

In addition, I share many of my colleagues' frustrations that the bill includes a provision that would prohibit gender-affirming healthcare for minors in certain circumstances. I voted against this provision in committee, and I disagree strongly with including such a, frankly, I think misguided provision in the Defense bill. We will continue to work to ensure the healthcare rights of all military personnel and their dependencies.

Ultimately, though, we have before us a very strong National Defense Authorization Act. I am confident it will provide the Department of Defense and our military men and women with the resources they need to meet and defeat the national security threats we face.

Now I would like to take an opportunity to recognize the staff who have made this bill possible. Senator WICKER has already pointed out the extraordinary members of his staff and rightfully commended them for their excellent work. I specifically want to recognize, first, the director of the Democratic staff Elizabeth King and the director of the Republican staff John Keast. They did a superb job. They have led their staffs with professionalism and skill.

I would also like to thank members of the Armed Services Committee staff on my side of the aisle: Jody Bennett, Carolyn Chuhta, Jon Clark, Jenny Davis, Jonathan Epstein, Jorie Feldman, Kevin Gates, Creighton Greene, Chad Johnson, Gary Leeling, Maggie McNamara Cooper, Mike Noblet, John Quirk, Andy Scott, Cole Stevens, Meredith Werner, Alison Warner, Isabelle Picciotti, Leah Brewer, Sean Jones, Joe Gallo, Ryan Bates, Sean Jones, Brittany Amador, Sofia Kamali, Noah Sisk, and Zachary Volpe.

Also, I want to thank the floor staff and the leadership. We can't get anything done around here without the floor staff and the leadership.

Thank you, Senator SCHUMER.

Mr. SCHUMER. In that order of importance, in my opinion.

Mr. REED. As the majority leader points out, the floor staff is the most important component of what we do.

You have been part of this process for the last several weeks and have done a remarkable job getting us to this point, and I thank you very much.

Mr. SCHUMER. Thank you.

Mr. REED. Finally, I urge all of my colleagues to support this bill.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HEINRICH). The Democratic leader.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, first, let me commend JACK REED for his great leadership as head of the Armed Services Committee. He is an amazing leader. He knows the military like no one, from his service there. He is a West Point graduate—great New York institution. Sorry they lost. I was on their side. He can explain things. He has just done an amazing job, and he is steadfast and intrepid and on the merits, and everyone respects him. That is

why we have gotten—this was a difficult year to get this bill done. Some thought we wouldn't be able to with the polarization, the late hour, and everything else, but because of this man, we did, and he deserves all of our thanks.

I want to thank Senator WICKER as well. He is a big, strong fighter for the military and did a great job as well.

So I thank both of you. This is the kind of bipartisan way we should do this.

Now, today, for the 64th consecutive year, the Senate passes a bipartisan National Defense Authorization Act to protect the American people and strengthen our security—64th year. Pretty good. Pretty good.

The NDAA is not perfect, but it still makes several important advances Democrats fought for to secure America's national defense and take a strong stand against the Chinese Communist Party. I am particularly glad that the NDAA expands the Tech Hubs Program that I created in the bipartisan Chips and Science Act, along with Senators YOUNG, CANTWELL, and others, and I thank our leaders for understanding the importance of that issue. It will help make tech innovation more achievable in the Midwest, across the country, and—near and dear to me—in Upstate New York.

The NDAA will also strengthen America's leadership on AI by expanding our AI infrastructure within the Department of Defense—something that our bipartisan AI forums from last year stressed was critical, and now we are getting it passed into law.

The NDAA gives our troops a raise, authorizes funding for military families to pay for childcare, extends programs for military spouses to find good-paying jobs, and expands mental health services for parents.

Again, I thank the staffs as well. They are great, professional, and excellent. I thank Senator REED. I thank Ranking Member WICKER and the members of the Armed Services Committee.

This is a good day for the strength of America.

MOTION TO CONCUR WITH AMENDMENT NO. 3317
WITHDRAWN

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the pending motion to concur with amendment No. 3317 be withdrawn.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

VOTE ON MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion to concur.

The yeas and nays were previously ordered.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Ohio (Mr. VANCE).

The result was announced—yeas 85, nays 14, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 325 Leg.]

YEAS—85

Barrasso	Graham	Peters
Bennet	Grassley	Reed
Blackburn	Hagerty	Ricketts
Blumenthal	Hassan	Risch
Boozman	Hawley	Romney
Britt	Heinrich	Rosen
Brown	Hickenlooper	Rounds
Budd	Hirono	Rubio
Cantwell	Hoeven	Schatz
Capito	Hyde-Smith	Schmitt
Cardin	Johnson	Schumer
Carper	Kaine	Scott (FL)
Casey	Kelly	Scott (SC)
Cassidy	Kennedy	Shaheen
Collins	King	Sinema
Coons	Klobuchar	Smith
Cornyn	Lankford	Sullivan
Cortez Masto	Lujan	Tester
Cotton	Lummis	Thune
Cramer	Manchin	Tillis
Crapo	Marshall	Tuberville
Cruz	McConnell	Van Hollen
Daines	Moran	Warner
Duckworth	Mullin	Warnock
Durbin	Murkowski	Whitehouse
Ernst	Murphy	Wicker
Fetterman	Murray	Young
Fischer	Ossoff	
Gillibrand	Padilla	

NAYS—14

Baldwin	Markey	Stabenow
Booker	Merkley	Warren
Braun	Paul	Welch
Kim	Sanders	Wyden
Lee	Schiff	

NOT VOTING—1

Vance

The motion was agreed to.
(Mr. HICKENLOOPER assumed the Chair.)

SOCIAL SECURITY FAIRNESS ACT OF 2023—MOTION TO PROCEED

The PRESIDING OFFICER. (Ms. CORTEZ MASTO). Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of the motion to proceed to H.R. 82, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows.

Motion to proceed to Calendar No. 693, H.R. 82, a bill to amend title II of the Social Security Act to repeal the Government pension offset and windfall elimination provisions.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 1631

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, in a few moments, my friend Senator PETERS will offer legislation that responds to the reports of unusual drone activity, and I thank him for his great work and leadership on this. I am proud to be a cosponsor of this bipartisan drone legislation, which the FBI, the DHS, the FAA, and the DOD—the Department of Defense—all support. The Senate should pass our bill without delay.

Our bill, among other things, explicitly authorizes State and local authorities to conduct drone detection and helps them better coordinate with Federal law enforcement Agencies to keep communities safe.

The people in New York and New Jersey have a lot of questions, and they are not getting good enough answers.

The utter confusion surrounding these drone sightings shows that the Feds can't respond all on their own; they need help detecting these drones from local officials who have neither the resources nor the explicit authority to act. The bill fixes that.

We all know drones are a relatively new phenomenon, and there are millions of them all over the United States. A lot of them are hobbyists. Some of them are companies doing legitimate work. But the Federal Government just doesn't have the ability or resources. If we were to say the Federal Government should look at this completely, they would be taken away from so many other important jobs. So the most logical thing to do is say: Let the localities have some authority. These are law enforcement authorities. These are people we know and we trust.

Now, for all we know, the recent drone incidents are entirely benign, but the people of New York and New Jersey understandably still have questions, and they deserve answers. The problem is, the widespread use of drones is relatively new in the eyes of Federal law, and therefore the authority to detect drone activity near sensitive infrastructure is totally within Federal jurisdiction. That should be fixed in an appropriate way. The Federal Government just doesn't have the ability to go in every corner of America and see whether the drones are safe or not safe.

Local law enforcement is appropriate, and they will work with the Feds in working on this. The bill is about giving local officials on the ground greater flexibility and proven technology to detect and track threats in their jurisdictions. It is about giving people answers they don't now have, heard directly from authorities on the ground. If this bill becomes law, we will have better clarity in the future.

So I yield to my friend from Michigan who has worked hard on this issue for a long period of time. It has broad bipartisan support. I hope the Senate can act.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

Mr. PETERS. Madam President, every day, more and more Americans are using drones for everything from hobby flights to commercial applications, as well as law enforcement activities. Drones can offer important societal and economic benefits, but they can also cause problems if they are not used appropriately.

Recently, in New Jersey, we have seen reports of loud and menacing drones. And while the Department of Homeland Security, the FBI, and other key Agencies have assured the public that these drones pose no immediate homeland security threat, they have certainly caused unease and concern for many Americans.

Rogue drones can interfere with commercial air traffic—as we saw with the recent closure of runways at a New

York airport—as well as large public gatherings like football games or concerts. The National Football League, a key supporter of this legislation, has shared that in recent seasons, they have seen more than 2,500 drones violate the airspace around stadiums, in some cases leading them to stop the football games to resolve potential threats to their fans as well as to their teams.

We have also seen how drones operated by a bad actor can quickly become a very serious security threat. This summer, an assailant used a drone to surveil President-elect Trump's rally site in Butler, PA, just hours—just hours—before firing shots in a horrific assassination attempt.

That is why I have been working to pass bipartisan legislation that would address these concerns by giving law enforcement the tools and the authorities that they need to detect, identify, and track drones to ensure that they do not pose any risk to Americans.

My legislation, which passed out of the committee that I chair—Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs—unanimously last Congress, out of committee, would equip law enforcement agencies, including State and local police—like the officials currently dealing with the ongoing situation in New Jersey—with the tools to better detect and to track drones and identify cases where they may pose a security threat to large public gatherings, airports, critical infrastructure facilities, as well as our communities.

Most urgently, this bill would ensure that law enforcement has the technology needed to quickly and clearly identify exactly what the reported sightings of drones across the country actually are. If a drone is found to be a potential danger, our law enforcement agencies, they must—they must—have the tools to mitigate these threats effectively.

That is why my bill would allow the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Justice to operate a pilot program so that State and local law enforcement agencies can conduct drone mitigation activities to safely disable threatening drones before they cause serious harm.

This legislation has strong bipartisan support here in the U.S. Senate. We currently have 28 cosponsors from both sides of the aisle—14 Democrats, 11 Republicans, and 3 Independents. And as the number of registered drones continues to grow, so does the need to pass this critical legislation to ensure that our law enforcement agencies can address these potential threats.

So I urge my colleagues to join me in passing this commonsense bill to safeguard our homeland and ensure that law enforcement can better protect our communities from the potential threats posed by recklessly or nefariously operated drones.

Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Af-

fairs be discharged from further consideration of S. 1631 and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration; that the Peters substitute amendment, which is at the desk, be considered and agreed to; and that the bill, as amended, be considered read a third time and passed and the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Kentucky.

Mr. PAUL. Madam President, reserving the right to object, no one disputes that drones flying in airspace could be a danger, that drones flying over the Super Bowl could be a danger, that drones flying over military bases could be a danger. That is why it is illegal. It is currently illegal, and the Federal Government has the capacity to investigate and stop drones that are in airspace over our military bases, following our ships. We have that capacity.

What is disputed and what the Biden administration is currently telling us is they don't see a problem. So if there is a problem, let the Biden administration be forthcoming. Let us know the extent of the problem. Let us know who is flying the drones. Let us know what is going on. Instead, this bill says: Well, we don't know. The Biden administration doesn't know, but why don't we give the power to the local officials to go after drones.

But I rise today to object to this unanimous consent request because, at this time, public trust in government is at historic lows. This body must not rush to grant sweeping surveillance powers without proper consideration and debate by the committees of jurisdiction, which is what I pledge to do beginning in January when we will be in charge of the committees.

Yet what is going on is exactly what this legislation seeks to do now: to expand Federal authority to intercept communications and disrupt drone activity, powers that raise serious concerns for Americans' privacy, civil liberties, and Fourth Amendment protections against unwarranted search and seizure.

We are being told this legislation is urgent; that it is needed to address an imminent drone threat. Yet the government itself admits no such threats exist.

So either there is a threat or there isn't a threat, but the Biden administration keeps saying: Well, it is all normal stuff, and it is just planes.

So it is or it isn't. Why don't we try to get to the truth of the matter of what actually exists and what the threat is before we propose legislation.

Federal Agencies, including the Department of Homeland Security and the FBI, have stated clearly that there is no current national security risk, no public safety concern, and no unlawful drone activity requiring intervention. So there either is a problem or there

isn't a problem. If there is a problem, let's discuss how to do it while protecting the communications of innocent Americans whose communications could be caught up in this legislation.

Until the Federal assessment changes—the assessment that it isn't a problem changes to that it is a problem, and these are the malefactors, these are the people that are orchestrating this—let's get that from the Biden administration. Tell us what the problem is. Tell us the extent of the problem. Instead, the Biden administration is saying there is not a problem.

So, Madam President, this pattern is all too familiar. History has shown us, time and time again, how fear and manufactured urgency are used as pretexts to expand government power at the expense of freedom.

After 9/11, Congress passed the Patriot Act. In the name of security, Americans were promised that these surveillance powers were necessary; they would only be directed toward foreigners; they would only be directed toward terrorists—until we discovered that these powers were being used on Americans. Americans were promised that these powers were necessary and temporary. Instead, they were abused, misused, and weaponized. Innocent Americans had their privacy violated, their data collected, and their rights trampled.

The lesson here is clear: When Congress legislates in haste, without careful scrutiny, without debate, and without accountability, it is the American people who suffer the consequences. Today, we are facing a similar moment.

The bill before us would grant law enforcement significant authority to intercept private electronic communications without consent.

For example, the bill will allow the government to conduct dragnet surveillance of the phones of innocent Americans traveling through U.S. airports, as long as the government claims they are doing it to neutralize a drone. So in order to look at the information that might be coming to a drone, it may be that you capture all the information of everybody surrounding an airport or everybody who lives near an airport.

Once you have all that data, what are the assurances that the government isn't looking at your data in addition to the data that may be related to flying the drone?

This is not just about security. It is about unchecked government overreach. It is about capitalizing on fear and media-driven hysteria to jam through sweeping legislation that could violate the civil liberties of American people.

Congress has a constitutional responsibility to serve as a check on the Executive power, not as a rubberstamp for it.

The Federal Government already has the power to deal with drones. The

Federal Government already has the power to stop any drones that are in airspace around airports. The Federal Government already has the power to protect its air bases. So if there is a significant problem here, the Biden administration needs to come forward and let us know: Who are these drones? Who is operating these drones?

What is the Federal Government doing to protect either airports or bases from this? Instead, we are told by the Biden administration there is no threat to our national security.

Let's first insist on truth and transparency from the Biden administration before offering up legislation that is feel-good, pat somebody on the back, and say: Oh, we have done something about drones. We are strong on drones.

Congress has a constitutional responsibility to serve as a check on Executive power, not as a rubberstamp. We owe it to the American people to demand compelling justification, meaningful safeguards, and full transparency before granting new surveillance authorities.

We are a Nation of laws, not fear, not panic, and not manufactured urgency. We do not trade away our freedoms, our privacy, and our constitutional protections for vague promises of security.

I will object to this bill today, but I am open to talking with the authors of this bill about how we could have enhanced ability to interrupt drone activity, but done while protecting all Americans' constitutional right to privacy.

I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

PROVIDING FOR A CORRECTION IN THE ENROLLMENT OF H.R. 5009

Mr. REED. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of S. Con. Res. 44.

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

The clerk will report the concurrent resolution by title.

The bill clerk read as follows:

A concurrent resolution (S. Con. Res. 44) directing the Clerk of the House of Representatives to make a correction in the enrollment of the bill H.R. 5009.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the concurrent resolution.

Mr. REED. I further ask that the concurrent resolution be agreed to; that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate.

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

The concurrent resolution (S. Con. Res. 44), was agreed to.

(The concurrent resolution (S. Con. Res. 44) is printed in today's RECORD (Legislative Day of December 16, 2024) under "Submitted Resolutions.")

Mr. REED. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Colorado.

THE CALENDAR

Mr. HICKENLOOPER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources be discharged from further consideration of S. 3373, H.R. 4385, and H.R. 5770, and the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of the following bills en bloc: Calendar No. 629, S. 4576; S. 3373; H.R. 4385; and H.R. 5770.

There being no objection, the committee was discharged of the relevant bills, and the Senate proceeded to consider the bills, en bloc.

Mr. HICKENLOOPER. I ask unanimous consent that the substitute amendment to S. 3373 at the desk be considered and agreed to; that the bills, as amended, where applicable, be considered read a third time and passed; and that the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table, all en bloc.

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

The bills passed, en bloc, as follows:

COLORADO RIVER BASIN SYSTEM CONSERVATION EXTENSION ACT

The bill (S. 4576) to amend the Energy and Water Development and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2015, to reauthorize the Colorado River System conservation pilot program, which had been reported from the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, was ordered to be engrossed for a third reading, was read the third time, and passed as follows:

S. 4576

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Colorado River Basin System Conservation Extension Act".

SEC. 2. REAUTHORIZATION OF COLORADO RIVER SYSTEM CONSERVATION PILOT PROGRAM.

Section 206 of the Energy and Water Development and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2015 (43 U.S.C. 620 note; Public Law 113-235), is amended—

- (1) in subsection (b)(2), by striking "this Act" and inserting "the Colorado River Basin System Conservation Extension Act";
- (2) in subsection (c)(2), by striking "2024" and inserting "2026"; and
- (3) in subsection (d), by striking "2025" and inserting "2027".

REQUIRING THE FEDERAL ENERGY REGULATORY COMMISSION TO EXTEND THE TIME PERIOD DURING WHICH LICENSEES ARE REQUIRED TO COMMENCE CONSTRUCTION OF CERTAIN HYDROPOWER PROJECTS

A bill (S. 3373) to require the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission to extend the time period during which licensees are required to commence construction of certain hydropower projects.