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Senate

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. GRASSLEY).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Eternal Spirit, thank You for the continuous blessings of Your handiwork, from the first blush of dawn to the wonders of the starry heavens, we are daily made aware of Your creative might. Lord, bless our Senators to see the wonder of Your presence on Capitol Hill today. In the hands of the many workers, may our lawmakers see the importance of teamwork.

Help our legislators to catch a glimpse of the unity and cooperation You desire for them. Make them willing to both receive and give forgiveness as they manifest Your spirit in deeds of kindness. As our lives intertwine through common tasks, remind us that ultimately we are accountable to You. Guide our thinking, speaking, and decisions that we may live worthy of Your great love. We pray in Your marvelous Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HUSTED). Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, VETERANS AFFAIRS, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2026—Motion to Proceed

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of the motion to proceed to H.R. 3944, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant executive clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to Calendar No. 121, H.R. 3944, a bill making appropriations for military construction, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2026, and for other purposes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

TRIBUTE TO BECKY KOENIG

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I would like to recognize an Iowa teacher who this very week is making the last trip of her almost 40-year teaching career bringing students to Washington, DC.

Becky Koenig has been an exceptional educator, coach, and mentor, as well as being very beloved by her students. Becky has made a lasting impact on students and their families in the communities of Sumner, IA; Forest City, IA; Lake Park, IA; and Spencer, IA.

Becky's contributions to the lives of so many Iowans will be remembered and felt long after her well-deserved retirement.

Outside of school hours, Becky has devoted 38 years to coaching speech. In fact, she has played a very major role in a remarkable Iowa record. The large-group speech program at Spencer has been able to send at least one group to the Iowa All-State Festival every single year of the competition's 50-year existence.

Although Becky will leave the classroom behind, the deep connections she

has built with her students will leave a lasting legacy in each of their lives.

Through her passion and energy, she has shaped the minds of many students. Iowa has been lucky to have an educator like Becky.

Most of us remember at least one teacher that inspired us to get where we are today. Becky has been that teacher for countless Iowa students.

I am pleased to join her fellow teachers, students, and all Iowans to say thank you to Becky Koenig for her exceptional career.

We wish you all the very best in retirement, and, of course, we thank you for your service.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant executive clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The majority leader is recognized.

GENIUS ACT

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, on Friday, President Trump signed the first major digital assets bill in American history into law. The GENIUS Act opens the door for digital assets to come into the mainstream, and it sets us up for sustained American leadership and financial innovation. Thanks to the work of Senators LUMMIS and HAGERTY and Chairman TIM SCOTT, the GENIUS Act will help, as President Trump said, make America the crypto capital of the world.

The GENIUS Act creates a first of its kind regulatory framework for stablecoins, an important part of the digital asset ecosystem. Now, \$250 billion in stablecoins is in circulation today, up 22 percent just this year. On an average day, around \$100 billion in transactions is executed using

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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stablecoins, and the vast majority of those stablecoins are backed by the U.S. dollar.

Stablecoins have an important role to play in payments. While digital asset advocates generally believe in holding Bitcoin because of its price fluctuations and growth in value over the last several years, stablecoins offer both the speed and security of the blockchain and the stability and usability of a dollar bill.

And since most stablecoins are backed by the dollar, this represents an opportunity to strengthen the dollar and, by extension, the economy.

When it comes to digital assets, in many ways, the future is already here. The question is whether we welcome that future. The GENIUS Act offers an emphatic “yes” to that question.

After years of stablecoins operating in a legal gray zone, the GENIUS Act finally lays out a clear regulatory framework. That includes consumer protections so Americans can trust who they are doing business with when they purchase stablecoins. The bill’s light touch and tailored standards will provide consumers with confidence, while promoting continued innovation right here in the United States. And its enforcement provisions offer clarity to stablecoin issuers and ensure accountability for violations.

The GENIUS Act also protects against bad actors using stablecoins for malicious purposes. It holds stablecoin issuers to the same standard as other financial institutions, subject to the Bank Secrecy Act. That means issuers will need to monitor and report suspicious activity, comply with U.S. sanctions, and block transactions that violate State and Federal law.

What is at stake here became clear last week when the Wall Street Journal reported that China seems to be concerned about stablecoin solidifying dollar dominance in the global financial system, spurred in no small part by the GENIUS Act. It is clear that the GENIUS Act is already helping our country secure American leadership in this important space. We want stablecoins to be made in America. We want digital assets to take root and to flourish in our country. We want America to lead in financial innovation, and the GENIUS Act will help us get there.

It won’t be the last word on digital assets, though. There is still much more work to be done in this space, including on market structure. Senators LUMMIS, HAGERTY, and SCOTT are once again leading on this issue, releasing the Senate’s market structure framework today, and I thank them for their important work.

And I want to say that the next steps on digital assets should look to the GENIUS Act as a model, both for its light touch and pro-innovation approach and for the bipartisanship that characterized the process.

Digital assets are the future, and we are going to continue working to make sure that that future is American made.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant executive clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The Democratic leader is recognized.

APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, later today, the Senate will take a procedural vote on the MILCON-VA funding bill. The Senate version of this legislation took some important steps to reverse a number of the awful cuts posed by DOGE and Russell Vought, particularly cuts against our Nation’s veterans—people who served us, who risked their lives for us—and they want to cut their healthcare and cut what the VA does for them. That is a bad thing, and I am glad this bill undoes a lot of that.

It is also, for now, a positive thing that the Senate version’s funding number is significantly higher than the House’s. That is thanks to the push Democrats made in committee, and I thank my colleagues for their work to date.

But we will see how the floor process evolves here on the floor. Given Republicans’ recent actions undermining bipartisan appropriations, nothing is guaranteed. Senate Democrats will meet today at our weekly caucus lunch to discuss today’s vote.

As recently as yesterday, though, I heard my friend the Republican leader come to the floor and talk about the need for bipartisanship in appropriations, and I heard him take issue with Democratic criticisms against the approach Republicans have taken over the last few months.

Look, we all would like to see bipartisanship. It has been a tradition in this Senate until that evaporated over the last decade. But Leader THUNE is sort of talking out of both sides of his mouth. On the one hand, THUNE says he wants bipartisanship. On the other, he is pushing rescissions packages here on the floor. He is allowing party-line votes to reverse bipartisan funding agreements.

Well, you can’t have it both ways. What he is doing with rescissions is the opposite of bipartisanship because rescissions packages totally renege on agreements both sides reached on funding.

When Donald Trump and Russell Vought insist on rescissions, and an obeisant Republican Congress goes along, even though many of them know it is wrong, it makes the spending process totally partisan.

So the leader’s words and his actions are a complete contradiction. He can’t have it both ways.

If Leader THUNE hopes to see bipartisanship, he should tend to his own gar-

den first and convince his Republican colleagues and the White House that bipartisanship is the way to go to do what is best for the American people.

Republicans sold their rescissions package as cutting wasteful spending, but we all know that it is not that at all; that it was about giving Donald Trump what he wanted and using partisan means to get it all done.

Meanwhile, we know that Russell Vought and Donald Trump want Congress to green-light yet another rescissions package for the near future. Russell Vought even says—openly—that the appropriation process should be “less bipartisan.”

Frankly, right now, the biggest obstacle to a good-faith, bipartisan funding process is coming from the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue and from Republicans all too eager to give Donald Trump and Russell Vought whatever they want.

And, of course, Republicans, not even a month ago, pushed Trump’s “Big Ugly Betrayal” on a completely partisan vote, passing devastating cuts to Medicaid, to healthcare, to good-paying jobs, especially in rural communities, all to fund tax breaks for billionaires. And they did it by breaking the norms of the Senate, by inventing fake math, by defying the concerns of even their own Members to get it done. That kind of legislative stunt only makes it harder—harder—for bipartisanship to take root.

We will see how our Republican colleagues choose to proceed this week. They can either keep doing Donald Trump and Russell Vought’s bidding or work with Democrats on funding priorities that will serve the American people well. They can’t do both. They can’t have it both ways.

NOMINATION OF EMIL J. BOVE III

Mr. President, now, on Mr. Bove, we all know that Donald Trump has a history of pushing shockingly unqualified and politically motivated nominees to the Federal bench. But, today, Leader THUNE will seek to file cloture on perhaps Donald Trump’s worst—worst—judicial nominee to date, Emil Bove.

One look at Mr. Bove and you know he is bad, bad news. He is someone hostile to the rule of law, hostile to democratic norms, but religiously obedient to Donald Trump.

And Republicans aren’t applying so much as a whisper of scrutiny. The Republican chair of the Judiciary Committee, in fact, cut off debate on Mr. Bove and refused to let Democrats speak or ask questions during Mr. Bove’s hearing.

Let me take a moment to explain why this nominee is uniquely unfit, which the American people must hear, even though the Republican Judiciary Committee didn’t want them to.

Mr. Bove’s entire career has been built on one thing—one thing: fealty to Donald Trump. He made his name handling Donald Trump’s dirty laundry. He handled Donald Trump’s dirty laundry, first, as his personal attorney and,

then, as his hit man at the Justice Department. He defended Donald Trump when he was charged with inciting an insurrection on January 6, on mishandling classified documents and on falsifying business records, and more.

That got him a promotion to a senior role at DOJ. There, Mr. Bove weaponized the Department to carry out political retributions against people Donald Trump considered his enemies, with a complete disregard for free speech and due process. He punished FBI agents investigating the January 6 insurrection and fired prosecutors working on criminal charges for the January 6 rioters. He reportedly told DOJ lawyers to ignore court orders and even deliberately mislead judges.

Let me say that again. Bove, a man seeking to become a circuit court judge, himself, has reportedly told DOJ lawyers to deliberately mislead judges. That, if true, is disqualifying—end of story. Nobody who is ever suspected of misleading judges should even be considered for judgeships themselves, without first getting to the facts. Yet Republicans are trying to rush him through the process.

It is no wonder that over 75 former State and Federal judges, nominated by Democratic and Republican Presidents, joined together—joined together, Democrats and Republicans—to oppose Mr. Bove's nomination.

If Senate Republicans allow Mr. Bove to pass through this Chamber without a thorough examination, they will cause profound damage to this institution as a check on the executive.

Our judges should always be held to the highest ethical standards and should be individuals that can be trusted to apply the law impartially, even if we may not all agree on every one of their opinions.

Mr. Bove, however, is the extreme of the extreme of the extreme. He is not a jurist but, rather, a Trumpian henchman. His past shows he seeks not to be impartial but rather to settle scores. All of the accusations against him suggest he holds deep hostility against the very bench he will soon be considered for. To even consider someone like this for the circuit court is a dark, disturbing proposition.

I very strongly oppose his nomination.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. LUMMIS). The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BARRASSO. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. BARRASSO. Madam President, today, I come to the floor to tell the body that, for the first time in years, the Senate is going to begin the appropriations process in the right way. The

right way is on time. The right way is here in public. And the right way is with bipartisan support.

Now, that may seem routine, and it would be expected to be routine. But here in the U.S. Senate, that hasn't been routine for a long time because, for years, the appropriations process has been broken.

We just heard the minority leader, Senator SCHUMER, come to the floor and say this process has become more partisan, as he said, only in the recent weeks. Let me remind the minority leader of his own actions to undermine the appropriations process.

Last year, 11 of 12 funding bills passed the Senate Appropriations Committee. They were passed through regular order in the committee. They had strong bipartisan support. Many actually were unanimous. Yet not a single one of the appropriations bills that were overwhelmingly agreed upon reached this floor of the U.S. Senate—not a one. Why? Because the minority leader, CHUCK SCHUMER, blocked each and every one of them from coming to this floor. He let these 11 bipartisan appropriation bills die at that desk right there.

As the majority leader at the time, Senator SCHUMER had the power to bring each and every one of these bills to the floor of the U.S. Senate, and he refused. Day after day—for 100 days, over 200 days—he absolutely refused. He unilaterally shut down the appropriations process, and now he and other Democrats are threatening to shut down the government of the country.

Both Republicans and Democrats are fully aware of how broken the appropriations process has become. The Senate is meant to be, as has been described, the greatest deliberative body in the world. Yet over the last 4 years, the Senate had become a graveyard for consensus during the Biden administration and with CHUCK SCHUMER as majority leader. The Senate Republicans are now here to correct that.

The Republicans believe in a Senate that debates and amends and then votes. We believe in regular order, not top-down control. That is why, today, Republicans are bringing our first appropriations bill to the floor. The bill funds veterans' healthcare. It strengthens military readiness. It improves housing for servicemembers as well as for their families. The bill went through the committee process. It passed 26 to 3. That is overwhelmingly bipartisan. This is one of several funding bills that earned nearly unanimous support in the Appropriations Committee. Now it deserves bipartisan support on the floor of the U.S. Senate.

This bill to fund veterans' healthcare and military readiness and housing should unite us. It shouldn't divide us. This is an opportunity to return to real governing after years of Democrat-imposed dysfunction. This is how we restore the trust in this institution and the faith in the work that we do here. When the Senate does its job, the

American people are better off. The appropriations process is how Congress fulfills our basic everyday legislative duty—the duty of controlling the power of the purse. It forces accountability, and it forces transparency that had been blocked in the past by the minority leader. It requires Congress to look closely at every taxpayer dollar being spent, and we should. We have an opportunity and an obligation to do that.

This process helps Congress fund what really matters to the American people. It means securing the border; it means strengthening our national security; and it means protecting the most vulnerable among us. It is the best tool that Congress has to rein in reckless, runaway Washington spending. That is what Republicans are doing—accountability, transparency, openness, letting people see the truth.

If Democrats walk away from this process again—and it sounds like CHUCK SCHUMER is trying to decide if he is going to allow his Members to even vote on some of these things—and if they want to do it simply to protect wasteful Washington spending, they will be the ones sabotaging the Senate and shutting down the government.

It won't be the first time. It will be another Schumer shutdown. A Schumer shutdown would punish hard-working families. A Schumer shutdown certainly hurts seniors who rely on Social Security. A Schumer shutdown hurts our military and the families who live paycheck to paycheck. And a Schumer shutdown forces Border Patrol agents to work without pay. The American people should not be forced to pay the price for the games of the Democrat Party.

To my colleagues on the Appropriations Committee who worked in good faith this last year only to see their hard work buried by petty politics, this is an opportunity for us to do better.

Republicans are committed to restoring regular order, transparency, and trust. We are doing the work of the American people here, and the question is: Will Senate Democrats join us, or will they once again drag this country into another Schumer shutdown?

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Ms. COLLINS. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that I be permitted to complete my remarks before we proceed to the vote.

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

Ms. COLLINS. Madam President, today, the Senate has the opportunity to begin the consideration of an appropriations bill that is vital to those now

servicing in our military as well as those who have served—our veterans.

I urge my colleagues to support cloture on the motion to proceed to the fiscal year 2026 Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill when we vote this afternoon. This bill addresses key military infrastructure needs, including housing improvements for military families, and it takes care of our Nation's veterans, to whom we owe an enormous debt—a debt that can never be fully repaid.

I am the daughter of a World War II veteran, who was wounded twice in the Battle of the Bulge and who earned two Purple Hearts and a Bronze Star. I know, from my father's service and from his example, how deep our gratitude should be to our veterans.

I want to commend the subcommittee chairman Senator BOOZMAN and the ranking member Senator OSSOFF for their cooperative work on this important bill.

In a moment, I will describe some of the major aspects of this appropriations bill, but, first, I would like to share a few thoughts on how we have arrived at this point.

When Vice Chair MURRAY and I took the helm of the Appropriations Committee last Congress, we committed to working together to get our committee back to the business of writing bills and advancing them through regular order so that each and every Senator could have a voice on the Senate floor in offering amendments, debating the bills, and voting on them. This is a fundamental responsibility of Congress.

I want to express my gratitude to the Senate majority leader Senator THUNE for giving us the opportunity to bring the first of the fiscal year 2026 appropriations bills to the Senate floor.

I would note that this is something that did not happen last year under Democratic control of the Senate despite our Appropriations Committee working so hard and reporting 11 of the 12 fiscal year 2025 appropriations bills; but not a single one was brought to the Senate floor by the Democratic leader.

Now, there is no doubt that this is a challenging legislative environment. We are currently operating under a yearlong continuing resolution. The delays in completing the fiscal year 2025 process and the fact that we are in the first year of a new administration has contributed to a late and incomplete budget request from OMB. In the face of these challenges, the members of the Appropriations Committee have worked so hard—for months—in analyzing the President's budget request, holding dozens of hearings, reviewing the enormous number of requests and inputs from other Senators, getting input from outside groups that were affected, and drafting legislation. So far, our committee has reported 4 of the 12 annual appropriations bills, and we have another two on the agenda for this Thursday.

I would point out to the Presiding Officer and to everyone who is listening

that each of these bills reported to date has been approved by overwhelming bipartisan support, reflecting the collaborative approach taken by the Appropriations Committee.

Turning now to the bill at hand, last week, our committee reported, by a vote of 26 to 3, the House-passed Military Construction and Veterans Affairs funding bill with a Senate substitute amendment. The Senate's version includes vital resources to support our servicemembers. It also invests in critical military infrastructure. For example, it includes funding for the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Kittery, ME—a pillar of our defense infrastructure that maintains and modernizes our Navy's submarine fleet. It invests in the Air National Guard's air refueling wing in Bangor, ME, known as the MAINEiacs, which delivers essential aerial refueling support to military operations around the globe. These are just two of the many examples of how this bill helps to sustain key defense installations in Maine and across the country.

The bill also includes funding to ensure that our veterans receive the care and the benefits that they have earned through their service to our country. Millions of Americans wear the honorable title of "veteran," and I am proud that our great State of Maine has one of the highest percentages of veterans in the entire country. This bill includes funding for the VA healthcare system, including Maine's only VA hospital, Togus. It includes investments to improve mental health care, such as veterans' suicide and homelessness prevention programs. It includes support for family caregivers—something that former Senator Elizabeth Dole has worked so hard on—and it expands care for rural veterans.

I am also proud that my hometown of Caribou, ME, was the location of the VA's very first community-based outpatient clinic, known as a CBOC, allowing veterans to receive care much closer to their homes. This model was so successful that today the VA operates more than 750 of these CBOCs across the country. The Senate measure also funds important veterans' benefits, such as disability pensions, the GI bill, and employment training programs.

I know from my colleagues that the Senate's substitute amendment was put together with input from 89 Senators who submitted a total of 989 requests.

I see my colleague the chairman of the Senate Finance Committee on the Senate floor. I am sure he can relate to these numbers.

My point is, this is not a bill that simply reflects the views of the members of the Appropriations Committee. The members of this committee went through 989 requests from 89 Senators in drafting this legislation. So it clearly reflects the input of our colleagues, just as it should.

Before I close, I would like to thank Vice Chair MURRAY for her leadership

and commitment to an appropriations process that works.

I am hopeful that cloture will be invoked today to allow us to proceed to consideration of the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs funding bill. Discussions are underway on whether to add to this vehicle the Legislative Branch appropriations bill, which was approved with only one dissenting vote, and the Agriculture, FDA, and Related Agencies appropriations bill, which received unanimous support when our committee reported those bills earlier this month. I will have comments on those other bills at a later time. Another possible addition is the Commerce-Justice-Science bill, which was also reported last week from our committee.

Finally, I would note that the responsibility of the purse is vested in Congress through article I, section 9, clause 7 of our great Constitution. That clause dictates that "no Money shall be drawn from the Treasury, but in Consequence of Appropriations made by Law." The appropriations process is one of the key ways—it is the key way that Congress carries out this significant constitutional responsibility. We must not abdicate our constitutional responsibility for the purse.

I ask my colleagues for their support. I yield the floor.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SHEEHY). Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session and resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The bill clerk read the nomination of Terrance Cole, of Virginia, to be Administrator of Drug Enforcement.

VOTE ON COLE NOMINATION

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

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. BARRASSO. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Louisiana (Mr. KENNEDY), the Senator from Kentucky (Mr. MCCONNELL), and the Senator from Oklahoma (Mr. MULLIN).

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

[Rollcall Vote No. 419 Ex.]

YEAS—50

Banks	Budd	Cotton
Barrasso	Capito	Cramer
Blackburn	Cassidy	Crapo
Boozman	Collins	Cruz
Britt	Cornyn	Curtis