, fentanyl traffickers, violent crime, cyber attackers, and more.

Meanwhile, DOJ would have to lose or freeze nearly 5,000 positions. We are talking about attorneys and agents that defend our civil rights, prosecute dangerous criminals, and keep our Nation safe.

Do Republicans really want to defund law enforcement?

One percent means slashing pay for our Federal firefighters. Any family

whose house has been threatened by one of the many devastating wildfires in recent years will tell you firefighters are not an optional expense. But over a quarter of the Forest Service's wildland firefighting jobs are vacant. And unless we provide funding to save our firefighters from a pay cut, those vacancies will get worse.

This is the very definition of a "must-have," not a "nice-to-have," kind of investment.

One percent means we are blunting momentum for lifesaving biomedical breakthroughs.

NIH is looking at a \$280 million shortfall as Cures Act funding tapers off. That absolutely cannot be filled with a 1-percent bump. And that is on top of the \$678 million in NIH Cures Act funding that already expired last year that we couldn't make up for because of the caps.

There are countless patients who would be devastated to hear that totally arbitrary spending caps are stifling research that could save their lives.

But that is barely scratching the surface. One percent means no major new funding for the opioid or mental health crisis.

It means fewer kids in Head Start, which is facing now a severe staffing shortage.

It means long waiting times for seniors and people with disabilities who need help with their Social Security benefits.

It means laying off meat inspectors and consumer product safety workers.

And let's not forget that 1 percent means we are giving up ground to our competitors and adversaries in just about every way.

It means delaying NASA missions.

It means letting adversarial governments fill the void in global politics and influence, failing to counter an aggressive Putin in Russia and allowing partners to succumb to economic coercion from Beijing and withdrawing from the world stage to let competitors set the international norms that impact our safety and economic strength.

It means falling way behind on innovation, which we should be leading the way.

Do you know how much the Chinese government is increasing their research and development spending this year? It's 10 percent—10 percent.

How do we expect to compete at 1?

You know, we authorized some truly transformative programs and funding levels in the bipartisan Chips and Science Act, but that doesn't matter if we don't provide bipartisan investments that live up to those ambitions.

The FRA has already forced us to fall short; and without more nondefense funding, it will force us to fall behind the Chinese government.

I have covered a lot, but here is the rub: This is not even close to a comprehensive list of what those spending caps mean for our country.

I cannot emphasize enough that under the caps for nondefense, every-

thing struggles to keep up with rising costs. Programs that our kids, the future of our country, depend on—public schools, public health, nutrition assistance, to name a few—cannot get by on 1 percent.

Programs that keep our economy strong and growing—childcare, training for our workers, support for small business and for farmers, cutting-edge research—can't get by on 1 percent.

Programs that help communities thrive—affordable housing, transportation, broadband, and, of course, support for our Tribes—cannot get by on 1 percent.

Programs that keep us safe—diplomacy, Border Patrol, food inspectors, law enforcement—cannot get by on 1 percent.

It is entirely self-defeating to box our future in, leave our families behind, and give our adversaries an opening to charge ahead.

Congress needs to decide, Do we want a stronger America?

House Republicans are saying "no" and writing fiscal year 2025 bills that ignore the deals that they negotiated in favor of devastating cuts to non-defense.

The Senate, however, needs to come together and chart a different path in a bipartisan way that says "yes" to a stronger America.

So, to me, the path for the Senate is clear: We have got to provide additional resources beyond the caps to address major shortfalls and new challenges.

I appreciate my colleagues who want to do more for defense. I also think the defense cap is too low. But I feel strongly that that increase cannot happen in a vacuum. We have to do more for nondefense as well.

Parity is the order of the day because investments in our families, in our economy, in communities' safety and success are no less important than investments at the Pentagon. They are, actually, in fact, connected. After all, a new submarine isn't just built with money; it is actually built by people who need schools and childcare for their kids, roads and public transportation to get to work, safe food and water, workforce training programs so they can take on new roles in advanced manufacturing, and more.

So let me be clear: I will not let us boost defense alone while leaving families and our country's future in the dust. That is a core principle for me. It is who I am.

Now, I want you to know I am not asking for the moon here. Parity for defense and nondefense is not new or radical; it was the norm. I should know.

When I sat down across from Paul Ryan—a principled conservative—to reach a deal that undid the worst of sequestration a decade ago, we didn't agree on everything. In fact, we didn't agree on a lot of things. Family and football and fishing was all we agreed to start with. That is where we started.

But we both understood the only way we were going to reach a deal, undo massive cuts, and help folks back home was by working together and producing a deal that may not be what we would have written alone but addressed concerns that both of us brought to the table.

A cornerstone of that agreement—and of numerous agreements since—was parity for defense and nondefense.

Parity is not new. It is not some antiquated concept either; it is as relevant today as ever, because I think we can all agree that making sure planes fly safely overhead, making sure we invest in R&D as the Chinese government now spends 10 percent more, making sure our kids don't get hungry is not some second order priority.

So we cannot shortchange either side of the ledger. We increased defense funding by tens of billions this year while nondefense was held flat; and I worked extremely hard alongside my colleagues to ensure we delivered on a \$95 billion national security supplemental to address the major global threats we are facing.

In fiscal year 2025, I cannot accept net cuts in real resources to NDD, which is what a 1-percent increase means.

Our duty to our constituents is to pass bills that make their lives better: to provide funds that let us actually meet this moment, support families, protect our Nation, and stay ahead of our competitors.

That will require more resources for nondefense. And I am ready to work with my colleagues to provide the same for defense.

Last year, we were able to produce strong, bipartisan bills in committee. I am very hopeful we are going to be able to do the same again this year.

I plan to hold our first fiscal year 2025 markup the week we return from the Fourth of July recess. And I look forward to working with all of my colleagues to make sure we meet this moment, take the concerns that we are hearing back home, and write and pass strong, bipartisan Senate Appropriations bills.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The minority whip.

MR. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the following Senators be allowed to speak prior to the scheduled rollcall votes: Myself for up to 10 minutes, Senator CORNYN for up to 15 minutes, and Senator MERKLEY for up to 5 minutes.

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

SENATE LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

MR. THUNE. Mr. President, with election day approaching in less than 5 months, Democrats are getting understandably concerned.

After all, a historic 3-year-plus border crisis and a historic 3-year-plus inflation crisis are not exactly an ideal record on which to run. And so Democrats have been doing what they can