

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

The senior Senator from Michigan.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Ms. STABENOW. Madam President, on behalf of the majority leader, I ask that the Chair execute the order of July 23, 2024, with respect to the Taylor nomination.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The bill clerk read the nomination of Margaret L. Taylor, of Maryland, to be Legal Adviser of the Department of State.

VOTE ON TAYLOR NOMINATION

Ms. STABENOW. 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. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Arizona (Ms. SINEMA) and the Senator from Oregon (Mr. WYDEN) are necessarily absent.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from South Carolina (Mr. GRAHAM), the Senator from South Dakota (Mr. ROUNDS), the Senator from North Carolina (Mr. TILLIS), and the Senator from Ohio (Mr. VANCE).

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

The result was announced—yeas 50, nays 44, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 246 Ex.]

YEAS—50

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

NAYS—44

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

NOT VOTING—6

Graham	Sinema	Vance
Rounds	Tillis	Wyden

The nomination was confirmed.

(Ms. BUTLER assumed the Chair.)

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

The Senator from Vermont.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. WELCH. Madam President, climate change, as we all know, has caused major disasters all across America, from Vermont's catastrophic flooding in July of 2023 and, again, exactly a year later, this past July, to the devastating wildfires in Hawaii, to hurricanes in Texas, floods in San Diego and southern Minnesota, tornadoes from Mississippi to New York. And just this week, Louisiana was hit by a hurricane, and North Carolina was hit by historic flash flooding. And North Carolina, earlier this week, saw 18—18—inches of rain in 12 hours, what the National Weather Service in Wilmington called a once-in-a-1,000-year event. That is not normal.

From 2023 to 2024, there were 48 climate disasters that incurred losses of billions of dollars and more. These events were devastating for the communities: many demolished homes and businesses, washed away roads, destroyed fields and barns, and loss of life.

And while we can count 48 from NOAA today, we know that this list will only grow as storm damage is assessed from Vermont and Louisiana and North Carolina.

Disasters literally from coast to coast hit the United States—35 severe storms; 4 floods, including Vermont's flooding; 3 tropical cyclones; 3 winter storms; 2 wildfire events; and 1 drought. This is just going on and on and on, and it is not even the full picture. We have had 125 from the same period.

I have shared the pain and anguish of Vermont's homeowners, farms, and businesses. For over 430 days, they have waited for Congress to act when it comes to supplemental relief for the Disaster Relief Fund. Vermonters need that help, as do folks in Hawaii, as do folks in North Carolina.

There is bipartisan support for this effort because it is obviously a bipartisan crisis. These weather events don't have any favorites. Whether you are in a red State or a blue State means nothing; it is the weather, and it will do what the weather decides to do.

This week, I joined with Senator BRIAN SCHATZ of Hawaii and our colleagues from Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, California, and Alaska in sending a letter to Senate leadership urging them to quickly pass disaster funding so our States can recover. We have a solid bipartisan group, and regrettably it is a growing group. The need is immense.

So we do need more financial support immediately through FEMA's Disaster Relief Fund. It is depleted, and it needs to be replenished.

One critically important program for long-term disaster recovery is through our Department of Transportation's disaster relief program. Senator SANDERS and I have seen the damage in Vermont. We have suffered brutal damage to our transit system. More than 6,000 tons of debris were removed by the State of Vermont, 409 miles of rail have been closed, 149 miles of rail trail closed, 64 bridges in Vermont closed, and 46 State roads were closed. As of last fall, Vermont incurred \$150 million in damages related to transportation alone. And then more flooding came.

Both Senator SANDERS and I have traveled across Vermont to talk with community leaders about the financial stress they face right now. We have also talked with my colleagues about the needs of our community leaders in their States and their needs as they rebuild and recover and plan for the next climate disaster. The reality is, the numbers don't paint the full picture. We do need that relief to get people moving ahead. But when your town and your street and your home and your lives, the lives of the people you represent, are so devastated, you really can't articulate a number. It doesn't capture it.

We need the Disaster Relief Fund replenished. We need transportation funding to reimburse our State governments for the costs they pay up front when a disaster hits. We need more money for the highway emergency fund. Our need is extreme. Our States and communities cannot do this alone, and that is no less true for every other colleague's State than it is for Vermont.

Today, I would also like to voice Vermonters' continued frustration—this is on a slightly different topic but related to the flooding—that 14 months after our post office was destroyed in Montpelier, the capital of the State of Vermont, we still don't have a fully functional post office.

After the July 23 floods, the Postal Service shifted its Montpelier Post Office operations to a series of temporary locations, and that included parked trucks miles away from where the old post office was. These were unsafe for the Postal Service workers, and they failed to ensure anything close to reliable service. There was no air-conditioning in the summer months or heat in the fall and no lighting. People literally were using like their iPhones to try to read what the labels were. That is unacceptable.

After a public outcry and demands from Senator SANDERS and me and our congressional colleague, Congresswomen Balint, the UPS moved postal operations to another temporary location. We thought that was progress when the Postal Service signed the new lease downtown in April, and they said it would be open by summer. It is September. The location is still not open,

and, reportedly, little progress has been made.

The capital city of the State of Vermont has not had a functioning post office for over a year. It is not a distinction we value. You know, the Postal Service has an internal benchmark of restoring retail service within 180 days of a natural disaster. They are now 256 days overdue. This failure is real and has very practical impacts on our constituents. Right now, Vermonters who live in Montpelier have to drive 7 miles if they want to buy a stamp or mail a package, and it is obviously very burdensome for our businesses.

The U.S. Postal Service and the Postmaster General, Louis DeJoy—let me be frank. They have really failed to deliver. And it is shocking to me, but we have had instances where Senator SANDERS and I and Congresswoman BALINT have tried to interact with the Postal Service, and he is silent, non-responsive. That is really an insult to the people of Vermont when they need this and can't even get an answer about what is going on.

So this is not your standard, run-of-the-mill management failure of the USPS. No. This is really a dereliction of duty, in my view, by Postmaster General DeJoy. He is choosing not to open a post office—a task his Agency has done thousands of times quickly in their 250-year history.

While the Postal Service may be independent, it is not without oversight. It does not have the authority to disregard the input of the public who so needs the services or congressional representatives, and it does not have the authority to act contrary to its statutory obligations.

I want to close by saying again that I stand ready and willing to work with any of my colleagues to get this disaster relief done. We cannot recover or rebuild without the Federal assistance that all of us in every State that has had a catastrophe, a weather event. We need the help, and we all have to help one another, not only for Vermont but for every community that needs help and will need help in the future.

Madam President, you know we can get this done. We have done it before for our constituents. But the delay is going on too long. It is that simple.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. SANDERS. Madam President, I am here for another reason this evening, but I wanted to concur with Senator WELCH. Obviously, we need more Federal disaster relief, we need reforms in FEMA, and we certainly need a permanent post office in Montpelier, VT. So I want to thank Senator WELCH for his work in that area.

ISRAEL

Madam President, in a few weeks' time, we will mark the 1-year anniversary of the war in the Middle East. It has been almost 1 year since Hamas's horrific terrorist rampage on October

7, which killed 1,200 innocent Israelis and took hundreds of hostages, including Americans. As I have said many times, Israel had an absolute right to defend itself and respond to the Hamas attack.

But, tragically, Prime Minister Netanyahu's extremist government has not simply waged war against Hamas; it has waged all-out war against the Palestinian people. Israel has conducted this war with little regard for innocent civilians, bombing indiscriminately, and severely restricting the humanitarian relief operation needed by desperate people.

After nearly 1 year of this carnage, out of a population of some 2.2 million people, more than 41,000 Palestinians have been killed and nearly 95,000 injured, 60 percent of whom are women, children, or elderly people. Let me repeat—60 percent of whom are women, children, or elderly people.

Netanyahu's policies have trampled on international law, made life unlivable in Gaza, and created one of the worst humanitarian disasters in modern history.

We cannot continue to turn a blind eye to the scale of the suffering caused by this all-out war against the Palestinian people—136,000 casualties, most of whom are civilians. The full toll is likely even higher, with thousands of bodies buried beneath the rubble.

Madam President, 90 percent of Gazans—90 percent of the people in Gaza—have been displaced from their homes, 1.9 million people. Many families have been displaced again and again and again, forced to uproot their lives and pick their way across a war zone with their children and what little they can carry. These are poor people going from place to place amid bombing and total destruction. When these families find, finally, a safe place to seek refuge, perhaps setting up a tent in a so-called safe zone, they are often then forced to evacuate due to renewed Israeli bombing.

Few of these people even have homes to ever return to. More than 60 percent of Gaza's housing has been damaged or destroyed, including 221,000 housing units that have been completely destroyed. Imagine—imagine—going from place to place, knowing that you are never going to be able to return to your home.

Today, as a result of the devastation of housing in Gaza, more than 1 million people are homeless. I would ask my colleagues to try to think for a moment what it means to be carrying your children from place to place in the heat, without food, without water, knowing that your home that you came from has been destroyed. That is what is going on today.

What we are witnessing now is not just the loss of human life, as severe and horrible as that is; Gaza's civilian infrastructure has been devastated, including water and sewage systems. Raw sewage runs through the streets, spreading disease. Clean water is still

in short supply. Most of the roads in Gaza are impassable, torn up by bombing and bulldozers. There is virtually no electricity right now.

But it is not just Gaza's infrastructure. The Netanyahu government has systematically—systematically—and I have talked to doctors about this—devastated the healthcare system in Gaza, knocking 19 hospitals out of service and killing more than 800 healthcare workers. So you have 95,000 people who have been injured, including a lot of children, and you have 19 hospitals that have been knocked out of service.

The World Health Organization has recorded thousands of attacks on healthcare facilities. Not surprisingly, with the collapse of the healthcare system, under the strain, diseases like hepatitis, dysentery, polio, and other infections have taken hold.

Gaza has 12 universities. Every single one of them has been bombed, as have hundreds of schools. Eighty-eight percent of all school buildings in Gaza have been damaged. Every university bombed, 88 percent of all school buildings in Gaza have been damaged, and more than 500 people have been killed while sheltering in U.N. schools.

There are many, many hundreds of thousands of children in Gaza. It is a young—the Palestinian population is by and large young, a lot of children. Virtually none of them have been in school since this war began.

As horrific and unspeakable as all of this is, there is something even worse taking place in Gaza now; and that is, as a result of Israeli restrictions on humanitarian aid, people in Gaza are now starving to death.

Leading experts from the U.N. and other aid organizations estimate that some 495,000 Palestinians—a quarter of the population—face starvation. These groups estimate that more than 50,000 children require treatment now for acute malnutrition and are at risk of starving to death—50,000 kids facing malnutrition.

And I am not a doctor, but I know enough to tell you that will impact these children for the rest of their lives. That is what childhood malnutrition does.

Malnourished women struggle to breastfeed their newborns. Formula is inaccessible; and even when available, it cannot be used without reliable sources of clean water.

According to the U.N. and virtually every humanitarian organization functioning in Gaza, there is one primary reason for this starvation and suffering; and that is that Israel has severely restricted the amount of humanitarian aid, including food, water, and medical supplies that can reach the desperate people of Gaza. This is a clear violation of U.S. and international law—not just immoral, not just outrageous, but a clear violation of U.S. and international law.

Every day—every single day—the bombardment continues—bombing and shelling carried out with U.S.—provided