

AGUA CALIENTE LAND EXCHANGE FEE TO TRUST CONFIRMATION ACT

Mr. PADILLA. Mr. President, I also ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Indian Affairs be discharged from further consideration of H.R. 897 and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 897) to take certain lands in California into trust for the benefit of the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians, and for other purposes.

There being no objection, the committee was discharged, and the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Mr. PADILLA. I ask unanimous consent that the bill be considered read a third time and passed and the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The bill (H.R. 897) was ordered to a third reading, was read the third time, and passed.

KATIMIIN AND AMEEKYÁARAAM SACRED LANDS ACT

Mr. PADILLA. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Indian Affairs be discharged from further consideration of S. 4439 and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 4439) to take certain Federal land located in Siskiyou County, California, and Humboldt County, California, into trust for the benefit of the Karuk Tribe, and for other purposes.

There being no objection, the committee was discharged, and the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Mr. PADILLA. I ask unanimous consent that the bill be considered read a third time and passed and the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The bill (S. 4439) was ordered to be engrossed for a third reading, was read the third time, and passed as follows:

S. 4439

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Katimiin and Aameekyáaraam Sacred Lands Act”.

SEC. 2. LAND HELD IN TRUST FOR THE KARUK TRIBE.

(a) FINDINGS.—Congress finds that—

(1) the Katimiin and Aameekyáaraam land is located in the ancestral territory of the Karuk Tribe; and

(2) the Karuk Tribe has historically used, and has an ongoing relationship with, the Katimiin and Aameekyáaraam land.

(b) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

(1) KATIMIIN AND AMEEKYÁARAAM LAND.—The term “Katimiin and Aameekyáaraam land” means the approximately 1,031 acres of Federal land, including improvements and appurtenances to the Federal land, located in Siskiyou County, California, and Humboldt County, California, and generally depicted as “Proposed Area” on the map of the Forest Service entitled “Katimiin Area Boundary Proposal” and dated August 9, 2021.

(2) SECRETARY.—The term “Secretary” means the Secretary of the Interior.

(c) ADMINISTRATIVE TRANSFER.—Administrative jurisdiction of the Katimiin and Aameekyáaraam land is hereby transferred from the Secretary of Agriculture to the Secretary, subject to the condition that the Chief of the Forest Service shall continue to manage the component of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System that flows through the Katimiin and Aameekyáaraam land.

(d) LAND HELD IN TRUST.—The Katimiin and Aameekyáaraam land is hereby taken into trust by the Secretary for the benefit of the Karuk Tribe, subject to—

(1) valid existing rights, contracts, and management agreements relating to easements and rights-of-way; and

(2) continued access by the Chief of the Forest Service for the purpose of managing the component of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System that flows through the Katimiin and Aameekyáaraam land.

(e) SURVEY.—Not later than 180 days after the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Agriculture shall provide to the Secretary a complete survey of the land taken into trust under subsection (d).

(f) USE OF LAND.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Land taken into trust under subsection (d) may be used for traditional and customary uses for the benefit of the Karuk Tribe.

(2) GAMING.—Class II and class III gaming under the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (25 U.S.C. 2701 et seq.) shall not be allowed on the land taken into trust under subsection (d).

(g) WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS MANAGEMENT.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Nothing in this section affects the status or administration of any component of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, including any component that flows through the land taken into trust under subsection (d).

(2) MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING.—The Secretary of Agriculture shall enter into a memorandum of understanding with the Karuk Tribe, consistent with the obligations of the Secretary of Agriculture under subsection (c), to establish mutual goals for the protection and enhancement of the river values of any component of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System that flows through the land taken into trust under subsection (d).

Mr. PADILLA. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. BOOKER. I didn't hear that, Mr. President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. BOOKER. Thank you very much, Mr. President. I appreciate that. I appreciate your kindness and the respect you give the great Garden State.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—H.R. 3771

Mr. BOOKER. Mr. President, I would like to talk a bit and then ask for unanimous consent on the South Asian Heart Awareness and Research Act. I am really proud of this work and the bipartisan effort.

In general, heart disease is widely prevalent. There is an alarming statistic that I want to reveal to everyone: that every 36 seconds, a person in the United States dies of cardiovascular disease. This is a national crisis. But when you break down the data by racial and ethnic group, it is the South Asian Americans who have the highest death rate from heart disease. Almost two-thirds of middle-aged South Asian Americans are at either immediate or high risk for heart failure within the next 10 years. Compared to the general population, South Asians are four times more likely to have heart disease and have a much greater chance of having a heart attack before the age of 50.

The prevalence of type 2 diabetes, a leading cause of heart disease, is the highest in America amongst South Asians. Some of these heightened risks are connected to social determinants of health, the conditions that people have to face every day of their lives.

For some South Asian Americans, language barriers even make visits to the doctor more difficult. Others are immigrants who are adjusting to this Nation, trying to make a living working multiple jobs, and often neglecting their personal health experience as well.

That makes it all the more important that Congress step in and act to promote better understanding, awareness, and research of heart disease. Because of that reason, I am proud to lead the Senate version of the South Asian Heart Health Awareness and Research Act.

For each year between 2023 and 2027, this bill would authorize additional funding and grant money to promote awareness of the increasing prevalence of heart disease in disproportionately affected communities. It authorizes the Centers for Disease Control to develop culturally appropriate materials to promote health, support community groups involved in heart health promotion, and support conferences and research workshops dedicated to the issue.

Finally, it establishes a central source of information on heart health to help patients access resources quickly, if need be.

This bill, again, is a bipartisan bill. It is a bipartisan approach. It is a bicameral approach to address a clear heart health and research gap. With the leadership of Representatives JAYAPAL and WILSON in the House of Representatives, this legislation has already passed one Chamber of Congress twice—twice, already. It is now up to the Senate to pass this common-sense bill and take a step toward addressing the disproportionate impact that heart disease has on South Asian Americans.

As a representative of New Jersey, one of the States with the largest South Asian communities in the country, I have the chance to interact often with constituents from Pakistan,

India, Bangladesh, and other South Asian countries. They are such critical aspects of the American story, the American fabric, and I urge us all today to not let this opportunity slip by. And I now ask for unanimous consent to pass the South Asian Heart Health Awareness and Research Act.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions be discharged from further consideration of H.R. 3771 and that the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration.

I ask unanimous consent that the Booker amendment, which is at the desk, be considered and agreed to; that the bill, as amended, be considered read a third time and passed; that the title amendment at the desk be considered and agreed to; and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

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

The Senator from Kentucky.

Mr. PAUL. I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. BOOKER. To the Senator from California, the Presiding Officer, it is good to see you there. I wish you a very merry Christmas.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—H.R. 5768

Mr. President, from 2019 to 2020, we have seen a rise in homicide rates in all corners of our Nation, by 30 percent in urban areas and 25 percent in our rural areas. Much of this increase can be traced to the gun violence epidemic that plagues America. But today I rise to ask my colleagues to join me in passing a bill that will address violent crime and bring perpetrators to justice at a time when our assistance is so desperately needed.

Each instance of violence and each death is especially painful for family, friends, and for the loved ones of victims. Nothing can ever replace losing a loved one, but some semblance of closure can be provided to victims' families when the perpetrators of these crimes are brought to justice.

It is time to do more. The data indicates that these crimes are committed repeatedly by the same individuals. Less than 1 percent of the population is responsible for over 60 percent of gun crimes in this country. A 2017 analysis of shootings in Oakland revealed that just 0.1 percent of the city's population was responsible for most of the homicides.

Yet the homicide clearance rate, defined as the percentage of those crimes that are solved, has dramatically declined recently, falling 7 percent from 2019 to 2020.

Currently, about half of the murders in the United States—half—are ultimately solved. For every murder and nonfatal shooting that goes unsolved, the public is put at greater danger. The pattern of dismal clearance rates in this country are disproportionately impacting minority communities.

It is a tragedy that we can solve. Police need the resources to solve homicides and crimes of gun violence nationwide. Police need the resources that the evidence demonstrates, if they had, they can vastly improve their clearance rates.

This past July, the House passed a bipartisan bill, the bill I introduced in June, the Violent Incident Clearance and Technological Investigation Methods Act, or the VICTIM Act. This bill would establish a new grant program through the Department of Justice to help State, local, and Tribal law enforcement agencies improve their clearance rates for homicides and nonfatal shootings.

At a time of this wrongful, erroneous language about anybody in this body wanting to defund the police, this is a chance to apply police resources, to give the police more resources to ultimately solve the crimes that are most savaging and hurting our neighborhoods.

This is a critical bill. It is a bipartisan bill. It is a bicameral bill, and it would provide the kind of grants that we have seen that help dramatically solve violent homicides.

The VICTIM Act has been endorsed by the largest police groups in the country: the Fraternal Order of Police, the International Association of Chiefs of Police, the Major Cities Chiefs Association, and others. They are telling us they need these additional resources to help make our communities safer.

It is unacceptable that we have this level of murder in our country. Communities are being shattered, and law enforcement agencies don't have the resources necessary to bring the victims and their families the justice they deserve. This is an issue that cuts at the heart of criminal and racial justice.

So, today, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of H.R. 5768, which has been received from the House and is at the desk; further, that the bill be considered read a third time and passed and the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Kentucky.

Mr. PAUL. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, our Federal debt is now over \$31 trillion, with no end in sight. The legislation before us authorizes a billion dollars in new spending. This bill comes just after, in the dead of night, at 1:30 in the morning, the leadership of this body released a 4,000-page bill that spends \$1.7 trillion and will add over a trillion dollars in new debt to the country.

We have learned the hard way that profligate Federal spending comes at a great cost. The trillions of supposedly free money that Congress spent over the pandemic was not free at all. Inflation continues to eat away at the purchasing power of every American fam-

ily, regardless of income. The least fortunate among us are worse off because of our spending. The working class and those who live on a fixed income are the ones who are hurt worst by inflation. Inflation comes from spending money you don't have.

This is why I offer to modify the request. We should study this issue. And before we add any dollars to it, we should study this issue further.

So I have asked that the Comptroller General of the United States conduct a study of crime and crime clearance rates by jurisdiction, identify specific technological methods that improve clearance rates, and determine whether one approach yields higher clearance rates than others. This report should also discern whether efforts to defund the police have adversely impacted those rates and explore fee-based mechanisms to pay for Federal grants to reduce violent crime after the completion of this study.

It is time we stopped forcing one-size-fits-all policies on States and local law enforcement. Each jurisdiction is unique and deserves to implement the most appropriate practices for their constituents and community. Therefore, I encourage the passage of my amendment.

So, still reserving the right to object, I ask unanimous consent that the Senator modify his request to include my amendment, which would allow for this report, which is at the desk; that the amendment be considered and agreed to; that the bill, as amended, be considered read a third time and passed; and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Does the Senator so modify the request?

Mr. BOOKER. Mr. President, this might be seen as a Christmas miracle, but I am grateful for that suggestion from the Senator from Kentucky. I am disappointed that he does not accept this bill, which does not impose anything on local law enforcement but gives them opportunities for resources that they can apply for. It is going to help us actually lower the cost for local communities because one murder in one community causes such economic damage. You can't put a price on human life.

But I do feel a sense of gratitude that the Senator from Kentucky might be willing to work with me on finding a way forward and that there is some area of common ground.

So I don't accept his amendment now, but I look forward, in the new year, in the next Congress, to finding a way to perhaps work together to some accord.

So, no, I object to the modification.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection to the original request?

Mr. PAUL. I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from New Jersey.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—H.R. 1693

Mr. BOOKER. Mr. President, today, right now, Christopher Bass sits in a

jail cell in Jesup, GA. He will sleep there tonight, and he has spent 19 years in that jail cell. Terrance Stanton sits in a jail cell in Wildwood, FL. He has spent the last 8 years in that jail cell.

Across our country, 8,000 people sit in jail cells who should have left a long time ago. Many have been there for years and will be there for years to come.

Christopher and Terrance are just two of the people languishing behind bars because of a mistake that Congress made 36 years ago. Their families are two of the thousands of families who are not reconnected with their families during the holiday season, who are not reunited with their children because of this mistake.

In 1986, Congress passed a law which created a 100-to-1 sentencing disparity between crack cocaine and powder cocaine offenses. The decision to enact this legislation was not based on science or data. Crack cocaine and powder cocaine are pharmacologically the same substance. They have the same effects. They are identical. That is science. But the one which was more prevalent in poor communities, in Black and Brown communities, was punished 100 times more harshly.

It was only in 2010 that Congress reduced but not eliminated this disparity to 18 to 1—better, yes, but why 18 to 1? Again, there is no reason behind this ratio for the same scientifically and pharmacologically exact substance. And this disparity continues to ruin the lives of hundreds of people convicted for nonviolent crack offenses because they received punishments 18 times longer than those with the powder.

Those of you who know me will understand that this is an urgency I feel because we are a nation that believes that liberty is one of the most sacrosanct ideals, and to unjustly take a person's liberty is an affront to our constitutional principles that we swear an oath to when we say we are one Nation under God with liberty and justice for all.

I believe we must deal with this. We know that this is an urgency. We know that this is wrong. In fact, the bill—the EQUAL Act—which was passed overwhelmingly in the House of Representatives, passed with a vote of 361 to 66. Republicans and Democrats joined together all across the political spectrum to say that this was wrong, that we should make these pharmacologically identical substances have the same punishment.

Here in the U.S. Senate, 11 Republicans have joined as cosponsors of the EQUAL Act legislation. This is supported bicamerally and in a bipartisan way. Yet we can't get this done. This bill gathers momentum. It is advocated for from police groups and all the way to think tanks on both sides of the aisle.

I believe now is the time, as we approach the holidays, to end this injustice, to restore more truth behind the ideals of liberty in this Nation.

So, Mr. President, therefore, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on the Judiciary be discharged from further consideration of H.R. 1693 and that the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration; further, that the bill be considered read a third time and passed and the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Arkansas.

Mr. COTTON. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, every American has heard about our drug death crisis. Many have, sadly, experienced it first- or secondhand, seeing loved ones and friends struggle with addiction.

And it is not just opioids. In the past year, more than 25,000 of our fellow citizens died by cocaine. That is more than a 25-percent increase since Joe Biden took office and more than double the overdoses in 2016.

At the same time, murders and other violent crime rates are skyrocketing, as we just heard earlier from the Senator from New Jersey. The murder rate has hit levels not seen since the 1990s. Gangs and cartels are emboldened in part because they know that many Soros prosecutors across the country in the Garland Department of Justice will treat them with kid gloves.

This so-called EQUAL Act is likewise going to go easier on crack cocaine traffickers, including members of gangs and cartels. This would only exacerbate our problems.

Why would we do that now, of all times, given these facts? Crack cocaine and powder cocaine, while true that they are the same primary chemicals, are different drugs. Their delivery is different. Crack cocaine is more addictive. The typical methods of trafficking and sale are more dangerous.

According to the U.S. Sentencing Commission, crack cocaine traffickers are more than twice as likely as powder cocaine traffickers to involve weapons in their crimes, and crack cocaine traffickers are the most likely of any type of drug trafficker to be rearrested. Nearly 60 percent of crack cocaine traffickers are rearrested, many for violent offenses within just a few years of release. Disproportionately, minorities and individuals in low-income areas bear the brunt of the violence of this trafficking.

That is why I have to remind everyone that Congress passed laws with enhanced penalties for crack cocaine trafficking in the first place, and I have to remind everyone that those laws passed almost unanimously decades ago, when the Senator from New Jersey and I were just kids, and they were supported by, among other people, the Congressional Black Caucus, Senator DURBIN, Senator LEAHY, Senator SCHUMER, and then-Senator, now-President Joe Biden.

This was not an accident. This was a deliberate policy choice for the reasons I have stated.

The EQUAL Act, though, would not just reduce sentences for those dealing drugs now; it would also retroactively allow crack cocaine traffickers in Federal prison to seek early release.

Nevertheless, I have heard, as we heard today, for years about this so-called disparity, as if it were an accident, as if it were unintentional—a loophole in the law—rather than people like Senator SCHUMER and Senator LEAHY and then-Senator Biden and the Congressional Black Caucus seeking it as a deliberate policy choice.

Oftentimes, it is attributed to racism. Again, the disparity is in the law because of the facts I have cited. However, I am willing to try to meet the other side halfway. I have a different plan to eliminate the disparity.

Rather than reducing sentences for crack cocaine traffickers, I propose that we increase sentences for powder cocaine trafficking to eliminate this disparity. Especially with cocaine overdoses on the rise now, we should start enforcing the law even more rigorously so innocent Americans don't die.

So, Mr. President, still reserving the right to object, I ask unanimous consent that the Senator modify his request to include my amendment, which is at the desk; that the amendment be considered and agreed to; that the bill, as amended, be considered read a third time and passed; and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Does the Senator so modify his request?

The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. BOOKER. Reserving the right to object, I question some of the comments that were made that—over a generation ago when Congress acted wrongly, the Senators whom he named—from the President of the United States, a former Senator; to DICK DURBIN; to members of the Congressional Black Caucus—have all said publicly that they think it was a mistake. There are things this body has done before, generations ago, like this that future Congresses said: Enough is enough. This Congress passed laws on gender, on LGBTQ Americans, and later Congresses said that was a mistake.

Now, the beautiful thing about this is it is not a partisan group of people saying it was a mistake. In the House of Representatives, you have dozens of Republicans and Democrats who were there a generation ago, over 30 years, who said it was a mistake. You now have this loud chorus of conviction that says this was wrong.

The Senator from Arkansas—I respect him deeply and consider him somebody who has helped to make me a better Senator, but if you look at what we call recidivism rates, the data my colleague from Arkansas cites counts arrests for minor violations of parole or other technical violations as recidivism. Often, it is people returning to low-income communities who

are more heavily policed. We know we have more interactions with police and more likelihood for rearrest.

This doesn't take away from the ideal that I talked about, an ideal to which my colleague and I both have this fierce fealty to, which is liberty. Right now, in prisons all over America, there are people who have been in jail for a decade or two decades for non-violent crack cocaine offenses while people with more cocaine, with weightier drugs that affect more people, have come in and out of jail. The people who are in jail for crack cocaine happen to be disproportionately African American.

At the time Congress made this mistake, which Republicans and Democrats in both Houses say was a mistake, there was a terrible fear that was gripping this country with a new drug coming along. It was that fear that drove us to do something that has now had people in prison for years and years and years.

So I do object to what my colleague and friend proposes, and I know that this will be corrected. Mark my words. The arc of the moral universe is long. We will get to one to one; I am confident of that. But why should people have to languish in prison for yet another year to 2 years—another Congress—separated from families, separated from their children? God, at this time of the holidays, where so many people are being reunited, this is not only an act of justice, it would be an act of mercy.

I object to my colleague's unanimous consent request.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Is there objection to the original request?

Mr. COTTON. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, just to be clear, powder cocaine sentences are here, and crack cocaine sentences are here. The bill in question would reduce these sentences to eliminate the so-called disparity. My amendment would simply raise sentences for powder cocaine dealing.

So I would suggest the issue here is not so much the disparity but tough sentences for crimes whatsoever. So I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The objection is heard.

Mr. BOOKER. I yield the floor to the great Senator from Louisiana.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Louisiana.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I am joined today with two of my esteemed colleagues from my office, Mr. Bubba Gesser and Henson Webre. And I am here in thanksgiving. I know it is not Thanksgiving. It is Christmas. But I am here in thanksgiving with a small "t," and I want to thank Congress on behalf of the American people.

I want to talk to you for a second about the Mississippi River-Gulf Outlet. We call it MRGO. Here it is here,

this straight channel—a canal, you might call it. This is the Mississippi River here.

In the 1950s and the 1960s, Congress authorized the Corps of Engineers to build the Mississippi River-Gulf Outlet, to dig it. The idea at the time—and it seemed a good one—was that the Mississippi River-Gulf Outlet, being 75 miles long and a straight line, would make it cheaper, easier, and more efficient for ships rather than going up the Mississippi River, which winds a good bit. They could go up the MRGO, as we call it—straight line, 75 miles—and they could save money by getting to the Port of New Orleans quicker.

The original canal or channel—MRGO—was about 650 feet wide. As I said, we thought it was a good idea. I am not blaming the Corps of Engineers. The Corps of Engineers was asked to do this. Our decision to dig the MRGO turned out to be a mitigated disaster in more ways than one.

First, the MRGO got bigger, it got deeper, and it got wider. The original 600 feet in some places became 3,000 feet. It was a huge undertaking, and it caused massive destruction to our wetlands. We dug out more dirt to build MRGO—once again, right here; here is the Mississippi River—than they dug out to build the Panama Canal, and we destroyed tens of thousands of acres of wetlands.

In addition, because it was pretty much a straight line and there was no current, unlike the Mississippi River, saltwater began to move up the Mississippi River-Gulf Outlet, MRGO, causing enormous erosion and saltwater intrusion.

When we had Hurricane Katrina in the early 2000s, 2005, well, MRGO became a superhighway for storm surge. I mean, the surge just came straight up this outlet—MRGO—swamping St. Bernard Parish, swamping New Orleans, breaking the levees. There have been estimates that MRGO increased the storm surge and the destruction by 25 percent.

We made a mistake building MRGO. After Katrina, we tried to correct our mistake, and we have been well on the way to correcting it.

First, Congress directed the Corps of Engineers to block the MRGO. It is still there, but we built about a thousand feet of barrier here of rock. Once again, this is MRGO, and here is the Mississippi River. So we blocked the channel so nobody can use it, but still, that wasn't enough.

Congress also directed the Corps of Engineers to come up with a Mississippi River-Gulf Outlet restoration plan, how we are going to get rid of MRGO and repair the damage that it did, and that is why I am grateful. In our Water Resources Development Act—which this Senate just passed, along with the National Defense Authorization Act—we have at long last done something that I have been working on since I got here from day one. I know Senator CASSIDY, my colleague,

has been working hard on it. We authorized the Corps of Engineers to begin implementing the Mississippi River-Gulf Outlet restoration plan.

What does that mean? That means that the Corps is going to fill it in and try to start repairing the wetlands and other ecological and environmental damage that was done when we built this channel. And it will not cost the people of Louisiana one single penny. The Corps of Engineers has agreed to fund the entire project. That is why I say I rise in gratitude and thanksgiving. I want to thank this Congress, and I want to thank the Corps of Engineers.

In the last few minutes I have, Mr. President, I am still in gratitude and thanksgiving. Most of my people in Louisiana celebrate Christmas, and to those who do, I just want to wish them a merry Christmas. I am so proud of my State. We don't take it for granted. God has blessed Louisiana, and having blessed us once, I think God blessed us a second time. We are at the top of the gulf coast. We are in the middle of the gulf south. We straddle one of the mightiest rivers in the entire world, the Mississippi River, right here. We have more oil and gas than most nations. My people are experts in endeavors like oil and gas exploration, petrochemical manufacturing, shipbuilding, agriculture, aquaculture, tourism, food, manufacturing, education, healthcare—and I could continue. My people—I have lived in five other States and a foreign country, and I have never, ever met people like my people in Louisiana. They are hardworking, they are God-fearing, and they are fun-loving.

I kid my two colleagues from Texas, Senator CRUZ and Senator CORNYN, all the time. I say, "Senators—actually, I say 'CRUZ and CORNYN,' but we are supposed to refer to them as Senators.

I say: TED and JOHN, you know, you represent Texas.

I love Texas. Wonderful State. Texas gets an extraordinary amount of good publicity. And I am happy for them. God bless. But I also tell my friends Senators CRUZ and CORNYN: Look at it another way. Texas is 5½ times bigger than Louisiana, but we are 10½ times more interesting, and that is because of my people, the people of Louisiana.

So my wish this Christmas to my people is, first, enjoy your family, worship your God, worship our God, and may your sunrises be full of hope and your sunsets be full of peace.

I yield.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I have come to the floor this afternoon with a request to confirm a highly qualified nominee. Dr. Brent Neiman is nominated to serve as the sixth Assistant Secretary of the Treasury for International Finance and Development.

Finance Committee members voted in November of last year—let me repeat: November of 2021, more than 13 months ago, over a year—to approve Dr. Neiman's nomination on a strong bipartisan basis. This is not a controversial nominee. His nomination has waited long enough. And there are a lot of challenges waiting for him at the Treasury Department. For example, China's lockdowns are creating a ripple effect throughout international supply chains. It is one of the major causes of the inflation that has been clobbering family budgets in Oregon and across the country the last few years.

Dr. Neiman will also have a role to play in dealing with the fallout of Russia's brutal and illegal invasion of Ukraine. He will directly address the economic impact of sanctions and the price cap on Russian oil. He will be involved in maintaining maximum pressure to hold Putin accountable for the horrors of the unprovoked, unjustified war that Vladimir Putin started.

Dr. Neiman will also work on the critically important issue of currency manipulation by foreign governments. This is a subject that the Finance Committee, on a bipartisan basis, has taken very seriously. Most importantly, the Treasury Department urgently needs an expert at the helm to address these issues and solve complicated policy questions that have everything to do with the global economy.

Dr. Neiman is the right man for the job. His qualifications are undeniable. Following an education in economics and mathematics, he served on the staff of the White House Council of Economic Advisers and the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago. He brings very valuable private sector experience. Let me underline that to our colleagues, real private sector experience.

At the University of Chicago's Booth School of Business, his decades of research have contributed to his expertise on international macroeconomics, finance, and trade.

He is an excellent choice for a very challenging job that handles a lot of difficult issues. I strongly support his nomination for this especially important, urgently needed post at the Treasury Department. He has support from both sides of the Senate Finance Committee. His nomination has waited long enough.

For that reason, I ask unanimous consent that as in executive session, the Senate consider the following nomination: Calendar No. 545, Brent Neiman to be a Deputy Under Secretary of the Treasury; that the Senate vote on the nomination without intervening action or debate; that if confirmed, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table and the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there an objection?

The Senator from Pennsylvania.

Mr. TOOMEY. Mr. President, on behalf of our friend and colleague, Senator BARRASSO, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I think this is very unfortunate. We very much need to have this post filled, and we are going to stay at it until Dr. Neiman, a very distinguished individual whose talents are immense and fit for the job, is approved.

GREAT DISMAL SWAMP NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA ACT

Mr. WYDEN. Madam President, at this time, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Environment and Public Works be discharged from further consideration of H.R. 1154, and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. ROSEN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

The clerk will report the bill by title.

The bill clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 1154) to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a study to assess the suitability and feasibility of designating certain land as the Great Dismal Swamp National Heritage Area, and for other purposes.

There being no objection, the committee was discharged, and the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Mr. WYDEN. I ask unanimous consent that the bill be considered read a third time and passed and the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

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

The bill (H.R. 1154) was ordered to a third reading, was read the third time, and passed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

ELECTORAL COUNT REFORM ACT

Ms. COLLINS. Madam President, the Senate is on the verge of enacting legislation included in the Consolidated Appropriations Act that would remedy the deep structural problems with our system of certifying and counting the electoral votes for President and Vice President.

These unfortunate flaws are codified in the 1887 Electoral Count Act, which guides the implementation of part of the Presidential election process included in our Constitution. This archaic law, vaguely written in the inaccessible language of a different era, was intended to restrain Congress; but in practice, it has had the unintended effect of creating ambiguities that could potentially be used to expand the role of Congress and the Vice President in ways that are contrary to the Constitution.

Despite its defects, this law was not an issue for more than a century because of the restraint of the people who exercise the serious, but limited, constitutional responsibility of counting the electoral votes. Vice Presidents and Congress sustained the will of the people, even when they did not like the result.

It took the violent breach of the Capitol on January 6, 2021, to really shine a spotlight on the urgent need for reforming this law. Earlier this year, I, along with a dedicated bipartisan group of our colleagues, set out to craft legislation to reform and modernize the Electoral Count Act. Our bipartisan group worked day and night over the period of several months to reach a bipartisan consensus on a series of reforms that will prevent this outdated law from being used to undermine future Presidential elections.

I am pleased that our legislation, the Electoral Count Reform and Presidential Transition Improvement Act, is included in the bill before us. This bill is the result of countless hours of deliberations by members of our working group. Cosponsored by 39 Senators, our bill enjoys broad bipartisan support and was reported favorably by the Senate Rules Committee by a vote of 14 to 1 after an excellent hearing at which the committee members heard from a wide range of constitutional experts.

I want to express my gratitude to my friend and partner in this effort, Senator JOE MANCHIN, and to all the members of our group for their work to craft this legislation. Specifically, Senators ROMNEY, SHAHEEN, PORTMAN, SINEMA, MURKOWSKI, WARNER, TILLIS, MURPHY, CAPITO, CARDIN, YOUNG, COONS, and SASSE have dedicated countless hours to this effort.

I also want to recognize Senators KLOBUCHAR and BLUNT. They are the leaders of the Senate Rules Committee. They provided their advice and counsel throughout this process and shepherded the bill through their committee.

Leaders MCCONNELL and SCHUMER cosponsored our bill and trusted us to undertake this vital task.

I want to thank all of the cosponsors, as well as Representatives GOTTHEIMER and UPTON, who introduced a companion bill in the House of Representatives.

In developing our bill, we also consulted with several election experts and legal scholars whose analysis helped shape the bill. Our bill would replace the ambiguous provisions of this 19th century law with clear procedures that maintain appropriate state and Federal roles in selecting the President and Vice President as set forth in the Constitution. It will also ensure that the electoral votes tallied by Congress accurately reflect each State's public vote.

There are a number of important reforms included in our bill. Let me take just a moment to highlight a few of them.

First, our bill reasserts that the constitutional role of the Vice President in counting the electoral votes is strictly and solely ministerial. The idea that any Vice President would have the power to unilaterally accept, reject, or change electoral votes or halt their counting is antithetical to our Constitution and basic democratic principles.