

Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Alaska (Mr. SULLIVAN) and the Senator from Ohio (Mr. VANCE).

The result was announced—yeas 49, nays 47, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 319 Ex.]

YEAS—49

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

NAYS—47

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

NOT VOTING—4

Manchin	Sullivan
Sinema	Vance

The nomination was confirmed.

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 action.

The majority leader.

PRESS ACT

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I thank my friend Senator WYDEN for coming to the floor to champion something I have been very supportive of and he has carried, the bipartisan PRESS Act, a bill every person in this room—whether they are Senators, journalists, citizens—should want to see become law.

No democracy can survive without a free and open and thriving press. The free press keeps governments accountable to the people, exposes abuse and wrongdoing, informs the public about what is happening in government.

But if government can unduly harass the press or when leaders smear journalists as enemies of the people and when there are too few protections for journalists, our democracy is at the very real risk of eroding away.

We have seen in some countries—in Hungary, Orban—a dictator tells his friends to buy the press so there can be no real freedom and no real counter-argument. And they do. They buy newspapers, televisions, et cetera.

And so we have to protect the press. It is sacred—sacred—to America. The

PRESS Act is a commonsense and strongly bipartisan bill to ensure journalists can do their job without with facing undue harassment.

I am so proud to support this act. Senate Democrats all support this bill. And the bill has already passed the House unanimously. I hope every single Senate Republican joins us to pass it today. I know many of them are ready to do the right thing. I think it has a majority support in both parties.

This bill, again, is common sense and balanced. It would prohibit the Federal Government from using subpoenas or search warrants or other measures to force journalists or third parties to reveal confidential information without their knowledge. It has exceptions carefully tailored to address matters of national security. And it would ensure that the decision to seize journalists' records and compel them to reveal sources falls to the Federal courts, not to the Department of Justice. It is more important now than ever before, when we have heard so many in the incoming administration talk about going after the press one way or another.

And 99 percent of the work to enact the PRESS Act into law is already done; all we need is for no Senator to stand in the way today.

So thank you, Senator WYDEN, for championing this bill. Thank you to the many reporters, news organizations, press leaders, and press associations for championing this bill.

Being a journalist is a hard job. It is hard enough. Journalists shouldn't have to fear baseless government harassment on top of that for just doing their jobs. So let's pass the bipartisan PRESS Act and send it to the President's desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. WYDEN. Madam President, before he leaves the floor, let me just thank the Senate majority leader. We have talked about this often. And I am particularly struck by the readings of the Founding Fathers because several of the Founding Fathers seem to think that a free press was at least as important as government. So the case that you are making today, Mr. Leader, is well stated.

Mr. SCHUMER. Again, let me thank the Senator from Oregon for his leadership. Thank you.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—H.R. 4250

Mr. WYDEN. Madam President, in a few minutes, I am going to ask unanimous consent to pass my bipartisan bill, the PRESS Act. And this legislation is deeply personal to me.

I am very proud to be the son of Peter Wyden, who was an award-winning journalist. My dad fled the Nazis in the 1930s, and members of his family died at the hands of the Nazis.

In the United States, my dad became such a good writer, he became part of our Army's elite group, the Ritchie Boys, that wrote the propaganda pamphlets that we dropped on Nazis.

Growing up, my dad always mentioned that several of our Founding Fathers—as I indicated to the majority leader here—stressed how important the free press was to our country. And my dad emphasized how important it is that American journalists can do their jobs without unneeded government interference.

So our bipartisan bill shields journalists from being forced by the courts to disclose their sources or information provided by their sources, with—as the majority leader and I have emphasized—key exceptions exist in our legislation for national security and other critical matters. And our bill also does not otherwise limit the government's ability to pursue leakers.

So this is so common sense that nearly every State in the country has some form of reporters' shield on the books. Democratic and Republican State legislators alike have found value in preserving the free flow of information and codifying these fundamental freedoms.

My bill, with Senator LEE—and I want to thank our colleague on the other side of the aisle on all his good counsel here. Our bill would finally ensure that these protections make it to the Federal level. This is a bill—and I note this. My colleague, the Presiding Officer, knows that sometimes it is pretty hard around the Congress to be able to get folks to agree to order a 7 Up or something. This bill passed this House unanimously and has the support of both the chair of the Judiciary Committee and ranking member Senator GRAHAM. Not only that, but our bill has been endorsed by people from across the political spectrum.

I would say to my friend from Nevada, Tucker Carlson is on board. FOX News is on board. This is about as bipartisan as you can get. Past administrations, both Democratic and Republican, have exploited the lack of a Federal shield law to curtail the freedom of the press and, in some cases, even jailed journalists who have refused to break their journalistic ethics and reveal their sources.

It is long overdue that these abuses be stopped. So my substitute amendment that I put together with Senator LEE addresses feedback that we heard on this Senate floor and elsewhere.

My colleague from Arkansas, a member of the Intelligence Committee, spoke about this before, and we heard feedback from the Department of Justice that they wanted some key national security exceptions for section 702 and threats to critical infrastructure, and ensuring that the Federal Government can still respond to cases that require exigency.

I want it understood that, between the time this came up on the floor previously and today, we have reached out for feedback that addresses a number of the concerns that I heard from my colleague from Arkansas, a member of the Intelligence Committee whom I work with, that I hope addresses his concerns.

So as if in legislative session, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on the Judiciary be discharged from further consideration of H.R. 4250 and that the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration; further, that the Wyden substitute amendment at the desk be considered and agreed to; that the bill, as amended, be considered read a third time and passed; and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. CORTEZ MASTO). Is there objection?

The Senator from Arkansas.

Mr. COTTON. Madam President, in reserving the right to object, this bill is a threat to U.S. national security and an insult to basic fairness and the principle of equality before the law. It is the biggest giveaway to the liberal press in American history.

The so-called PRESS Act would turn reporters into a protected class, free to hold, share, and publish highly classified and dangerous information that no other American is allowed to possess. The passage of this bill would turn the U.S. Senate into an active accomplice of deep state leakers, traitors, and criminals along with the America-hating and fame-hungry journalists who help them out. This legislation would make it all but impossible to ever compel a reporter to reveal their sources or compel them to return classified information in their possession.

Reporters would become the only class of people legally permitted to possess classified information in an unsecured and unmonitored environment. It gives reporters rights that no other American possesses. No Senator even has these protections. In fact, if the Senator from Oregon was given unsecured classified information and refused to turn it over, he could be censored, prosecuted, and possibly put in jail. And we wouldn't want that to happen. We would miss him dearly.

Even former Presidents don't have the rights that this legislation provides to liberal journalists. Just remember, the FBI raided President Trump's house on the mere accusation that he held unsecured classified information. And unlike President Trump, President Biden actually committed this crime and only escaped prosecution because the prosecutor concluded he was too addled to be convicted. Thanks to this bill, reporters at CNN, MSNBC, and the New York Times would have more rights and privileges than former Presidents and Vice Presidents.

This bill would also embolden every leaker and would-be traitor in the Federal Government within arm's reach of classified or damaging information. Leakers could reveal anything from the placement of American troops in foreign countries to the location of nuclear weapons, with only the thinnest and hardest to prove exceptions. They could release embarrassing or incriminating information from FBI background checks. They could also release information provided by allied nations,

endangering America's alliances around the world. If this bill became law, every leaker would sleep well at night knowing their accomplices in the media would never have to turn them in.

The leakers could also release, say, phone records of discussions between the President of the United States and foreign leaders, and this bill would protect any reporter who released or possessed the contents of those calls. Maybe it should be called the "Alexander Vindman Protection Act."

Not surprisingly, President Trump recently wrote:

REPUBLICANS MUST KILL THIS BILL!

And, for the benefit of those who missed it, he wrote it in all capital letters with an exclamation point at the end.

The bill's advocates often say too much stuff is classified. I agree. On the intelligence committee, I am often asked: Why is this classified? But some information ought to be classified, and the solution to overclassification is to classify less stuff, not to enable liberal deep staters to leak to liberal journalists.

Another argument I hear is government employees often violate the law and abuse our citizens—I agree, especially when Democrats are in office—but whistleblowers have plenty of legal and effective avenues to raise those concerns. If their superiors refuse to listen to them, they can contact their Departments' inspectors general or ombudsmen. They can also contact congressional oversight committees or Federal law enforcement. What they shouldn't do—what the law, in fact, forbids them from doing—is run off to the liberal media.

Even with its present protections, which I think are excessive, the liberal media has a long record of endangering our troops and our interests around the world. The liberal media doesn't deserve more privileges, protections, and perks. Releasing classified information is a serious crime, and it should be punished seriously.

Contrary to what members of the press may think, a press badge doesn't make you better than the rest of America or put you above the law.

For several years, the media has conducted itself in a disgraceful manner and destroyed its reputation with the American people. Yet some in Congress—maybe the only institution less popular than the press—now want to give it more privileges? I don't think so. My message is simple: No one is entitled to the privileges provided in this bill, certainly not the press.

Therefore, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The objection is heard.

The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. WYDEN. Madam President, let me be brief here.

This legislation that we have been discussing passed the House of Representatives early this year, and it was unanimous. So for people who are fol-

lowing the debate, every single Republican—everyone in the other body—in effect, approved this legislation.

Why did they do that? Because it clearly is sensitive to these national security concerns. We put in express exceptions for national security, including an area my colleague and I know a lot about, section 702 of FISA.

My colleague was very kind to me. He said, gosh, if I wasn't here, he would miss me. Well, that is very kind and thoughtful, but what we are really missing is the overwhelming support from Republicans for this legislation. I spoke about the Members in the other body, and no one else is objecting here.

I just think that, if we look at the writings of the Founding Fathers and their importance of a free press, what we ought to be saying is, yes, we should be listening to each other. That is why I made those changes since the last time my colleague from Arkansas objected. This is going to also—and I think my colleague and I would agree on this—protect citizen journalists who don't have the legal budget to fight subpoenas the way big newspapers can. That is why my bill has been endorsed by independent journalists like Catharine Herridge.

I understand that we don't have unanimous consent today. I think it is unfortunate. I think America would be stronger and freer if we were passing this legislation today, but we will be back, and my hope is that we can work with the Senator from Arkansas to get his support.

I want it understood from the standpoint of good faith that I listened the last time. My colleague and I were here on the floor of the U.S. Senate, and I thought he made good arguments. I am not here to say he is without good arguments. That is why I went out and I told our staff and all the folks on the Intel Committee and the people who work with us on it to make these changes to see if we can come aboard.

I realize we don't have unanimous consent this afternoon, but I would just say to my colleagues this is about as important as it gets. Free speech is fundamental to what makes our country so special. I have had more than 1,100 townhall meetings at home, and people always come and say: I don't agree with you about "this," or I don't agree with you about "that," but we are using our First Amendment. We are making sure we can always be heard.

I will tell my colleague, my door is open, and we will be talking to your folks to see if we can get this resolved. As I say, I made those changes since the last time we were on the floor for the express purpose of our being able to see if we could find agreement.

So I respect my colleague's right to dissent in spite of the fact that every single House Republican voted for it, and I am going to be coming back and seeing if we can find ways to work it out.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arkansas.

Mr. COTTON. Madam President, I appreciate the remarks of the Senator from Oregon.

The Founding Fathers designed the Senate to be the sober second thought to the House of Representatives or even transient and fleeting public opinion. The Senator from Oregon cited the unanimous vote in the House. Sometimes, that is an indication of widespread support for a sound and wise policy, but on occasion, it is an indication that a rash, impetuous, hasty, impulsive decision by the House deserves a sober second thought in the U.S. Senate. And not for the first time, I am pleased to provide the sober second thought on this and other issues.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority whip.

POLITICAL PRISONERS IN ERITREA, SAUDI ARABIA, TAJIKISTAN, AND VIETNAM

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, periodically, I have come to the Senate floor to raise the issue of political prisoners languishing in jails around the world. You would wonder why I do this. Well, it came to my attention that there are some real miscarriages of justice in terms of these political prisoners, and it also came to my attention that when I make a speech on the floor, sometimes people hear it and it makes a difference.

Thanks to the good work of Chris Homan, my chief staffer on this project, we have been party to and assisting in many releases of prisoners around the world. Some have come to visit me in my office here at the Capitol, saying they were languishing in prison and nobody even knew they were alive and that I gave a speech and I talked to the Ambassador and, the next thing you know, they are home.

So on the off chance that good fortune will come through again, I am going to make this effort this evening and am joined by Senator WELCH of Vermont.

There are journalists, activists, opposition candidates, and everyday citizens who are too often victims of petty, repressive regimes for simply trying to exercise basic democratic freedoms we take for granted in this country. Over the years, many of those eventually released have come to see me here in DC. Without fail, they say that their jailers cruelly tried to make them think they were forgotten and shared how sustaining it was to know voices around the world kept attention on their plight. So I will raise a few more cases today, and I am glad to be joined by my friend, the junior Senator from Vermont Senator WELCH, who is also taking up this effort.

I would like to first start with the country of Eritrea—an abysmal human rights record in that country. It has the nickname, the distinction, of being the North Korea of Africa. Eritrea has been ruled, since its independence three decades ago, by President Afwerki, whose regime has a well-documented history of arresting or forcibly

disappearing thousands of political prisoners into secret detention centers known for appalling conditions, usually without any charges, trial, or sentencing.

In September 2001, Eritrea banned all independent media and arbitrarily arrested journalists for any criticism of the government. Let me highlight a few who have been jailed for more than two decades—two decades: Dawit Isaak, an award-winning Swedish-Eritrean journalist; Amanuel Asrat, a distinguished poet and publisher; Seyoum Tsehaye, a war journalist and television executive; and, finally, Temesgen Gebreyesus, an actor and journalist. All are depicted on this sign.

They remain imprisoned, along with thousands of Eritreans, under unimaginable conditions, with no end in sight. I urge President Afwerki: End this madness. Free these political prisoners. It would be an important step toward establishing your reputation in the world and ending international sanctions and Eritrea's isolation.

Next, Saudi Arabia, a country with which we have shared many interests and also in which unacceptable political repression continues to complicate our relationship.

I have long advocated for the case of writer Raif Badawi—over in this corner—who, in 2022, was at last released after spending 10 years in a Saudi prison for the crime of exercising his right to free speech. Yet, to this day, he remains subject to a cruel travel ban, preventing him from reuniting with his family in Canada.

Waleed Abu al-Khair, a women's rights activist, and Salma al-Shehab are other such prisoners. Waleed has been in prison since 2014 for his human rights work, and in 2022, Salma was given an outrageous 34-year prison sentence for this. Let me tell you what her crime was. Ready? She used Twitter. That was it. Enough—34 years; throw away the key.

For too long, the Saudi Crown Prince has silenced dissidents and pro-democracy activists while claiming to embrace reform. Such reform should include allowing Raif to unite with his family in Canada as well as unconditionally releasing Waleed, Salma, and countless other political prisoners without delay.

Next, the Asian country of Tajikistan, which wants to increase security and economic cooperation with the United States. As I have long said, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, especially for opposition parties, remains critical for countries that want a closer relationship with the United States.

As such, I urged the release of human rights lawyer Buzurgmehr Yorov, who is serving 28 years in prison for simply representing Tajikistan's legal opposition in court.

Lastly, I want to focus on the nation of Vietnam, with whom, amid China's bullying in the region, the United

States has built a remarkably good reputation over the years. Yet Vietnam remains at the bottom of World Press Freedom Index. In 2024, Vietnam ranked 174th out of 180 nations. The Vietnamese Government continues to heavily restrict free speech, with too many journalists and human rights defenders facing harassment, detention, and harsh prison sentences under so-called anti-state propaganda laws.

This includes people like Pham Chi Dung, one of the most popular writers on Voice of America's Vietnamese service, who was sentenced to 15 years in prison in 2021—he helped create the Independent Journalists Association of Vietnam—and Pham Doan Trang, considered one of the most prominent Vietnamese dissidents, who so far has served 4 years of a 9-year prison sentence. Just this year, she was awarded PEN America's Barbey Freedom to Write Award, adding to an already long list of awards from several governments and press freedom groups.

In 2020, just before her arrest, she wrote very movingly—and I want to quote her:

I don't want freedom for just myself; that's too easy. I want something greater: freedom for Vietnam.

That is an amazing show of courage. I have seen the same from so many other political prisoners around the world, willing to go to prison for their freedom.

Before I turn the floor over to Senator WELCH, I want to remind these brave individuals in Eritrea, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, and Vietnam that you are not forgotten. We will continue to advocate for your well-being and release and speak your names to the world. And when you are free, please come visit me here at the Capitol. I will be waiting to shake your hand.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. WELCH. Madam President, I want to thank Senator DURBIN for his ongoing commitment to highlighting the plights of people who have been imprisoned for doing nothing more than exercising free speech, for doing nothing more than speaking up on behalf of the oppressed in their own country, for speaking up on behalf of human rights and justice.

What Senator DURBIN said inspires me, and that is: We don't know what the outcome will be. Is anyone paying attention? We don't know, but what we do know and we have seen is that this does help and make a difference and get some attention on people who were unjustly imprisoned for doing something that is noble.

And our goal here is not always to have everything be instrumental immediately, but it is to reassert the commitment that this U.S. Senate has to do what is within our power—sometimes it is very limited, as in this case of advocacy and attention to highlight and hopefully result in the highlighting of an oppressive situation—to

have a release of a person who has been unjustly detained.

So I just want to express my gratitude to Senator DURBIN. And over the years, I have met people who used to be political prisoners and were shaking the hand of Senator DURBIN. His advocacy made a difference. The advocacy of other Members of the Senate makes a difference.

And the most compelling thing for me is just think about what it is like to be a person who has made a statement, who used Twitter and you are suddenly arrested; you are suddenly cut off from your family; you are suddenly cut off from any visitation; you have no idea whether you have a future. And you have to feel, day in and day out, in that captivity, that people have completely forgotten who you are, that you have become invisible.

So the act of trying to make visible people who, as a result of the use of state power, have been made invisible is something that each and every one of us should do our best—using this office that we have and this forum we have—to stand up and remember people who have been made forgotten because they have done decent things.

I am really grateful to work with Senator DURBIN on this, and I want to focus attention on other political prisoners.

The first is Maryia Kalesnikava. Maryia is a professional musician. Think about that—a gifted musician. Think of the discipline that goes into becoming a professional musician. She was admired throughout Belarus for her talents and as a leading member of the political opposition. She left aside just being a musician to speak out on behalf of her people.

She called for free and fair elections. Arrest follows. After every leading opposition candidate had either been jailed in Belarus or fled the country, Maryia was apprehended in 2020 by officials driving an unmarked vehicle and taken to the Belarus border, where they attempted to forcibly deport her to Ukraine. She wouldn't allow herself to be forcibly deported. Think about that. She had to risk coming back when she was in the custody of unknown people who had no good intention for her. They put her on trial. She was tried, and she was sentenced to 11 years in a penal colony—11 years—for the crime of calling for free and fair elections.

Her situation is obviously concerning for many reasons, not the least of which is that between February 2023 and November 2024—1 year and 9 months—she was not allowed any visits by her family. I mean, just think about that: Your son or your daughter is cut off from you, and you have no idea of how they are doing, whether they are alive, are they suffering. Only after nearly 600 days was Maryia's father finally permitted to visit her last month.

Now, I am speaking about this with some passion because I met her sister

just recently. Her sister Tatsiana came to my office, and she has been out and about telling her sister's story and seeking for her release. Tatsiana was joined in my office by two human rights defenders who are courageously working to help secure the release of Maryia and other Belarusian political prisoners.

There have been a small number of Belarusian prisoners convicted of "extremism" who have been released, and I am hopeful that Maryia will also be released. And while the United States and Belarus have profound disagreements, including over human rights and Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine, I believe that officials of both governments should speak respectfully toward each other and seek opportunities to work together to address issues of common interest. My hope is that her release will be one of them.

Madam President, secondly, I want to speak about Maykel "Osorbo" Castillo. Maykel is an Afro-Cuban musician and writer who won a Latin Grammy Award while imprisoned in a Cuban jail. How do you do that? He won a Latin Grammy while he was in jail. He helped write a hit pro-democracy anthem that won Song of the Year at the 2021 Latin Grammys.

One of the things that are so extraordinary about folks like this who are illegally, wrongly imprisoned is that it doesn't somehow quell their spirit to express themselves and their joy of life.

Maykel is definitely one of them. He was arrested in May 2021 following months of police harassment, including intensive surveillance, movement restrictions, and "preventative" detention. He was sentenced a year later on politically motivated charges of evading police custody and sharing social media critical of the government.

Maykel is one of the many who have been unjustly imprisoned, and I urge the Cuban Government to release him. I also hope the incoming Trump administration will not do what many fear, which is to tighten, really, a lot of further sanctions on Cuba even more.

Finally, I want to mention Dr. Salah Soltan. Salah is a 65-year-old U.S. permanent resident, academic scholar, and prisoner of conscience in Egypt. Dr. Salah has quite a smile, as you can see. He is a husband, he is a father, and he is a grandfather to 11 grandchildren—American citizens, by the way—with deep roots in Michigan and the Midwest.

He has been unjustly imprisoned for 12 years, and he is in fragile health. In recent years, there has been growing bicameral, bipartisan, domestic, regional, and international support for his release on medical and on humanitarian grounds.

President Sisi has taken some modest steps towards justice for political prisoners, including removing more than 700 Egyptians with tangential ties to opposition political parties from domestic terrorism lists. That is good, what President Sisi did.

We want him and urge him to release Salah on humanitarian grounds so he can rejoin his family in the United States.

Madam President, these are only three of the tens and probably hundreds of thousands of prisoners of conscience in the world. The arbitrary arrest and imprisonment of individuals for nothing more than peacefully expressing views in support of democracy, in support of freedom of expression and other human rights, is abhorrent. These folks are accused of all sorts of fabricated charges. And it is really abuse of the awesome power of the state to essentially oppress people who are critical of the state. These folks are apprehended. They are subjected oftentimes to inhumane conditions, often solitary confinement in decrepit prisons, without access to lawyers or families. They are erased. They become invisible, as Senator DURBIN was discussing. Some of these folks die in prison from torture or untreated medical conditions. So anytime we can raise the possibility of their getting some attention so their case can be heard, so they have some possibility of release, is a good use of our time.

The question about why we do it kind of surprises me, actually, because the answer is simple. Americans care about people whose fundamental rights are denied, and whoever and wherever they are, we should continue to express that concern. I am proud to say that certainly is a legacy of my predecessor, Senator Patrick Leahy, who served in this body for 48 years. In fact, that right is every person's responsibility under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which no country voted against when it was adopted on December 10, 1948—66 years ago today.

I want to finish where I started by thanking my colleague from Illinois not just for his advocacy but for his inspiration to all of us to do what we can with this office that we hold for whatever period of time we have been entrusted to speak out on behalf of wonderful people like the people I mentioned and Senator DURBIN mentioned.

I yield to my colleague Senator DURBIN.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. I want to thank my colleague Senator WELCH from Vermont. He is a great partner in this effort. His heart is in the same place mine is.

One of the things that just struck me that some of the prisoners said to me when they came home and made it to the United States, to my office—one of them said: You don't realize that your mentioning my name on the floor of the U.S. Senate could have saved my life.

Many of the jailers and oppressive governments that have these people imprisoned beat them, torture them, starve them, and believe no one knows or no one cares. But if all of a sudden the name of that prisoner becomes conversation at the Embassy or at the

State Department or even in some of the halls of leadership of governments around the Nation, they think twice before they hurt them or kill them.

It is hard to imagine that our simple speech on the floor could have that impact, but it has. I thank you for joining me in this effort. I hope our colleagues will join us as well.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I move to proceed to legislative session.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 835.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will report the nomination.

The assistant bill clerk read the nomination of Matthew James Marzano, of Illinois, to be a Member of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission for the term of five years expiring June 30, 2028.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The assistant bill clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Executive Calendar No. 835, Matthew James Marzano, of Illinois, to be a Member of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission for the term of five years expiring June 30, 2028.

Charles E. Schumer, Thomas R. Carper, Tammy Baldwin, Gary C. Peters, Peter Welch, Richard Blumenthal, Sheldon Whitehouse, Tim Kaine, Jack Reed, Michael F. Bennet, Tammy Duckworth, Catherine Cortez Masto, Debbie Stabenow, Robert P. Casey, Jr., Tina Smith, Christopher A. Coons, Brian Schatz.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

GUATEMALA

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, I come to the floor today to celebrate the 175th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Guatemala and the United States.

As we mark this milestone, I want to highlight the strength of the U.S.-Guatemala bilateral relationship today. Earlier this year, I led a congressional delegation to Guatemala, and we met with President Bernardo Arevalo. He is a leader who was elected last year by voters who were sick of widespread corruption. He ran by focusing on corruption and insecurity, as well as generating employment and promoting climate change policies. And I was impressed. Prior to serving in elected office, Arevalo worked in Guatemala's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He served as First Secretary and Minister Counselor in Israel in the 1980s and as Ambassador to Spain and Deputy Foreign Minister in the 1990s. For several years, Arevalo was active as a leader in civil society, promoting anticorruption initiatives.

The Guatemalan President clearly cares—as do I—about upholding the rule of law, promoting democratic values, and combatting corruption. I believe that Guatemala stands at one of the most pivotal and potentially transformative moments since the end of the 1996 civil war.

But the path it takes going forward will largely depend on the extent that President Arevalo is able to govern. I was deeply concerned by attempts to undermine his democratic election last year and by the concerted efforts by the previous government to obstruct the peaceful transfer of power.

Attorney General Maria Consuelo Porras led the charge in weaponizing the justice system against him. She criminalized the President's political party. She jailed journalists. She has forced former prosecutors and judges investigating corruption into exile. She continues to use the Public Ministry to protect her personal financial and political interests—working without any practical check on her power.

This makes it difficult to combat corruption, to go after transnational crime, and to seek justice for human rights defenders persecuted under the previous government.

And yet despite these challenges, President Arevalo has not given up. He hasn't given up on his commitment to

rooting out corruption at home, as we have seen with the launch of the National Commission Against Corruption.

He has continued to build on our strong economic relationship; the U.S. is Guatemala's largest investor and trading partner. Just this year, our countries held a High-Level Economic Dialogue with discussions across all sectors of society, including private businesses and indigenous groups.

President Arevalo has also continued to have the courage to support liberty across the globe. Despite economic coercion by the People's Republic of China, he has maintained Guatemala's diplomatic relations with Taiwan. And on the question of migration, his government has been supportive of the Biden administration's safe mobility office in Guatemala. This effort has been critical to reducing irregular immigration on our southern border and providing legal pathways to vulnerable populations.

I know we will continue working together to address the root causes of migration, whether it is corruption, poverty, violence, crime, or climate change.

Now, I recognize these are immense challenges. And we are going to have a new administration coming into office here in the United States in January with very different views of America's role in the world—especially with regards to our relationship to the Western Hemisphere.

But for those of us who believe deeply in values-based policy making, for those of us who understand the importance of democracy and the rule of law, for those of for whom respect for human rights is paramount, we must not give up.

Making the world a better place is hard, but it is not impossible. So whether you live in Guatemala—or in the United States—let us come together in mutual respect to address the challenges we face.

And let us commit to making the next 175 years of our relationship one of prosperity, security, and peace.

ENDING IMPROPER PAYMENTS TO DECEASED ACT

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I am announcing my intention to object to any unanimous consent request to proceed to S. 2492, the Ending Improper Payments to Deceased Act.

I support my colleagues' efforts to identify opportunities to reduce Federal improper payments by indefinitely extending the cooperative data exchange agreement between the Social Security Administration and the Department of the Treasury's Do Not Pay (DNP) working system, as established by the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 (P.L. No. 116-260). However, this bill rushes to make this data exchange permanent without evaluating the efficacy of the data exchange.