



United States  
of America

# Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 119<sup>th</sup> CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

Vol. 172

WASHINGTON, THURSDAY, JANUARY 15, 2026

No. 11

## Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable MARKWAYNE MULLIN, a Senator from the State of Oklahoma.

### PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Sovereign God, our hope for the years to come, we magnify Your Name.

Lord, we sense that our battles are not simply with flesh and blood but against principalities and powers. Thank You for providing us with spiritual weapons to defeat carnal foes.

Lord, forgive us when we chase the temporary and flee from the permanent. Forgive us when we major in minors and minor in majors. Forgive us when we refuse to set our affections on things above but focus, instead, on the things of Earth.

Today, give our lawmakers an awareness of the complexity of the warfare between good and evil as they remember the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.—that “truth crushed to earth will rise again.”

We pray in Your victorious Name. Amen.

### PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Presiding Officer 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.

### APPOINTMENT OF ACTING PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will please read a communication to the Senate from the President pro tempore (Mr. GRASSLEY).

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,  
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,  
Washington, DC, January 15, 2026.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable MARKWAYNE MULLIN, a Senator from the State of Oklahoma, to perform the duties of the Chair.

CHUCK GRASSLEY,  
President pro tempore.

Mr. MULLIN thereupon assumed the Chair as Acting President pro tempore.

### RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

### CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

### LEGISLATIVE SESSION

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of H.R. 6938, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 6938) making consolidated appropriations for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2026, and for other purposes.

Pending:

Thune amendment No. 4208, to change the date of the enactment.

Thune amendment No. 4209 (to amendment No. 4208), of a perfecting nature.

Thune motion to commit the bill to the Committee on Appropriations, with instructions, amendment No. 4210, to change the enactment date.

Thune amendment No. 4211 (to the instructions (amendment No. 4210)), of a perfecting nature.

Thune amendment No. 4212 (to amendment No. 4211), of a perfecting nature.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority whip.

IRAN

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I rise today to stand with the brave people of Iran. These are people who have been in a fight for their freedom. For the past 2 weeks, they have taken to the streets in 185 different cities in all 31 of the Provinces in Iran. It is unlike anything their country has seen in a generation. Iranians are rejecting the poverty, the repression, and the ruin that have been brought forth by four decades of tyranny.

Americans stand with them. I think free people everywhere are watching. From Europe and South America to right here in the United States, we bear witness to the contrast—and it is a dramatic contrast—between the Iranian people’s bravery and the Iranian regime’s brutality. The regime’s answer to these legitimate protests—we have seen it—has been mass murder. Ayatollah Khamenei has unleashed his Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, and they are doing tremendous damage. He has unleashed them to massacre his own citizens.

Credible reports estimate that thousands—perhaps tens of thousands—are dead in Iran. This surpasses the death toll of previous crackdowns throughout the Iranian regime’s history of bloodshed. Tens of thousands of protesters have been thrown into prison, we understand. The regime has shut off internet and phone access.

And the regime is doing that because it is anxious to hide its crimes. It has failed. The truth has gotten out. The world is seeing it.

For decades, Iran’s government has been the world’s leading state sponsor of terrorism. The world knows it. And now it has turned that same terror onto its own people.

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



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I applaud President Trump's leadership on Iran. President Trump's strategy has brought Iran to this breaking point. He withdrew from a failed nuclear deal. He destroyed Iran's nuclear program. He rebuilt the sanctions the previous administration had torn down. President Trump has made a significant difference around the world and certainly in Iran. Maximum pressure has strangled the regime's revenue, and it exposed its weakness. A weak Iran is a safer America.

The Ayatollah has a history of paying his henchmen— Hamas, Hezbollah, the Houthis, and other terrorist groups. Iran kidnaps American citizens and holds them for ransom. We have seen this. Iranian-backed militias killed one in six American troops during the war in Iraq. Today, it continues to target our troops throughout the Middle East.

Iran's allies and enablers today are in Beijing and in Moscow. They share Iran's hatred of our freedom and our people. They share its determination to undermine our strength. That is why it is important for us to stand with the people of Iran. Their coconspirator from Venezuela, Nicolas Maduro, is now behind bars, thanks to a brave military action led by our Commander in Chief.

What is happening in Iran today will determine the future of this entire axis of aggression. It is opposed to what we do as Americans, as free people.

President Trump has made it very clear where the United States stands: Those who massacre innocent citizens will be held to account.

This week, President Trump announced that any country that trades with Iran will face tariffs of 25 percent. We must continue to take action to help the people of Iran. In recent weeks, the United States has successfully seized several tankers that were smuggling oil from Venezuela.

What were they doing? They were smuggling it in violation of international sanctions.

Well, we must now do the same with Iran's vast so-called ghost fleet and stop them with the same resolve. Those vessels smuggle Iranian oil in defiance of sanctions. Cash from the oil fills the regime's war chest. It funds its murderous ways. Every dollar that we deny Iran's government is one less bullet that they can fire at their own people.

The regime in Iran today is weaker, and it is weaker than it has been at any time since their revolution of 1979. The Iranian grip on power is slipping. The world sees Iran as true evil, and we must stand with those who risk everything for freedom.

That is what it means when we talk about American peace through strength. When America stands for freedom, our Nation and the entire world is safer.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The majority leader is recognized.

APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, the work of the Appropriations Committee never seems to stop, and that has certainly been true over this past year. Under the leadership of Chair COLLINS, our colleagues on the Appropriations Committee have held hearings and markups and done the hard work of writing legislation to fund the government.

They reported eight full-year bills from the committee, most of them with broad bipartisan support. That put us in a position to be able to pass three appropriations bills here in the Senate before the August State work period last year.

We hadn't passed a single government funding bill in this Chamber before August since 2018. In 2025, we passed three of them, and we were able to reconcile those three bills with the House and get them signed into law in November. That is the way we should be passing appropriations bills, through regular order—a process that gives all Senators the opportunity to make their voices and the voices of their constituents heard.

That is a far cry from how things have too often been done around here in the past. In too many years, we have had massive omnibus bills written behind closed doors. That is not how I wanted to operate. When I became majority leader, I said appropriations would be a priority. I said that I wanted to take bills through regular order to open up the process and ensure we were making the best use of taxpayer dollars.

We made considerable progress this past year getting back to regular order. I hope that progress will continue as we look ahead to the next appropriations cycle, but we have to finish this one first. We have a January 30 deadline to fund the remainder of the Federal Government, and we are on track to do that.

Before we leave this week, the Senate will send another package of three bills to the President's desk. This package received a big bipartisan vote in the House last week. We had a big bipartisan vote here in the Senate earlier this week, and we are on track to pass it later today, and President Trump is expected to sign it into law.

Yesterday, the House passed another package of two bills, again with broad bipartisan support. I want to point out that this package, like the three-bill package we are considering in the Senate, actually spends less money than if we were to do just another continuing resolution. It cuts \$10 billion or more than 10 percent from what we would ex-

pect to spend on these Agencies under a continuing resolution. That is thanks to our appropriators doing the hard work of going through the budget and making the tough budgeting decisions all Americans are familiar with, whether they are running a business or managing their household budget. That is the result of a better process, and it is what happens when we make government funding a priority.

Appropriators are working on another package of the four remaining bills, which I hope will receive the same bipartisan backing that has characterized the appropriations cycle thus far. Before the end of the month, the Senate will need to process all of these funding bills and get them to the President's desk.

Appropriations doesn't always make headlines, but it is an important responsibility. So I want to thank our colleagues on the Appropriations Committee again for their diligence in crafting these bills.

I know that when we finish this cycle, the next one is coming in right on its heels. My hope is that we will be able to build on the progress we have made this past year to get the appropriations process back to what it should be—an open process that every Senator can participate in.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The Democratic leader is recognized.

HOUSING COSTS

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I just got back from an event at the Center for American Progress. I joined with Senator DUCKWORTH and Senator SCHATZ to roll out Senate Democrats' new vision to tackle the housing crisis, lowering housing costs for every single American. We call our housing agenda: Opportunity Starts at Home—Opportunity Starts at Home.

Democrats are going to focus on costs like a laser in 2026 and beyond. We are going to lay out, over the next few weeks and months, detailed platforms and plans on many issues related to costs.

In a few weeks, it will be groceries; then, a few weeks later, issues like childcare; then, energy costs, healthcare, and more. We talked about these issues in depth this morning, and I will get to that in a moment.

But, first, I just want to respond to an outrageous thing that happened with the Trump administration yesterday, showing how much of a clueless bubble these people are in. Hold on to your seats. It is hard to believe that

Donald Trump's Secretary Of Agriculture said this—oh yes, a very bold solution to the grocery costs.

She said, basically: Just eat less and spend less. Can you imagine the solution to higher grocery costs, eat less and spend less?

Now, it is hard for people to believe she said it. So let me read the quote.

We've run over 1,000 simulations. It can cost around \$3 a meal for a piece of chicken, a piece of broccoli, corn tortilla, and one other thing.

Do you hear that, America? This is what Donald Trump's golden age looks like: a piece of chicken, a piece of broccoli, a tortilla, and something else that the Secretary of Agriculture forgot.

The people who run this administration are just not serious. This is an insulting way to talk to the American people, telling them: Just get by with less, and stop complaining about affordability.

The American people have had enough of this. So as I just said, Democrats—every day, every week, every month this year—are going to put costs front and center in our agenda. This spring and over the next few months and throughout 2026, Democrats will talk about precisely how a Democratic majority would lower costs for everyday Americans.

We are going to go issue by issue, spending weeks at a time rolling out a plan to lower grocery costs. Then a few weeks later, we will unveil a vision for electricity and energy costs. We will roll out a plan to help people afford childcare and healthcare.

Lower costs is going to be the North Star now and throughout all of 2026. And when it comes to costs, it is important to begin with housing because it quite literally is the closest to home for most people.

For millions of Americans, owning a home is the most important part of the American dream. Young families, when they own a home, know they are building equity and they are building a future, knowing they have something they can give to their kids.

But as we all know, over the last few decades, the American dream of finding a home has become more of a mirage. The median price of a home is up 55 percent since COVID—55 percent. Rent is up by a third.

Listen to this horrifying statistic. This should shake every legislator in their boots because, it is so awful, we have to work to change it. The average first-time home buyer is now 40 years old. That is a record high.

And, again, what has Donald Trump done about all of this? Well, his tariffs have raised housing construction costs by \$17,000 per home. He is launching a criminal investigation against the Chair of the Federal Reserve. And when there is chaos and politicization at the Fed, interest rates are more likely to go higher and stay higher because lending institutions, when they are not sure of the future, keep rates high to avoid any sudden downside.

Then, Donald Trump, of all things, proposed 50-year mortgages, an idea so inane and unserious it was ridiculed by the right, left, and center, right after he issued it.

Ironically, the only decent idea Donald Trump has floated recently on housing is one he stole from Democrats, calling for an end to institutional investors gobbling up homes and crowding out individual families.

Democrats tried to get it done last year. Every Democrat voted for it, but the Republicans in Congress voted against it, and we didn't get it passed.

The American people have had enough. What they want isn't rocket science. They simply want lower costs. They want opportunity. And Democrats believe that when it comes to creating opportunity, opportunity must start at home. So that is what I am calling our housing agenda: Opportunity Starts at Home.

The Democratic majority will tackle the housing affordability crisis by working to reduce rent, boost home ownership, stop predatory corporations, supercharge construction, and provide housing security for all Americans. We spoke about these proposals and other things earlier this morning, like passing the ROAD to Housing Act, which Senator WARREN put together with great mastery, and it passed the Senate by unanimous consent—unanimously. In her bill, there are many things that Senate Democrats have fought for, many bills that other Members have introduced.

Democrats also want to expand downpayment assistance. We want to encourage local zoning reform by providing new incentives and disincentives—carrots and sticks—to localities to reform outdated rules that stand in the way of building housing. We want to stop institutional investors from gobbling up entire neighborhoods for profit.

We want to empower HUD to invoke the Defense Production Act, something Senator DUCKWORTH has emphasized, guaranteeing the purchase of housing materials in short supply and scaling production of modular and manufactured housing. And we want to create an ARPA Home to bring down housing costs. Just as DARPA was able to lower defense costs, we need an ARPA for housing. It is a national crisis, just as important as defense. So let's get an ARPA for housing.

And this isn't just talk. Democrats have delivered on housing relief when we had the majority. When I was majority leader, we delivered the largest rental relief package ever, and we expanded rental assistance and emergency housing vouchers. We saved millions from eviction in the depths of the COVID crisis.

Now, we need expanded rental relief to help during the housing crisis faced by so many Americans. It is not COVID. It is not happening all at once every place, but it is happening in so many places throughout America. We

need the same kind of large rental relief package.

In the weeks and months to come, the American people will also hear from Democrats on other areas where we are fighting to lower costs. As I mentioned, food costs, energy costs, groceries, healthcare, childcare, and so many other things Americans pay for every day.

Democrats are ready to get to work, and as I said, cost—the high cost of living—and the affordability crisis will be our focus throughout 2026 because that is what the American people are demanding. And we will show that the Trump administration and Republicans have made costs even worse, and what Democrats will do, when we get power, to reduce those costs in a very significant way that will affect every single American.

#### VERIZON OUTAGE

Mr. President, now, on the Verizon outage, yesterday, more than 100,000 Verizon users experienced outages and disruptions to their cell service for roughly 10 hours. Obviously, this caused real confusion and disruption for many Americans relying on service for work or emergencies. It is encouraging that Verizon said it will give account credits to customers affected by the outage, but this raises a very serious point.

At a time of high costs, consumers must always be automatically compensated for service disruptions, fully and completely. Last month, I led Senate Democrats in urging Chairman Carr of the FCC to ensure that when outages happen, customers are automatically compensated.

Full compensation to customers for service disruption should be mandated, not just a courtesy, not just a suggestion, not just when the company decides to do it, it is OK, and when they decide not to do it, it is OK, too, because that is wrong.

And, again, at a time when Americans want lower costs, automatic refunds when disruptions occur should be the norm for all telecommunication companies, and the FCC has a responsibility to require just that. Americans already facing high costs shouldn't be the ones paying the price for service disruptions, and the FCC must ensure that.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Florida.

Mrs. MOODY. I ask unanimous consent to speak for up to 5 minutes prior to the scheduled rollcall vote.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

WAIVING QUORUM CALL

Mrs. MOODY. I ask unanimous consent to waive the mandatory quorum call with respect to cloture on Calendar No. 299, H.R. 6938.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

TAMPA POLICE DEPARTMENT

Mrs. MOODY. Mr. President, I am honored to rise on the floor today to recognize some of Florida's—the Sunshine State—very best.

As you know, last week we celebrated Law Enforcement Appreciation Day, and I wanted to recognize two great officers from the Tampa Bay area, where I, as one of the newest U.S. Senators, hail from.

Last month, Tampa Police Department Officers Jason Sikoski and Kaleb Girard saved an 86-year-old man who was found dangling off of his roof.

The senior had gotten to the roof to clear foliage, lost his balance, and had inched his way, with no success, to climb back up to the edge of the roof. When the officers found him, he was already dangling and was almost falling off the roof.

And so you can imagine the quick response from Tampa Police Officers Sikoski and Girard, along with fire rescue, who showed up. They acted timely, without hesitation, and they were able to save this Florida man from falling.

And it was obvious from the situation that they found, had they not shown up, had they delayed in any way, had they not responded swiftly and acted quickly, that Floridian would have fallen 30 feet to the ground, where no doubt this story would have ended with a very tragic conclusion.

So I am very proud today to rise to recognize Officer Sikoski and Officer Girard on the Senate floor as some of Florida's finest and present them with our Florida's Finest Award.

Certainly, as attorney general of Florida before I came to the Senate a year ago, I had always recognized law enforcement for their courage, for dedicating their professional lives to enforcing the people's law. Certainly without that brave commitment by them, our society would not function as we know it. It has been important to me to honor the extraordinary work of those selfless officers that protect Floridians.

Our Florida's Finest Award honors those Floridians and law enforcement officers who demonstrate selfless courage, who go above and beyond to save lives. I am so thankful that these Tampa police officers saved this man's life and for all they do every day to keep the Tampa community safe.

Congratulations to Officers Sikoski and Girard for helping us make Florida stronger and safer. I am so honored to recognize them today on the Senate floor.

I will end by saying that each and every one of our law enforcement officers is essential to upholding the rule

of law, the people's law. Without them showing up day after day, faithfully executing their duties without obstruction or threats or attacks, certainly government and the people's government could not function the way it is intended to.

I will keep standing up for the men and women of law enforcement, every law enforcement officer, because we know that they are essential not only for a stronger and safer Florida but for a stronger and safer United States of America.

I yield the floor.

CLOTURE MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SHEEHY). 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 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, Tom Cotton, Mike Rounds, Mike Crapo, Katie Boyd Britt, Jim Banks, Tommy Tuberville, David McCormick, Steve Daines, Markwayne Mullin, John Barasso, John R. Curtis, Roger F. Wicker, Deb Fischer, Jon A. Husted, Pete Ricketts.

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 bill, H.R. 6938, 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 legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Michigan (Mr. PETERS) is necessarily absent.

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 85, nays 14, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 10 Leg.]

YEAS—85

Alsobrooks	Ernst	McConnell
Baldwin	Fetterman	McCormick
Banks	Fischer	Merkley
Barrasso	Gallego	Moody
Blackburn	Gillibrand	Moran
Blumenthal	Graham	Moreno
Blunt Rochester	Grassley	Mullin
Boozman	Hagerty	Murkowski
Britt	Hassan	Murray
Budd	Hawley	Ossoff
Cantwell	Heinrich	Reed
Capito	Hirono	Ricketts
Cassidy	Hoeven	Risch
Collins	Husted	Rosen
Coons	Hyde-Smith	Rounds
Cornyn	Justice	Schatz
Cortez Masto	Kaine	Schmitt
Cotton	Kelly	Schumer
Cramer	Kennedy	Scott (SC)
Crapo	King	Shaheen
Cruz	Klobuchar	Sheehy
Curtis	Lankford	Slotkin
Daines	Lujan	Smith
Duckworth	Lummis	Sullivan
Durbin	Marshall	Thune

Tillis	Warnock	Wyden
Tuberville	Welch	Young
Van Hollen	Whitehouse	
Warner	Wicker	

NAYS—14

Bennet	Lee	Sanders
Booker	Markey	Schiff
Hickenlooper	Murphy	Scott (FL)
Johnson	Padilla	Warren
Kim	Paul	

NOT VOTING—1

Peters

The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 85, the nays are 14.

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. Cloture having been invoked, the motion to commit and the amendments pending thereto fall.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HAGERTY). The Senator from Illinois.

CREDIT CARD COMPETITION ACT

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I am trying to remember what year it was. It could have been 15 years ago in the Senate when I walked into a hearing chaired by Senator Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania. It was the Senate Judiciary Committee. I didn't know what the topic of the hearing was, but as a member of the committee, I was curious, so I sat down and listened, and I learned about something I really wasn't aware of.

Testifying were retailers across the United States, talking about something called a swipe fee, interchange fee. I didn't know what that was. Turns out it is the fee that is paid to the banks that issue credit cards when you engage in a transaction. It is not identified to the ordinary consumer, but the retailer who is using the credit card certainly knows quite a bit about it. It is the fee that he is charged, he the retailer is charged, for the use of banks' credit cards.

They were complaining—the retailers were—that the terms in the agreement, the interchange fee between Visa and MasterCard, which, of course, dominate the credit card world, were so opaque that they couldn't even get a copy of the actual contract between Visa, MasterCard, and this retailer sitting at the table.

They had a stack of papers in front of them which was part of the contract and agreement for the interchange fee but not the complete agreement. They were frustrated because they had no control whatsoever in terms of what Visa and MasterCard were going to charge.

I took an interest in it and asked Chairman Specter at the time: Is the Senate Judiciary Committee going to do something?

He said: Of course.

The honest answer was no. We had a hearing, and that was the end of it.

But I took an interest in the issue and decided to author a study to see what the impact was on small businesses and retailers of these interchange fees and swipe fees charged by

the banks that issue Visa and MasterCard.

The industry had no interest in any study on any aspect of it. They made it clear to me they were going to oppose every effort I had to try to get to understand this issue better by a credible study.

I was frustrated by this and decided to make an offer of a change in the law when it came to debit cards. Debit cards are different than credit cards because they are virtually a checking account. You can only charge as much as you have on balance to pay. And the question of credit is not as paramount as it is with the credit cards.

So I came to the floor and offered with Dodd-Frank, the banking reform, an amendment on debit card swipe fees and interchange fees.

Just to show you what a different time it was in the U.S. Senate, this was a bill that was being offered by Senator Dodd in the Senate and a Republican Senator as well on a bipartisan basis.

I offered this amendment on the floor and got into the queue. I was about the 25th amendment that was considered. And it wasn't approved by the Banking Committee; I was just offering this on the floor. What I was trying to establish was the actual fee that was being charged for debit cards.

As I said, I was about the 25th amendment to be offered. It turned out that there were so many controversial amendments in Dodd-Frank that I didn't rise to the top as the most controversial.

And so the issue was called and, at the last minute, the chairman of the committee, Senator Dodd said: Of course, that would require 60 votes. His belief was, if he required 60 votes, the Durbin amendment would go away, would be defeated.

It turned out he was wrong. The retailers of America came together in a way they had never come together before to raise questions about debit cards and the fees that are being charged to them.

The amendment passed with more than 60 votes, to the surprise of this sponsor, as well as the other Members of the Senate.

As luck would have it, the House of Representatives decided—Barney Frank, in particular—that this issue showed enough support in the Senate not to be part of any meaningful negotiations in conference, and the so-called Durbin amendment went through.

Since then, there have been several efforts on the floor of the Senate, over the years, to remove the Durbin amendment on debit cards, where the fee was established with the cooperation of the Federal Reserve, and they have failed. So we have debit card world semiregulated or somewhat regulated, not so much on the credit card side.

ROGER MARSHALL is a colleague of mine—a Republican colleague—in the Senate today, from Kansas. He and I

and PETER WELCH of Vermont have co-sponsored legislation to extend the coverage of this issue to credit cards. Senator MARSHALL and I agreed, whichever of us had the majority party at the time would be the lead sponsor. So it is the Marshall-Durbin-Welch bill, today, that is considered when we discuss credit cards.

I give this lengthy introduction to show you there is a deep history on this issue, and it continues to this day, and it has particular relevance at this moment for several reasons. Let me explain.

Data released this week by the Bureau of Labor Statistics confirms what many in the Chamber already know from our daily lives: Americans feel, every day, prices are just too high. Consumer prices—from rent to groceries, to utilities and more—are up nearly 3 percent compared to last year.

Affordability is real. It is a concern that supercedes virtually every other political concern with basic American families. While costs continue to go up and everyday Americans are struggling, big banks are rolling in cash, with profit margins around 30 percent. That is right. Big banks have profit margins in this economy of over 30 percent.

Why are banks making so much money? It is because they profit off of something called a swipe fee, or an interchange fee. Every time you use your credit card, Visa or Mastercard charge the merchant what is essentially a service fee. The merchant pays a fee of 2 percent to 3 percent on each transaction, meaning, if you spend \$100, the merchant gets \$97 or \$98. While Visa and Mastercard keep some of the \$2 or \$3 themselves, most is pocketed by the big banks that issue the cards. A few bucks here, a few bucks there, and you have yourself a pretty good haul if you are a big bank.

How good? In 2024, the year before last, Visa and Mastercard and their big bank partners raked in \$111 billion in credit card swipe fees. These swipe fees are crushing small businesses and their customers through higher prices.

If you don't believe me, listen to what a constituent of mine in Chicago wrote. Rick is his name. He owns a gas station. He pays \$50,000 to \$60,000 a year in swipe fees. He says:

These fees have [an] impact on pricing in the store.

Small business owners like Rick have little recourse. Visa and Mastercard have a near-virtual grasp on the credit card network market, controlling 85 percent of it. That is right. Visa and Mastercard control 85 percent of the credit card market.

I will give you an example of some other businesses that wrote to me in relation to this issue. Credit processing fees are crushing businesses, taking up to 4 percent for credit card sales. "Currently," this individual wrote to me and said, "88% of my sales are credit card."

It has become, literally, the coin of the realm.

This individual, Laura, says she owns a coffee shop:

My per ticket amounts are low, roughly \$5, yet each transaction can take up to 25 cents in swipe a fee [to the credit cards].

We need competition in the credit card marketplace and options to choose from.

Just like small businesses have to compete for customers, credit card companies should have to compete for our business.

Laura has a coffee business in Elmhurst, IL.

Why are banks making so much money? The swipe fees are virtually unregulated. We would like to change that.

Another source of information is from Sesser, IL, which is in Downstate Southern Illinois. Greg Kelly writes me:

When combined with basic merchant processing fees and set monthly access fees, credit card fees can add up to nearly 5 percent of total transactions.

Greg writes:

This is insane. This prevents hiring and hinders business growth, as well as being able to compete. Credit card reform is needed now.

Small business owners like Rick have no recourse. Visa and Mastercard have a near-virtual death grasp on the credit card network market, controlling 85 percent of it. Because of this, Visa and Mastercard are free to set fee rates on credit cards wherever they like. For their retailers, take it or leave it.

This allows them to tell small business owners like Rick that they are going to set the standard. He has no negotiating power. There is no competition unless the Marshall-Durbin-Welch bill passes. This is not how our system and our economy are supposed to work. It is time we bring back real competition to the credit card industry, the kind that encourages growth and brings about lower prices.

This bipartisan bill that I described to you, the Credit Card Competition Act, was endorsed by President Trump this week. It was kind of a pleasant surprise. I didn't know it was coming. He was unequivocal in supporting it. It would address the outrageous swipe fees being charged to retailers.

Talk about a hidden cost of business. Every time you use your credit card, if it is for a transaction, for a meal at a restaurant, for a contribution to a charity, the swipe fee is being taken out of it, 5 percent or more. My bill would require the largest 30 or so banks—only the largest banks—to enable at least two credit card networks to be used on the credit cards they issue, with at least one being outside the Visa-Mastercard duopoly. That would create real competition.

The banking industry hates the Marshall-Durbin-Welch amendment like the devil hates holy water. To them, any kind of regulation is unacceptable. By injecting competition into the credit card market, this bill would help bring down swipe fees that small businesses pay and that ultimately get passed on to working families in the form of higher prices.

Opponents of our bill have falsely claimed such provisions would squeeze Visa and Mastercard and the big banks, and force them to scale back reward programs.

I learned something recently in lobbying on this bill. The major airlines all oppose this bill that would limit the swipe fees and interchange fees. I was curious why the airlines would be so interested in it. It turns out, for most of the major airlines, they make more money off their credit cards than they issue than they do off air operations. That is right—more money off the little square plastic than they do on the actual airplane passengers.

So when I go into Reagan National Airport, I am not surprised that they have banners flashing: Stop the Durbin amendment. Stop anything that might affect your frequent flier plan.

I often wonder in an airplane—I pay attention to this; most people don't—when they give the announcements from the flight attendants about their credit cards, as soon as you reach a point where they completed all their safety announcements and told you to buckle up and shut up because we are about to take off, then they announce their credit card program and want you to sign up for it. That is the reality of it.

Watch next time you get on an airplane when they do this. These poor flight attendants have to bring applications up and down the aisles, trying to get people to sign up for credit cards.

Visa and Mastercard and card-issuing banks have plenty of room for reform. In 2024, banks netted about \$378 billion in revenue from debit and credit cards, but they pay only \$47 billion in rewards.

I value frequent flier miles like everyone else, but the program will not even be touched. I am no mathematician, but banks have plenty of revenue to continue offering rewards without hurting their bottom line.

Those worried about airline miles and cash back, an analysis by payments consulting firm CMSPI found rewards would be reduced by less than one-tenth of 1 percent, at most, because of the Credit Card Competition Act.

They are crying wolf. This bill has the support of a conservative Republican Senator from Kansas, Senator MARSHALL, and a liberal Democrat, PETER WELCH from Vermont, and myself, of course. I urge my Senate colleagues: Let's come together and get this done on behalf of consumers and small businesses. You want to do something that really makes a difference to the bottom line and debt of families? Address the outrageous interest rates being charged on credit cards and address the swipe fees being charged to retailers that are fed into the inflationary aspects of this economy.

This is the time to do it, if we are going to meaningfully address the real expenses that families face. I urge my colleagues to take a look at this meas-

ure—this bipartisan measure, this commonsense measure—that will make a difference in the families that we represent.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from California.

#### CAMPAIGN FINANCE

Mr. PADILLA. Mr. President, I rise today to join Senator KELLY and many of our colleagues who spoke just yesterday afternoon to highlight the enduring damage done to our democracy, nearly 16 years ago, when a single decision handed down by the Supreme Court of the United States gave corporations and billionaires in our country unlimited spending power to influence our elections.

The case is referred to as Citizens United, and the ruling didn't just change campaign finance law. It fundamentally altered our democracy. It truly was a turning point. It was a moment where the voices of everyday Americans began to be drowned out every election cycle by a small and powerful few, armed with unlimited money and unprecedented access.

We see the consequences of it to this day. Just one example—this may shock you: a billionaire like Elon Musk, who was not shy nor discreet about spending nearly \$300 million to support President Trump's candidacy in 2024. Others were similarly involved, but he was not shy about it.

So it wasn't a surprise, it was not a coincidence, when early in the Trump administration, he was basically given the keys to the Federal Government and allowed to run roughshod through Federal Departments and Agencies and budgets through this experiment called DOGE.

That is just one of many, many examples of how those with a lot of money—corporations and individuals—can now influence elections and the election outcomes and then take folks into offices that were their preference to reap benefits, all while this administration continues to ignore the needs of America's working families, who are facing increasing electric bills, grocery bills, and certainly health insurance costs, among so much more.

Senator KELLY and others spoke to this eloquently yesterday afternoon. I wanted to add to that conversation and add to the picture of what is happening with campaign finance in America at this moment.

The American people are increasingly concerned with the influence of money in politics because they also see fewer efforts and resources being committed to enforcing what is left of campaign finance oversight and accountability on this administration.

What is left of campaign finance systems and accountability is also under further attack. President Trump has completely silenced our country's top campaign finance watchdog, the Federal Election Commission. Just last year, President Trump fired one of the Commissioners, Ellen Weintraub, with-

out cause or without justification. It was clear retaliation for her attempts to hold him accountable during his first term as President. Removing an FEC Commissioner like this was not only unlawful and without precedent, but it was soon followed by Republican members of the Commission also leaving voluntarily to pursue other jobs.

Under normal circumstances, when there is a vacancy or vacancies to the FEC, an administration would consult with the Senate on nominations to fill these vacancies quickly and on a bipartisan basis—but not with this administration. Now there are just two Commissioners who remain, and the Agency has lacked a quorum for 260 days and counting, with no end in sight. It is not an oversight. It is clearly intentional by the White House. President Trump is purposely leaving these vacancies open, refusing to send bipartisan nominees to the Senate for consideration and confirmation.

The reason it is so critical and the reason it is so urgent is that we are quickly entering the midterm election season. So imagine that. We are entering a midterm election—a very consequential midterm election—that will undoubtedly be met with unlimited spending not just by candidates but through super PACs and other dark forces without our having the tools of campaign finance oversight, regulation, and accountability. That should concern all of us as it concerns the American people.

Colleagues, we have the power to fix this. We can legislatively fix the wrongs of the Citizens United case by the Supreme Court, and we must immediately restore a quorum to the FEC so they can do their critical and important job in the months ahead.

I will continue to be a leading voice in this fight, and I look forward to working with all of you on both sides of the aisle to do what is right.

#### TRIBUTE TO TESS OSWALD

Mr. President, I rise today with the bittersweet task of saying goodbye and paying tribute to my communications director Tess Oswald.

Tess has done such outstanding work not just for me but on behalf of the people of California. She has been alongside me since my first days here in the Senate 5 years ago. I know I speak for our entire team when I say that we are honored to have had the privilege of working alongside her and that we are going to miss her.

She is a proud daughter of California and of parents who served the public as Federal prosecutors, so public service is in her blood. She has brought remarkable drive and passion to every facet of her work.

She has both led the communications team and has mentored so many of the communications team members with her heart and her presence of mind, which is not surprising to me given her tremendous past experience both in serving multiple Members of Congress

but also in working on political campaigns—to include a Presidential campaign many years ago—of the Members she has worked for in the past, to include that of my now colleague's, Senator ADAM SCHIFF, who also represents California.

I could go on and on about her resume and on and on about her contributions to different issues and to different engagements with the people of California—speaking engagements, speeches, et cetera—but of the many, many moments that were so impactful, I think the best example of her insights and value of her advice was in the aftermath of what has become known as an infamous incident at a Department of Homeland Security press conference that I attended last year in Los Angeles.

With the visuals of that incident that shook some across California and across the country, Tess, in her wisdom, took the worst of circumstances and both properly and successfully pivoted the attention and the message to where it rightfully belonged—in highlighting the cruelty of this administration and how it was terrorizing communities throughout the Los Angeles region and, soon, elsewhere around the country.

This administration has been targeting indiscriminately and in an increasingly cruel fashion immigrants and not just the worst of the worst—the dangerous, violent criminals that the administration likes to talk about so often. What we have seen in reality is so many of the immigrants being arrested, detained, and even deported without due process. The undocumented or otherwise hard-working people who contribute to our country are the vast majority of the victims of this administration's mass deportation efforts. Tess has helped to correct that narrative and to emphasize and highlight that narrative as part of her public service.

On a personal note, as a husband and as a father myself, I know—and I share it very frequently—that public service is not without personal sacrifice. Tess's family has seen nothing different. I have seen her in some of her personal milestones over the last few years—from an engagement, to marriage, to becoming a mother.

So I thank Quinn, her daughter; Justin, her husband; and her entire family for sharing Tess with us over these last 4 years and certainly throughout her career. Quinn may not appreciate it today, but I hope she one day learns to appreciate not just the value of that sacrifice but the importance of Tess's work to me, to our office, to the people of California, and to the Nation.

To Tess and her entire family, I just want to say that we thank you. We appreciate everything that you have done for me, for Angela, for our office, for California, and for our Nation. It is with a heavy heart that we both say thank you and send you off into your next chapter knowing that you won't

be that far away. We will have to call you back into action from time to time as life needs it, but we just so truly, truly appreciate everything you have done and how you have done it.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Indiana.

#### VENEZUELA

Mr. YOUNG. Mr. President, since the beginning of this year, there has been a lot of conversation both here in Washington and around the country about the future of American involvement in Venezuela and how that relates to the War Powers Act. So, as we head into the recess and as my colleagues head back to their respective States and to other locales, I just wanted to take a minute and update my constituents on how this U.S. Senator is approaching the situation.

First, I want to reiterate that I support President Trump's decision to bring Nicolas Maduro to justice for his many crimes. I know I speak for countless Hoosiers in expressing my gratitude that after years of oppression, the Venezuelan people now have new hope. In fact, I have taken meetings in recent days with diplomats, national security luminaries, business people, expats, and others. Those meetings have reinforced the reality for me that right now we have an opportunity for brighter days ahead in Venezuela, and I know the administration is working with multiple stakeholders to effect that sort of positive change that we are all hoping for.

I, of course, also want to commend the bravery and the professionalism of the U.S. service personnel who carried out this successful law enforcement mission in Venezuela earlier this month—highly impressive, highly sophisticated. I am awestruck by the mission and all that it accomplished, and I thank the men who were a part of that.

Now, while I applaud and stand with the President and his team on the law enforcement action taken in Venezuela to remove Nicolas Maduro, that law enforcement mission is now complete. I just want to clarify that for many of my constituents.

I have also expressed concerns about the possibility of American military involvement in Venezuela as we move forward. The President and members of his national security team have openly stated that the United States now runs Venezuela, and because we can't predict the future, no one can guarantee with certainty that an American military presence won't be required to stabilize the country.

So I, along with whom I believe to be the majority of Hoosiers, am not prepared to commit American troops to that mission. I strongly believe that any such commitment of U.S. forces in Venezuela must be subject to debate and authorization from Congress. That is what has animated so much of my activity in recent days and weeks.

That belief is not a new one to this situation or to this President. In fact,

for over a decade and under multiple Presidents, I have pushed for Congress to fulfill its role as defined in the Constitution on matters involving the use of military force. Since U.S. involvement in Venezuela began last year, I have pushed for briefings and other forms of congressional engagement. Just last week, because of those concerns, I ultimately voted to advance a War Powers Resolution to make my concerns crystal clear to the administration and to my colleagues.

The reality, though, is this: Even if the Senate had adopted that resolution, had it not been derailed through a procedural vote, it likely would have died in the House of Representatives—very likely—or at a minimum have been vetoed by the President of the United States. That much was clear.

Given that stark, incontrovertible, unavoidable reality, I have had numerous conversations with senior national security officials over the past week and since the first vote took place, and in those conversations—some in person, some by phone—I received assurances that there were, No. 1, no longer any American troops in Venezuela. I also received a commitment that if President Trump were to determine American forces were needed in any major military operation in Venezuela, the administration would come to Congress in advance—in advance—to ask for a formal authorization on the use of military force.

Lastly, Secretary Rubio has agreed to my request to appear before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to provide a public update on Venezuela immediately after the recess, facilitating the very type of public debate and, if necessary someday, authorization around these matters, hopefully working the muscle memory of this institution and its various committees on issues of war powers so that they might be more inclined to operate those prerogatives—to exercise those prerogatives in the future.

For those like me who want Congress to perform its longstanding role on these issues, the commitments I have secured are major commitments that will help keep Congress better informed, help ensure we make better decisions, and ensure in this situation that any future commitment of U.S. forces in Venezuela is subject to public debate and authorization here in this body.

Let me just end by saying that President Trump campaigned against forever wars. Millions of people strongly supported him in that position. I strongly support him in that position still today, and I believe that a drawn-out campaign in Venezuela involving the American military, even if unintended, would be the opposite of President Trump's goal of ending foreign entanglements. But I also make that statement with humility, understanding that world events are fluid, that the world is complicated, and that circumstances can change.

What all of us in this body should want is the opportunity to perform oversight and provide input on these critical foreign policy issues on behalf of those we represent. If we must make a decision—a very difficult decision—at some point in the future, our constituents should be able to hold us accountable for those decisions.

Regardless of who serves as President or which party controls the White House, Congress must get back to carefully fulfilling its constitutional responsibilities. I am pleased that we have a path forward toward that goal now, and I look forward to the next steps in the weeks ahead.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

#### APPROPRIATIONS

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, I come to the floor this afternoon to congratulate the appropriations colleagues who have got us to this point of voting today on final passage of three important appropriations bills.

I want to congratulate specifically Senator COLLINS and Senator MURRAY from my home State of Washington. They have done an admirable job, and I certainly want to compliment Senator MURRAY for her hard work and attention on policies that affect our State, particularly in the areas of water. But we are here today because we want to say to our fellow colleagues: These are three important bills to preserving science and the role that science plays in moving our Nation forward.

Last May, I hosted an online roundtable with Senator VAN HOLLEN, a lead appropriator—and I thank him and the rest of the appropriators on the committee, both on the Democrat and Republican side—because we wanted to speak out about how Federal Agencies and scientists, including some from my State, were here to decry the impacts that we would see if the Trump administration was successful at cutting the National Science Foundation particularly, cutting NOAA, cutting NASA.

These participants made it clear that industry depends on strong partnerships with the government to conduct basic and applied science and that they can't do it on their own. Important people also were convened in a group in June—meteorologists from around the country—to specifically home in on how cuts to the NOAA budget would endanger Americans on issues like peak hurricane and wildfire season.

And we called on the administration to restore the Agencies to their full capacity. So I am very happy that these three bills, I think, represent a win for science as was recently reported in the *New York Times*. But it also was specifically important for the science NOAA research budget: \$634 million so that NOAA can continue to improve weather forecasting and development of tools that actually save lives and save money.

I know my colleagues from all over the country are plagued by weather

events. It could be a hurricane; it could be a tornado; it could be a flood. We obviously were just impacted in the Pacific Northwest, but we need the tools. We need new hurricane hunters. We need new radar systems. We need the meteorologists.

We need the people on the ground, like what happened in Texas, so that you can take weather information about how warmer events are creating more precipitation, and that precipitation could lead to record flooding. We need the whole system to work with the emergency responders, and we need the ability to get people out of harm's way.

These bills also maintain NOAA's fishery funding and increase investment in salmon hatcheries and the Columbia River, and it protects the Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund from being zeroed out.

I see my colleague from Oregon here. I know, as an appropriator, he knows how well and important the Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund is, just as my colleagues from Alaska, Oregon, California, Idaho, and Montana know. The whole region knows how important these funds are.

Congress has rejected the administration's attempts in the NOAA budget to cut \$1.7 billion out of the NOAA budget. It literally wanted to slash the entire R&D arm of NOAA and slash the NOAA fisheries budget by 29 percent, and these three bills today obviously reject that.

We are also sending a strong message that we believe in our scientists in other Agencies, and I will get to NASA in a minute. But just on this continued improvement of sensors and instruments, this bill invests in NOAA's critical research and lifesaving Agencies.

During the last month of record flooding in my State, over 100,000 people were forced to evacuate their homes, and now, 73 landslides have been reported. So these important reminders, like weather events, are why we sent a five-point plan to the President saying funding for research, technology, tools, buoys, and other information are important to modernizing the Nation's weather forecasting capabilities.

In addition, as I mentioned, there were other Agencies where the President thought we should make massive cuts. Thank God our bipartisan efforts by appropriators and our colleagues represented by the earlier votes on these bills show that we don't agree with that.

We will double the request for funding for the National Science Foundation, and we support the NSF fundamental applied research investment in universities across our Nation. This is important work in all sorts of medical devices, insulin pumps, pacemakers, important things for healthcare and for manufacturing competitiveness.

We also with this bill send a strong message that we stand by our NASA Agency. This legislation funds all

NASA mission areas and avoids jeopardizing our exploration of the moon and solar system. We are not going to put aviation safety at risk or leadership in aerospace technology such as advanced composites.

It restores NASA's budget from under \$19 billion, as proposed by the Trump administration, to \$24 billion to ensure that we can return to the Moon before China and sustain America's presence there.

So I am very happy that all of these things are really important investments, generational investments in science programs, rejecting the cuts by the administration, and instead fueling the innovation economy that is so important for America's competitiveness.

While I am very happy to celebrate these three bills, we also have more work to do. This week, it is clear that the economic numbers point to the fact that we are not lowering costs in America. The Bureau of Labor Statistics said this week that consumer prices are up 2.7 percent higher than a year ago. It has been a full year since this administration has set in motion its economic policies, and now, we know the prices of groceries are up 2.4 percent, the price of shelter is up 3.2 percent, the price of medical services is up 3.5 percent, the price of electricity is up 6.7 percent, and the price of natural gas is up 10.8 percent.

So the reality is, is that tariffs are having an impact. They are adding to the sticker shock on American families, and they are affecting the price of everything from coffee to clothes to cameras to furniture.

A team of Harvard economists have been tracking retail prices using realtime barcode data. So one thing I want to show is just look at this chart that we are presenting here, "Tariffs are Raising Prices for Americans." With January 2024 retail prices as a benchmark, you can see that, during 2024, retail prices were trending down on both domestic goods and imported goods.

These two lines here—these two lines on domestic and imported goods were basically trending downward—this upper line: domestic, imported goods. So here we are all the way through 2024; these numbers are going down.

But all of the sudden, in 2025 and particularly here in April, all of the sudden, the numbers for both imported and domestic products start going back up, all the way to where we are today, so 2024 policies of the last administration driving prices down. All of the sudden, tariff implementation and these policies, prices now going back up.

This is when so-called "Liberation Day" tariffs were announced. Americans started getting squeezed. I don't think they are feeling very liberated. This has been the centerpiece of the President's economic policies, and it remains, in my mind, a broken promise on trying to lower costs.

Inflation does remain a consistent problem. American businesses know it;

American families know it; and they are being squeezed by it. So I am hopeful the Supreme Court will act soon and help Americans by lowering the prices they are feeling because of the Trump tariffs and the fact that they are being imposed on manufacturers, on households, and consumers that are having an effect on our economy.

But I want Congress to act. I hope that, as the Supreme Court takes a look at this, that my colleagues will realize that it is their constitutional duty to play a role here and be responsible, similar to what the Cantwell-Grassley Trade Review Act says. That is, that we are saying Congress has the dutiful constitutional authority on tariffs and you have to have all trade policies come before Congress in a transparent and consistent fashion.

I hope that my colleagues will respond to this as the Supreme Court acts, and hopefully, we will get more attention to the oversight demanded on high costs being impacted by tariffs.

We also must work harder to stop inflation and support policies that my colleagues on our side of the aisle have been talking about: how we want to have more affordable housing, how we want to lower the cost on household goods in general, how we want to address energy prices, and how we want Americans to feel like they can keep pace.

Yet here we are on one of the biggest crisis that we could do something about right now—healthcare—and we are not doing anything about healthcare, the expired ACA—the Affordable Care Act—enhanced premium tax credits, the commonsense solution that we would have had, many Americans—millions of Americans—still having affordable insurance.

Our colleagues have not chosen to address this issue. The House passed an extension, a 3-year extension, and yet here we are, about to leave for a week, and our colleagues in the Senate will not even bring that extension up for a vote.

Mr. President, 80,000 people in my State are now at risk of losing their health insurance. So I asked our colleagues to do something about this. I see the President released a one-page healthcare framework today, and I am glad he is getting in that, but today is the end of enrollment. We need more than a one-page plan. There are a lot of details that go into something that is 18 percent of U.S. GDP. This is almost 1 in every \$5 spent in the American economy.

And after 15 years, we have heard nothing really from our Republican colleagues on how they are going to drive down the cost of healthcare. So my constituents now looking at these increased inflation numbers also know that they can't afford to get sick. If they are going to lose this healthcare, they can't afford the impacts of the economy, and they can't afford the impacts of healthcare disappearing out from under them.

It is time we address inflation on a daily basis here. It is time we really think about what we can do to help the U.S. economy, help Americans keep pace, and help Americans restore the healthcare that they deserve to have.

I yield the floor.  
The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, I thank my colleague from Washington State for her fierce advocacy on healthcare and on so much more in terms of the affordability of living in America. Our families are oppressed.

Mr. President, we are considering a trio of appropriations bills, and one of those is the appropriation bill, or spending bill, for Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies. I believe that this Interior bill for fiscal year 2026 is an important step toward Congress reclaiming its constitutional power of the purse.

The bill protects funding for public lands, including national parks, wildlife refuges, conservation lands, and national forests.

President Trump's proposed budget slashed \$1 billion from the National Park Service and created the opportunity to transfer or sell off our national park treasures. This bill rejects that vision. It has a better plan: full staffing capacity for our national parks, full complement of seasonal staff, State and Tribal historic preservation offices funded, and needed park maintenance and repairs funded.

President Trump proposed massive cuts to the U.S. Forest Service, which would be devastating, \$1.4 billion in cuts. Those of us who live in the West who have significant amounts of Federal forests know how much investment it takes to appropriately manage these lands.

So this bill presents a better plan. It funds the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program. It preserves State forestry grants and programs for research and forest health management. It invests in hazardous fuels reduction projects and wildfire preparedness and suppression efforts. It ensures that Federal wildlife firefighters are fully paid. The bill funds the Land and Water Conservation Fund at \$900 million instead of a much smaller amount proposed by the President. And this bill requires that all projects get funded, not simply projects that the President favors.

The bill fully funds Payments in Lieu of Taxes, normally known as PILT, to ensure counties across the country, especially rural communities, have resources they need. The bill upholds our commitment and treaty obligations to Tribes. It rejects President Trump's attempt to slash \$1 billion from Tribal programs. It boosts funding for the Indian Health Services. It provides resources to staff newly opened hospitals and clinics, and it preserves the Indian Health Services advanced appropriations for fiscal year 2027 to ensure that, if there is a government shutdown,

healthcare through the Indian Health Service will not shut down. That is protection for 2.5 million people across Indian Country.

President Trump proposed gutting the Environmental Protection Agency. This bill has a better plan. It provides almost \$5 billion above his budget. It protects the Energy Star Program, the water and wastewater State Revolving Funds—so important to so many communities across the land—and the WIFIA Program, the Water Infrastructure Finance Innovation Act, that provides low-cost loans for large water projects across the country that would otherwise be unaffordable.

It preserves programs for air quality management and pollution control. And the bill includes more than \$1.7 billion for community initiated projects. Now, these are projects where communities said, Here is our top priority, and Senators then advocated and House Members advocated that those projects be included in this budget. That is a powerful vision of a local understanding of the best and the most important need being addressed through this bill. Often, that involves replacing wastewater treatment plants or restoring critical watersheds.

This bill, in addition to these programs, takes another critical step forward. When programs are included in an appropriations bill, the details of how Congress intends for those funds to be spent are traditionally laid out in report language. The report language doesn't have the force of law, but in the understanding of the separation of powers, the administrations of the past respected and operated according to that report language.

Every single former Presidential administration has honored those directives, but not the Trump administration. That is why we have included 140 new line items in legislative text, moving items that used to be in report language into the actual language of the law.

It is a challenge if the administration does not respect the visions laid out through the language of our spending bills. How can Members of Congress negotiate a compromise that includes the priorities of different Senators from different parts of the country, different House Members from all over the country, if a President is going to say, Well, you know what, I have decided I am simply not going to act on some of those projects; maybe I will only implement the projects for red States and not blue States?

Or maybe a different President might say: I will do the projects for blue States but not red States—or Senators I like rather than Senators I don't like.

No. That is unacceptable. Every time you hear the phrase of the administration saying—a Cabinet Member or the President himself, We are going to cut programs that don't align with the administration's priorities, that is an authoritarian strongman state comment

that breaks the law and guts the Constitution. That is the administration stealing the power of the purse.

The Founders deliberately placed the power of the purse—the spending power—with Congress. You can read it in article I of the Constitution because it is therefore the people's representatives who decide the design of the programs and how much money they will receive. If just the Chief Executive makes those decisions, then we don't have a President; we have a King; we have a tyrant. And we here in Congress have failed our responsibility to defend the Constitution—yes, that Constitution, the one we took an oath to defend.

It is the vision of a democratic republic that we come together from all over the country, from different walks of life, and work together to forge spending bills and authorizing bills that serve interests across this Nation.

In a continuing resolution last year, Congress abdicated that responsibility. We failed in defending the Constitution and effectively handed the President a blank check. That is exactly what Trump wanted this year, another blank check to operate as a tyrant instead of a constitutional President.

But he is not getting it. We have protections in these spending bills that take a significant stride toward defense of our constitutional responsibility and the power of the purse. Now, it is not as strong a language as I would have liked, and yes, there is vulnerability to slow-walking or freezing or transferring, but we have taken a strong step in the right direction.

There is more we need to do in that, more than we ever thought we had to do, but it is going to take the majority and minority parties working together to fully restore our responsibility under the Constitution.

A huge thank you to the chair of the committee, the subcommittee, Senator MURKOWSKI. She is a great partner to work with. We come from different sides of the aisle, but we both come from States full of BLM lands—Bureau of Land Management lands, that is—full of forests, full of challenges that are addressed in this bill. We both care a great deal about the environment, that we have a responsibility to defend now and hand to the next generation in healthy condition. The bill that we worked on together here in the Senate, it passed the Senate committee 26 to 2. That says a lot.

To summarize, the bill before us today rejects the President's disastrous cuts. It defends our public lands and our Tribal programs and our environment. It keeps out new poison pill riders—and there were a lot of them in the House version of this bill.

Together, let's proceed to do more of this kind of bipartisan work and to enable the responsibilities invested in Congress to be fulfilled in responsibility to our constituents across the Nation and the structure of our democratic republic.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

FLINT, MICHIGAN

Ms. SLOTKIN. Mr. President, I rise today as the new Senator from the State of Michigan and in particular to recognize the 10-year anniversary of the declaration of emergency in the city of Flint, MI, 10 years on.

In April of 2014, the city of Flint decided to switch the city's water source from Lake Huron to the Flint River. It was a decision made by State officials to save money at the time, but neither the city nor the State made sure to treat the new water before it came into Flint's taps.

Because of that, an American city was poisoned. In less than 2 years, 100,000 people were exposed to toxic levels of lead, bacteria, heavy metals like iron, and chemicals known to cause cancer. That includes about 10,000 children. Imagine the Big House at U of M packed on game day, and that is how many people were poisoned.

Ten years ago this week, President Barack Obama declared a Federal state of emergency for the city of Flint, and that declaration wasn't necessarily the beginning of the crisis, but it was supposed to be the beginning of the end, a turning point where Flint could begin to recover.

But let me be clear, the crisis in Flint has not ended—not in Flint, not in Michigan, and as a Michigander and Flint's Senator, not for me. Flint is a community still in pain, still seeking justice, still seeking accountability. As Flint's newest Senator, I wanted to be here on the 10-year anniversary to make sure Michiganders and Americans don't forget what happened.

Like I said, let's review the bidding. Flint is an apocalyptic poisoning of an American city, and it should be a warning to all Americans on what happens when there is not accountability. It is a story of government's failure to protect its citizens, and more than that, it is a human tragedy of ordinary people living ordinary lives, people like Brittney Thomas.

Brittney lives in Flint. She has two children, Jabari and Janiyah. Janiyah was just a year old when the city of Flint switched their water from the Flint River. Jabari was 4. Around her, Brittney's neighbors began seeing foam coming out of their taps. Their water was yellow or brown or rust-colored. It smelled metallic. Visible particles were floating around in the water.

Soon, Brittney and her children started developing unexplained rashes. Janiyah's soft baby skin was streaked with red, riddled with bumps. Concerned, Brittney, of course, reached out to her pediatrician. Then her children started having seizures. For months, they were in and out of the hospital. Brittney didn't know why. She could only watch in panic as her kids grew sicker.

To the parents watching this, imagine your 1-year-old baby, this tiny, helpless life that you are supposed to

protect, seizing again and again, and you have no idea what is going on. There are no words to describe that terror.

Being in and out of the hospital had other consequences. Brittney lost multiple jobs. She began struggling with her bills. She was forced to borrow money from loved ones, and the effects of these unexplainable illnesses seeped into every aspect of their lives.

For the rest of 2014, more and more families in Flint began to experience sudden, strange symptoms: thinning hair, rashes, seizures, pain, and chronic conditions. Kids began developing speech impediments, seemingly out of nowhere. Students consistently getting As and Bs were suddenly having a hard time being able to read or think clearly. Their grades slipped. Some developed learning disabilities. Many kids started showing changes in their behavior, where once they were calm, sweet, and curious, they became extremely anxious, emotional, and aggressive.

Their parents had no idea why. There was no visible reasons, no obvious explanation. Water, even when it is poisoned, leaves very few visible scars.

It wasn't until doctors ran blood tests that Brittney discovered that her children had lead poisoning. Families across the city started to get the same diagnosis. But that wasn't enough of an explanation. Brittney knew it. So did other parents. And they suspected there was a link between their kids getting sick and the brown water coming out of their tap, so they began demanding answers. They raised issues with the city council, with county leadership, with State officials. Every time, they got the same response: Our tests are showing that the water is just fine.

Others waved off the signs. Flint is a poor city. Its residents are mostly African American. It was way too easy for leaders to just shrug and look away. Sometimes, people actually laughed.

Some parents were spending days at a time in the hospital. They were living a nightmare, and they were asking their leaders for help. Instead of getting answers and support, they were dismissed.

Brittney and other parents, including Melissa Mays and Leanne Walters, wondered if the city's tests were actually accurate. They decided to test the water for themselves. So in January of 2015, they got boxes of test kits and instructions from a lab supervisor at Flint's water treatment plant. They paid for it with Melissa's tax refund.

The accepted limit for lead in drinking water is 15 parts per billion. One home, the home of Leanne Walters, showed a test reading 104 parts per billion. Leanne tested her water again a few weeks later. This time, it jumped to 400 parts per billion. The water her kids were drinking, bathing in, and brushing their teeth with contained more than 25 times the amount of lead that is safe for children.

Terrified and frustrated, she called the EPA to complain. She reached a researcher named Miguel Del Toral, who began investigating. Over the next few weeks, Miguel asked Michigan's Department of Environmental Quality over and over again whether Flint's water had been treated properly. First, they said it had been treated. Then they admitted it hadn't.

Miguel couldn't believe what he was hearing. Flint was an older city, which meant their plumbing was mostly lead pipes. In his field, it was common knowledge that corrosion control was needed to prevent exactly this type of crisis.

Brittney, Melissa, and other parents organized marches and protests almost every week. In July, over 500 people marched 70 miles from Detroit to Flint. Everyone, from local media, to international press, to Hollywood directors, started paying more attention. Yet, when Michigan outlets reached out to the State's environmental department, their spokesman said the following:

Anyone who is concerned about lead in the drinking water in Flint can relax.

Doctors like Dr. Mona Hanna, a pediatrician, compared the results to her own patients' records from the last 2 years. The results matched exactly. Flint was being poisoned by its own drinking water. Dr. Mona and other doctors teamed up with parents to shine a light on these results, and they talked to anyone who would listen.

It is an important lesson in banging pots and pans until you get the help you need. But it took almost 2 full years of advocacy and fight from Flint's parents for their kids to get this declaration of an emergency.

During those 2 years and beyond, the scale of the government's deception started coming out. Detroit press reported that the city had known about the risk to the water before they even switched the source. A city report back in 2011 had identified the Flint River as corrosive, in need of special chemicals. Both city and State officials reported that as early as 2013—a year before the city water was switched.

But Michigan's own State environmental department had been doing exactly what they accused others of doing—manipulating data. They had changed city reports to make the lead levels look within acceptable levels. The State's tests, which they had cited for months to discredit the Flint parents, were revealed to have been cherry-picked.

Meanwhile, Federal reports of lead in Flint's water had been buried by senior officials at the Environmental Protection Agency until Miguel—that one researcher we spoke about—risked his job and leaked the reports to the press.

Starting things off, 12 people died from Legionnaire's disease alone.

In fact, Flint knew how to fix these problems before they even changed the water and did it anyway. Treating Flint's water would have cost approximately \$60 a day. For \$60 a day, offi-

ciala could have prevented 100,000 people from getting poisoned.

Now, what has that led to? Flint's advocacy changed more than just the city's water source; it changed Michigan. Michigan is the Great Lakes State. Water is part of our core identity. We have always seen ourselves as protectors of our Nation's water.

Threats to our water are threats to our very identity as Michiganders. To be frightened of our water hits at the core of who we are. But Flint helped us realize that protecting water doesn't start and stop at the Great Lakes; it includes the water around us—in our rivers and in our taps. Because of Flint, Michigan is now a powerful voice speaking out on issues like PFAS, chemical contamination, and river pollution. Republican or Democrat, Michiganders see themselves as stewards of all of America's water no matter where it flows, and it is no exaggeration to say that Flint changed our country.

More than 10 years after the crisis in Flint, billions of dollars have been spent, going to American cities to swap out lead pipes, including hundreds of millions for Michigan secured by Senators Debbie Stabenow and GARY PETERS.

The issue of aging lead pipes drew national attention. Cities in New Jersey, Colorado, and Kentucky began replacing their aging pipes. In 2018, Michigan became the first State to require the removal of all lead pipes. And citizens were empowered to hold elected officials accountable for environmental negligence rather than just companies.

But all of that is, frankly, cold comfort to the people of Flint. In their community, the damage has been done. More than a decade later, it is still ongoing.

An entire generation of Flint's children still live with the long-term effects of lead poisoning. It never leaves the body. There are learning disabilities, ADHD, anxiety and depression, not to mention PTSD. Studies estimate that roughly 3,000 children have been diagnosed with these conditions and more. The actual number could be much higher.

Flint's schools paid a heavy price. Test scores dropped dramatically. Special needs requests spiked. Enrollment in Flint schools plummeted from 8,500 students in 2012 to less than 3,000 this year. More than 20 school buildings are sitting empty.

Both Brittney's kids still suffer from recurring seizures almost 12 years after the crisis began. Her son Jabari has extreme anxiety and issues with his memory. He began struggling in school.

Around her, Brittney's friends and loved ones now have chronic, incurable conditions. There are children whose kidneys are so damaged that they are in constant risk of severe dehydration; women with repeated and above-normal miscarriage rates; teenagers with hardened heavy metal deposits in their

heels and in their knees, making it painful to sit or stand; parents with a slew of autoimmune disorders—lupus, rheumatoid arthritis.

With every hospital stay, every specialist's visit, every missed day of school, Brittney and her loved ones are forced to relive that trauma—helplessness, panic, and confusion, not to mention pain in their everyday lives.

The story is not over yet even 10 years on. They are still fighting to be heard. Flint wants accountability. Who wouldn't? They deserve nothing less after an American city is poisoned. People died. Children lost their parents. People lost their siblings, neighbors, friends. So nearly 10 years later, Flint residents have brought charges, criminal and civil, against everyone involved in this catastrophe. They sued the city. They sued the county. They sued the engineering firms that switched Flint's water. They sued the State of Michigan, including Gov. Rick Snyder at the time, for their staggering lack of oversight. They sued the EPA, which was supposed to be the backstop for everything, which consistently buried reports of lead poisoning instead of holding officials accountable.

Most of these cases have been settled, with one notable exception: the EPA. More than a decade later, the EPA is denying, deflecting, and dragging out this cause in court. In fact, the Trump administration, just like the Biden administration, has the ability to settle this case without Congress or anyone else. They should either take their day in court or settle fairly.

But it was never really about money for Flint. People wanted someone to take responsibility.

Unfortunately, Flint residents have yet to see anything from a settlement over the last decade. Timeliness for the rest of their payouts are vague and always changing, and estimated amounts of initial payments are unacceptably small.

It is possible that Flint families will not see the dollars they are owed. No apology, no amount of assigning blame, and certainly no amount of money can make Flint whole, but even after all they have endured over the past decade, this community is being denied what little they were promised, and that should make every American furious.

Now, as Flint's newest Federal Senator, I see my responsibility to fight for Flint. It is not their job to push, prod, or hope a decade later. Flint deserves someone who actually is up for that fight. I am determined to follow in the footsteps of the leaders who have come before me—former Congressman Dan Kildee, former Senator Debbie Stabenow, GARY PETERS, Jim Ananich, Mayor Sheldon Neeley, who is now still in office. These are people who have fought for Flint in Michigan and in this very building. I will take that torch proudly and strive to be worthy of the appreciation of Flint residents.

I know there will be more fights and setbacks for Flint. There will be consistent fights for dollars, to get over promises broken, for accountability and apologies. But I want to say here on the floor of the Senate directly to Flint:

No matter what is coming, I have your back, and it is my responsibility to fight for you.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Before the Chair recognizes the Senator, I would like to note that the floor has been held open as a courtesy to the Senator from Colorado.

Mr. BENNET. I am grateful for that. Thank you, Mr. President. Thank you for holding open the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Colorado.

NATIONAL CENTER FOR ATMOSPHERIC RESEARCH  
Mr. BENNET. Mr. President, last night, President Trump announced his attempt to disassemble the National Center for Atmospheric Research, or NCAR, which is based in Boulder, CO.

NCAR is the leading atmospheric research institution and a central part of our Nation's scientific infrastructure. Its research forms the backbone of weather forecasts, disaster preparedness, water planning, wildfire prevention, and aviation safety all across our country. Its work even protects American troops overseas by providing next-generation weather prediction for military operation.

NCAR scientists, engineers, and meteorologists equip emergency responders, airline pilots, farmers, local utility managers, and military planners with the tools they need to protect American lives, property, and our national security.

The President has blown all that up. But as he tries to shut down this institution, the world has not gotten any less dangerous. We can't wish away extreme drought or pause seasonal wildfires, which, as my colleagues from other Western States know, don't stop at State lines and barely have a season at all anymore because they are so present. You can't rebuild decades of scientific research and expertise once it is destroyed.

That is why, today, my colleague Senator HICKENLOOPER and I are offering an amendment to the appropriations package that would protect funding for NCAR. This isn't about one lab, one institution, or even one State. It is about protecting the foundation of our national research capacity, a capacity built over decades—decades—and generations of taxpayer investment and public service, capacity that once lost can't be replaced and may never be replaced.

But we know from painful experience that this attack on NCAR is just another instance of senseless destruction and political retribution, one we have all watched take place over the past year, time and again.

Colorado has been singled out by the President. The people of Colorado have

found themselves the victims of political retaliation. That is why he vetoed the bill to finally finish the Arkansas Valley Conduit and deliver to 50,000 rural Coloradans access to clean drinking water. This legislation would finally fulfill Washington's promise to deliver clean drinking water to farmers and ranchers in Southeastern Colorado, a promise made over 64 years ago by John F. Kennedy. The conduit has always been a partnership between the Federal and local governments, driven by the leadership of the Southeastern Colorado Water Conservancy District.

In the face of rising costs of materials and labor, once again, Southeastern Coloradans came together and put forward an inventive solution to lower costs by changing the project's financing, with no increase to Federal spending.

The bill passed both Chambers of Congress unanimously, with the most bipartisan support anybody could have. But President Trump used his first Presidential veto of his second term to deny Coloradans what should be a basic fundamental right—the access to clean drinking water.

This retaliation campaign is why he continues to delay Colorado disaster relief and is working to cancel hundreds of millions of dollars in Federal grants for childcare, for energy, for wildlife, and for transportation funding. That is why the President is interfering in the State's ability to decide how we clean up our air and deal with the aging costly energy infrastructure that we have. That is why the President has doubled down on his attacks, not just in Colorado but in other places, on food assistance programs, and, sadly, why he moved Space Command out of Colorado to a State that had voted for him.

But these attacks are just the beginning, when it comes to this singular lawlessness and recklessness of President Trump. As soon as he returned to power, President Trump weaponized his office, punishing political opponents, rewarding loyal allies, working tirelessly not for the benefit of the American people but for those—only those—who supported him and for himself and for his family.

That is not the American way. It is not how an American President should make decisions about anything. An election is one thing, but once we hold office, we have a responsibility to represent every citizen, regardless of their politics, regardless of who they voted for.

This President has taken the opposite approach, unleashing mayhem on American citizens, based primarily on whether they live in a State that voted for him or one that didn't vote for him.

We have seen a President send a surge of ICE agents to occupy Minnesota and deploy the National Guard into one American city after another. We have all watched the videos of the chaos and fear and heartbreak these decisions have wrought.

No matter your views on our immigration problems, I don't believe any person in America should have to wonder whether masked men in unmarked cars, carrying guns, might, at any moment, snatch them from the street or break their car windows or leave them bloodied on the side of the road.

That is not the country that I grew up in. That is not the country that we want to live in. But it is happening today in American cities all over our country.

We have seen the President, without congressional authorization or even notification, send helicopters to seize a foreign dictator and the next day tout the investment opportunities that he has created by this incursion—investment opportunities, by the way, that few American companies seem excited about and which promise only to flood the international oil market at a time when oil prices are the lowest that they have been in years.

When one oil company decided to dare to tell the truth—to say what any sane executive would be thinking, what any sane observer of the market would be thinking, what anybody who understood the oil markets would say, which is that a country that has a history of expropriating property is not the first investment choice—they were quickly punished. And that should come as no surprise.

President Trump's Federal Communications Commission attempted to silence a late-night comedian because he didn't like the criticism. That, itself, would be laughable if it weren't so troubling.

For decades—for decades—the United States has stood up for the freedom of expression and freedom of the press, for the right of journalists and authors and comedians to not hide their opinions in underground newspapers and in hidden leaflets but instead to deliver it honestly and widely; to hold power to account; to undergird an important public debate that is the root of our democracy. But those same rights are under threat today here in America.

Even the Federal Reserve is not immune from efforts to control or curtail its independence. The United States boasts the largest and most dynamic economy in the world, with the deepest and most appealing and most attractive capital markets. We print the global reserve currency here in America. We are the envy and the first destination of every entrepreneur and innovator in the world. But President Trump seems eager to throw all of that away through lawsuits and investigations designed not to deliver justice but to squeeze the Federal Reserve Chair until he gives President Trump what he wants—lower interest rates.

With every action like this, President Trump is undermining the American economy and driving up costs for communities all over our State, and he is doing it in almost every way imaginable.

Not even 6 months ago, I was here on the Senate floor during the longest

government shutdown in American history, all because President Trump refused to extend tax insurance, premium tax credits, and provide reliable, affordable healthcare that the American people deserve. Now healthcare premiums are set to double, to triple, and in some cases to quadruple. That comes on top of other price pressures that families all over this country are facing, which have been caused in part by the President's trade war with the entire world.

The dollar has depreciated sharply since March as investors hedge against the effects of the President's tariffs. Hiring has stagnated, and the unemployment rate has risen. Residential electricity prices increased over 10 percent in the first 8 months of 2025. The price of beef has risen 16 percent over the last year, and coffee is up almost 20 percent. The Agriculture Department expects grocery prices, which are already out of sight, to increase even more in the coming year.

Families and small businesses all across America are struggling to afford housing and struggling to afford groceries and other basics, and the President has only made things harder.

At the same time, President Trump has worked to withdraw our country from the world—at least when it comes to diplomacy.

One of his first acts as President was to shut down the U.S. Agency for International Development, which provided things like medical supplies, lifesaving vaccines, and clean water infrastructure to the most vulnerable populations around the world.

When his trade war with China began to go badly, he quickly capitulated in exchange for a relatively paltry amount of agricultural purchases. He gave our greatest strategic competitor access to cutting-edge technology. They didn't even ask for the semiconductor.

After aiding our adversary, he has turned his attention to our allies. He is threatening to annex Greenland—a NATO country's territory—and take military action against Colombia and Mexico, which are longstanding U.S. partners. In the case of Greenland, President Trump's threats risk the unity of NATO—the most successful alliance in human history. This dangerous behavior makes clear to our adversaries and to our allies that the United States is more focused on extracting concessions from its friends than in protecting our collective security.

His continued abandonment of basic principles of international law and order will eventually reverberate against American national interests. The only question is when.

Coloradoans don't need to look abroad to understand the President's destructive impulses; they have all the evidence they need here at home. When Coloradoans open a newspaper, they might see that the Federal Government has rescinded childcare funding

for themselves and for their neighbors; they might see that transportation funding that this Congress has appropriated has been canceled or that energy investments that this Congress has passed have been pulled back.

They feel like they are under attack from a Federal Government whose obligation is to protect them, to support them. This is a belief that is felt very strongly by the people of my State, and I think everybody here should understand that if it is happening to Colorado, it could happen anywhere in America, for any reason.

The Trump administration's announcement that it was dismantling NCAR was made on the evening of December 16. Over the next 2 days, my office received over 2,000 pieces of mail. By the end of the new year, we had received 500 phone calls on the same topic. We have since surpassed 4,000 letters. I know Senator HICKENLOOPER has had the same, especially in those first 2 days of outreach when fierce windstorms were sweeping across the Front Range of Colorado and creating an enormous wildfire risk.

Numerous citizens wrote to me as they recognized the important role that NCAR scientists play not just in Colorado but in the Nation and in the world. They identify communities that are in the greatest danger. They inform a power company's decision about where to shut off electricity to keep people safe. People in Colorado and throughout the West and I think throughout this country understand the value of NCAR, and they know that sort of essential information and those emergency services are at risk of disappearing possibly forever.

I really want to thank everybody who has written in, and I want to highlight some of the stories they took the time to share with me. I am going to read some of those letters now.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that these letters be printed in the RECORD.

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

LETTER FROM DENVER WATER CEO, ALAN SALAZAR

On behalf of Denver Water, I want to express our deep appreciation for your collective efforts to prevent any effort to dismantle or degrade the National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR). This world-class facility plays an absolutely vital role in climate and weather research that has a direct impact on water management, not just in Colorado but across the country.

Denver Water provides safe, secure, treated drinking water to 1.5 million people in Denver and surrounding suburbs, accounting for roughly one quarter of Colorado's population. To fulfill its mission, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, Denver Water necessarily relies on expertise far beyond its own highly skilled and knowledgeable staff. NCAR is a key source of this critical expertise.

NCAR's value to Denver Water and other water utilities in the western United States includes flood and drought forecasting, streamflow assessment, ongoing study of major river systems, supercomputing, under-

standing of atmospheric rivers and their role in catastrophic flooding, maintaining open data platforms important to water supply managers, climate modeling for longterm forecasting, and other functions essential to managing and allocating scarce water supplies.

We have collaborated with NCAR for many years, both directly and indirectly, including on the preeminent report on Colorado River science. NCAR is considered among the most trusted and well-respected voices on weather, atmospheric and climate science, and we consider NCAR an invaluable partner in our role in providing a critical, life-giving resource to the people living in the Denver region.

A more detailed snapshot of NCAR's value to western water providers. NCAR:

Saves lives and protects property through operational hydrologic forecasting. NCAR created and maintains WRF-Hydro, the community hydrologic modeling system that underpins NOAA's National Water Model—the nation's backbone for streamflow and flood guidance across 2.7 million river reaches. Removing NCAR would directly degrade nationwide flood and drought intelligence that water utilities and emergency managers rely on.

Makes active improvements to streamflow forecasting skill for snow, runoff, and seasonal flows. NCAR's research teams improve sub-seasonal to seasonal streamflow forecasts for the West by integrating temperature predictions with snowpack and precipitation—capabilities that directly inform reservoir operations and demand management.

Produces authoritative reports and syntheses that are crucial to understanding major river systems such as the Colorado River. These reports integrate atmospheric science, hydrology, and water management insights, enabling utilities and policymakers to make informed decisions on allocation, infrastructure, and long-term resilience. A key example of a report co-produced by NCAR is the Colorado River Basin Climate and Hydrology: State of the Science' report, which is considered the preeminent scientific report on the Colorado River.

Provides world-class computing that makes actionable water intelligence possible. NCAR's Derecho supercomputer (19.87 petaflops, GPU-accelerated) is explicitly designed for data assimilation, machine learning, and high-resolution modeling used in hydrology and extreme-event prediction. Dismantling NCAR would strand this public investment and slow or halt models critical to water planning in complex terrain.

Advances understanding of atmospheric rivers—a major source of risk for catastrophic flooding. NCAR advances our understanding of atmospheric river precipitation extremes, giving utilities the science they need for forecast-informed reservoir operations and infrastructure design.

Sustains the open data platforms water managers depend on. NCAR's Research Data Archive (RDA), Geoscience Data Exchange (GDEX), and the Climate Data Guide are trusted, expert-curated sources for re-analyses, climate indices, and down-scaled products that are core to utility planning efforts. Defunding NCAR would jeopardize access and stewardship of these datasets.

Bridges research-to-operations (R2O) across agencies. NCAR is a partner with NOAA's National Water Center, collaborates with regional centers like the Center for Western Weather and Water Extremes (CW3E), and partners directly with local water utilities through various workgroups and project-based efforts. These collaborative efforts help to bring cutting-edge coupled weather-hydrology models into practice for western basins as well as advance science to assist

general water management planning and operations.

Supplies climate models that utilities use for long-range planning. NCAR's Community Earth System Model (CESM) enables utilities and states to explore credible ranges of future hydrologic conditions, with recent work evaluating CESM from a water manager perspective and adding explicit human water use modules directly relevant to western water scarcity.

Defunding NCAR would create immediate, material harm to water supply operations, flood control operations, economic resilience, and national competitiveness. Dismantling NCAR's vital functions would disrupt operational forecasting, strand modern high performance computing investments, endanger crucial water management datasets, and harm research-to-operations collaborations that water utilities depend on every day.

Dismantling an organization of such importance to water supply, weather forecasting, drought and flood preparation, would make it harder and more expensive to plan for the challenges we face today and into the future, and will likely end up costing the American people more money due to water supply disruptions and the reduced ability to anticipate and plan for extreme weather events.

I am confident that we at Denver Water are not alone in our concern about the future of NCAR. The importance of NCAR to water planning and delivery across the country will be compromised by this proposal.

Thank you for your efforts. We look forward to working with you to ensure that NCAR's important work continues without disruption.

Other statements in support of the Arkansas Valley Conduit:

Norman Noe, manager South Swink Water Company: "The Arkansas Valley Conduit is important to South Swink not only to meet radionuclide standards and compliance orders, but also it would give us another source of water other than the deep wells we rely on."

Kevin Karney, former Otero County Commissioner and Southeastern District Director: "We've waited for so many years for the Arkansas Valley Conduit to be built. It's really the only way to resolve long-standing water quality and water supply issues in the Lower Arkansas Valley, and the longer we delay it the more expensive it becomes. Now that we finally have some momentum, this is not the time to stall the AVC project."

Rick Jones, manager of May Valley Water Company: "The Arkansas Valley Conduit is something we've been looking at to solve our issues with compliance with EPA standards. The EPA has been breathing down our necks and the AVC is the way to solve this issue."

Mr. BENNET. Mr. President, I will start with a constituent from Canon City.

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the administration's recent plans to dismantle the National Center for Atmospheric Research, NCAR. NCAR is a cornerstone of American scientific leadership and public safety. Since 1960, it has provided the essential infrastructure, including super computers, research, aircraft, and sophisticated modeling that protects American lives and our economy every single day. I urge you to push back against the move for the following reasons: public safety. NCAR's research is vital for predicting extreme weather events like hurricanes, tornadoes, and wildfires. Dismantling this center puts our emergency response capabilities at risk; aviation and transportation: NCAR technology is used at a major hub like Denver

International Airport to manage snow and ice, and their wind shear detection systems are crucial for aviation safety; economic security: from agriculture to energy, the private sector relies on NCAR's open source models to manage risk and maintain a competitive advantage; national defense: NCAR collaborates with the Department of Defense to develop tools that ensure our military can operate safely in any environment.

Stripping NCAR of its funding or breaking up its integrated labs will leave our Nation behind in the atmospheric threats of the 21st century. Please support the continued funding and operation of NCAR and its headquarters at the Mesa Laboratory.

From a constituent in Denver:

I am writing as a concerned Coloradan to urge you to stand up for the National Center for Atmospheric Research and oppose any plans to dismantle or significantly weaken the institution. NCAR is not only a world-class scientific organization; it is a major economic asset to Colorado and to the United States. Its presence strengthens our State's economy. It supports high-quality jobs, attracts private investment, and reinforces America's global leadership in science, technology, and national security. NCAR's direct economic value to Colorado is substantial. The center employs hundreds of highly skilled scientists, engineers, IT professionals, and support staff, many of whom live and raise families and pay taxes here in Colorado. These are stable, high-paying jobs that cannot be easily replaced. They won't be easily replaced. In addition, NCAR's operations support local contractors, suppliers, and small businesses across the Front Range, creating a multiplier effect that benefits the broader regional economy. NCAR is also a powerful driver of innovation and private-sector growth. Its research underpins advances in aviation safety, agriculture, water management, energy production, wildfire forecasting, and weather risk modeling—industries that collectively represent billions of dollars in economic activity. Private companies rely on NCAR's development tools and data to improve efficiency, reduce losses, and plan investments. The weakening of NCAR would not reduce regulation or bureaucracy; it would reduce the high-quality information that businesses need to compete. From a national perspective, NCAR strengthens U.S. security and resilience. Accurate weather and climate forecasting is essential for military readiness, disaster preparedness, infrastructure planning, and supply chain resiliency. These capabilities help save lives and taxpayer dollars by reducing the costs of natural disasters and improving long-term planning. Other nations are aggressively investing in atmosphere, science. Dismantling NCAR would cede leadership to global competitors at a time when American technological dominance is increasingly challenged. Finally, NCAR represents an excellent return on taxpayer investment. Its budget is modest relative to the economic losses it helps to prevent and the innovation it enables. Cutting or dismantling NCAR may appear to save money in the short term—I doubt very much anybody really believes it—but the long-term costs to businesses, farmers, municipalities, insurers, and emergency responders would be far greater. Colorado has been a leader in science, innovation, and pragmatic problem-solving, and NCAR is a cornerstone of that legacy. I respectfully ask for you to stand up for Colorado jobs, American competitiveness, and fiscally responsible governance by opposing efforts to dismantle or weaken the National Center for Atmospheric Research. Thank you for your service to our State and for considering the economic and strategic importance to our State.

From Boulder:

Thank you for supporting science and specifically for supporting NCAR. I don't need to tell you how important NCAR's work is for the safety of our Nation. This move against NCAR serves no valid purpose. It appears merely punitive as are many of the moves that the Trump administration has made against our State. I work in research at a university. We work closely with NOAA and with NCAR. The last shutdown was stressful to our researchers and our institutions, but if another shutdown were to happen in order to save institutions like NCAR from arbitrary posturing and governance, I know that our research and community would support that cause. Stand strong, Senator. We support you.

And here is a letter from an NCAR institutional stakeholder:

We write to express our strong support for continued—

This is from, I think, the Governors: Jared Polis, Josh Green, Spencer Cox, Bob Ferguson, Michelle Lujan Grisham, Gavin Newsom, and Katie Hobbs—Democrats and Republicans.

We write to express our strong support for continued Federal funding for the National Center for Atmospheric Research, NCAR, and to underscore its importance to States all across the Nation.

Governors rely on NCAR's research and modeling and data infrastructure to help protect lives, strengthen regional and national economies, and improve preparedness for increasingly complex environmental challenges.

NCAR's work directly informs decision making at the State and local level, supporting emergency management, infrastructure planning, and long-term resilience.

We agree with your administration's fiscal year 2026 National Science Foundation budget request to Congress that NCAR is a critical national research and infrastructure asset. As the budget request notes, NCAR is an NSF-sponsored, federally funded research and development center that integrates advanced observational facilities, widely used community weather and climate models, and high-performance computing. Together, these capabilities provide foundational tools used by Federal Agencies, the military, State and local governments, universities, and the private sector. For our States, NCAR's work delivers direct and practical value.

By the way, I have not found a single person on this floor who doesn't agree with what these Governors have to say, who hasn't said that NCAR is a vital resource to their State, that their work delivers direct and practical value.

In wildfire-prone regions, NCAR research improves understanding of fire behavior, smoke transport, and extreme weather conditions that exacerbate fire risk, supporting more effective mitigation and response and recovery efforts. Governors depend on these insights to inform emergency management decisions and to protect communities' infrastructure and public lands. Where else are we going to get this data and information?

NCAR's modeling and forecasting capabilities are also essential to agriculture and to water management across the West. Seasonal and subseasonal forecasts help producers plan for droughts, floods, and shifting precipitation patterns, while supporting more efficient use of scarce water resources. These tools are increasingly important as our States work to sustain agricultural productivity, rural economies, and food security amid growing variability.

I can't find a single person on this floor who would disagree with what the Governors have said.

In addition, NCAR's capabilities support national defense and homeland security priorities. Accurate, timely weather and Earth system information is critical for military operations, forest protection, aviation safety, and infrastructure resilience.

NCAR's high-performance computing and data integration capacity strengthens situational awareness and operational readiness across air, land, and maritime domains.

The Governors continued:

Tourism and outdoor recreation, cornerstones of many of our economies, also benefit from improved forecasting and hazard preparedness. Reliable weather and environmental information helps protect visitors, supports local businesses, and reduces disruption from extreme events, reinforcing economic stability in communities that depend on these sectors—

Which is to say, virtually every community in the American West.

We [these Governors] respectfully urge your administration to continue supporting NCAR, consistent with your 2026 fiscal year budget request, and to work with Congress to ensure stable funding for its core capabilities. Continued investment will allow NCAR to deliver high-value research and service that strengthens public safety, economic resilience, and preparedness all across the Nation.

Thank you for your leadership and your continued partnership with the Nation's Governors.

These Governors sign on.

Here is Tony Busalacchi, who is the president of UCAR, University Corporation for Atmospheric Research, the operator of NCAR. Busalacchi—I apologize if I butchered that name.

NSF NCAR's research is crucial for building American prosperity by protecting lives and properties, supporting the economy, and strengthening national security. Any plan to dismantle NSF NCAR would set back our Nation's ability to predict, prepare for, and respond to severe weather and other natural disasters.

I have an open letter here from major scientific societies—from the American Meteorological Society, the Alliance for Data Science and AI. I won't read the rest, Mr. President.

The letter says:

The United States of America needs the National Center for Atmospheric Research. On behalf of the scientific societies we represent, we write to express our strong support of NCAR and the full breadth of scientific research undertaken by the scientists at NCAR.

The benefits of NCAR to the United States and the world are enormous. Since its inception in 1960, NCAR has made groundbreaking advances in weather, water, and climate science. Working with partners within the United States, as well as across the world, NCAR scientists have provided crucial insights on severe storms, flash floods, drought, air quality, wildfire, climate, and weather predictions, to name just a few key contributions.

These discoveries improve early warnings and weather forecasts, ensure enhanced transportation safety by air, sea, and ground, and reverse the adverse impacts of hazards. Crucially, they save lives and make America safer!

Recently, the White House announced plans to dismantle it. Sending various parts of NCAR to other cities will isolate expertise and reduce the synergies and enhanced productivity that results when people work together. NCAR is an incredible resource, and losing it would hurt the economic health of the Nation and the safety of its people. A better option would be to work to maintain and strengthen NCAR, including through enhanced cooperation with Federal science Agencies, academic institutions, and private sector researchers.

Science improves lives and drives economic prosperity.

"Science improves lives and drives economic prosperity," and we used to care around here whether we were the leader among nations in that.

Scientific innovation promotes public safety, enables new businesses, and helps us thrive in a competitive global marketplace. The United States has long been a world leader—

I would say the world leader—

in all science, including the science of environmental prediction. The Nation's strong support of science over the past century is a foundation of our success. A strong NCAR will lead to further forecast improvements that enhance our national well-being.

We stand ready to work with the administration and leaders in Congress to ensure that U.S. scientific preparedness, including with respect to environmental prediction, remains second to none.

And Colorado does as well.

Finally, from Arvada:

Thank you for defending NCAR and holding up the budget unless full funding is included.

As you know, parts of the State are out of power right now due to high winds and dry, warm conditions that put us at fire risk. We need to continue to study climate and weather to fight climate change but also to predict and respond to weather emergencies. Shutting down NCAR will be bad for everyone in the country.

Thank you, and please continue to fight for our State and the environment.

I could not have said it better myself. Shutting down NCAR will be bad for everybody in the country, and that is a fact. And the people there obviously don't deserve it.

And we also need to set a standard for what we expect out of the leadership in the White House, which is that they are going to actually serve everybody in the country, whether they voted for them or not.

What is happening to Colorado today could happen to your State tomorrow. (Mr. MORENO assumed the Chair.)

We also lost, to the President's first veto of his second term, the Arkansas Valley Conduit. That is a pipeline that I have been working on since the day I got here. It is the very first piece of legislation that I wrote. It was an effort to try to keep a promise that had been made to Colorado in 1960 by Jack Kennedy, who went out to Pueblo and said to the people there, to the farmers and ranchers—mostly Republicans then, in 1960, and still mostly Republicans today. That doesn't matter, but I just want to set the scene for what we are dealing with here, which is a group of people that have fought and fought

and fought, generation after generation after generation, to supply their farming families, their ranching families with clean water that the United States, the richest country in the world, promised them many, many years ago.

And I have a constituent from Pueblo who wrote in. The letter says:

I am writing as a deeply disappointed, concerned, and frankly angry constituent regarding President Trump's veto of the finishing of the Arkansas Valley Conduit. This legislation passed unanimously in both the House and the Senate, an increasingly rare example of true bipartisan agreement, because it addressed a fundamental responsibility of government: providing clean, safe drinking water to America.

Communities across Colorado's eastern plains, between Pueblo and Lamar, have waited too long for this project to be completed.

The AVC is not political theater. It is a public health necessity. Using access to clean water as a bargaining chip for punishment against a State is unacceptable.

Using access to clean water as a bargaining chip for punishment against a State is unacceptable.

It is unacceptable.

My constituent from Pueblo writes:

The President is obligated to represent and serve all Americans, regardless of party, State, or political disagreements. This action falls short of that standard and undermines trust in our democratic institution.

I could not agree with that more.

I urge you to do the right thing for the people of Colorado by supporting and voting to override this veto. Clean drinking water should never be held hostage to partisan grievances or personal vendettas. Congress spoke clearly and unanimously once. Now it must stand by that decision.

Please let me know what actions you will take to ensure this vital project moves forward and that the needs of Coloradans are placed above political calculation.

Here is a letter in support of the conduit from the Otero County Commission:

Your public statements of opposition to President Trump's veto to finish the Arkansas Valley Conduit Act are greatly appreciated by those of us who have long supported this project to ensure that residents in rural Southeastern Colorado have access to a safe drinking water supply. The challenges we face with naturally occurring contaminants in groundwater are precisely why the Federal Safe Drinking Water Act exists.

It is imperative that we work together to overturn this decision. We stand ready to assist you in any effort to override the veto or pursue an alternative path to enact this strongly supported legislation.

It is unanimously supported legislation. The conduit can't be viewed as a mere amenity or a frivolous investment. It is the most effective way to deliver safe drinking water to 50,000 people without creating harmful side effects that are associated with other treatment processes like reverse osmosis.

This is a public health issue, and shared investments by Federal, State, and local governments are critical to addressing it.

Indeed, H.R. 131 highlights the significant non-Federal investment—35

percent of the total cost—to say nothing of the blood, sweat, and tears that generations of South Coloradans in Southeastern Colorado have been willing to exert in this cause in their partnership with Federal Agencies to get this project built.

This is a classic case of Americans doing the work for the next generation of Americans and the generation after that—the county commissioners in Otero County who came and lived and died long before the ones that are here writing in about this right now without ever seeing their dream for clean water for their families or their communities realized in the richest country in the world. We are this close to having it done, and it was canceled out of spite.

In addition to pointing out the local share that the communities—and by the way, these are tiny farming communities. Every dollar they spend on a project like this is a hard dollar for them to spend, but they know why it is so important.

This bill—the bill that we passed unanimously, which the President vetoed—this bill adjusts the interest rate and extends the repayment period while also providing an option for economic hardship consideration, which is vital given the challenging economic conditions of our region.

The longstanding bipartisan support—

The commissioners continued—

for the Arkansas Valley Conduit speaks volumes about its clear purpose: a safe—safe—clean drinking water supply. Together, we must fight this attempt to stop the project and diminish its critical importance. We respectfully ask you to use all your tools available to overturn the decision and ensure the enactment of H.R. 131. Thank you for your leadership and commitment to the health and wellbeing of our Southeastern Colorado community.

I have got one last letter that I am going to read from the Pueblo County commissioners:

Thank you for your public statements opposing President Trump's veto to finish the Arkansas Valley Conduit Act. Your leadership on this issue is deeply appreciated by the communities of Southeastern Colorado who have worked for decades to secure a safe and reliable drinking water supply. As an elected body representing residents of Pueblo County, we see firsthand the challenges posed by naturally occurring groundwater contaminants. These conditions are precisely why the Federal Safe Drinking Water Act exists and why Federal partnership is essential. Access to clean drinking water is not optional; it is a fundamental public health responsibility.

It is critical that we work together to overturn this veto or pursue an alternative path to enactment. We stand ready to assist in any effort necessary to ensure this project moves forward.

The Arkansas Valley Conduit should not be characterized as discretionary or a non-essential investment. It is the most effective and sustainable way to deliver drinking water to approximately 50,000 people without the long-term complications and unintended consequences associated with other treatment methods.

H.R. 131 appropriately recognizes the significant commitment already made at the local and at the State level with other non-

Federal partners covering approximately 35 percent of the total cost. The bill's modest adjustments to the interest rate and repayment period, along with provisions for economic hardship, are especially important given the economic realities facing rural Southeast Colorado.

I can see that my colleague from Colorado has arrived at the floor, which means that I am going to have to wind up in a minute. Before I finish, I just had a few more closing remarks, and then I will turn it over to my friend.

Political decisions in America are not supposed to be made this way. I know they are sometimes in other countries. I know there are many countries around the world where there is corruption, and the way decisions are made is, might makes right, and whoever happens to get elected to a certain term—that person gets to reward their friends and punish their enemies.

I can guarantee you that every one of those places has a less successful economy than the United States of America. Our economy is based on the rule of law, not might makes right. Our economy is based on the idea that the citizens we represent and their futures are far more important than the political scorekeeping that any President or any chief executive officer should maintain.

This is not, I have to say, what the American Government is supposed to look like or what the American Government has ever looked like. Making these kinds of partisan decisions, like the one that is underlined, the cancellation of the Arkansas Valley Conduit or NCAR or the other hundreds of millions of dollars that are being taken away from poor families in Colorado who are just trying to raise their children, who are now not going to have access to food or access to schooling—which, by the way, just for political reasons, this strikes at the heart of the constitutional system that was envisioned by our Founders. That is not an exaggeration. The men who framed our founding document were raised in and were some of the greatest exponents of the scientific revolution and the fundamental shift in human thought and reason that we now call the enlightenment.

That tradition prioritized—and by the way, they weren't just politicians; many of them were scientists themselves. That tradition prioritized freedom of thought and considered debate. It held that truth was best drawn out from the contrast of opposing views and beliefs or disagreements.

The Founders understood that this philosophy could only reach its full potential within the framework of a constitutional republic. It had never existed before anywhere. They drew up the Bill of Rights, with its freedom of speech and its freedom of press, in order to protect that ability to face each other in the public square with our disagreements, and they ingrained their belief in the overwhelming power of reason to discern truth from falsehood and science from superstition in the original text of our Constitution.

In article I, section 8, they charged Congress with the responsibility to “fix the Standards of Weights and Measures” and provide for policies that “promote the Progress of Science and useful Arts.”

The Founders understood how fundamental these responsibilities were to the country they hoped to create. These directives are in the very same section as the power to lay and collect taxes, to borrow money, and to declare war.

NCAR is a modern embodiment of the Founders' intent—the careful and objective collection of data to inform public policy and political debate free from restriction or censure or political punishment. And that is what is at stake today. That is why this should matter to everybody on this floor.

NCAR was founded in 1960, and it has operated over 13 Presidential administrations and 32 Congresses, Democratic and Republican alike. NCAR's work benefits Americans, as we have heard, from every State, from disaster forecasts, to aviation fog warnings, to drought predictions that guide crop planning and water management, to weather intelligence for military operations, to early detection for solar storms that threaten our electric grid and communications systems.

When it comes to NCAR, the President's effort at political retribution threatens the health and safety of communities all across the country—all across this country.

The entire implication of what the Founders were writing about in this context was that nobody has a monopoly of wisdom—least of all, a President. The Founders' greatest fear was to have a demagogue in that office unconstrained by the rule of law. And they knew how fragile all of this experiment was. They knew how easily, under the wrong direction, it could collapse.

Now we know this is not some temporary bump in the road; it is a reflection of what the Founders understood is a fundamental aspect of human nature: that there would always be somebody who would reach out to grab the kind of unconstrained power that this President has reached for.

In moments like this, what the Founders expected was that it would be up to all of us—the rest of us—to prevent exactly what they were worried about. There was no self-reinforcing mechanism. Nobody was riding to our rescue, because, as I mentioned earlier, what can happen to our State can happen to any other State. The Founders understood that the American people would know that and that they would rally to support the rule of law, they would rally to support their democracy.

What is happening today under a Republican President could happen with the wrong kind of Democratic President.

Our children and future generations have a reasonable expectation that their government should be designed to

work for them—all of them; all of them—regardless of their political leaning. We have a responsibility as legislators, as Americans, and an obligation to the Constitution, to our respective States no matter what color they are on the political map.

I urge my colleagues to reject these partisan games and to stand up for scientific integrity and the rule of law. It is what the people of Colorado and all Americans expect, and it is what they deserve.

As I come to a close, I am going to read what I have to read for the amendment. I just want to say how proud I am to be here today on the floor with my colleague Senator JOHN HICKENLOOPER, whom I have known for more years than I would care to actually admit to you, Mr. President.

But one of the things that I know about JOHN is that he embodies the hope, the aspiration that our Founders had for citizen legislators. He is somebody who came to politics with a business background but, I would say in the context of the discussion we are having today, with the background of a geologist, somebody who came to the West to begin with to be able to apply his scientific imagination to the challenges that we were facing at the time and was able to then use that in business but then also in politics and who has brought that intellect and scientific commitment to the Commerce Committee, where he sits.

I think all of Colorado has been incredibly well served and the country has been incredibly well served in this debate by that scientific background. If I dare say it—I am not saying that he is exactly who Ben Franklin was envisioning, but I will say that JOHN HICKENLOOPER and Ben Franklin would have gotten along extremely well had they had the chance to serve with each other.

AMENDMENT NO. 4153

With that, I ask unanimous consent to call up and make pending amendment No. 4153 to H.R. 6938 to maintain operations and capabilities at the National Center for Atmospheric Research.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Maine.

Ms. COLLINS. Reserving the right to object, let me first say that I appreciate the advocacy from the Senators from Colorado for the National Center for Atmospheric Research, an NSF-funded research and development center in Boulder.

The bill before us includes robust funding for the National Science Foundation. That has been a top priority of mine and of many other members of the Appropriations Committee.

Consistent with longstanding practice, the bill does not have a carve-out for NCAR, nor any of the other NSF research facilities around the globe, and it does not direct grant-making to certain activities. This longstanding precedent is designed to preserve NSF's

autonomy in funding decisions and empowers the big foundation to prioritize scientific needs.

Let me emphasize that nothing—nothing—in this bill precludes continued support for operation of the center.

This is a carefully negotiated package that passed the House of Representatives with an overwhelming vote last week. Any amendment that would send the package back to the House would make its fate uncertain. We would risk a continuing resolution or, even worse, another disastrous government shutdown at the essential Agencies funded in this package.

Therefore, I must object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The objection is heard.

The Senator from Colorado.

Mr. HICKENLOOPER. Mr. President, I am going to talk for a moment about my path towards science and what it meant.

A lot of people know my mother was widowed twice before she turned 40. My father died when I was 8. I was the youngest kid. I had really thick glasses and acne, and I was let's just say marginalized when I was in third and fourth grade, the butt of many jokes. I was bullied on a regular basis.

But it is funny, as I went through school, I did have this natural curiosity. I mean, I loved sports, but it didn't keep me from doing schoolwork around discovery. And there is a whole peripheral culture in most schools—the high schools and the middle schools I went to—where the kids that are the nerds—I guess I would call myself a nerd back then—kind of hung out together, and they were also the people who were into the arts or into music, into tech.

It is really only in the last 25 years that that peripheral part of most colleges and universities became the foundation of—or I should say the fulcrum of our economic growth, and that is the beginning of the age of technology back in the 1990s.

We are here today because before the holidays, the Trump administration announced that they were going to dismantle the National Center for Atmospheric Research based in Boulder, as my colleague Senator BENNET so elegantly described. I am going to go through some of that, reiterate some of what he said, just because I think it is that important that we hear it more than once.

In our office—my office, Senator BENNET's office—we are determined to do everything we can to stand up to this administration and their actions that harm Coloradans and I think in many ways harm the country.

Our demand is simple: Put language into the appropriations bills that guarantees full funding for NCAR.

I understand the Senator from Maine's objection to—in history and certainly in recent history, there has been no precedent for this, but in recent history, there has been no precedent for a President to go back and tell

the National Science Foundation: You have to rescind this money from that specific office of research.

NCAR isn't just a research center, as Senator BENNET described, it is a national resource. Obviously, this administration has a different view.

When Russell Vought took to social media to announce his plan, he called NCAR “one of the largest sources of climate alarmism in the country.” Now, I am not sure that Mr. Vought knows exactly what NCAR does. If he did, I think he would understand the irony in that tweet. NCAR quite literally powers our country's alarm system around weather. It is our watchdog for extreme storms, fires, hurricanes, tornadoes, the things that cause floods.

Every single American, whether they are aware of it or not, relies on NCAR data. Most of them—this administration is included—aren't really aware of it. So here are a few more reasons why all of us should want NCAR to stick around:

If you are an American who likes to know whether a tornado is headed your way; if you are one of the people who appreciate an early text alert before you get an oncoming winter storm—let me say we have had far too few of those this year; if you would prefer to be on high ground instead of stuck in your car during a flash flood; if you like to look at maps to show you where and when extreme weather is going to hit, then you need NCAR. If you like any of those things, you are directly benefiting from the National Center for Atmospheric Research.

Here is where the administration gets it really wrong. If we are going to call anything alarming, it is our weather patterns—wildfires, tornadoes, hurricanes, floods, severe weather in all forms, winter storms. They are all becoming more intense and less predictable.

I, along with many scientists, refer to it as climate change. Back when I was in graduate school, we called it the greenhouse effect. But to call it a hoax or just extreme weather doesn't change what is happening right outside your front door.

We have had less snowfall in Colorado this winter than in any year in recorded history. Now, if you are going to get rid of NCAR, you are going to take away that opportunity to use history and the facts from recorded history. It is NCAR's job to use science to make extreme weather at least somewhat predictable and to make sure that we can save American lives and property.

The National Center for Atmospheric Research built the backbone of American weather forecasting models that are now used all around the world. Their weather prediction system is used by NOAA, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. It is used by the National Weather Service, the Department of Defense, emergency managers in pretty much every State, and all the universities worldwide to

predict hurricanes, blizzards, floods, and wildfire behavior.

When we track hurricanes today, our 3- to 5-day forecast is as accurate as a 1-day forecast was back in the 1990s. That is from research, because NCAR research helped improve global radar systems.

Take Hurricane Sandy in 2012. High resolution models helped forecasters predict the hurricane's unusual path a whole week before landfall. That extra time meant emergency crews could get a head start, could evacuate entire communities and prepare for that storm's landfall. It wouldn't have been possible even a decade before.

Back home in Colorado, NCAR's fire weather research and modeling tools are critical for wildfire comparatives. NCAR's research helped us understand how extreme winds and local weather provided the fuel for the 2021 Marshall fire—the single most destructive fire in Colorado history. Almost 1,100 homes were destroyed. We vowed that would never happen again, but we can't make good on that promise without NCAR. Its research is actively improving wildfire prediction not just in Colorado but across the country.

NCAR is our safety net, and dismantling it to combat so-called climate alarmism is the policy equivalent of sticking your fingers in your ears and yelling "la, la, la" to drown out the tornado that is rearranging your living room. Without NCAR, our country isn't safer; we are just more unprepared.

NCAR also conducts the research on space weather. This allows us to know what threats there are for our satellites, especially our GPS satellites, which are crucial for the health of our infrastructure, not to mention our weather forecasting.

It is not just weather; it is also our national security. Without NCAR, our military defense systems could take a huge hit. NCAR has been central to President Trump's military adventure. On January 3, when the U.S. military launched 150 aircraft across the Western Hemisphere to capture Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, they knew in advance that visibility would be clear.

Members of Delta Force had been training for weeks under the exact weather conditions they would be operating in. Conditions had to be perfect because there was a zero margin for error. How did they know that the conditions would be clear on January 3? The National Center for Atmospheric Research. NCAR's scientists developed the advanced weather prediction system the Pentagon relies on, known as the Global Climatology Analysis Tool or GCAT.

To put it simply, however you feel about the President's mission, a small failure—even the smallest failure would have been putting American lives at risk. NCAR's technology helps make our military the strongest in the world. It is a part of that strength.

The irony here is that this administration is too focused on retribution—

in this case, to our State of Colorado and our Governor—to actually understand the consequences of really what is going to be the consequence of what they are doing.

U.S. military success and our country's ability to keep Americans safe from natural disaster hinge on NCAR. This administration might as well declare war on smoke detectors in our homes or carbon monoxide alarms because those critical detection systems function in much the same way that NCAR's research does.

This administration's war on our premier weather research center isn't a stand-alone attack, and very sadly, it is part of a broader campaign to, well, spite our State. The President and his administration have set their sights on Colorado to settle what they perceive as a political score. He wants Colorado to release one of his most fervent supporters, Tina Peters, a former clerk and recorder of Mesa County. Ms. Peters is currently in prison after she was convicted on State charges of tampering with Colorado's election equipment in 2020.

This wasn't just a case of election denialism or spreading conspiracy theories; Ms. Peters is in prison because she tampered with the election equipment she took an oath to protect. She was tried and prosecuted by a Republican district attorney and convicted by her peers, a majority Republican jury, in Mesa County.

Now the President is pressuring our Governor to release her and in the process, hurting Coloradans to do it.

We have one strong message in that Colorado is not going to give in to a bully or bow to a King. We believe in the rule of law, and we are going to fight to protect the traditional notion of American democracy.

Even worse, most of Coloradans who these attacks harm have no clue who Tina Peters actually is. Many of the people most severely subject to the consequence of these decisions are Republicans.

And NCAR is just one of the recent targets.

As part of his campaign against Colorado, President Trump denied emergency disaster relief to help families rebuild after devastating wildfires and floods. He canceled millions of dollars for clean energy. He slashed hundreds of millions of dollars in childcare assistance for families and denied 50,000 rural Coloradans clean drinking water.

Let me say it again. The President of the United States denied emergency funding for American citizens to help them rebuild their lives after wildfires and flooding that, for many of them, destroyed the lives they knew this past summer.

This is not a game. These are people's lives. These are our constituents' lives.

We can start with the President's second attack on FEMA funding, in August, when the Elk and Lee fires tore across the Western Slope of Colo-

rado, burning more than 152,000 acres of land. Farmers and ranchers lost thousands of acres they were depending on for grazing and for farming. The fire also damaged electrical infrastructure that businesses and families depend on, not just to do their business but to live at home. They depend on it for energy.

Just weeks later, floods ripped through more communities in western Colorado, including La Plata, Archuleta, and Mineral County. Families lost homes. Businesses lost everything. The floods even destroyed drinking water and wastewater infrastructure, risking people's safety.

Residents have been left to pick up the broken pieces of their lives and try to rebuild. Colorado estimates the fires cost \$27 million of damage, and flooding cost at least \$13 million more.

Unfortunately, Colorado is no stranger to major disasters and the struggle to rebuild the lives hurt in the aftermath. It is, sadly, a part of our way of life. We band together, we lift each other up, and we rebuild back better than it was before. We rebuild stronger.

I will always remember the horrible wildfires and floods our State experienced when I was Governor. I remember visiting Lyons after the floods of 2013—the worst floods in the history of our State—and flying over that area in a helicopter and seeing people marooned on the roofs of their houses or their businesses. Some of them were there for a couple of days waiting to get help.

I saw and heard how neighbors and small business owners reached out and helped each other. They helped get each other through the worst hard times of their lives. They cleaned their stores out, their shops. They rebuilt their homes. It was a herculean effort, and our Federal Government stepped up with emergency FEMA help that could make it possible. They don't pay for everything. They pay for a very small amount, but it is a crucial piece of the recovery.

That is why President Trump's decision to reject Colorado's disaster request without any objective reason and to withhold resources that would help our communities recover—that is why it is so infuriating, not just to me and Senator BENNET but to so many people across our State and across the country. I mean, why in God's name would the Federal Government turn its back on its own citizens who have gone through, in many cases, the worst hard time of their lives?

Why should Coloradans not get the same support to rebuild their lives that the Trump administration had already delivered to the people of Alaska or North Dakota, following the natural disasters in their communities? Because people in Colorado opt to vote by mail, like in many red States, and President Trump hates vote-by-mail? I am not sure that is true. That is certainly not how America should work.

The President's third target was our booming energy economy. This October, the administration canceled \$7.5

billion in clean energy grants in blue States. Colorado's Noble Energy lost \$550 million in funding that had already passed into law and had already been appropriated. The rationale? He said the Democrats had a "Green New Scam."

I would really like to ask the President: Is making energy more efficient a scam and were all those grants—the majority of which went to red States, States that had a Republican Governor and a Republican general assembly—were they part of the scam? What about lowering energy prices so families can heat their homes this winter without sacrificing the ability to afford their kids' health insurance? Is that a scam?

What happened to the Republicans' so-called energy emergency? Canceling billions of dollars in energy projects ready to go or very close to ready to go, or in some cases almost complete, while disrupting much needed updates to our energy grid is going to increase prices. This is going to hurt American families. It is lunacy. It makes no sense.

Many millions of people voted for this President because they were struggling to afford their lives and they heard that promise to lower prices. But you don't lower energy prices by punishing communities and canceling energy projects that are almost complete. That wastes the money that has already been spent.

The fourth step on this revenge list—this revenge tour against Colorado—is a direct hit to our kids and to our families. At the beginning of this month, the administration tried to freeze \$10 billion of Federal funding for childcare, for Colorado and four other States—again, blue States.

Let me say this again. While prices are already increasing across the board, the President of the United States is cutting childcare services and other resources for the most vulnerable families. Childcare. No matter how you cut it, going after childcare services for American families and for Colorado families is just plain cruel. Even worse, these services are for families that need it the most. More than 1.4 million children around the country depend on those programs. In Colorado, these programs help more than 27,000 children get childcare so their parents can work.

The administration has tried to claim that this is about rooting out fraud and waste, but there is no record in Colorado of fraud to justify their actions. We have safeguards in place to prevent fraud at that scale and to ensure that Federal funds actually go toward the care of children. Parents have enough to worry about. Now they have to figure out how to keep their jobs, deal with rising costs, and care for their children. The result? Families are going to lose the support that helps them keep financial stability.

Thankfully, a Federal judge has temporarily blocked the administration's

attack on childcare. But that has not stopped this President in the past, and we are not going to stop pushing back.

That brings us to the President's other target: clean drinking water for rural Coloradans.

In certain parts of our State, we have high levels of radioactive minerals, heavy metals. And in some cases, this is from waste. In some cases, this is natural. But it makes the drinking water unsafe.

With one stroke of a pen, President Trump used the first veto of his second term to stand in the way of the Arkansas Valley Conduit, a 130-mile water project and infrastructure project that would bring clean drinking water to 50,000 Americans in Southeast Colorado. This is the first time a bill has gone through both the House and the Senate on a unanimous basis. It passed the Senate unanimously. It passed the House unanimously. But for the first time—for the first time since President Johnson—a President vetoed a bill that was passed by both houses unanimously—for the first time since President Johnson. I am not talking about Lyndon Johnson. I am going back to the Civil War, to Andrew Johnson. That is the last time this happened.

It is a decision that really does defy logic, but it fits a troubling pattern. While parts of this administration are spending time on personal grievances and political beefs, the basic needs of American families are being treated as afterthoughts, and, in many cases, the prices soar.

The Arkansas Valley Conduit has been in the works for 60 years—almost 65 years—after President John Kennedy came to Pueblo, CO, in 1962 and gave a rousing speech and promised that the Federal Government would see it through.

For six decades, Colorado leaders from both parties have fought to keep that promise. We are now in the final stages of the project, with the Arkansas Valley Conduit as the remaining piece. We secured more than \$500 million for the project from our historic bipartisan infrastructure law, and we broke ground on the conduit—the remaining portions of the conduit—in 2023.

We worked with Republican Representative LAUREN BOEBERT to introduce the Finish the Arkansas Valley Conduit Act to keep construction on track and to lower costs. This bipartisan bill passed the Senate unanimously; this bipartisan bill passed the House unanimously—both, last year. That means every single Senator and every single House Member was good with it.

But the President vetoed it. I am not sure why anyone would veto a unanimous, bipartisan rural water project, unless they had a pretty serious beef, especially when our bill and the project would actually help the President keep his campaign promises.

The completion of the Arkansas Valley Conduit would mean water for our

rural schools in communities like Lamar, which are teaching the next generation. It would mean water for our local hospitals in towns like La Junta, which keep Coloradans healthy.

Trump has left these communities out to dry—communities that have been waiting for clean drinking water for over 60 years, communities that overwhelmingly voted for him. If you go look at these counties, they are a large proportion of who voted for President Trump in 2024.

When a President puts a political grievance against the Governor of a State, against the working people that did their very best to elect him, against the schools and hospitals and ranchers that supported him, he isn't "shaking up" Washington. He is undermining the very people he swore to serve, and it is working people in rural communities who are paying the price.

If members of either party wanted to actually deliver for their constituents, then the best path forward would have been clear. Congress could have stood up to this intimidation, honored the promise that 60 years ago came from Washington, and overridden this veto.

But, last week, the House refused to do so. It was Washington at its worst.

Now, rural Colorado is going to pay the price. Southeast Colorado was the target this month, but it could be your community tomorrow. I wish the President could spend some time in Southeast Colorado. If you go back and look at the book, the worst hard times—talking about the Great Depression and the dust storms—the far northwest part of Oklahoma and the far southeast part of Colorado were the hardest hit. And that durability and willingness to withstand the worst hardships and keep on keeping on is what really sets Southeast Colorado apart.

They were still the target this month, but it could be any community across the country tomorrow.

President Trump's cuts aren't limited to Colorado or blue States. He seemingly made it a goal to hinder America's leadership in science and innovation. He has fired, literally, thousands of scientists from our leading government Agencies, like the National Renewable Energy Lab in Golden, or NREL, and the National Institute of Standards and Technology in Boulder.

And in the face of natural disasters, he has even shuttered NOAA facilities. That is the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. He shuttered their facilities and fired scientists there, weakening not just Colorado but the entire Nation's ability to respond to wildfires or to track the West's worsening drought.

The Trump administration also slashed funding for the National Institutes of Health, which is having a devastating impact on medical research projects in every State of this country. They left veterans battling PTSD who were beginning to find relief in clinical trials. They stripped resources from

critical research to improve the lives of people with Down syndrome. They cut support groups for LGBTQ persons struggling with mental health issues.

We can't be surprised that the President doesn't place a high priority in science and research. He has never shown a great respect or support for it.

Back when I graduated, in 1979, with my master's in earth and environmental sciences—we called it geology back in those days—I published peer review papers. And from that process and that experience, I have a reverence for the scientific method. It is not always right. The science doesn't always get it right. I am not saying there haven't been glaring mistakes in the history of science. But science always points us in the right direction, and it helps us determine when and where those mistakes are and how to rectify them.

MARK KELLY told me when I first got here—even though he was an engineer, I told him he was a scientist as well, and he said: No, no. You are the only one in here who has actually done experiments and then published peer-reviewed papers.

As I said, science can sometimes surprise us. It is always evolving. It is always trying to figure out what is next, what the next frontier is. It is why the field relies on constant evaluation and research to make new discoveries or deepen our understanding of some of the most complex problems facing the world. I also know that leading with science helps us get the most accurate information we can—not always perfect but the most accurate information we can get. So it really is frightening when the administration has shown a bias toward elevating people who peddle disinformation, and they sow doubt into every level of settled science.

Cuts to science funding are going to cause long-term and profound damage to our standing in the world in terms of innovation. How can we expect to beat China in the fight—in the race to succeed at AI or to find a cure for cancer or to remain the world's strongest economy if we are not investing in science?

Science has been the foundation of every aspect of our economy. If our scientists are fleeing to other countries—and we are seeing this now at an increasing rate—if our scientists are fleeing to other countries that recognize the economic and national security value of scientific research, what is next?

Not only are our scientists leaving to work in other countries, but our students are choosing different careers because they don't see a safe, reliable future in science. With the administration's cuts to research funding, some of those folks who are finishing their PhD research are now stopped. They won't get that degree that in some cases they have spent 3 or 4 or 5 years working on. We can't train the next generation of scientists, engineers, and innovators without having that upward flow.

President Trump's Secretary of the Department of Health and Human

Services, Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., is an example of someone who in many cases seems willing to overlook facts and overlook settled science. One of his most anti-scientific claims—that autism is caused by childhood vaccines—is a claim that has been spread within communities for decades, but it is all based on one single paper that was published way back in 1988. That paper has been retracted for years. There have been hundreds of studies investigating the link between autism and the measles vaccine ever since, and they have found no—let me reiterate. They have found zero connection between vaccines and the cause of autism.

It is settled science. Vaccines are not only extremely safe but extremely effective. Every year, they save millions of lives around the globe, effectively eliminating some of the worst diseases, like polio, and we are already making considerable progress toward a vaccine for some of the other really debilitating diseases, like HIV and AIDS.

In the last 100 years, our country's life expectancy has increased by 30 years, and 25 of those 30 years have been attributed to public health intervention, including clean drinking water and widespread vaccine adoption. So 25 of those 30 years of our improved life expectancy came from those investments in science.

We should recognize and accept that vaccines have had a huge impact on all of our abilities to lead healthy lives and to get out of childhood being spared from diseases that in previous generations would have killed us.

Some of the damage from the disinformation about vaccines is almost impossible to undo. Why do some accept the results of one debunked paper rather than the conclusions of the hundreds of studies that have been conducted since in careful, measured processes? I mean, they have even tried to link Tylenol to autism with, again, no conclusive proof.

People who peddle vaccine skepticism are preying upon a parent's very rational fears. These skeptics are trying to advance their own conspiracy theories. Parents are trying their hardest to keep their kids safe and healthy, and I think it is irresponsible for people to plague them with misinformation and what is not real science when the science has been settled for decades. The measles vaccine is safe, and it doesn't cause autism.

We can't let ourselves backslide in the number of children getting vaccinated, but that is what is happening. President Trump and R.F.K., Jr., are moving full speed ahead in putting the health of our children and communities at risk by implementing health changes based on conspiracy theories and not science.

Measles cases are now higher than they were in 1991, with there being over 2,000 confirmed cases nationwide. We have literally slid backward in the progress of eradicating measles. The U.S. eliminated the disease in 2000, but

due to vaccine skepticism and vaccine rates going down, we have had a resurgence.

Mr. Kennedy seems unfazed that our kids are getting sick. He fired the top, nonpartisan public health officials at the CDC because they wouldn't adhere to his agenda. I asked two of them, in a Senate hearing back in September, what keeps them up at night when Mr. Kennedy is at the helm of America's public health. They both said the same thing: the next pandemic.

In President Trump's first term, which was at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Operation Warp Speed helped bring vaccines to the public in record time. It was a remarkable success, and President Trump deserves credit for that. The National Institutes of Health estimates that Operation Warp Speed saved 140,000 lives by speeding up the development of the vaccines by 5 months.

It is not if the next pandemic comes but when. We will need a robust Federal response and a thorough preparedness plan, one guided by actual science. Otherwise, we will endanger lives and the health of Americans.

Reproductive health care—they are getting at that too. Back when I was Governor, we made free and low-cost birth control accessible to every Coloradan—low-cost, reversible contraception. We reduced unwanted pregnancies by nearly 60 percent. Those were pregnancies that were unwanted, but you were also looking in many cases at avoiding what would have been abortions.

Now this administration is doing everything it can to eliminate the last remaining protections. They are threatening access to mifepristone—a medication that has been proven to be safe and effective for decades, especially when someone has had a miscarriage as it allows them to deal with that safely at home.

Colorado understands the importance of reproductive freedom. Women deserve the right to make their own reproductive health care decisions without having politicians or the government telling them what to do with their bodies.

All of this comes at a time when some MAGA Republicans passed their One Big Beautiful Bill last summer. Some of us call it the "Big Ugly Betrayal Act." The bill cut more than \$1 trillion from Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act—more than \$1 trillion. The results are going to be clear, and they are already becoming clear. Over time, 15 million Americans are likely going to lose their health coverage. Again, about 240,000 of them are living in Colorado. Hundreds and hundreds of hospitals and nursing homes around the country are at risk of closing. Many of them are in Colorado.

Since both sides—well, certainly Republicans—have refused to work together to extend the ACA enhanced premium tax credits, 20 million more Americans have been hit with some of

the largest price hikes in recent memory for their health insurance. We have heard from Colorado families across the State that their monthly healthcare premiums have doubled, tripled, and in some cases quadrupled. In many cases, that is higher than their mortgages now. This is unsustainable and is crushing many Americans and many Coloradoans. It means that working families are being forced to choose between putting food on the table or their healthcare or, even worse, dropping their insurance altogether.

Without a doubt, this is a crisis. It seems that the other side has realized that this will be devastating to their constituents. Hopefully, we can find some compromise to resolve this.

Last week, the House of Representatives passed a clean 3-year extension of the ACA enhanced premium tax credits in a bipartisan vote. Yet, yesterday, it got blocked here in the Senate.

Soaring healthcare costs are squeezing working families in ways we couldn't have imagined a few years ago. We should be making it easier for Americans to get healthcare that is affordable, accessible, and universal and not harder.

It is worth remembering why they made all of these cuts to healthcare in the first place, why they made all of the cuts to research funding or to childcare grants, why they fired so many government employees. It is because they wanted to pass a budget and find a way to pay for \$4.5 trillion in tax breaks, most of which go to the largest corporations and to some of the wealthiest people in this country. To do this, they cut food stamps and they cut healthcare in order to pass the largest transfer of wealth from the poor to the rich in the history of the country. I think that speaks volumes as to the values before us.

We are not going to let some of these actions go down without a fight.

It has been clear from the beginning that President Trump's goal in his second term is shock and awe—to bombard the American people with wall-to-wall coverage of every aspect of every decision that they make. They are trying to attack anything that is the status quo. I think he believes that this constant chaos will drown out all voices of opposition. Well, we are still here, we are still fighting, and we are not quitting.

This past year, we have seen the administration send masked armed agents—without identification—into communities to separate families and to pull people off the streets and into unmarked vans. We have seen them target people strictly based on the color of their skin or on the accents they may have when they speak.

In the past week, the footage out of Minneapolis and out of Portland, OR, was truly horrifying. An ICE officer shot a woman, Renee Good from Colorado Springs, apparently in cold blood. We are going to argue the legal aspects

of this case, but she was shot, to the best of our knowledge, while she was trying to have her voice heard that what was being done to her and to the communities in this country was wrong.

Our office has been working tirelessly trying to help families who have been desperately searching for loved ones who have been arrested by ICE. We have shown up repeatedly at the ICE detention facility in Aurora to press officials on the concerns about the conditions of the facility, on the delays in communication, on the irregular process changes and on the reports of ICE pressuring detainees—some of them minors—to voluntarily deport instead of proceeding through the judicial process.

We are also working on legislation with Senator CORTEZ MASTO to redirect the excessive increase in Federal funding for ICE that was snuck into the Big Beautiful Bill to triple ICE's budget, and we are working to redirect that money to actually keep our communities safe.

When President Trump shut down the government last fall, he went after the most vulnerable in this country, but we were resilient in raising awareness of the healthcare crisis and in fighting back against—we have to call them—the heartless SNAP cuts, which is the nutrition support for many of the neediest people in our communities. Both times, Republicans put forward a continuing resolution to keep business as usual, but we pushed back in every way we could.

Back in May, when Republicans were on an ill-fated mission to sell off public lands to the highest bidder to supposedly lower the public debt, we fought back hard and got them to abandon that plan. Some things just shouldn't be for sale, and one of them is our public lands.

Even as they continue to try to sneak in different pieces of legislation, we have tried to stop them every time, but we know that President Trump and his MAGA allies aren't going to stop. That is why they have nominated Steve Pearce to lead the Bureau of Land Management. The BLM manages many of our Federal lands and is the caretaker for some of the most breathtaking and sacred landscapes. Mr. Pearce, on the other hand, has proudly advocated to sell off these public lands.

I will say once again—I have said it a bunch of times—Colorado's public lands are not for sale, and they never will be for sale. So I will certainly vote no on Mr. Pearce, and I will be fighting his nomination every step of the way.

All of this brings us back to the final question: How did we get here?

It was the NCAR disaster relief, the canceling of clean energy projects, freezing childcare funding, the demolition of the Arkansas Valley Conduit, and the relentless attacks on science.

The President was elected, as I said earlier, because Americans thought he was going to make their lives better.

One year later, families are still wondering when that relief is going to come. The cuts to NCAR, to clean energy and to clean drinking water, the cuts to childcare and to financial assistance for Colorado families—all this does nothing to improve anyone's quality of life. It doesn't make groceries cheaper. It doesn't bring down the cost of rent or the utilities cost at the end of the month.

To be frank, we have pretty much completely lost the narrative, the plot line of the administration. They seem to be more focused on building ballrooms and getting involved in wars without a necessary plan in place.

If you want to talk about how to get and create a forever war, that would be to depose a leader of a foreign country without a plan of what the transition is going to be.

And they have been vetoing unanimous, bipartisan legislation for rural water infrastructure projects that actually help working people.

And that brings us back to NCAR. The work the National Center for Atmospheric Research does is critical. Senator BENNET talked about that at great length. I have talked about it. It informs so much of the weather data and scientific research that makes our country safer, both militarily and in terms of natural disasters. We can't let the dismantling of NCAR be just a blip in the news.

Time and time again, the President makes critical announcements, but before we can even digest them, he has moved on to the next reckless action. This pattern leaves everyday Americans to pick up the pieces. The consequences permeate the fabric of our society.

Dismantling science and cutting funding for the National Center for Atmospheric Research harms every single American and diminishes the opportunities that we will be able to create for the next generation. It threatens our safety. It threatens our economy. It threatens our national security. It threatens our livelihoods.

We can't just stand by because of one more crazy thing that comes out one way or the other. We need to all be determined to do everything we can to stand up to these attacks on science, and I think that starts with standing up for the National Center for Atmospheric Research.

Senator BENNET and I have a simple demand: Put language into the appropriations bill that guarantees the full funding for NCAR through the end of this fiscal year.

That was money that was appropriated to the National Science Foundation with the full expectation that that is where they would allocate it, and they did allocate it there. Once they have done that, the President should not be able to come back in and tell them to—I don't know if "deallocate" is the right word, but "re-scind" the money, if you want to use legal terminology.

It should be abundantly clear that the work of the National Center for Atmospheric Research impacts every one of us. Again, it saves lives. It protects property. It boosts our economy. It creates the foundation on which our future economy is going to be based.

We have heard countless stories from our constituents about how important it is. We have heard from family members of NCAR researchers who don't want the work of their loved ones to be thrown out, families who will struggle to support someone who got laid off at NCAR, students whose work relies on NCAR data who may be in the process of finishing their Ph.D. We have heard from scientists who recognize this international crown jewel of research.

We have heard from them all, and I brought just a few to read today. One constituent wrote:

My father has worked at NCAR for 20 years . . . and I'm seriously concerned about its continued existence. I voted for President Trump in the latest election but feel this attack on NCAR is more about a personal attack on Colorado for being a largely blue State than a legitimate action for the betterment of the American people.

My Dad has worked tirelessly for this place for decades, putting in long hours and taking on more responsibilities than he ever bargained for to keep up the work that he loves being a part of. Please fight for NCAR, fight with all you've got, it means so much to the people who have spent their life's work to keep it going.

Another constituent, this one from Lafayette, CO, wrote:

NCAR is important for Colorado—and the nation—and provides not only top notch science but employs close to 1,000 people in my community.

My husband has worked for NCAR for over 16 years as a scientist and administrator. The loss of his job would be devastating to our family. We would not be able to help support our two college-aged daughters. My husband carries our health insurance. I have stage 4 breast cancer and having to find new health insurance—that is affordable—would be very difficult [and quite possibly impossible] and would [certainly] threaten my current health status.

Another constituent from Glenwood Springs wrote:

I have worked with NCAR scientists and educators for all of my career as a science teacher here in Colorado. I now live in Glenwood Springs, retired, and I think NCAR is one of the jewels of our state. I feel the same way about the former [National Renewable Energy Laboratory].

And then last—I can't wrap it up more succinctly than this constituent:

I am writing as a constituent and a scientist to ask you to stop the dismantling of the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Boulder, Colorado, as announced by OMB Director Russ Vought. NCAR is the beating heart of climate research in the US. I grew up in Boulder and I am one of the scientists who has worked at NCAR. My current research depends on NCAR. My future career opportunities in Colorado will be decimated if NCAR is dismantled.

NCAR provides essential forecasting support to our nation, such as: Partnerships with airlines to provide in-flight turbulence and icing guidance—Collaboration with reinsurance companies to assess risks of

wildfires, heat waves, and hurricanes—Forecasting capabilities that inform farmers, truckers, and other critical components of our economy about severe weather disruptions.

Dismantling NCAR is a wasteful exercise that could cost lives. Please do everything you can to keep our community safe and don't let NCAR be dissolved.

I would like to urge Congress to stand up and protect this critical scientific research, to stand up for American innovation, and to protect American families.

#### AMENDMENT NO. 4153

I ask unanimous consent to call up and make pending amendment No. 4153 to H.R. 6938 to maintain operations and capabilities at the National Center for Atmospheric Research.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BUDD). Is there objection?

The Senator from Maine.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, I appreciate the advocacy from the Senators from Colorado for the National Center for Atmospheric Research in their State and, in the case of Senator HICKENLOOPER, his advocacy in support of scientific research in general.

It is important for Members to know that the bill before us includes robust funding for the National Science Foundation. This has not only been a top priority of mine but of many members of the Appropriations Committee.

Consistent with longstanding practice, the bill does not have a carve-out for NCAR nor for any of the National Science Foundation's research facilities around the globe, and it does not direct grant-making to certain activities. This longstanding precedent is designed to preserve the National Science Foundation's autonomy in funding decision and empowers the Agency to prioritize scientific needs.

Nothing in this bill precludes continued support for NCAR. This is a carefully negotiated package that passed the House of Representatives overwhelmingly in a bipartisan way last week. Any amendment would send the package back to the House, where its fate would be uncertain. We would risk a continuing resolution or, even worse, another disastrous shutdown at the essential Agencies funded in this package. Therefore, Mr. President, I must object, and I do object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I want to thank Chairs COLLINS and COLE, Ranking Member DELAURO, as well as our fantastic subcommittee leaders and all of our staffs for working so hard to put this package together.

This vote is about returning power to the American people, protecting the funding that they count on, and making sure Congress—not Trump and Vought—decide how taxpayer dollars get spent.

We have, of course, the package of bipartisan bills, the product of hard, seri-

ous negotiations that reject devastating Trump cuts that would cut scientific research, raise energy prices, and make our communities less safe and prosperous. These bills protect key investments in scientific research, our Tribes, our public lands, and so much else, and they reassert the power of Congress to make our Nation's funding decisions—Congress, that is us.

So let's choose to exercise our power and make sure our States' voices are heard by passing these bills now and getting them signed into law.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I will withhold my remarks until after the vote.

#### AMENDMENT WITHDRAWN

Mr. President, I withdraw amendment No. 4208.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, the amendment is withdrawn.

#### VOTE ON H.R. 6938

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I know of no further debate at this time on the bill.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there further debate?

Hearing none, the clerk will read the title of the bill for the third time.

The bill was read the third time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The bill having been read the third time, the question is, Shall the bill pass?

Ms. COLLINS. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. BARRASSO. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Tennessee (Mr. HAGERTY) and the Senator from Florida (Mrs. MOODY).

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

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Michigan (Mr. PETERS) is necessarily absent.

The result was announced—yeas 82, nays 15, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 11 Leg.]

#### YEAS—82

Alsobrooks	Cruz	Kaine
Baldwin	Curtis	Kelly
Banks	Daines	Kennedy
Barrasso	Duckworth	King
Blackburn	Durbin	Klobuchar
Blumenthal	Ernst	Lankford
Blunt Rochester	Fetterman	Lujan
Boozman	Fischer	Marshall
Britt	Gallego	McConnell
Budd	Gillibrand	McCormick
Cantwell	Graham	Merkley
Capito	Grassley	Moran
Cassidy	Hassan	Moreno
Collins	Hawley	Mullin
Coons	Heinrich	Murkowski
Cornyn	Hirono	Murray
Cortez Masto	Hoeben	Ossoff
Cotton	Husted	Reed
Cramer	Hyde-Smith	Ricketts
Crapo	Justice	Risch

Rosen	Slotkin	Warnock
Rounds	Smith	Welch
Schatz	Sullivan	Whitehouse
Schmitt	Thune	Wicker
Schumer	Tillis	Wyden
Scott (SC)	Tuberville	Young
Shaheen	Van Hollen	
Sheehy	Warner	

NAYS—15

Bennet	Lee	Paul
Booker	Lummis	Sanders
Hickenlooper	Markey	Schiff
Johnson	Murphy	Scott (FL)
Kim	Padilla	Warren

NOT VOTING—3

Hagerty	Moody	Peters
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The bill (H.R. 6938) was passed.  
 The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HUSTED). The Senator from Maine.

MORNING BUSINESS

Ms. COLLINS. 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.

REMEMBERING REVEREND CHESTER LEONARD CAVIL

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, today I pay tribute to a native Iowan who left this good Earth on November 26, 2025. With his loving wife at his bedside, Rev. Chester Leonard Cavil was welcomed home at age 77.

Now, Mr. Cavil and I crossed paths decades ago because of my sister Bunny Wiegmann. My oldest sister worked her entire career at F.W. Woolworth's in Cedar Falls, IA. She was the bookkeeper for the business.

Back then, women didn't run the store, at least not officially. But I know that Bunny ran the show. As part of her responsibilities, she trained all the employees and was assigned to train the incoming store manager. That happened to be Mr. Cavil. They worked together at Woolworth's for 12 years. Bunny continued her job there as bookkeeper for a total of 45 years.

During his time as store manager, Bunny and Mr. Cavil became good friends. To be sure, their friendship lasted long after he left Woolworth's. Bunny always called him Mr. Cavil, a sign of respect in the workplace. Most of their friendship was long distance. Bunny and her husband Ed traveled to Chicago to celebrate Mr. Cavil's wedding to his beloved wife Ruby in 1986.

Thinking back, I would have to say their friendship was the reason Mr. Cavil became one of my earliest—and most visible—supporters.

At the time, I was serving in the State legislature. In early 1974, I decided to run for the House of Representatives when H.R. Gross announced his retirement.

When I decided to run for Iowa's Third Congressional District, which included the Cedar Falls-Waterloo area, Mr. Cavil wanted to help. Of course, back then, there wasn't such thing as

advertising on social media. You did it the old-fashioned way. Mr. Cavil offered to put a larger-than-life sign that said "Grassley for Congress" anchored on top of his car. Turned out, that 24/7 kind of advertising was worth its weight in gold—and it was free.

Looking back, I would say he went out on a political limb to help me get elected. Every day, Mr. Cavil parked his car with the big blue and white sign anchored on top in the front of the shopping center. Remember, this is before online shopping. So, that sign caught the attention of countless customers in 1974, from the primaries all the way to election day that November.

But perhaps most noteworthy was where Mr. Cavil drove his car home every night and parked: his urban neighborhood in Waterloo. I am sure many of his neighbors didn't have the slightest idea who CHUCK GRASSLEY even was. For those who knew my political party, I am surprised the sign didn't get ripped off the roof. Either way, the giant "Grassley for Congress" sign on top of his car certainly raised my name recognition. And to have his backing made a difference—nothing beats retail politics. I will never forget his steadfast support and loyalty to Bunny.

After my election to Congress, Mr. Cavil and his wife kept in touch over the years. After I was elected to the Senate, they visited my office in Washington, DC, a couple of times. The Cavils raised a family and built their life together in Georgia, where they launched a couple of businesses and Mr. Cavil followed his vocational calling. He volunteered for decades as a chaplain and was ordained a Baptist minister. Reverend Cavil immersed himself in his ministry, teaching Sunday school, Bible studies and performing weddings and funerals for the faithful.

Barbara and I extend our condolences to his loving wife Ruby, as well as his children, grandchildren, and entire extended family. I have no doubt Mr. Cavil and Bunny have enjoyed reminiscing about the good old days at Woolworth's.

RECOGNIZING THE FALL 2025 SENATE PAGE CLASS

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that a list of the fall 2025 Senate Page class be printed in the RECORD.

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

Nikita Bates, Cecilia Bleyer, Cheyenne Brindac, Elizabeth Cannon, Hunter Coy, Ian Goff, Reagan Grau, Lucas Hogan, Everett Jennings, Addison Norris, Caden Perkins, Chloe Quinn, Ahliya Roy, Luke Stanton, Evelyn Szauskellis, Maureen Bai, Jacqueline Belliveau, Nicholas Cellini, John Ciok, Gabriel Frech, Lilliana Grinberg, Steven Jiang, Sadie Jordan, Naisha Maheshwari, Jace Miles, Chris Qian, Emma Russ, George Solomon.

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:

DEFENSE SECURITY COOPERATION AGENCY, Washington, DC.

Hon. MIKE JOHNSON, Speaker of the House, House of Representatives, Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. SPEAKER: Pursuant to the reporting requirements of Section 36(b)(1) of the Arms Export Control Act, as amended, we are forwarding herewith Transmittal No. 24-121, concerning the Army's proposed Letter(s) of Offer and Acceptance to the Government of Iraq for defense articles and services estimated to cost \$110 million. We will issue a news release to notify the public of this proposed sale upon delivery of this letter to your office.

Sincerely, MICHAEL F. MILLER, Director.

Enclosures.

DEFENSE SECURITY COOPERATION AGENCY, Washington, DC.

Hon. JAMES E. RISCH, Chairman, Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate, Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: Pursuant to the reporting requirements of Section 36(b)(1) of the Arms Export Control Act, as amended, we are forwarding herewith Transmittal No. 24-121, concerning the Army's proposed Letter(s) of Offer and Acceptance to the Government of Iraq for defense articles and services estimated to cost \$110 million. We will issue a news release to notify the public of this proposed sale upon delivery of this letter to your office.

Sincerely, MICHAEL F. MILLER, Director.

Enclosures.

DEFENSE SECURITY COOPERATION AGENCY, Washington, DC.

Hon. BRIAN MAST, Chairman, Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: Pursuant to the reporting requirements of Section 36(b)(1) of the Arms Export Control Act, as amended, we are forwarding herewith Transmittal No. 24-121, concerning the Army's proposed Letter(s) of Offer and Acceptance to the Government of Iraq for defense articles and services estimated to cost \$110 million. We will issue