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No. 21

House of Representatives

The House was not in session today. Its next meeting will be held on Friday, January 30, 2026, at 10:30 a.m.

Senate

THURSDAY, JANUARY 29, 2026

The Senate met at 10:30 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. GRASSLEY).

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Gracious God, without You, we are but disappearing dust. Draw near to our Senators, for in Your presence they find their dignity, destiny, and direction. Lord, breathe into them an awareness of Your presence and the saving knowledge that they belong to You. May this awareness inspire them to walk the days of their years in service to You and humanity. Help them to remember that You are changeless, nor is there any variability in Your judgment, mercy, and love. Remind them also that they can depend on You for the vindication of every just cause, the forgiveness of every confessed sin, and the strength for every setback.

May they trust You to give them strength to work today for the glory of Your Name.

We pray in Your omnipotent Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MULLIN). Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

CONSOLIDATED APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2026—Motion to Proceed—Resumed

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of the motion to proceed to H.R. 7148, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to Calendar No. 302, H.R. 7148, a bill making further consolidated appropriations for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2026, and for other purposes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

NATIONAL TRAFFICKING AND MODERN SLAVERY PREVENTION MONTH

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, January is National Trafficking and Modern Slavery Prevention Month. For that reason, the senior Senator from Nevada and I are introducing a resolution to raise awareness and honor the victims.

Every day, victims are trafficked across the world. Each person has a

role to play and ought to be vigilant in preventing the vulnerable from becoming victims of trafficking.

As chairman of the Judiciary Committee, I will continue to support legislation like the Working Families Tax Cut law to give law enforcement all the resources it needs to protect people from the scourge of human trafficking. I will also continue to push legislation like the Senate-passed Preventing Child Trafficking Act, which would ensure our Federal Agencies take needed steps to protect in a better way potential victims.

So, today, please join me in raising awareness. And to those who may be victims, please know that there are resources available to you. If you are in Iowa, please visit stopthiowa.org, or, anytime and anywhere, you can text "HELP"—H-E-L-P, obviously—to 233733.

I thank the Senator from Nevada for joining me in this effort.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The majority leader is recognized.

WORKING FAMILIES TAX CUT

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, there is almost nothing parents won't do for their children. From the moment they

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



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hand you that little bundle, your whole life becomes about giving them a better life, ensuring that they have every opportunity that you can give them, and setting them up for success. Most often, that starts with a good education. So last year, Republicans set out to support parents and empower them to make the choices they believe are right for their children's future.

For decades now, the 529 savings plan has been a powerful tool for parents to save for their kids' education. At first, 529s could only be used for college, but in 2017, Republicans expanded the eligible uses of 529 plans to include K through 12 expenses as well. And in last year's Working Families Tax Cut, Republicans again expanded 529 plans to include a number of education investments: tutoring, vocational education, homeschool materials, and continuing education. And on top of that, we doubled the amount that you can spend from your 529 account to \$20,000 a year. These reforms will help more Americans find success, whether they need a little help getting through algebra or want to pursue a career in the trades.

As we mark School Choice Week this week, I also want to note how the Working Families Tax Cut supports scholarships for students who attend the school that best suits them. I am a proud product of public schools, the son of two public school educators, and both of our daughters graduated from our local high school. Students can get a great education at their public school, and they are a point of pride for many communities. But I also understand that some parents would like to send their child to a school outside of their district or to a nonpublic school or choose to homeschool.

My home State has been a leader in offering open enrollment, which allows students to go to the public school of their choice, even if it is not the school closest to home, or to enroll in another school district altogether. South Dakota gets it.

And I am not surprised that we were one of the first States to opt in to the scholarship initiative created in the Working Families Tax Cut, which encourages private support for scholarships that will help students cover a variety of education expenses and enable them to take advantage of the type of educational freedom that South Dakotans have long enjoyed. And I am glad to see that more than 20 States have already pledged to participate in this important initiative to encourage donations to K through 12 scholarship funds.

Our bill doesn't stop there. The Working Families Tax Cut provided additional funding for Pell grants and created the Workforce Pell Grant Program, which will support students pursuing shorter term job training programs that prepare them for in-demand skilled jobs.

Then there are our actions tackling the high cost of college degrees. The cost of a college education is out of

control. Research suggests that a number of degree programs now have a negative return on investment. The answer isn't throwing more Federal dollars at the problem; it is putting downward pressure on tuition and holding schools accountable for the value of the education they provide.

That is what Republicans did last year. We implemented accountability measures to rein in high costs. We also streamlined student loan repayment programs, simplifying the process and providing much needed clarity to folks repaying their loans.

And we ensured that graduates won't have to pay taxes on tuition assistance from your employer, a measure that I introduced and this bill makes permanent.

The education provisions in the Working Families Tax Cuts gives the next generation more opportunities to get ahead and succeed. But before I close, I want to talk about another part of this bill that sets America's next generation up for success. That is the new Trump Accounts.

These new investment accounts provide parents with another vehicle to save for their children's future, to invest that money and let it grow over the years. And when those children turn 18, that money—thousands or tens of thousands of dollars—will be tax advantaged and can be used for education, to start a business, or to buy their first home.

In short, Trump Accounts will help the next generation get a head start on their American dream.

And for children born between 2025 and 2028, the government is offering an initial \$1,000 investment in Trump Accounts. We have also seen similar activities from philanthropists and matching commitments from various companies for their employees. A number of those initiatives were announced during yesterday's Trump Accounts summit at the White House.

Musician Nicki Minaj was among those at yesterday's summit. She grew up in a housing project in a family that faced its share of financial struggles, and she is now raising her own family.

She recently said of Trump Accounts: This program will benefit everyone—decreasing the gap for future prosperity between children who traditionally aren't born with a full bank account and children who are.

I hope that parents will take the opportunity to learn about this option to invest in their children's future because the more people learn, the more they will see the potential to set their children—an entire generation of Americans—up for success.

A good education is the key to opportunity. It is one of the best gifts that parents can give to their children. Thanks to the Working Families Tax Cuts, the next generation will have greater educational freedom and be empowered to seize more opportunities and to find increased success.

Our legislation puts our Nation's children on a smoother path to achiev-

ing the American dream, and it gives a whole generation more opportunities to get ahead.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The Democratic leader is recognized.

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, this is a moment of truth for the United States of America. What the Nation witnessed on Saturday in the streets of Minneapolis was a moral abomination. Federal agents shot and killed Alex Pretti, an American citizen, in broad daylight.

It was the second time that agents killed a U.S. citizen in 2 weeks after the tragic killing also of Renee Good.

Enough is enough.

What ICE is doing outside the law is state-sanctioned thuggery, and it must stop. It is state-sanctioned thuggery, and it must stop. Congress has the authority and the moral obligation to act.

This morning in Minneapolis, Tom Homan, Donald Trump's border czar, held a press conference. He didn't say much of significance, but he did say one thing that was important. Here is what Homan said:

For the people out there who don't like what ICE is doing, if you want certain laws reformed, then take it up with Congress.

For the people out there—

Homan said,

—who don't like what ICE is doing, if you want certain laws reformed, then take it up with Congress.

I don't agree very much with Mr. Homan, and he is certainly not my choice for someone to lower the temperature in Minneapolis, but he is right in saying the epicenter of change has to be Congress—not the executive branch.

And change is desperately needed because the images of masked men beating up people in the streets and shooting American citizens in broad daylight have shocked the conscious.

Alex was holding his hand up. He had one hand up and another hand holding, I believe it was, a radio, and they shot him many times. It made every American recoil to see that our law enforcement is doing that to our citizens.

It is confounding. It does not look like America in these pictures. Oh, no. And it has been unleashed by Donald Trump and the people under him—Noem, who should be out of there. Thank God they got rid of Bovino. His face, when you saw, it looked like he was grimacing like a thug.

This has got to stop.

Congress must step up to the plate. The Republican majority must step up

to the plate. Republicans in Congress cannot allow this violent status quo to continue. They must work with Democrats on legislation—real legislation, strong legislation—to rein ICE in.

Let me be clear: Democrats are ready to pass five bipartisan funding bills in the Senate. We are ready to pass them today. We are ready to fund 96 percent of the Federal Government today, but the DHS bill still needs a lot of work.

So after meeting yesterday as a caucus, Senate Democrats are united on three main goals that will rein in ICE and end the violence—rein in ICE and end the violence: first, end the roving patrols; second, enforce accountability; third, masks off; body cameras on. Each officer must have visible—visible—ID.

Now, no one thinks we are going to solve every single problem in one fell swoop. But the American people are demanding that something gets done. And, of course, to pass legislation and enshrine this into law, we need our Republican colleagues to come along with us.

So, again, first, we need to end ICE's indiscriminate patrols. We need to tighten the rules governing the use of warrants. ICE needs to stop the mass chaotic patrols. They need to work with State law enforcement, local law enforcement—not against them.

That means no more ICE agents barging into people's homes without a judicial warrant. When does that ever happen in America? It is a flagrant violation of the Fourth Amendment.

It also means stopping the dragnet harassment of American communities.

Second, we need accountability. ICE needs to be held to the same basic standards as any law enforcement agency in the country. We need a uniform code of conduct for ICE and all Federal agents, just like State and local law enforcement have. If they violate these standards—like in the instances of Renee Good and Alex Pretti—they must be held fully accountable.

And we need independent investigations, not ICE investigating itself—ICE, the leadership of which is a bunch of liars. We don't trust them to do the investigation.

Most Americans might be shocked to learn that these basic rules do not apply right now to Federal agents like ICE. It is the kind of thing most people would just assume is already in place because it is so obvious, but that is not true when it comes to ICE. They are operating effectively outside the law, and a small glimpse of a video taken by a bystanding citizen shows it every day, every minute. You see these videos. Again, you recoil. It is not America. It is thugs roaming our streets.

Third, we need the masks to come off, and we need the body cameras to stay on. No more secret police. Masks must come off, and body cameras must stay on. Agents need to carry clear identification. The public deserves transparency as it always has asked for with law enforcement.

These three—ending roving patrols; enforcing accountability; masks off, cameras on—are commonsense reforms. They are reforms that Americans already expect from law enforcement.

Now, the onus now is on Leader THUNE and Senate Republicans to work with Democrats to turn these goals into legislation. They are in the majority—the Republicans are. They are the ones who have responsibility to govern, and Democrats are ready to come to the table.

If Republicans refuse to work with us to rein in ICE and to end the violence, they are telling the American people they are choosing to protect ICE over choosing to protect people's safety.

Americans, by and large, support law enforcement. I do. And most people support border security. I do as well. But Americans do not support ICE terrorizing our streets, operating outside the law, killing American citizens.

The madness and violence must end. Congress must act to rein in ICE and end the violence—rein in ICE and end the violence.

The American people deserve nothing—nothing—less.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SHEEHY). The majority whip.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, on the Senate floor today, right now, are six bipartisan appropriations bills—six—bills to keep America safe, bills to keep our government funded and government open, bills that the Senate Democrats have helped draft, bills that the majority of the House Democrats have voted for.

These are bipartisan bills, and they fund the rest of government for the remainder of the fiscal year. Every Senator should vote yes. Americans are counting on our government to stay open, to keep people safe.

Today, Senate Democrats are threatening to block these bills, not just to vote against them but to actually block us even getting the bills to the floor for debate.

So, once again, Democrats are threatening to shut down the government. If the vote we are about to take here today in the Senate doesn't succeed, if the bill stalls out, the government will shut down tomorrow night—Friday night—about 36 hours from now.

Let's talk about the painful consequences because here they are: no funding for FEMA. Now that is the Federal Emergency Management Agency. It would be disastrous to shut down FEMA in the middle of a major winter storm. It is affecting half the country, and it appears that another storm is along the way.

A shutdown would mean no paychecks for our troops, once again; no money for TSA agents or air traffic controllers. This is at the time the country is trying to get back on the move again. These are the consequences, and they are painful.

Now, we all remember the Democrat shutdown at the end of last year. That

was the longest shutdown in the history of the American government. It was the politics of pain delivered by the Democrats.

The last Democrat shutdown was about covering up the many failures of ObamaCare. This Democrat shutdown would be about prioritizing illegal immigrants over American citizens. The Democrat shutdown does not change the immigration law, nor will it halt immigration law enforcement.

Even Senate Democrats admit that publicly. That is because Republicans already put into law the largest investment in border security and immigration enforcement in the history of this Nation.

Let me be clear: The vote that we are going to take, in just a few minutes, to advance the six bipartisan appropriations bills allows us to avoid a shutdown, to keep the government open, to make America safer.

The bills that are on the floor fund disaster assistance through FEMA. They hire thousands of new air traffic controllers. They fund TSA agents, the Coast Guard, and our military. They give our troops a well-earned and well-deserved pay raise. They support housing assistance for vulnerable families. They improve roads, bridges, and ports across the Nation. They upgrade our Nation's outdated air traffic control system. All of that is in front of us today.

These bills are the product of the Senate working the way it was designed to work. They reflect months of bipartisan committee work and good-faith negotiations.

I applaud Senator SUSAN COLLINS of Maine. She is the chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee. These bills are the product of her determination to deliver for the American people.

It is time for the Senate to vote yes, and every Senator should vote yes to avert a painful shutdown.

Republicans are going to keep working with Democrats to keep the government open. This Nation deserves safety and security, not another government shutdown.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, Democrats have been very clear. We have five bills in this package we would be happy to pass today on their own. We are all in agreement on funding for childcare, cancer research, air traffic controllers, our troops, and more. But we have also been clear that we cannot and will not move the DHS bill without real progress on accountability.

ICE and CBP are out of control, and we cannot approve that bill until commonsense reforms are included. That is

what the vast majority of the American people are demanding, and many Republicans now also say that must happen as well.

So Congress, all of us, need to act. Peaceful protesters and American citizens are being targeted, detained, attacked, and killed. We have to say no to what this President is doing.

So while I am very glad to see that the White House and Republicans are now talking with Democrats to finalize a plan to pass the five bills and split off DHS, until that deal is finalized, I will be a no on this vote.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

WAIVING QUORUM CALL

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to waive the mandatory quorum call in relation to the motion to proceed to Calendar No. 302, H.R. 7148.

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

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to be permitted to complete my remarks before the vote begins.

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

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I urge my colleagues to vote to end debate on the motion to proceed to the six-bill package of appropriations legislation sent to us by the House of Representatives. These are fiscally responsible funding bills that reflect months of hard work and deliberation and contributions from Members of both parties and on both sides of the Capitol.

I would like to take a few moments to highlight some of the key aspects of these bills.

Let's begin with the funding for the Department of Defense. This legislation provides U.S. military services with the funding needed to deter China and Russia, supports our servicemembers and their families, and strengthens the defense industrial base. It addresses major funding gaps across the board, such as in shipbuilding. The bill provides a critical downpayment toward an additional DDG-51, the workhorse of the U.S. surface fleet, and invests in additional Columbia- and Virginia-class submarines.

The bill also provides multiyear procurement authority for critical munitions production, a priority for the President. It funds drone and counterdrone technologies, which, as we have learned in both Ukraine and Israel, are increasingly changing the nature of the battlefield.

And it sustains security cooperation with close allies and partners whose growing defense capabilities are force multipliers for the United States and contribute to the deterrence of shared adversaries. This is especially true of our NATO allies who are increasingly increasing their own domestic levels of military investment at the push and encouragement of President Trump, and appropriately so.

Finally, the Defense bill invests in our most precious asset: the men and women of our Armed Forces. The bill fully funds the 3.8-percent pay raise for servicemembers and the additional pay raise for our junior enlisted servicemembers, showing our commitment to their readiness, well-being, and mission success.

The second bill is the National Security, Department of State, and Related Programs bill. It used to be known as the State, Foreign Operations bill. It contains security assistance for key allies and partners, including Israel, Jordan, Egypt, Taiwan, and the Philippines.

The bill also supports important global health programs. It continues support for the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, known as PEPFAR, which has saved a remarkable 26 million lives since 2003, including the lives of 8 million babies born to HIV-infected mothers. It is difficult for me to contemplate another global health program—and we have many good ones—that has had more of a positive impact than PEPFAR. In many ways, I think it was President George W. Bush's greatest legacy.

Turning to the Labor, HHS bill, this appropriations bill would prioritize funding to help make Americans healthier, and it robustly funds life-saving biomedical research.

This has been a top priority of mine, and I know of many other Members as well, including the subcommittee chair, SHELLEY MOORE CAPITO and her ranking member, TAMMY BALDWIN.

Funding for NIH is not decreased, as was proposed in the administration's budget. Rather, it is increased by \$415 million, including increases of \$100 million for Alzheimer's research and \$10 million more for diabetes research, with a focus on type 1 diabetes.

This bill also makes critical investments in our Nation's children and families and invests in America's workforce. It includes funding for childcare programs to help low-income working families and for apprenticeship programs to help us reach the goal of 1 million new active apprentices.

The bill also includes more funding for low-income heating assistance, which is absolutely crucial for States like Maine and is an issue that I have worked for years on with my Democratic colleague JACK REED of Rhode Island.

The Transportation, Housing, and Urban Development bill focuses on our most pressing transportation challenges, including modernizing our Nation's outdated air traffic system. And I give Secretary Duffy a great deal of credit for coming up with a workable, much needed plan in that area. It would also address the air traffic controller shortage and provides a pay raise there as well.

The bill invests in critical infrastructure, like our roads, bridges, ports, and rail.

At the same time, the appropriations will continue to fully fund existing

rental assistance for more than 4.6 million households to ensure that seniors, the disabled individuals, and working families who currently receive such assistance are not put at risk of homelessness.

The Financial Services and General Government bill funds core government functions. It increases funding for taxpayer services at the IRS, re-allocates resources to strengthen court security, and helps keep our Nation's Capital—Washington, DC—safe for both residents and visitors.

As the vice chair of the committee has mentioned, there has understandably been a great deal of attention focused on the Homeland Security portion of the package, given the events of the past week. The horrific shooting death of Alex Pretti must be thoroughly and impartially investigated, and President Trump has promised that it will be investigated both impartially and thoroughly.

The Homeland Security funding bill includes important provisions that we put in during the negotiations that would make such incidents less likely to occur. For example, it includes \$20 million for body-worn cameras, which help to protect both law enforcement officials and those with whom they are interacting. It includes \$2 million to ensure that training requirements include how to deescalate an encounter with protestors. Yet another important provision of the bill empowers the inspector general to review and investigate detention centers.

These are all critical reforms, but it does not mean that we cannot do more. But to do more, we need to get onto the bill so that we can make the critical decisions that are being negotiated by leadership in both the House and the Senate and the White House as to how we proceed. Do we split off the Homeland Security bill and pass the other five and put Homeland Security on a continuing resolution, which will, by the way, delay implementation of the three reforms that I just discussed? Or do we try to amend that part of the bill with the agreed-upon additional precautions and safeguards?

We can't do that if we don't get onto the package.

It is also worth noting that more than 80 percent of the funding in the Homeland Security bill is for non-immigration and border security functions. For example, 35 percent of the funding of the Homeland Security bill is for FEMA. And think about what FEMA has been doing on the ground, right now, due to the horrific storm that we have experienced.

It includes \$35 billion for FEMA to help State and local governments prepare to respond to disasters, including funding for programs that help local law enforcement and our firefighters that are so important. It includes funding for the nonprofit security grant program that helps organizations like synagogues, churches, temples, and mosques protect themselves from terrorism.

Another important component of this bill supports our Coast Guard. Think of our Coast Guard personnel out in this terrible weather, being available to rescue our fishermen, our lobstermen, or others who are in trouble. The Coast Guard provides critical safety, security, and stewardship functions from Maine to the Caribbean, to the Arctic and a myriad of places in between.

The bill provides funding to secure our borders and to stop the flow of the illegal drugs, money, weapons, and people being trafficked into our country by cartels and transnational criminal organizations. It includes funding for TSA to help keep Americans safe while they travel, as well as funding for a 3.8-percent pay raise for air traffic controllers to help address the serious workforce shortage that also can affect air safety.

Mr. President, my hope is that we can come up with an agreement that allows us to proceed to this bill and to provide some additional safeguards. Those negotiations are underway right now. But if we don't get on to this package, we cannot change this package. I think that our colleagues on the other side of the aisle need to recognize and acknowledge that.

I want to end by noting the tremendous work of the full committee staff, my staff and Senator MURRAY's staff. I particularly want to acknowledge the hard work of Betsy McDonnell, who has worked night and day as the staff director. I want to thank our subcommittee chairs and ranking members and their staff, who have worked so diligently and are so dedicated.

I know the conversations are continuing even as we speak between the administration and Congress on how to complete action on the Homeland Security portion of this package. This morning's vote is about taking the first step—not the final step—to consider the package on the Senate floor. I urge my colleagues to support cloture on the motion to proceed to this vital appropriations package.

CLOTURE MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Pursuant to rule XXII, the Chair lays before the Senate the pending cloture motion, which the clerk will state.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the motion to proceed to Calendar No. 302, H.R. 7148, a bill making further consolidated appropriations for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2026, and for other purposes.

John Thune, Chuck Grassley, Ted Budd, Tom Cotton, Cindy Hyde-Smith, Katie Boyd Britt, John R. Curtis, John Cornyn, Bernie Moreno, Tommy Tuberville, Roger Marshall, David McCormick, Jerry Moran, Markwayne Mullin, Tim Scott of South Carolina, Tim Sheehy, Susan M. Collins.

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 Calendar No. 302, H.R. 7148, a bill making further 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.

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 45, nays 55, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 13 Leg.]

YEAS—45

Banks	Ernst	McCormick
Barrasso	Fischer	Moran
Blackburn	Graham	Moreno
Boozman	Grassley	Mullin
Britt	Hagerty	Murkowski
Capito	Hawley	Ricketts
Cassidy	Hoeven	Risch
Collins	Husted	Rounds
Cornyn	Hyde-Smith	Schmitt
Cotton	Justice	Scott (SC)
Cramer	Kennedy	Sheehy
Crapo	Lankford	Sullivan
Cruz	Lummis	Tillis
Curtis	Marshall	Wicker
Daines	McConnell	Young

NAYS—55

Alsobrooks	Johnson	Sanders
Baldwin	Kaine	Schatz
Bennet	Kelly	Schiff
Blumenthal	Kim	Schumer
Blunt Rochester	King	Scott (FL)
Booker	Klobuchar	Shaheen
Budd	Lee	Slotkin
Cantwell	Lujan	Smith
Coons	Markey	Thune
Cortez Masto	Merkley	Tuberville
Duckworth	Moody	Warner
Durbin	Murphy	Van Hollen
Fetterman	Murray	Warner
Gallego	Ossoff	Warnock
Gillibrand	Padilla	Warren
Hassan	Paul	Welch
Heinrich	Peters	Whitehouse
Hickenlooper	Reed	Wyden
Hirono	Rosen	

(Mr. MORENO assumed the Chair.)

(Mr. SHEEHY assumed the Chair.)

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HAGERTY). On this vote, the yeas are 45, the nays are 55. Three-fifths of the Senate, duly chosen and sworn, not having voted in the affirmative, the motion is not agreed to.

The motion was rejected.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

MOTION TO RECONSIDER

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I have a motion to reconsider.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The motion is entered.

The Senator from North Carolina.

FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

Mr. TILLIS. Mr. President, nearly a year ago, Secretary Noem visited Western North Carolina to see the devastation caused by Hurricane Helene firsthand.

That day, the Secretary told the crowd in Bat Cave, NC, that "the previous administration failed in many areas and we're going to learn from that and do better," a sentiment that I shared wholeheartedly.

Secretary Noem highlighted some of the actions taken in the early days of President Trump's second term to remove all of the redtape that previously slowed the Department down and West-

ern North Carolina's recovery. These actions were sorely needed, and I fully supported what she intended to do.

Now let's fast forward a year. Earlier this week, the New York Times reported that approximately 17 billion, with a "b," in Federal disaster funds for States has been delayed over the past year.

The article states:

The delays stem from a directive issued by Ms. Noem in June that said any expenditure of \$100,000 or more must be approved by her office, which oversees the disaster agency, to root out "waste, fraud, and abuse." The bottleneck includes money that had already been approved by regional FEMA offices for things like debris removal and repairs to roads, bridges, and water and sewer systems.

This is being delayed, folks. This new reporting sadly confirms what the people of Western North Carolina have known for the past year.

This chart shows a comparison between FEMA obligations and outlays in Hurricane Matthew and Hurricane Florence under President Trump in his first term. The obligations and outlays to date for Hurricane Helene under the second Trump administration are these marks.

Down here is what I would call, in my management consulting days, best practice. We had storms, Florence and Matthew. We knew what the State and local governments needed. We got it out without any delay.

Now, under Noem's leadership, which is supposed to be more efficient, more effective, and more responsive to the disaster in Western North Carolina and the other States that were affected, it looked like the EKG of somebody who is having a heart attack. It makes no sense. This chart shows a comparison between FEMA obligations and outlays for Hurricanes Matthew and Florence under the first Trump administration with the FEMA obligations and outlays to date for Helene under the second Trump administration.

The data clearly shows that something is seriously wrong here. Under Secretary Noem's lack of leadership, FEMA has invented an entirely new set of bureaucracies, the likes of which I have never seen, and I am in a State that deals with a disaster almost every season.

We are about to have another one potentially this weekend, and we just are recovering from an ice storm last weekend. And I have got this to deal with. What do I tell my citizens of Western North Carolina? The result has not been the elimination of waste, fraud, and abuse in the Federal disaster spending; instead, Secretary Noem's new review processes have indefinitely prolonged disaster recovery efforts across the country and inflicted needless pain onto already vulnerable communities and people.

Yesterday, in my office, I was notified that FEMA released more than \$233 million in Helene-related reimbursements. They are approved to move to North Carolina. This is great news. And these resources are severely

needed in Western North Carolina. However, when you dig into the details of the announcement, it becomes clear that this money is long overdue.

Again, this list is just from yesterday's announcement alone—\$200 million for North Carolina Emergency Management as partial reimbursement for their emergency expenses incurred in the first 6 months of Helene—folks, we are well past 6 months—meaning this is only part of what the State is owed before March of 2025. We are in 2026, folks.

There is nearly \$9 million for the Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative for repairing and replacing electric and fiber infrastructure. Great, glad to see it come. For comparison, this is roughly equivalent to what Blue Ridge Electric spent on fiber for the entire year in 2023.

Mr. President, 1.8 million for the town—this is one I hope people pay attention to, 1.8 million for the town of Lake Lure to rebuild its marina and docks. For those that don't know, Lake Lure is some of the most iconic scenes that you are going to find in the movie "Dirty Dancing." That is where that movie was filmed out in Western North Carolina.

The entire economy depends on access to the lake through the marina. The Corps of Engineers recently finished removing more than a million cubic yards of debris just from the lake itself.

After losing more than a year of tourism revenue, the town hopes to reopen the lake and the marina at some point in the spring or summer. This one award represents more than 20 percent of the town's general fund budget for this fiscal year, and it is just coming.

There is 22 million for the NCDOT for road repairs. Again, much needed funding, but to put things in perspective, I don't know, if you have not been through Western North Carolina, I-40 is a two-lane road now. It was down to a single lane at one point. We have managed to get two lanes. Everybody thought it was going to be done in a year-and-a-half. I told everybody they are crazy. Now it looks like it is going to be 2027. It is going to cost \$2 billion, twice what we thought it was, and we hope it gets opened by 2027. It is trending more like 2028.

So think about that, a major interstate section, a major economic corridor between my State and the Presiding Officer's State of Tennessee is at a trickle right now. That is the sort of damage we are experiencing every day in North Carolina. And yet, I have got a Secretary of Homeland Security who thinks, at one point, FEMA shouldn't even exist and now is running the organization like some amateur.

So moving from yesterday's funding approvals, I want to share the plight of 1 of the 39 Helene-impacted counties in North Carolina, Yancey County. It is home to some of North Carolina's most cherished natural resources, including

Mount Mitchell. If you want to win a bar bet, ask somebody what is the highest peak east of the Mississippi River. They are probably going to say Mount Washington or somewhere up in New England. It is actually in the great State of North Carolina at almost 6,700 feet, a little over.

But Yancey County was at the epicenter of Hurricane Helene's impact in North Carolina. There is a good chance, if you remember any of the devastating images of the aftermath of Helene, you are probably thinking about Burnsville, the Yancey County seat. To date, Yancey County has incurred \$50 million in debris removal costs alone for Hurricane Helene, far exceeding the annual budget of the county of \$37 million.

You would think that today, more than 16 months after Helene, Yancey County would have received a significant amount of funding from FEMA to help the county recover from this historic devastation. Well, you would be wrong under the so-called leadership of Secretary Noem.

As of today, Yancey County received a grand total of \$5.7 million from FEMA. Remember, we are talking about a \$50 million debt right now, a \$50 million deficit in a small county—\$5.7 million. And of that, only \$3 million of it was for debris removal.

In fact, Yancey County has not even been approved for a \$5 million Community Disaster Loan that the county began application process for in October of 2024, after the hurricane impact. The county was told just last week that FEMA should have an answer for them by June of this year. Good on you, Secretary Noem, 2 years late—more than a year-and-a-half after the storm, folks.

This is completely unacceptable and, sadly, just wrong.

So it is not a secret that I have problems with the Secretary of Homeland Security and the way that her failed leadership has led to unconscionable results in Minneapolis.

I thank the President for putting an adult in charge who actually knows law enforcement by having Mr. Homan go there. He is going to lower the temperature. He is going to keep the law enforcement officers safe. He is going to make Minneapolis safer. Thank God we have adult supervision there.

But another part of the Secretary of Homeland Security job is disaster response, and I cannot tell you enough how incompetent, based on the facts, she is on that score as well. The people of western North Carolina, the people of eastern Tennessee, the people of South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida who were affected by Helene deserve better. No reasonable businessperson would accept this in the C-suite. She needs to get out of the C-suite.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from West Virginia.

ENERGY

Mrs. CAPITO. Mr. President, this week—this is no news flash here—a

major winter storm brought snow, sleet, frozen rain, and bitter, bitter cold temperatures to most of the middle and eastern parts of the country. I rise today to really highlight dispatchable baseload power—coal, natural gas, and nuclear—the role those items played in keeping the 200 million Americans impacted by this winter storm safe and warm.

Common sense tells us that in the peak heat of summer or the depth of a winter cold, we are going to consume more electricity. Americans expect, very reasonably, that our country's energy policies will result in affordable and reliable electricity so that they can keep their homes cool in the summer and warm in the winter. If we know that demand for electricity is at its peak during times of extreme heat or extreme cold, such as we are experiencing—I think it was 6 degrees this morning—then it would make sense that our energy policy would prioritize those generation sources that are available to meet the demand when electricity is needed the most.

So which sources of energy showed up this week? Not surprisingly, fossil fuels and nuclear power provided the bulk of electricity during this week's storm and the intense cold that has followed.

PJM Interconnection is the electric grid operator in all or parts of 13 States—including my State of West Virginia—that were impacted by this winter storm. In a filing with the Department of Energy, PJM projected that its highest ever—highest ever—winter peak electricity demand would take place on Tuesday morning of this week. At 8 a.m. on Tuesday morning, fossil energy sources, including coal, natural gas, and oil, provided two-thirds of PJM's power, and another 23.6 percent of that was nuclear power. So that means that at a time of record winter electricity demand, 90 percent of the load was shouldered by baseload energy sources.

Electricity is just part of the story because natural gas is also used for residential heating in many of the same areas, providing energy beyond what is reflected in electricity generation sources.

This chart here really shows—it is from the Energy Policy Research Foundation, and it shows PJM electricity generation by source for the past week. It illustrates just what I have said—that fossil fuels and nuclear carried the load across PJM throughout this week's winter storm and its aftermath.

The solid-blue here represents nuclear. It stayed solid—like you would a baseload energy resource.

Similarly, the red shows the reliable supply of electricity from coal plants. You see it fluctuates a little bit, but it is still very steady and very meaningful.

The green shows electricity produced from natural gas—the largest single source in the PJM region. There is the green.

At the very top, what you see here is you see the relatively small amount of electricity produced from wind, solar, and hydroelectric sources.

What is notable is not just that the renewable sources generate smaller amounts of electricity, but see how sporadic they are. This is through a whole week here of the last storm we just had. So you can see from the chart that solar energy, which is yellow, basically disappears at night, of course. Then on Saturday, we had all that cloud cover, and again—or Sunday, cloud cover, too, from the snow. No generation. Wind power produced more on Friday—wind is the blue—but then it basically disappears on Saturday because the wind wasn't blowing.

So I highlight this chart not because I want to pick winners and losers among our energy sources. To the contrary, I believe all types of energy, all of this, including renewables, should be part of our energy mixture. But our country must have enough dispatchable baseload energy—that is from green on down—the type of reliable power that fossil fuels and nuclear provide, if we are going to stay warm in situations such as this during the depths of the winter.

The Biden administration, like the Obama administration before this, did everything possible to shut down our coal fleet. The Biden EPA had an entire strategy for pursuing multiple regulations, and I will just name a few of them: Clean Power Plan 2.0, ELG rules for powerplants, coal ash regulations, unachievable particulate matter rules, ozone rules, and the MATS rule—all to make it impossible to keep a coal plant open.

As the Wall Street Journal editorialized on Monday, coal is an especially valuable part of our grid during periods of peak winter demand because months of fuel can be stockpiled onsite at a plant—you see this all over West Virginia because we have not just the resource but the power generation from it—and can be used to supply more electricity when natural gas is also needed for residential heating.

On the oil and gas side, the Biden administration imposed a natural gas tax designed to make energy more expensive for consumers. The administration canceled the Keystone XL Pipeline and, working with their allies in State governments, stood in the way of pipelines that could move abundant natural gas produced in West Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Ohio to gas-starved areas in our Northeast and in our Southeast.

I was very proud of the bipartisan work that we did in passing the ADVANCE Act to make nuclear licensing more efficient, but even that overwhelmingly bipartisan bill took years longer to pass because of a handful of Democrat opponents.

So I am glad that we had sufficient dispatchable power to make it through the winter storm this week, but I am not convinced that we would have if we

had continued the Biden administration's radical opposition to the energy sources that people rely on to keep them warm in the winter and cool in the summer.

I appreciate President Trump, EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin, Energy Secretary Chris Wright, and others across the administration for their commonsense approach to regulation that allows us to keep producing and utilizing the energy resources that we need, especially during periods of peak demand.

Going forward, I will continue working with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to lock in commonsense permitting reform so that projects of all types, including sources of dispatchable baseload electricity, can be permitted through a fair and efficient process.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. President, I am going to switch gears here to another hat that I wear, and I want to talk about another topic—and that is the progress we have made in restoring a functioning appropriations process—and the critical importance of the work before us. But first, I would like to thank our Appropriations leaders Chair COLLINS and Vice Chair MURRAY, as well as Leader THUNE. I applaud them for their steadfast commitment to returning to regular order, and I am glad to see that our work has brought these bills to the Senate floor.

In particular, I am proud of the work we accomplished in a bipartisan fashion on my Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies bill. It is a big bill. I would like to thank all of my fellow committee members for their input. We received 12,000 total member requests for this bill.

As Senator BALDWIN and I begin our fourth year this year of working on this subcommittee together, I am pleased that we are once again able to bring forward a bipartisan bill that reflects targeted investments, disciplined decision making, and a shared commitment to meeting the needs of the American people.

The Labor-H bill allocates limited taxpayer resources to key bipartisan priorities, and it does so at a lower level than we did in fiscal year 2025. In fact, it decreases the base discretionary cost of the bill by \$3.2 billion compared to fiscal year 2025.

To achieve this, the bill reduces or eliminates funding for more than 40 programs and activities and realigns spending to reflect Republican values and priorities, while continuing to deliver on areas where agreements exist across the aisle.

The bill includes a number of Member priorities, such as greater investments in America's biomedical research, childcare, mental and rural health, workforce development, and continued efforts to combat the opioid epidemic.

As we work to rightsize the Federal Government, the bill also includes tar-

geted decreases in administrative funding while ensuring that our Agencies have appropriate staffing levels to carry out their statutory responsibilities.

We also preserve longstanding, consensus-driven policy provisions and reject the inclusion of any new controversial riders. That stability is really important, not only for our Agencies but for our families, our workers, and communities counting on the programs that we authorize.

A major priority in this bill is our sustained commitment to the National Institutes of Health. We provide funding for NIH to support lifesaving biomedical research, which touches us all, and research that makes Americans healthier. It strengthens our economy and pushes the boundaries of what is possible in medicine.

This investment includes targeted increases for research in critical areas such as Alzheimer's, diabetes, Parkinson's, women's health, maternal health, rare diseases, and cancer.

We also increase support for NIH's IDeA Program, which expands research capacity in 23 States, including my home State of West Virginia, and continues to be important for institutions like West Virginia University and Marshall University.

The bill strengthens our efforts to combat substance abuse—an issue that still continues to affect many families and communities across the country and my State most deeply. So we are supporting prevention, treatment, research, and recovery programs. If you look at the latest statistics, we are actually bringing the statistics down, but they are still way too high. We bolster support for rural healthcare programs. Rural America is tough to get healthcare affordable and accessible in some ways, but we are trying to increase access to care for more than 60 million Americans who live in rural areas.

Critically, we maintain important conservative policy riders, like the Hyde and Weldon amendments, ensuring the bill reflects longstanding bipartisan consensus.

The Labor-HHS bill focuses on our children from early childhood through postsecondary education, ensuring that they are prepared for the jobs of today and the jobs of tomorrow. This includes critical infrastructures to help American workers upskill and to advance in their careers. We include funding for apprenticeship grants to support the Trump administration's goal of creating 1 million active apprenticeships.

The bill is important to our country. But make no mistake, it is really important to my State of West Virginia, for our universities, our hospitals, dozens of nonprofits and workforce programs, treatments for our coal miners and those suffering from opioid addiction. All of these things help my fellow West Virginians. And I know this because I hear directly from them about it every single day. My driving force in

crafting this bill was to help meet those needs for my fellow Virginians, and I am proud to say this bill does just that.

Mr. President, as encouraging as this progress sounds, our work is not done. The American people expect Congress to fulfill its most basic responsibility: funding the government responsibly and on time. Every delay undermines confidence in our institution and forces our Agencies into wasteful, short-term planning cycles.

Completing this work is not about a partisan victory. It is about good government. It is about keeping our commitments. It is about demonstrating that Congress can function and can work together to deliver real results. That is why we must come together to pass this package. It ensures that the priorities that we carefully crafted, debated, and agreed to on a bipartisan and bicameral manner can actually be carried out.

So, once again, I want to thank Chair COLLINS for her leadership throughout this process. I encourage all my colleagues to vote positively on the entire package. We saw earlier, it didn't pass. But we still have negotiations moving so we can responsibly fund the government. This is what the American people sent us here to do.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas.

ANNIVERSARY OF FLIGHT 5342

Mr. MARSHALL. Mr. President, I rise today to mark a solemn anniversary, one that continues to weigh heavily on the hearts of Kansans and families across this great Nation.

It was a year ago today that flight 5342 left Wichita, KS, en route to Washington, DC. As we all know, it never reached its destination. Sixty-seven lives were lost, amongst them, seven Kansans. Certainly, families were changed forever.

Today, we pause to remember those lives and honor their memory and to stand with the loved ones who carry this burden every day. Kansans grieve together. When tragedy strikes, we don't do it alone. We lean on each other, we lean on our faith, and we lean on our communities.

Today, we just want to remember those who were lost, remembering these were Kansans. They were sons and daughters, husbands and wives, parents, friends, and coworkers. And many were simply doing what so many of us do every day: traveling for work, for family, or to return home.

The best way we can honor those we lost is by remembering them and learning from the tragedy. We tried to ensure there was full accountability since this tragic accident. We tried our best to ensure complete transparency, and then take a look to the future to see what we could do for the safety of future flights. And, certainly, we owe it to their families and to the memory of these loved ones to pursue these improvements and never forget why it matters.

I recall a phone call early the next morning from the mayor of Wichita, KS, Mayor Lily Wu. She asked me—and we have a good friendship. She said, “ROGER, what can I tell the people of Wichita so they know that it is safe to travel on this flight?”

And she pointed out this is the busiest runway in all of America. She asked me: Why was a military helicopter in that airspace?

So I picked up the phone and I asked our Secretary of Transportation and our Secretary of Defense that same question: Why would a helicopter be in that airspace?

At that moment—or shortly minutes after that, they grounded any helicopters from being in that airspace.

Then what did the Senate do? I am so proud of what my colleagues have done. Senator MORAN helped lead the charge on that—and many others. We passed the ROTOR Act out of the Senate, which would implement common-sense reforms to ensure a tragedy like this never happens again. I would hope that our colleagues on the House side would also pass this bill and we can get it to the President's desk.

Just in closing, here we are a year later, and we are here to remember, to honor, and try to figure out the best ways to move forward. But at the end of the day, we want the families of those back home to remember that we have not forgotten about their loved ones and that their lives did matter.

I think I would be remiss not to express gratitude to the first responders that we met that night out in the frigid cold, sacrificing their lives, diving into the chilly waters in hopes of finding someone whom they could save. Thanks to all of our first responders.

Finally, of course, we pray that God would continue to comfort the families who lost their loved ones.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

TENNESSEE

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. President, I would like to take a moment and express my gratitude for the Tennessee National Guard, the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency, our Governor, our electric power distributors, and our first responders, who are in every county, for working around the clock, as well as local elected officials. I thank everyone who has stepped up to help keep Tennesseans safe during this horrific storm, as it is truly one of the worst winter storms that has hit our State in decades.

At its peak, you had over 200,000 people in the Middle Tennessee area who were without any power. Days later, people are still waiting for that power to come back on. We are hearing from some people that they have been told it is going to be days or weeks before that power is restored, and we know that everyone is working as quickly as they can to restore this. We are grateful for the support that has come from surrounding States in order to help in ours.

We know people are really braving these downed powerlines, these hazardous roads, frozen pipes, and frigid temperatures. We have lost 13 individuals connected to the storm, and I am joining all Tennesseans in mourning their loss and in praying for their families. We also are focusing on making certain that roads are cleared, that water mains are repaired, and that power is restored.

I am continuing to get updates from mayors across our State and especially there in the mid-State, and I am so grateful for President Trump's swift approval of Governor Lee's emergency declaration request so that we can get our State the resources that we need.

As we recover, I encourage everyone to stay off the roads, to stay home, and to be mindful of all of the recovery crews that are out working and to stay safe.

ONLINE TICKETING PRACTICES

Mr. President, any American who has purchased tickets for a concert, a sporting event, or a show knows that online ticket-selling is broken. Scalpers are using AI-powered bots and software programs to scoop up hundreds and thousands of tickets at a time. They are forcing some events to sell out within just a minute or two of the window's opening for ticket purchase. With no other options, consumers are forced into the secondary, or resale, market, and scalpers are marking up ticket prices to extreme rates.

The consequences have been disastrous for the ticket-selling marketplace. In 2022, Ticketmaster's website crashed after scalpers used bots to purchase thousands of tickets for “Taylor Swift's Eras Tour,” reselling them by as much as 70 times the face value.

One of the scalpers involved in the fiasco is a U.S.-based company that is actually located in Maryland. It is called Key Investment Group. They purchase more than 375,000 event tickets over the course of a year. In the process, they clear millions of dollars in markup resale.

These scalpers add zero value to the ticket-selling market. Fans are extorted to go see their favorite singers, teams, and entertainers. Performers do not see a dime of the money that these bots and scalpers are skimming.

This practice is illegal. In 2016, I led the enactment of the Better Online Ticket Sales Act, or the BOTS Act, which prohibits ticket scalpers from using software to purchase high volumes of tickets. Yet, under the Biden administration, the FTC rarely enforced the law, and scalpers like Ticketmaster turned a blind eye and bypassed the safeguards to prevent mass ticket buying. In some cases, the company allegedly engaged in bait-and-switch schemes with scalpers to drive up the ticket price.

Live Nation, the company that owns Ticketmaster, even, allegedly, provided tech support for scalpers by helping them aggregate tickets purchased from multiple Ticketmaster accounts.

The reason is simple: If Live Nation enforced its ticket-purchasing limits, then Ticketmaster would lose \$220 million in resale revenue. But by working with the scalpers, it was able to collect fees at three different points in the purchase and resale process.

This extortion of the American people is inexcusable. That is why Republicans and the Trump administration are demanding accountability from ticket sellers and cracking down on the fraudsters.

In September, Senator LUJÁN and I sent a letter to Live Nation's president, demanding answers about his company's abusive practices.

Yesterday, I chaired a hearing for the Senate Commerce Subcommittee on Consumer Protection, Technology, and Data Privacy on live performance ticket sale practices. We had the opportunity to hear from Kid Rock, who explained how bot scalpers harm the entertainment industry. I also questioned a representative of Live Nation, who had no explanation for why his company is putting fraudsters ahead of hard-working Americans.

Thankfully, the FTC, under President Trump and Chairman Ferguson, have launched several enforcement actions under the BOTS Act, including against Live Nation, Ticketmaster, and scalpers like Key Investment Group. Unlike the Biden administration, the Trump administration is enforcing the BOTS Act, as it is intended, to hold accountable both ticketing platforms and scalpers.

In the entertainment industry, nothing is more important than the relationship between the performers and their fans. With the exploitive practices of these scalpers and Ticketmaster, bot-powered scalpers threaten that bond. Republicans are doing everything possible to hold these criminals to account.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MORENO). Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Colorado.

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

Mr. HICKENLOOPER. Mr. President, we like to believe that when democracy erodes, it is unpredictable and in some ways out of our control, but history tells us a different story. Authoritarianism rises through a time-tested playbook. These leaders have learned which moves weaken opponents, which tactics will rally a crowd, and which moments of fear or crisis work best to their advantage.

They don't need to invent new strategies. They can run familiar plays. There is one target we are watching this administration go after the hard-

est, and that is the truth. They begin by attacking every source of independent information. It started with universities and colleges. They moved on to our largest research institutions. They discredited or tried to discredit every journalist whose reporting differs from their own narrow point of view, and in doing so, they have tried to make the administration and the President the sole source of truth.

We have seen this play out in Minneapolis during the past few weeks. So let's get a few facts straight.

On January 7, ICE officers shot and killed Renee Good while she was in her own car. She was a mother of three, originally from Colorado Springs. Then, again, this past weekend, Americans watched the videotape of Federal immigration agents shooting and killing Alex Pretti. They fired 10 times in 5 seconds.

It is sickening. No family should have to witness their loved one being killed in such a fashion, and yet, obviously, Alex's parents did.

His parents live in Colorado. I connected with them earlier this week. Among other things, they wanted to make sure that we do everything we can to make sure that Alex's name is out front, that we keep their son's story alive to make sure that his life wasn't lost in vain. They have asked for truth and accountability. What they are getting—what all of us are getting—are excuses and lies—lies about their son. The reality of who Alex Pretti was doesn't fit the administration's playbook, so they are filling the airwaves with lies, repeating them over and over and over to try to somehow get them to stick.

DHS Secretary Noem, within hours of Pretti's death, said:

It looks like a situation where an individual arrived on the scene to inflict maximum violence . . . and kill law enforcement.

Next, it was Greg Bovino, Trump's now-fired Border Patrol commander, saying that Pretti intended "to massacre law enforcement" and that he "violently resisted."

Stephen Miller called Alex Pretti a domestic terrorist, with Vice President VANCE and President Trump promoting that sentiment and that blatant lie from their pulpits.

By this point, we have all seen that video from multiple angles. We have seen it with our own eyes. Alex was not a terrorist. He was in no way an assassin. He was a U.S. citizen exercising his First Amendment right to protest ICE's lawlessness.

This week, families in Eagle County, CO, experienced another type of cruelty that fits into this administration's playbook. They found "death cards" left in the automobiles of their family members who were taken away by ICE agents. These cards—I hold one up here—have a history of being used by White supremacist groups to intimidate people of color. Death cards is what they call them. These cards found

in Colorado had the address and phone number of the Aurora ICE detention facility printed on them. Aurora is a neighboring city to Denver.

Now, imagine just for a second that you haven't heard from your brother, your sister, and when you finally find their empty, abandoned car, it has one of these death cards sitting in the driver's seat. I mean, this is cruelty for the sake of cruelty, and it fits into the troubling pattern that we are seeing coming from some of the top officials in the White House.

This morning, I voted against a government funding that would have handed billions of dollars to DHS. Continuing to fund ICE while Federal officers terrorize our cities and kill people is unconscionable. We need to stop ICE officers beating Americans, killing Americans, arresting Americans without due process, taking away the civil rights of Americans.

The overhaul of ICE that we are demanding is common sense. The fact is that these are all basic standards of local law enforcement, who go after violent criminals, gangsters—in many ways, the worst of the worst. These are standards that those local police officers already follow.

ICE needs, first, to take their masks off. They need to turn on body cameras. They need to be clearly identified. There can be no accountability without transparency.

No more unmarked vans and masked agents pulling people over and pulling people away and arresting them to wherever. No more roving patrols. ICE needs to have judicial warrants signed by a judge. They need to stop arresting children on the side of the road and end these cruel family separation policies.

Secretary Noem—what she said, I think, is untenable and unacceptable, and I think she needs to resign. But let's be clear. ICE is carrying out the policies of our President, so just changing leadership at ICE or DHS is not going to be sufficient. We have to fundamentally overhaul the lawlessness of these organizations.

This administration is asking us to ignore what we can see with our own eyes. They get us to a point where we mistrust so many sources of information, and they force us to rely on believing what we see. They are asking us to believe lies about Alex and about Renee, about what is happening in Minneapolis, but we watched the videos. We saw those videos.

Those words matter—"we watched," "we saw"—because they acknowledge a larger truth that binds us all together. We saw what happened. We saw what happened. We saw the cruelty, and we saw and understand that it needs to end.

Asking us to make peace with that cruelty is asking us to ignore the values that make us Americans. It is telling us to believe that somehow we owe nothing to each other—not to our neighbors, not to our community, not to our country. We will not. We know

the truth, and we are not going to look away.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BUDD). The Senator from Oklahoma.

NATIONAL SCHOOL CHOICE WEEK

Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. President, this body disagrees on a lot of things—a lot. But we should have at least one thing we can agree on. It is pretty simple. Kids are different.

You get three kids in a room and all three of those kids are very, very different. I know. I have two daughters, and they are different. I love them both deeply, but they are very different. I find that in a lot of different families.

Students and kids are different. One kid likes football. One kid likes baseball. Another kid doesn't like any sports at all. One likes the band. One likes choir. One likes drama. One doesn't like any clubs at all. One is in Latin club and another is in chess club and the other thinks chess club is dorky. You know why? Because people are different.

That seems normal for us to be able to think about that most basic thing, that not everyone is the same and not everyone chooses the same things that they like or has the same needs. But sometimes when we get into school, we will say: Oh, but they all need to go to the same school. I just disagree.

In America this week—this is actually School Choice Week. Some people may or may not even track that. That is fine. There is a week designated for everything across the country. But in Oklahoma, we really prioritize the ability for every family to be able to make their own choices for education for their kids. We have strong homeschooling. We have strong private schools. We have strong public charter schools. And we have public education. All of them are important to us, and all of them provide different options for families. Now, we have still got a long way to go in education in Oklahoma, but we are investing more and more and more into education. And I am proud of our State legislators prioritizing—in this coming session—reading for early childhood education and to make sure that we are doing the things that we need to do to improve our public education.

In the meantime, we want to continue to provide options to every single family and to every single kid to be able to make sure that the best education environment is out there for that particular child because we want every child to be able to thrive in America. We want every child to be able to have the opportunities that they need to be able to be successful in the days ahead, and that starts with a great education.

Quite frankly, some of our districts are doing not as well as others. Some are doing great, and some are struggling. I don't want a single family in my State, though, to have to think: My kids have to go to a certain school because of the ZIP Code that I live in and

that is the only option. Quite frankly, I don't even want for families to say, "Every one of my kids has to go to the same school," because sometimes it just doesn't work the same.

Now, I have heard some folks that are very passionate about public education, which, by the way, I am too. My mom was a lifelong public school educator. My degree was in secondary education. My family is very, very involved in education, and I am very passionate about public education. I think it is vitally important that we do it and that we do it very, very well. But I want to make it very clear for all of the folks whom I meet who say: If you will just give us a couple more years, this will improve. Give us a couple more dollars and a couple more semesters and this will get better for this particular school. I want to remind them that the kid growing up next to that school doesn't have a couple more years. It has to be right now for them. They can't wait until things get better. They only have today. So that is why school choice is so incredibly important, that every family and that every kid has the options to be able to get a better education or to get an education that exactly fits them best. That works better.

This past July, we passed the historic Working Families Tax Cuts Act. In that act, we did a lot of investment in education.

We expanded the 529 savings account to allow more parents to be able to set aside funding for private education if they choose to do that and put that in their 529 so it can grow tax-free.

We invested more into Pell grants and expanded the growth of Pell grants.

Now, you might say: Why does that matter for K through 12?

Well, Pell grants have been really targeted towards institutions that do what is called terminal degrees. So, if you are a kid in poverty and you want to get a degree in philosophy, we would help you do that. But if you are a kid in poverty and you want to get a certification in welding or in plumbing or in carpentry or as a truckdriver, we would say: You are on your own. Well, what in the world? For years, we have been fighting this to be able to say: If we are going to help somebody, give them more options than just a 4-year degree. If they want to do certification programs to be able to get into a vocation faster, why wouldn't we help them do that to be able to rise out of poverty? We fixed that in the Working Families Tax Cuts Act to expand the use of Pell grants so that more individuals who are in poverty can get access to education that helps them get a job even faster.

We actually reversed some changes that were done in the FAFSA. I am not even going into all of the issues of the FAFSA and for getting into higher education, but it actually blocked out kids from agricultural families because of the land and the equipment that

they owned. They may be land rich, but they are often cash poor, and they were still blocked out of getting Federal assistance and getting a higher education. We finally fixed that, and there are a lot of other areas we fixed.

We also set up a new program where individuals could actually give to school choice for other families they will probably never ever meet. It is to help them in the days ahead be able to have an option for private education when they couldn't get there.

I have folks who catch me on this occasionally and will say: You talk about school choice all the time and the different options for families. Do you just hate public education or why is this such a big deal to you?

I smile at them and remind them of my mom and of my own past and that I am very, very passionate about public education and that we need to make sure we are investing in doing that well. But if I have a quiet moment with folks when they say to me, "Why do you care so much about school choice?" I will tell them there are two reasons. One is that my State cares about this a lot. Our homeschool programs and our programs for private education are thriving, and we have great public charter schools. We have a lot of great districts around, but in many of our districts, according to our State law—even in our public education in Oklahoma—you can choose from one district to another district even if you don't live in that ZIP Code for that district so that you even get school choice in Oklahoma even in public education. It is a big deal to us, but it is a big deal to me personally because I have personally experienced it.

You see, my mom—a single mom, a public school educator—did not make much. There was a time when I was in elementary school, and so was my brother, that education was not working for us. So my single mom sacrificed everything for my brother and me to go to private school. I went to private school for 2 years, and then she ran out of money. My brother continued on for a while, but I went back into public school, which there is no complaint there, but I watched, even in my own family, my mom say: I wish we had different options. As a public school educator and a single mom, she made the hard call to say: I have got to figure out a better place because my kids will only get one shot at education, and it has got to count.

I could not tell you how grateful I am for my mom and the sacrifices that she made for my brother and me because it made all the difference for us, but it is because she made a choice, where you would have looked at her and said she had no choice. She figured it out. We all sacrificed a lot, but education was just that important to her.

I don't want that to just be for my family. I want that option for every family. I want the option for every kid to have the opportunity to get the best possible education for who they are, because my brother and I—I love him—

but we could not be more different because we are two different kids, which is just like a lot of other families. So please don't say every kid has to do education exactly the same way when we all know every kid is different.

Why don't we give families the option to choose what is the best education environment for that particular kid and to allow them to thrive in the days ahead? I think that is better for kids—to allow them to have a choice—and for every family to get that choice as well.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida.

Mrs. MOODY. Mr. President, as you may know, we are recognizing National School Choice Week, and I thank my colleague for organizing those of us who believe dearly in educational options for children to come to the floor and speak about what we have accomplished and what we hope to accomplish on behalf of America's kids.

As you may know, in addition to being a U.S. Senator, I am also a mom of a kid in school who has gone to many different kinds of schools over the course of his educational career, and I am honored to serve as a cohost this week with the chairman of the HELP Committee Senator CASSIDY, as well as my friend Senator TIM SCOTT to represent the long strides that my home State of Florida has taken to make us the best State, I believe, in the Nation for educational freedom.

This did not happen overnight. It took decades of thoughtful policymaking and implementation and tweaks along the way, and we are still working to get it right. But I wanted to show up here today and tell my colleagues about how Florida has set its kids on paths to success by thinking outside the one-size-fits-all approach for education. That has happened from tireless work from parents, from advocates, and a State government that has transformed Florida from a State with poor performance across the board to a leader nationwide in education.

We went from having graduation rates at just 60 percent, with less than 1 percent of K through 12 students attending a public charter school, and fewer than 10 students in the State receiving a K through 12 scholarship in 1999. I will say that again: a 60-percent graduation rate. In the decades that have followed—today, I am proud to say Florida now has a graduation rate of 92 percent of its kids graduating on time. That coincides with when we really started pushing educational options for our kids, beginning with Governor Bush right up until our current Governor Ron DeSantis, who got to make this great announcement. We were one of the first States, a few years ago, to adopt universal school choice. Close to 1 in 8 of our students now attends a public charter school—a public charter school—and more than 450,000 students receive some form of K through 12 scholarship, including the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship.

For our children in Florida, school choice has been an invaluable tool for success no matter their background, their means, or what ZIP Code they live in. It is these accomplishments in Florida that drive me now as a U.S. Senator to ensure that all of America's kids can prosper.

I have been a proud champion of the Education Freedom Tax Credit, which is now, I am proud to say, signed into law. Not only do Florida kids have access to all of the options that we have provided to them through State law, but they now have access to supplemental resources that were provided through the Education Freedom Tax Credit. I thank my colleagues, and I thank the President for supporting this measure as, now, 2 million children across the Nation will be able to seek the schooling that best fits their needs. This is another way that we are empowering parents: by supporting educational freedom across the country.

As we wrap up National School Choice Week, we must remember and keep advocating publicly because there are some States that have the opportunity to opt in but refuse to do so, and that breaks my heart for the many kids who could benefit from what is available to them through educational choice. We must continue to remind the rest of America about the success we have seen in States that have embraced educational alternatives and have seen what it means when you place an emphasis on individual school needs and student needs, not ZIP Codes or economic means.

The individual needs of students and the individual circumstances of students should drive their opportunities for success. The possibilities are endless when we do away with that one-size-fits-all approach and empower parents to choose what best fits their individual child. That is why I commit to continuing to advocate for school choice—so that all of America's kids see the same opportunities that we have been able to offer to the children of Florida.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Colorado.

TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

Mr. BENNET. Mr. President, for many months, the Trump administration has unleashed a campaign of fear across American cities, deploying thousands of immigration agents onto our streets and into our neighborhoods in an effort to terrorize and punish communities.

In Chicago, Portland, Los Angeles, and most recently Minneapolis, we have watched masked Federal agents in unmarked cars snatch people from the street, destroy private property, and leave others bloodied on the side of the road.

We have witnessed an approach to internal immigration enforcement that no President in our history has pursued, that no President would ever have conceived because of how fun-

damentally it violates our principles and the rule of law.

We have witnessed children separated from their parents—a 5-year-old detained by armed agents in Minnesota—people pulled from their cars, their engines still running.

All us have read reports of people grabbed off the sidewalk and abandoned hours later, miles away.

Every step along the way, Donald Trump's immigration troops have escalated tension on our streets with total disregard for the rule of law, basic safety, and their own accountability.

These events would be terrible enough, but even as communities across the country have struggled to pick up the pieces left in their wake, we have been forced to contend with another injustice: an administration that has tried to convince us time and time again that what we have seen with our own eyes is not the truth, that somehow the opposite has taken place, that reports and testimony contradicting the administration's position are simply political propaganda.

Over and over again, DHS Secretary Kristi Noem and others in the administration have lied to the American people and to Congress about what we are all seeing in plain sight. Now they are lying to justify the murder of Alex Pretti.

Right after the shooting of Alex Pretti in the street, Noem went on national television and told us that Alex was "brandishing" a firearm, "impeding" the law enforcement officers and attacking them, and that he acted "violently" or "reacted violently" when officers attempted to disarm him. She insisted that "an agent fired defensive shots" and that it appeared that this was "a situation where an individual arrived at the scene to inflict maximum damage on individuals and kill law enforcement."

Stephen Miller, who works at the White House, called Alex a domestic terrorist and a would-be assassin. Vice President JD VANCE amplified these statements.

Gregory Bovino, a senior Border Patrol official who is serving as "commander at large," maintained that Alex had intended to "massacre" law enforcement agents. At a press conference, Bovino turned the facts completely upside down, insisting that the victims of Saturday's violence were the Border Patrol agents that were there.

Bovino, by the way, has served as the face of the administration's operations as they have swept through America's cities—in Chicago, in Charlotte, in New Orleans and then Minneapolis.

The American people deserve to know the truth, and Alex Pretti and his family deserve to have the truth told about him and what he did.

Thanks to a number of courageous bystanders at the scene, we know what happened that day, and we know that everything that Noem and Miller and others have said has been lies. The truth is that Alex put himself between

Federal agents and a woman they were shoving in the street. He had been filming Border Patrol agents detaining someone else on the side of the road when he went to help this woman. The officers responded by pepper-spraying him and wrestling him to the ground, where he was quickly surrounded by a group of seven agents. They struck him repeatedly with the pepper spray canister while he lay in the street. One officer took away his gun—a gun that had remained holstered and that Alex was legally allowed to carry. Then, disarmed and incapacitated, they shot him in his back. They shot him at least 10 times within 5 seconds.

Alex Pretti was killed by his own government, and then his government immediately began to lie about him and what had happened. He did not attack the agents. He did not threaten them. And at no point did he pull a gun. In the video of that horrific scene, it is clear that an agent disarmed him before any shots were fired. Multiple agents held him to the ground. Three of them beat him.

No reasonable person would have believed he posed any threat to the agents or anyone else at the scene, but the agents still shot him. They shot him 10 times.

(Mr. HUSTED assumed the Chair.)

In the days since his murder, we have learned a lot more about Alex from those who knew him and loved him. Alex was a dedicated ICU nurse at the Veterans Affairs hospital in Minneapolis. His colleagues described him there as helpful and kind and that he was uniquely capable of handling things with integrity and with grace.

His high school classmates remember him as a role model. They recalled him being a really good friend and a really good man.

Alex loved his country, and, like many of us, he was deeply concerned about the Trump administration's actions and the devastating effects they are having on our democracy.

It is true that he had very strong feelings about the presence of ICE on his city streets, but the day he was killed, Alex was exercising his First Amendment rights to peacefully protest and document the actions of Federal agents as they threatened his community.

Alex's parents, Michael and Susan, live in Colorado. They want the world to know the truth about what happened that day and the truth about the kind of person their son really was.

They told the world that Alex wanted to make a difference in the world. His patients and colleagues, friends and family testified to the fact that he did, and it is another tragedy that he will no longer be able to continue to do so.

But Alex's murder is only the most recent outrage we have been subjected to by a reckless and out-of-control DHS. On January 7, Federal agents shot and killed Renee Good in Minneapolis. Renee was a mother of three and a native of Colorado Springs. The

next day, Federal agents shot and wounded two people in Portland. A week later, Federal agents shot and wounded another man, again, in Minneapolis.

It is worth remembering that these are just a few of the instances that have occurred in broad daylight and in public spaces, where bystanders have been there to witness these brutal activities firsthand and managed to capture video of what happened.

But if this is what is happening out in the open, it is hard to imagine what is happening behind closed doors.

Last year, 32 people died in ICE custody. That is the most in over 20 years. Given the total lack of transparency and accountability that we have seen from ICE, we can't be sure what has happened to these people. There have been reports about sexual abuse of detainees. There are disputed facts over deaths that occurred in ICE custody.

People in ICE facilities have reportedly been forced to ration food. They often go days or weeks without their prescription medicines or access to medical care.

Overcrowded detention facilities leave the lights on 24-7, and families report extreme violence and intimidation by guards.

These stories are consistent for people held in detention across the country, including in the detention facility in Aurora, CO. But the administration has lied about all of them.

President Trump has claimed that Renee Good was a "professional agitator," that she was "very disorderly, obstructing and resisting, then violently, willfully, and viciously ran over the ICE officer."

Noem described Good's efforts to leave the scene peacefully as "an act of domestic terrorism." Her Department issued a statement saying that "violent" rioter had "weaponized her vehicle."

In October, Noem and her Department lied when she said no U.S. citizens had been arrested, detained, or deported.

In November, Federal Judge Sara Ellis described Gregory Bovino as "evasive," "not credible," and declared that he was "outright lying" when questioned under oath.

A consistent pattern of lies corrodes American's faith in our government, which is already stretched dangerously thin. It strikes at the core of our constitutional system, which requires at least some basic level, some basic fidelity to facts in the conduct of our public affairs and our public discourse.

When the Secretary of Homeland Security appears on television to insist repeatedly on her preferred version of events, she is not just offering another lie that must be rebutted; she is insisting that there could never be a truth that actually mattered to the American people or to our sense of public safety or to our exercise in self-government.

And that is what is at stake here. If we allow this to continue, we risk fall-

ing into a degraded version of political debate when there are so many lies and so many contested facts, that the American people regard any claim with exhausted cynicism and suspicion. And if we go too far down that path—and we are headed a long way down it right now—the only guaranteed outcome will be greater contempt felt by Americans for their government and for the political process.

They will withdraw from public life, and the possibility for genuine political disagreement—in other words, a debate over what to do in the face of facts, rather than over the facts themselves, or unwilling to even have a discussion about it because of our permanent partisan division—will be erased.

Every one of us has a responsibility at a moment like this, and we know from American history that, in some ways, the most significant resistance in moments like this comes from the public itself. It comes from the people of this country. I could see that on the steps and the grounds of the State capitol in Colorado, last weekend, when thousands of Coloradans were there to rally, not just for themselves but for their fellow citizens in Minnesota and across our country.

I think, when times are tough, we often have a tendency to think that we are living in uniquely bad times. But I believe that way of thinking almost always does a disservice to the people who have come before us, who took on even tougher battles with longer odds and who, while they were doing that and because they were doing that, bequeathed to us their own legacy of resistance and the possibility of change, no matter how hard it seemed. And I think we should look to those battles for inspiration in our time.

It is important for us to tell our kids about those battles, to make sure they understood what those fights actually looked like and how hopeless, at times, those fights seemed to the people that were waging them.

When I was growing up—and I know this is true for many of my colleagues who are here—the moral character of this country was defined by the civil rights movement, the struggle against segregation, and the fight for equality. This fight, this battle—the effort to demolish centuries of legalized discrimination and disenfranchisement—never was going to be easy, and many believed that it was nearly impossible. And there were others who believed that it shouldn't have been fought to begin with. And, I would say, to this day, we have a long, long way to go.

The structure of Jim Crow, of the poll tax, of separate and worse schoolrooms and hospital wards and lunch counters had been built up over generations. State laws had established these exclusionary practices. State officials enforced them, and State courts upheld them.

There was no guarantee that they would ever come crashing down, but they did because the leaders of the civil

rights movement and ordinary citizens in the streets and in America's pulpits, and reporters and journalists sent their reports on the demonstrations. And the conditions of real life in the South of this country made it impossible to ignore the facts.

It was harder then than it is in our own time just to turn the channel and imagine that that alternate reality didn't actually exist. For people in that country, with the broadcasters—ABC and CBS and NBC—it was impossible for the public to ignore what was right before their eyes.

The success of that generation of brave Americans was achieved because they forced a broad swath of this country, a majority of this country, to finally see what they would have preferred to be blind to—the reality of segregation and the subordination of their fellow citizens under law.

It is a story of moral reckoning and of citizen action. It is a story of street protests and police brutality and political vacillation, but it is also a story of American renewal, of our ability to author our own history, to continue the endless founding and refounding of this country as generations of Americans lay claim to it and shape it.

I don't believe that we have lost that ability. I don't believe that we have lost that ambition. I don't believe that people in Colorado and Minnesota and all across this country have given up on the promise offered by America, a promise that can only be given and kept to each other.

As Alex Pretti said himself when honoring a veteran who died in his care, "today we remember that freedom is not free. We have to work at it, nurture it, protect it, and even sacrifice for it.

In the end, it is also not enough for there to be just public expressions of disapproval. We actually have to change the laws.

Part of our job here as Senators is to uphold the ideals that Alex and so many others in Minnesota and across Colorado and across the country believe in and are fighting for. And it is our job here in the Senate to provide a check on an Executive that our Founders knew was always susceptible to the temptations of unlimited power. That was their concern about a unitary Executive, the President of the United States.

And this week we have an opportunity to be that check. We have an opportunity to change the law.

The Senate is considering a number of bills to fund the government, including one that provides over \$10 billion to the varied Departments responsible for the murder of Alex Pretti and the chaos we are seeing in communities across the country.

It would be unconscionable for us to pass this bill without amending how ICE or the Border Patrol operate at all.

In fact, we should use this as an opportunity to do it. What better opportunity will there be?

As written, the Homeland appropriations bill provides no real accountability, no oversight, no guardrails or transparency. It offers no guarantee at all that what happened to Alex Pretti won't happen again.

That is all the more absurd because Republicans gave the Department of Homeland Security an additional \$190 billion on top of the regular annual appropriations. Think about that—190 billion additional dollars on top of the annual appropriations last year as part of their Big Beautiful Bill that they passed on a partisan vote. And this funding, I can assure you, came with no accountability or oversight at all.

In the midst of all this, it would be a profound abdication of our responsibility as Senators to entertain the idea of providing more funding to the Department unless serious reforms are put in place. I think these reforms are common sense that you would want for any law enforcement agency operating in America but especially when it comes to a Federal Agency operating in some sense now as the President's internal army.

I think the least we could ask is that children are no longer detained or stripped from their families. Who wants to come to this floor and debate the opposite of that point?

Immigration officers should take off their masks and provide clear identification.

There is no doubt in my mind that the minute we get through this fraught political moment in America, there will be a broad consensus—in fact, I think there is one now—that ICE shouldn't be separating children from their families; that law enforcement agents shouldn't be wearing masks; that they should use body cameras consistently with any immigration enforcement activities; that ICE stay away from sensitive areas like schools and hospitals and places of worship; and, consistent with our responsibility, our duty to provide a check, to provide our own oversight, that Members of Congress have full access to immigration detention facilities.

Those are reforms that do not today define the way ICE does its work—they do define the way a lot of our local law enforcement does its work—but I think they reflect a massive consensus in the country about what would fix the challenges we are facing. It would at least be a basic start in the right direction.

In my view—you might disagree, but in my view, President Trump would be doing himself and the country a favor if he removed Kristi Noem from her position and prevented her from doing any more harm to this country and to our communities and if he removed DHS agents from Minnesota and other cities across our country.

I would say to all of my colleagues here, Republicans and Democrats, that we cannot simply accept a promise of change or action or reform from this administration, which has spent months lying to Congress and the

American people with a straight face. There is no world where we can sit back and assume that the President and his team are going to be persuaded to do anything—anything—unless we write it into law. Even then, we have no guarantee, of course, that this administration won't just break the law as soon as it is written. That has been our experience in Colorado. But at least putting this into statute would be a better pathway for holding Noem and Miller and others accountable for the bloodshed and chaos we are seeing in our streets.

After that, I think we could have serious conversations about passing a funding bill. Until then, we can't allow this legislation to go forward.

Our children and future generations have a reasonable expectation that their elected officials will do everything in their power to keep them safe and to provide the plain facts as they are.

As legislators, it is our responsibility to stand up to an executive branch that is unleashing mayhem in our streets and gunning down American citizens while insisting that the public should not believe what they have seen and what they have heard or that it is unpatriotic all of a sudden to disagree with the President's version of events.

We have seen this story before. There is nothing new under the Sun. We know the dark path this can lead us down. But we have also seen the courage that was demonstrated by the generations of Americans who have come before us, who have disagreed in this Chamber, who have disagreed with each other, but who ultimately have rejected injustice, particularly when it was directed from the highest levels of government.

One of these people was a hero of mine, it won't surprise anybody here to know, and it was Colorado's former Governor Ralph Carr, who spoke out against Japanese internment when most politicians in the West and in this country were staying silent.

Addressing a crowd one day on the Eastern Plains of Colorado, Governor Carr said:

I am talking to . . . all American people whether their status be white, brown, or black . . . when I say that if a majority may deprive a minority of their freedom, contrary to the terms of the Constitution today, then you as a minority may be subjected to the same ill-will of the majority tomorrow.

What happened to Alex Pretti and the lies that followed were an assault on every one of us, on all of our children, on our sense of dignity and our innate understanding of right and wrong.

Now is the time for my colleagues to come together and demand that we reassert these principles and demand the return of safety and security and sanity to our government rather than the chaos and destruction we have recently seen. It is what all Americans expect, and it is what our country deserves.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

(Mrs. MOODY assumed the Chair.)

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. McCORMICK). Without objection, it is so ordered.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. LEE. Mr. President, I have come to the floor today, once again, to raise objections—in fact, deep concerns—about something known as congressionally directed spending, but the more colloquial term for what I am describing is “earmarks.” Specifically, I want to talk about the inclusion of earmarks—a lot of them—about \$5 billion worth in this particular package of bills.

The government-directed micro-management of any large, complex economy never works. By “never,” I mean literally never. Never in the history of human beings has this worked or has it ended well except for a small handful who grow richer and more powerful every time government attempts it. Very often, it is undertaken with an eye toward a populous objective, one that is supposed to elevate the poor, but it, in the end, has quite the opposite effect. A reverse Robin Hood world then develops, one in which those who are already wealthy and already powerful become more so and everyone else suffers. It has been attempted time after time in this country and in other countries all over the world, in many different eras, and it literally never works.

It is like the game Mouse Trap. If you ever played Mouse Trap as a kid, you know the experience that I am talking about. In the game of Mouse Trap, you would set up this elaborate system of marbles, and they would go down a little tunnel and a little ditch, and they would turn a wheel and ring a bell at the end of it. The game never worked. Mouse Trap never works. Earmarks never work—neither does socialism, neither does the progressive nightmare that we have been living in for a long time—nursing it along—pretending that somehow, this time, it will turn out differently. It will not.

Our former colleague and dear friend of mine, the late Senator Tom Coburn from Oklahoma—a dedicated fiscal conservative and a fierce, stalwart opponent of earmarks—once said, “Earmarks are the gateway drug to spending addiction.” His words were prescient, and they remain as truthful today as ever.

Earmarks are, by their very nature, corrupting—corrupting of the process—perhaps not in a legally cognizable way, but they are corrupting, nonetheless, of the process. They allow for special interests to exert greater influence in our politics and steer Federal taxpayer dollars to pet projects in individual States or specific congressional

districts often to benefit a particular business enterprise, nonprofit, or someone else. They fund projects that, as worthy or unworthy as they might be—and there is a broad spectrum of earmark beneficiaries that can be found at every point along a continuum of worthiness in the abstract, or unworthy. But they have got certain things in common, and one of those is that they often shouldn’t be funded by government at all. And for those that ought to be funded by the government, many of them shouldn’t be funded by this government—this government, which is a government of limited, enumerated power, something that we fail most of the time to even acknowledge anymore, much less respect.

Remember, James Madison described, at the dawn of our Republic, as our Constitution had been proposed but not yet ratified—and during the ratification debates, he penned so many of the Federalist Papers. And in Federalist 45, he wrote that the powers of the Federal Government are “few and defined” and those reserved to the States are “numerous and indefinite.”

The “few and defined” powers really are that. As much as we sometimes like to pretend otherwise, we are in charge of just a few basic responsibilities where we have exclusive domain within our system of government, where our power trumps State and local power. But those areas really are limited, you see, because our Founding Fathers understood a very simple truth, which is that the risk of corruption grows larger and the difficulty of overcoming corruption becomes more distant, more remote, more tenuous the higher the level of government you go. They understood that problems arising in a government are much more difficult to eradicate in a larger, more national government, and that is why they very carefully—almost religiously—reserved most of the power to be exercised at the State and local level.

But they carved out exceptions. What are those exceptions? Well, the most notable and obvious among them are national defense, weights and measures, trademarks, copyrights and patents, postal roads, regulating the interstate, and foreign trade or commerce. And there are a few others, but that is the gist of it. There is no general power in there. There is no power in there, for example, to say: Let’s make sure we have good schools. Let’s make sure everybody is happy. Let’s make sure that a good idea gets funded.

No, those things don’t exist in there. That is a figment of our imagination. For the first 150 years of our Republic when operating under the Constitution, we respected those limits and those boundaries. It started to change during the New Deal era in the 1930s where Congress and the executive branch and the judicial branch undertook a sort of collusive pattern of behavior to sideline principles that had fostered the development of the greatest civilization

the world had ever known and ushered in one of the greatest, most prolonged eras of more or less continuous peacetime economic expansion.

And they just said: Oh, those rules that have worked here in the past that are still the law, were still the law in the 1930s, and remain the law today, we are going to set those aside. We are going to make them malleable. We are going to decide that they can mean whatever we want them to mean.

But, Mr. President, as Mark Twain is quoted as having said: If you name the tail of a dog a leg and you ask how many legs does the dog have, what is the answer? Well, it is still four legs. The tail of a dog is still a tail and is not a leg, even if you call it a leg.

We have called these things Federal powers, many of them since the 1930s, or at least looked the other way, with the Supreme Court also looking the other way since the 1930s, but it doesn’t mean that these are appropriate activities for the Federal Government to engage in.

Now, what does this have to do with earmark spending? Everything. Because when we earmark spend, almost every time—not always, but almost every time—it is dealing with something that is at the far frontiers of what is even debatably connected to something that is debatably connected to an enumerated Federal power.

We have steered so far away from where we are supposed to be acting, we have forgotten why we are here. And as is the case when raising kids, especially when they get to be teenagers, you get into trouble when you stop doing the things that you are supposed to be doing. And when you start doing things that you are not supposed to be doing, you forget the things that you are supposed to be doing, and you don’t do them very well.

We see that today, here, in this bill package right now, where we are being asked to jettison funding for a Department that includes, among other things, the enforcement of our immigration laws and the enforcement of our borders, something that has been severely compromised in the last few years and that President Trump is working hard to overcome. We are being asked to jettison that portion of the bill and replace it with a 2-week substitute, a 2-week temporary continuing resolution.

What does this have to do with earmarks? Everything. It has everything to do with it because, as we are not doing that, we are focusing on a whole bunch of stuff that we have no business doing, no business funding. And the way in which we are funding it is itself corrupting and corrosive of our process.

Any process that is designed to maintain sanity, fiscal responsibility, it is designed to maintain limited government with limited enumerated powers, we have thrown it all to the wind. The consequences have been disastrous. We are \$38.5 trillion in debt, and we are

adding to that debt at a staggering rate, close to \$2 trillion a year, with no end in sight. Now, I can already hear the apologists of earmarks, the earmark brigade we will call them, saying: Well, earmarks are just a tiny, tiny percentage of overall spending.

That is true. They are. The same way that when you look at a locomotive, something that might stretch, I don't know, a half mile or a mile, the engine car of the mile-long locomotive is a tiny, tiny piece of the train, but it is what is driving the train. That is what earmarks do. They drive excessive Federal spending; they facilitate \$2 trillion annual deficits; and they drive us into this awful downward spiral that leads us to a very dark place.

Now, at a time like this when American families around the country are working hard and the comeback is still just getting started, Congress really does need to remember its role as the steward of tax dollars. And to be a good steward of tax dollars, it has got to recognize some limit around its authority, but it doesn't do that. Its earmarks facilitate our further drift away from that standard.

We should consider earmark spending in the context of our \$38.5 trillion debt, but we are adding to it at a rate of nearly \$2 trillion a year. And our debt itself is a percentage of the economy—and you have to remember, it is at an alltime high. It is not just that the nominal debt, that the number is higher than it has ever been. It is true. We have never had a \$38.5 trillion debt. But adjusted by every conceivable measure, whether you look at it in inflation-adjusted dollars, whether you look at it as a percentage of the economy, it is at an alltime high.

Now, fortunately, President Trump and many Senate Republicans have worked hard in an effort to root out wasteful spending and decrease the likelihood of a debt crisis or inflation or both. Remember the excitement when, about a year ago, first—a little over a year ago, as we were preparing for the new administration and the new Senate Republican majority to kick in and the new House of Representatives to continue under Republican control, there was a lot of enthusiasm over it with President Trump and Elon Musk kick-starting the DOGE process? You saw every Republican in Congress, and really in both Chambers, champing at the bit to be part of the DOGE movement. It was cool. It was hip. It was happening. It was the energy that this town needed. Everybody was excited about it. Everybody wanted to be part of the DOGE process. And then all of a sudden, they lost interest in it. Within just a few months, it has faded. And that is really, really sad.

But fast-forward to now, and there is still a lot of good things that we could and should be doing. In fact, just days ago, President Trump announced his appointment of a new Department of Justice official who will focus specifically on efforts to root out the fraud

and abuse of American taxpayer dollars. That is a good thing. That is a natural outgrowth of the DOGE effort. It is a natural outgrowth of President Trump's desire to make America great again. This is an important project, and I hope and expect that it will succeed.

Yet sometimes I think that, while we draw near to the concept, to the idea, to the suggestion of being more efficient, of being more careful as stewards of the people's hard-earned money, we draw near to these concepts with our lips, but we show through our actions that our hearts are far from it. Democrats are continuing to push for more spending, more earmarks, and more government. That is not the path to prosperity.

As I have said before, earmarks don't just promote reckless spending; they are reckless spending. The process itself, when in the hands of fallible, mortal human beings, is itself naturally corrupting. They naturally do lead to and contribute to but fundamentally are reckless spending.

Now, according to the Congressional Research Service, from 1944 to 2011, there was a 282-percent increase in earmarks in appropriations bills. So after the very successful red wave election of 2010, the election in which I was first elected to the U.S. Senate, both the Senate and the House Republican conferences simultaneously adopted earmark bans correctly recognizing the corrupting nature of earmarks and their growing contribution to an increasingly problematic and unsustainable fiscal picture for the Federal Government.

I remember that moment well. I had just been elected to the Senate. It was November of 2010. I had yet to be sworn in. That wouldn't happen until January of 2011. But I came back here for my new Member orientation and was permitted, as a newly elected Senator-elect, to participate in my first Senate Republican conference. And it was in that measure that I supported and advocated aggressively for the earmark ban that we adopted.

It was a great move. So successful and so popular, so backed by popular voter demand was this anti-earmark wave that even former President Obama, while occupying the White House at the time, agreed, agreed right then, he said—shortly after the November 2010 election, about the same time the Senate Republican conference, just down the Hill from here in the Capitol, adopted this earmark ban which, in my view, is still in place—he said:

I agree with those Republican and Democratic members of Congress who have recently said that in these challenging days (referring to rising deficits and debt levels) that we cannot afford . . . earmarks.

He was absolutely right. And if he was right then, it follows—in fact, it follows a *fortiori* that it is even more true today that the same words that President Obama uttered then are even more applicable then—they were appli-

cable then; they are more applicable now, way more applicable.

Our national debt is several multiples of what it was then, \$38.5 trillion, adding to it at a rate of about \$2 trillion a year. Now, in 2019, Senate Republicans made the earmark ban permanent that had previously been considered temporary, a pause, a moratorium. And we had this decades-long earmark moratorium.

During that moratorium, what happened? Did the sky fall? No, it didn't. It didn't fall. Were there dogs and cats living together in the streets? Book of Revelation stuff? Not at all. There was no Armageddon. Were there disastrous political consequences to the Republicans who had spearheaded that earmark ban? No, not at all. Republicans did not suffer massive electoral defeat.

In fact, within a few years, we captured the majority again in the U.S. Senate. So to my Republican colleagues, stop telling yourselves that earmarks are necessary, that they are indispensable either for electoral success or the survival of the American economy or the survival of your home States' economy. They are not. That simply is not true. That is a lie we tell ourselves. It is not true.

Unfortunately, however, after Democrats took back the White House with House and Senate majorities also under Democratic control in 2021, they brought back the earmark practice. And, sadly, many Senate Republicans decided to go along with it at that time. Let's just go along because they are doing it. We might as well not let them have all the fun. So some started to do that.

Now, this return in recent years, starting in 2021, to include billions of dollars' worth of earmarks in annual spending bills, this is a microcosm of Federal waste and Congress' refusal to properly act to stave off a fiscal crisis.

This is the kind of direct attack on the President's economic agenda that goes unnoticed because those who support it often do so quietly, sometimes with a whisper or a whimper.

I will not go quietly, nor should I, nor should any of us when we consider what we do to our children and our grandchildren, whether they are born or unborn. Whether their parents are alive yet or not, our posterity will suffer from the consequences of these.

But it is not just that. It is those of us who are alive today, those of us who are working hard just to provide for our families today who suffer because when we spend too much money, everything costs more money. As Milton Friedman used to say, the true rate of taxation has to be measured not just by the top marginal tax rate. You have to look at the rate of government spending as a percentage of the economy because, one way or another, that piper has got to be paid. One way or another, it comes out in the wash. One way or another, the people will pay for it. They pay for it in terms of higher prices on everything they buy—every good, every service.

And, tragically, it is not the wealthy who bear this burden disproportionately. It is hard-working Americans, poor and middle-class Americans, those who work hard, pay their bills, pay their taxes and find that every dollar they earn buys a little bit less. We have seen more of that in the last few years than we have in a very long time.

Government Agencies, for their part, very often will try to hide the true impact of this, but they can't hide it for too long. They can conceal it. They can obscure it a little bit. But the American people know; they know what is happening. This is catching up to us.

Are earmarks the whole problem? No. Are they a small percentage of overall Federal spending? Yes, they are. Is discretionary spending much smaller than all mandatory spending? Yes. But this is all part of the same problem. And, again, it is earmark spending that drives the train. It is earmark spending that very often distracts us away from the things we are supposed to be doing and takes us down the direction of areas where the Federal Government probably shouldn't be acting in any event.

So let me ask this question: How are voters to trust Republicans in Congress to get spending in order and reduce our national budget deficits and eventually our debt if we don't have the discipline as a conference to cut even a few billion dollars in pork-barrel spending? How can we, as Republicans in Congress, in the House or the Senate, rightfully cancel wasteful foreign aid and subsidies to leftwing public radio but then simultaneously offset those things by greenlighting the enactment of several billion dollars' worth of wasteful earmarks?

Now, I will concede here everybody has a different definition of what is wasteful, what is good, what is bad. I will concede that a number of these probably go to worthy beneficiaries or at least good people intending, wanting to do good things for the American people. That doesn't mean that it is our money to spend. It doesn't mean that it is the appropriate role of the Federal Government to do that. It doesn't mean it is appropriate for any government to do that. And it doesn't mean that this process—the way we do it here—isn't terribly corrupting, with the tendency to drive up overall Federal spending.

To quote President Trump, "For years, the radical left Democrats exploited the green-energy scam as an excuse to funnel many billions of dollars into their own massive slush funds" and "drastically drove up prices."

That is what happens. That is what they do. Well, through certain earmarks, they quietly do the same, diverting the tax dollars of the American people to the kinds of projects that should never receive taxpayer money.

In total, the cost of earmarks this time around is around \$5.2 billion. Yes, it is a small percentage of overall Federal spending. Yes, it is a small per-

centage even of the Federal spending in this particular package. But it is what is driving the train, and it is emblematic of the kind of problem that creates the much larger problem. While we are focused obsessively on doing these, we are not doing what we are supposed to be doing.

Speaking of emblematic, as we remove funding from the Department of Homeland Security, one of the few Departments that is pretty easy to fit within the enumerated powers of the Federal Government—why? Because the Federal Government is in charge of immigration laws, borders, and the enforcement of those laws governing immigration and nationality and that sort of thing. And yet that is what gets pulled out. We leave in there all the stuff that is tangentially related, at best, to enumerated Federal powers under the Constitution. Now, in total, yes, it is a small percentage, but it is what is driving the train.

Earmarks aside, perhaps the biggest problem with spending bills—with these spending bills, this package of spending bills that we will soon be considering—is that they simply spend too much money. Much of this stems from the fact that discretionary outlays spiked during COVID, and they never came back down to pre-COVID levels. In fact, total discretionary spending from fiscal year 2020 through fiscal year 2024 was \$1 trillion higher than the Congressional Budget Office had projected it to be over that timeframe when they issued their 2019 budget baseline projections. That is the discretionary side.

Meanwhile, the mandatory side also exploded, so it got a lot worse. A lot of people are fond of saying: Well, it is not discretionary spending; it is mandatory spending. But they both went way, way up.

It is time to stop talking a big game about fiscal responsibility and to show voters that we measure up to the task. We cannot simply relent when Democrats want to tie the hands of this administration and saddle the American people with unsustainable debt.

So the question I pose to my colleagues who are OK with earmarks in their spending bills is this: Why are Senate Republicans supporting the effort to ignore our conference's still active, still intact earmark ban to partner with Democrats and reverse course on President Trump? You don't believe me? Well, this bill, as presently constituted, does among many, many other things the following: It funds hospitals and healthcare clinics that provide puberty blockers to children and perform abortions. It does that.

It sends money to a dance festival. This dance festival may be lovely. I am not really personally into dance festivals. Maybe some are. Those who like them, I hope they enjoy them. Dance festivals, I am sure, can be a great thing. That doesn't mean that the Federal Government should be funding it—or any government. I don't know why

it is the job of any government that collects money from people, loosely speaking, at the point of a gun—because if you don't pay your taxes, eventually people with guns will come and issue a fine or haul you off if you refuse to pay—but we are funding it anyway.

It provides for million-dollar renovations at both the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Metropolitan Opera in New York City. Let's think about that for a minute. That is one of the wealthiest cities not only in America but in the world. And let's take the opera, for example. The opera: It is a great thing. I love the arts. It is fantastic. This is not exactly an everyman hobby. Now, I am sure there are exceptions. But it has a well-earned reputation for being something that is favored by the elite, by very wealthy individuals, in one of America's wealthiest cities.

So why are we sending them a million dollars? The Metropolitan Opera, the last time I checked, has an endowment worth about \$255 million. It has multiple employees earning in excess of \$1 million a year. I believe it has real estate assets valued at around half a billion dollars. And yet hard-working Americans in Peoria, IL, and in Orem, UT, all over the country, people who probably don't visit New York very often, if ever, who may not be into the opera, they are all being asked to subsidize that, to pay a million dollars for elevator renovations not only at the Metropolitan Opera but also at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Why? Why is that our role?

But not only why is it our role; why is it the responsibility of a plumber from Montana who is just trying to feed his family, who is probably never going to attend that opera or the Metropolitan Museum of Art? Why are you sticking that person with the bill?

The spending package also allocates dollars for nonprofits; specifically, nonprofits providing aid and counseling and legal services to illegal aliens, to individuals whose sole unifying characteristic is that they are here inside the United States unlawfully. Why are we doing that when it is counter to what we are supposed to be doing, which is to discourage illegal immigration and to make possible bringing to justice those who break the laws—something that—oh, yeah, we are removing that part of the bill that would even do that because we are too busy making sure that we are funding the hobbies of the ultrawealthy in one of America's wealthiest cities that most Americans will never visit. This is reverse Robin Hood at its worst. This is taking money from the poor and giving it to the rich, and it is wrong.

The bill also contains earmarks funding a nonprofit organization called NICE. Now, don't let the name fool you. NICE is not so nice. NICE is the New Immigrant Community Empowerment to assist illegal aliens in getting jobs—jobs that ought to go to American citizens or at least individuals

who, if not citizens, are inside the United States legally and legally authorized to work in the United States of America.

The Federal Government, through taxpayers, should not be funding hospitals that give puberty blockers to children or nonprofit museums or leftwing labor activist organizations or leftwing physicians activist organizations or groups providing legal aid or subsidized housing specifically to illegal aliens. It shouldn't do that. It shouldn't do that ever, regardless of who is in charge, especially in a time when the House of Representatives is under Republican control, when the Senate is under Republican control, and the White House is occupied by a Republican President. It shouldn't do it ever but especially not when Republicans are in charge of all three levers of the two political branches: the legislative and the executive.

Senate Republicans especially should not be facilitating this abuse of power and at the hard-earned money of the American people, many of whom work months out of every year just to pay their Federal taxes only to find that every dollar they have left buys less because we are spending too much money.

We shouldn't be facilitating this abuse of power and violating pledges that President Trump and that we ourselves, as Senate Republicans, have made on the campaign trail to root out and end wasteful, woke spending across the Federal Government.

Even in a Republican-controlled Congress, Democrats are still able to effectuate and fund a radical agenda that the American people opposed when they elected us to this majority and that we promised we wouldn't perpetuate. And yet here we are. It is tragic.

Congress does not need to and should not use earmarks as sweeteners, for lack of a better word, to make the appropriations process work. We cannot continue appropriations bills that perpetuate excess spending, especially when those same things are pushing policies that inevitably, invariably, deliberately hobble the efforts of this administration.

This is like putting a humidifier and a dehumidifier in the same room and just letting them fight it out when you promised only the dehumidifier would be there.

And at a minimum we should build on the successful rescissions bill initiated through the DOGE process and carried forward throughout the last year, the successful rescissions bill that, by exerting some basic fiscal discipline to enforce our conference rules and put an end to earmarks—or rather than just put an end to it, resume the end that we put in place 15 years ago, heal the breach that has now been there for about 5 years, and honor what is still our conference position.

Only then will we be able, I believe, to tackle the self-inflicted economic wounds that cloud the bright skies of opportunity before us.

As President Trump said in his end-of-year speech, just a few weeks ago, “we're poised for an economic boom the likes of which the world has never seen.”

I believe him, and he is doing a lot of things that are helping us get there. The least we can do is not undercut him. And to achieve that potential, we the Congress, we the Senate, and we the Senate Republican conference in the majority must act.

Earmarks aren't the way. They are the wrong way. Earmarks aren't the solution. They are the problem. We need to end them.

In connection with this package of bills, I have put forward an amendment to strip them from this bill, and I humbly, with all the conviction I am capable of communicating, implore my colleagues to support the amendment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. TUBERVILLE). The majority leader.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. THUNE. 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.

H.R. 7148

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. President, we are considering an appropriations package on the floor this week, and there has rightfully been a lot of focus on the section of the bill that funds the Department of Homeland Security, a section that I and my Democratic colleagues continue to insist should be considered separately, as it was in the House, to secure essential reforms to end the Department's abuses, stop the killings, protect people's rights, and ensure real accountability. Any additional funding for this unconstrained, lawless operation at DHS is unacceptable as we witness executions of civilians in our streets, unaccountable and warrantless raids, and in my home State of Maryland, inhumane conditions at the Baltimore Holding Center even as ICE moves to set up a warehouse with the capacity to process and detain 1,500 persons. I said I would not support one more dime for Trump's lawless ICE operation, and I meant it—not even for 1 more day.

But I also want to take a moment to speak to the rest of that funding package, which includes the work of five other Appropriations subcommittees: Defense, State and Foreign Operations, Transportation and Housing, Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and Financial Services and General Government.

I appreciate the work of the Democratic ranking members of these subcommittees and Vice Chair MURRAY, who secured some important provisions in the bill to reassert the congressional power of the purse with specific spend-

ing directives in legislative text. For example, the Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education bill rejects the administration's effort to eliminate the Department of Education and cut Pell grants.

It also rejects the Trump proposal to cut NIH nearly in half and instead increases funding; and it successfully overrides the OMB directive that NIH fund more lump sum multi-year grants, which would otherwise result in fewer overall grants and less research activity. NIH, which is located in my home State of Maryland, is one of our greatest American success stories, where some of our brightest minds pursue treatments and cures to diseases that impact virtually every American family. This administration has spent the last year attacking the critical work of NIH, canceling grants and clinical trials and short-circuiting lifesaving research. I am glad this bill roundly rejects that and requires the administration to change course. At the same time, I am very disappointed that the bill does not reverse the rescission cut to public broadcasting, which provides critical services to Americans across the country, particularly in rural communities.

Indeed, while these bills make important investments and include some critical safeguards, I have serious concerns that they do not go far enough to protect the power of the purse and the Federal employees who carry out the programs we fund, particularly as the administration continues its efforts to strip away the protections that safeguard our nonpartisan civil service and hollow out Agencies. Without enhanced guardrails in this package, the administration will continue to wreak havoc on the ability of our dedicated, merit-based civil servants to provide critical services to the American people.

I also have deep concerns about the State foreign operations bill, now called the national security package. I know and appreciate the work of Vice Chair MURRAY and Ranking Member SCHATZ to preserve the legacy of U.S. foreign assistance in this bill after Elon Musk, Russell Vought, and their DOGE cronies took a chainsaw to USAID and the State Department.

The bill includes some new guardrails to prevent deeper cuts going forward, but it still reflects a \$9 billion cut from FY25 levels. The largest share of those cuts comes from humanitarian assistance and development assistance.

Foreign aid is not a giveaway; it is an investment in the world we all live in. When your neighbor's house is on fire, it is foolish to wait until the flames reach your own home. Conflicts, pandemics, and humanitarian collapse do not respect borders. Preventing wars from starting and stopping new diseases before they reach American shores costs far less than fighting those threats once they arrive here.

For less than 1 percent of the Federal budget, we can help save the lives of the world's most vulnerable children.