

sustain our communities, Alaskans continue to show what makes our State so special. Whether it is the mushers crossing the Alaska Range, dog teams charging across the interior, or communities all across the State coming out to the trail to welcome racers and visitors from around the world—or what we call the Iditarod Air Force, which are small bush pilot planes helping to supply these mushers and their dogs and their canine athletes—this is a great event that helps define what the last frontier is all about.

One of the clearest places those values come together, as I mentioned, is in our tourism industry, an industry that connects our communities, supports local jobs, and allows visitors to experience Alaska not just as a destination but as a place shaped by its people, which brings me to our Alaskan of the Week.

This week's Alaskan of the Week is Olivia Klupar of Skagway, AK. She is the cofounder of Voyij, a technology platform that connects Alaska's small businesses, artists, and tour operators with visitors and consumers from all over the world to browse and discover over 20,000 Alaska items that they can buy or they can see when they come to Alaska, including fresh seafood, Alaska Native art, apparel and jewelry, and experiences from dog mushing, the Northern Lights, salmon fishing, whale watching, and much, much more.

Now, I had the honor of meeting with Olivia in DC just a few weeks ago. She is an entrepreneur, a small business advocate, and a wonderful bridge between Alaska's communities and the global marketplace.

The oldest of five siblings, Olivia was born in Skagway, a town without a hospital to deliver babies. When she was born, a doctor had to fly in from Haines, AK, during a snowstorm, and because Skagway did not have runway lights yet, the people of the town lined up their cars along the airstrip—headlights on—and guided the plane safely to the ground. That is how Olivia was born. That story may sound remarkable, but to many Alaskans, it has a familiar start to a life in the last frontier—one shaped by community, resilience, and shared responsibility.

Olivia grew up immersed in a small family-owned business that welcomed the world to Alaska. Her parents own and operate the Historic Skagway Inn—a Gold Rush-era bed and breakfast that now welcomes visitors from around the globe. I had the privilege of staying there before I was a U.S. Senator, and it is a great place.

Again, if you are watching on TV or from the Galleries, come on up to Alaska. Get to Skagway and stay at the Historic Skagway Inn.

Her family also operates Olivia's Bistro, a scratch kitchen of all homemade food—serving Alaska seafood, halibut, salmon, and wild game.

In addition, her parents run the Lynch & Kennedy Gallery in Skagway,

which is a respected art gallery that showcases curated Alaska art and locally crafted jewelry from artists all across our great State.

From an early age, Olivia learned that tourism is not just about visitors and revenue; it is about creativity and stewardship. As Olivia said:

Tourism isn't just about people coming to Alaska—it's about how we take care of our communities and share who we are.

Like many Alaskans, Olivia left home to see the wider world. She earned a degree at Boston College, moved to New York City, and worked at a major law firm before joining Citigroup. She was surrounded by opportunity, but she said something was missing. As Olivia put it, "living that cubicle life" in the big city "made me realize my parents—the small business owners back home—were truly the brave ones."

I love that quote. It is a great quote.

That realization brought Olivia back to Alaska. Together with her brother Greg, a software developer trained at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, Olivia cofounded Voyij, a technology platform built specifically for Alaska's tourism and small business community.

Voyij grew directly from lived experience. Olivia remembers spending an entire summer building a website for her parents' art gallery, only to watch it become outdated as the business evolved. She recognized the challenge shared by countless Alaska entrepreneurs. As Olivia said:

Small business owners already wear every [single] hat—they don't have time to be web developers, marketers, and operators all at once.

So that is where Voyij came in. Today, Voyij partners with roughly 400 Alaska businesses across more than 65 communities, offering over 20,000 Alaskan-made goods, services, and experiences, connecting visitors and consumers with local operators all across the State and, really, all across the world.

More than 20 percent of Voyij's platform features indigenous artists or galleries representing authentic Alaska Native art. Olivia and her team have worked diligently with Tribal organizations, including in remote communities, to provide training on photography, pricing, and online sales, helping artists—Alaska artists—in very rural communities reach markets that they might not otherwise access.

The importance of Olivia's work became unmistakably clear during the COVID-19 pandemic, when cruise tourism all stopped. We get about 1.5, 1.6 million tourists coming up on cruise ships to Alaska every summer. And when COVID hit, none of them came. It was a very scary time for our small businesses and the tourism industry.

When it stopped, Alaska communities felt the impact immediately. Businesses that relied on short summer seasons for all their business lost critical revenue. Some, unfortunately, never even reopened.

Voyij pivoted quickly. With the platform already built, Olivia and her team worked with cruise lines, the Alaska Small Business Development Center, and BuyAlaska to help businesses sell online when ships were no longer coming. Their message was simple: Shop now, and you visit later after the pandemic.

Those partnerships continue today. Voyij now works with every major cruise line that visits Alaska—and there are a lot of them—reinforcing a message essential to our State's long-term success: When visitors come to Alaska, they should support Alaska's local businesses.

Olivia's work reflects a clear understanding of what makes Alaska's economy strong. When I met with her a few weeks ago, we discussed the issues that go beyond tourism, issues that matter to the local economy, issues that matter to the future of our State. That includes the ARTIST Act, which is my legislation that I am proud to have gotten through the Senate at the end of last year. I appreciate all my colleagues voting for that. This legislation passed the Senate unanimously and clarifies protections for Alaska Native artists who craft walrus ivory.

We still do that in Alaska, and it is legal. Some States didn't recognize that. So our ARTIST Act makes sure the whole country recognizes you can buy beautiful Alaska Native ivory from walrus.

Alaska's economy and identity grow in our communities—in families and small businesses and the preservation and celebration of culture and tradition, including through art and through the creativity and innovations of Alaskans themselves. And that is the essence of the work Olivia does.

So, Olivia, thank you for your great work, for showcasing and supporting Alaska's economy, for helping other Alaska businesses and artists reach the entire world, for your creativity and dedication in helping our great State. I want to thank you again for all you are doing and, of course, congratulate you on this very prestigious award, being our "Alaskan of the Week."

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HUSTED). The Senator from Alaska.

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## LEGISLATIVE SESSION

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### MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate resume legislative session and be in a period of morning business with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

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### REMEMBERING SUNIL PURI

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, when I think about the American dream, I

think about my friend Sunil Puri. In 1979, Sunil immigrated to the United States from India when he was just 18 years old. He arrived in Rockford, IL, with little more than hope, tenacity, and \$150 in his pocket. Yet, over the span of four decades, he became one of Rockford's leading businessmen and philanthropists. Sunil was defined by his commitment to his city, his country, and his family, and his contributions can be found anywhere you look in Rockford. Sunil left his adopted city far better than he found it, and it is with great sadness that I share the news of his passing.

Sunil made the journey from Bombay (Mumbai) to Rockford without the explicit permission from his parents and with the hopes of receiving a liberal arts education at Rockford College, now Rockford University. Through hard work, dedication, and many odd jobs, including cleaning bedpans and laying concrete, Sunil put himself through school. Yet it was the kindness of Illinoisans during his college career that stuck with Sunil: the elderly Swedes who taught him English, the families who hosted him during their holiday celebrations, and his classmates, who took an interest in him and celebrated his culture when he was thousands of miles away from his childhood home. The citizens of Rockford opened their arms to Sunil, and in return, Sunil would spend the next four decades repaying the favor.

After graduating from Rockford College with a degree in accounting, Sunil founded First Rockford Group, which is now known as First Midwest Group, a real estate development firm. If you have played a round of mini golf at Volcano Falls, taken a walk along Perryville Path, or filled up your tank at a Road Ranger stop, you may have seen some of Sunil's work. In fact, if you live in or visit Rockford, it is hard to avoid First Midwest's many projects. They have turned abandoned and forgotten buildings into thriving restaurants, offices, and warehouses. First Midwest's investments in Rockford have breathed new life into the city, driving economic growth and creating jobs for thousands of Illinoisans. But none of this success would have been possible without Sunil. His drive and passion were the defining features of First Midwest. Sunil ensured that First Midwest's projects did not just replicate amenities a neighborhood already possessed, but that they contributed something new to his adopted town. Because of Sunil, when his developments succeeded, so did the community.

Sunil's contributions to Rockford and the State of Illinois extend far beyond his work at First Midwest. Inspired by his parents' lesson to "water the flowers where you smell the roses," Sunil gave millions of dollars and—equally as valuable—countless hours of his time and energy to various charities and community projects. Sunil's passion for development was obvious in

his charity work, where he funded the construction of many Rockford city staples. His donations led to the creation of the Keeling-Puri Peace Plaza, the southeast Rockford branch of the YMCA, the Salvation Army Puri Family Disaster Services Center, and many more community hubs. Sunil helped families access vaccines during the COVID-19 pandemic and encouraged children to find their passion by sponsoring youth sports programs. He supported educators by spending hundreds of hours a year working on Rockford Public Schools' budget and operations committees and funding the Golden Apple's Outstanding Principal Award. It is no surprise that Sunil received a key to the city of Rockford not once, but twice in his life, as a recognition of his enduring devotion to his home.

Despite the attention required to manage his large real estate business and numerous charitable contributions, Sunil never forgot the university that made it all possible. Through a donation of \$5 million and a 28,000-square-foot building, Sunil helped create the Puri School of Business at Rockford University. He founded the school with the hope that it would serve as a vehicle for economic revitalization and as an engine of opportunity for bright and talented students. Soon after, Sunil created the Charles Box Scholarship, which provided a full ride to the Puri School of Business to 30 Black students from the Rockford area. Sunil also served on the board of trustees at Rockford University, using his role to give the next generation of students the same opportunity that he had.

Elected officials on both sides of the aisle have praised Sunil for all that he has done for his community, and I am pleased that, last year, the Illinois State House adopted a resolution honoring his contributions to the State. But Sunil's work extended far beyond Illinois, and his contributions and insights were appreciated by more than one President. Never forgetting where he came from, Sunil was a passionate advocate for improved U.S.-Indian relations and traveled with President Clinton and President Obama to India, in hopes of expanded ties between our two countries. He was appointed by President Obama to the President's Advisory Commission on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and by President Biden to the President's Advisory Committee on the Arts for the John F. Kennedy Center.

Loretta and I send our deepest condolences to Sunil's loving partner Candace Ross and his three children Ashwin, Chandan, and Anjali.

Sunil was a living embodiment of what makes America the envy of the world. Coming from humble beginnings, he found much success, both in his business and in his community. The contributions that Sunil made to Rockford were an indispensable part of the city's revitalization and will continue to fuel the city's growth for years to come. While I will miss my

friend Sunil, I take comfort in knowing that I can always feel his presence whenever I am in Rockford.

#### DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

Mr. OSSOFF. Mr. President, yet again, Senator MURRAY offered the measure to fund critical Agencies within the Department of Homeland Security, and yet again, the measure was blocked by the Senator from Alabama. As I urged last week, I urge the Senate to adopt this measure and fund these Agencies.

#### ARMS SALES NOTIFICATION

Mr. RISCH. Mr. President, section 36(b) of the Arms Export Control Act requires that Congress receive prior notification of certain proposed arms sales as defined by that statute. Upon such notification, the Congress has 30 calendar days during which the sale may be reviewed. The provision stipulates that, in the Senate, the notification of proposed sales shall be sent to the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

In keeping with the committee's intention to see that relevant information is still available to the full Senate, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD the notifications that have been received. If the cover letter references a classified annex, then such an annex is available to all Senators in the office of the Foreign Relations Committee, room SD-423.

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

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE,  
Washington, DC.

#### CONGRESSIONAL NOTIFICATION TRANSMITTAL LETTER

Please find enclosed the following notification from the Department of State.

Department Notification Number: RSAT 26-0F

Pursuant to the reporting requirements of Section 36(b)(5)(C) of the Arms Export Control Act (AECA), as amended, we are forwarding Transmittal No. 26-0F. This notification relates to enhancements or upgrades from the level of sensitivity of technology or capability described in the Section 36(b)(1) AECA certification 24-78 of September 6, 2024.

Recipients:  
Speaker of the House of Representatives  
House Committee on Foreign Affairs  
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations  
Sincerely,

PAUL D. GUAGLIANONE,  
Senior Bureau Official,  
Bureau of Legislative Affairs.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE TRANSMITTAL NO. 26-0F  
Report of Enhancement or Upgrade of Sensitivity of Technology or Capability Pursuant to Section 36(b)(5)(C) of the Arms Export Control Act

(i) (U) Prospective Purchaser: Government of the Netherlands.

(ii) (U) Sec. 36(b)(1), AECA Transmittal No.: 24-78; Date: September 6, 2024; Implementing Agency: Navy.

(iii) (U) Description: On September 6, 2024, Congress was notified by congressional certification transmittal number 24-78 of the