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Senate

The Senate met at 3 p.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.

Sacred Father, open the hearts of our lawmakers to the power of Your providence. Lord, provide them with a greater appreciation of Your wisdom, power, and love. Remind them of Your plans to keep them from stumbling or slipping, as You prepare them for their accountability to You. Give them strength for their challenging pilgrimage, and provide them with a faith that will not shrink, though pressed by many a foe. Empower them with the moral and spiritual stamina to walk in the paths of integrity, courage, and joy.

And, Lord, bless all who labor to bring Your peace on Earth.

We pray in Your sovereign 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. BUDD). Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

COMMERCE, JUSTICE, SCIENCE; ENERGY AND WATER DEVELOPMENT; AND INTERIOR AND ENVIRONMENT APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2026—Motion to Proceed—Resumed

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of the motion to proceed to H.R. 6938, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant executive clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to Calendar No. 299, H.R. 6938, a bill making consolidated appropriations for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2026, and for other purposes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

OBAMACARE

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, one of the issues that Congress must deal with—and do it very shortly—is the cost of health insurance.

President Obama famously said that ObamaCare would let Americans keep their health insurance if they liked it and that it would also lower their premiums. We know, more than a decade later, that those promises were never true.

We need to lower healthcare costs. It starts with expanding access and competition to high-quality, affordable health insurance through health savings accounts, association health plans, and other consumer-driven health plans. It also requires action to reduce prescription drug prices through pharmacy benefit manager reform. That reform should not be a tough thing to do because we have three separate approaches in the U.S. Senate, with a total of about 60 to 65 Members, in a bipartisan way, supporting the passage of PBM reform.

The evidence for fixing ObamaCare can be found in America's pocketbook today. I recently received a letter from an Iowan, documenting the increases this person has seen in his monthly health insurance premiums, just since ObamaCare became law. Before

ObamaCare was signed into law, this Iowan saw zero-percent increases in his health insurance premiums and even saw premium reductions. In the 8 years prior to ObamaCare, this Iowan had a cumulative premium increase of 4 percent. In the 8 years since ObamaCare, this Iowan saw a cumulative premium increase of 87 percent.

Health insurance has gotten more costly under ObamaCare—case in point with this Iowan's story. His monthly health insurance premium, which was once around \$800 before ObamaCare, is now over \$2,000 a month.

Extending temporary COVID bonuses for wealthy households, where the money is shovelled to insurance companies, is not the answer. We need to enact commonsense solutions to bring down healthcare costs.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

COMMERCE, JUSTICE, SCIENCE; ENERGY AND WATER DEVELOPMENT; AND INTERIOR AND ENVIRONMENT APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2026

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, before I begin, I just want to mention Thursday's appropriations vote in the House.

Thanks to Speaker JOHNSON, House Appropriations Committee Chair TOM COLE, and others, the House passed a three-bill appropriations package—Commerce, Justice, Science; Energy and Water Development; and Interior and Environment—by an overwhelming bipartisan margin.

Now it is our turn, and I hope that we will be able to get these bills passed here in the Senate in the next couple of days. We have a lot of appropriations work left to do before the January 30 deadline, and we should not waste any time in getting this bipartisan package over the finish line.

SOUTHERN BORDER

Mr. President, it is difficult to overstate just how dramatically the situation at the southern border has changed over the past year.

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



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In November, the latest month for which we have border numbers, there were just 11,000 total encounters at the southern border—11,000. Now, to put that number into perspective, the previous November, under President Biden, saw 94,000 encounters. The November before that saw a staggering 242,000 encounters, and the November before that, 235,000. This November, there were 11,000, and not one individual who tried to cross the border illegally was released into our country—not a single one. In fact, it has been months since an illegal immigrant was released into the interior of our country. Contrast this with the Biden years, which saw literally millions of illegal immigrants released into the interior.

I was down at the border recently, and the situation could not be more different from my 2021 and 2023 visits. Back then, I was meeting with overwhelmed border agents and was visiting overwhelmed border facilities. I remember, during my 2021 trip, we visited a facility that was at 16 times its allotted capacity—16 times. During one of my trips, I remember actually seeing with my own eyes individuals attempting to cross the border illegally, and I remember talking to Border Patrol agents—Border Patrol, who, by the time of my 2023 trip, had spent 2 years dealing with recordbreaking numbers of illegal immigrants; Border Patrol agents who were in desperate need of resources and support from the Biden administration—resources and support that never came.

I talked to Border Patrol agents on my most recent trip, and what I heard cannot be more different. Border Patrol agents are telling me that the flood that they once dealt with has shrunk now to a trickle; that they are being supported in their work and are allowed to do the job that they were hired to do, which is to protect our southern border.

I still can't get over the difference. In 2021 and 2023, I visited the southern border, and I saw chaos. In 2026, I visited, and I saw calm and order, and our country is so much safer because of it.

I am grateful for all that President Trump and his administration have done to make and keep our southern border secure. I am proud of the work that we have done here in Congress to help ensure that border security is here to stay.

Our Working Families Tax Cuts legislation made a generational investment in the resources that law enforcement needs to secure the border and deter illegal immigration. We funded the completion of the border wall, new technology and border surveillance equipment, and additional Border Patrol agents. We expanded detention capacity and expanded partnerships with local law enforcement to enforce immigration law.

And these resources are already having an effect. On my recent trip to the border, agents repeatedly emphasized how they are seeing effects from our

Working Families Tax Cuts legislation and in particular with the addition of needed new personnel and counterdrone technology. Thanks to that counterdrone technology, Border Patrol personnel can take over or destroy cartel drones at the border, limiting cartels' surveillance abilities and ability to transport dangerous items.

I am proud that after 4 long years of strain thanks to President Biden's border crisis, Border Patrol agents are finally receiving the resources they need to do their jobs, prevent illegal immigration, and keep us safe.

Mr. President, January 9 was National Law Enforcement Appreciation Day, and my conversations with Border Patrol agents on my recent trip reminded me of just how blessed we are to have men and women who step up and answer the call to serve as law enforcement officers. From the Border Patrol to the Capitol Police and other Federal agents, to our local sheriff and police departments, our safety is secured for us by men and women who willingly choose to place themselves between us and danger. Too often, the sacrifices these men and women make are not appreciated. In fact, we have seen a reprehensible amount of hostility toward law enforcement in recent months and years.

I hope that today and every day, we will take a moment to remember what our law enforcement officers do for us and how very lucky we are to have them.

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.

JEROME POWELL

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, last night, the New York Times reported that a criminal investigation has been opened into Jerome Powell, the chairman of the Federal Reserve Board. Anyone with two eyes and half a brain knows exactly what this criminal probe represents: a brazen attempt by Donald Trump to cannibalize the Fed's independence.

The allegations behind this probe are clearly bogus. This has nothing to do with building renovations, of all things; it has everything to do with Donald Trump weaponizing the DOJ into his attack dog and bullying America's central bank into submission on something unrelated to what they do.

This is another ominous, troubling step toward the MAGA-fication of America's monetary policy, which is the bedrock of the global economy and essential for stability in the markets.

So the American people should beware: If you are worried about making

sure mortgage rates come down, making it easier to buy a home, Donald Trump's attack on the Fed should trouble you deeply. If you are worried about what the economy is going to look like in the next 6 months, 12 months, and beyond, Donald Trump's attack on the Fed should alarm you.

If you are a Senate Republican in this Chamber who has at any point spoken out about the Fed's independence, about the need to bring inflation down, about the importance of law and order, now is the time to find your voice and to take a stand.

The bogus criminal probe conducted by the DOJ screams for congressional oversight. We need to bring DOJ officials to testify before the Senate and explain this outrageous criminal probe, and the Senate must reject any future Trump nominee to the Fed so long as this dark cloud continues to hang over the central bank—because if Donald Trump can use the threat of criminal investigation to influence monetary policy, then we will have no independent Fed to speak of, and, again, interest rates will go up, mortgage rates will go up, car loan rates will go up, credit card rates will go up, and the American consumer will pay more.

The American consumer is already worried, troubled, and devastated by the lack of affordability, and what Trump is doing will make things even more unaffordable. You would say: What the heck does one have to do with the other? But when the markets feel there is no steadiness, no stability in the Fed, they charge more, they get worried, they clamp down.

And, look, Donald Trump is clearly angry that his own Presidency has been a disaster for our economy so is looking for a scapegoat, and he thinks Jerome Powell can be one. He has made a big mistake. No one is going to fall for that bull.

Everyone knows Jay Powell and the Fed aren't the reason Donald Trump's poll numbers and our economy are in the garbage. If he wants someone to blame, Donald Trump should simply look in the mirror, not at Jerome Powell.

VENEZUELA

Mr. President, on Venezuela, last night, Donald Trump posted on Truth Social a ridiculous screen shot of a fake Wikipedia page that called him the acting President of Venezuela. Donald Trump calling himself the acting President of Venezuela is stupid, but it is a very useful illustration of where his head is at right now. He is totally focused on military adventures and completely ignoring the affordability crisis here at home.

To those Republicans who hemmed and hawed last week saying the U.S. involvement in Venezuela was a one-and-done, those views have now aged like spoiled milk. Last week, Donald Trump was asked if we are staying in Venezuela for a month, 6 months, a year, or longer. He answered:

I would say much longer.

And he says this with a smile on his face.

What does he think the American people are thinking—that we want another endless war, this time in Venezuela; that we want to stay for years and waste treasure and possibly lives on this adventure in Venezuela? The American people don't want that.

Then he says:

We are going to [give the] money to Venezuela.

Do you think the American people want that—a foreign adventure so we can give money to Venezuela?

Just yesterday, Energy Secretary Wright said the United States will be in Venezuela for maybe a year, maybe 2 years, and maybe more. The American people didn't vote for Donald Trump to be acting President of Venezuela for a year, 2 years, 3 years—even for a day; they voted for him to put America first and bring down the cost of living.

The more people learn about what is going on in Venezuela, the more people hear that U.S. involvement could last years, the more they will demand that Congress act.

Now, the good news is that this week, the Senate has a chance to halt Trump's military follies, to halt his focus on foreign adventurism rather than bringing down their prices.

Last week, a strong bipartisan group of Senators moved forward with a War Powers Resolution I championed with Senators Kaine, Schiff, and Paul. The Senate will vote this week to pass this resolution and affirm the Congress's constitutional authority on matters of war and peace.

I say to my Republican colleagues who don't yet support this resolution: Join us to prevent another forever war.

The pressure will be on Senate Republicans this week to make a choice: Stand with the majority of Americans who don't want us in Venezuela or enable Donald Trump and risk entangling us in another forever war.

The American people will be watching what we do this week. Americans don't want another round of endless wars. They don't support propping up foreign nations and regimes.

The vote this week will tell all, and the American people will be watching.

TARIFFS

Mr. President, finally, on tariffs, as soon as this week, the U.S. Supreme Court may rule on whether or not Donald Trump's chaotic tariff policies are constitutional.

I have long been very clear that the Supreme Court should strike Donald Trump's tariffs down. The President's tariffs are an unlawful usurping of Congress's authority over trade, and I have seen firsthand in New York how they have raised prices for families and shut down so many small businesses.

Congress may not have a say on whether or how the Supreme Court will rule, but we absolutely have a say on future legislation on the President's tariff authority. The Senate has al-

ready voted four times on a bipartisan basis to reject Trump's illegal trade war.

If the Supreme Court strikes down all or some of Donald Trump's tariffs, we know he will come to Congress and demand another blank check. Republicans must be ready to buck up and tell him no.

Senate Democrats will not support any legislation that hands the President a free pass to slap tariffs on whoever he likes, the consequences for our economy be damned, in his eyes.

No blank checks for an endless trade war. No blank checks for Donald Trump to issue tariffs whenever he likes against whomever he likes, regardless of the consequences—particularly the American people, as he raises and raises and raises their cost of living.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic Whip.

AFFORDABLE CARE ACT

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, last week, against the direction and wishes of the Speaker of the House MIKE JOHNSON, 17 House Republicans joined every Democrat in the House to vote for an extension of the Affordable Care Act enhanced premium tax credits.

Last year, 22 million Americans relied on these tax credits to be able to afford their health insurance, but on January 1, those credits expired because the Republican-controlled Congress refused to extend them. Because these tax credits have lapsed, millions—millions—of Americans are being forced to drop their health insurance or to pay double or triple for their healthcare plans. Families are already struggling with the expenses they face every single day—grocery prices, electric bills, mortgage payments. We shouldn't add health insurance to that list.

The House has done its part. The only barrier to putting a bill on the President's desk is this body, the U.S. Senate.

Last month, Senate Democrats voted to extend these tax credits. Four Republicans joined us, but we fell short of the 13 we needed to get the job done. Now we have another chance. There is no excuse for further delay. We can act this week, before we take a break, to avoid this healthcare catastrophe.

I have spoken to colleagues on both sides of the aisle who have said that they want to make healthcare more affordable. They have spoken to these families. They know the hardship they face with these premiums.

Extending the premium tax credits is the only way to do that immediately. Let's do it on a bipartisan basis and surprise everybody. We can help provide Americans with the peace of mind that their families need, give them coverage so that if there is a bad diagnosis, an accident, a tough hospitalization, they are covered.

CRYPTO

Mr. President, on a separate topic, later this week, the Senate Banking

and Agriculture Committees plan to mark up and vote on landmark crypto market structure legislation.

While we await the release of the specific bill text, let me be clear. A strong crypto market structure bill must include the following provisions: ensure protection for investors, especially retail consumers; protect victims from fraud, like crypto ATM scams; strengthen our financial stability; provide strong guardrails against money laundering; and prevent the President and his family from further enriching themselves.

In the year 2008, the American people faced the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression. This was spurred in large part by risky, subprime mortgages that went belly-up.

The Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation has stated that “financial innovation and deregulation contributed to an environment in which the [United States] and global financial systems became far . . . less stable than in previous decades.”

In the wake of this, we did something to prevent a future crisis: We passed the Dodd-Frank bill, providing much needed reforms to the financial system that protected consumers and increased accountability on Wall Street.

But it has been 16 years since Dodd-Frank was signed into law, and the financial system in America has changed dramatically. Today, it is the rise of cryptocurrency—a risky, volatile, unpredictable investment that requires meaningful—meaningful—regulation.

The crypto industry has wide reach. It was valued in excess of \$4 trillion in 2025, and estimates show that the industry has 40 to 70 million active users each month.

Naturally, the crypto industry is calling for rubberstamp regulation of this asset in the name of innovation. Sound familiar? It is the same reason the FDIC gave us as the cause for the great recession. What does this mean? The next crypto crash could wipe out not just the fat cats but a lot of working families—just like in 2008.

President Trump has failed to put in place commonsense guardrails to fend off another market collapse.

Since returning to office, financial regulators like the SEC have dropped lawsuits against some of the largest and most dubious crypto companies, creating an environment of unaccountability.

President Trump has pushed for deregulation of financial markets, including by taking his chain saw to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau in the name of “government efficiency.” He has pardoned crypto executives that have allowed funds to flow to terrorists, drug cartels, and cybercriminals—the worst of the worst.

Trump has personally enriched himself—to the tune of nearly \$1 billion in the first half of 2025—through crypto scams like meme coins.

The industry has proven repeatedly that it plays a key role in facilitating

fraud. Crypto ATM scams illustrate this perfectly. These scams swindle unsuspecting Americans—usually senior citizens—out of their life savings when they receive phony phone calls telling them that they owe taxes to the Internal Revenue Service or a penalty for missing jury duty. The scammer who calls tells the victim that they can pay what they owe at a crypto ATM machine. They are popping up all over the United States. Little does the victim know that the money they deposit into the crypto ATM is transferred to the criminal's digital wallet. The person putting it in the machine will never see it again.

The FBI estimates that in 2025, last year, victims lost more than \$333 million to scams facilitated by crypto ATMs. Congress must meaningfully regulate this industry and address these scams. We cannot make the same mistakes we made leading up to 2008, and we cannot expect taxpayers to support a multibillion-dollar bailout for the crypto industry if there is a crypto crash.

Capitulating to the crypto industry and the self-imposed rush to mark up these forthcoming crypto market structure bills comes at the direction of a President who is trying to enrich himself and his family. I wish I didn't have to say that, but it is true.

As the Senate Banking and Agriculture Committees consider cryptocurrency legislation, I advise Chairmen SCOTT and BOOZMAN to work across the aisle to explore proper protections and regulations in the crypto market. Rushing this process is unwise and poses a serious danger to the U.S. financial system.

We have been warned. We have been through this in recent memory. Let's not do it again to unsuspecting victims.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. BRITT). The Senator from Arizona.

TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

Mr. KELLY. Madam President, I didn't expect that I would ever find myself here, as a U.S. Senator, having filed a lawsuit against a Secretary of Defense.

When I graduated from the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy in 1986 and was commissioned into the U.S. Navy as an ensign, I swore an oath to support and defend the Constitution against all enemies, foreign and domestic. I have upheld that oath every single day since.

I upheld it on the second night of Operation Desert Storm, when a Russian-made SA-6 surface-to-air missile locked onto my airplane when I was on a mission to bomb an airfield in southern Iraq. I made a last-ditch maneuver. The missile exploded above us, and I delivered the bombs on target.

I upheld my oath as a test pilot, logging hundreds of flight hours, pushing aircraft to the limits, to make sure that our pilots had the best aircraft and systems to use in combat.

And I upheld my oath when my service took me to NASA, where I went into space four times, where I was honored to command two space shuttle missions, and where I was also the first astronaut on the scene in East Texas after Space Shuttle Columbia exploded during reentry, and I had to recover the bodies of my friends and astronaut classmates.

And I have upheld my oath here in the U.S. Senate, a place I never expected to find myself in because my wife Gabby was always the elected official in our family. If she had never been shot in the head, she would be here in this Chamber and not me. But I love this country, and I felt that I had an obligation to continue my public service in a way that I never expected. And so I have upheld my oath in this job too because I take seriously my duty to protect the Constitution for all Americans.

I just never expected that I would have to protect the rule of law against a Secretary of Defense. Pete Hegseth is now coming after what I earned through my 25 years of military service, in violation of my rights as an American and as a retired veteran and as a U.S. Senator, whose job it is to hold this and any administration accountable. He doesn't like what I said, and so he is trying to censure and demote me.

And let's talk for just a second about what it is that I said that he decided to censure me over, according to his letter: first, that I simply restated the law—that servicemembers must refuse illegal orders. Somehow, restating the law is now against the law, according to Pete Hegseth.

This isn't new. It is something every recruit is taught. It is something that Pete Hegseth himself has said repeatedly, including, specifically, about this President and Commander in Chief, Donald Trump.

Second, that I criticized him for firing admirals and generals and that this administration is surrounding themselves with a bunch of yes-men.

Let me repeat it here right now: It is bad for our national security that Pete Hegseth fired admirals and generals because of who they are. And a bunch of yes-men—well, that is bad for any organization.

Lastly, he is censuring me because I have raised concerns about his actions and military operations. Well, that is my job. I have every right to say these things—as an American, as a retired servicemember, and as a U.S. Senator, and especially as a member of the Armed Services Committee whose duty it is to provide oversight over the Department of Defense.

Pete Hegseth's unconstitutional crusade against me sends a chilling message to every retired member of the military. If you speak out and say something that the President and Secretary of Defense don't like, you will be censured, threatened with demotion, or even prosecuted.

Every servicemember knows that military rank is earned; it is not given. It is earned through the risks you take, the sacrifices you and your family make, the leadership you display, and the respect you earn from the superiors who recommend you for promotion. After my 25 years of service, I earned my rank as a captain in the U.S. Navy.

Now, Pete Hegseth wants even our longest serving military veterans to live with the constant threat that they could be deprived of their rank and retirement pay, years or even decades after they leave the military, just because he or another Secretary of Defense or a President doesn't like what they have said.

If Pete Hegseth succeeds in silencing me, then he and every other Secretary of Defense who comes after him will have license to punish any retired veteran of any political persuasion for the things that they say. And by that logic, a 100-year-old World War II veteran could be hauled in and censured or court-martialed because he says something that Pete Hegseth disagrees with.

That is wrong. It is not the way things work in the United States of America, and I will not stand for it because our freedom of speech, the separation of powers, and due process are not just words on a page. They are core principles of our democracy. When we say we have an obligation to protect and defend the Constitution, this is exactly what we are all talking about. It is this—because that oath that I spoke about earlier, it should sound very familiar to other folks in this room because it is the same one that every Member of the U.S. Senate has taken.

For 250 years, we have been the greatest democracy the world has ever seen because patriotic Americans have been willing to stand up for not just their own rights but for the rights of all of our fellow citizens. That continued resolve is what will decide if our democracy lasts another 250 years.

That is why, today, I filed a lawsuit against the Secretary of Defense to protect my rights, the rights of retired veterans, and the rights of all Americans. I have never backed down from a fight for our country, and I am not going to back down from this one.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Virginia.

RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION

Mr. WARNER. Madam President, I come to the floor today to condemn the heartbreaking and anti-American rise in religious discrimination and hate-fueled extremism and to call particular attention to the ways this administration has fueled the flames of Islamophobia and anti-Arab hate that has hurt countless members of our Muslim American and Arab American communities.

Now, unfortunately, neither religious discrimination nor acts of hate-fueled violence are new or are uniquely American.

Last month, I joined Senator SCHUMER and all of my Democratic colleagues in speaking out against the horrible anti-Semitism targeting our Jewish communities and calling out disgusting vitriol from the likes of Nick Fuentes and his ilk, and I joined people of conscience everywhere in mourning and standing with the Jewish community in Australia after that monstrous attack took 15 lives during a Hanukkah celebration.

Now, in America, in years back, Dr. Martin Luther King warned us that injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere, and the same is true about religious intolerance, bigotry, and violence. Any prejudice or discrimination or violence rooted in how people believe, express, and experience their faith is a threat to all people of faith everywhere.

I rise today to specifically condemn the discrimination our Muslim and Arab American communities are facing because, unfortunately, this President and his administration have openly stoked and institutionalized Islamophobic discrimination.

We all recall, on November 26, we saw a horrific attack on two members of the West Virginia National Guard deployed here in our Nation's Capital. That type of violence has no place in a just society. But the Trump administration did not meet this attack with targeted, measured attempts to minimize violence or curb extremism. Instead, their actions and rhetoric stoked further divisions by using this awful attack as grounds to justify targeting Afghan-American communities in the United States.

After that attack, the Trump administration announced a halt to the processing of all immigration requests from Afghan nationals, coinciding with an announcement from the State Department that they would immediately be halting visa issuance for individuals traveling on Afghan passports. The President and his administration are taking the actions of a single person and distorting this horrific, isolated incident to justify suppression and cruelty against many more who have done nothing wrong, many who have risked their lives, families, and communities to support U.S. servicemembers during the long war in Afghanistan.

Another example: Look at the President's commentary related to members of the Somali community. During a Cabinet meeting last month, the President called the Somali community "garbage," saying:

We don't want them in our country.

I have to tell you, I believe these comments are disgusting, they are dehumanizing, and they are un-American, and they should roundly and loudly be condemned by all public officials. The intolerance and ignorance that motivates these statements and these actions didn't just begin in the past few weeks or even with this administration.

I say to my colleagues: Ask any of your Muslim or Arab constituents

when they got the so-called talk from their parents or heard the first attack on their faith or their culture.

This rot—this un-American activity—has been in this country a long, long time.

Just the other week, I was sitting with a group of Virginians who happened to be Muslim Americans. One of the individuals I have known a long time, has been a community member and well-known business guy, and happens to also be Muslim. This individual had been doing a lot of work all across Northern Virginia, working with local governments and others, trying to develop affordable housing projects.

He was working specifically with a county in outer Northern Virginia. He had been assured everything was set. He was going out to the meeting where it was going to be "project approved." He got to, again, the county offices. And it was at a time during the day, as somebody who practices his faith, that he got out and prayed, as Muslims do on a regular basis during the day. And after doing that prayer privately next to his car, he then went into the county meeting. And, suddenly, everything that had been totally pro forma—someone had seen him praying, and he suddenly found out the contract wasn't going to be signed.

The fact is, this individual has got an extraordinary record of, as I said, producing affordable housing all across the region. But the fact that simply displaying his faith caused him to lose a piece of business that was there just for a pro forma approval ought to shock us all.

I think we all have to talk to our Muslim and Arab neighbors, our constituents. These kinds of stories are, unfortunately, not the exception. There are too many examples of fear or discrimination or being somehow made to feel, if you happen to be Arab American or Muslim American, that you are somehow a lesser American. And rather than being a leader who elevates our morality, who confronts these views, President Trump and his administration seem deliberately intent on preying on these kinds of fears and deepening divisions based on religion or immigration status.

Just last month, the administration announced it would stop adjudicating all immigration benefit requests for nationals of 19 countries. That means law-abiding residents who have lived in this country—many, for years—are seeing their naturalization interviews paused and their citizenship ceremonies canceled. Now, these decisions build on a travel ban that was put in place by the administration earlier in the year—or last year.

Let me be crystal clear. At least in my mind, these bans are not about your safety or mine. These bans are about limiting access to the American dream to a select few that the administration thinks look the right way or worship the right god.

But it is not just the President—not just President Trump. On the floor of

this body, a Senator called Islam a "poisonous religion" that "is fundamentally incompatible with our Western values." In recent weeks, a Member of the House posted on his official Twitter page:

How to Deal with Mainstream Muslims: I don't know how you make peace with those who seek your destruction, I think you destroy them first.

This is an official Twitter page of a Member of the House of Representatives.

All too often, this vitriol is met with silence—a dangerous, weaponized apathy that says Islamophobia is somehow acceptable at the highest levels of government. All of us, but especially those of us who serve in this body, in public office, have a duty to end that silence and loudly and resolutely condemn Islamophobia and anti-Arab hate.

And while others seek to divide and distort circumstances to advance their narratives, there are so many stories actually worth telling. So I want to take a moment to recognize and celebrate the contributions of Muslim Americans to Virginia's history. Muslim Virginians are integral to what makes our Commonwealth thrive. They are lawyers, doctors, educators, home-makers, and entrepreneurs. They are engineers designing infrastructure, researchers advancing technology, small-business owners fueling our local economies, and transportation workers getting folks to where they need to go. Muslim Virginians live out the democratic values that this country was built on. They are serving in elected office, shaping policy, and making this country a better place to live.

As a matter of fact, last November—just a few months ago—Virginia voters proudly made history by electing the first Muslim woman to statewide office in any State in our country. Ghazala Hashmi will be sworn in as Lieutenant Governor of Virginia this coming Saturday. She joins the growing number of Muslim Virginians that already serve across all three levels of Virginia government—in the State House, in our judiciary, and in so many levels of local government. And they represent their neighbors with dedication and integrity.

Muslim Virginians are also patriotic and want to keep this country safe, many of them bravely choosing to serve as police officers, intelligence officers, and servicemembers in our Armed Forces. One of those patriots was CPT Humayun Khan, who died in service to our country during Operation Iraqi Freedom. His efforts alone saved the lives of more than 100 soldiers, and I still remember his mother and father speaking at a political convention and holding up our American Constitution and talking about their son's sacrifice to keep America safe.

Contrary to the rhetoric of our President and his administration, our country is safer because of Muslim Americans like Captain Khan and the thousands of Muslim American police and

Muslim American soldiers, sailors, marines, airmen, and guardians. I am grateful for their service every day.

The contributions of Muslims to Virginia should not just be measured by titles or economic impact; they are seen in generosity, compassion, and community. Islamic centers and mosques across the Commonwealth step up to serve their communities with food assistance, refugee resettlement, youth mentorship, and much more. They open their doors not only to worship but to serve as an example of compassion and mercy that is inseparable from their Muslim faith.

Muslim Virginians also add to the cultural richness of our Commonwealth through art, music, literature, and food. They bring languages and stories from across the world—from Sudan to Pakistan, Somalia to Afghanistan, Morocco to Palestine. They also bring the uniquely American experience of growing up, learning, working, and building a life in our Commonwealth of Virginia. Their story is Virginia’s story—one of perseverance, community, success, and hope.

So when the President and his administration or my colleagues here or in the House use xenophobic, fearmongering tactics to attack and intimidate or diminish members of the Muslim or Arab American community, I want you to remember that they are individuals who are being wrongly misrepresented.

Next month marks the start of the holy season of Ramadan for our Muslim brothers and sisters. Particularly during this time of reflection and community but frankly throughout the whole year, it should be incumbent upon all of us to call out all forms of bigotry and discrimination against any religious community and to stand up for all of our communities against injustice.

I think all of us should once again commit to never stay silent in the face of religious intolerance against the Christian faith, against the Jewish faith, against the Muslim faith, or other great faiths of the world. Our job as representatives of the American people is to protect our communities and our people—all of our people. We abandon each other I think at our own peril and at our Nation’s peril.

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.

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

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

APPROPRIATIONS

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, the spending bills that we write are not just numbers on a page; they affect the daily lives of Americans across the country in very real ways, like whether or not they can afford their electric

bill or whether families have clean drinking water at home, whether communities have infrastructure to prevent flooding and respond to devastating weather events like the ones we saw in my home State of Washington last month, and whether they have the resources they need to keep people safe.

These are the issues at stake, the issues that are in my mind each year as I work to negotiate our appropriations bills. It is a responsibility I take extremely seriously, and it is why from day one I have vowed to rip up President Trump’s budget and write a new one, because this President and his budget director, Project 2025 author Russ Vought, want to slash over \$160 billion in essential investments for American communities and working families. They actually tried to cut our entire nondefense budget by over one-fifth. But even that number disguises the much deeper cuts that have been pushed for key programs. In some cases, House Republicans adopted those in their own bills alongside hundreds of extreme poison pill provisions.

Democrats said: No way. Absolutely not. And we made clear that our conference bills had to be closer to the bipartisan Senate levels that ensured our bills cleared our committee with overwhelming support. Throughout these negotiations, our ranking members and I focused on protecting funding that our communities rely on, rejecting sweeping, devastating cuts, and eliminating far-right, poison pill riders.

Now, this week, the Senate is taking up the package that the House cleared last week in an overwhelming vote, which contains the CJS, Energy and Water, and Interior funding bills. In each of these bills, I am very happy that we protected critical funding and fought off poison pill riders.

In the CJS bill, we rejected Trump’s plan to slash funding for scientific research and the National Science Foundation’s budget by 57 percent, cut NASA’s science budget in half, and devastate NOAA and climate research that all of us rely on for accurate weather forecasting, whether we know it or not.

Trump also wanted to cut funding to prevent violence against women by \$215 million, which was truly heartless. Democrats protected that funding and increased it by \$7 million.

We shot down Trump’s proposals to merge and weaken important Federal Agencies—Agencies like the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, the Drug Enforcement Administration, and the Office on Violence Against Women and COPS Office under the Office of Justice Programs.

Similarly, the Interior bill protects the Forest Service from over \$1 billion in Trump cuts. It protects clean water programs from those massive cuts. It protects air and pollution grants from outright elimination. It protects the pay of our Federal wildland firefighters. It rejects nearly \$1 billion in

Trump cuts to Tribal programs for school and safety and self-governance.

As ranking member of Energy and Water, I worked hard to make sure these bills definitively rejected Trump’s damaging proposals and made major investments that are absolutely critical both to my home State of Washington and our entire Nation.

President Trump’s proposal would have raised Americans’ energy bills by cutting energy and grid programs, including eliminating the Weatherization Assistance Program, but Democrats saved those and in fact procured more assistance to help lower families’ energy bills.

Not only did we reject Trump’s \$2 billion cut to the Army Corps of Engineers, we actually increased funding and spelled out in line item after line item exactly how that funding is to be spent because last year, Trump and Russ Vought blatantly defunded Army Corps construction projects in blue States like Washington and California and steered hundreds of millions of dollars to red States instead. I called that out for what it was—a politically motivated abuse of power that was only possible because we were operating under a slush fund, full-year CR.

This year, we made sure that Trump and Russ Vought cannot muck around again and turn crucial flood prevention projects like the Howard Hanson Dam in Washington State into political hostages. I am very proud that we were able to write in much needed funding for the Howard Hanson Dam bill, alongside crucial funding for many of our Nation’s ports and harbors.

The Energy and Water bill protects investments in water infrastructure, hydroelectric power, and scientific discovery so our National Labs can keep doing the cutting-edge work that we all rely on. It rejects Trump’s proposal to gut clean energy funding; zero out solar, wind, and hydrogen research programs; and eliminate several independent Agencies that support economic development in the country.

Now, throughout these bills, I was very happy to work with Chair COLLINS and address indirect costs to ensure that our scientific research can continue without drastic interference and disruption.

I want to thank everyone—some of my fellow leaders on the Appropriations Committee who came to the table for very serious, hard negotiations to put these bills together. This was not easy work, and it was done under a very challenging timeline, but we are showing what can still get done when both sides work together.

I want to start by acknowledging and thanking very much Chair COLLINS and her staff, who have worked extraordinarily hard with my staff throughout this process, and we are continuing to work.

I also want to thank House Chairman TOM COLE and Ranking Member ROSA DELAURO and all their staffs.

I want to thank Senator KENNEDY, who is my counterpart on the Energy

and Water Subcommittee; Senator MORAN and Senator VAN HOLLEN, our leaders on the CJS Subcommittee; and Senator MURKOWSKI and Senator MERKLEY, our Interior Subcommittee leads; and, of course, their counterparts in the House: Representatives FLEISCHMANN and KAPURT on Energy and Water, ROGERS and MENG on CJS, and SIMPSON and PINGREE on Interior.

Our ranking members, along with the chairs in both the House and Senate, did a tremendous job working together to get these bills done. These bills reassert Congress's power over key spending decisions, and that cannot be more important.

These bills will put an end to some of the truly unacceptable and partisan retaliation we have seen from the Office of Management and Budget by telling this administration exactly how Congress has decided funding must get spent. That is a huge improvement from the status quo we have with Republicans' yearlong slush fund CR that gave Trump and Vought way more power to decide how to spend our taxpayer dollars and which projects and priorities to fund.

Over the last year, we have seen them abuse the power that terrible slush fund CR gave them to rob our communities and completely remake Federal spending priorities without so much as talking to Congress. That is why right now it is so important that we end that slush fund authority and reassert our power as lawmakers by passing these full-year spending bills that specify exactly how funds are to be spent, just as we had always done until last year.

So with the next funding deadline coming up, it is crucial that we pass these bills, protect the funding that our families count on, reject Trump's heartless cuts, and put power back in the hands of the American people and their elected representatives where it belongs. That is what this package does and what I am intent on doing with the rest of our bills as well.

My North Star is always, what can I do that does the most for folks back home in Washington State, how can I protect the programs that hard-working people count on, and how can I deliver real wins that make families' lives better?

So to all of my colleagues who share my outrage over how Trump has trampled over our spending laws and my grave concerns over his damaging cuts and harmful budget proposals, I will continue to join you in pushing back against his agenda on the Senate floor. These are not the bills we would have written on our own. I know that. These are not the bills I would write on my own. But they do mark significant improvement over the status quo where Trump and his Agency heads can rewrite parts of the budget without Congress, and they are vastly better than the Trump budget plan, which was full of cuts and extreme policies.

So I will continue to work with my colleagues to make sure that the pro-

grams that protect our communities and save families' money don't get axed.

Passing funding bills that we shape and write is one of the most important ways that we wield our power and make the voice of our constituents heard. It is one of the most fundamental jobs of Congress to write these bills, to decide how our taxpayer funds get spent.

So I urge all of our colleagues to join me this week in voting to pass this next package of bills and reassert our power so that we can put forward and pass into law bills that aren't only bipartisan but that make sure all of our constituents come first.

In fact, just yesterday, we put out a bipartisan package for S-FOPS and FSGG funding bills, and it is a package that once again saves crucial investments in our communities, in our small businesses, and in America's global leadership.

I will have more to say on that soon, but I see that our chairman Senator COLLINS has joined me on the floor, and I do again want to thank her personally for all of her hard work to get this done.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. TUBERVILLE). The Senator from Maine.

WAIVING QUORUM CALL

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to waive the mandatory quorum call with respect to closure on the motion to proceed to Calendar No. 299, H.R. 6938.

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

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I also ask unanimous consent to be able to complete my remarks before the vote is called.

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

APPROPRIATIONS

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I anticipate that this evening, the Senate will take advantage of the opportunity to begin consideration of a carefully negotiated, fiscally responsible, bipartisan and bicameral package of fiscal year 2026 appropriations bills that are vital to the safety, security, and economic well-being of all Americans.

This fiscally responsible package includes funding for the following three bills: the Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies legislation; the Energy and Water Development bill; and the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations. Among other things, it provides full-year appropriations for the Department of Justice, the Department of Commerce, the Department of Energy, and the Department of the Interior. It also funds the National Science Foundation—a priority of mine—and the EPA.

Let me explain to our colleagues, who I think are well aware of this fact, that this package did not come together overnight. It is the result of months of work, of bipartisan and bicameral negotiations, and last week

passed the House by an overwhelming vote of 397 to 28.

I want to thank the House Chairman TOM COLE and Ranking Member ROSA DELAURO of the Appropriations Committee, as well as the vice chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee, Senator PATTY MURRAY, from whom we just heard, for their hard work, including over the holidays, to get these bills done.

We also could not have done it without the extraordinary staff that we are blessed to have, some of whom stayed up literally all night working on these bills.

We also worked closely with the administration, which has issued a statement in support of passage of this package.

The appropriations mini package that is before us would actually reduce discretionary spending while better focusing funding on key priorities of the American people. Let me highlight just a few of those priorities.

The Commerce, Justice, and Science bill invests in America's economic development and trade relationships. It supports our State and local law enforcement, including through the Byrne Formula Program that supports a range of law enforcement activities, from prosecution to crime prevention.

It funds space exploration and research in critical scientific and technological fields. The bill invests in the National Science Foundation, which supports research in all 50 States and helps to spur new discoveries that will advance health, prosperity, and welfare. The National Science Foundation is basic to much of the foundational research that leads to exciting technological and scientific breakthroughs.

I am a strong supporter of the NSF. I am pleased that we restored funding that was proposed to be cut, and I am also delighted that we dealt with an issue that has been a very high priority for me, and that is how we handle indirect research costs. I think we have come up with a good solution to hold steady how indirect costs are dealt with now at universities and colleges; independent, nonprofit laboratories; medical institutions and hospitals; and other entities that contribute so much to our way of life.

The bill—the Commerce bill—also supports our oceans and fisheries and weather programs that are enormously important to our working waterfronts. As you can imagine, this is of particular concern to me, representing the State of Maine, where we are so proud of our fishing and lobster sectors, which are synonymous with the State of Maine.

Recently, in Portland, there was a bad fire on the working waterfront, and it was extraordinary to see how everyone came together to work to put out the fire and also to help those who were affected, including our fishermen and lobstermen who had boats tied up to the wharf, the wharf owner, the restaurants on the wharf, and the businesses like Sea Bags, which are located

on the wharf. Everyone came together in a sense of community that really defines my State.

I want to express my thanks to Subcommittee Chairman JERRY MORAN and Ranking Member CHRIS VAN HOLLEN for their hard work on the CGS bill.

Next, the Interior bill provides resources for the management and conservation of public lands, while fostering economic development through critical energy programs. It supports Tribal programs across the country; helps ensure that Americans have clean air, water, and soil; and provides Federal firefighters with the tools that they need to prepare for and suppress wildfires. It also includes funding to fight the devastating impact of the spruce budworm, which is being experienced right now in the State of Maine and other States.

I want to commend the subcommittee chair LISA MURKOWSKI and the ranking member JEFF MERKLEY for their efforts in crafting this legislation.

Finally, the Energy and Water Development bill will improve water infrastructure and promote American energy independence. It will also strengthen our nuclear deterrence posture, ensure our nuclear stockpile readiness and safety, and prepare for existing and future nuclear threats.

Subcommittee Chair JOHN KENNEDY and Ranking Member PATTY MURRAY worked tirelessly on this bill, and they have my appreciation.

Members ought to have a voice in the funding decisions that affect all of our States and constituents back home. The bills in this package were drafted with input from nearly every Senator. Together, Senators submitted literally thousands of requests to the committee for consideration. In some cases, these were programmatic requests, supporting programs they know well from their own State's experience. In other cases, they were a community development project request, or CDS. The legislation before us incorporates many of these requests and takes into account viewpoints from across the Chamber on both sides of the aisle. It truly is a Member-driven product.

Enacting this package would bring the total number of full-year fiscal year 2026 appropriations signed into law to six, as the first three bills—the Agriculture, Military Construction and Veterans Affairs, and Legislative Branch bills—were enacted in November.

We are continuing our hard work. Yesterday, the final versions of the National Security, State Department, and Related Programs and the Financial Services and General Government appropriations bills were released and publicly posted. The House of Representatives is slated to take up those two additional appropriations bills this week.

It is our intention to complete work on all 12 of the annual appropriation

bills this month. That is an ambitious goal, but it is one that we can achieve with cooperation and collaboration that have brought us to this second round of three bills today.

I want to thank all of the members of the Appropriations Committee and, again, our extraordinary staff for their hard work, and I want to express my appreciation to Majority Leader THUNE. He promised that he would bring appropriations bills to the Senate floor. That did not happen in the past. And I am delighted, but not surprised, that he has kept that promise. He has supported our committee's process and worked to bring these bills to the Senate floor.

Again, I urge my colleagues to support cloture on the motion to proceed to the package that is before us. And, again, my thanks to all the Members in both the House and the Senate who worked so hard to bring us to this point.

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 legislative 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. 299, H.R. 6938, a bill making consolidated appropriations for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2026, and for other purposes.

John Thune, Susan M. Collins, John Barrasso, Tim Sheehy, Ashley B. Moody, Lindsey Graham, James Lankford, Joni Ernst, John Boozman, Jim Justice, Marsha Blackburn, Pete Ricketts, Jon A. Husted, Tom Cotton, Dan Sullivan, Mike Rounds, Ted Budd.

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 Calendar No. 299, H.R. 6938, a bill making consolidated appropriations for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2026, and for other purposes, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant executive clerk called the roll.

Mr. BARRASSO. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Texas (Mr. CORNYN), the Senator from Texas (Mr. CRUZ), the Senator from Iowa (Ms. ERNST), the Senator from Tennessee (Mr. HAGERTY), the Senator from Kentucky (Mr. PAUL), and the Senator from Idaho (Mr. RISCH).

Further, if present and voting: the Senator from Tennessee (Mr. HAGERTY) would have voted "Yea."

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Georgia (Mr. WARNOCK) is necessarily absent.

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 80, nays 13, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 7 Leg.]

YEAS—80

| | | |
|-----------------|------------|------------|
| Alsobrooks | Graham | Murray |
| Baldwin | Grassley | Ossoff |
| Banks | Hassan | Peters |
| Barrasso | Hawley | Reed |
| Blackburn | Heinrich | Ricketts |
| Blumenthal | Hirono | Rosen |
| Blunt Rochester | Hooven | Rounds |
| Boozman | Husted | Schatz |
| Britt | Hyde-Smith | Schmitt |
| Budd | Justice | Schumer |
| Cantwell | Kaine | Scott (SC) |
| Capito | Kelly | Shaheen |
| Cassidy | Kennedy | Sheehy |
| Collins | King | Slotkin |
| Coons | Klobuchar | Smith |
| Cortez Masto | Lankford | Sullivan |
| Cotton | Lujan | Thune |
| Cramer | Lummis | Tillis |
| Crapo | Marshall | Tuberville |
| Curtis | McConnell | Van Hollen |
| Daines | McCormick | Warner |
| Duckworth | Merkley | Welch |
| Durbin | Moody | Whitehouse |
| Fetterman | Moran | Wicker |
| Fischer | Moreno | Wyden |
| Gallego | Mullin | Young |
| Gillibrand | Murkowski | |

NAYS—13

| | | |
|--------------|---------|------------|
| Bennet | Lee | Schiff |
| Booker | Markley | Scott (FL) |
| Hickenlooper | Murphy | Warren |
| Johnson | Padilla | |
| Kim | Sanders | |

NOT VOTING—7

| | | |
|--------|---------|---------|
| Cornyn | Hagerty | Warnock |
| Cruz | Paul | |
| Ernst | Risch | |

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. RICKETTS). On this vote, the yeas are 80, the nays are 13, and the motion is agreed to.

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 Senator from Ohio.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. MORENO. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate 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.

MESSAGES FROM THE HOUSE

At 3:02 p.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Mrs. Alli, one of its reading clerks, announced that the House has passed the following bills, in which it requests the concurrence of the Senate:

H.R. 1834. An act to advance policy priorities that will break the gridlock.

H.R. 5184. An act to authorize the Secretary of Energy to transmit to the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development recommendations for changes to preemptive energy conservation standards applicable to manufactured homes.

The message further announced that the House of Representatives having proceeded to reconsider the bill (H.R. 131) to make certain modifications to the repayment for the Arkansas Valley Conduit in the State of Colorado, returned by the President of the United States with his objections, to the