

wonderful, talented, willing-to-serve person that she is not welcome in America.

Are we willing to walk away from this talent and disrupt the scientific progress so we can say we stopped another person from a foreign country from coming into the United States? These are exactly the immigrants we need.

What message are we sending to families and researchers by doing this, by the President's budget dramatically cutting medical research and the President's immigration policies willy-nilly hurting innocent people, like this doctor?

During Secretary Kennedy's testimony last week, he justified the proposed NIH cuts by saying that "a lot of money was wasted" on so-called "insane" studies. Do you know who disagrees? The parents of a 3-year-old in Southern Illinois who have waited for more than a year to enroll their daughter with a rare genetic disease into an NIH-funded clinical trial. It could be their last hope. The chaos of the Trump administration has delayed the grant award, and their daughter waits day after day after day for this clinical trial which has been held up by the Trump administration.

Medical research is vital to the safety, security, and prosperity of this Nation, and we ought to encourage the best and the brightest to aid us in these noble pursuits.

Let me close by saying that last year we came together despite President Trump's calls for cuts in medical research. Democrats and Republicans ignored his request and actually gave more money for medical research.

I want to salute the two Senators on the Senate Appropriates Committee—SUSAN COLLINS, Republican of Maine, and PATTY MURRAY, Democrat of Washington. They were determined to make sure that we kept hope alive by putting this money in medical research.

We need their leadership again, and we need the American people to say to the Trump administration: Enough. Stop this. This notion of cutting medical research is hurting America and American families. Give these doctors and researchers a chance to make this a better, safer nation.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. BRITT). The Senator from Vermont.

LOW INCOME HOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Mr. WELCH. Madam President, the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, known as LIHEAP, is a life-saving program with a long history of bipartisan support from its very first days. LIHEAP was started in the administration of Ronald Reagan, and the program helps people in need heat their homes in the winter and cool their homes in the summer.

You know, it is a beautiful day here in DC, but across the country, in many places, it is still very cold and still very hot. LIHEAP was established, as I

mentioned, in 1981, by President Ronald Reagan, and it provides funding to States to help low-income households with their energy costs. The program originally just covered heating, but in 1984, it was expanded to cooling, as it should be, because people in the Presiding Officer's State, people in Arizona, Nevada, and many other States are threatened by extreme heat, just as those in cold-weather States, like Vermont, are threatened by extreme cold.

This program has been reauthorized many times since its inception, and I am so pleased that it has always been bipartisan, because the folks we represent, whether it is in cold- or warm-weather States, know that people need the security that they are not going to freeze to death or that they are not going to die of heatstroke. And that happens; that is real.

And the Americans that rely on LIHEAP to heat their homes in the winter and cool their homes in the summer are very scared. They need help, and their neighbors and friends need help and assurance that this program will continue.

President Trump, in his budget, has proposed to zero out the budget for LIHEAP—literally, to end what Ronald Reagan began.

And when we are talking about those who do get some help with their heating bills, we are talking about folks who are barely able to pay their bills at the end of the month and often can't. And, again, this is in the Presiding Officer's State and in my State.

For a family of four, the eligibility limit is \$61,000. For a single mother and a child, it is \$40,000. For a single person just trying to get by, it is \$29,000.

So Vermonters who are struggling to pay their bills themselves but are thinking about neighbors across the country are concerned about this. I had a constituent from Essex, VT, urging me to protect LIHEAP because "I know it gets awfully cold in North Dakota and . . . Minnesota."

People in all our States understand how their neighbors and, in many cases, they themselves need this. This is not a luxury. It can be a matter of life and death for hundreds of thousands of Americans, from Montpelier to Fairbanks, AK.

You know, this year, Burlington, VT, had its coldest weather in 17 years, with more than 20 straight days of below freezing temperatures. In Fairbanks, Alaskans endured more than 89 days below zero, many days below 30 to 40 degrees below zero.

And LIHEAP also provides cooling assistance to families in warm weather climates, like Phoenix, AZ, where more than 100 days a year saw temperatures of 100 degrees.

You know, I have gone on some fuel deliveries with the fuel dealers who have a program to provide assistance, and what I know is, Vermonters, when they see that fuel truck show up, are terrified because that is a big, big

monthly bill. And without the assistance that we have been providing to people around the country to help them with this, they literally are facing freezing or heatstroke.

That is also at a time when our heating bills are going up, and our cooling bills. In December, household energy bills were up by more than 13 percent. The war in Iran has absolutely exacerbated that problem. Gas prices are up more than 30 percent, over \$4 a gallon. They are approaching \$5 a gallon. More and more commentators believe that the Strait of Hormuz will be closed for much longer, indefinitely. We don't know when. And that is also going to continue the pressure on the price of home heating fuel.

You know, I do have a real contention with the administration when President Trump, on the one hand, is zeroing out the home heating assistance program, and cooling assistance as well, but on the other hand, is pursuing policies that are driving up energy costs, as we saw and are seeing with the war in Iran, which has closed the Strait of Hormuz and is crippling the economy but is leading directly to higher home heating fuel costs.

And that is in contrast with some of the comments that I can only characterize as cruel and totally "out of it" by some of his advisers. Kevin Hassett made a very telling remark to CNBC. Here is what he said:

While it's very frustrating to go to the pump and see what the price of gasoline looks like . . . the benefit for oil producers is significant.

Seriously? What about your constituents and mine, who are paying the price that is of benefit to the oil producers and then find out that the home heating and cooling assistance help that they had last year is going to be zeroed out this year. That is absolutely outrageous.

The only people benefitting from this energy crisis are people in Big Oil. They are making an estimated \$30 million windfall every hour.

The price goes up. It is painful for consumers and for businesses and for farmers, but it is a windfall for the oil companies.

So shouldn't this Congress stand up and provide some help to maintain some sense of security for the people we represent?

But by proposing a 100-percent cut to Federal LIHEAP funding, President Trump has made it clear what his priority is. It is accelerating the profits for the oil industry at the expense of people who have absolutely no control over what the price is at the pump, what the price is when that home heating gas or oil is being delivered to their homes.

All of us are here and believing that we are fighting for the families that we represent in our States, and I am fighting for Vermont families. Last week, Senator REED and I filed an amendment to the Republican budget resolution that would protect LIHEAP from this zeroing out in the Trump budget.

The amendment was not adopted. But I will keep fighting, and I hope many of my colleagues will join me to protect LIHEAP so that there can be some reassurance to the people who are going to be hammered and threatened by the zeroing out of this program.

You know, in the past, Congress has, on a bipartisan basis, rejected the administration's attempts to zero out the LIHEAP budget and illegally fire the staff that oversees the disbursement of LIHEAP funding to the States. That is why we included report language in the fiscal year 2026 bill to require that funds that are allocated to States be distributed on a timely basis. And that is true in Alabama, and it is true in Vermont.

And I urge my colleagues to join those of us who want to make certain this fuel assistance is available to families, regardless of whom they voted for, regardless of policy orientation, and regardless of politics.

This is not a red State or blue State issue. Americans everywhere are paying for the reckless economic policies in this illegal war, and this war is imposing substantial and daily and punitive costs on struggling Americans, struggling farmers, and struggling businesses.

But all of us are in need of maintaining this program, and we can if we come together to do it.

You know, Texas receives about \$181 million in LIHEAP funding, and it helps 65,000 households; in Nebraska, \$32 million, 53,000 households.

So by attempting to zero out LIHEAP funding, the Trump administration has said it loud and clear. It is plain before our eyes. They are willing to throw Americans out in the cold or in the heat and are quite content with a \$30 million-an-hour windfall for the oil companies.

My hope is that we in Congress, whatever our differences are, can work together to save and preserve the LIHEAP program, which is a lifeline for so many people you represent and I represent.

I yield the floor.

(Mr. LANKFORD assumed the Chair.)

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

WAIVING QUORUM CALL

Mr. MORAN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum call with respect to the Cekada nomination be waived.

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

NOMINATION OF ROBERT CEKADA

Mr. MORAN. Madam President, later this evening, the Senate will consider the nomination of Robert Cekada to serve as the Director of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, or what we call the ATF.

In my capacity as the chairman of the Appropriations subcommittee that provides funding to the U.S. Department of Justice, including the ATF, I have had many opportunities to get to know Rob.

In his current role as the Deputy Director of the ATF, Mr. Cekada is a "lawman." He worked the frontlines as a New York City police officer and rose through the ranks of the ATF. He is an honorable man who believes in serving his community, enforcing the rule of law, and promoting public safety.

The ATF is a multifaceted Agency, and its regulation of firearms—a constitutionally protected right—has made it, at times, a politically challenging Agency to lead.

Rob's work and influence with State and local law enforcement is often demonstrated to me in the conversations I have with local sheriffs and police chiefs. Their respect for Rob is apparent, and Kansas law enforcement has shared with me how the ATF's partnerships have helped reduce gun violence in their areas.

This was evident when Rob was in Wichita last November to help announce the opening of the ATF's new field office—an effort that reflected his commitment to strengthening partnerships on the ground and supporting law enforcement where they need it the most. That same approach carries through in the Agency's broader work, including its leadership in crime gun intelligence, particularly through the National Integrated Ballistic Information Network, or NIBIN, which has been a game changer for fighting violent crime.

In Kansas, Wichita State University supports this work, and next month, we will open a new Crime Gun Intelligence Laboratory on campus, further expanding the ATF's ability to provide cutting-edge forensic support to law enforcement nationwide.

Simply put, the ATF is a significant component of our efforts to combat violent crime and to support law enforcement, and I think no one is better prepared to lead this Agency than Rob Cekada.

I urge my colleagues to support his nomination.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the 5:30 scheduled vote begin immediately.

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

CLOTURE MOTION

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 nomination of Executive Calendar No. 670, Robert Cekada, of Florida, to be Director, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives.

John Thune, Tom Cotton, Tim Sheehy, John Barrasso, Jon Husted, Tommy Tuberville, Jim Justice, Cindy Hyde-Smith, Roger F. Wicker, Mike Rounds, Steve Daines, Marsha Blackburn, David McCormick, John Cornyn, Thom Tillis, James Lankford, John R. Curtis.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the mandatory quorum call under rule XXII has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the nomination of Robert Cekada, of Florida, to be Director, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives, 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 Indiana (Mr. BANKS), the Senator from Texas (Mr. CRUZ), the Senator from Wyoming (Ms. LUMMIS), the Senator from Ohio (Mr. MORENO), and the Senator from Alabama (Mr. TUBERVILLE).

Further, if present and voting: the Senator from Texas (Mr. CRUZ) would have voted "yea."

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Pennsylvania (Mr. FETTERMAN), the Senator from Washington (Mrs. MURRAY), the Senator from California (Mr. PADILLA), and the Senator from Georgia (Mr. WARNOCK) are necessarily absent.

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 54, nays 37, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 106 Ex.]

YEAS—54

| | | |
|-----------|------------|------------|
| Armstrong | Grassley | Moody |
| Barrasso | Hagerty | Moran |
| Blackburn | Hassan | Murkowski |
| Boozman | Hawley | Paul |
| Britt | Hoeben | Ricketts |
| Budd | Husted | Risch |
| Capito | Hyde-Smith | Rounds |
| Cassidy | Johnson | Schmitt |
| Collins | Justice | Scott (FL) |
| Cornyn | Kaine | Scott (SC) |
| Cotton | Kennedy | Shaheen |
| Cramer | King | Sheehy |
| Crapo | Klobuchar | Sullivan |
| Curtis | Lankford | Thune |
| Daines | Lee | Tillis |
| Ernst | Marshall | Whitehouse |
| Fischer | McConnell | Wicker |
| Graham | McCormick | Young |

NAYS—37

| | | |
|-----------------|--------------|------------|
| Alsobrooks | Heinrich | Sanders |
| Baldwin | Hickenlooper | Schatz |
| Bennet | Hirono | Schiff |
| Blumenthal | Kelly | Schumer |
| Blunt Rochester | Kim | Slotkin |
| Booker | Lujan | Smith |
| Cantwell | Markey | Van Hollen |
| Coons | Merkley | Warner |
| Cortez Masto | Murphy | Warren |
| Duckworth | Ossoff | Welch |
| Durbin | Peters | Wyden |
| Gallego | Reed | |
| Gillibrand | Rosen | |

NOT VOTING—9

| | | |
|-----------|--------|------------|
| Banks | Lummis | Padilla |
| Crux | Moreno | Tuberville |
| Fetterman | Murray | Warnock |

(Mr. ROUNDS assumed the Chair.)

(Mrs. BRITT assumed the Chair.)

(Mr. RICKETTS assumed the Chair.)

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HUSTED). On this vote, the yeas are 54, the nays are 37. The motion is agreed to.

The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.