

Veterans Affairs, impersonated the dead person, and convinced them to start sending the checks again.

Again, it was not necessarily the fault of the Department of Veterans Affairs. The VA didn't know that the Social Security number belonged to a deceased person.

Another example: A person in Ohio was able to collect her deceased mother's Veterans Affairs benefits for 48 years—48 years. Of course, she was caught.

The truth is, it is sort of like being asked: You didn't go fishing on Saturday; how many fish do you think you didn't catch?

We don't know how much money we are sending out every year to dead people.

Let me give you an example of how screwed up the data is. This is a strong indicator of what is wrong.

The Social Security Administration, if you asked them, will tell you that there are, according to their records, 6.5 million Americans living today in America who are 112 years of age or older. They say there are 6.5 million Americans who are at least 112 years old or older.

Now, I don't know about you, but I don't know anybody who is 112 years old. And I checked. At any given time, there are about 40 people on an ongoing basis in the world who are fortunate enough to live to be 112. The data is so screwed up. According to SSA, 6.5 million people are 112 years old.

A number of years ago—7 years ago—I started working with Senator TOM CARPER, a fine American if there ever was one. I started working with TOM on this issue. I went to Social Security, and I said: Look, this problem is easily solved. Just share the Death Master File with other Agencies and especially share it with the Department of the Treasury.

I don't want to confuse anyone, but the Department of the Treasury has a "Do Not Pay" list of people who aren't supposed to receive checks for a variety of reasons that other Agencies consult. But I said to my friends at Social Security: Why don't you just give the Death Master File to other Agencies?

They said: We can't. It is illegal. The way we construe our enabling statutes, we don't have the authority.

Well, I said, OK, I am not going to argue with them; we will just go pass a law. It was harder than I thought. But we did. In 2020, Senator CARPER and I passed a bill. The bill was called Stopping Improper Payments to Deceased People Act, and it gave the Social Security Administration permission and, indeed, directed the Social Security Administration to start sharing its list of dead people with other Agencies in the Federal Government.

I don't want to get down in the weeds, but—believe it or not—we had people oppose the legislation, and many people within the Federal Government. So in order to get our bill passed, we had to compromise. We had

to agree to only implement this requirement that Social Security share the list of dead people with everybody else—we could only get them to agree to do it for 3 years, in a trial program.

This clock started ticking on our 3-year period in December of 2023. So, obviously, 3 years is right upon us. And if we don't make this program permanent, it is going to expire in 2026.

So Senator CARPER and I have introduced another bill. It does basically the same thing as the 2020 bill, but it makes the program permanent. This new bill is called Ending Improper Payments to Deceased People Act, and we need to pass it.

There has been a lot of squabbling back and forth. I don't want to do anything to step on too many toes to jeopardize my bill, about how much the States are going to be paid and who is going to pay Social Security for sharing their dead persons list with the rest of the government. I think we have a lot of it worked out. But we need to go pass this bill.

I mean, this makes no sense whatsoever. I can understand if we talk about changing the Medicaid Program, for example—what is fair, what is unfair. I can understand debating that, and I can understand reasonable people disagreeing over what changes, if any, we ought to make to the Medicaid Program. I get it.

I just listened to Senator SANDERS, once again, speak very eloquently about the waste at the Department of Defense. That is something that reasonable people, all of whom agree that we ought to have a strong defense—but reasonable people—can disagree over how to achieve that.

But, my God, you don't have to be Euclid to figure out that this is just fraud. It is abuse. It is low-hanging fruit, and it is so easily solved. All we have to do is direct the Social Security Administration, on a permanent basis—not a 3-year trial basis, on a permanent basis—to start sharing the list of dead people with the Department of the Treasury and everybody else in the Federal Government who wants it. And then everybody is on the same page, and we know who is deceased. And we can stop sending the money to dead people who cash the checks.

Now, I am talking about this now—I have talked about it before on the floor. I am not going to try to pass the bill this year. I am not. We are running up against a clock, and we have the NDAA. We have a CR to pass, and we have to keep government open. We have to renew the flood insurance program. And you know all that. But I am going to be back. I am like "The Terminator." I will be back as soon as the new Congress is sworn in.

Many of my colleagues have said to me: You know, it is time we stop talking about who needs to pay more in taxes and start talking about and asking the question with respect to "What the hell happened to the money?" And I agree with that. I can't think of an easier place to start.

Let's just pass this simple bill. Let's stop sending money to dead people. Again, we can debate about the wisdom of dead people voting. We all know it happens. But cashing checks is a bridge too far.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. HASSAN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—H.R. 8413 AND H.R. 8219

Mrs. FISCHER. Madam President, I come before you today to discuss a grave situation that is unfolding in the southwestern part of my State.

Two Nebraska communities—one at Swanson Reservoir and the other at Red Willow—are at risk. Over the past 50 years, residents of these two communities have built friendships. They have started and supported businesses, and they have enjoyed the recreation that the local area offers. But in just 2 months, these Nebraskans will be forced to leave. They will be forced out of their homes over a disagreement between the Federal Government and local stakeholders on how the land should be managed.

The good news is, there is a simple solution to this problem. In working with the rest of the Nebraska delegation as well as the Bureau of Reclamation, I have introduced legislation that benefits all parties. It transfers the ownership of this land from the Federal Government to local officials.

I want to thank Congressman ADRIAN SMITH, especially, for introducing companion legislation in the House.

Once the counties control the land around these reservoirs, the residents of Red Willow and Swanson can work with local authorities to chart a better path forward—one that preserves the communities and one that also improves the recreation areas.

Since I introduced this bill, I have heard from over 1,000 Nebraskans about how urgently they need this land transferred. I have received numerous letters of support from local communities and businesses. Everyone—everyone—involved supports this bill. The residents and their local government officials support this bill. Our colleagues on both sides of the aisle have offered no objection to this bill. The Committee on Energy and Natural Resources passed this bill on a voice vote. We also worked with the Bureau of Reclamation on this solution. Everyone—everyone—agrees that my bill offers the best future for the hundreds of Nebraskans who call these areas home. It is time to do what is right and to save these communities.

I yield to the Senator from Hawaii.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Hawaii.

Ms. HIRONO. Madam President, today, I rise in support of H.R. 8219, the Lahaina National Heritage Study Act. I also want to lend my support to the bill that is proposed by my esteemed colleague from Nebraska.

H.R. 8219 requires the Secretary of the Interior to study the potential of Lahaina to be designated as a National Heritage Area. The August 2023 wildfires brought to the forefront how special Lahaina is to Maui, to Hawaii, to our country, and, indeed, the world. The National Heritage Area designation could bring important Federal resources to help protect and manage the historic natural and cultural resources that are unique to Lahaina.

I thank Senator FISCHER for her partnership in supporting this measure, and I ask my colleagues to join me in passing this bill today so that the President can sign it into law, and the National Park Service can begin working with local partners on this effort.

I just want to mention that it is very clear that both Senator FISCHER and I have worked very closely with our communities in garnering support for these two bills, and no one is raising any substantive objections to these measures. So as we rush to finish the work of the Senate, I think it would be a very positive decision on our part to support these bills that nobody substantively objects to. So I hope that we can UC these bills.

I yield to the Senator from Nebraska.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nebraska.

Mrs. FISCHER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate en bloc consideration of H.R. 8413 and H.R. 8219, which were received from the House. I further ask that the bills be considered read the third time and passed and that the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from West Virginia.

Mr. MANCHIN. Madam President, in reserving the right to object, I have no substantive concerns with these bills. However, we have dozens and dozens of other bills that have been reported out of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee. Senator BARRASSO and I have been very clear about our intentions to put together and pass a public lands bill, which consists of about 150 bills. All of these reported bills have gone through the same process in a weighted package. These two bills would be part of that. This week is our last chance to reach agreement on and to finalize that package.

I cannot, in good conscience, start deconstructing this package that so many of our colleagues have worked so hard on for so long and have waited for today while we are continuing to negotiate on it. We have just finished large meetings, and we will continue the meetings throughout tonight and tomorrow.

So, for now, I have to preserve the option to get a package agreed to, and I object to both Senators' unanimous consent requests.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The objection is heard.

The Senator from Hawaii.

Ms. HIRONO. Madam President, I would just like to note that I certainly recognize that the esteemed chair of the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources is working very hard to put together a bill that contains dozens of these kinds of bills that have been worked through the committee as well as by the proponents. However, the reality of time is that there are serious concerns as to whether or not we are going to be able to get the kind of agreement that the chairman seeks.

Therefore, here we are with the actual two bills. And, believe me, if all of the other people who have similar kinds of legislation come to this floor and ask for unanimous consent, I will be happy to give it. That is all we are asking at this point—that these two bills are ripe today. Whether or not the chair is able to succeed in putting together this massive legislation that he referred to, I think, is very problematic, and I think we should, at least, take positive action on the bills that the Senator from Nebraska and I have worked very hard on.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nebraska.

Mrs. FISCHER. Madam President, this really is outrageous. My legislation cannot wait. As I have said, it passed the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources on a voice vote. Last week, it passed the full House of Representatives unanimously.

The bill is different from the rest of the package that my colleagues are negotiating. Nebraskans are watching this bill—they are watching my bill—because Nebraskans will be kicked off their land starting in February—2 months from now—if it is not signed into law.

I have been working with the chair. I have been working with his team for over a year—over a year—on this legislation, incorporating feedback from them and continuously emphasizing the urgency with my legislation. None of my colleagues are objecting to policy in this bill. They know it is the right thing to do. In fact, my colleague objecting has already voted in favor of the bill in committee. Rather, objecting to this legislation is choosing to use these people, their homes, and these reservoirs and the small businesses as political leverage for unrelated matters.

I have heard from over 1,000 constituents who are in support of this legislation. They know that it will chart a better path forward for that local community and the Federal Government. They did not ask to be used as political leverage.

I hope my colleague will reconsider his objection. Otherwise, I will con-

tinue coming to this floor, day after day this week, asking for unanimous consent; although, I have been told by our cloakroom that there is no time available tomorrow for any action like this on the floor. It needs to happen now.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from West Virginia.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. MANCHIN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that 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 PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

TRIBUTE TO KATE KÄUFER

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, I rise today to recognize Kate Käufer, who is retiring after serving on the Senate Appropriations Committee for 20 years and who has left her fingerprints on so much of the crucial legislation to keep our country safe and improve the lives of our servicemembers and their families.

Kate Käufer first started on the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee in December 2004 when Senator Stevens was chair and served under Chairs Inouye, Cochran, Durbin, Shelby, and TESTER. Colleagues from each era can attest she has always been an invaluable member of the team—so valuable in fact, that, in March 2022, she was asked to take over as clerk of the subcommittee.

Through times of immense global change, instability, and uncertainty, when the investments we make in our military have had huge implications—not just for families today and not just for our own country, but for the world—Kate Käufer has worked tirelessly to help the Senate solve problems, address threats, and ensure Congress makes critical strategic investments in our servicemembers and our national security.

It is impossible to sum up two decades of Kate's leadership and smart analysis on the subcommittee. When Kate started in the Senate, individual appropriations bill were routinely debated and passed on the Senate floor. More recently, much of that work is done off the Senate floor, and she has remained steadfast in her loyalty to the deliberative processes of this body and tirelessly advocating for the well-being of our troops and the security of this country.

Over her 20 years of service, Kate handled almost every single appropriations account and military service. Those include several classified accomplishments for which there is no public record. But publicly, from firsthand experience, I can say that she was instrumental in providing for our men and