

U.S. Assistance to Combat This Harmful Practice Abroad is Limited.” And “limited” is an understatement.

I am publicly releasing this report today, which outlines the U.S. Government’s limited—limited—efforts. I am terribly disappointed. I am embarrassed that the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development are not fully engaged in dedicating resources to put an end to this.

According to the GAO report, USAID and the State Department each had just one active stand-alone project focused on stopping female genital mutilation. One of these projects is gone—already ended. Less than \$2 million has been spent on these projects combined.

The GAO also found that the United States has never contributed—never contributed—a penny to the world’s largest international effort against this horrible, awful practice. It is called the Joint Programme on FGM/C. It is embarrassing. We have not put one penny into this.

During the course of the GAO investigation, State and USAID both began to take action. They were embarrassed, I assume. If they weren’t, they should have been. But they haven’t done much. USAID, for example, decided to update the guidance it released 16 years ago, and Secretary Kerry recently announced that the United States will be contributing to the Joint Programme for the first time. Bravo.

I commend this commitment, but I understand these funds are not a dedicated funding source. They are just a one-time, very limited pledge. Maybe we will have to get another GAO report before we get something into that program. It shouldn’t take a GAO investigation for State and USAID to act. The United States should prioritize ending this practice, but it hasn’t.

This is shameful. It is a tragedy that our great government is not doing more. It is inexcusable that the United States, a nation with wealth and power, is standing by while such sickening violence against women and girls is occurring. As we speak, 200 million have undergone this in the world—200 million.

The State Department and USAID should end it or do everything they can to make female genital mutilation a priority and dedicate substantial resources to this issue. It is a cause. It should be, if it isn’t. The United States can and must do far more to eliminate this practice worldwide. We still have problems here in the United States.

This shameful GAO report, I hope, is a wake-up call. Something had to wake us up because we have done almost nothing as a country. The report should be a turning point in the fight against FGM, a moment when the most powerful nation in the world commences the stopping of this brutal form of abuse.

The United States should be a leader in this fight and not a bystander. We must put this brutal practice to an

end. America must lead the world in stopping these assaults of little girls and big girls and women. I hope the Senate will join me in these efforts.

Mr. President, I don’t see anyone on the floor. I ask the Chair to announce the business of the day.

#### RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

#### TRANSPORTATION, HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2016

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of H.R. 2577, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 2577) making appropriations for the Departments of Transportation, and Housing and Urban Development, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2016, and for other purposes.

Pending:

Collins amendment No. 3896, in the nature of a substitute.

McConnell (for Lee) amendment No. 3897 (to amendment No. 3896), to prohibit the use of funds to carry out a rule and notice of the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

McConnell (for Nelson/Rubio) amendment No. 3898 (to amendment No. 3896), making supplemental appropriations for fiscal year 2016 to respond to Zika virus.

McConnell (for Cornyn) modified amendment No. 3899 (to amendment No. 3896), making emergency supplemental appropriations for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2016.

McConnell (for Blunt) modified amendment No. 3900 (to amendment No. 3896), Zika response and preparedness.

Collins (for Blunt) amendment No. 3946 (to amendment No. 3900), to require the periodic submission of spending plan updates to the Committee on Appropriations.

McCain/Blumenthal amendment No. 4039 (to amendment No. 3896), to extend and expand eligibility for the Veterans Choice Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs and to establish consistent criteria and standards relating to the use of amounts under the Medical Community Care account of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the time until 11:15 a.m. will be equally divided between the managers or their designees.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. BOOKER. Mr. President, I appreciate seeing the Presiding Officer in the chair and having a “Corey” represented and presiding over the U.S. Senate.

I rise today to speak against an amendment now pending to this bill

that would block a rule that seeks to fulfill the promise of the Fair Housing Act. This issue is very deeply personal to me and one that really has defined my own personal history. I would like to start by telling a story.

In 1969, just 1 year after the passage of the Fair Housing Act, a couple here in Washington, DC, married with two boys, decided to move to New Jersey. In New Jersey, they encountered a lot of a practice called real estate steering, where Black couples were steered away from certain neighborhoods.

Realizing they were being steered away from White neighborhoods, they grew frustrated, and they sought the help of the fair housing council. They set up an elaborate sting operation where my parents would go look at a home—or this couple would go look at a home—and they would then be followed by a White couple. The couple was told the house was sold or it was not for sale. The White couple would then appear and find out if that was, indeed, true. Most often for this couple from Washington, DC, yes, they would find out the house was still for sale.

Eventually this couple found a house they loved in a small town called Harrington Park, NJ, but they were told that the house was not for sale. They were told the house had been pulled off the market or sold. They left. Then the White couple came behind them. Lo and behold, the house had not been sold or was not pulled off the market. The White couple pretended that they loved the house as the Black couple did and put a bid on the house. The bid was accepted.

On the day of the closing, instead of the White couple showing up, the African-American gentleman from the Black couple and a volunteer lawyer came to confront the real estate agent. The real estate agent was so upset that he stood up and punched the lawyer representing the Black couple and siced his dog on the African-American man. Yet the law was on their side. The fair housing law of the United States of America, the law of the Federal Government, was on their side.

Eventually, that Black couple and their two kids moved into that home in Harrington Park, NJ. That was 1969. It was the year I was born, and that couple was my parents, Cary and Carolyn Booker. That is my origin story. Legislation that this body passed empowered my family to move into the home of their dreams in an all-White neighborhood with incredibly good schools that I went through from K-12. I am the beneficiary of work this body did to ensure that our American values are preserved, our values of inclusion and integration, to make sure fair housing is the law of the land. That work gave me my start in life. The activism of local activists, combined with the law of the land as passed by us, defined my path.

After decades of struggle in communities across the country, we have largely been successful in banning overt housing discrimination. We

should be proud of our work. But legislation that we passed should not become a relic of history. It is not something for us to turn and admire. We all know on many issues the cause of freedom and the cause of justice necessitate constant vigilance.

So I rise today with the knowledge that while major pieces of civil rights legislation like the Fair Housing Act have had a significant impact on millions of Americans—White, Black, Latino, Asian, disabled—this has had a full impact. We still have work to do to continue that vigilance to make sure that those values, those ideals, and the law of the land are made real for families.

Unfortunately, for nearly 50 years there has not been real guidance, direction, or tools to help local officials achieve the goals of the Fair Housing Act, which are integrated housing, fair housing, equal access. In 2010, in fact, the Government Accountability Office found that the Department of Housing and Urban Development, HUD, failed to properly administer oversight obligations under the Fair Housing Act and failed to monitor its guarantees for compliance with the law.

In 2013, HUD proposed affirmatively furthering fair housing, a new rule that would seek to fulfill the promise of the Fair Housing Act and eliminate a lot of the historic patterns of segregation that still go on in America today. The vision for the rule is to institute a data-driven analysis of localities and to develop Federal grant programs for housing and economic inclusion.

When I was mayor, people came to me with passions and accusations and the like. I used to always say: In God we trust, but, everybody else, bring me data. It is important to look at the numbers to know what really is going on.

So HUD brought about this idea of making sure we have that data—not in a rushed process. The administration engaged in a diligent 2-year rule-making process with public inclusion, participation from others, and lots of public comment periods. They finalized that rule in July 2015.

It is unfortunate that one of my dear colleagues—somebody whom I value very much because we do a lot of work across the aisle—has introduced an amendment that would block this rule's implementation, and I must respectfully disagree with the intent of this amendment. The Fair Housing Act and, really, the entirety of the Civil Rights Act were meant, again, to be real today, not just relics of yesterday. They were meant to be guideposts and standards by which we hold ourselves accountable for the values we put forth.

The affirmatively further fair housing rule is a measure of accountability for HUD and for ourselves. You cannot change what you cannot measure. Let me say that again. I learned this as a manager: If you can't measure it, you can't change it or affect it.

The rule will arm communities most in need with knowledge and numbers so they can make intelligent local decisions and best apply their resources. It is what everyone who has to manage something needs: accurate data. It will improve the access to quality data on local demographics and streamline the process for analyzing local fair housing impediments, helping grantees establish their own local fair housing priorities. This rule does not interfere with local zoning or housing laws, and it prevents further taxpayer dollars from being used to discriminate.

Every stakeholder—every one of us—is afforded an opportunity to comment on the rule that HUD made, and, as a former local leader, it empowers people at the localities to do justice by their communities. This is a balanced and a measured rule, and it takes up the cause of the work to make our country more and more just.

I know personally that so much of the character of our country comes from the values we have as a whole. There are rare times in our history where this body is called upon to affirm those values. This body's history—the noble history of this body—is something I have benefited from personally around fair housing. Now we have more tools necessary, with big data and analysis, to more effectively and affirmatively assert our values and ensure injustice is not being done.

I want to make sure that we defeat this amendment for those reasons. I believe and know the values of my colleague who proposed this. I do not think it achieves the end that we want to see by disempowering people to try to help families like mine. I was a child in DC moving to New Jersey and found justice—found a pathway toward integration. Indeed, I doubt I would be here right now if it weren't for the laws of our land.

I hope we can defeat this amendment and ensure that our Nation becomes more fair and more just and that more families like mine can find the America we hail when we pledge allegiance to the flag and say we are a Nation of liberty and justice for all.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the time during the quorum calls be charged equally, fairly—like fair housing—fairly, to both sides.

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

Mr. BOOKER. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MCCONNELL. 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 PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

THE APPROPRIATIONS PROCESS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, Senators have been working diligently this week, continuing our efforts to advance American priorities and responsibly fund important programs through the appropriations process. We have made good progress so far. The Senate already passed one funding bill by a broad majority at a record early time. Another Appropriations subcommittee approved its own funding bill just the other day, and it is my hope that we will be able to move two more funding measures across the finish line very shortly. With continued work and cooperation, we can do just that.

The two measures before us are the result of hard work, negotiation, and compromise. They are the product of strong leadership by Senators COLLINS and KIRK, and they are the culmination of a good deal of input from both sides of the aisle.

Here is what we know these bills can achieve: The transportation and housing infrastructure appropriations bill will invest in our transportation systems and help ensure safety and efficiency. The veterans and military construction funding bill will help improve care for veterans and increase oversight and accountability efforts at the VA.

The legislation before us will also include a provision to help address Zika. This compromise provision will focus on immediate needs while also providing resources for longer term goals such as a vaccine. It is another reminder that keeping Americans safe and healthy is a top priority for us all. Let's continue our work today to move these important funding measures closer to passage.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The 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.

AMENDMENT NO. 3897

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, a home is more than just a roof over someone's head; it is actually where a family builds their lives. In our country, we need to do everything we can to make sure families have options when it comes to finding a place to live, and they need access to affordable, safe, and fair housing. Unfortunately, today Republicans want to deal a significant blow to fair housing. The amendment they are offering would tear down the civil rights protections in the Fair Housing Act of 1968, and I am here today to strongly urge my colleagues to vote against it.

Before the civil rights movement, African Americans faced an enormous amount of injustice and racism in housing. People of color were often relegated to substandard housing. They were denied mortgages, and rent in an

African-American neighborhood was often higher than rent in a White neighborhood.

When the Fair Housing Act went into effect in 1968, it not only banned discrimination in the sale, rental, and financing of housing, it went a step further: A new Federal housing agency was charged with proactively rooting out discrimination and segregation in communities across the country. That is an important part of the law because today people across the country still face systemic and sometimes racially motivated barriers to housing. People with disabilities, people of color, families with children, and religious groups in many areas have limited housing choices.

Last year the Department of Housing and Urban Development, also known as HUD, issued a long-overdue rule to help carry out that mission to proactively eliminate housing segregation and discrimination. For States and local governments that get HUD investments, this rule would improve the quality and access to data on demographics, it would help researchers analyze the barriers people face to access fair housing, and it would help set priorities and goals for carrying out the mission to actively fight back against discrimination and segregation.

Based on pilot programs from around the country, we know this rule can help expand opportunity to more Americans. One of those pilots was in Seattle in my home State of Washington. After an assessment of high-poverty areas in Puget Sound, the city saw that neighborhoods that historically have been disenfranchised lacked job opportunities. Armed with that data, the city is setting up a food distribution center and a job incubator in those neighborhoods. The city's work is helping to foster job growth in places where low-income residents live, and through that work, the city expanded economic security to more people. That would not have been possible without the data this long-overdue rule provided us.

This is the kind of success this new rule will help further, but unfortunately we are seeing that some Republicans want to put a stop to those positive changes and backtrack on the gains we have made on civil rights in housing, and to me, that is unacceptable. Here in Congress, we should be clearing pathways for more Americans to access more housing, not blocking the way.

I am here today to urge my colleagues to vote against that amendment, which we will be voting on later.

Mr. President, while I have the floor, I wish to talk about another topic that is very important to me. I am very honored to come to the floor today with good news for thousands of military families, including three couples I met just last week here in the Nation's Capital. Each of the veterans I met with had suffered a catastrophic injury while fighting for our country, which

changed the course of their lives and their families' lives forever.

Matt Keil was shot by a sniper and paralyzed. Kevin Jaye was injured by a roadside bomb in Afghanistan. Tyler Black was paralyzed during a firefight. What was the one thing each of these veterans wished for after he returned home and got out of the hospital? Well, like so many women and men in our country, they dreamed of having a family of their own.

Even though each veteran suffered injuries that made it nearly impossible to conceive naturally, they have hope because in this day and age, the medical technology exists to make their dream of having a family come true. The most popular path is in vitro fertilization, known as IVF, but because of a policy enacted decades ago, the VA is barred from covering the costs of IVF, which forced Matt, Kevin, and Tyler, with their partners, to go down that road alone even though their injuries were caused while serving all of us overseas. Collectively, they have paid tens and tens of thousands of dollars out-of-pocket. Matt said to me that when he heard the VA wouldn't cover the one medical procedure he and his wife wanted so badly, he felt like his country had abandoned him. We are talking about a man who sacrificed his body for our country.

I believe this is wrong. When this country sends brave men and women to work, we promise to take care of them when they return home. That is why I have been fighting to change this policy once and for all, and today I am very proud to see this effort take a big step forward with bipartisan support here in the Senate. My provision in the underlying VA appropriations bill will finally allow the VA to cover those costs and let our veterans know their country is there for them when they come home. It is the right thing to do for Matt and his wife Tracy, Kevin and Lauren, Tyler and Crystal, and every other military family in this country.

As we move to pass this bill through the Senate, I call on my colleagues in the House to follow suit and get this done. This is not about politics or partisanship, and we shouldn't be cutting corners when it comes to our veterans and their families. This is a chance to support our veterans and the dreams they have fought so hard for—to have a family.

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

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

AMENDMENT NO. 3900, AS MODIFIED

Mr. LEE. Mr. President, I call for regular order with respect to the Blunt amendment No. 3900.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The amendment is now pending.

Mr. LEE. Thank you, Mr. President.

I rise not to debate the broad question of the Federal Government's proper role in protecting and advancing public health; instead, I am here to stress to my colleagues that with a growing national debt that will soon exceed \$20 trillion, we cannot continue spending money we don't have.

If this emergency supplemental measure is adopted, it will be the 15th emergency supplemental we have passed since 2006, totaling about \$190 billion in deficit spending. This is not how responsible governments budget. It is not how responsible governments behave.

Indeed, we have the ability to provide the resources the country needs to fight the Zika virus without adding to our national debt. For starters, we can undo the \$500 million President Obama took from the international infectious diseases account which was placed in his unapproved Green Climate Fund. USAID is sitting on \$1.2 billion in unobligated Ebola funds. The Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response currently has \$347 million not being put to use. There is \$525 million in CDC's global health security agenda that is unspoken for.

To the extent that the Zika virus is truly an emergency, one that deserves the Federal Government's attention, we already have more than enough unused emergency funds to pay for the fight against this emerging threat.

Yesterday, my colleague, the distinguished junior senator from Oklahoma, Mr. LANKFORD, illustrated that this administration has tens of billions of dollars in unobligated discretionary funds to pay for this as well.

What we should not do, however, is allow the Zika virus to be yet another excuse to run up the national debt, just so appropriators can come back and use unspent emergency money on non-emergency parochial priorities at some later date.

The entire emergency spending label is to some, perhaps, a little bit misleading. It does not mean that the money gets spent any faster. All it does is give Congress the ability to spend the money without having to pay for it, to spend the money without having to offset it somewhere else. That is not how we should operate.

I urge my colleagues to uphold this budget point of order.

Mr. President, pursuant to section 314(e) of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974, I raise a point of order against all of the emergency designations contained in amendment No. 3900, a list of which I am sending to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I certainly share the deep concern expressed by my colleague from Utah over the growing size of the Federal debt. It is a serious problem. I encourage him to look at the chart that Senator ALEXANDER has produced, which shows where the problem is.

The problem is on the mandatory side of the budget, not the discretionary side of the budget, which, due to efforts we have made, has been held relatively flat for several years. But the mandatory spending side of the budget is soaring. There is no doubt about that. For example, many of us, when the administration presented its budget, rejected the gimmicks that were included, for example, in the transportation budget to shift some \$7 billion from discretionary to mandatory spending. That was unwarranted. We did not do that.

But if ever there were an emergency, it is the threat posed to public health by the Zika virus. About 2 weeks ago, Senator JOHNNY ISAKSON and I went to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, GA, and heard briefings from the top experts in the world about the threat posed by the Zika virus.

The fact is that the news keeps getting worse and worse. Zika has now been linked for certain to a severe kind of birth defect, making pregnant women particularly at risk. It has also been linked to a disease known as Guillain-Barre syndrome, which can cause paralysis and even death.

Those of us who live in Northern States—this kind of mosquito, for example, is found only in the very southern tip of Maine—should take no comfort from that fact. The CDC has documented cases of the Zika virus in virtually every State in the Union, and that is because disease knows no boundaries in this world of international travel. In addition, the CDC has documented approximately 1,000 cases of Zika. It is an epidemic in Puerto Rico, where there are more than 475 documented cases—a true crisis for that U.S. territory.

From my perspective, we have to act. We have to act quickly. The Blunt-Murray compromise bill deserves the emergency designation which is attached to it.

Mr. President, pursuant to section 904 of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974 and the waiver provisions of applicable budget regulations, I move to waive all applicable sections of that act and applicable budget resolutions for purposes of the Blunt-Murray amendment No. 3900, and I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. RUBIO). Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The yeas and nays were ordered. Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I believe we are going to have that vote a little bit later.

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

AMENDMENT NO. 4039

Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, last night I was off the floor when Senator MCCAIN of Arizona offered an amendment regarding the Veterans Choice bill. Before the decision is made, I wish

to memorialize my support for the McCain amendment.

As chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, we waived jurisdiction so it could be offered on the VA component of this bill.

I wish to add one further comment. The cost associated with extending the eligibility of Veterans Choice by 3 years, which is the McCain amendment, scores at a cost. But to recognize that cost, you have to assume we would not have treated an eligible veteran under any other program if Choice expired.

We are never going to abandon our veterans. We have a commitment to the veterans for the health care they have signed up for.

What Senator MCCAIN is doing is trying to improve access to health care and to maintain access through the choice of a private sector provider or through a VA provider. There is no additional cost, unless you assume that you want to take away a benefit that we gave 2 years ago in the omnibus that we passed.

I commend Senator MCCAIN for extending the eligibility for Choice for 3 more years. I will support the amendment when it comes before the Senate, and I encourage all other Members to do the same.

I yield the floor. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that there be 2 minutes of debate equally divided prior to each vote in relation to H.R. 2577.

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

AMENDMENT NO. 3900, AS MODIFIED

Under the previous order, all postclosure time has expired.

The question occurs on agreeing to the motion to waive.

The yeas and nays have been ordered. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll. Mr. CORNYN. The following Senator is necessarily absent: The Senator from Texas (Mr. CRUZ).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS) is necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 70, nays 28, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 76 Leg.]

YEAS—70

|            |          |         |
|------------|----------|---------|
| Alexander  | Booker   | Capito  |
| Ayotte     | Boozman  | Cardin  |
| Baldwin    | Boxer    | Carper  |
| Bennet     | Brown    | Casey   |
| Blumenthal | Burr     | Cassidy |
| Blunt      | Cantwell | Cochran |

|            |           |            |
|------------|-----------|------------|
| Collins    | Klobuchar | Roberts    |
| Coons      | Leahy     | Rounds     |
| Donnelly   | Manchin   | Rubio      |
| Durbin     | Markey    | Schatz     |
| Feinstein  | McCain    | Schumer    |
| Franken    | McCaskill | Shaheen    |
| Gillibrand | McConnell | Stabenow   |
| Graham     | Menendez  | Tester     |
| Grassley   | Merkley   | Tillis     |
| Hatch      | Mikulski  | Udall      |
| Heinrich   | Murkowski | Vitter     |
| Heitkamp   | Murphy    | Warner     |
| Hirono     | Murray    | Warren     |
| Hoeven     | Nelson    | Whitehouse |
| Isakson    | Peters    | Wicker     |
| Kaine      | Portman   | Wyden      |
| King       | Reed      |            |
| Kirk       | Reid      |            |

NAYS—28

|          |          |          |
|----------|----------|----------|
| Barrasso | Flake    | Risch    |
| Coats    | Gardner  | Sasse    |
| Corker   | Heller   | Scott    |
| Cornyn   | Inhofe   | Sessions |
| Cotton   | Johnson  | Shelby   |
| Crapo    | Lankford | Sullivan |
| Daines   | Lee      | Thune    |
| Enzi     | Moran    | Toomey   |
| Ernst    | Paul     |          |
| Fischer  | Perdue   |          |

NOT VOTING—2

Cruz Sanders

The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 70, the nays are 28.

Three-fifths of the Senators duly chosen and sworn having voted in the affirmative, the motion is agreed to and the point of order falls.

AMENDMENT NO. 3946

The PRESIDING OFFICER. There is now 2 minutes of debate equally divided prior to a vote in relation to amendment No. 3946, offered by the Senator from Maine, Ms. COLLINS.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, on this amendment, I yield back the remainder of our time.

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

All time is yielded back. The question is on agreeing to the amendment.

The amendment (No. 3946) was agreed to.

AMENDMENT NO. 3900, AS MODIFIED, AS AMENDED

The PRESIDING OFFICER. There is now 2 minutes of debate prior to a vote in relation to amendment No. 3900, offered by the majority leader for Mr. BLUNT and Mrs. MURRAY.

The Senator from Missouri. Mr. BLUNT. Mr. President, we have looked at the proposal. I think we have reached an agreement on the proposal that takes this issue up through September of next year. I think now is the time to move forward.

I urge my colleagues to vote for the amendment, and at that point we will work with the House for a final conclusion.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I am disappointed that Republicans refused to work with us to fully fund the President's emergency supplemental proposal, and it shouldn't have taken us so long to get to this point, but I am pleased that this will move us to a down payment on the President's emergency funding package through the Senate.

I want to commend Chairman BLUNT for his work with us on this and all the Democrats and Republicans who are supporting it. But I want to remind all of us, this is only a first step, and we have to make sure that this agreement gets through the House and to the President's desk in the least amount of time.

I hope we can separate it from this bill and move it quickly. That was objected to yesterday over pay-fors, which are not part of this amendment, but this is a critical emergency. We need to move on this first step, and I hope we can do it in a timely manner.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the amendment.

Mr. VITTER. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Texas (Mr. CRUZ).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS) is necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. FLAKE). Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 68, nays 30, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 77 Leg.]

YEAS—68

|            |            |            |
|------------|------------|------------|
| Alexander  | Franken    | Murphy     |
| Ayotte     | Gillibrand | Murray     |
| Baldwin    | Graham     | Nelson     |
| Bennet     | Grassley   | Peters     |
| Blumenthal | Hatch      | Portman    |
| Blunt      | Heinrich   | Reed       |
| Booker     | Heitkamp   | Reid       |
| Boozman    | Hirono     | Rounds     |
| Boxer      | Hoeven     | Rubio      |
| Brown      | Isakson    | Schatz     |
| Burr       | Kaine      | Schumer    |
| Cantwell   | King       | Shaheen    |
| Capito     | Kirk       | Stabenow   |
| Cardin     | Klobuchar  | Tester     |
| Carper     | Leahy      | Tillis     |
| Casey      | Manchin    | Udall      |
| Cassidy    | Markey     | Vitter     |
| Cochran    | McCaskill  | Warner     |
| Collins    | McConnell  | Warren     |
| Coons      | Menendez   | Whitehouse |
| Donnelly   | Merkley    | Wicker     |
| Durbin     | Mikulski   | Wyden      |
| Feinstein  | Murkowski  |            |

NAYS—30

|          |          |          |
|----------|----------|----------|
| Barrasso | Flake    | Perdue   |
| Coats    | Gardner  | Risch    |
| Corker   | Heller   | Roberts  |
| Cornyn   | Inhofe   | Sasse    |
| Cotton   | Johnson  | Scott    |
| Crapo    | Lankford | Sessions |
| Daines   | Lee      | Shelby   |
| Enzi     | McCain   | Sullivan |
| Ernst    | Moran    | Thune    |
| Fischer  | Paul     | Toomey   |

NOT VOTING—2

Cruz  
Sanders

The amendment (No. 3900), as modified, as amended, was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that following the

cloture vote on the Collins amendment No. 3896, Senator ENZI or his designee be recognized to make a budget point of order against McCain amendment No. 4039; further, that Senator MCCAIN be recognized to make a motion to waive the point of order and that the Senate immediately vote on the motion to waive.

I further ask that the votes in this series be 10 minutes in length, strictly enforced.

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

AMENDMENT NO. 3896, AS AMENDED

There is 2 minutes of debate prior to the cloture vote.

Who yields time?

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I yield back the remainder of the time on this side.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is the time yielded back by the minority?

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I yield the remainder of the time on this side.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. All time is yielded back.

CLOTURE MOTION

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

The senior assistant 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 Senate Amendment No. 3896 to Calendar No. 138, H.R. 2577, an act making appropriations for the Departments of Transportation, and Housing and Urban Development, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2016, and for other purposes.

Mitch McConnell, Susan M. Collins, Roy Blunt, John Cornyn, Richard Burr, Bill Cassidy, Roger F. Wicker, Johnny Isakson, Marco Rubio, Mark Kirk, Lindsey Graham, Chuck Grassley, Jerry Moran, Orrin G. Hatch, John Hoeven, John Barrasso, John Boozman.

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 amendment No. 3896, offered by the Senator from Maine, Ms. COLLINS, as amended, to H.R. 2577, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Texas (Mr. CRUZ).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS) is necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 88, nays 10, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 78 Leg.]

YEAS—88

|            |            |            |
|------------|------------|------------|
| Alexander  | Franken    | Murray     |
| Ayotte     | Gardner    | Nelson     |
| Baldwin    | Gillibrand | Peters     |
| Barrasso   | Graham     | Portman    |
| Bennet     | Grassley   | Reed       |
| Blumenthal | Hatch      | Reid       |
| Blunt      | Heinrich   | Roberts    |
| Booker     | Heitkamp   | Rounds     |
| Boozman    | Heller     | Rubio      |
| Boxer      | Hirono     | Sasse      |
| Brown      | Hoeven     | Schatz     |
| Burr       | Inhofe     | Schumer    |
| Cantwell   | Isakson    | Scott      |
| Capito     | Johnson    | Sessions   |
| Cardin     | Kaine      | Shaheen    |
| Carper     | King       | Shelby     |
| Casey      | Kirk       | Stabenow   |
| Cassidy    | Klobuchar  | Sullivan   |
| Coats      | Leahy      | Tester     |
| Cochran    | Manchin    | Thune      |
| Collins    | Markey     | Tillis     |
| Coons      | McCain     | Udall      |
| Corker     | McCaskill  | Vitter     |
| Cornyn     | McConnell  | Warner     |
| Donnelly   | Menendez   | Warren     |
| Durbin     | Merkley    | Whitehouse |
| Enzi       | Mikulski   | Wicker     |
| Ernst      | Moran      | Wyden      |
| Feinstein  | Murkowski  |            |
| Fischer    | Murphy     |            |

NAYS—10

|        |          |        |
|--------|----------|--------|
| Cotton | Lankford | Risch  |
| Crapo  | Lee      | Toomey |
| Daines | Paul     |        |
| Flake  | Perdue   |        |

NOT VOTING—2

Cruz  
Sanders

The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 88, the nays are 10.

Three-fifths of the Senators duly chosen and sworn having voted in the affirmative, the motion is agreed to.

AMENDMENTS NOS. 3898 AND 3899, AS MODIFIED, WITHDRAWN

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, amendments Nos. 3898 and 3899 are withdrawn.

The Senator from Wyoming.

AMENDMENT NO. 4039

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, I thank Senator MCCAIN for his tremendous effort on behalf of veterans and the different approaches he has used. I don't think anybody has worked harder on it or understands it better.

I wish there were more we could do for veterans and will work with him to see that that happens, but this amendment isn't the right place to do it. This amendment proposes that we increase overspending by \$7.7 billion for a continuation of the Veterans Choice Program. It doesn't offer badly needed reforms to the program, it simply provides more funding.

Unfortunately, the accountability measures currently in place at the VA do not go far enough in ensuring that the health care needs of our veterans are the priority. By extending the Choice Program, we would be extending problematic waiting periods, we would be extending a backlog of health care claims, and we would be giving little or no authority to the VA to manage its employees.

We have been getting complaints about many of these things, and another veterans proposal in the Senate improves both health care access for veterans and expanded disciplinary

measures at the VA. Senator McCAIN has worked on that as well. At the same time, it provides offsets to ensure that we continue to help our veterans in the future.

I have been concerned about what I thought was \$6 billion of emergency expense every year. I had them actually total that up in the committee and found out that we do \$26.1 billion a year in emergency spending. We are going to have to find that money somewhere because if we don't provide offsets, we will not be able to help our veterans or our military or our education or anything else. Continued spending without making responsible choices for priorities will put us in a real hole.

In order to make sure we are spending on our priorities, such as national defense and our veterans, and that they are not crowded out, I raise a point of order.

Mr. President, pursuant to section 314(e) of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974, I raise a point of order against the emergency designation found on page 3, lines 7 through 12, of amendment No. 4039 to H.R. 2577, the Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. McCAIN. Mr. President, I note with some interest that the Senator from Wyoming did not have the same zeal for the \$1.1 billion that we just passed in emergency spending for Zika that is not paid for, but the important issue is, that this is a program for 1.4 million appointments for veterans who would otherwise wait for delayed care, over 2.5 million separate payments to doctors, 450,000 Choice health care providers—the list goes on and on.

All I am asking for is an extension of a program that is in effect and helping our veterans. The fact is, the chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee said last night: What Senator McCAIN is trying to do to improve access to health care is maintain the access through the choice of a private sector provider or VA provider. There is no additional cost unless you assume that you want to take away a benefit that was given 2 years ago in the omnibus bill we passed. He goes on to say he would support this amendment.

Who is taking advantage? The majority of the people who are taking advantage of this Choice Card, I will tell the Senator from Wyoming, are the young men and women who are just returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. We are giving them a choice. We are giving them a choice to be able to get the care they need and deserve.

In my home State of Arizona, 50 veterans died while on a nonexistent waiting list—50 of them. That is why we have a Choice Card, so they can go out and get the care they need and want and not be on a nonexistent waiting list.

I don't know what the priorities are of the Senator from Wyoming, but I can tell him now, they are not mine, and they are not of the men and women who are serving this Nation who deserve the best care and the choice of going to the provider that they want to within certain parameters.

This is simply an extension of a program that is in existence that cares for our men and women who served our Nation with sacrifice, and some of them didn't even come back to have a chance to have a Choice Card.

Mr. President, I ask to waive the budget point of order.

Pursuant to section 904 of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974, and the waiver provisions of applicable budget resolutions, I move to waive all applicable sections of that act and applicable budget resolutions for the purposes of my amendment, and I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Texas (Mr. CRUZ).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS) is necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 84, nays 14, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 79 Leg.]

YEAS—84

|            |            |            |
|------------|------------|------------|
| Alexander  | Franken    | Murphy     |
| Ayotte     | Gardner    | Murray     |
| Baldwin    | Gillibrand | Nelson     |
| Bennet     | Graham     | Peters     |
| Blumenthal | Grassley   | Portman    |
| Blunt      | Hatch      | Reed       |
| Booker     | Heinrich   | Reid       |
| Boozman    | Heitkamp   | Risch      |
| Boxer      | Heller     | Roberts    |
| Brown      | Hirono     | Rounds     |
| Burr       | Hoeven     | Rubio      |
| Cantwell   | Inhofe     | Sasse      |
| Capito     | Isakson    | Schatz     |
| Cardin     | Johnson    | Schumer    |
| Carper     | Kaine      | Scott      |
| Casey      | King       | Shaheen    |
| Cassidy    | Kirk       | Stabenow   |
| Cochran    | Klobuchar  | Tester     |
| Collins    | Leahy      | Thune      |
| Coons      | Manchin    | Tillis     |
| Cotton     | Markey     | Toomey     |
| Crapo      | McCain     | Udall      |
| Daines     | McCaskill  | Vitter     |
| Donnelly   | McConnell  | Warner     |
| Ernst      | Menendez   | Warren     |
| Feinstein  | Merkley    | Whitehouse |
| Fischer    | Mikulski   | Wicker     |
| Flake      | Moran      | Wyden      |

NAYS—14

|          |           |          |
|----------|-----------|----------|
| Barrasso | Enzi      | Perdue   |
| Coats    | Lankford  | Sessions |
| Corker   | Lee       | Shelby   |
| Cornyn   | Murkowski | Sullivan |
| Durbin   | Paul      |          |

NOT VOTING—2

|      |         |
|------|---------|
| Cruz | Sanders |
|------|---------|

The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 84, the nays are 14.

Three-fifths of the Senators duly chosen and sworn having voted in the affirmative, the motion is agreed to, and the point of order falls.

The majority leader.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the time until 1:45 p.m. be equally divided between the two managers or their designees and that at 1:45 p.m. the Senate vote in relation to the Collins amendment No. 3970 and the Lee amendment No. 3897; further, that following disposition of the Lee amendment, all postcloture time be expired; that the substitute amendment, as amended, be adopted; that the cloture motion on the underlying bill be withdrawn, the bill, as amended, be read a third time, and the Senate vote on passage of the bill, as amended.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. President, I wish to speak to the issue that was just brought up dealing with veterans funding and specifically the Choice Program.

Three years ago, Congress put into place a response to what was happening in VA centers all over the country. We were all appalled with what was happening at VA centers all over the country. But for any of us who are in congressional offices, we were aware, were pushing on this issue, and had pushed on this issue for a while.

But the media exposed what we all saw, and that was long-secret waiting lists for veterans so that the VA centers could keep their positive numbers up and look better—months of waiting for things that would take days across the street.

As I dealt with the VA center in my own city, at times it would take 6 months to get a knee replacement surgery at the VA center, when at the great hospital directly across the street, they could get that same surgery within 2 days.

As to hearing aids, it would take months and months to actually go through the process and to get them at our VA centers.

As to cancer care, if you were diagnosed with cancer and had needs and treatment that was going to be required, they would literally send you across the country, sometimes more than 2,000 miles away, to actually get cancer treatment—away from your family.

Congress responded to that by putting into place the Choice Act. It was an emergency. There were major problems that were happening around the country in multiple VA centers, and there had to be a response right then. Congress set aside emergency funding and an emergency response to make sure something came into existence that only loosely existed before. What was called community care was now clarified to say that this is Choice, and it was simple. If a veteran had to wait

more than 30 days to get into an appointment or get treatment or if they lived more than 40 miles from a VA center, they would be given the option to go wherever they wanted to go. VA was required to start working relationships in every community across the country so that veterans would have the option to go wherever they wanted to go.

I would acknowledge that program is in its infancy. It is 2 years old at this point. It has a ways to go to be perfected. There are still problems with it, and there is a constant push from Congress to provide accountability to make sure that program is done and done well. That should be the first step in giving veterans real choice. The first step of that is 30 days or 40 miles. The second step of that is any VA-eligible veteran would get a card and they could go to anyplace that accepts Medicare. If they accept Medicare anywhere in the country—any lab, any hospital, any doctor—they should also be able to receive veterans as well. So veterans can go wherever they choose to go regardless of the distance.

I have veterans who drive past six great hospitals, drive 200 miles to get to a VA center, and their families have the burden of all of that travel. It should not be that way. Veterans should be able to go wherever they choose to go for care.

So the Choice Program is not only a good program, it is the right direction to go and it is a positive first step. But here is the problem: The way this particular amendment has come up, it is not only not germane to this bill because it deals with something that started 3 years ago and we are dealing with a new bill right now, but it is also an issue of, we are doing the right thing the wrong way.

My staff has heard me say this over and over again: There is a right thing to do and there is a right way to do it. Three years ago, we knew this was an issue. Three years ago, the planning should have been put in place to put this into the normal appropriations process. This process puts it into place, so we are adding \$7.5 billion onto our children for a program that should be in the normal appropriations process that was started 3 years ago and that is not an emergency anymore. This is not an emergency. This is now normal funding of a program we want to keep going and expand. So there is a big issue here we do have to resolve.

I want to see us do the Choice Program and do it right, but there is a right thing to do and a right way to do it. This program is already fully funded through the next year. It is not an emergency. It is in place, funded, and ready to go. It doesn't go away in the next year, all the way through the fiscal year. Let's put it in the normal process, let's do it the right way, and let's not add \$7 billion to our children for an emergency that is actually a year away. No one is going to convince me that in a \$4 trillion budget, there

are not areas we could cut. Earlier this week I identified \$86 billion in funds that are available to cover the \$1 billion for Zika that this Congress decided to do in emergency funding anyway. We have the funds available.

We can honor our veterans. We can do this and also honor our children. At the same time we are honoring our veterans, let's honor the next generation and make sure we are not adding debt to the next generation.

With that, Mr. President, I raise a point of order that the McCain amendment No. 4039 is not germane to the Collins amendment No. 3896, as amended, or H.R. 2577.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The point of order is sustained, and the amendment falls.

Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. KIRK. Mr. President, I urge my colleagues to support my VA spending bill to final passage. It is a very bipartisan bill.

I also would like to thank my ranking Democratic member, Senator JON TESTER of Montana, who has been a great partner. We have worked with all Senators on both sides of the aisle to include their priorities and have worked through dozens of amendments. We include more than two dozen amendments in this bill.

The bill provides record funding for our veterans' health care, protects whistleblowers, includes opioid safety, and also has the RAID Act to clean up the VA so that cockroaches are not in the VA kitchens and dining facilities. This bill also adds 100 staff to the IG's office and combats veteran homelessness. It requires better screening of VA doctors so they can't switch from State to State. The bill also increases medical research and adds money for health care for our veterans.

I thank the subcommittee staff for doing outstanding work this year, and that includes Tina Evans, Chad Schulken, Michael Bain, Robert Henke, D'Ann Lettieri, Patrick Magnuson, and Carlos Elias.

The bottom line: This bill does right by our troops and does right by our veterans. I thank my Senate colleagues and urge its rapid adoption.

Ms. MIKULSKI. Mr. President, I wish to voice my full support for the fiscal year 2017 Transportation, and Housing and Urban Development, and related agencies appropriations bill which includes the fiscal year 2017 Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and related agencies appropriations bill. Each of these bills was passed out of the Senate Appropriations Committee by a vote of 30-0 last month. I urge all

my colleagues to support this bipartisan package of bills.

I commend Senators COLLINS and REED for their hard work on the T-HUD bill and their collegiality on the floor this week managing this bill. T-HUD is our annual jobs bill making investments at the State and local level, delivering on America's physical infrastructure needs and America's compelling human needs. The bill before us will keep our roads and transportation systems safe and in good repair while preserving housing assistance for our Nation's most in need.

I am especially proud of Senators COLLINS and REED for making renewed investments in lead paint poison prevention. As the Maryland Senator from Baltimore, this is an issue I know all too well. Senator Kit Bond and I worked together on the VA-HUD bill to first bring attention to this crippling public health problem. April 19 marked the anniversary of Freddie Gray's death, a young man who grew up in Baltimore's low-income housing. Before Freddie's second birthday, his blood lead levels were seven times the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's suggested level, leaving Freddie severely and permanently brain damaged. Today there are still half a million children under the age of 6 with lead poisoning.

This bill increases lead prevention funding in three programs. First, the Office of Lead Hazard Control and Healthy Homes is funded at \$135 million, an increase of \$25 million to support lead-based paint hazard reductions in 1,750 additional units. This program provides safer homes for more than 6,200 people. Second, the Mikulski-Bond Lead Hazard Reduction Demo Program is funded at \$55 million, an increase of \$10 million. This program provides competitive funds to State and local governments to implement lead hazardous reduction programs in privately owned and owner-occupied housing. Third, the Public Housing Capital Fund is funded at \$1.9 billion, an increase of \$25 million. This will remediate 1,500 public housing units.

This bill also includes a number of reforms to HUD's lead programs. Among these is the requirement for HUD to update its blood level standard to the stronger Centers for Disease Control and Prevention standard. HUD's standard hasn't been updated since 1999. In addition, the bill makes studio and efficiency apartments eligible for remediation grants for the first time. It is estimated that 34,000 zero-bedroom dwellings house children under 6 years old.

The transportation portion of this bill makes significant investments in Maryland's highways, byways, and transit systems. It cuts the first check under the FAST Act passed last December. This means more formula funding for every State. For Maryland, that is an increase of \$62 million.

For transit, this bill provides increased funding for the Federal Transit

Administration totaling \$575 million. It includes the Job Corridor-Purple Line project in the Washington suburbs of Maryland. A total of \$125 million is provided for the construction of this light rail project.

For the DC Metro system, this bill provides the eighth installment of \$150 million in Federal dedicated funding. This is the fully authorized level and will be matched dollar for dollar by the three jurisdictions. Fighting for this annual appropriation was the promise I made and have kept since the deadly Fort Totten crash in June 2009. This funding must be used on capital improvements relating to safety including buying new rail cars, track improvements, and signal upgrades.

I included bill language requiring the U.S. Department of Transportation Secretary to do three things before this funding money can be spent. First, the Secretary must approve each expenditure. Second, the Secretary must certify Metro is making progress implementing FTA's safety and financial management corrective actions. Third, the Secretary must determine that Metro is using this money for top safety priorities.

In addition to this dedicated funding, I am proud of the safety amendment I introduced with Senators SHELBY, CARDIN, WARNER, KAINE, and BROWN that was passed earlier in the week. This amendment provides additional funding to FTA to expand its safety oversight workforce for a total increase of \$5.25 million over the current year funding level. It will enable FTA to hire six full-time employees for Metro's Rail Operations Control Center, four more investigators, seven additional inspectors, and six more contractors.

This additional funding means FTA will now have more inspectors to watch as Metro crews work to complete SafeTrack, the yearlong plan to accelerate repairs on the system. Inspectors will be there to make sure the track work is fixed the right way for good. FTA also will have safety staff at the Rail Operations Control Center 24 hours a day and 7 days a week making sure emergency procedures are followed to prevent future incidents. FTA staff will help Metro implement the National Transportation Safety Board's recent recommendations to overhaul the center's emergency operations and training. FTA staff will make sure these reforms remain in place and are followed. Finally, more investigators will help FTA tackle approximately 100 Metro investigations conducted each year.

I also want to say a few words about the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs appropriations bill. This is another bipartisan bill funding vital programs for the health and well-being of our Nation's veterans, troops, and their families developed by Senators KIRK and TESTER. Overall, this bill provides \$83 billion in discretionary funding which is an increase of \$3.2 billion above the current year funding level.

This bill fully funds VA Medical Services at the President's request of \$52.8 billion. This is \$1 billion over what we advanced last year to address increased demand for VA medical care both within and outside the VA health care system.

The bill provides additional funding for disability claims processing. Significant progress has been made to eliminate the backlog in processing initial claims, but unfortunately, the backlog in appeals is rapidly building. This bill includes \$2.9 billion for claims processing, \$30 million above the request, to hire 300 new claims processors and 240 additional employees for the Board of Veterans Appeals. Also included is an increase of \$46 million for the Board of Veterans Appeals, bringing their total funding to \$156 million. This will provide for hiring an additional 240 new employees focused on appeals processing.

For our women veterans, this bill makes significant strides bring parity between male and female veterans. This bill mandates that the VA research and acquire prosthetic devices specifically designed for women. It includes \$5.3 billion overall to treat more than 500,000 female veterans who get care through the VA. This bill targets \$535 million for gender-specific health care which is \$20 million over the request and nearly \$70 million over the current funding level. This includes gynecology, reproductive health, and mental health care for women. I also was proud to support Senator MURRAY's amendment in committee, allowing the VA to cover the cost of reproductive services for veterans who suffered service-related injuries that prevent them from starting families.

The military construction part of this bill fully funds all seven Maryland projects included in the President's budget request. This means a total of \$340 million for construction jobs at Fort Meade, Pax River, Joint Base Andrews, and Bethesda Medical Center.

Finally, the bill includes \$1.1 billion in emergency spending to combat the urgent Zika crisis. CDC, NIH, and USAID need this funding on the ground today. \$1.1 billion is a bottom line, not a starting point for negotiation. I am committed to sending a Zika supplemental to the President as soon as possible.

I urge all of my colleagues to support this package of bills. It meets many compelling human needs and physical infrastructure needs of our nation and does not include poison pill riders. It is an example of how, working together, we can solve problems and put America to work.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President. I rise to speak in support of the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs division of the substitute before us. I commend Chairman KIRK and Ranking Member TESTER for their leadership in crafting the fiscal year 2017 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs funding bill. As a member of the Mili-

tary Construction and Veterans Affairs Subcommittee, I have appreciated their steady, strong advocacy for our Nation's veterans, servicemembers, and their families.

As the daughter of a World War II veteran, I know well the sacrifices of those who serve and have served on our behalf, as well as the sacrifices made by their families. The vital programs and benefits funded by this bill will help fulfill our obligations to them and honor their commitment to our Nation.

While we can never fully repay these debts, we must strive to provide each veteran with the quality health care that they deserve. One way this bill helps to meet this goal is through the extension it would provide of the highly successful Access Received Closer to Home, or ARCH, program. This pilot program, which is scheduled to expire in August, serves rural veterans in northern Maine, Montana, Kansas, Virginia, and Arizona, providing them access to high quality care in their communities and near their families.

Many of my constituents tell me that this program has proven to be a lifeline for them and has saved them the arduous burden of traveling up to 600 miles round trip to receive care at the Togus VA Medical Center in Augusta, ME.

In Maine, the program not only reduces wait times for appointments and prevents veterans from going through a third-party administrator to receive care, but it is cost effective. According to the VA's own statistics, the average cost of ARCH per veteran in Maine is less than half the average cost for VHA direct care. More than 90 percent of ARCH veterans are overwhelmingly satisfied with their care, a testament to why ARCH should be a model for the Nation.

Ensuring that veterans continue to receive this seamless care is paramount, and I thank Chairman KIRK and Ranking Member TESTER for including an extension of this vital program in the fiscal year 2017 funding legislation.

I am also pleased that this legislation would fund the President's fiscal year 2017 request for VA medical leases, including funding to lease a new Community Based Outpatient Clinic—CBOC—facility in Portland, ME. This project would allow VA to consolidate and colocate the Saco and Portland CBOCs with Maine Medical Center and its affiliate, the Tufts University School of Medicine. This collaboration will provide primary care, mental health, women's health, and specialty care medical services for veterans.

This legislation would also help to address the opioid epidemic by requiring the Department to improve appropriate pain care for veterans. It also includes programs to help end veteran homelessness, expand care services focused on our growing population of female veterans, and support caregivers, who shoulder the enormous responsibility of caring for veterans who are unable to care for themselves



Finally, I want to highlight the funding included in this legislation for our Nation's civilian and military members—and their families—who serve at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Kittery, ME. The legislation includes \$74.9 million for housing, the replacement of the medical and dental clinic, and utility nuclear improvements. These projects will help provide the exceptional personnel at PNSY with the facilities they need and deserve to carry out the mission.

Again, I thank the chairman and ranking member for their excellent work in balancing the priorities within their bill, and I urge my colleagues to advance this important legislation.

Mr. TESTER. Mr. President, universal, safe, and consistent trucking regulations are vital to all aspects of the trucking industry and to all users of the national highway system. Ensuring highway safety must remain a priority of this body. It also remains critical that this body maintain predictable safety laws to sustain efficient outcomes for truckers, trucking companies, the manufacturers and growers of the goods that trucks transport, and the customers who buy the products.

Congress determined years ago that a uniform system of Federal trucking rules would lead to safer and more productive outcomes than a 50-State patchwork of trucking regulations, as goods are often transported across State lines. Despite Congress's intentions, we are seeing various State trucking rules being implemented across the country that stray from the Federal guidelines. We need to figure out how to address this. We need to make sure that we have commonsense rules that don't change every time a driver crosses a State line while continuing to protect truck drivers and road users from unsafe situations.

I think we have got a little more work to do before we are ready for a solution, but I pledge to work with all who are willing and maybe we can figure something out in the coming months.

Thank you.

#### MARITIME SECURITY PROGRAM

Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, I join today with my good friend, Senator HIRONO, to address the requirement for full authorized funding of the Maritime Security Program. Senator HIRONO and I serve together on the Seapower Subcommittee and firmly believe that this program is important to our national security.

The United States needs a U.S.-flag merchant marine that is strong, active, competitive, and useful to the military. Our merchant marine has a long history of providing sealift support to our Armed Forces for global military operations. The Maritime Security Program is a unique public-private partnership that helps the merchant marine, enhancing America's commercial sealift capability while saving the American taxpayer billions of dollars.

Ms. HIRONO. Mr. President, as ranking member of the Seapower Sub-

committee, I could not agree more with the Senator from Mississippi's views concerning the importance of the MSP program. The 60-ship MSP program is the most prudent and economical means to address the U.S. military's current and projected sealift requirements. A 2006 report prepared for the Military Sealift Committee of the National Defense Transportation Association concluded that "the likely cost to the government to replicate just the vessel capacity provided by the MSP dry cargo vessels would be \$13 billion." In addition, the U.S. Transportation Command, TransCom, has estimated that it would cost the U.S. Government an additional \$52 billion to replicate the "global intermodal system" that is made available to the Department of Defense, DOD, by MSP participants. In contrast, MSP participants now provide DOD with the same vessels and global intermodal system at a fraction of what it would cost our government to do the job itself.

Mr. WICKER. The Senate version of the Transportation-HUD Appropriations Bill for fiscal year 2017 includes \$275 million for the Maritime Security Program. This is an increase of \$65 million above the enacted level for fiscal year 2016. Although we are pleased that the Senate Appropriations Committee has recommended this increase in funding, we hasten to point out that Congress acted last December to increase the authorization level for the Maritime Security Program to \$299,997,000 for fiscal year 2017. The House Appropriations Committee has recommended funding for the next fiscal year that would meet this authorization.

As this appropriations bill works its way through Congress, we urge the chairs and ranking members of the Transportation-HUD Appropriations Subcommittees and the full Appropriations Committee to work in a bipartisan, bicameral fashion to provide funding for the Maritime Security Program at its fully authorized level of \$299,997,000 for fiscal year 2017.

Ms. HIRONO. I strongly agree with Senator WICKER. Despite the clear benefits the MSP program provides, the MSP commercial fleet is under extreme economic pressure from reductions in government-impelled cargoes and foreign competitive factors. I completely share the concerns expressed by the then-TransCom commander, GEN Paul Selva, in his March 2015 testimony before the Armed Services Committee, where he stated that the "reduction in government impelled cargoes due to the drawdown in Afghanistan and reductions in food aid . . . are driving vessel owners to reflag to non-U.S.-flag out of economic necessity . . . With the recent vessel reductions, the mariner base is at the point where future reductions in U.S.-flag capacity puts our ability to fully activate, deploy and sustain forces at increased risk."

Accordingly, to ensure that this essential U.S. commercial sealift capa-

bility provided by the MSP program remains available to meet America's national security requirements, the MSP program needs to be fully funded as authorized by the Congress.

Mr. WICKER. I would like to add a comment from the current TransCom commander, GEN Darren McDew. In January, General McDew said, "As a military professional and senior leader, I think about and plan for what the future may hold, and I would tell you we must prepare for the real possibility we will not enjoy the uncontested seas and broad international support experienced in 1991. If either of those possibilities becomes reality, and if we remain committed to responding to security incidents around the globe, the only way of guaranteeing we decisively meet our national objectives is with U.S. ships operated by U.S. mariners."

I thank Senator HIRONO for joining me in this effort to ensure that full funding is secured for the Maritime Security Program in fiscal year 2017.

Mr. KIRK. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SASSE). The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

#### U.S. INNOVATION AND COMPETITIVENESS

Mr. PETERS. Mr. President, I rise today to discuss the need to drive innovation and competitiveness here in the United States.

I vividly remember watching the Apollo missions on TV and the launch of that 36-story tall Saturn V rocket that took Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin to the surface of the Moon.

The space program not only inspired a generation of Americans, but it also led to incredible advances in science and technology that over the last 50 years have accounted for as much as half of all the economic growth in the United States. These groundbreaking advances firmly established our Nation as an international leader in innovation.

During the height of the space race, America's Federal investment in research and development reached nearly 2 percent of the Nation's GDP. Today, overall Federal R&D spending—the seed corn of our future prosperity—has fallen to a historic low of 0.78 percent of GDP.

With the United States investing less on science, research, and education, and our competitors outpacing us, we are losing our footing in the global marketplace. Congress must increase the Federal investment in R&D to 1 percent of GDP if we want to continue to be leading the world in innovation. This commitment should include a focus on increased Federal support for basic research—an essential component of any kind of innovation economy.

In addition to increased investment, we in Congress need to implement policy solutions that will reassert American leadership internationally. We need to invest in what works. We need to listen to the innovators, academic leaders, and industries that are making the life-changing inventions of the future a reality. To that end, my colleague Senator CORY GARDNER and I have convened a series of roundtable discussions on ways to improve the American innovation system. Just last week, our Commerce Committee leaders, Chairman THUNE and Ranking Member NELSON, held a productive hearing on ways to leverage the U.S. science and technology enterprise. After receiving input from industry, academia, science organizations, and economic development organizations, Senators THUNE, NELSON, GARDNER, and I are working to develop new legislation to guide our Nation's research priorities in the coming years and to improve America's innovation system. Through these roundtables, we heard that the stakeholder community agrees that modest, sustained, and predictable increases in Federal research and development investments are absolutely critical to ensuring the economic competitiveness of the United States.

We need continued Federal investment in basic research, while also providing opportunities to commercialize that research. There is basic research that our companies simply cannot afford to conduct, making Federal investment absolutely critical. We also need to work to reduce administrative burdens on researchers so that we can maximize our Federal research investment. We need that investment to be put into the lab and not filling out more paperwork. We need stronger partnerships between government, the private sector, and academia in order to capitalize on discoveries emerging from our world-class research universities, such as the University of Michigan, Wayne State University, and Michigan State University.

We must also close the significant employment gap in the STEM workforce for women and underrepresented minorities. Women make up less than 50 percent of post-bachelor STEM degree programs and only about one-quarter of the STEM workforce. Underrepresented minorities, including Hispanics and African Americans, make up about 10 percent of the science and engineering workforce. Last month, I joined a number of my colleagues in introducing the STEM Opportunities Act, legislation that would improve inclusion of women, minorities, and people with disabilities in STEM careers. It is a top priority for me to see that a similar provision is included in our bipartisan legislation.

Finally, if we want to continue to be a leader in the global economy, we need to be a nation that makes things. Michigan is a State that builds and grows things, and I will continue to

fight to make sure we continue doing that. Investments in advanced manufacturing will support firms of all sizes and support good-paying jobs and help keep them here in the United States. That is why it is one of my top priorities for this legislation that we ensure American manufacturing companies can compete and succeed in the highly competitive global marketplace.

Last month, I joined my colleagues, Senators COONS and AYOTTE, to introduce the bipartisan Manufacturing Extension Partnership Improvement Act. The Manufacturing Extension Program, or MEP, is a Federal public-private partnership that helps businesses get their products to market through a variety of consulting services. The MEP Improvement Act would expand and improve the MEP Program to serve small- and medium-sized manufacturing companies, which are a critical part of our economy and our national competitiveness. Including key components of the MEP Improvement Act will be a top priority for me in the new legislation being drafted.

Science and technology are inseparable from the American competitiveness ecosystem. However, we need to focus on the entire ecosystem—from STEM, or STEAM, to basic research, to application and commercialization—and the inspiration that drives ambitious endeavors like exploring space and the other frontiers of science. We in Congress must do our part by supporting and investing in our efforts to drive economic growth, unleash increased productivity, enhance our safety and security, and make the world a better place for future generations.

We are facing big challenges as a Nation, but I am committed to working with everyone—Democrats, Republicans, industry, academia, workers, students, and employers—to increase investments and implement the solutions that will ensure American competitiveness and create more good-paying jobs here in the United States.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, if there is one specialty that every Member of Congress has, it is air travel. We spend more time on airplanes, more time in airports, more time waiting for flights and worrying about flights than most other Americans.

As Members of Congress, we are veterans of air travel.

We have all seen the footage of people waiting to go through security screening at major airports, particularly in the city of Chicago at both O'Hare and Midway. The lines are so long that people have had to wait 2 to

3 hours—2 to 3 hours to go through a security checkpoint.

People are angry, and I don't blame them. Thousands of people have missed their flights, and some were stuck sleeping in airports overnight. The commissioner of aviation, Ginger Evans, told me: We pulled out the cots that we save for snow emergencies so that people now, in the heat of early summer, are facing the same kinds of delays.

Our highest priority is to protect those who travel on our airplanes. Poor planning and inadequate funding have led to alarming delays across airports in America, and in Chicago we have felt it more than most. More needs to be done to fix the problem. That is what I have been working to do.

Earlier this week, I talked to the Department of Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson on the phone about the next steps. Yesterday, I followed up with a call to TSA Administrator Peter Neffenger to hear his thoughts. We all agree that the real problem is the shortage of TSA screeners. More people need to be hired and trained so security lines can stay open and people can move through the checkpoints faster.

In the meantime, there are immediate steps we need to take in Chicago. First, we are going to get 58 more TSA screening officers in the next 2 weeks and 224 by August. That is about a 15-percent increase in TSA staff, and it is a good start.

O'Hare will also receive 5 K-9 teams. That will double the number of K-9s we have at the airport. Two teams were brought in yesterday, and the rest will arrive within 5 days. These bomb-sniffing dogs do important work. They check carry-on baggage. If there is no problem, the passengers can move out of the standard line and into the expedited line. These dogs can help us speed up the process by allowing up to 5,000 additional passengers a day to move through the faster security lines.

There will also be a shift of 100 TSA staff from part-time to full-time status so more people can be on deck to help with the lines. And officers who currently work on nondirect security functions are going to be called to pitch in and help officers at the checkpoints.

We are also working to get more people enrolled in TSA PreCheck. I can't emphasize enough how important that is. For \$85, a regular traveler can buy—or at least apply for and be given—a TSA PreCheck status for 5 years. PreCheck lines can scan nearly twice as fast as the ordinary lines. Customers don't have to wait as long or remove their shoes, belts, or light jackets. We need to make sure more people are hearing about this option and are signing up for it as quickly as possible.

TSA is now working on a mobile app to help people get enrolled while they are waiting in lines, and they are also looking at lowering PreCheck signup costs by competing out the actual function of signing up for PreCheck.

PreCheck has gotten a lot of traction, especially in Chicago, where this past month alone we have seen 5,700 new enrollments. I hope we can continue to quickly expand this program to help more people into the faster lines.

The airlines have to be part of the solution as well. I am glad Senator BLUMENTHAL of Connecticut is on the floor because both he and Senator MARKEY of Massachusetts spoke out early on this aspect that I am about to address.

Airlines can help us by reducing high wait times, especially during the peak summer season. I have joined my colleagues Senator BLUMENTHAL and Senator MARKEY in urging the airlines to suspend the checked bag fees over the summer. A lot of people are dragging their bags on the airplanes because they don't want to pay to have them checked. On Monday, I spoke with Secretary Johnson, who told me baggage fees are contributing to long lines because more people are carrying on luggage that should be carefully screened through check-in.

Over the last year, the volume of passengers and personnel passing through security checkpoints has increased 7 percent while the number of checked bags has increased only 3 percent. That tells the story: More people are carrying on their luggage and causing problems as more travelers pack their roller bags to the brim, making the bags take even longer to be scanned. Waiving the checked baggage fee during the summer travel season can reduce the incentive for passengers to carry-on luggage, and it can help speed up the process.

Let me also add that it is in this baggage that people are dragging onboard that TSA screeners are finding things that aren't supposed to be on an airplane. Last year, they found 2,653 firearms, and 83 percent of them were loaded. Most of them were from one State; I will not name it. But by and large, we have to be more mindful of the fact that this stops the process or at least slows it down.

I am convening a meeting with Administrator Neffenger tomorrow, along with State and local officials and airlines at Chicago O'Hare, and then we are also going to be visiting the Midway airport. We will see firsthand what airlines are experiencing and what their response is. We have to stop this meltdown when it comes to airport security.

Let me close by saying this: The news today about EgyptAir was a grim reminder that we still live in a very dangerous world. The role and responsibility of the Transportation Security Agency is to make sure that when we and our families travel, we come off those planes just as safely as we went on. It is an important security responsibility. Yes, it is an irritation and a frustration, but we need to do it in this dangerous world to make sure that we stop people from using their carry-on baggage and other sources to cause harm to innocent people.

I stand behind TSA and its mission, but what happened in Chicago is unacceptable. This meltdown should have been avoided. There should have been better management, more screeners, and we should have been ready for the surge in passengers. Beginning this week, we are going to make that right. I hope the visit by the TSA Administrator tomorrow will be the beginning of a conversation that will not only help our airports in Chicago but also help our Nation.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I thank my colleague and friend from Illinois for his leadership on this issue and his support for the initiative that Senator MARKEY and I first raised, which he has supported so very helpfully, and essentially that is to persuade the airlines to stop charging for bags that are checked onto planes as opposed to being carried on. Obviously, the fee for checking those bags adds to the number of carry-ons and provides an incentive for larger numbers of carry-ons. In fact, TSA itself reports that there has been an increase in carry-ons due to these fees.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. I thank the Presiding Officer.

The elimination of the fees for checked bags is not a panacea. It is not going to solve this problem alone. But it will, along with other measures, help reduce lines that result from screening.

I commend Admiral Neffenger for his very close and prompt attention to this matter and for a number of the initiatives he has taken. We heard about them in the Commerce Committee this morning. I also thank Secretary Johnson for supporting elimination of the fees for checked bags. I think his leadership will be important.

There are a number of other initiatives that can and should be taken. There is automated equipment that can expedite the screening of those carry-on bags. The use of additional screeners is important. The number has been reduced over the last 3 years by about 5,800. The addition of another close to 800 will help compensate. But again, alone, none of these solutions will provide the answer.

As far as the automated equipment is concerned, the cost for the 20 busiest airports is about \$30 million—a pittance compared to the \$3.8 billion in revenue the airlines make every year as a result of the fees for checked baggage. I will repeat that: \$3.8 billion is going to airlines as a result of their purposefully charging for bags checked instead of carried on. Many of those bags that go through screening now wind up in the holds of those airplanes anyway because there isn't room for

them on the plane, so they wind up being checked at the gate. That simply adds to the cost and inconvenience of passengers: delayed flights, missed flights, flights that are in effect late because of the boarding problems. All of these accumulating issues are reasons to eliminate these fees and also give passengers the benefit of lower costs.

My hope is that the airlines will voluntarily eliminate these fees for checked bags. After the meeting we had today with Admiral Neffenger, I am encouraged that the TSA will take initiative and help to implement other measures as well.

In the meantime, we need the airlines to show some leadership as well, and I am hopeful they will do the right thing. The U.S. Travel Association has called it a national crisis. The evidence is irrefutable. At checkpoints that have no fee charges for bags, the carry-ons are 27 percent lower, so the numbers of carry-ons definitely diminish as the fees are eliminated. This evidence is irrefutable and argues powerfully that the airlines should not keep their passengers waiting in line. They should make some sacrifice to their bottom line and should not be profiting at the expense of their passengers.

I will conclude by saying on this point—and I am so glad to see my colleague and friend from Massachusetts—that we need this initiative now, and we need it to happen.

I also want to advocate on behalf of the safety of our roads. Blumenthal amendment No. 4002 will not be called up in part because it had been willfully mischaracterized by an industry campaign. In effect, we need to make truck drivers more safely empowered on the roads to take steps to protect themselves. Drivers who spend too much time behind the wheel are tired. They can't drive as safely. This amendment would enable them to drive more safely, give them the rest they need, protect them, and enable the roads to be safer not only for them but for people generally.

Mr. MARKEY. Mr. President, will the Senator yield?

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. I yield to Senator MARKEY.

Mr. MARKEY. I just want to thank the Senator for his work. We have been partnering on this issue of eliminating bag fees at airports. Since they have been imposed, 27 percent more bags now go through baggage clearing with passengers. If we could just get that out of the way, get rid of those baggage fees, I think it would expedite dramatically the ability of people to get on planes in this country. So I am glad we are able to have this moment to be able to speak about the importance of this issue.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, as I mentioned earlier, the Senator from Massachusetts and I have been partners in this effort, and I hope we can prevail.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

AMENDMENT NO. 3970 TO AMENDMENT NO. 3896

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I call up the Collins-Reed-Cochran amendment No. 3970.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Maine [Ms. COLLINS] proposes an amendment numbered 3970 to amendment No. 3896.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the reading of the amendment be dispensed with.

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

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: To prohibit the use of funds to carry out a final rule and notice of the Department of Housing and Urban Development)

At the appropriate place in division A, insert the following:

SEC. \_\_\_\_ None of the funds made available by this Act may be used by the Department of Housing and Urban Development to direct a grantee to undertake specific changes to existing zoning laws as part of carrying out the final rule entitled "Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing" (80 Fed. Reg. 42272 (July 16, 2015)) or the notice entitled "Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing Assessment Tool" (79 Fed. Reg. 57949 (September 26, 2014)).

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, the amendment that Senator JACK REED, Senator THAD COCHRAN, and I are offering would make very clear that none of the funds made available in this appropriations bill can be used by the Department of Housing and Urban Development to direct a recipient of Federal funds to undertake changes to their zoning laws. There has been concern that some have brought up that a new rule that was issued last year by the Department would somehow allow HUD to be the national zoning authority for every neighborhood in our country. While I do not believe that is a correct interpretation of the fair housing amendment or regulation that HUD has promulgated, the Collins-Reed-Cochran amendment ensures that HUD cannot do that. It eliminates that possibility and ensures that communities will continue to make their own decisions to address these Federal requirements.

By contrast, the proposal offered by my colleague from Utah, Senator LEE, would prohibit all funding for a rule that was issued by HUD based on a requirement that is included in the landmark civil rights era law known as the Fair Housing Act of 1968. It is important to know that this regulation was in direct response to a 2010 GAO report that criticized HUD's implementation of the requirement of the law that grantees, recipients of these funds, affirmatively enhance fair housing opportunities. It also was issued in response to requests from communities seeking guidance to ensure compliance because they don't want to be sued for inadvertently violating Fair Housing Act requirements. So communities asked HUD for more tools, better assessments, and more guidance to make sure that they were in compliance.

It is important to know that the Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination not only based on race, national origin, and religion but also against those with disabilities. Indeed, 56 percent of the complaints of housing discrimination have been initiated by individuals with disabilities. That is why Senator LEE's amendment is opposed by the Paralyzed Veterans of America and other disability groups, as well as the Urban League, the NAACP, and countless civil rights groups. On the first vote, we will be voting on the Collins-Reed-Cochran amendment.

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Will Senator COLLINS yield briefly for a question?

Ms. COLLINS. Yes, I will yield.

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Senator COLLINS and every member of this body know that I support fair housing. It is so important for my State, where there is a lack of affordable housing, and the Anchorage School District is one of the most diverse in the Nation. However, I have heard concerns from people in Alaska. They worry not so much about the rule itself but about how HUD could implement it. Many communities in Alaska are overwhelmingly Alaska Native, 90 percent or more of the population.

Will this affirmatively furthering fair housing rule result in Federal grants being withheld from communities that are currently and have long been populated almost entirely by Alaska Natives because those communities are now considered to be segregated?

Ms. COLLINS. No community in the United States or its insular areas will lose Federal housing funds solely because of its racial demographics. There are communities throughout the United States that are racially homogeneous for reasons that have nothing to do with discrimination or other historic barriers.

The rule does not change the Fair Housing Act, which for decades has included the affirmative fair housing requirement. The whole purpose of the rule is to ensure that States and communities that receive Federal funds take this requirement seriously.

This rule is a planning tool, created to help grantees identify barriers to fair housing and plan how to address them. The rule does not penalize any community for where it starts but rather assists a community in taking meaningful steps to address any barriers it may find.

HUD would never deny Federal funds to a community simply because of its demographics. It has never done so in the 48 years since the passage of the Fair Housing Act, and it will not under this rule.

Additionally, I know some have expressed concern about what effect this rule would have on Alaskan Natives and other Native Americans. HUD's housing programs for Native Alaskans and other Native Americans are authorized under the Native American Housing Assistance and Self Deter-

mination Act, NAHASDA. NAHASDA includes a statutory exemption from the Fair Housing Act, which the affirmatively furthering fair housing rule does not change.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

Mr. LEE. Mr. President, the affirmatively furthering fair housing rule, which my amendment would defund, is equal parts condescension and willful blindness. The condescension of this particular rule and its proponents is that local governments and public housing authorities across America can't figure out how to provide fair and affordable housing to their communities without the help, without the paternalistic interference of Federal bureaucrats. This is the epitome of the paternalism that informs so much of what happens in Washington, DC, today.

I don't doubt, as Senator COLLINS has said repeatedly, that local governments would like "better guidance" from the Department of Housing and Urban Development in Washington. But this is a problem that was created by HUD, with its onerous requirements and its vague mandates, not the result of local governments being unable or unwilling to provide adequate low-cost housing for their neighbors in need.

This brings us to the willful blindness part of the affirmative furthering fair housing rule. Proponents of the rule claim that HUD officials consulted closely with local governments and public housing authorities when drafting and finalizing the AFFH rule. In their telling, local housing agencies across the country are welcoming the AFFH rule with open arms. But this ignores what local officials have actually said about AFFH.

I will let these local officials speak for themselves. Roger Partridge, the county commissioner of Douglas County, CO, had this to say, in an email, about AFFH, the closed process that produced it, and the immense burdens it will place on local governments:

Douglas County believes that the Assessment of Fair Housing tool as it now stands is an unfunded mandate that will create an administrative nightmare for jurisdictions who want to further fair housing and implement community programs with HUD grants.

Partridge continues:

HUD headquarters has repeatedly ignored the local practitioners responsible for AFFH and implementing the AFH in our communities.

He continues:

In fact, HUD headquarters staff was in Denver for a Public AFFH roundtable on April 21st, during [the AFH tool] comment period. They ignored the opportunity to inform Region VIII Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity (FHEO) staff or the local practitioners attending the roundtable. No notice from the HUD EXCHANGE to the grantee list serve was found. The local governments who were asked to comment on the publication were shut out of the process.

Likewise, this is what we have heard from Salt Lake County officials:

The administrative burden imposed by this tool is excessive. Resources that could be put

into housing related tasks are being funneled into completing the tool and its associated administrative tasks.

Additionally, although HUD claims that this tool can be completed without the use of a consultant, the assessment is complex enough to warrant considering a consultant. The rule imposes a jurisdictional and regional analysis that is too complex to be effectively completed by staff without specific statistical and mapping knowledge. As housing providers, most staff at PHAs have comparative advantages that lie in providing affordable housing services, but not providing complex statistical data analysis. Forcing PHA staff to do this analysis is an inefficient use of their scarce time.

Salt Lake County officials added the following:

The AFH does not recognize the zero-sum nature of a PHA's resource allocation. By allocating resources to complete this process, PHAs are not allocating resources somewhere else. Those resources could be used to provide additional housing assistance.

Instead of ignoring the words and the experiences of our local officials, and instead of condescending to them, we should listen to them and learn from them. We should stop this disastrous new housing rule from causing more problems than it has already caused.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I know the Senator from Alabama is going to speak, and the Senator from Rhode Island should have an opportunity to speak. So I ask unanimous consent for 1 additional minute for each side prior to the votes in this series.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Alabama.

Mr. SHELBY. Mr. President, I rise today in support of Senator LEE's amendment that would prevent the implementation of HUD's affirmatively furthering fair housing regulation.

Contrary to statements that have been made, the Senator's amendment does nothing to change fair housing laws or to prevent the enforcement thereof. What the Lee amendment does is to prevent the implementation of a rule that would give HUD Federal control over local planning decisions.

Supporters of this program have argued that it is intended to protect communities from fair housing lawsuits. It is quite the contrary. This rule, if allowed to be implemented, will actually lay the predicate for endless litigation against every community in our respective States that are required to participate. This should be unacceptable to every Member of this body.

Supporting Senator LEE's amendment is the only option before us to prevent centralized Federal control of local planning decisions. In my judgment, the Collins-Reed amendment does nothing to restrain the full implementation of HUD's program. I urge my colleagues to support the Lee amendment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. REED. Mr. President, the pending amendment is authored by my colleague from Maine and myself. The amendment makes very clear that local officials will remain in charge of zoning decisions and will determine how to best meet their obligations under the Fair Housing Act. Those obligations are fundamental to our American fabric, our lives, and the aspirations of this country, because they protect Americans' housing choices no matter their physical ability, race, family status, or religion. These protections are fundamental to who we are. But without effective information and transparency so that local communities can make wise decisions, these aspirations can never be realized, are seldom realized, or are not realized to the extent that we, as Americans, feel that they should be.

Senator COLLINS and I have worked very hard to develop language that provides local communities with wide flexibility to meet their requirements under the Fair Housing Act. Those requirements will still be there regardless of our action today. If the resources made available under the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing regulations are not provided, however, those communities will still be required to ensure that housing is available within their communities, regardless of race, physical ability, or the other protected classes under the law.

The Lee amendment would make grantees liable for compliance without providing the data and tools needed to comply. The thrust—the heart and soul—of this HUD proposal, based on GAO analysis, is to give local communities the tools, so that they can determine the local answer that makes sense.

Thank you.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there is 4 minutes equally divided on the Collins amendment.

The Senator from Maine.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I will be very brief. Let me just reiterate what I have been saying repeatedly. What the amendment Senator REED, Senator COCHRAN, and I have introduced does is make very clear that HUD is prohibited from intervening in local decisions regarding zoning ordinances. That is in direct response to what some people have been claiming, incorrectly in my view; that the rule on affirmatively furthering fair housing would somehow allow HUD to be a national zoning commissar. That is not the case, but to make absolutely sure that could never happen, we have teamed up on this amendment to prohibit HUD from intervening in local zoning matters. It is very different from the Lee amendment, which we will discuss shortly.

This is an important clarification that should take away any fear that there is any possibility of HUD using funds authorized by this bill to interfere in local zoning decisions.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

Mr. LEE. Mr. President, the amendment offered by my friend and colleague from Maine in and of itself is unobjectionable and does no harm, and on that basis I intend to vote for it. Unfortunately, it also doesn't do anything. It does nothing to help the many housing agencies that have told the Federal Government that President Obama's AFFH rule imposes far too many reporting costs and their already stretched staffs are going to suffer as a result. It does nothing to shield local housing authorities from the very many real lawsuits they will face as a result of the data collected from this regulation, and it does nothing to stop HUD from blackmailing local housing agencies with Community Development Block Grant Program funds.

At this time, I wish to cede the remainder of my time to my friend, the senior Senator from Alabama.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alabama.

Mr. SHELBY. Mr. President, we should all be aware that the Collins-Reed amendment provides no protections to local communities on their local planning rules because it merely prohibits an activity that the rule does not contemplate. Even the sponsor of this amendment acknowledged earlier today that the amendment prohibited an activity that she believed would not occur.

Make no mistake that the so-called affirmatively furthering fair housing rule will likely heavily influence local zoning decisions. However, it does so indirectly, not through direct action as in the Collins-Reed amendment. HUD advertises this fact on its own Web site, where it details how communities will have to submit for approval an assessment of fair housing and that these communities will "use the fair housing goals and priorities established in their [assessment] to inform the investments and other decisions made in their local planning processes."

In other words, HUD does not intend to direct any specific zoning requirements. It does, however, intend to significantly influence local zoning decisions by withholding approval of local plans until they meet HUD's central planning goals.

This amendment is not sufficient on its own. I believe the only way to prevent HUD from intruding into local community planning exactly as they openly state they intend to do is to support the Lee amendment. I believe the Collins-Reed amendment is not alternative to Senator LEE's amendment, it is, at best, complementary to the Lee amendment, and that is something we will have to vote on in just a few minutes.

I thank the Presiding Officer.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I yield back the remainder of time on our side, and I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The question is on agreeing to the amendment.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Texas (Mr. CRUZ).

Mr. DURBIN: I announce that the Senator from California (Mrs. BOXER), the Senator from New Mexico (Mr. HEINRICH), and the Senator from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS) are necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 87, nays 9, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 80 Leg.]

YEAS—87

|            |            |            |
|------------|------------|------------|
| Alexander  | Flake      | Murray     |
| Ayotte     | Franken    | Nelson     |
| Baldwin    | Gardner    | Paul       |
| Barrasso   | Gillibrand | Perdue     |
| Bennet     | Graham     | Peters     |
| Blumenthal | Grassley   | Portman    |
| Blunt      | Hatch      | Reed       |
| Boozman    | Heitkamp   | Risch      |
| Burr       | Heller     | Roberts    |
| Cantwell   | Hirono     | Rounds     |
| Capito     | Hoeven     | Rubio      |
| Carper     | Inhofe     | Sasse      |
| Casey      | Isakson    | Schumer    |
| Cassidy    | Johnson    | Scott      |
| Coats      | Kaine      | Sessions   |
| Cochran    | King       | Shaheen    |
| Collins    | Kirk       | Shelby     |
| Coons      | Klobuchar  | Stabenow   |
| Corker     | Lankford   | Sullivan   |
| Cornyn     | Leahy      | Tester     |
| Cotton     | Lee        | Thune      |
| Crapo      | Manchin    | Tillis     |
| Daines     | Markey     | Toomey     |
| Donnelly   | McCain     | Udall      |
| Durbin     | McCaskill  | Vitter     |
| Enzi       | McConnell  | Warner     |
| Ernst      | Mikulski   | Whitehouse |
| Feinstein  | Moran      | Wicker     |
| Fischer    | Murkowski  | Wyden      |

NAYS—9

|        |          |        |
|--------|----------|--------|
| Booker | Menendez | Reid   |
| Brown  | Merkley  | Schatz |
| Cardin | Murphy   | Warren |

NOT VOTING—4

|       |          |
|-------|----------|
| Boxer | Heinrich |
| Cruz  | Sanders  |

The amendment (No. 3970) was agreed to.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I move to reconsider the vote.

Ms. COLLINS. I move to lay that motion on the table.

The motion to lay on the table was agreed to.

AMENDMENT NO. 3897

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HOEVEN). There is now 4 minutes of debate prior to a vote in relation to the Lee amendment No. 3897.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the subsequent votes in this series be 10 minutes in length.

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

The Senator from Utah.

Mr. LEE. Mr. President, unlike the Collins amendment that just passed with broad support, my amendment would actually do something with respect to affirmatively furthering the

fair housing rule. Specifically, it would defund this rule and ultimately force the Department of Housing and Urban Development to respond to the GAO in a way that does not undermine local control or increase costs on already stretched thin local housing agencies.

My colleagues who oppose this amendment have given a number of examples of local governments being newly connected to make better governing decisions, but my amendment in no way stops local governments from continuing to do that. All my amendment does—the only thing it does—is to prevent the Federal Government from forcing local governments to comply with a costly and unnecessary new data collection program, and it does so in order to protect local autonomy. I therefore encourage each of my colleagues to support this amendment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, the amendment offered by my colleague Senator LEE would prohibit all funding for a fair housing regulation issued by HUD based on a requirement of a landmark civil rights law, the Fair Housing Act of 1968. Not only was this not a regulation that appeared out of thin air, the GAO did a report criticizing HUD, and once the regulation was implemented, closed the recommendation.

In addition, communities asked HUD to issue better guidance on this part of the law so that they could avoid being sued under the Fair Housing Act of 1968.

Thank you, Mr. President.

Mr. President, I move to table the Lee amendment, and I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Texas (Mr. CRUZ).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from California (Mrs. BOXER) and the Senator from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS) are necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 60, nays 37, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 81 Leg.]

YEAS—60

|            |            |           |
|------------|------------|-----------|
| Alexander  | Cochran    | Isakson   |
| Ayotte     | Collins    | Kaine     |
| Baldwin    | Coons      | King      |
| Bennet     | Donnelly   | Kirk      |
| Blumenthal | Durbin     | Klobuchar |
| Blunt      | Feinstein  | Leahy     |
| Booker     | Franken    | Manchin   |
| Brown      | Gillibrand | Markey    |
| Burr       | Graham     | McCain    |
| Cantwell   | Hatch      | McCaskill |
| Cardin     | Heinrich   | Menendez  |
| Carper     | Heitkamp   | Merkley   |
| Casey      | Hirono     | Mikulski  |
| Coats      | Hoeven     | Murkowski |

|         |          |            |
|---------|----------|------------|
| Murphy  | Reid     | Tillis     |
| Murray  | Schatz   | Udall      |
| Nelson  | Schumer  | Warner     |
| Peters  | Shaheen  | Warren     |
| Portman | Stabenow | Whitehouse |
| Reed    | Tester   | Wyden      |

NAYS—37

|          |           |          |
|----------|-----------|----------|
| Barrasso | Gardner   | Rounds   |
| Boozman  | Grassley  | Rubio    |
| Capito   | Heller    | Sasse    |
| Cassidy  | Inhofe    | Scott    |
| Corker   | Johnson   | Sessions |
| Cornyn   | Lankford  | Shelby   |
| Cotton   | Lee       | Sullivan |
| Crapo    | McConnell | Thune    |
| Daines   | Moran     | Toomey   |
| Enzi     | Paul      | Vitter   |
| Ernst    | Perdue    | Wicker   |
| Fischer  | Risch     |          |
| Flake    | Roberts   |          |

NOT VOTING—3

|       |      |         |
|-------|------|---------|
| Boxer | Cruz | Sanders |
|-------|------|---------|

The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

AMENDMENTS NOS. 4050 AND 4026, AS MODIFIED, TO AMENDMENT NO. 3896

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the following amendments be called up en bloc and reported by number: Amendment No. 4050, offered by Senator RUBIO; and amendment No. 4026, as modified, offered by Senator BALDWIN.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The clerk will report the amendments en bloc by number.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Maine [Ms. COLLINS], for others, proposes amendments numbered 4050 and 4026, as modified, en bloc to amendment No. 3896.

The amendments are as follows:

AMENDMENT NO. 4050

(Purpose: To make temporary relocation assistance available for tenants in project-based section 8 properties with imminent health and safety risks)

On page 85, line 6, insert "Provided further, That the Secretary may provide section 8 rental assistance from amounts made available under this paragraph for units assisted under a project-based subsidy contract funded under the 'Project-Based Rental Assistance' heading under this title where the owner has received a Notice of Default and the units pose an imminent health and safety risk to residents: Provided further, That to the extent that the Secretary determines that such units are not feasible for continued rental assistance payments or transfer of the subsidy contract associated with such units to another project or projects and owner or owners, any remaining amounts associated with such units under such contract shall be recaptured and used to reimburse amounts used under this paragraph for rental assistance under the preceding proviso:" before "Provided further,".

AMENDMENT NO. 4026, AS MODIFIED

(Purpose: To prohibit certain health care providers from providing non-Department health care services to veterans)

At the end of title II of division B, add the following:

SEC. 251. PREVENTION OF CERTAIN HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS FROM PROVIDING NON-DEPARTMENT HEALTH CARE SERVICES TO VETERANS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—One year after enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs

shall deny or revoke the eligibility of a health care provider to provide non-Department health care services to veterans if the Secretary determines that—

(1) the health care provider was removed from employment with the Department of Veterans Affairs due to conduct that violated a policy of the Department relating to the delivery of safe and appropriate patient care;

(2) the health care provider violated the requirements of a medical license of the health care provider;

(3) the health care provider had a Departmental credential revoked and the Secretary determines that the grounds for such revocation impacts the ability of the health care provider to deliver safe and appropriate care; or

(4) the health care provider violated a law for which a term of imprisonment of more than one year may be imposed.

(b) **PERMISSIVE ACTION.**—One year after enactment of this Act, the Secretary may deny, revoke, or suspend the eligibility of a health care provider to provide non-Department health care services if the Secretary has reasonable belief that such action is necessary to immediately protect the health, safety, or welfare of veterans and—

(1) the health care provider is under investigation by the medical licensing board of a State in which the health care provider is licensed or practices;

(2) the health care provider has entered into a settlement agreement for a disciplinary charge relating to the practice of medicine by the health care provider; or

(3) the Secretary otherwise determines that such action is appropriate under the circumstances.

(c) **SUSPENSION.**—The Secretary shall suspend the eligibility of a health care provider to provide non-Department health care services to veterans if the health care provider is suspended from serving as a health care provider of the Department.

(d) **INITIAL REVIEW.**—The Secretary shall review the Department employment status and history of each healthcare provider providing non-Department healthcare services to determine instances of circumstances described in paragraphs (a) through (c) and shall take action as appropriate to each circumstance as described in paragraphs (a) through (c).

(e) **REPORT REQUIRED.**—Not later than two years after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Comptroller General of the United States shall submit to Congress a report on the implementation by the Secretary of this section, including the following:

(1) The aggregate number of health care providers denied or suspended under this section from participation in providing non-Department health care services.

(2) An evaluation of any impact on access to care for patients or staffing shortages in programs of the Department providing non-Department health care services.

(3) An explanation of the coordination of the Department with the medical licensing boards of States in implementing this section, the amount of involvement of such boards in such implementation, and efforts by the Department to address any concerns raised by such boards with respect to such implementation.

(4) Such recommendations as the Comptroller General considers appropriate regarding harmonizing eligibility criteria between health care providers of the Department and health care providers eligible to provide non-Department health care services.

(f) **NON-DEPARTMENT HEALTH CARE SERVICES DEFINED.**—In this section, the term “non-Department health care services” means—

(1) services provided under subchapter I of chapter 17 of title 38, United States Code, at non-Department facilities (as defined in section 1701 of such title);

(2) services provided under section 101 of the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014 (Public Law 113-146; 38 U.S.C. 1701 note);

(3) services purchased through the Medical Community Care account of the Department; or

(4) services purchased with amounts deposited in the Veterans Choice Fund under section 802 of the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate now vote on these amendments en bloc.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I know of no further debate on these amendments.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. If there is no further debate on the amendments, the question is on agreeing to the amendments en bloc.

The amendments (Nos. 4050 and 4026, as modified) were agreed to en bloc.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, all postcloture time has expired.

Under the previous order, the substitute amendment No. 3896, as amended, is agreed to.

Under the previous order, the cloture motion on the underlying bill is withdrawn.

The amendment was ordered to be engrossed, and the bill to be read a third time.

The bill was read the third time.

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

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Texas (MR. CRUZ).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from California (Mrs. BOXER) and the Senator from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS) are necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SULLIVAN). Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 89, nays 8, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 82 Leg.]

YEAS—89

|            |         |            |
|------------|---------|------------|
| Alexander  | Capito  | Donnelly   |
| Ayotte     | Cardin  | Durbin     |
| Baldwin    | Carper  | Enzi       |
| Barrasso   | Casey   | Ernst      |
| Bennet     | Cassidy | Feinstein  |
| Blumenthal | Coats   | Fischer    |
| Blunt      | Cochran | Franken    |
| Booker     | Collins | Gardner    |
| Boozman    | Coons   | Gillibrand |
| Brown      | Cornyn  | Graham     |
| Burr       | Cotton  | Grassley   |
| Cantwell   | Daines  | Hatch      |

|           |           |            |
|-----------|-----------|------------|
| Heinrich  | Menendez  | Schumer    |
| Heitkamp  | Merkley   | Scott      |
| Heller    | Mikulski  | Shaheen    |
| Hirono    | Moran     | Shelby     |
| Hoeven    | Murkowski | Stabenow   |
| Inhofe    | Murphy    | Sullivan   |
| Isakson   | Murray    | Tester     |
| Johnson   | Nelson    | Thune      |
| Kaine     | Perdue    | Tillis     |
| King      | Peters    | Toomey     |
| Kirk      | Portman   | Udall      |
| Klobuchar | Reed      | Vitter     |
| Leahy     | Reid      | Warner     |
| Manchin   | Roberts   | Warren     |
| Markey    | Rounds    | Whitehouse |
| McCain    | Rubio     | Wicker     |
| McCaskill | Sasse     | Wyden      |
| McConnell | Schatz    |            |

NAYS—8

|        |          |          |
|--------|----------|----------|
| Corker | Lankford | Risch    |
| Crapo  | Lee      | Sessions |
| Flake  | Paul     |          |

NOT VOTING—3

|       |      |         |
|-------|------|---------|
| Boxer | Cruz | Sanders |
|-------|------|---------|

The bill (H.R. 2577), as amended, was passed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, before I make some closing remarks, I would yield to Senator REED, who has been such an extraordinary partner as we have worked together in a transparent and collaborative way to bring this bill across the finish line.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. REED. Mr. President, let me return the compliment to the Chairman of the committee, Senator COLLINS of Maine, for her extraordinary insight, leadership, and ability to bring us together. This bill reflects the priorities of members on both sides of the aisle, it reflects sound policy, and it was a pleasure to work with her.

I think that she will also commend our extraordinary staffs who provided support, working many times when we were not working to get the job done. I thank Dabney Hegg, Heideh Shahmoradi, Christina Monroe, Nathan Robinson, Jordan Stone, Jason Woolwine, Mike Clarke, Lydia Collins, and Gus Maples. These are professionals who are thoughtful, skillful, pleasant, and probably deserving of the real praise for work done on the floor.

Let me once again thank Senator COLLINS for her thoughtful leadership and her commitment to fairness and principle. I think that she is one of the major reasons we are here today.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, the Senate has completed its consideration of this appropriations measure, which provides essential funding for the Department of Transportation, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, related agencies, military construction programs, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and to combat Zika. I thank all of my colleagues for working together with us in an open and collaborative manner.

I would note that the legislation we just passed incorporates some 40

amendments. There were also recommendations from more than 75 Senators from both sides of the aisle included in the Transportation-HUD appropriations portion of this bill which were incorporated at the committee level. I thank all of my colleagues for giving us their suggestions, their requests, and their insights. It made for a better bill.

As I mentioned, I am particularly grateful to Senator JACK REED, the ranking member of the Transportation-HUD Subcommittee, for his work.

I also thank the staff for their diligence and commitment throughout this process. As Senator REED mentioned, we worked extremely hard, but our staff worked even harder. So I thank Heideh Shahmoradi, Rajat Mathur, Jason Woolwine, Lydia Collins, Gus Maples, Dabney Hegg, Nathan Robinson, Christina Monroe, Jordan Stone, and Mike Clarke on the subcommittee staff.

I also give special thanks to the floor and cloakroom staffs who worked so hard. Without the help of Laura Dove and her team and the team on the Democratic side, we could not be where we are today. They did a lot of the vetting that needed to be done on various amendments. They helped us in the negotiations and compromises that ultimately were included in this bill.

I would note that our Transportation-HUD portion of this bill recognizes the fiscal reality while making critical investments into our crumbling infrastructure and economic development projects. It meets our responsibility to vulnerable populations. I think most of our colleagues are unaware that 84 percent of HUD's budget goes to subsidized housing. When we fund that, we keep very vulnerable low-income families, disabled individuals, and our low-income seniors from being at risk of homelessness.

We also paid special attention in this bill to vulnerable homeless populations, such as our veterans and our young people. We continued a program the administration wanted to abolish that helps our homeless veterans, to whom we owe so much—\$57 million in new vouchers, so that we can continue the progress we are making in housing our homeless veterans. Since we started this program, the number of homeless veterans has declined by about one-third. This program works, but we can't declare victory until the job is done. That is why both last year and this year we funded the program, even though the President's budget sought to eliminate it.

We have made real investments in helping some of our most vulnerable young people, and those are youth who have been in the Foster Care Program and then age out of that program. In some cases, they are aging out of the program before they have even graduated from high school, and they have nowhere to go. So through family reunification vouchers and other programs, we are beefing up support so

they don't fall through the cracks and become vulnerable to traffickers, to dropping out of school, to couch surfing, or ending up in shelters. In particular, I am very proud of the work we have done in that area.

I am very pleased this bill funds the TIGER Grant Program at \$525 million. This program has been extraordinarily popular and effective. It has funded projects in each and every State—projects that have led to job creation and economic development. When we think about it, at heart, much in this bill is about creating jobs and security for our fellow citizens. If you don't have a place to live, it is very difficult to show up for work every day. If the infrastructure is crumbling, it is very difficult for a business to hire the employees who produce the products and get those products to market. The construction projects this bill will fund creates good-paying jobs. In many ways, I think of this as a jobs bill.

Let me give another example of a very popular program, the Community Development Block Grant Program. If you ask of the mayors and other town and city officials in your State, they will point to that program as one that gives them the flexibility to improve their downtowns, to make investments that bring new employers to the region, to build affordable housing, whatever their needs are, and that is the beauty of that program. It is not dictated from Washington. It gives tremendous flexibility to States and communities to design the kinds of economic development programs that boost growth and create jobs.

In short, our bill strikes the right balance between thoughtful investment and fiscal restraint and thereby sets the stage for future economic growth, something I know the Presiding Officer has been a real leader in speaking out about and reminding us that must be our focus as Members of the Senate.

I am also pleased we were able to bring spending bills to the floor for Members to examine, debate, and vote on in a transparent manner. The worst situation is when we do a series of continuing resolutions temporarily funding the essential functions of government. They create such uncertainty, they lock in priorities from previous years rather than reflecting today's priorities, and they end up costing more money. Agencies are unable to enter into contracts. Businesses, because of the uncertainty, tend to build in a little extra into their bids. It is a terrible way to operate.

Equally bad is the practice of bundling all 12 of the appropriations bills into one gigantic omnibus bill, thousands of pages long, that is rushed through at the end of the fiscal year—or, more often, at the expiration of one of those continuing resolutions that I just deplore. We are not doing that this year. This is the third appropriations bill that the Senate has passed earlier than ever, with great cooperation from both sides of the aisle. The Members of

the Appropriations Committee and its two leaders, Senator COCHRAN and Senator MIKULSKI, deserve great credit for putting us on a strict schedule and keeping the process moving.

In fact, in the full committee today, we approved two more appropriations bills that are ready to come to the Senate floor. That is the way the process used to work. That is the way the process should work, and that is the way the process is working this year. I believe it is a great credit to the Senate, to the leaders of the Appropriations Committee, and to Majority Leader MCCONNELL, who has made it a goal that all 12 bills be reported by the Appropriations Committee and brought to the Senate floor, individually or two or three combined, for full and open debate.

Again, I thank Members on both sides of the aisle. Many of your requests are included in this important legislation. I feel fortunate to have worked with Senator JACK REED on this bill. He is not only a great colleague and a terrific Senator but also a good friend.

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#### MORNING BUSINESS

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, 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. RUBIO. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. CAPITO). Without objection, it is so ordered.

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#### INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

Mr. RUBIO. Madam President, there is an ongoing debate in our politics today about the value of leadership around the world in the 21st century. There is a view that seems to be gaining traction and favor—that our international engagement is one-sided, that our allies are free riders, that we contribute too much and get too little in return, and so why should we be involved in the world? These voices exist in both parties, and I would like to answer them today.

I want to start by looking back at the last century, when the world emerged from the death and destruction of the Second World War. The United States could have decided after that war to wall ourselves off—that after the loss of so many of our best and brightest, we had already paid enough for peace.

Instead, our country became the driving force behind international