

uniform, for the loved ones they leave behind, and for their families is one of our Nation's most sacred obligations. We owe those who served all that they are entitled to and perhaps more.

I remember making a commitment when I was in high school to express my gratitude and respect for those in uniform. I never envisioned being a U.S. Senator and, now, the chairman of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, where our responsibilities are greater than just respect and gratitude. That is certainly important, but now we are here to make certain that all the promises we made to those who serve are kept.

I want a VA Secretary who understands the VA's mission. I want a Secretary who will put veterans first. I want a Secretary who recognizes the VA's importance in serving veterans and contributing to a safe and successful future for our Nation. The success they had in uniform, I want them to have that success as a veteran, as a civilian, as a citizen.

Congressman Collins is that person. Through his own service, which continues in the Air Force Reserve, Congressman Collins knows firsthand service in the uniform, and he knows the benefits and challenges that veterans face and the challenges their families face.

In his testimony before the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, he demonstrated significant understanding of the policies he will be expected to administer at the Department of Veterans Affairs and proved to me and to others that he is prepared to lead the VA into the future.

He is committed to working closely with Members of Congress and certainly the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs and to make sure that our input is understood, taken into account, and, hopefully, implemented. His nomination was reported out of the committee in an overwhelmingly bipartisan manner. On a rollcall vote, the vote was 18 to 1.

I am thankful for Congressman Collins' interest in serving in this capacity. I ask my colleagues to support his nomination, and I look forward to working with him to improve the lives of veterans, caregivers, survivors, and military families.

I yield the floor, but before I do, I ask that the vote scheduled at 12:15 occur immediately.

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

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the clerk will report the nomination.

The bill clerk read the nomination of Douglas Collins, of Georgia, to be Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

VOTE ON COLLINS NOMINATION

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

Mr. MORAN. 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 assistant bill clerk called the roll.

The result was announced—yeas 77, nays 23, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 32 Ex.]

YEAS—77

Banks	Grassley	Mullin
Barrasso	Hagerty	Murkowski
Bennet	Hassan	Ossoff
Blackburn	Hawley	Paul
Blumenthal	Heinrich	Peters
Boozman	Hickenlooper	Ricketts
Britt	Hoeven	Risch
Budd	Husted	Rosen
Capito	Hyde-Smith	Rounds
Cassidy	Johnson	Sanders
Collins	Justice	Schiff
Cornyn	Kaine	Schmitt
Cortez Masto	Kelly	Scott (FL)
Cotton	Kennedy	Scott (SC)
Cramer	King	Shaheen
Crapo	Klobuchar	Sheehy
Cruz	Lankford	Slotkin
Curtis	Lee	Sullivan
Daines	Lujan	Thune
Durbin	Lummis	Tillis
Ernst	Marshall	Tuberville
Fetterman	McConnell	Warnock
Fischer	McCormick	Welch
Gallago	Moody	Wicker
Gillibrand	Moran	Young
Graham	Moreno	

NAYS—23

Alsobrooks	Kim	Schumer
Baldwin	Markey	Smith
Blunt Rochester	Merkley	Van Hollen
Booker	Murphy	Warner
Cantwell	Murray	Warren
Coons	Padilla	Whitehouse
Duckworth	Reed	Wyden
Hirono	Schatz	

The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the motion to reconsider is considered made and laid upon the table, and the President will be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

RECESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands in recess until 2:15 p.m.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 1:10 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mrs. BRITT).

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Virginia.

TRUMP EXECUTIVE ORDERS

Mr. KAINE. Madam President, I rise to talk a little bit about what I am hearing from constituents in the Commonwealth, in the last week, and then, in particular, to direct a message to Federal employees. There are about 140,000 people who live in Virginia who work for the Federal Government.

It was a week ago yesterday—Monday morning—when I was attending a fairly standard annual celebration by the Fredericksburg Chamber of Com-

merce and the local United Way to open up seasonal tax preparation. It is called the VITA Program: Volunteers in Tax Assistance. Organizations all around the country train volunteers to help low- and moderate-income people do their taxes, and it was just the kickoff of this 21st annual event in the Fredericksburg area to help folks. And it was an opportunity to thank volunteers and to see those early-bird tax filers who were there the first day to try to get their taxes done.

Someone came up to me and told me that they were a veteran and that they had tried to log onto the VA portal that day to get a medical appointment and were shut out of the portal. Someone else heard the person telling me that story. The Fredericksburg area, about 50 miles south of DC, is very heavily populated with veterans. Others started to share their experience.

It just so happens that we have just constructed, at the cost of \$370 million, a new veterans clinic in Fredericksburg that is scheduled to open on February 28. Someone heard this discussion and said: Oh, we hear the grand opening is going to be delayed because of a Federal hiring freeze imposed by this administration.

That conversation at this otherwise good-news event started what has become a cascade of concerns that I have heard expressed by Virginians: Head Start programs not getting their monthly funding; universities that are midstream on Federal research projects being told that a funding freeze would prohibit them from drawing down dollars, thus jeopardizing the jobs of the researchers; numerous Federal employees who have been told that they are being reclassified from professional civil service to political appointee, where their future depends upon their loyalty to a person rather than their service of their fellow Americans.

I was at church on Sunday. I go to a church that has a high percentage of Congolese refugees who are here under humanitarian visas or refugee status. Many of them are worried about the possibility of deportations because they happen to live in families where there might be mixed status: some citizens, some green card holders, some refugees, others who are not documented. A Sunday school teacher at my church came up and told me that, at the Saturday religious instruction program that he holds at a nearby Catholic school, because there are a number of Latino immigrant families in that program, the attendance is down because families and kids are worried about ICE raids and deportations.

Yesterday, I had two interactions with Virginians, one with local government officials and NGO CEOs—folks running domestic violence shelters, homeless programs, free clinics, et cetera—in the Richmond area, where I live, and then a second meeting with the Virginia School Boards Association—elected school board members

from all around the Commonwealth of Virginia—that was taking place in Alexandria, VA. And, in each instance, I heard again and again the story of fear, confusion: Are our funds being cut off? Can we say anything about it? We are set up in such a way that we have served underserved populations. Are we allowed to do that now?

And, finally, Madam President, this morning, I came into work and I had an email from one of the largest federally qualified health centers in Virginia, located in the Hampton Roads—1.6 million people in the southeast portion of our State; Virginia Beach, Norfolk, Hampton, Portsmouth, Chesapeake, these communities—and they said: Look, we are the healthcare safety net of first resort for a lot of low- and moderate-income people, and we have done this for years, and we receive Federal funding. In fact, Federal funding for most of our FQHCs is about 20 to 25 percent of their budget.

They tend to get paid the last day of the month. Yesterday was the 3rd of February. They indicated they had not received their January payment and, when they were reaching out to determine whether they would receive the January payment—or the February payment, for that matter—they wouldn't even be given the courtesy of an answer.

There is grave, grave concern about the numerous efforts that this administration has taken with respect to Federal employees and with respect to the funding freeze. The funding freeze that was announced last week was partially retracted by the administration. It has been partially and temporarily enjoined in now multiple court cases. But as the email from this morning indicated, organizations that should be receiving funds, if the funding freeze is in fact enjoined, are still not receiving them.

Obviously, we have got a lot of work to do to get to the bottom of this. The administration has not shared with any of us what their plans are. The analogy that I have used is it is like somebody has taken a jigsaw puzzle and dumped the pieces upside down on a table in front of me. All I am seeing is the cardboard backside. I don't have the box with the picture on it.

Every time I talk to a constituent, a Federal employee, somebody who works at a domestic violence shelter, a mayor, I can turn over a piece of the puzzle based upon what they are telling me, and as I turn it over, I can start to assemble what is in fact happening. And we need to do more to assemble it.

I just want to pledge to Virginians: I will be doing all I can to make sure you are protected.

But what I want to do now is read a letter that I have written and that I am posting today on my website and disseminating publicly, specifically to Federal workers. It is a letter that tries to honor them and give them a pep talk and also direct them to resources that they can access in case they are concerned.

And, once again, Madam President, 140,000 of these workers live in my Commonwealth.

Dear Federal Workers:

As you are all too aware, we are in a dark time. The Trump administration has made plain that it wants to kick you around—by blocking your ability to administer federal resources, censoring your free speech, locking you out of your workplaces, demonizing you in the press, and sending you ominous, and at times threatening, messages. These actions are shameful and harmful not only to you, but to Americans across the country that you serve.

But especially in the darkest of times, we must stay focused on finding our guiding lights. I hope you will let the call to service that you answered when you first swore your oaths as federal employees serve as that light.

My advice to you today is simple, even if it's not easy: Don't give up. Keep serving everyday folks.

You are here because of your expertise. You are here because of your patriotism. You are here because you know the value in dedicating your life to serving your fellow Americans.

America needs you—that has never been clearer than in the wake of [the administration's] Federal funding freeze last week. I heard from folks in every corner of Virginia about the invaluable support they receive from Federal workers like you.

Across the country, Americans are counting on you to deliver crucial services—from inspecting our food to make sure it's safe, to protecting our national security. From administering Social Security benefits, to staffing air traffic control towers, to supporting our allies around the world and keeping the influence of China, Iran, and Russia at bay.

I know it has been—and will continue to be—tough. Donald Trump and his cronies are determined to do anything they can to knock you off course. They've even dangled a phony buyout in your face. But make no mistake: that buyout is a trap. Donald Trump has no authority to offer you a resignation buyout. Don't trust a guy with a long history of stiffing contractors by taking him up on a sham deal that he won't follow through on.

You aren't alone. I'm going to be here with you, every day, working alongside you in service.

I want to share with you some specific ways in which I want to be a resource to you. On my website, kaine.senate.gov, I am collecting stories from federal workers about what you are experiencing. Under no circumstances will I publicly share any information you send me without your consent. You can also choose to submit your [information] anonymously if you prefer.

I will also be updating my webpage with information that may be helpful to you, including summaries of your rights, recourse you can seek if you believe you are being illegally terminated, and answers to other frequently asked questions my office is receiving.

Please know, that I'm going to do everything I can to stand up for you—just like you're standing up for [and serving] the American people. Thank you for [all that you do].

With that, Madam President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

U.S. TRADE

Ms. CANTWELL. Madam President, I come to the floor to talk about export strategies, collaboration, and American principles.

Madam President, no one likes to be left behind. I know somewhere people think there is this, "I win, you lose," mentality. But what happened to "let's grow the pie" instead of just hoarding a few pieces that are left. Growth, not contraction, is the right solution.

The world is more connected, not necessarily just because of globalization. We are now more connected because of technology, and nothing we are doing is going to stop that. The speed of information is empowering anyone with an internet connection aided by the brain of an AI app to get answers and ideas hundreds of times faster than ever before.

Do we need new principles for the information age? Rules the world and we should strive to adhere to? I definitely agree that the answer is yes.

But, Madam President, I thought we were for capitalism.

Yes, capitalism in the information age needs better rules so markets aren't distorted because markets need to be properly policed and they aren't right now. And I believe that the U.S. should aggressively define the rules in the information age.

I believe in a technology NATO—a model of key democracies and key sophisticated technology countries, defining the rules of the information age and telling anybody who wants to follow that, we will give you a discount on our technology, instead of those who are advocating to buy from people who have a government backdoor. Or even in today's analogy, where you allow somebody to have a government backdoor to your technology.

Madam President, capitalism is still the largest, smartest export America wants to export. We want open markets, and we want more people to sell to 95 percent of consumers who live outside the United States.

Now, it is clear not all the world community is down with capitalism, especially places like China or North Korea. But that doesn't mean that we shouldn't continue to advocate for it.

What has U.S. advocacy for capitalism done to grow and stabilize the world? I would say immeasurable, immeasurable, immeasurable progress. In fact, the period from the end of World War II to the early 1970s is considered one of the greatest eras of economic expansion in world history. In the U.S., gross domestic product increased from \$228 billion to just under \$1.7 trillion in 1975. So whether it was Germany, Japan, South Korea—we have brought about a world economy because the shiny American dream was worth chasing. So whether