

when it comes to Federal spending. We know his true motivations; it is pretty transparent. He wants Congress to be more partisan—he has said so—and less powerful. They want to gut programs left and right without giving us any say whatsoever.

So I believe we have to reject that path and assert our authority and fight for our communities. We will do that today by passing this bipartisan funding package and pushing ahead with the other bipartisan bills we have in the pipeline as well.

The bills we are moving today show bipartisan work is possible. And the cuts we were able to reject and investments we were able to secure show this to all of us: This is worthwhile.

I hope all of my colleagues join with me in voting for these bills and work with me to keep this progress going.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREEMENT—EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, notwithstanding Rule 232, I ask unanimous consent that upon disposition of Calendar No. 121, H.R. 3944, as amended, if amended, the Senate vote on confirmation of the Rinaldi nomination, and following disposition of the nomination, the Senate execute the order in relation to the Woll and Kent nominations.

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

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I want to take this opportunity, also, to thank Leader THUNE for his willingness to bring these appropriations bills before the full Senate. I also thank our Democratic counterparts for working with us to come up with this rather complex time agreement. But it is one that will allow different voices to be heard on both sides of the aisle.

I am very pleased that the Senate is proceeding to consideration of these appropriations bills. Congress has responsibility—a constitutional responsibility—under article I for the power of the purse. We are executing that responsibility by proceeding to these bills. These bills all mean a great deal to each of us.

I want to give my colleagues just some idea of the amount of input that these subcommittees on the Appropriations Committee have received from our colleagues. To give you an example, on the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs bill, we have had, literally, thousands of requests of support, of suggestions from our colleagues from more than 87 of our colleagues. That is very typical. In fact, this past week, when we reported the Defense appropriations committee bill, I think we reached a record high of 95 Senators weighing in with their suggestions, their requests for funding, their suggestions for programmatic changes or support. Those 95 Senators requested and submitted more than 14,000 different letters or inquiries or suggestions for us.

My point is that a great deal of input has gone into the drafting of these bills. That is the way the process should work.

We have had a thorough committee process, with hearings and input from noncommittee members. We have marked up these bills at the subcommittee and full committee levels, and that is what we like to see.

I am very proud of the fact that Maine, the State of Maine, which I am so proud to represent, has one of the highest percentages of veterans in the entire Nation. That is why the funding that is provided by this bill has a special meaning to me, because I know that my State has more than done its part, and I want to ensure that our veterans have access to the benefits and the healthcare they have earned.

My own father was a World War II veteran who was wounded twice in the Battle of the Bulge, earning two Purple Hearts and a Bronze Star. It was wonderful to go to the 80th anniversary of the Battle of the Bulge and to actually talk to a veteran who had been in the same division as my father. It was deeply moving.

When you read about the bravery of those in that historic battle, which was a turning point in World War II, you can't help but be filled with a sense of awe and gratitude to those who have sacrificed so much for our Nation.

I know that the Presiding Officer has also done his part for our country, and I am grateful that he is presiding today as we take on the Military Construction and Veterans' Administration bill.

We also will be taking up the Agriculture appropriations bill—again, a very important bill for the State of Maine. I grew up in Northern Maine, where potatoes are the major crop, along with broccoli. Maine is also known for its great, wild blueberries. The University of Maine is known for its agricultural research program, and there is funding for that in this bill.

In short, those two bills, plus the bill for the legislative branch, are the ones we will consider today, and I hope at some point we can return to the Commerce-Justice-Science bill—another very important bill that passed easily from our committee.

I would note that the Agriculture appropriations bill was reported by our committee unanimously. Every one of the bills was passed with great bipartisan support.

So I just wanted to give that general background.

We will shortly begin processing the amendments, and there will be very little time for both sides to speak, but I am hopeful that we can make the kind of progress we want to see and use the August time—I am not going to call it a recess or a work period—to talk with our House counterparts, to do some conferencing and get these bills signed into law before the start of the fiscal year on October 1. That is the way the system should work.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, we will soon be voting on bipartisan appropriations bills. These represent the spending strategy that has been worked out between Democrats and Republicans on the committee.

When I came here as an intern some 49 years ago, Senator Hatfield was very engaged on the Appropriations Committee, and he was later chair. I really enjoyed interning for him and hearing how appropriators really considered themselves as, well, first appropriators before they were Democrats or Republicans and how important it was to forge a vision going forward that addressed the needs in every geographic area of the country, in both rural and urban areas, and to bring in the collective voices of everyone together that would help take the country forward.

When Senator Hatfield was ill and not far from passing from this planet, in the last conversation I had with him, he expressed his concern about the committee losing that sense of bipartisan collaboration, and he mentioned specifically—and he was a Republican—working with PATTY MURRAY and with a Democrat, Daniel Inouye, as some of his fondest memories.

Thus, when I ran for reelection, it didn't seem very likely I would win, but I said: If I run, can I be in the first group in my class to be appointed to the spending committee, to the Appropriations Committee? Because I know how important a voice on this committee has been for Oregon as to what we need to be done on water systems, both clean water presentation and septic or sewer systems; how important it is on transportation and to tackle many of the needs that we have throughout our forests, both our national forests and our BLM lands—so many concerns that are addressed. The leadership on the Democratic side said yes.

Then, miraculously—it was an easy promise to make because I wasn't likely to win, but you never know what is going to happen, and I ended up here in the Senate. I was appointed to this committee, and I am very pleased to be on this committee.

But I am concerned now that a huge threat exists to further degrade this bipartisan cooperation, and that is that we have this process called rescissions—a fancy term—and it exists from the 1974 bill, the Budget and Impoundment Control Act. It says that a President can send a request to Congress to undo the bipartisan work that was done here by the spending committee, by the Appropriations Committee. That has never been used in this fashion until this year.

Now, it isn't that there haven't been rescissions—rescissions mean repealing former funding decisions—but they have been done by the Appropriations Committee.

So what has been forged together—Democrats and Republicans together, with every geographic area of the country represented—in that bipartisan

fashion has for the first time been undone in a partisan fashion.

Now we are hearing that Mr. Vought at the OMB, the Office of Management and Budget, is planning to send a rescissions package to us maybe in the middle of August. Why is this important, and why is this a problem and a challenge? It is because he has expounded on a theory that he calls a pocket rescission, and that is, if the fiscal year ends on September 30, which it does, and if he sends it within the last 45 days, he believes that he can thereby, even if we were to meet in September and reject the rescission—that even then, he would be able to use a 45-day pause that is in that 1974 law to not spend the funds that we had directed.

So what does that look like? That looks like a law was passed to spend the funds, but with no change in the law, the President's team stalls until the end of the year, sends in a rescission, and then stalls to the very end of the year and never spends the money. In other words, what was passed into law never happens.

This is a direct attack on the power of the purse, which in the Constitution is allocated to Congress. In that sense, we on the Appropriations Committee are carrying that responsibility, that constitutional responsibility of the power of the purse.

In facing this in the past, the Supreme Court has weighed in twice. The first time was in 1996. Actually, the first time was in 1975. Excuse me. In 1975, the Supreme Court weighed in on the fact that a couple of years earlier, in 1973, President Nixon had frozen, or impounded, funds and not done what Congress had set in a law that had been passed in both Chambers and had been signed by the President.

The Supreme Court said: Hell no. You can't do that. Mr. President, you cannot do that. No President can do that. You have to follow the law. You cannot take the power of the purse.

Then, in 1996, Congress said: Hey, we want to give the President line-item veto.

They passed a law to do so.

The Supreme Court weighed in again and said: Hell no. You have the responsibility under the Constitution of the power of the purse.

So now we are facing the situation in which Mr. Vought is saying: The law is just a suggestion. It is just a ceiling. We can spend less if we want to. We can spend more by transferring funds from one place to the other. The law is just a suggestion.

Well, no, Mr. Vought, it is not just a suggestion, and the President is not a King.

But by doing what he is planning to do with this late rescission, he is basically trying to find a way to, well, run out the tape—"run out the clock" I guess is the right term—run out the clock and alter the power of the purse.

So I am asking for us to stand together, Democrats and Republicans,

and defend our constitutional, bipartisan responsibility and should there be a rescission that comes in in August, for us to come in the first thing in September and vote against it and therefore say no in both Chambers of Congress, thereby sending that message, because that would provide a foundation for us to challenge the strategy Mr. Vought is putting together.

In addition, today, I am asking us to join together, Democrats and Republicans, to say that nothing that is passed by us in the fiscal year 2026 spending bills—nothing that is in those bills will be subject to the 1974 rescission. So this would not be retroactive. It could not at this moment, in this bill, be able to address a possible rescission of funds from 2023 or 2024 or 2025. But we can certainly insulate the funds in 2026 from this partisan attack by the President, this unconstitutional attack by the President.

The first amendment to be up when we convene at 4:15—about 3 minutes from now—will be this amendment to say: Together, Democrats and Republicans, let's defend our constitutional responsibilities, and let's say that nothing we pass in the fiscal year 2026 bill will be subject to that strategy by Mr. Vought and President Trump.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

#### LEGISLATIVE SESSION

#### MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, VETERANS AFFAIRS, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2026

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, in a moment, we will begin votes on an appropriations package that includes the fiscal year 2026 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs and the Agriculture, FDA, and Rural Development appropriations bills. We will also have the opportunity to consider the fiscal year 2026 Legislative Branch appropriations.

These bills were approved by the Senate Appropriations Committee in overwhelmingly bipartisan votes.

I gave a longer floor speech last week on the Military Construction, Veterans Affairs funding bill, so I will focus my comments now on the Agriculture-FDA and Legislative Branch appropriations.

The Ag-FDA bill was approved unanimously by the Senate Appropriations Committee earlier this month. It is a carefully crafted bill that supports our farmers and rural communities; the safety of our food supply; critical Federal nutrition programs like the WIC Program; and medical research and advancements.

The bill invests in agricultural research that is vital to our farmers as they work to improve the quality, safety, and affordability of our food supply. The dollars invested in these programs, like the potato and blueberry research lines that are so important to my home

State of Maine, have yielded significant improvements to the industries they support.

The bill also invests in research facilities across the country, like the University of Maine Forest Health Lab, to ensure that we can continue to lead in agricultural innovation.

This legislation also supports the administration's request in the areas of food safety and rural housing, and it provides much needed investments in animal and plant health programs to protect our agricultural and natural resources.

It also maintains support for our rural areas to ensure that communities in Maine, and, indeed, across the country, have access to the resources they need to continue to thrive in these challenging times.

Turning now to the fiscal year 2026 Legislative Branch bill. This legislation provides funding for Congress and the offices and agencies that support our work.

It provides an increase for the Capitol Police to help them meet the expanding mission requirements to keep Members safe and Members' staff and visitors to the Capitol Complex safe. The number of threats against Members of Congress has, unfortunately, increased significantly over the past few years. This bill reflects a bipartisan commitment to address these security concerns.

Again, I want to thank the vice chair; Senators BOOZMAN and OSSOFF, the chair and ranking members of the MILCON-VA Subcommittee; Senators HOEVEN and SHAHEEN, the chair and ranking member of the Agriculture Subcommittee; and Senators MULLIN and HEINRICH, the chair and ranking member of the Legislative Branch Subcommittee, for their hard work and dedication.

Finally, let me note that these are fiscally responsible bipartisan bills, and I urge my colleagues to support them.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to execute the order with respect to Calendar No. 121, H.R. 3944.

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

Under the previous order, the Senate will resume legislative session and resume consideration of H.R. 3944, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 3944) 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.

#### AMENDMENT WITHDRAWN

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the committee-reported substitute is withdrawn.

#### AMENDMENT NO. 3411

(Purpose: In the nature of a substitute.)

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I call up my amendment No. 3411 and ask that it be reported by number.