

a pretty simple thing. And he is a self-proclaimed recovering Governor, but he is well-versed in the art of getting things done.

Above all, Chairman CARPER is a true American. He served his country bravely overseas in wartime, and he has given the last 23 years of his life to the service of this Chamber. Chairman CARPER has consistently dedicated himself to making our country as strong as it can be and delivering for the people he represents. His character, compassion, and, yes, dogged determination will certainly be missed in the U.S. Senate, but the impacts of his work will continue to make a difference for generations to come.

Chairman CARPER—my friend TOM—it has been an honor to work with you, alongside you, and deliver for our country and for the people we both love so very, very much. So I wish you the best—you and Martha the best.

I will tell you what. That man loves his wife Martha.

The way he talks about you in such a venerated way is the way we should all be talking about our loved ones. I have a deep appreciation for that.

So I wish you all the best. Thanks for your years of service, your friendship, and thanks for giving me a little part of your heart over these last several years because it has really helped me, and it has helped us work together so well.

Thank you.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the clerk will report the nomination.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of Noel Wise, of California, to be United States District Judge for the Northern District of California.

NOMINATION OF NOEL WISE

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, today, the Senate will vote to confirm Noel Wise to the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California.

Born in Cherry Hill, NJ, Judge Wise earned her B.S. at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas in 1989; her J.D., cum laude, from Nova Southeastern University Law School in 1993; and her J.S.M. from Stanford Law School in 2002. After graduating from law school, Wise served as a law clerk to Justice Harry Lee Anstead on Florida's Fourth District Court of Appeals.

Between 1994 and 2002, Judge Wise served in various roles at the Department of Justice, including as a trial attorney in the environmental enforcement section from 1999 to 2002 and the environmental crimes section from 1998–1999; on detail as an assistant U.S. attorney from 1997 to 1998; and as an honors trial attorney from 1994 to 1997.

From 2002 to 2004, Judge Wise worked as of counsel at Stoel Rives, LLP, advising clients on civil and criminal environmental law, land use, energy, and grand jury inquisitions. She also litigated and settled civil and criminal

cases in State and Federal court. From 2004 to 2006, Judge Wise worked first as in-house counsel and later as the acting director/manager renewable power generation at Pacific Gas and Electric Company, PG&E. Before her judicial service, Wise ran her own law firm—Wise Gleicher—from 2006 to 2014.

Since 2014, she has served as a judge on the Superior Court of California in Alameda County. During this decade of service, she has held several additional roles in the California judiciary, including working as a judge and supervising judge in the family law division; being a panel judge and supervising judge in the appellate division; and holding those same roles in the State's civil division.

Judge Wise has issued at least 10,000 written decisions that are substantive orders or appealable judgments. In addition, she has conducted approximately 500 settlement conferences, presided over thousands of hearings, and issued approximately 290 decisions while serving on the appellate division.

The American Bar Association unanimously rated Judge Wise as “well qualified,” and her nomination is strongly supported by her home State Senators, Mr. PADILLA and Ms. BUTLER.

Judge Wise's judicial experience, coupled with her experience in public service and private practice, have prepared her to serve the Northern District of California honorably as a district judge.

I am proud to support her nomination.

VOTE ON WISE NOMINATION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Wise nomination?

Mr. COONS. Madam 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. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Kansas (Mr. MARSHALL), the Senator from Kentucky (Mr. MCCONNELL), and the Senator from Ohio (Mr. VANCE).

The result was announced—yeas 50, nays 47, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 321 Ex.]

YEAS—50

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

NAYS—47

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

NOT VOTING—3

Marshall	McConnell	Vance
----------	-----------	-------

The nomination was confirmed.

(Ms. HASSAN assumed the Chair.)

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. OSSOFF). 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.

NATIONAL PRIORITIES

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, as the holiday season approaches, it is an appropriate time to talk about our national priorities, where we are as a nation, and where we should be going into the future.

Right now, tonight, as we assemble here in Washington, DC, there are thousands of people in this city and in the surrounding areas who are sleeping out on the streets. And that is not just Washington, DC, it is almost every major city in the country.

When we talk about the housing crisis, it is not just homelessness, it is a reality that millions of people in Vermont and throughout this country are paying 40, 50, 60 percent of their limited incomes for housing. We have a major housing crisis. We need to invest in low-income and affordable housing.

Today, in the United States, in the richest country in the history of the world, which today has more income and wealth inequality than it has ever had, while the very rich become much richer, 60 percent of our people are living paycheck to paycheck and millions of workers are earning starvation wages, barely enough to stay alive.

The time is long overdue, when we talk about our national priorities, that this Congress pass a livable minimum wage. Raise that minimum wage to a livable level so that no worker in this country who works 40 hours a week lives in poverty—not a radical idea.

In the United States today, we have a broken and dysfunctional healthcare system whose major function is not to provide quality, affordable care to our people but to make billions in profits for the insurance companies and the drug companies.

The truth is that while 85 million Americans are uninsured or underinsured, while 60,000 die each year because they don't get to a doctor in time, the insurance companies and the drug companies make tens of billions of dollars a year in profit.

The time is long overdue for the United States to do what every other major country on Earth does, and that is to guarantee healthcare to all people as a human right. In my view, the most efficient way to do that is to pass a Medicare for all single payer program.

Unbelievably, in this wealthy Nation in which three people on top own more wealth than the bottom half of our society, we have the highest rate of childhood poverty of almost any developed country on Earth, and on top of that, millions of parents, working-class parents, cannot find affordable or quality childcare. We need to make quality childcare available for all.

In America today, unbelievably, in my view, 25 percent of senior citizens in our country are trying to survive on \$15,000 a year or less—\$15,000 a year. I don't know how anybody in America, no matter where you live—let alone if you are a senior citizen with additional healthcare and other needs—I don't know how anybody survives on \$15,000. We need to expand Social Security benefits by lifting the cap on taxable income so that every senior in this country can retire with dignity and security.

Those are just a few of the things that, in my view, we should be doing in Congress if we are representing the needs of all Americans and not just wealthy campaign contributors in the top 1 percent.

But tonight I want to say a few words about something that we should not be doing, and that is, in the coming days, with almost no debate, we should not be passing the National Defense Authorization Act, which provides some \$900 billion for the Department of Defense—a little bit less than that—\$895.2 billion. When spending on nuclear weapons and emergency defense funding is included, the United States will spend this year close to \$1 trillion on the military—\$1 trillion on the military, and a few blocks away from here, people are sleeping out on the streets.

While middle-class and working-class families are struggling to survive, we supposedly just don't have the financial resources to help them. We just cannot afford to build more housing. We just cannot afford to provide quality childcare to our kids or to support public education or to provide healthcare to all. We just can't afford to do that. But when the military-industrial complex and all of their well-paid lobbyists come marching into Capitol Hill, somehow or other, there is more than enough money for Congress to provide them with virtually everything they need. The military-industrial complex speaks, and Congress responds.

Of that nearly \$1 trillion that will be voted on in the next few days, about half will go to a handful of hugely profitable defense contractors. The Pentagon accounts for about two-thirds of all Federal contracting, obligating more money every year than all civilian Federal Agencies combined—com-

bined. Yet the Pentagon remains the only major Federal Agency that cannot pass an independent audit.

The Department of Defense still cannot accurately account for their finances more than 30 years after Congress made it a requirement under Federal law. In the most recent failed audit attempt, the Department of Defense still could not fully account for huge portions of its more than \$4 trillion in assets. The GAO—the Government Accountability Office—reports that the Defense Department cannot accurately post transactions to the correct accounts each year. Auditors find billions of dollars the Pentagon didn't even know it had. In fiscal year 2022, Navy auditors found \$4.4 billion in untracked inventory. They just lost it. Hey, what is \$4 billion among friends when you have \$1 trillion to play with?

I don't often agree with Elon Musk. I agree with him very, very rarely. But he is right when he says the Pentagon "has little idea how its annual budget of more than \$800 billion is spent." That is Musk.

The inability to track taxpayer dollars has allowed, within the Defense Department, massive fraud, massive amounts of waste, and unbelievable amounts of cost overruns. Defense contractors routinely overcharge the Pentagon by 40 percent and sometimes much higher than that.

For example, just one example, in October, a few months ago, RTX—formerly Raytheon—was fined \$950 million for inflating bills to the Department of Defense as they lied about labor and material costs and as they paid bribes to secure foreign business. They were fined \$950 million.

In June, Lockheed Martin was fined \$70 million for overcharging the Navy for aircraft parts—the latest in a long line of similar abuses.

The F-35—the most expensive weapon system in history—has run up hundreds of billions of dollars in cost overruns. GAO now estimates that it will cost more than \$2 trillion to develop, maintain, and operate this fighter jet through its lifetime.

Today, as a result of massive consolidation in the defense industry, a large portion of the Pentagon budget now goes to just a handful of huge defense contractors like Lockheed Martin, RTX—formerly Raytheon—General Dynamics, and Northrop Grumman. That consolidation has been extremely profitable for the industry.

Since 2022, these four contractors have brought in over 600 billion in revenues, including 353 billion in U.S. taxpayer funds and recorded 57 billion in profits. During that same period, they have spent 61 billion on dividends and stock buybacks to make their wealthy shareholders even wealthier. That is just four companies, over less than 3 years, taking 353 billion in taxpayer money and handing 61 billion back to wealthy shareholders.

It is worthwhile listening to what Navy Secretary Carlos Del Toro said

earlier this year to a defense industry convention. This is the Secretary of the Navy speaking to defense contractors:

Many of you are making record profits, as evidenced by your quarterly financial statements. . . . You can't be asking for the American taxpayer to make greater public investments while you continue to goose your stock prices through stock buybacks . . . and other accounting maneuvers.

That is the U.S. Secretary of the Navy, and he is quite right.

It is not only fraud and cost overruns that drive up military spending. The major defense contractors also provide their CEOs with exorbitant compensation packages. In the last 3 years for which information is available, the top four defense companies paid their CEOs more than 257 million combined. These companies are all significantly reliant on the U.S. taxpayer. Yet they pay their CEOs about 100 times more than the Secretary of Defense receives. CEOs, defense industry, receive more than 100 times greater compensation than the U.S. Secretary of Defense and 500 times more than the average newly enlisted servicemember.

Now, how does that happen? How does it happen that the Defense Department can't pass an audit? How does it happen that every one of the major defense contractors ends up paying fines for fraud? How does it happen that we have massive cost overruns, and yet we give the military industrial complex pretty much what they want. And, by the way, there will be virtually no debate on that issue here on the floor. It is only a trillion dollars. Hey, what is a trillion dollars among friends?

People sleeping out on the street; people can't afford healthcare; children going hungry; elderly people can't afford to heat their homes. Got a trillion bucks, no questions asked, for the military industrial complex.

So how does all of this happen? And I think most Americans now know the answer. It ain't complicated. These companies—just like the drug companies, just like the insurance companies, just like Wall Street and the big banks, just like the fossil fuel industry—they spend millions and millions of dollars on campaign contributions and lobbying. In the recent election cycle, the one we just came through, defense contractors spent nearly \$251 million on lobbying and contributed almost 37 million to political candidates.

And surprise, surprise, aren't we all shocked that they end up getting what they want with almost no debate?

The waste and fraud in the defense industry is not just, interestingly enough, costing American taxpayers huge amounts of money, it is also costing lives. So let me tell you what I mean by that. Take a look at the war in Ukraine. The United States is providing tens and tens of billions of dollars to help defend Ukraine from Putin's horrific invasion of that country.

Despite their recordbreaking profits, many defense contractors said that they couldn't ramp up production of key weapons without more taxpayer support. So the U.S. Government wanted to support, with my vote, Ukraine against Putin's invasion. Ukraine needs weapons. And the defense contractors said: Hey, if you want us to help Ukraine, get them weapons, we need to ramp up production. We need more Federal aid.

And so, as part of that process, Congress repeatedly appropriated emergency funding with roughly 78.5 billion going to buy equipment and services from the major defense contractors for Ukraine.

And how did, with all of that money, these patriotic defense contractors respond? Did they say: "Well, thank you. We are going to do everything we can, get all of the weapons we can at a reasonable price to Ukraine, which is fighting for its life"? Not quite.

What the defense contractors did is jack up the prices they were charging us in order to help Ukraine. RTX increased prices for Stinger missiles from \$25,000 in the 1990s to \$400,000 in 2023. Even accounting for inflation and improvements in technology, that is an outrageous price increase.

But it wasn't enough for RTX. A recent NATO contract reveals RTX is now charging approximately \$745,000 per Stinger. Lockheed Martin and RTX raised the price of the Javelin missile system from about 263,000 per unit just before the war to 350,000 this year.

The United States has provided more than 10,000 Javelins to Ukraine. Similar price hikes took place for Patriot missiles and other weapons systems.

And make no mistake, every time a contractor pads its profit margins, fewer weapons reach the frontlines. The greed of these defense contractors is not just costing American taxpayers huge amounts of money, it is killing Ukrainians. They are getting less weapons than they should, given the amount of money that we are spending.

And there is a name for all of this. It is called war profiteering, and this is not a new problem. During World War II, then-U.S. Senator from Missouri Harry Truman was shocked by the profits made by military contractors while American boys were getting killed in Europe and in the east. And he appointed a special commission—it is called the Truman Commission—to investigate war profiteering, and they found massive amounts of fraud.

In my view, that is exactly what we should be doing now. We should be instituting a Truman Commission, or call it whatever you want, to take a hard look at the prices that the defense industry is charging us for the weapons they provide.

We should also consider other ideas to reduce waste and fraud in the military industrial complex, such as wider use of the Defense Production Act, significant penalties for audit failures, and a windfall profit tax on hugely profitable defense companies.

Most Americans would agree that we need a strong military, and I agree that we need a strong military. But we do not need a defense system that is designed to make huge profits for a handful of giant defense contractors while providing less of what the military needs. We do not need to spend almost a trillion dollars on the military while half a million Americans are homeless, while children go hungry, and while elderly people have difficulty heating their homes.

Let me conclude by saying something, which I think is one of the more profound statements ever made by a President, and that is that Dwight D. Eisenhower, who was a former five-star general and a Republican President from 1952 to 1960—he warned us about everything that I am talking about in his farewell address in 1961, and it would be very wise for us to remember what President Eisenhower said, and this is the quote. I quote President Eisenhower:

In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist.

What Eisenhower said was true in 1961. It is even more true today.

I intend to vote against this inflated military budget.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Louisiana.

ENDING IMPROPER PAYMENTS TO DECEASED PEOPLE ACT

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, with me today are two of my colleagues from my Senate office, Mr. John Lowery and Mr. Jackson Bewley. I am grateful for their good judgment, counsel, and advice.

I am delighted to see so many Members of Congress—and I mean this sincerely—so many Members of Congress embrace the call for a less wasteful Federal Government, for a more efficient Federal Government. We spend a little over \$6 trillion a year, as Senator SANDERS so eloquently pointed out. When you spend \$6 trillion a year, somebody is getting \$6 trillion a year.

Every penny in our budget has a constituency, and that constituency will fight us. They will fight us. And I recognize that, and it is something that as we go about downsizing government, we have to be mindful of. However, there is one constituency that is not going to be able to fight us in our quest to scrutinize Federal spending, and I am referring to dead people, and that is what I want to talk about today. I want to talk about dead people and the fact that they are getting money from the Federal Government.

In fiscal year 2023 alone—this is just 1 year—our government sent \$1.3 billion—not \$1.3 million—we sent \$1.3 billion in checks to dead people. Those aren't my numbers. Those numbers come from the Office of Management and Budget. That is just 1 year.

Not only is the Federal Government sending checks to dead people, those checks are being cashed. Now, I have heard of dead people voting, but cashing the checks? You don't have to be God's perfect idiot to realize that there is fraud happening with respect to all this money.

Here is how this problem arises. When you die in America, your name is sent to the vital records office in your State. And at that point, the Social Security Administration pays each State to give an ongoing list of deceased Americans in that State. So far, so good.

The Social Security Administration takes this down, this list of deceased people, and they compile an ongoing basis a list called the Death Master File. The Death Master File. That is just a list of everybody, updated daily, of people in the United States who are deceased.

Why does the Social Security Administration do this? Well, so the SSA, the Social Security Administration, can stop sending people who have died checks. So far, so good.

There is just one problem. I discovered this about 7 years ago. The Social Security Administration refuses to share that list with anybody else in the Federal Government. They won't share it with any other Federal Agencies, many of which send out checks.

The Department of the Treasury, for example, sends out checks. SSA won't share the information with them. The Small Business Administration sends out a lot of checks. The Social Security Administration has a list of all deceased Americans, but SSA will not share that information with the SBA.

I will give you some examples. You remember when we were in the coronavirus crisis, and we had an economic meltdown. We sent stimulus checks to Americans to try to keep the economy on its feet. We paid \$1.4 billion to dead people, and they cashed the checks.

The Paycheck Protection Program, which was a part of our stimulus program, paid out \$38 million in loans to dead people. These were people who were using—live people, obviously—who were using dead people's Social Security numbers to collect payments.

The COVID-19 Economic Injury Disaster Loans fund—another culprit—was involved in sending checks to dead people.

The Department of Veterans Affairs—and I am not blaming them. In many respects, it is not their fault. A couple of years ago, a scam artist stole the Social Security number of a deceased person—a deceased veteran—and received about \$825,000 in checks from 1997 to 2024.

Now, the person committing this fraud was just quietly accepting the checks. Somehow, the Department of Veterans Affairs, for some reason, stopped sending that person the checks. So the fraudster just picked up the phone and called the Department of