

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate and the provisions of S. Res. 817 (119th Congress), do hereby move to bring to a close debate on Executive Calendar Nos.: 729, 730, 731, 732, 733, 734, 739, 740, 746, 747, 748, 749, 757, 759, 761, 762, 764, 766, 781, 782, 820, 821, 822, 823, 824, 826, 832, 834, 835, 836, 837, 840, 841, 842, 843, 844, 845, 846, 847, 848, 849, 850, 853, 854, 855, 856, 857, 858, 859, 860, 861, 862, 863, 864, 865, 866, 867, 868, 869, 870, 871, 872, 873, 874, 875, 899, 900, 903, 904, 905, 906, 907, 908, 909 en bloc.

John Thune, John Cornyn, Chuck Grassley, Tim Sheehy, John Barrasso, Mike Crapo, John Boozman, Tim Scott of South Carolina, Pete Ricketts, Tommy Tuberville, Alan Armstrong, Joni Ernst, Eric Schmitt, Bernie Moreno, Roger F. Wicker, Mike Rounds, John R. Curtis.

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

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the en bloc nominations, provided for under the provisions of S. Res. 817, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. BARRASSO. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Tennessee (Mrs. BLACKBURN), the Senator from Mississippi (Mrs. HYDE-SMITH), and the Senator from Kentucky (Mr. McCONNELL).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Arizona (Mr. GALLEGGO), the Senator from Minnesota (Ms. KLOBUCHAR), and the Senator from Georgia (Mr. WARNOCK) are necessarily absent.

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 50, nays 44, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 221 Ex.]

YEAS—50

Armstrong	Fischer	Moreno
Banks	Graham	Murkowski
Barrasso	Grassley	Paul
Boozman	Hagerty	Ricketts
Britt	Hawley	Risch
Budd	Hoeben	Rounds
Capito	Husted	Schmitt
Cassidy	Johnson	Scott (FL)
Collins	Justice	Scott (SC)
Cornyn	Kennedy	Sheehy
Cotton	Lankford	Sullivan
Cramer	Lee	Thune
Crapo	Lummis	Tillis
Cruz	Marshall	Tuberville
Curtis	McCormick	Wicker
Daines	Moody	Young
Ernst	Moran	

NAYS—44

Alsobrooks	Hickenlooper	Rosen
Baldwin	Hirono	Sanders
Bennet	Kaine	Schatz
Blumenthal	Kelly	Schiff
Blunt Rochester	Kim	Schumer
Booker	King	Shaheen
Cantwell	Lujan	Slotkin
Coons	Markey	Smith
Cortez Masto	Merkley	Van Hollen
Duckworth	Murphy	Warner
Durbin	Murray	Warren
Fetterman	Ossoff	Welch
Gillibrand	Padilla	Whitehouse
Hassan	Peters	Wyden
Heinrich	Reed	

NOT VOTING—6

Blackburn	Hyde-Smith	McConnell
Gallego	Klobuchar	Warnock

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SCHMITT). On this vote, the yeas are 50, the nays are 44. The motion is agreed to.

The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Cloture having been invoked pursuant to the provisions of S. Res. 817, the nominations listed therein are pending en bloc.

The Senator from Kansas.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 738

Mr. MARSHALL. Mr. President, I rise today to ask the Senate body to join me in the stopping of the funding of viral gain-of-function research.

Viral gain-of-function research is what led, of course, to the COVID virus being developed and, of course, the COVID epidemic. I think it is important to pause and stop and think why this is still important—what is it now—5 or 6 years later.

We all know we lost 1 million Americans to this COVID virus. Twenty million Americans still suffer from long COVID. Many, many Americans died alone—maybe at a nursing home, maybe in their own home. But they weren't allowed to have their own children, their spouses come visit them in those last moments of their life.

We had tens of millions of students miss their senior year of high school, their senior year of college. Maybe it was the State track meet. Maybe it was the State softball team they had been working on their whole life.

We have kids that still have learning disabilities or are lagging in their learning—specifically reading—not to mention their social interactions and their social development. This COVID virus left a huge physical, economic, and emotional scar on America.

And that is why I am asking that we stop this viral gain-of-function research. I am so proud that the President, recently, has agreed to stop the funding. I have been calling for the stopping of this since 2021 as well.

And I think it is important to realize how Anthony Fauci evaded the intentions of Congress and the rules from his own White House. Even President Obama asked him to stop doing viral gain-of-function research, but, of course, Anthony Fauci had more attorneys than Carter has pills, and they always found some loophole. Then, when they couldn't do it here, he offshored the funding of this.

Make no mistake about it, the United States was funding viral gain-of-function research for decades. This was Anthony Fauci's baby. He thought that this was his ticket to a Nobel Prize.

You know, whether you are a physician, like myself, or a mom or dad or a businessperson, a military officer, you always had to sit there and weigh the benefits and the risks of something like this.

I mean, what the benefits are, I am not sure of. You know, maybe they said

it was so that if some unknown organism appeared, that we would be able to develop a vaccine. But, of course, the downside was always the fear of risk of a virus they made in a laboratory, of it escaping.

And, of course, why wouldn't there be? Multiple times in history, viruses, microorganisms have escaped from laboratories. It is practically impossible to control it. In 1978, a smallpox virus escaped from a lab in the United Kingdom. In 2007, foot-and-mouth virus accidentally released from a United Kingdom lab. In 2014, the CDC had an anthrax issue. Again, in 2014, NIH-FDA, there were unsecured smallpox vials seen.

These mice they were doing experiments on and infecting them with these monster viruses, from time to time, escaped.

So it seems like we were set up for failure. And, again, despite scientist after scientist, President after President, warning Anthony Fauci to stop doing this research, he persisted and he persisted and he persisted, until finally COVID-19 was accidentally released from a lab in Wuhan, China. And the rest is history.

And that is why I think it is so important that we stop the funding for this once and for all. Let's codify what the President has done here and make sure—at least until someone can come to this Congress and say: Look, we have a foolproof system for keeping this in control.

But when you are making monster viruses, the worst-case scenario is probably some type of terrorism; that it would be so easy, once these are made, to be replicated and turned into a terrorist weapon—much more of a serious consequential threat to America than nuclear warheads are.

Think about this: This virus alone has exponentially been more lethal than all the years of nuclear weapons.

This bill does one simple thing: It stops Federal tax dollars from funding the kind of research that could turn a virus into a weapon—no more offshoring risks to avoid oversight, no more asking permission from the very Agencies that created the problem.

Mr. President, that is why today, as if in legislative session and notwithstanding rule XXII, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions be discharged from further consideration of S. 738 and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration; further, that the bill be considered read a third time and passed and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there an objection?

Mr. KIM. I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The objection is heard.

The Senator from Iowa.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—H.R. 2069

Ms. ERNST. Mr. President, during my 12 years in the Senate, I have exposed many outlandish examples of government waste.

For example, I uncovered that Washington sent nearly \$500 million to China to pay for everything from poetry projects to dangerous research on bats.

Another \$870 million of U.S. taxpayer money went to Russia. This includes more than \$770,000 from the National Institutes of Health sent to a state-run lab in Russia to put cats on treadmills.

How did I uncover these crazy trails of money to our foreign adversary? It is quite simple. For 20 years now, the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act has required unclassified government spending to be put online in a searchable public website, usspending.gov. This allows taxpayers to see for themselves how the money they are sending to Washington is spent.

Bureaucrats, however, have been hiding tens of billions of dollars distributed through secret spending arrangements known as other transaction agreements, or OTAs, by not publicly disclosing these expenditures on USAspending.gov. The Pentagon alone has obligated \$77.7 billion for thousands of OTAs over just the past 5 years through over 30,000 hard-to-track contracts.

The lack of transparency with OTAs is having a real impact. According to the Government Accountability Office, the Pentagon “cannot assess the extent to which OTAs are delivering capabilities to the warfighter.” The Office of the Inspector General also found the Pentagon doesn’t even have an accurate count of OTAs or their dollar values.

OTAs are also being used by the Departments of Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, Transportation, Energy, as well as NASA.

We recently learned that NIH’s new ARPA-H biomedical research contracts are being processed as OTAs through the Interior Department. This means if you want to know the details behind NIH’s biomedical research contracts, you practically have to be a data wizard and know where to look deep in the Department of the Interior’s databases. I know, it makes no sense. As we witnessed last week, we can’t get answers from Dr. Fauci about what NIH has been funding because he is hiding behind the Fifth Amendment.

Taxpayers deserve to know how their dollars are being spent in Washington, and we have an obligation here to show them.

In June, the Senate unanimously passed my bipartisan Stop Secret Spending Act to require OTAs to be publicly disclosed on USAspending.gov just like all other government spending.

I very much appreciate Senators PETERS and HASSAN, whose support was critical for making this happen. I was also delighted last month when the House approved the bipartisan companion bill introduced by Representatives MOORE and PANETTA, which is

now at the desk here in the Senate. We all know Congress can’t agree on very much these days, so it makes a very powerful statement when folks on both sides of the aisle and from both Chambers come together by passing this transparency bill to hold Washington accountable for how Americans’ tax dollars are being spent. With fraudsters stealing \$1.4 billion every single day, we need this information now so we can account for who is taking tax dollars and why they are taking them.

Earlier today, I attended the meeting of the Vice President’s Task Force to Eliminate Fraud at the White House, and the success of this effort depends on being able to track how dollars are being spent. Unfortunately, some Governors are impeding anti-fraud efforts by blocking access to spending information about how tax dollars from Washington are being spent in their own States.

We can’t stop what we can’t see, but we can do our part by passing the Stop Secret Spending Act today. This bill will end the secrecy about how tens of billions of dollars are being spent every single year. There are no excuses for delaying sending this bill to the President today to become law. In fact, the only reason to oppose the Stop Secret Spending Act is if you have something to hide.

As if in legislative session and notwithstanding rule XXII, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of H.R. 2069, which was received from the House. I further ask that the bill be considered read a third time and passed and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there an objection?

The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CRUZ. Reserving the right to object, I understand that my colleague from Iowa is deeply interested in getting this legislation passed, and I appreciate the diligence and effort she has devoted to this legislation. This is a good bill. I support her bill. Indeed, I voted for her bill, as did every other Member of this body.

But the Senate also has a great many other bills that we are working on, that we have passed, and that have run into a roadblock in the House of Representatives. The House of Representatives currently is refusing to take up Senate-passed bills and, rather, is passing almost exclusively House bills. This is an unreasonable position for the House to take. Indeed, it is not a theoretical position; it is what the House has done on this very bill.

On this bill, Senator ERNST introduced it, the Senate passed it unanimously, it was sent to the House, and what did the House do? They did not pass the Senate-passed bill; instead, they passed essentially the identical bill but as a House measure. Now, mind you, that was not because they had any substantive objections to Senator

ERNST’s bill but, rather, it was because they were refusing to do their job as another Chamber in this Congress.

Among the bills that the Senate has passed that are sitting, languishing at the House right now is a bill that I have worked very hard to pass called Trey’s Law.

Trey’s Law is named for Trey Carlock, a beloved citizen of Dallas who tragically, as a young boy, was a victim of sexual assault at a summer camp. Litigation ensued, and Trey ended up signing an NDA where he was blocked by law from sharing the details of the horrific sexual abuse he endured. That silence weighed on Trey powerfully, and he ultimately took his own life at age 28.

Trey’s Law is an initiative that has been championed by Trey’s sister Elizabeth. Numerous States, including my home State of Texas and including, Mr. President, your home State of Missouri, have passed Trey’s Law.

In the Senate, I introduced Trey’s Law as bipartisan legislation, and the Senate passed it 100 to none, and it is sitting at the House languishing—not because anyone objects to it but simply because the House has decided not to process Senate bills.

So, as my friend Senator ERNST knows, I have placed a hold on House bills until the House starts taking up and passing Senate bills. I have been actively in negotiation with House leadership, and I am confident this issue will get resolved. The House is going to take up and do their job and pass Senate bills, and the Senate will likewise take up and pass House bills. And I am confident in particular that Senator ERNST will succeed in passing this bill into law this year—with my enthusiastic support.

But often in Congress, the only way to get a change of action is to exercise leverage. That is what I am doing now to get the House to take up and pass important bills, so therefore, at this time at least, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The objection is heard.

The Senator from Iowa.

Ms. ERNST. I can appreciate the dilemma that many of us are in as we debate these very important bills, and they are very important bills. So what I have in front of me here at my desk is a list of 59 House bills that have been passed this Congress. They are H.R. bills. They are H.J. Res. 140; H.R. 7147—59 House bills that have already passed through the Senate in this Congress.

Now, I understand that we all have ways that we have to use leverage. I completely understand that. As a matter of fact, the bill that I had passed through this Chamber, you know, I would love to have it as an S. bill, a Senate bill, and I would love to see my name at the top of the bill rather than a House bill.

The companion bill was passed by the House. So, again, I would love to see my name at the top of the bill and it listed as a Senate bill.

I discussed it with my staff. I am in the last 6 months of my final term in the U.S. Senate. I would love to have more of my legacy items with my name on them, but I told my staff that it is more important that we get these bills done. I don't care if it is a House bill. I don't care if this has my name all over it. The important thing is that when we have good pieces of legislation put in front of us and that we worked hard in a bipartisan manner, in a bicameral manner, and it is good for the American people, that we move forward with those bills.

So I am disappointed today that my piece of legislation under the title of a House bill will not be moving, and I know that many of our constituencies will be greatly disappointed.

I do hope in the future that, between the Senate Republican leadership and the House Republican leadership, we can come together on these issues because it is not good for the American people when we have this infighting on good, solid pieces of legislation. We can do better.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Hawaii.

ECONOMY

Mr. SCHATZ. Mr. President, the price of everything is up, and that is on purpose. It is on purpose because Donald Trump made it so.

We are not in the middle of a pandemic or a recession or a national emergency, but the President of the United States has decided that Americans should pay more for everything—food, gas, electricity, healthcare, housing, clothes, everything. So while he is busy lining his pockets with crypto schemes and insider-information subscription programs, regular people can't afford their lives.

Now, I say he is doing this on purpose because these are deliberate policy choices he has made. First, it was the tariffs that jacked up the prices of goods across the board. Tomatoes—tomatoes—went up 40 percent. Coffee went up by 20 percent. Clothes and car seats went up by 20 percent. Electronics shot up by hundreds of dollars. So it wasn't as if you could avoid the hit by not shopping at a particular store for a particular thing.

People in Hawaii are very expert at figuring out "OK, turkey is high; let's get chicken. Pork is high; let's get beef." The difference now is that there is no escape. Literally everything is up. That is because the President of the United States has decided, through this Iran war, through the tariffs, through the energy bans, through the Medicaid and Medicare cuts, through the ACA cuts, through the nutrition cuts, to make literally every aspect of your life more expensive.

Then came the One Big Beautiful Bill where, in order to cut taxes for billionaires, Trump and the Republicans slashed subsidies for affordable healthcare and food assistance.

I want you to understand. This sounds like the kind of thing a partisan

would say, and it is, but it is also true that the way they paid for tax cuts for the wealthiest people and the wealthiest corporations on this planet—the way they literally paid for it—was to take away people's healthcare. Without the enhanced premium tax credits, ACA premiums went up by close to 60 percent. As a result, millions of Americans are living without healthcare this year. Millions of Americans are living without healthcare this year not by choice but by force.

I want to read some of what those people had to say about it.

A man in Texas said:

The prices are simply too high. I don't think we could afford our mortgage if I had to pay for health insurance. If I have a catastrophic health event, it makes more sense for me to just declare bankruptcy than it would be to be delinquent on other payments.

Here is another one—a 38-year-old from Alabama:

[I] can't afford insurance, [I] can't afford health care without insurance, so basically just hoping and praying I don't get sick . . .

People are having to gamble on their health so that the richest people to ever live can pay even less in taxes. And the price hikes aren't over yet because premiums are set to rise by double digits again next year according to proposals from insurers.

Aside from healthcare, the Republican tax bill also compounded Trump's ban on wind and solar energy. They are banning wind and solar energy, which is not only clean and helps us to address the climate crisis, it is just the quickest and cheapest energy that we could possibly get on the grid. It is not like we are in 1970 and we are arguing with the climate crisis versus the price that people pay on their utility bills.

The way to address the climate crisis is to do a lot more wind and solar, and the benefit is that it is the cheapest form of energy. Yet, this President has banned wind and solar energy through their administrative actions, and that is spiking the price of utilities across the country.

This is all before you factor in the war in Iran. In addition to being a spectacular failure that has achieved very little of Trump's own stated goals, it has also caused gas and energy and food prices to spike everywhere. Gas is over 4 bucks, right now, nationally, and it is even higher in Hawaii at \$5.45. Diesel is \$1.60 more than it was a year ago, which means that we are all paying more at stores for deliveries and transportation. In Hawaii, electricity bills went up 20 percent in 1 month—20 percent in 1 month—because of skyrocketing oil prices. Food prices continue to climb everywhere as the closure of the Strait of Hormuz extends a global fertilizer shortage.

It is common for Presidents to have to deal with the problems related to the economy. Specifically, what can be a real political killer is the question of inflation, but this is very unusual, and it may be unprecedented in American history. You have a President of the

United States whose stated policy on tariffs, on energy, on Iran, on healthcare, and on food is to raise the price of everything. That is not a sort of accidental outcome of his economic policy; it is his economic policy to raise the price of everything.

People are going broke, and they are doing it to you on purpose.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

NOMINATION OF TODD BLANCHE

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I was never going to come out here and support Todd Blanche for a long list of reasons.

I do believe he is one of the most corrupt Justice Department officials in our country's history, for one. He was Trump's former personal lawyer, and it seems that he never quit. The only difference now is that taxpayers are signing his checks instead of Trump. He was the one who negotiated a \$1.8 billion slush fund to pay off violent insurrectionists and who cut a backroom deal to give the President and his entire corrupt family immunity from IRS investigations, not to forget that Todd Blanche is the guy who botched the Epstein file so badly that survivors had their names and faces exposed while the names of alleged abusers were hidden.

This is a man who wouldn't meet with survivors until Senators put him under a tremendous amount of public pressure. When the meeting eventually got on the books, the survivors made it crystal clear Blanche didn't listen to them. He was more interested in checking a box than in hearing their stories or bringing them justice.

All of that is, of course, absolutely unacceptable and disqualifying, but I come here today to sound the alarm on some of the most disturbing comments I have ever heard from the Nation's top law enforcement official. I guess Todd Blanche thought no one was listening because, on a private call with anti-abortion activists, Mr. Blanche told us all exactly what he plans to do if Senators confirm him. His goal was to make the Dobbs decision "permanent in every single state"—"every single state"—not just in Texas or Idaho. He wants to ban abortion in Washington State, in California, in New York—in every State.

He told them:

We will have victory, and victory will be soon, and it will be permanent.

Victory over what exactly? Victory over women who just want to make their own healthcare decisions? Victory over patients in States where abortion is legal—where voters have said over and over at the ballot box: Keep your hands off our rights?

A DOJ spokesperson tried to clean up Blanche's words, saying he was only focused on restricting access to medication abortion in all 50 States, as if that is somehow better.

I am here to say: I will believe the tape. I believe Todd Blanche's own words.