

evacuation of your village in the situation of Kip and Kwig and some of the others.

And we also know that what happens is these communities were in the news, certainly in Alaska when all this was going on—small community, big impact. But we have this tendency to just move from what we are seeing unfolding on our screens to the next disaster that has hit somewhere else. And the people who are living with that trauma and looking at the disaster still in their area, they can't look away. And I can't look away, you know, when arctic typhoons—arctic typhoon. Just think about “arctic” in the same space as “typhoon.” There were no typhoons when I was growing up in Alaska, regardless of where I was living.

But we are seeing these phenomenons impact us growing more frequent. Mr. President, 50-year floodplain estimates are now being reached in closer to 2 or 3 years, and so it is just hard to move away from the growing reality.

We have got an emergency response manager. He is an extraordinary professional, Bryan Fisher. He has been with the State of Alaska—30-year career in emergency services. And he testified to us in that hearing that out of 198 disasters that he had led the State response to, Typhoon Halong, he said, has been “by far the most catastrophic.”

We know increased community threats from natural disasters, again, are not just a problem in Western Alaska or in Alaska in general. We have heard the stories from colleagues from North Carolina, from Tennessee, from Georgia who were here to talk about the devastation following Hurricane Helene and the challenges that those communities have faced with Federal disaster relief and recovery.

There were also stories of Tribal communities in Southwest Washington State and Louisiana that face worsening extreme weather events and sea level rise.

So after our field hearing, it is even more clear to me that the systems in place to protect our communities don't work as we need them to.

Going back to my example of Newtok moving to Mertarvik, people want to view that relocation and say “success, we have relocated a village.” And I suppose it is if you want to consider the simple idea that the community wanted to move, voted to move, and they have since moved.

But a closer look reveals many difficult, expensive lessons learned along the way. That relocation was a generation-plus in the making. Its great success is now arguably measured in the lives not lost during ex-Typhoon Halong. And I just think about that, and I think that we have got to have a higher bar than that. Success cannot be measured only in terms of life or death. It also must include the dignity afforded to communities that our constituents call home.

So where does this put us? What do we do going forward?

We all need to pay attention, show up for the people we serve and for each other. And in the coming months, my team and I will continue working with Alaska communities, the State, and other Federal Agencies to chart a path forward. And our goal is to establish a more nimble system for the communities facing environmental threats, one that works with them and for them.

So a couple suggestions here: First, I think you need a lead agency. Back in 2004, witnesses from the State of Alaska expressed that this is just too much for the State to take on alone. That was true back in 2004; that is still true. And with the communities threatened across the country, there is a Federal nexus. And we will do better if we can pool experience and lessons learned and work from a centralized vantage point.

Next, we need to take another look at the way that we have siloed community resilience away from disaster response. We need to ensure that all parties are communicating, they are pulling together on infrastructure hardening, predisaster planning and mitigation, disaster response, recovery, and relocation efforts.

And we also need to ensure that these systems are easier to navigate. I hear this all the time. These systems have to be easier to navigate for the communities that—they are strapped for resources. So narrow grants that have to be pieced together—oftentimes over the course of years—are not the most cost-effective way to address the problem, especially for Tribal communities that are already struggling with low capacity.

Right now, Tribal leaders like Janet and her fellow council members in Chefnak, they are being asked to choose between building new homes for families that have moved in with relatives since their old homes were literally leaning into the river or decommissioning and decontaminating old buildings that are also about to fall into the river.

I do want to acknowledge, and we are very grateful for the \$16.7 million that the BIA just awarded to Chefnak through the Tribal Community Resilience Program, but this is just a start because those are impossible choices that are facing too many of our communities. It is not just Chefnak.

In the meantime, I promise not to look away and to keep bringing folks up to Alaska to see, to understand, to hear. As conversations continue about the best way to structure our disaster response system, I want to work with colleagues—both sides of the aisle, wherever you are—to address not only the unique needs in my home State, but of all our States and make sure that they are adequately addressed. Our disasters and the response to them may look different. I get that. But our people all deserve the same access to safety and disaster response. And I don't think—we just can't lose sight of that.

I also want to acknowledge Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Billy Kirkland. Assistant Secretary Kirkland and his staff showed up for the people of my State. He sat with me for hours as we heard from the people of Kipnuk and Kwigillingok when we had our field hearing in Anchorage, and then he travelled with me to Bethel as we heard from Tribal leaders across the YK Delta on these very important issues. As we listened, I was struck by some words from Charlotte Nayagak. She is from the Chevak Native Village, and she has worked on disaster recovery and prevention in the region for many years.

She went up to the mic, and she had like 2 minutes to speak, but she started off by saying:

Finally. Finally someone from out there, not just from Alaska—finally somebody is listening to us. We need this. We need this help.

Finally somebody is listening to us.

So imagine spending decades watching, as Charlotte described, the erosion of your land getting worse and worse each year, happening faster and faster, and just feeling like nobody from outside your community, nobody from outside your State is listening.

We should all be listening. We should all be working together to provide a better future—even after the darkest disasters—for the people we serve no matter where they live. So I look forward to working with all of my colleagues to do just that.

TRIBUTE TO SARAH MCKINNIS

I also want to acknowledge before I close that I have a member of my Indian Affairs team that has been with me now for a couple years. She started off at a very junior level and has worked her way up to a level of trust and responsibility within the committee. She is going off to pursue dreams of higher education in significant institutions. She has been a true asset to the committee and to me, and so I want to acknowledge the good work of Sarah on my team and wish her well.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BANKS). The Senator from Tennessee.

MEMORIAL DAY

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. President, we are looking at Memorial Day weekend and certainly on Monday taking that time to pause and reflect on the brave men and women from Tennessee and, indeed, across the entire country who have made the ultimate sacrifice in defending our freedoms right here.

Tennessee is really so blessed to have a very strong military community. In our State, we have more than 400,000 veterans that call Tennessee home. They, indeed, enrich our communities with their records of service and sacrifice.

We also have several major military installations in our State. There is Fort Campbell, which primarily sits in the State of Tennessee. There is Arnold Engineering Development Center, an

Air Force base which is in Tullahoma. In Millington, we have the naval air station. We also have our Army and Air National Guard facilities across our State.

To each and every one of these individuals that call Tennessee home, that raise their hand, take that oath, and serve, we say thank you.

It is an honor to represent so many servicemembers and veterans in our State. These veterans and servicemembers do represent the best of what this Nation has to offer. They are leaders, public servants, warriors who put their lives on the line every day. And the loss of any single one of them is deeply felt in their home communities and across our State.

HONORING CHIEF WARRANT OFFICER 3 DUSTIN WRIGHT

Last June, we lost CW3 Dustin Wright. He was a pilot assigned to the 101st Airborne Combat Aviation Brigade, and he was lost during a helicopter training accident at Fort Campbell. His brigade commander said that he “cherished every opportunity to be outside and support ground troops . . . with strength and honor.”

He was a member of the Mosaic Church in Clarksville, TN, where he served on the security team.

His awards included the Meritorious Service Medal, the Air Medal with “C” Device, the Army Commendation Medal with three oak leaf clusters, and the Army Achievement Medal with three oak leaf clusters. He had many other awards also.

We must never forget his legacy and the legacy of each of these that have served across our State and have lost their lives in service to our Nation. We can never repay that sacrifice, but we must always honor their service.

VETERANS’ HEALTHCARE

For our Nation’s veterans, we must ensure they receive the benefits and the timely access they have earned so that they are getting the quality care they deserve.

On the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee, we are working on several pieces of legislation to ensure that veterans’ needs are going to be met in a timely manner.

My Veterans Health Care Freedom Act would place veterans at the center of the community care referral process and empower them to seek care from providers right in their home communities. They wouldn’t have to rely solely on VA facilities. They could go there at home when it was convenient for them.

This is important to us in Tennessee because 78 of our 95 counties are considered rural, and many vets face challenges when they are trying to access care through the VA facilities.

As warfare becomes increasingly complex, the veteran population will require more sophisticated care than previous generations, and community care will be essential in meeting these needs.

Also, earlier this year, I introduced the Veterans’ Bill of Rights Act. This

would ensure veterans are clearly informed of their existing rights regarding their VA healthcare, benefits, and services. Too often, complex statutes, regulations, and internal policies can leave veterans unsure about the resources that are available to them, which they have earned through their services. This legislation would address it by requiring the Department of Veterans Affairs to clearly inform our veterans of their existing benefits and services and healthcare and to make certain they know their rights.

In March, I also introduced the bipartisan Women Veterans Specialty Care Access Act to improve access to specialty care—including gynecology, obstetrics, maternity, and postpartum care—for our female veterans. What we do know is that female veterans are one of the fastest growing populations that are served by the VA, and we need to do everything in our power to ensure they receive the care they have earned in a timely manner.

To expand access to evidence-based mental health care for our veterans, my RECOVER Act would strengthen partnerships between the VA and community-based mental health care providers.

To cut redtape and improve care for our veterans and servicemembers, I am working on legislation that would require the Department of War and VA to establish a uniform credentialing service for medical providers. Right now, clinicians who transfer between Department of War and VA facilities can face monthslong approval delays before they are able to treat patients again. This makes absolutely no sense at all. Why would we delay the clinicians from being able to move from a hospital in the DOW system to a VA facility? So our legislation would help create a streamlined process so that providers can get where they are needed at the fastest possible moment and deliver the care for our vets and our servicemembers.

I hope this Memorial Day provides an opportunity for each and every American to reflect on the service of our fallen heroes and to commit ourselves to ensuring that our servicemembers and our veterans receive the care, honor, and respect they have earned.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

The Senator from Nevada.

RECONCILIATION

Ms. CORTEZ MASTO. Mr. President, I am here on the floor of the Senate today because I want to talk about what is happening this week with the reconciliation package that Republicans are attempting to move this week.

For many that might be watching—or maybe it is just my family who is watching. Who knows? But for many that are out there, let me just say that what is happening right now is that our Republican leaders in Congress in essence are trying to give billions of dollars more in funding to out-of-control Federal immigration enforcement Agencies that are brutalizing our communities.

I want to be clear about something. We all agree that we need strong border security and that criminals need to face justice. I am going to say that again. We need strong border security. Criminals must face justice.

President Trump said his administration would be going after the worst of the worst, but what really is happening is that masked and unidentifiable agents are roaming around, arresting and even killing American citizens, racially profiling people, including Latinos, and deporting Dreamers.

I am here to tell my colleagues that if you are not paying attention to the American public when you are listening to them—because if you are, you are hearing that they are saying: Enough. They want safe communities but not lawlessness and fearmongering.

That is why my Democratic colleagues and I have been clear since February: You will not get our votes on new funding for Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Border Patrol unless it includes commonsense guardrails to rein in these Agencies’ abuses. But over the last several months, unfortunately, President Trump and Republican leadership have showed us, time and time again, that they are simply not interested in doing the right thing here, even the popular thing.

Now, I want people to keep in mind that Republicans have already given these two Agencies \$150 billion in their so-called Big Beautiful Bill. They did that with another reconciliation package. They have plenty of money. ICE and CPB have plenty of money to operate for years to come—because their annual budget is only around \$8 to \$10 billion. They have \$150 billion.

But now, what is happening this week is that, at the request of Donald Trump, Republicans now want to add another \$70 billion to these Agencies, on top of the \$150 billion they have. That multibillion-dollar check isn’t for lowering the price of groceries for Americans. It is not lowering the cost of energy for Americans or healthcare or even helping them put more gas in their tanks at a lower cost. That is not what this is. It is not bringing back the manufacturing jobs this administration has lost us. And it definitely is not making our communities any safer.

We know that because we are seeing what Federal immigration enforcement has been doing with the \$150 billion they already got for their mass deportation efforts. Let me tell you, they are not spending it on going after the worst of the worst. They are not doing