

The amendment (No. 3343) in the nature of a substitute was agreed to, as follows:

(Purpose: In the nature of a substitute)

Strike all after the enacting clause and insert the following:

**SECTION 1. EXTENSION OF TIME TO COMMENCE CONSTRUCTION OF CERTAIN HYDROPOWER PROJECTS.**

(a) **DEFINITION OF COVERED PROJECT.**—In this section, the term “covered project” means a hydropower project with respect to which the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission issued a license before March 13, 2020.

(b) **AUTHORIZATION OF EXTENSION.**—Notwithstanding section 13 of the Federal Power Act (16 U.S.C. 806), on the request of a licensee of a covered project, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission may, after reasonable notice and for good cause shown, extend in accordance with subsection (c) the period during which the licensee is required to commence construction of the covered project for an additional 4 years beyond the 8 years authorized by that section.

(c) **PERIOD OF EXTENSION.**—An extension of time to commence construction of a covered project under subsection (b) shall—

(1) begin on the date on which the final extension of the period for commencement of construction granted to the licensee under section 13 of the Federal Power Act (16 U.S.C. 806) expires; and

(2) end on the date that is 4 years after the latest date to which the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission is authorized to extend the period for commencement of construction under that section.

(d) **REINSTATEMENT OF EXPIRED LICENSE.**—If the time period required under section 13 of the Federal Power Act (16 U.S.C. 806) to commence construction of a covered project expires after December 31, 2023, and before the date of enactment of this Act—

(1) the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission may reinstate the license for the applicable project effective as of the date of expiration of the license; and

(2) the extension authorized under subsection (b) shall take effect on the date of that expiration.

The bill (S. 3373), as amended, was ordered to be engrossed for a third reading, was read the third time and passed.

**DROUGHT PREPAREDNESS ACT**

The bill (H.R. 4385) to extend authorization of the Reclamation States Emergency Drought Relief Act of 1991 was ordered to a third reading, was read the third time, and passed.

**WATER MONITORING AND TRACKING ESSENTIAL RESOURCES (WATER) DATA IMPROVEMENT ACT**

The bill (H.R. 5770) to reauthorize certain United States Geological Survey water data enhancement programs was ordered to a third reading, was read the third time, and passed.

Mr. HICKENLOOPER. Madam President, in Colorado and across the West, as you know as well as I, many, many communities are facing a historic drought crisis. Decades of drought are, in fact, long-term aridification and in many ways have become the new normal.

These bills respond to the urgent needs of our drought-stricken communities. They maintain the Federal Government’s ability to respond to drought and allow voluntary water conservation in the Upper Colorado River Basin.

We need these now as we are seeing in realtime how drought threatens our very way of life. More than 40 million people rely on the Colorado River for water, food, recreation, energy. Our communities, our farms, our environment all depend on water. These bills extend programs that we already know work. At risk is our entire way of life.

Thankfully, the two House bills I mentioned, the Drought Preparedness Act and WATER, the Water Data Improvement Act, will now become law. My colleague from Boulder, JOE NEGUSE, has done the heavy lifting to get this across the finish line in that Chamber. I am happy to do the same here.

But the two Senate bills just passed will still need to pass the House to help us out in the West. We really are running out of time.

The System Conservation Pilot Program enables voluntary water conservation in the Upper Colorado River, and I have been working closely with Senator BARRASSO to reauthorize it. It is supported by the Upper Colorado River Commission and got its start in the depths of the 2022 Colorado River drought that continues to this day.

It is critical that we pass this 2-year reauthorization because water users and farmers who participate need to make decisions now about signing on for next year. Any delay that will limit the Upper Basin’s ability to find participants and run a successful water conservation program, we can’t afford that.

We are asking Speaker JOHNSON to please put this lifeline for western farmers and ranchers on the suspension calendar and make sure that it is able to pass this year.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Louisiana.

Mr. CASSIDY. Madam President, I am speaking to S. 3373, the hydropower license extension, which helps a lock on the Red River and Overton Lock projects. This bill is incredibly important to Louisiana.

Hydropower is reliable, safe, and responsible; and the Federal Government should be enabling projects, not standing in the way.

Today’s actions are bipartisan, pro-job and pro-American energy. I am glad to see Congress cut the redtape holding up the Red River and Overton Lock projects.

These hydropower projects have been negatively impacted by supply chain issues the last 4 years. They simply need more time to start construction.

I am very pleased to see this get across the finish line.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

Ms. LUMMIS. Madam President, I am proud to support H.R. 4385, the Drought Preparedness Act, which I joined my colleague from Colorado in introducing.

Senator HICKENLOOPER has been fabulous to work with, as have all of the Senators from the States that headwater and utilize the Colorado River, including yourself, Madam President.

This bill would reauthorize the Reclamation States Emergency Drought Relief Act and allow the Department of the Interior to prepare drought contingency plans and provide technical assistance to State, local, and Tribal governments on their drought contingency plans.

This is one of the many bills I have had the pleasure of partnering with Senator HICKENLOOPER on, and I look forward to the President signing it into law.

Again, Madam President, I appreciate your help on these matters as well.

I am also pleased to support H.R. 5770, the Water Data Improvement Act, also sponsoring and introducing with my colleague Senator HICKENLOOPER, to reauthorize three water data programs at the U.S. Geological Survey that address water scarcity in the West. The West continues to lead the Nation in water conservation and management practices and is home to some of the best and brightest experts in this field. By extending these successful programs, we will improve water quality, secure our water infrastructure, and ensure we remain good stewards of our natural resources.

Again, with my appreciation for my fellow Colorado River Senators, with whom we have been working for the last couple of years on these measures and others to support our State’s engineers in the more than 100-year-old Colorado River Compact, I thank you and look forward to continuing to work with you to address the important Colorado River issues to the West and to our country.

I yield the floor.

**SOCIAL SECURITY FAIRNESS ACT—MOTION TO PROCEED**

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

**TRIBUTE TO ANNE STANSKI**

Ms. STABENOW. Madam President, I rise today to pay tribute to a wonderful staffer who has been indispensable to me and the entire Stabenow team. She has left us now; so she is in the Gallery, rather than sitting next to me. But I am so grateful for Anne Stanski and her incredible work.

Anne began as a scheduler in my Washington office at the beginning of my second term in the Senate, and after just a few weeks, I wondered how I got along for 6 years without her. Anyone who knows congressional offices knows that being the scheduler is not the most glamorous job. But having a great scheduler is the secret sauce of every successful Hill office.

Anne tracked countless flights to and from Michigan, organized every detail of a codel to four different countries in Africa, planned and executed numerous events, and so much more. No task was ever too small or too large for Anne to handle. She knew how to do it all, and she did it all exceptionally well. She rolled with the punches and was always, always available to untangle the knots that inevitably make their way into a well-planned schedule.

After 10 years of being the go-to person on all things scheduling, Anne transitioned to be my deputy chief of staff. I pride myself on having the best team in the Congress, and Anne was influential in building that team.

Over the years, Anne has mentored countless interns, many of whom became staffers in our office and grew to become integral members of our team under her guidance. Her latest achievement in this area includes two of her former schedulers becoming engaged to each other.

Everyone on staff always knew they could go to Anne for help. Whether it was managing the front office, solving a scheduling issue, or just needing someone to talk to, Anne was always there. Anne's leadership and hard work has made my office effective at getting things done and a great place to work.

During her time in my office, we have had one of the lowest staff turnovers of any office in the Senate. Most recently, Anne took on the responsibility of leading the Democratic policy and communications committee, comprised of 51 Senators whose schedules often appear to be purposefully planned to thwart any attempt to get us all in one place. Despite this, Anne successfully planned and executed annual retreats, which is no small job, and weekly policy luncheons for the committee, all while carrying out the essential service of steering our party's policies and messaging forward.

May I add, she has accomplished all of this while she and her husband Matt are raising very impressive twin girls, Addie and Lizzie, who were born while Anne was working for me and are now in high school. I can't believe this.

They are such a beautiful family. Now, despite what many people think, you don't have to be a Michigan State University fan to work in my office, but it helps. As proud alums, Anne and I have always spent so much time together cheering on our Spartans, even watching them play in the Sweet 16 at Madison Square Garden. Go, Green.

Anne, thank you for everything—your incredible work, your loyalty, your friendship. I wish you every happiness and success possible in the future. You deserve it.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

#### ORDER OF BUSINESS

Ms. STABENOW. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum call with respect to the cloture motion on the motion to proceed to H.R. 82 be waived.

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

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

The Senator from North Carolina.

#### SOCIAL SECURITY FAIRNESS ACT

Mr. TILLIS. Madam President, I come to the floor to talk about the vote that we are about to move to here shortly. It sounds like motherhood and apple pie—the Social Security Fairness Act. Who could be against Social Security fairness?

The fact of the matter is, the policy does address a challenge with Social Security for a single-digit percentage of people who have a pension—a government pension program—and they are not necessarily getting exactly what they should back. So it is something we need to fix, but this is not the way to fix it.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are 10 years away from most economists' consensus believing that the Social Security trust fund is going to reach insolvency—10 years—10 years away.

This bill will take \$200 billion over that 10-year period out of the Social Security trust fund without any offsetting payment to it. So that is, to right a wrong for a small percentage of people that should get fairly treated, they are going to rake \$200 billion—with a "b"—over 10 years to pay for this.

That pulls insolvency forward by 6 months. Now 6 months doesn't sound like a lot, if you are talking years and years and years into the future, but we are estimated to be reaching insolvency within the next 9 to 10 years. Suddenly, 6 months becomes a pretty significant amount of time. So we are bowing—we have people here who have voted against bills before because they say: I don't like the idea of something not going through regular order, getting dumped on us at the last minute, and voting on it.

Ladies and gentlemen, this bill has not even had a hearing in any committee in the House or the Senate. It got sent to us through a procedure called a discharge petition, which means that they have discharged their duty of doing regular order, sent it to us, and now we are about to take a vote today without having voted on it.

Now, I know there are a lot of people that say: THOM TILLIS must be committing political suicide because how could you be against Social Security fairness?

People asked me the same question when I was against the PACT Act that my office helped author. The PACT Act was a veterans bill, a trillion-dollar bill that we had a commitment to take through regular order to get it right before we passed it. I talked to vet-

erans groups who were concerned with my lack of support for a bill that I helped author, and I said: It is because I think you are going to regret it by us not thinking through the implications.

I said: It wouldn't surprise me if, 2 years from now, you are going to see and realize the very challenges that I told you about.

They said: You know what, we think it will work itself out.

Well, do you know what happened almost 2 years to the month? We are \$3 billion in the hole for the current year veterans budget and \$15 billion in the hole going forward because we didn't do our homework. We caved to the pressure of the moment instead of doing this on a sustainable basis.

Now, I don't know how many people are going to oppose the bill today. It is likely to move through. But to those of you who are looking past the regular order and fixing the things that I know are not fixed in this bill, own it when we have to come back and fix it. I will come back and fix it. I will help with Social Security reform. But know that you are making the job harder to fix a trust fund that is within 10 years of going insolvent.

It would be easy for me to talk to my friends at the Fraternal Order of Police and say: Yes, we are going to get this done.

And by God, I hope somebody over the next 8 to 10 years fixes Social Security in the future because in 10 years, there will be a mandatory 17—minimum 17 percent cut in the Social Security benefit across the board if we continue to fail to act here and if we continue to dig a deeper hole by the vote we are having today.

So to those of you who need this fixed, who need to be treated fairly, count me in. But understand that the folks who are rushing this vote today are hastening the day where they are probably going to break the promise for 97 percent more people on Social Security who do not benefit from this bill.

Look, I am in an election cycle. A lot of people may think that I am committing political suicide by doing this, but this Chamber needs courage and needs to say what needs to be said. We are about to pass an unfunded \$200 billion spending package for a trust fund that is likely to go insolvent over the next 9 to 10 years, and we are going to pretend like somebody else has to fix it. Well, when you are a U.S. Senator and you have the election certificate, that falls on us.

I want to finish with this: There is nobody in this Chamber I hate to be in disagreement with more than the senior Senator from Maine. Senator COLLINS understands that we do need to fix this, and her sense of fairness and her expertise are unmatched in this Chamber. We do not disagree with what we ultimately need to do. This is a disagreement in how to get there and how to have something that addresses the downstream risk.

So it is with some trepidation that I come to the floor and criticize the good work of Senator COLLINS, but I do it because there is so much riding on us getting this right and having the courage to fix Social Security over the next few years, folks, or—record this speech—we will rue the day that we failed to do it.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

Ms. COLLINS. Madam President, let me just briefly say that I have great admiration for the Senator from North Carolina. This is a rare instance in which we see the issue differently. But I appreciate his leadership and hard work.

I rise today in strong support of the long overdue Social Security Fairness Act. This bipartisan bill would repeal two Social Security provisions that unfairly penalize many public servants in Maine and across the country.

I also want to acknowledge and thank Senator BROWN for his leadership. We have championed this bill together for several years. In fact, we have been debating this inequity in the Social Security System for decades—for decades.

In 2003, I held the very first Senate hearing on this policy. In 2005, the late Senator Dianne Feinstein and I introduced the first Social Security Fairness Act. In 2007, Senator Barbara Mikulski and I introduced another version of the bill. Just last month, the House of Representatives passed the bill overwhelmingly by a vote of 327 to 75.

It is now time for the Senate to finally pass this legislation so that it can become law.

Social Security is the foundation of retirement income for most Americans. Yet many teachers, firefighters, police officers, and other public servants often see their earned Social Security benefits unfairly reduced by two provisions: the so-called windfall elimination provision and the government pension offset.

The windfall elimination provision, or WEP, affects public servants who receive a pension from a job not covered by Social Security but who also worked long enough in another job to qualify for Social Security benefits. In other words, they have earned those benefits. They have worked the 40 quarters, the 10 years, under a job that pays into Social Security. Due to the WEP, however, their Social Security benefits are calculated using a different formula, which reduces their monthly benefits. For workers who become eligible for benefits in 2024, the WEP reduction can be up to \$700 per month.

The government pension offset, or just GPO, affects public servants who receive a pension from a job not covered by Social Security but who are also eligible to receive a Social Security spousal or widow's benefit. The GPO, however, reduces the Social Security spousal or widow's benefits by an

amount equal to two-thirds of the non-covered pension. More than 70 percent of those affected by the GPO lose their entire benefit.

This issue is extraordinarily important to people in my State of Maine because the State's pension system does not include a Social Security component. Among those most affected are Maine schoolteachers. They love their jobs and the children they teach, but they have to worry about their future and their retirement security.

Many are women, often retired from teaching, whose spouses worked full time in the private sector, but when they become widowed, their retirement security is often jeopardized because they don't receive the standard amount from their late spouse's Social Security. The fact is that 83 percent of retirees penalized by the GPO provision are women.

According to the Social Security Administration, in November 2024, more than 2 million people—including more than 20,000 in Maine—had their Social Security benefits reduced by the WEP. Similarly, more than 650,000 people were affected by the GPO in November of 2024, including more than 6,000 in Maine.

Let me give you one example. There are so many. Catherine Sjogren from Bangor, ME, told me about having to reenter the workforce at age 72 after retiring from teaching for many decades. Her husband, a Navy veteran, paid into Social Security for 40 years. When he passed away, the GPO reduced Catherine's widow benefits by two-thirds. She did not have the financial security any longer to remain retired, and the GPO penalty left her with few choices but to return to work.

Our dedicated public servants, such as our teachers who help prepare our children for future success and our police officers and firefighters who help keep our communities safe, should receive the full Social Security benefit that they have earned. Let me stress that last point: They have earned these benefits.

This is an unfair, inequitable penalty. I urge my colleagues to support the Social Security Fairness Act and end this inequity once and for all.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Louisiana.

Mr. CASSIDY. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that I be permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes and that Senator BROWN be permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes prior to the scheduled vote.

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

Mr. CASSIDY. Madam President, when Washington, when we in Congress, when the President makes a promise to the American people, people expect us to fulfill it. Today, the Senate has an opportunity to live up to a promise.

Millions of teachers, firefighters, police officers—I worked in a public hos-

pital for the uninsured, and I would add nurses, technicians, lab techs, janitors—they expect us to fulfill this promise, and they are watching today. They are watching, filled with hope that the Senate will pass the Social Security Fairness Act to finally stop punishing them for having elected to serve our communities. We can fix a broken system that has unfairly harmed them for almost 30 years. We can finally deliver relief this Christmas for millions of Americans after years of nothing but empty promises.

The Social Security Fairness Act has passed the House and has overwhelming, bipartisan support in the Senate. With 62 cosponsors, it should not be even a question if we have the support to move forward today.

Not too long ago, I met with a retired Louisiana schoolteacher impacted by GPO. She cried in my office, not understanding why she was getting less in Social Security spousal benefits than if she had never worked at all. Think about this. She had her quarters. She had worked, say, 20 years in the private sector. She was getting less from spousal benefits than if she had never worked at all. She felt like she was being punished for educating generations of Louisiana children, and she was being punished. There is no excuse to treat our public servants this way.

So to my colleagues who are concerned about the pricetag, I hear you. The good news: I have a plan that helps address these concerns. I have a comprehensive Social Security plan that addresses both the insolvency in 9 years and including paying for this repeal of WEP and GPO. If you want to talk about it, I have been promoting this for 4 years.

By the way, it does not increase the full retirement age. People can still retire at the age at which they planned to retire.

By the way, it checks boxes that President Trump, during his campaigning, said he would like to do in order to benefit our Nation. It checks that box too.

So if you are concerned about the pricetag, please talk to me about how we can afford to do right by the public servants who are being penalized by WEP and GPO but also help our Nation financially.

We can do both if we have the courage to do both. But at the very least today, we can keep a promise to make Social Security fair again.

I want to thank all the advocates for their work in getting here, including the Louisiana Sheriffs' Association, the Louisiana Chiefs of Police Association, the Louisiana State Employees' Retirement System, the Louisiana Police Jury Association, the Louisiana Municipal Association, the International Association of Firefighters, the National Fraternal Order of Police, and all the others who have contributed so much to this effort.

I also want to thank President Trump, who has publicly announced his

support for this bill. It is a sacred trust between the American people and our government. President-elect Trump—soon-to-be President Trump—recognizes this.

As long as I am here, I will fight to keep the promises that we make to the American people.

With that, I yield to my good friend Senator BROWN.

Mr. BROWN. Thank you, Senator CASSIDY.

I thank Senator CASSIDY and his incredible staff for the work that they have done with the Cleveland Connection. And I just appreciate so much, as I leave the Senate, the work that Senator CASSIDY and I have done on a host of bills. And I would say the same about my work with Senator COLLINS. I have been at this bill for a long time. She has been at this bill for now more than two decades.

And I know from our pension bill, I know from the child tax credit, I know from the PACT Act, I know from a whole lot of issues that this stuff takes time. But 21 years is ridiculous. And we need to move forward on this. And I so appreciate that she kept this alive.

Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that following my remarks, Senator SCHUMER be permitted to speak for 2 minutes prior to the scheduled vote.

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

Mr. BROWN. And I will be brief.

Social Security, we know, is a bedrock of our middle class. It is retirement security that Americans pay into and earn over a lifetime. You pay in for 40 quarters. You pay in for, essentially, 10 years. You have earned it. It should be there when you retire.

These restrictions right now, though, prevent some 3 million Americans—nearly 250,000 people in my State alone, many of whom are law enforcement, first responders, teachers, schoolbus drivers, school cafeteria workers, public servants—it means that many will not get their full Social Security benefit.

It makes no sense. These workers serve the public. They protect our communities. They teach our kids. They pay into Social Security just like everyone else.

When we did a hearing a few months ago at a fire station in Columbus, I met Barbara Ward. She drives a special needs bus for Fairland Local Schools in, I believe, Lawrence County, on the Ohio River. She drives 200 miles a day. She has done this for 40 years. She is in her seventies. Her mom was the first female busdriver hired in that district. Her husband served our country in the Navy Seabees, building our naval bases, and paying into Social Security with every paycheck.

After he passed away 10 years ago, Barb started receiving his Social Security survivors benefits, until Barb retired with her school pension, when her Social Security benefit dropped from \$2,100 a month to 500 a month.

Again, he earned this. This wasn't charity. This wasn't a giveaway. He earned that Social Security benefit, and she should have it.

At our hearing, she said: It is just not fair. My husband worked for that. We worked for that.

They earned that Social Security. They paid into it.

Over and over, these Americans, like that busdriver, have watched corporations get tax cuts and Wall Street gets bailouts. All these workers are asking for is what they have earned.

It is an issue that has a huge impact on a worker's life. But it doesn't get enough attention in Washington.

Again, I thank Senator COLLINS for keeping this alive for so long.

The people it affects aren't powerful corporate interests. They are cops. They are sheriff's deputies. They are firefighters. They are teachers. They work at parks. They work at libraries. They pick up our trash, and they plow our roads. They make our lives livable and better.

We must finally get this done. The House passed it with 327 votes. They don't agree on much in the House, period. But Members of both parties came together and agreed. I believe every single Ohio Member of Congress voted for this. We need to restore those workers' Social Security.

Yesterday, in front of about 50 of my colleagues, I gave what some called my last speech on the Senate floor. I ended it by saying it would not be the last time you heard from me.

Of course, it wouldn't. I am back today fighting for the dignity of work. It is the way I began my career in the Senate. It is what I will continue to do, whether in the Senate or not. Whether it is restoring workers' Social Security or saving workers' pensions or fighting for overtime pay, for supporting unions, so much of what I fought for in the Senate has one thing in common: It is about hard work paying off. It is about what workers earn. It is about honoring the dignity of work.

If you love this country, you fight for the people who make it work. I urge all my colleagues on both sides to join us. Restore the Social Security that people who protect us and serve us have earned over a lifetime of work.

Senator SCHUMER.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. ROSEN). The majority leader.

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, in just a few moments, the Senate will hold a vote to take up the Social Security Fairness Act, a bill that ensures no retiree or spouse is wrongly denied their well-earned benefits simply because they chose, at some point in their careers, to work in public service.

Time is short, but I am hopeful the Senate can take up and pass this bill and send it to the President's desk very quickly.

Passing this Social Security fix right before Christmas would be a great gift for our retired firefighters, police officers, postal workers, teachers, and oth-

ers who, for years, contributed to Social Security but are now being penalized because of their time of public service. That is unfair. It is deeply unfair. It goes against the American ideal of working hard, chipping in, and enjoying a well-earned retirement.

Our bill will finally repeal the outdated and unfair WEP and GPO programs which have wreaked havoc on the hard-earned benefits of our public service retirees and their spouses. It has been going on too long. People have been working for decades to pass legislation to fix this issue. We now have that opportunity.

The House has already passed this bill by an overwhelming margin, with Democrats and Republicans, 327 to 75.

We Democrats are ready to stand with our public service retirees and finally fix this problem. The American people will see today which Senators are ready to deliver on these Social Security benefits and who will block this golden opportunity that could help millions.

I thank Senator BROWN and others for their hard work.

I yield the floor.

#### CLOTURE MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Pursuant to rule XXII, the Chair lays before the Senate the pending cloture motion, which the clerk will state.

The 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 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.

Charles E. Schumer, Robert P. Casey, Jr., Tammy Baldwin, Catherine Cortez Masto, Alex Padilla, Debbie Stabenow, Margaret Wood Hassan, Tina Smith, Richard Blumenthal, Martin Heinrich, Richard J. Durbin, Gary C. Peters, Christopher A. Coons, John W. Hickenlooper, Tammy Duckworth, Tim Kaine, Chris Van Hollen, Jack Reed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the motion to proceed to H.R. 82, a bill to amend title II of the Social Security Act to repeal the Government pension offset and windfall elimination provisions, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. BALDWIN). Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 73, nays 27, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 326 Leg.]

#### YEAS—73

Baldwin	Blumenthal	Boozman
Bennet	Booker	Braun

Brown	Hoeven	Sanders
Cantwell	Kaine	Schatz
Capito	Kelly	Schiff
Cardin	Kennedy	Schmitt
Casey	King	Schumer
Cassidy	Klobuchar	Scott (FL)
Collins	Lankford	Scott (SC)
Coons	Lujan	Shaheen
Cornyn	Markley	Sinema
Cortez Masto	Merkley	Smith
Cotton	Moran	Stabenow
Cramer	Mullin	Sullivan
Duckworth	Murkowski	Tester
Durbin	Murphy	Van Hollen
Fetterman	Murray	Vance
Fischer	Ossoff	Warner
Gillibrand	Padilla	Warnock
Hagerty	Peters	Warren
Hassan	Reed	Welch
Hawley	Ricketts	Whitehouse
Heinrich	Rosen	Wyden
Hickenlooper	Rubio	
Hirono		

## NAYS—27

Barrasso	Graham	Paul
Blackburn	Grassley	Risch
Britt	Hyde-Smith	Romney
Budd	Johnson	Rounds
Carper	Lee	Thune
Crapo	Lummis	Tillis
Cruz	Manchin	Tuberville
Daines	Marshall	Wicker
Ernst	McConnell	Young

The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 73, the nays are 27.

Three-fifths of the Senators duly chosen and sworn having voted in the affirmative, the motion is agreed to.

The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The junior Senator from Maryland.

## UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUESTS—EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Madam President, we all have State and local governments that have control over their own judicial systems. For example, in my State of Maryland, we have the Maryland Court of Appeals. We have the lower courts in the State of Maryland. Then, of course, we have the Federal court system.

What I am talking about today has nothing to do with the Federal court system. What I am talking about today has to do with judges appointed to the District of Columbia, and because of current law, this Congress oversees those judicial actions.

I think we would all agree that, if we were here in the U.S. Senate blocking decisions, nominations made for judges back in our States or our local jurisdictions, that would be a kind of bizarre thing to do. So I want to make it clear that today we are not talking about the Supreme Court of the United States or the U.S. courts of appeals or Federal district court judges. We are talking about the local judges for the people of the District of Columbia, and in that local court system, they have a commission that determines who the nominees are. But the President then nominates the local judges because of the statutes governing the District of Columbia within the U.S. Congress.

I have heard on the floor of the Senate, many times, legitimate concerns expressed about crime in the District of Columbia and a backlogged court system in the District of Columbia. And yet some, until today—and I hope today will be different—have blocked

consideration or votes on the judges for the people of the District of Columbia. Because of that, Washington, DC's court system has been plagued by vacancies for years. They currently have 11 vacancies—9 on the superior court that handles civil, criminal, and small claims cases; and 2 on the court of appeals. And because of these vacancies, fewer judges are having to take on significantly more case, leading to long delays. In some cases, these proceedings take years.

Judges in the civil division are handling things like landlord and tenant disputes, medical malpractice, and discrimination, and they are handling double the casework that they used to, an average of 473 cases a year.

Without the appointment of a new judge—in other words, if we don't allow the appointment of a new judge here—there will be only one judge handling all of the criminal domestic violence misdemeanors—30 to 60 cases per day. I want to say that again. Unless we take this action, you are going to have only one judge overseeing criminal domestic violence misdemeanors—30 to 60 cases a day—with longer waits for litigants and significant delays in resolving domestic violence cases.

Judges are double- and triple-booking trial dates. One hundred to 200 cases every year are delayed in the court of appeals. Again, not the U.S. court of appeals. I want to make it clear: This is the District of Columbia system and their court of appeals.

The judges before us today are all nonpartisan. In fact, two of them were previously nominated by President Trump. It gives you an idea how long they have been waiting. They are not interpreting Federal law. They are overseeing local criminal and civil cases, just like judges in our State and local courts, as I said.

So I just want to be really clear for our colleagues who are going to delay these judges. They are going to make it even more difficult for the people of DC to deal with criminal justice issues and with their civil litigation.

I really hope, given the fact that we are not talking about Federal judges, we will be able to proceed with these nominations and support them.

With that, Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that, as if in executive session, the Senate proceed to the consideration of the following nomination: Kenechukwu Onyemacchi Okocha, to be an associate judge of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia; that the Senate vote on the nomination without intervening action or debate; that if confirmed, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate; that any statements related to the nomination be printed in the RECORD; and that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Kansas.

Mr. MARSHALL. I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Madam President, would it be in order if I ask what the basis of the objection is, given the fact that these are nonpartisan judges for the District of Columbia? Would that question be in order if I were to yield to the gentleman?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator may ask questions through the Chair.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. I am just wondering if my colleague from Kansas would like to explain the basis for objecting to a judge—this particular judge—in the DC court system.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator should continue.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. I gather not, OK.

I ask that it be in order to make the same request with respect to Calendar No. 767, Sherri Malloy Beatty-Arthur, to be an associate judge for the Superior Court of the District of Columbia.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. MARSHALL. Madam President, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Madam President, I ask that it be in order to make the same request with respect to Calendar No. 768, Erin Camille Johnston, to be an associate judge of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Kansas.

Mr. MARSHALL. I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Madam President, I ask that it be made in order to make the same request with respect to Calendar No. 769, Ray D. McKenzie, to be an associate judge of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Kansas.

Mr. MARSHALL. Madam President, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Madam President, I ask that it be made in order to make the same request with respect to Calendar No. 770, Rahkel Bouchet, to be an associate judge of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. MARSHALL. Madam President, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Madam President, I ask that it be made in order to make the same request with respect to Calendar No. 771, John Cuong Truong, to be an associate judge of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. MARSHALL. Madam President, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Madam President, I ask that it be made in order to make the same request with respect to Calendar No. 838, James Graham Lake, to be an associate judge of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. MARSHALL. I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Madam President, I ask that it be made in order to make the same request with respect to Calendar No. 839, Nicholas George Miranda, to be an associate judge of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. MARSHALL. Madam President, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Madam President, I ask that it be made in order to make the same request with respect to Calendar No. 774, Carmen G. Iguina Gonzalez, to be an associate judge of the District of Columbia Court of Appeals.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. MARSHALL. Madam President, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Madam President, I am going to try one more time. I ask that it be made in order to make the same request with respect to Calendar No. 775, Joseph Russell Palmore to be an associate judge of the District of Columbia Court of Appeals.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. MARSHALL. Madam President, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Madam President, I would just say that based on what I said in my earlier remarks, I have not heard and the body has not heard of any good reason to be blocking these judges for the District of Columbia, have not heard one substantive objection to any of these individuals, have not heard any other rationale for why we are not going to act on these judges right away.

As I indicated, the result of inaction in blocking these judges is just to back up the entire court system of the District of Columbia—criminal cases, civil cases. It makes no sense.

If someone was looking out on the Senate right now, they would see this as one of the many examples of complete dysfunction because of the kind of obstruction based on who knows what rationale for doing the right thing for the District of Columbia.

This is just one reason why many of us support statehood for the people of the District of Columbia. They

shouldn't have to have the U.S. Senate sign off on their judicial nominations, just as we don't sign off on judicial nominations for State courts, whether it be the State of Wisconsin or my State of Maryland. We don't sign off on nominations for local courts in our States, but we do have that power for now and responsibility for now in the U.S. Senate, and this is just an example of total failure to live up to our responsibility to make sure there is a functioning court system in the District of Columbia.

So it is another bad day as we come to the close of this Congress, another unnecessary obstruction that just makes it more difficult for people to get justice in civil cases or in criminal cases and for people to be held accountable in criminal cases, including, as I mentioned, the many domestic violence cases.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The senior Senator from Pennsylvania.

#### FAREWELL TO THE SENATE

Mr. CASEY. Madam President, I rise today for the final time as a U.S. Senator with a heart full of gratitude. When I was growing up in Scranton, PA, my mother Ellen Harding Casey would often say to my brothers and sisters and me:

Count your blessings. Count your blessings.

She would say that over and over again. So, today, I seek to do so here on the floor of the U.S. Senate. I begin with an expression of deep, abiding gratitude to the people of Pennsylvania who conferred upon me the honor of serving them in three statewide public offices for 28 consecutive years; first as auditor general, then as State treasurer, and for the last 18 years, as U.S. Senator. It has been a privilege to have served our Commonwealth, to have served the people of our Commonwealth.

Now, for 39½ years, I have been blessed by the unconditional love and unflinching support of my wife Terese, the oldest daughter of John and Nancy Foppiano. Every day—every day—that I have been a public official, Terese has been the foundation of our family. Her love for me and our daughters has been boundless and constant.

I want to thank each of our four daughters who are with us today. And for me, just saying their names is like a prayer of thanksgiving: Elyse, Caroline, Julia, and Marena. They, like Terese, sacrificed so much while I was in public office. I am so proud of the accomplished young women they have become.

Elyse and our son-in-law Michael brought us the gift of our grandsons: Max, age 4, and Aiden, a 2-year-old, each of whom bring so much joy to our lives.

And I am so grateful that my brothers and sisters, their spouses, and Terese's sisters and their spouses and so many of my nieces and nephews are with us today and so many friends from all across our Commonwealth.

I remember today my late parents Bob and Ellen Casey, who gave me and my siblings life and love, as well as their shining examples of treating every person that we meet with respect.

My father's work as a public official was a testament to the inscription on the finance building in Harrisburg where he once worked and I worked as well. This inscription has also guided my work all these years. Here is what it says:

All public service is a trust, given in faith and accepted in honor.

The Senate is a place where Senators are accorded most of the attention—not breaking news there. Today, I want to thank, of course, the men and women who don't get the headlines, the men and women who work behind the scenes every day, the staff of the Senate Sergeant at Arms and Doorkeeper who keep the business of the Senate running seamlessly every day, people like Delta Whitfield, Raicee Leake, Rocketa Jackson, and Tim O'Neill, just to name a few who go out of their way to make everyone feel like a VIP; the staff at Restaurant Associates who cater and staff our special events on campus and who serve Senators, staff, and visitors to our Capitol with a smile in our cafeterias; the men and women of the Architect of the Capitol and Senate Superintendent who clean up the Capitol buildings and keep the facilities immaculate every day, even in this centuries-old building; and, of course, the Capitol Police officers. How can we even begin to thank them for their service? Police officers keep us in our complex safe every day. Many of you will never get the commendation or credit that you deserve, but the work you do is vital and is a great service to our Nation.

Of course, I will miss working with Senators on both sides of the aisle, many of whom are here today with us. I am grateful for lasting friendships, like Senator BROWN on my right, Senator KLOBUCHAR on my left. We have a lot of stories, which I won't share today, but I am so grateful for their friendship, and all of my 2006 classmates and so many others in different classes who came in after us and before us, so many Senators who served with distinction.

I have been honored to serve these past 2 years with my friend and Pennsylvania colleague Senator FETTERMAN. I am honored he is with us today again.

Majority Leader SCHUMER and the late Senator Harry Reid, I want to thank them for encouraging me to run for the Senate way back in 2005. I want to thank Chuck for his leadership and our friendship.

I have been blessed to have been served by an exceptional staff every single day that I have been in the U.S. Senate. From my former chief of staff Jim Brown and former legislative director Dick Spiegelman to my current chief of staff Kristen Gentile, who is

right over here, and our legislative director Derek Miller, who is right between those columns there next to former Senator Harkin, I have been blessed by their help all these years, and I am also grateful to have had help in the State as well. My current State director Teresa Dennis has served with me every year that I have been a public official.

These last few years were especially challenging for our office and I know many others with the pandemic and so much else. We had the pandemic and then we not too long after that were in a long, difficult election cycle. I was blessed to have Kristen Gentile, my chief of staff, whose leadership and hard work guided our staff through difficult and demanding times. She led with grace, grit, and humor, and I am grateful for her service, her public service here in the Senate.

But I want to thank each and every single person who served on my Senate staff from January 3, 2007, to today. They have worked tirelessly every day to help the people of Pennsylvania. So I want to thank our staff who are on both corners of the room here, on the left and the right, both present and past, and I know some others in the Galleries. I am so grateful for their work.

Without objection, Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to enter the names of all my past and current staff, both in my office and on the Aging Committee, into the record so they can be recognized for their hard work and exemplary public service for the people of Pennsylvania and our Nation.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

Tad Abramowich, Natalie Adams, Rotimi F Adeoye, Sandra C Aguilera, Callie R Anderson, Andres D Anzola, Michael L Aumiller, Karsen P Bailey, Jordan Ball, Alexander A Baloga, Christina Baumgardner, Dianne M Beecher, Kathleen B Bell, Tayo Belle, Elly Bennett, Robert J Bielunas, Kimberley Y Bierly, Hulan Bikales, Reagan Blewett, Claire Blewitt.

Claire Borzner, Chloe Bowser, Elizabeth C Breckenridge, Regina A Brennan, Sydney M Brooks, Christina M Brown, Heather Brown, James W Brown, Cheryl B Bullock, Jessica M Butherus, Kathi Brumbaugh Caber, Gwen M Camp, Meg Campbell, Jenna Carmen, Michael W Carmody, Jeralyn Cave, Alyssa J Charney, Julia Cinquegrani, MacKenzie Cliatt, Cameron T Cochran.

Liz Conroy, Max Conway, Elizabeth M Cooper, Shavonnia L Corbin-Johnson, Connor Corpora, Ryan Costella, Amy E Cozze, Jessie L Crabb, Vivian G Cueto, Rory C Daly, Alexander G Davis, Michael J Deery, Erin Delaney, Stephanie Deluca, Teresa L Dennis, Kaylin K Dines, Elena C Ditraglia, Joshua Dubensky, Alexandria Duque, Brett T Ekberg.

Jaclyn W Erickson, Micah G Escobedo, Mark J Farrell, Marlon L Ferguson, James A Ferruchie, Elizabeth L Fishback, Lara K Flynn, Jamie F Fofanah, Adam C Fountaine, Caitlin G Frazer, Katie Fricchione, Deirdre D Fruh, Ian M Futerfas, Michael A Gaffin, Alexa R Gall, Jeannie Galloway, Bonnie Geist-Seaman, Kristen Gentile, Kasey Gillette, Ben Gilsdorf.

Veronica Goodman, Joseph F Gookin, Ian Graham, Matthew D Grill, Jack B Groarke,

Andrea M Guscott, Larry Hailsham, Michelle Haimowitz, Kyle L Hannon, William E Hansen, Kristen Harfield, Douglas Hartman, Elizabeth Hermsen, Maria A Hernandez, John Hicks, Joseph V Hill, Sonja Hoover, Corey Husak, Sean R Hyland, Kurt E Imhof.

Maurya T Incavido, Jennifer Jackson, Ian M Jannetta, Brian D Jennings, Harry Johnson II, Aisha T Johnson, Christopher M Johnson, Jonathan A Jones, Augustin Jones, Jofi J Joseph, Madeline L Joyce, Robert J Joyce, Matthew W Justinus, Elizabeth L Kanick, Zoey N Keeley, Anna G Keilly, Mary A Kent, Samantha M Koshgarian, Molly Krafcik, Matthew W Lachman.

Abby R LaForm, Kendra Barkoff Lamy, Deborah Landau, Trace J Ledgard, James Lee, Virginia H Lenahan, Matthew J Leonard, Misha Samuel Linnehan, Kylie C Lipinski, Jaren Love, Nefetia Z Lundy, Sharon E Lynett, Mairead Lynn, Charles R Lyons, Ian F Madigan, Kristin A Magnotta, Shoshana Z Marin, Lindsay M Martin, Arthur R Martinucci, Sara C Maskornick.

Roberta M Matesic, Cindy E Matos Beltre, Jae Von L McClain, Jennifer S McCloskey, J Michael McCullough, Bryn McDonough, Spencer R McKinstry, Jacob P Medvitz, April K Melody, Alina C Meltaus, Leah M Mercik, Datnilza Metz, Alexandra J Miller, Derek J Miller, Aryeh E Mittleman, Geoffrey A Mock, Patricia A Monahan, Makese S Motley, Jeff W Mozdziocik, Gillian R Mueller.

Thomas J Murabito, Damian Murphy, Jonas Murphy, Catherine M Murray, Morna A Murray, Peter Nalli, Katharine Nasielski, Evan C Neill, Grace V Nelson, Paul A Nestler, Sarah A Newman, Carol Obando-Derstine, Stephen O'Brion, Maureen O'Dea-Brill, Kennedy E O'Dell, Nduvuisi Onwumere, Panini Chaitanya Pandya, Reecha R Patel, Jacob Pawlak, Taylor A Pelletier.

Isabel Perez, Joycelyn Pickens, Nikki Rai, Jacklin B Rhoads, Nicole E Rhoads, John L Richter, Tyisha S Rivas, John Rizzo, Antoine Jamal Robinson, Robert Roggio, Pablo Rojas, Emma Rachel Romanowsky, Rahmon L Ross, Ryan C Ross, Christopher T Rosselot, Jesse A Salazar, Kate E Samuelson, Valli Sanmugalingam, Benjamin J Schwartz, Michael J Schwartz.

Ethan Seletsky, Julia R Sferlazzo, Zachary M Shaw, Emily J Sheehan, Livia Shmavonian, Avni P Shridharani, Michelle S Shwimer, Sara-Paige Kathleen Silvestro, Madison F Sloat, Larry M Smar, Allegra F Smith, Jared S Solomon, Ben Soltero De Martin, Zahra J. Somji, Brooke M Souder, Richard D Spiegelman, Kevin M Stanton, Nico Starr, Nathan C Steinwald, Sadie L Sterner.

Jackson Still, Monica L Swintz, Adam G Tarr, Cameron G Thompson, Ashely Stover Tokic, Mary C Topolinski, Amanda Toth, Alexandra F Trachtman, CT Turner, ND Ubezou, Barbara J Vachon, Jenna J Valle-Riestra, Mariska H Van Aalst, Nikita Varman, Landy Wade, Noel Walker, Karen L Walsh, Heather E Walters, Elizabeth A Washo, Kevin J Washo.

Tia L Watson, Melody R Webb, Kichelle Webster, Aimee C Wechsler, Ebony S Weidman, Liz Weintraub, Adam T Wells, Wesle Whistle, Edward C Williams, Erin Wilson, Lucy Xiao, Joshua A Yearsley, Stephanie D Zarecky.

Mr. CASEY. I am proud of the work we have done together, on behalf of the people of Pennsylvania, to fight for our children, our seniors, people with disabilities, our veterans, and our workers.

In my 18 years in the Senate, I have worked to pass many laws focused on improving the lives of everyday Americans. Allow me to give you some exam-

ples. One of my proudest accomplishments is the Stephen Beck, Jr., Achieving a Better Life Experience Act, the so-called ABLE Act, which turned 10 years old this month.

Before ABLE, people with disabilities could not save more than \$2,000 without risking access to their Federal benefits, forcing many people with disabilities into a permanent state of poverty.

I worked with Senator Richard Burr to pass the ABLE Act in 2014 so that people with disabilities can save for their futures. There are almost 190,000 ABLE accountholders across the Nation who have already saved over \$2 billion. Brenda Dare is one of those, an ABLE accountholder from Allegheny County, PA. She says that ABLE "gives us a way to be fully functional citizens who are able to save and prepare for their futures." Her ABLE account allows Brenda to own her own home and raise her niece full time.

In building on the success of the program, starting in 2026, people who acquired their disability before the age of 46 will be able to open ABLE accounts, expanding eligibility to 6 million more Americans, including more than a million veterans.

In 2013, I passed the Campus SaVE Act to put greater responsibility on colleges and universities to prevent sexual assaults on college campuses. This was important legislation to make sure students understood their rights and protections on campus. It has made college campuses safer in the decade since its passage.

The Pregnant Workers Fairness Act passed 2 years ago this month. It provides pregnant women with "reasonable accommodations" to work and to maintain a healthy pregnancy as they continue to do their work. Senator BILL CASSIDY worked with me to pass this bill, and I am grateful for his help.

Modeled after the Americans with Disabilities Act, this legislation ensures that pregnant women can go to their employer and ask for reasonable accommodations, simple things like a stool to sit on or a water bottle or bathroom break and other accommodations, just as people with disabilities have been able to ask for accommodations of other kinds for the past three decades in their workplaces.

A number of years ago, as a Member of the Senate Agriculture Committee, I was proud to author a law that has dramatically improved our schools and our children's nutrition. That provision, modeled after a Philadelphia pilot program, allowed high poverty schools to offer school lunch and breakfast free of charge.

Nearly 68 percent of American school districts now offer free meals under this option, and 20 million children attend schools offering universal free meals. That is 10 times the number of children as in 2010.

Captain Victor Saracini was a Bucks County resident and a United Airlines pilot killed in the terrorist attacks of 9/11. His wife Ellen Saracini turned her

unimaginable grief into action, and she fought to pass legislation to make airline cockpits safer.

I was honored to work alongside Ellen to pass two laws to make sure that new airplanes are built with a secondary barrier to the cockpit and to retrofit older planes. These laws would help prevent future terrorist attacks.

We all know the global food insecurity around the world not only leaves millions of children starving and malnourished, but it also creates political instability. I worked with my Republican colleagues to authorize and then to reauthorize—more than once—the Global Food Security Act to combat food insecurity, create economic opportunity, and promote international stability.

I also fought to keep our service-members safe in Afghanistan by working to reduce the number of IEDs—those awful explosive devices. In the 2000s, IEDs were killing and wounding U.S. troops in Afghanistan at an alarming rate. Through legislation to stop the flow of ammonium nitrate used in IEDs as well as pushing the Pentagon, by 2012, deaths by IEDs had dropped significantly.

But passing legislation isn't the only measure of success in the Senate. I am an extraordinarily proud Senator of the work that was done by my constituent services team, currently led by Lindsay Martin, all of whom have some of the hardest jobs here in government anywhere in the Capitol—in our States, as well.

Over the course of my three terms in the Senate, they have closed almost 200,000 constituent cases. Let me give you just four examples: First, the number represents Pennsylvanians we helped get the Social Security benefits that they were due but were not receiving; second, the 94-year-old World War II veteran from Philadelphia for whom we secured updated discharge papers and backpay reflecting a promotion he had been denied because he was a Black soldier; the first responder from Erie we helped receive money that she was owed from the 9/11 Victim Compensation Fund; and, finally, the mother whose son was denied care by their insurance company for 2 months until our office reached out on their behalf—and so many more constituents across the State.

Finally, I fought to deliver Federal funding for Pennsylvania families and communities in all 67 counties. I worked to provide investments to lift up families during the pandemic; support public safety by delivering funding for police and fire departments; improve water and sewer systems, roads, and bridges in small rural areas; and support local nonprofits that protect the most vulnerable among us.

In Southwestern Pennsylvania, that economy of that corner of the State relies upon our waterways system. The Port of Pittsburgh and the region's locks and dams could move essential commodities. Those waterways create

jobs, and they promote economic development.

Without our waterways, the region's entire economy would come to a standstill, threatening some 200,000 jobs.

Thanks to the Infrastructure Law and persistent work over many years to highlight just how vital these waterways are, I was able to secure nearly a billion dollars to replace the Montgomery Locks and Dam in Beaver County, PA, and invest in the broader waterway system.

In 2016, during a phone call with county commissioners in Southwestern Pennsylvania, one of the commissioners just started to scream into the phone. He said: "Senator, kids can't do their homework." And he made a point to me that I will never forget.

So I went to work, as we all did, on high-speed internet. I was able to deliver significant investments to expand high-speed internet to rural communities across our Commonwealth. Without high-speed internet, not only are schoolchildren adversely impacted, small businesses can't connect with their customers; farmers can't fix their equipment when it breaks down in the field. But that is changing.

Just last week, I was in Washington County, in the southwestern corner of our State, to highlight the expansion of high-speed internet for 9,000 residents and small businesses in rural communities, made possible by a public-private partnership that folks at the local level started. But it included \$25 million from the American Rescue Plan legislation.

Washington County is not alone. High-speed internet is being deployed all across the Commonwealth.

As many of you know, Pennsylvania has a rich history of energy production. Our coal miners risked their health and their safety and many lost their lives over generations to power the Nation.

Pennsylvania's energy workers, I would argue, are the best in the world. And they are also well-equipped to lead us into the energy economy of the future.

As the Senate worked to pass the Inflation Reduction Act—as many know, a bill to spur a new energy manufacturing renaissance—I made sure that Pennsylvania energy communities were first in line.

In the bill, I secured an energy communities tax credit for investments in clean energy facilities and communities whose economies have relied upon coal, oil, or natural gas.

These incentives are spurring investments all across Pennsylvania—from the Mineral Basin solar plant on abandoned mine lands in Clearfield County to the expanded demand for Voith Hydro's production in York County.

I want to wrap up with just some thoughts about what is ahead for the next Congress—and the next number of Congresses probably—with some of these challenges. I want to highlight some of the challenges that lie ahead for our Nation.

There are so many priorities we could talk about today, like combating climate change and gun violence and the opioid crisis, lowering costs for families, providing home and community-based services for seniors and people with disabilities. And there are so many more that I didn't mention.

As many of you know—and you see it in your own communities, your own families, your own States—it is much more difficult to raise a family and provide long-term stability than it used to be. Pennsylvanians used to be able to work one job, often without a college degree, and provide for their families for decades.

There is a big moment in 2025: a tax bill. I won't be here for it. But that tax debate will be a critical moment for American families. Congress will decide whether to help middle-class and low-income families—people striving to get to the middle class—or to continue what I would argue is a 40-year trend to provide substantial tax benefits to the largest corporations on the planet Earth and the wealthiest Americans. I hope that the Senate will act to help the middle class and those striving to get to the middle class.

I urge, as well, the Senate to make the Child Tax Credit—something that Senator BROWN and Senator BENNET long ago introduced legislation on—to make that Child Tax Credit—two words—"fully refundable" rather than provide more corporate and high-income tax breaks.

When that tax credit was made fully refundable in 2021, that one action changed the lives of so many children. It reduced childhood poverty by 40—40—percent.

I have long warned as a United States Senator that China is not just a competitor, it is an economic adversary, and that we must continue to confront China head-on. I have often said that when China cheats, Pennsylvania loses jobs.

I have worked for years to crack down on China's trade cheating and to limit the risks of sending our national security technology and know-how to China.

Senator CORNYN and I have been working for years to pass legislation to crack down on U.S. investments in China that would undermine our national security. And later this week, Congress will pass a version of that legislation in the continuing resolution to fund the government.

We all know that a key to global competitiveness lies here at home. In order to compete globally, we must invest in our children.

Inspired by Franklin Roosevelt's Four Freedoms, I introduced, in early 2020, a set of ideas where I proposed Five—Five—Freedoms for America's Children: the freedom to be healthy, the freedom to learn, the freedom to have economic security, the freedom to be safe from harm, and the freedom from hunger.

If every American child—every American child—was able to benefit



from these five freedoms, they would have the opportunity to succeed in life. There are so many benefits to our Nation as well: a higher skilled workforce, if we invest in our kids; a greater GDP; a stronger national security; a healthier society, if—if—we invest in our children.

Finally, the Senate—and the American people—have to make a choice in the years ahead between dictators and democracy. We must continue to support—not just in the Senate and the House but as Americans, we must continue to support the people of Ukraine in their consequential war with a murderous dictator, Vladimir Putin.

Our Nation has generously supported the Ukrainian military. We cannot stop. Abandoning them now undermines freedom-loving people all over the world.

You and others have been a patient audience. But I would like to conclude with some final thoughts. I want to go back to my mother. Inspired by my mother, I have been granted today the privilege of counting my blessings on the floor of the U.S. Senate.

One of the greatest blessings in my life—and I know for so many people here—has been the blessing of public service. As the scriptures tell us:

It is in giving that we receive.

Dr. Martin Luther King said it another way. He said:

Everyone can be great, because everyone can serve.

King taught us in that simple statement that the word “great” in this context isn’t about fame or a claim or notoriety or riches. “Great” is about something much more valuable, much more valuable: the opportunity to help others.

I will continue to do my part to serve as a citizen and as a Pennsylvanian. And serving in the U.S. Senate has been an honor of a lifetime. Thank you. And God bless you.

I yield the floor.

(Applause, Senators rising.)

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The junior Senator from Pennsylvania.

TRIBUTE TO ROBERT P. CASEY, JR.

Mr. FETTERMAN. Madam President, this is not a speech that I ever expected to give and definitely never wanted to give. Discussing this has been difficult. Anyone who was with us last night at that dinner would confirm that.

But today, on the floor of the Senate and for the record, I will confirm that BOB CASEY is Pennsylvania’s best Senator. Now, it is difficult to follow BOB CASEY, both right now but also without him. I really can’t imagine it. For 18 years, BOB showed up, he put his head down, he worked, and he delivered for Pennsylvania. It has been a supreme honor to call BOB a colleague, a friend, and a mentor.

During my campaign, BOB was by my side. When I had a stroke, he lent me his voice when I was learning how to speak again. I never forgot that. And

when I got to the Senate 2 years ago, he became a mentor to me. At a very difficult time in my life, he stuck by me because that is who BOB is—a friend and an amazing Senator.

Every day for 18 years, he fought for working Pennsylvanians. He fought for our rural communities. He fought for seniors and for people with disabilities, including myself. He fought for all of us. After 18 years, BOB CASEY’s legacy is a better Pennsylvania.

Thank you, BOB CASEY.

I yield the floor.

(Applause.)

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The senior Senator from Ohio.

Mr. BROWN. Madam President, I have enjoyed watching Senator FETTERMAN and Senator CASEY and working together in the mentoring and seeing how productive that has been for them in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Marcus Aurelius said:

Humility is the foundation of all virtue.

Humility is the foundation of all virtue.

Humility is not a common trait in this body, perhaps, but humility infuses the work of BOB CASEY every single day. I have worked with his staff. My office, in fact—we have worked with his staff perhaps—not perhaps—more than any other office, and I feel that, you know, what he brings to this is that uncommon humility and uncommon kindness in his personal relationships with his friends in the back row here, an uncommon kindness to the people of Pennsylvania, and an uncommon kindness with his own staff—I love watching that: little test, little staff turnover—the kind of energy that they bring and the kind of kindness they bring.

One of the things that really brought that home to me, in listening to BOB’s talk a minute ago, was he concentrated on constituent service. BOB CASEY understands that to do this job—the real building blocks of this job—you help people individually. There are tens of thousands of people he has helped in his offices in, I guess, Philly and Pittsburgh, and I don’t know where else—whatever all these inferior cities are—inferior to Ohio—in Pennsylvania.

(Laughter.)

But what he has brought to his offices in reaching out to people—those really are the building blocks of public service. He has been a public servant extraordinaire in the way he does his work, in the way he does his job. As I said, he brings to it that uncommon kindness, that uncommon humility, and it infuses his work in constituent services. It infuses his work in fighting for economic justice.

He didn’t talk that much in his speech about what he has done with children and poor children. I saw three of his daughters and Terese downstairs before the speech, and I got a chance to talk to them. I have watched them grow up over these years. Terese was already grown up. I have watched his daughters grow up over these 18 years.

(Laughter.)

And there is just this kind of energy and commitment to service to people that I have seen in them, which has been a delight to watch.

But he didn’t talk all that much about what he has done for children. Nobody in the body has focused their work on children as much as BOB CASEY. It is the child tax credit, for sure, but it is so many things—from disabled kids; from giving kids from, you know, Erie to Sharon, to Philly, to Bucks County—giving them more opportunity in life than they otherwise would have had.

Also, one of the things that—when I think about BOB CASEY, I think of him standing up for the little guy. I have heard him talk about his trips to the grocery store and how some people in this body blame inflation on government spending, which, of course, doesn’t hold economic water. But BOB has really focused on helping me come to discuss inflation.

Connie and I go to church. When we go to church on Sunday, we often stop at a nearby grocery store, and you talk to people at the checkout line or at the meat counter or just walking down the aisles, talking about how much things cost. BOB had this understanding. He called it shrinkflation. What he kind of taught me to say is, When you go to the grocery store and you are paying higher prices, you are paying them because of private, executive compensation and bonuses. You are paying for those higher prices by stock buybacks and exorbitant profits. And BOB understood that and always fought for the little guy.

I so appreciate the friendship, first of all. I appreciate the gentleness of spirit and his uncommon empathy and understanding. He always understood, in part, because he goes home and listens. He doesn’t go home and make a lot of speeches. He goes home and listens to people and understands their concerns. He brought them here. He made such a difference for Pennsylvanians. He made such a difference for Ohioans and for the people in the other 48 States too.

I will be eternally grateful to BOB CASEY for that friendship, for the humility that he has shown toward his job and toward the world around him, and just for being a really, really good man.

(Applause.)

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The senior Senator from Minnesota.

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Madam President, I rise from the back row—with some of my best friends back here—to honor, like everyone gathered here today, BOB CASEY, who has served the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania for 17 years here with honor, dignity, and, yes, joy. He served before he got here—as he noted, always a public servant—and he will serve after he leaves here. That we know for sure.

So, yes, we were this great class of freshmen Senators together, and I do remember when BOB first led the Senate in the Pledge of Allegiance—is this

not correct?—the day after we got sworn in. There was someone who was particularly rule-bound who worked here at the time. BOB finished. He thought he had done such a good job. He comes back to his seat.

Mr. CASEY. Are you really telling this?

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. I am really telling it.

And she says to him: Do you know what, Senator? In the U.S. Senate, when we say the Pledge of Allegiance, we put our hand over our heart.

He said: Well, that is what I did.

She said: No, you were doing it like you were getting sworn in again.

He went like this.

(Laughter.)

Mr. CASEY. A true story.

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Then I remember our—what?

Mr. CASEY. A true story.

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. It was a true story. Thank you. That is one of my virtues.

(Laughter.)

I remember our first day of our first classified briefing. We had no idea what we were doing, and they said: Well, you just go right at this statue, left at this painting, right at this thing.

The two of us are wandering through the halls of the Senate. We get completely lost; we are going to miss the classified briefing. And, all of a sudden, we see a group of Minnesotans coming over.

They just stop, and they go:

Look, it's Amy, and she has a guard.

So, not missing a beat, your Senator, BOB CASEY, goes all full Secret Service on us and plays the part.

(Laughter.)

We have been friends ever since, and I think so many people here see BOB as their friend. So many people in Pennsylvania see him that way.

Terese and BOB were over with us last night and got to watch the video of his postelection day. One of his neighbors—just a man on the street—was interviewed and said: Well, yes. I have always been a Republican, but BOB is such a good neighbor; so I voted for him.

I think that says a lot about BOB.

You know, in 1977, Minnesota's "happy warrior," Vice President Hubert Humphrey—and this is the ultimate compliment from Minnesotans—said this: The moral test of government is how the government treats those who are in the dawn of life, how it treats those who are in the twilight of life, and how it treats those who are in the shadows of life.

From the moment BOB CASEY got to this place, he saw that as his job—always looking out for people who didn't have a voice, always looking out for people who couldn't afford to hire a lobbyist, always looking out for people when no one else was listening. He did that.

He looked out for seniors and people with disabilities with the ABLE Act. I have been with him when people have

come up and told him that, because of BOB CASEY and his leadership on that bill, when no one else was caring about it in the U.S. Senate, they have a savings, and they have a future life.

He headed up the Aging Committee, looking out for the people in the twilight of their lives. He fought to bring down prescription drug costs.

He stood up for kids on childcare when no one else was doing it, looking out for people in the dawn of their lives. He made adoption easier for Americans looking to start families.

And that is barely scratching the surface.

We have worked on 150 pieces of legislation together, but who is counting? And we are still friends.

But what has made BOB truly a good friend is you can actually trust him. In an environment where you tell people things, and you tell them "don't tell anyone," and the next day, it is either in the news or a colleague down the hallway is saying, "Hey, I heard about this," not BOB. He keeps your trust. In that way, he has been to me like the brother I never had.

His friends trust him. His family trusts him. The people of Pennsylvania trust him, and, I will add, maybe that has something to do with this incredible family of his: seven brothers and sisters, four daughters—that must have been a time growing up—and, of course, Terese.

When you put all those names in the RECORD, I thought it was going to be your entire family, and it was going to take up the day's RECORD.

(Laughter.)

So we want to thank you, BOB, for everything you have done. We can't wait to hear what you do next. Thank you for your public service. Thank you for being a true public servant. Thank you.

(Applause.)

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The senior Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. BOOKER. Madam President, so much niceness headed toward this guy—it is killing me over here.

(Laughter.)

I want to clear the record, and I have a beef to settle with the good Senator from Pennsylvania.

I will tell you this: I consider myself a person of faith, and I think that Senator BOB CASEY has done something very irreligious if I must say. I know he grew up as a Catholic. I grew up in a Baptist church. We are both Christians. We have very different religious faiths, but I have an issue with BOB CASEY because, in the organizing Bible verse that I used to tell people was how I motivated my life, I come here, and he completely eviscerates my allegiance to this Bible verse.

So I am using this, and forgive me. And I might be rule XIX'd by somebody for maligning a colleague. But I am very upset that you have made me lose my religion a little bit, and I will give you an example.

If you know—a point of order? No.

(Laughter.)

Will the Senator yield? No, I will not.

(Laughter.)

Matthew 25 is really one of those Bible verses that has, for so much of my life, motivated me. You know, the Lord said: I was hungry, and you fed me; or thirsty, and you gave me to drink.

And it ends with this verse 40: And then you shall answer and say unto them, "Verily I say to you, in so much as you have done to the least of these my brethren, you have done to me."

The least of these is how—I thought that that was the calling of my faith—to do unto the least of these. And for 10 years now—11 years that I have been in the Senate, you have undermined that idea of doing unto the least of these.

Now, look, BOB—if I may call you that, sir—I came into the Senate thinking that was our job, but I have watched you for 11 years never see anyone as "least." You have this way of looking at everybody and seeing their grandeur. You see people not as if they are in a lower station in any way, but you have a way of seeing people as if they are a reflection of the Divine Himself.

I had a very humbling experience in the past 7 days with the good Senator from Iowa. We were down in the basement of Dirksen when people from the disability community from Pennsylvania and all around America came to give you tribute. As I sat there welling up at the tributes to you from these extraordinary Americans, every person that spoke and that I spoke to afterwards told me that you saw them; that you were a person who recognized their humanity, who recognized their strength, who saw their character, capabilities; and that you were not doing to any least but that you were elevating everyone and this Nation in the process.

When you remarked about the little lobbyists, you pointed out how powerful they were in saving healthcare for all Americans.

So I want to tell you, in my farewell to you after your speech, that when I was coming out of college, my greatest hero in America was not a Senator or a politician; it was Marian Wright Edelman. I thought that should be the calling of this country, to focus on children.

I love what Marian Wright Edelman said:

So much of America's tragic and costly failures to care for all of its children stems from our tendency to distinguish between our children and other people's children—as if justice were divisible.

I see this framing that has made humanity suffer for thousands of years—those who framed humanity in us versus them. You have this superpower to only see just us. It is not your family and my family; we are family—to try not to sound like a famous song.

Somehow, my friend, you make real the words of one of my favorite poets, Gwendolyn Brooks, who simply said:

We are each other's harvest; we are each other's business; we are each other's magnitude and bond.

I look up to you, BOB. I see in you—if you ask me what is the difference between a Hollywood heartthrob—or what does BOB CASEY have in common with a Hollywood heartthrob, I would say, nothing at all.

(Laughter.)

You are not sexy. You are not glamorous.

(Laughter.)

My church tradition was, you had charismatic leaders in the pulpit giving great speeches. You must have gone to a very boring church.

(Laughter.)

But somehow you made me aspire to know in the Senate the difference between celebrity and significance, the difference between a showhorse and a workhorse, the difference between some nobility that you feel that you are reaching out and reaching down to help others, to humbling yourself before God's creations.

I end with this framing: Marian Wright Edelman inspired me at the beginning of my career, and the way you have focused on children inspires me amidst my middle-age years as a Senator. I still am inspired by people who care about kids. That is why you have been one of my greatest heroes.

So to steal from CHRIS COONS, who is the one person, I think, who knows Swahili in this Chamber, I would like to end with some Swahili words.

The Maasai warriors have this incredible tradition. These are the people who are most valued in their defense of those in the village who might not be able to defend themselves, who are powerful in their fierce fighting capabilities and fight for those who are powerless.

When they are out and about, they have a greeting that they say to each other, and the greeting, if I am pronouncing it right—and CHRIS COONS will correct me later—is “Kasserian ingera.” This is the greeting of two warriors. When they see each other, they greet each other: “Kasserian ingera.” The response is “Sepati ingera,” which means—one warrior says to the other “How are the children?” and the response of two warriors is “The children are well.” This is the indicator for the Maasai people of what the strongest, what the most powerful, what the fearsome fighters are most focused on, which is the children.

You, my friend, are one of the greatest warriors I have ever served with. I know your heart. I know your moral compass. I know how you live your faith every single day and how much you have deepened mine.

In the words of the Maasai, I have two words to say: “Asante sana”—thank you very much.

(Applause.)

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The junior Senator from Delaware.

Mr. COONS. Madam President, I rise in defense of my colleague from the

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. BOB CASEY is sexy.

(Laughter.)

Being fully bald is not the sole indicator of one's celebrity or sexiness.

Although an inspiring quote was just delivered by my dear colleague from our neighboring State of New Jersey, that was not Swahili, and I ask leave to conduct the rest of my remarks today in Kiswahili.

(Laughter.)

I am kidding.

I will just briefly say of my dear friend and colleague, of my neighbor, traveling companion, partner, and source of inspiration, that long before I imagined I could ever be a Senator, I served in local government in Delaware and knew that there was to our north a son of Scranton who was someone who was deeply grounded in his family, in his faith, and in his sense of justice.

Some mistake Senator CASEY for not only not being sexy but for not being a fighter. One of the things I have held most closely to, as I have tried to conduct myself in this Chamber and in this work of being a Senator with humility and dignity and kindness, is that it is possible—in fact, daily demonstrated—for someone like Senator CASEY, who is humble and unassuming, who is generous and kind, who sees every one, who treats all of us with respect, to still be fierce and to still be determined and to still be a fighter and to still be someone who sees righteousness and refuses to yield.

There was attributed to St. Francis an important saying, I think:

Preach the Gospel at all times; when necessary, use words.

Senator CASEY's walk through this life, alongside his incredible blessing Terese, alongside the amazing blessing of Elyse, Julia, Caroline, Marena, and those two great grandsons, has been a walk of dignity and fierceness. To fight for the five freedoms for children, to coauthor the Global Food Security Act, to be someone who crafts legislation that touches people all over our country and the world, is to deliver on the promise and the call of the Gospel.

From your time as a Jesuit volunteer, from your days at a dance at Holy Cross, from the days that you have spent here and crisscrossing the Commonwealth, you have shown, with a heart like a lion, that you are every bit the fighter as those who are more known on Twitter and TV and that you are every bit as fierce.

We had the blessing of traveling with you—my wife Annie, who is from Pennsylvania, and I with Terese and BOB—and what you just said about the importance of fighting for Ukraine and Ukrainians and of seeing everyone and of caring for them we got to see in the joy that you brought to delivering relief to Ukrainian children refugees.

This place will not be the same without my colleague from Pennsylvania. I have never campaigned harder for a colleague. I have never been more disappointed at an outcome. It has never

seemed more unjust to me than the days we must face ahead without this son of Scranton, who has not just counted his blessings before us today but who has been a blessing to us every single day.

With that, I yield the floor.

(Applause.)

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic whip.

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I say to the Senator, I want to add a few words to the tribute to you, BOB, and just to take another angle, if I might.

I have been fortunate enough to join you and campaign in your home State. I remember your first campaign and a trip that I took to try to help. It ended with a party at the end of the day, and if I am not mistaken, it was a bank that had been converted into some meeting hall, maybe, in Scranton.

Mr. CASEY. A bar.

Mr. DURBIN. A bar—more appropriate.

I recall standing there with your friends and family, having a drink and a good time, and I am thinking to myself, I could back up a big truck right to the front door here, ask everyone to take their drinks and walk on, take them to the Beverly section of Chicago, open the door, and they could continue the conversation without any interruption. It was an Irish-Catholic, largely Democratic group. They would have been just as comfortable in the environs of Chicago and many other places in this country.

But what I remember is how many members of your family were there. I think you filled the place with family members. It told me an awful lot about the “Casey” name in Pennsylvania. It wasn't just a legend. It was more than that. It made a difference in the lives of so many different people and inspired you into public service. I think that was probably the beginning of your commitment to what you have reached in your career—family, faith, and a sense of fairness.

I went back on a bus trip on another one of your campaigns. That is when I met Lieutenant Governor-Candidate JOHN FETTERMAN and a lot of other of your friends. We went through Bucks County and other places. I have seen you in Chicago. You look just as much at home as you would in the State of Pennsylvania. I think it speaks to what I understand in politics: Family, faith, and fairness can take you a long way. You have made a career out of it. What you have been able to do is to reach out and help people who otherwise wouldn't have had a fighting chance, and that, in my mind and yours too, is why we are here today.

I want to close with this brief remark and just make note of a mutual friend of ours that we talk about all the time. He is a fellow in Philadelphia that I turned to in 1992 to be my political adviser, a fellow named Saul Shorr.

I know that he loves you as a politician and a friend and dedicated so much of his life's work to your success.

And I know that your defeat hurt him as much as it does all of us.

But you will be remembered here, and you will inspire others. A new generation will follow, and they will say: We are keeping up the Casey name. We are standing up for what BOB CASEY stood for: family, faith, and fairness.

Thanks, BOB, for being a great friend and a great Senator.

(Applause.)

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The junior Senator from Minnesota.

#### AMENDING THE THYE-BLATNIK ACT

Ms. SMITH. Madam President, northern Minnesota is home to some of the most beautiful and valuable forestlands in the Nation.

As a Minnesota Senator, my job is to make sure that northern Minnesota communities are treated fairly when it comes to taxes, and that is what this bill is about that I am here to speak about today. It is a very particular Minnesota issue that doesn't affect any other State, but it is extremely important to us.

For decades, the bipartisan Thye-Blatnik Act has ensured that Lake County, Cook County, and St. Louis County in Minnesota receive a vital source of revenue in exchange for hosting Federal wilderness lands. Thye-Blatnik is unique from other similar laws around the country in that the Federal Government makes payments to counties depending on appraisals that are conducted every 10 years by the U.S. Forest Service. And for decades, everything has worked just great.

But then, in 2018, because of unusual circumstances, the regular appraisal led to almost a 50-percent cut in the Thye-Blatnik payments to the counties, and this created a big hardship for the residents in these small-population rural counties that do not have a big tax base because so much of their land is tied up in national forestland and wilderness areas.

Many of my colleagues on this floor represent counties like this and understand the challenges of providing essential services like road maintenance and public safety in these communities. So without the action in my bill today, communities in northern Minnesota would face a serious budget crunch.

Since 2018, I went to work with Senator KLOBUCHAR and Republican Congressman PETE STAUBER, from Minnesota's Eighth District, to figure out how to fix the problem. We worked with the Biden administration and the Trump administration to find a fix. And while everyone agrees that the problem needs to be fixed, no one can figure out how to do this administratively. That is why we need this bill. It is a technical fix that will go a long way toward helping rural Minnesota counties.

This bill would make sure that future Thye-Blatnik payments don't go down

because of the vagaries of appraisals that no one has any control over. It is a simple bill. It is not controversial. It is bipartisan. And, as I said, it doesn't affect any other State or county in the country. But, of course, to these three counties in Minnesota, it is a real lifeline.

Without action, this vital source of revenue, which supports services like emergency management and road maintenance, will decrease. So I am asking for Congress to get this done.

So, Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of S. 5595, which was introduced earlier today.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 5595) to amend the act of June 22, 1948.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Ms. SMITH. I ask unanimous consent that the bill be considered read three times and passed and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

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

The bill (S. 5595) was ordered to be engrossed for a third reading, was read the third time, and passed as follows:

S. 5595

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

#### SECTION 1. APPRAISALS.

Section 5 of the Act of June 22, 1948 (commonly known as the "Thye-Blatnik Act") (62 Stat. 570, chapter 593; 16 U.S.C. 577g), is amended by striking "of the fair appraised value of such" and inserting "of the highest fair appraised value, including historical fair appraised values, as determined by the Secretary of Agriculture in accordance with this section, of such".

#### UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Ms. SMITH. Madam President, I now rise in support of my friend Patrice Kunesh, who was nominated to serve as Chair of the National Indian Gaming Commission.

Patrice is a descendant of the Standing Rock Lakota and is currently commissioner of the Administration for Native Americans at the Department of Health and Human Services and a distinguished and highly qualified public servant. Her current role at the Administration for Native Americans is just the latest role in her lifetime of service to Indian Country.

In addition to Federal service at the Departments of the Interior, Agriculture, Justice, and the Minneapolis Federal Reserve, she has worked for the Native American Rights Fund, in-house for the Mashantucket Pequot Tribe, and in academia.

The last time she was nominated for a Senate-concerned position, she received strong bipartisan support.

Madam President, I have been hearing from Tribal leaders in Minnesota

and around the country about the importance of confirming Patrice Kunesh to be the NIGC Chair. To them, her confirmation isn't a partisan issue, nor should it be; it is about securing strong leadership at a body created to advance Tribe sovereignty and economic self-determination.

NIGC is responsible for regulating Tribal gaming, and it has been without a Chair since February. Patrice is eminently qualified, she is experienced, and she is ready to serve Indian Country.

So therefore, Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that, as in executive session, the Senate consider the following nomination: Calendar 841, Patrice H. Kunesh, of Minnesota, to be Chairman of the National Indian Gaming Commission for the term of three years; that the Senate vote on the nomination without intervening action or debate; that, if confirmed, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table and the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The junior Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. MULLIN. I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The objection is heard.

The Senator from Wyoming.

#### THE CALENDAR

Mr. BARRASSO. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of the following bills en bloc: Calendar No. 595, S. 3123; Calendar No. 644, S. 5125; Calendar No. 306, S. 2018; Calendar No. 649, H.R. 5443; Calendar No. 304, S. 961; and Calendar No. 613, S. 4209.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the bills en bloc.

Mr. BARRASSO. I ask unanimous consent that the committee-reported amendments, where applicable, be considered and agreed to; that the bills 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:

#### MODERNIZING ACCESS TO OUR PUBLIC WATERS ACT

A bill (S. 3123) to provide for the standardization, consolidation, and publication of data relating to public outdoor recreational use of Federal waterways among Federal land and water management agencies, and for other purposes, which had been reported from the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources with an amendment to strike all after the enacting clause and insert in lieu thereof the following:

#### SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

*This Act may be cited as the "Modernizing Access to Our Public Waters Act".*

#### SEC. 2. DEFINITIONS.

*In this Act:*