

Gary Leeling, Kirk McConnell, Maggie McNamara Cooper, Bill Monahan, Mike Noblet, John Quirk, Andy Scott, Cole Stevens, Isabelle Picciotti, Alison Warner, Leah Brewer, Megan Lustig, Joe Gallo, Brittany Amador, Griffin Cannon, Sofia Kamali, Chad Johnson, Jessica Lewis, Vannary Kong, Noah Sisk, Zachary Volpe, and once again my staff director, Elizabeth King, who deserves great credit for this.

Let me also thank the floor staff and the leadership staff who have been part of this process and who have been able to keep our floor open so we could conclude this bill.

This is an important, important step. Now I look forward to joining my colleague Senator WICKER and our colleagues in the committee to go to conference to work out a bill that we can support as vigorously on a bipartisan basis as we have this Senate legislation.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. WYDEN. 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.

SECURING THE U.S. ORGAN PROCUREMENT AND TRANSPLANTATION NETWORK ACT

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, before I make a unanimous request on this important bipartisan, bicameral bill, I wish to talk for a moment about why it is so critical that the Senate pass this urgently needed legislation.

For hundreds of thousands of Americans and their families waiting for a transplant, this is not an abstract issue. We are talking about life and death. More than 100,000 people are on the waiting list to receive a transplant, and, on average, 17 people die each day waiting for an organ transplant. In the first half of this year alone, more than 2,200 Americans have died while waiting for a transplant.

The inadequacies of the current system are especially harmful to minority populations who are disproportionately represented on the organ transplant waitlist, yet, on average, wait longer for a transplant and are at a higher risk of death while waiting.

I would just say to my colleagues that this is morally repugnant, and this legislation begins, finally, to root out this bias against our minority communities.

For the last 40 years, the same contractor has had a stronghold on this contract. The lack of competition has not been in the best interest of patients, and this fall the contract will be up for renewal.

In last year's bipartisan investigation, the Finance Committee found

shocking failures with the current contractor who oversees the entire system: long wait times for patients on transplant lists, viable organs being lost or damaged in transit. We saw pictures of these organs lying around in airport hangars. There has just been a lack of accountability when the problems happen, technology failures, and even patient deaths.

The last place anybody wants to hear about gross mismanagement and incompetence is in the business of saving lives. It is time for real accountability and real change.

This bill would build on the administration's recently announced plans to modernize the program and clarify that there is the ability to award multiple contracts for these key functions. This would create real competition for these contracts and ensure the best-in-class organizations can be awarded contracts to support this critical system.

The bill, which passed in the other body last week, would bring much needed change and modernization of the organ transplant system by supporting the administration's efforts and codifying, in the black letter law, modernization efforts where we aren't going to turn back the clock. We are not going to go back. We are going to go forward.

I would like to thank a number of Members on both sides of the aisle who have been on the frontlines in this fight, particularly Senator GRASSLEY, Senator CARDIN, and Senator YOUNG, who always worked in a bipartisan way. Senator GRASSLEY, in particular, has been a longtime leader on this issue, an outspoken advocate for fixing a broken organ transplant system. I believe he had a challenging schedule, as many Senators did tonight, but I wanted to thank Senator GRASSLEY. And I want to also thank my friend from Vermont, Senator SANDERS, and his very talented staff for their commitment to help us get to this point, and we are going to continue to work in the future.

Let's be clear about what is on offer. Every Member of Congress wants Americans to have the best-in-class organ transplant system. Our legislation is written from top to bottom to ensure competition for technical functions like those that will help this program perform to the highest possible level.

I said we were going to pull out all the stops to get this passed because the patients deserve it. This is the final stop after all of these years of foot-dragging and excuses. And tonight, this is the final stop. Let's send the Securing the U.S. Organ Procurement Transplantation Network Act to the President's desk today.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, the Securing the U.S. Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network Act is an opportunity for Congress to make history, an opportunity to change the lives of the more than 100,000 Americans waiting for an organ transplant.

Organ donation has always been a bipartisan issue. In 1984, Congress passed the National Organ Transplant Act. That bill was cosponsored by Senator Al Gore and Senator Orrin Hatch. I would like to thank the bipartisan group of Senate colleagues who cosponsored our bill. I would like to give special thanks to Senator CASSIDY, who championed the bill in the HELP Committee. I would also like to recognize Senators WYDEN, CARDIN, and YOUNG, who have worked with me for years to shine a light on the deadly failures of the Nation's organ donation system.

Thank you all for your leadership. Our bipartisan work will continue. The organ donation system has failed patients and generous donor families from all walks of life. After years of bipartisan work in the House and Senate, we have finally passed this bill. Success with this bill means patients are the winners.

For almost two decades, Congress, government watchdogs, and the media have questioned the United Network for Organ Sharing's ability to carry out its responsibilities. I have written about these issues since 2005. Since then, 200,000 Americans have died on the organ waiting list.

Those aren't numbers; those are lives. To put it in perspective, that is the population of Des Moines, IA. There is a reason I call the United Network for Organ Sharing the fox guarding the hen house.

In August of 2022, the Senate Finance Committee issued a bipartisan report that detailed vast disparities in how Organ Procurement Organizations serve their communities. Based on the findings, the organ network has worse outcomes for people of color and rural residents. This bipartisan investigation, which started when I was chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, uncovered fraud, waste, abuse, criminality, deadly patient safety issues, failure to recover organs, and retaliation against whistleblowers. The Senate Finance Committee's bipartisan report was clear: "From the top down, the U.S. transplant network is not working, putting Americans' lives at risk."

We must break up the monopoly that has held the U.S. organ donation system hostage since 1986. Patients deserve the best possible care; it is the difference between life and death. Our bipartisan bill will help ensure they get the best care.

Earlier this week, our colleagues in the House passed this same legislation to break up the organ monopoly and serve patients instead of special interests. Today, by passing this bill, we have accomplished a major milestone in saving lives and taking care of those who need it most.

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of H.R. 2544, which was received at 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 action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. SANDERS. Reserving the right to object

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. SANDERS. Let me begin by thanking Chairman WYDEN for his leadership on the need to fundamentally reform our Nation's organ transplant program. I share his concerns. A 2020 bipartisan Finance Committee investigation that Chairman WYDEN co-led with respect to the current system found "lapses in patient safety, misuse of taxpayer dollars, and tens of thousands of organs going unrecovered or not transplanted . . . resulting in fraud, waste, and abuse of our Nation's Medicare program and American taxpayer dollars."

That is unacceptable and that has got to change. The legislation Senator WYDEN would like to pass in the Senate today by unanimous consent, while not perfect, includes important reforms to the current system that I support. Once it is signed into law, there may need to be some technical changes to it that I look forward to working with Chairman WYDEN and my other colleagues on.

All of us believe that the administration should have the flexibility it needs to fix the current system. We also believe that corporations should not be able to make an outrageous profit from the organ network.

As my good friend from Oregon knows, this bill is within the jurisdiction of the HELP Committee, a committee that I chair.

Before I withdraw my objections to the organ transplant bill, I want to raise an issue of enormous importance to the American people, and that is the need to address the very serious primary care crisis in America and the massive shortage of doctors, nurses, mental health professionals, and dentists in America.

As my colleague from Oregon knows very well, tens of millions of Americans are unable to access the primary medical care, dental care, and mental health care that they desperately need.

As everyone in America understands, we don't have enough doctors, nurses, psychologists, psychiatrists, dentists, and home healthcare workers in our country.

As the Senator from Oregon knows very well, on September 30, mandatory funding for Community Health Centers, the National Health Service Corps, and Teaching Health Centers will expire unless Congress acts, and Congress must act.

The HELP Committee is working on bipartisan legislation, not only to reauthorize these critical programs, but to significantly expand them. We need a major expansion of Community Health Centers in America to make

sure that tens of millions of underserved Americans not only receive the primary care they need, but are also able to receive the high-quality mental health care and dental care they need as well.

We need a major expansion of the National Health Service Corps Program, the program that provides scholarships and debt forgiveness for doctors, nurses, dentists, and mental health providers who are prepared to work in our Nation's most underserved areas.

We need a major expansion of the Teaching Health Center Program, the Nurse Corps, and the Nurse Faculty Loan Program, among many other things.

Of particular concern is an issue I heard about from every single major medical organization in our country, and that is that over the next decade, our Nation faces a shortage of more than 120,000 doctors, including a major shortage of primary care doctors. I don't know how we can grow the number of doctors in America without expanding the Medicare Graduate Medical Education—GME—Program, a program that is within the jurisdiction of the Finance Committee.

Let's be clear. The problem is not so much about the number of doctors graduating from medical school. No, the problem—the bottleneck—is that some 6,800 applicants for a residency position don't match into a program due to a shortage of spots. As my colleague from Oregon knows, if a doctor graduates from medical school but cannot get a residency slot, that person cannot practice medicine in the United States.

In my view, it is critically important that we expand the GME Program. There is bipartisan legislation that does this: S. 1302. The Resident Physician Shortage Reduction Act of 2023, led by Senators MENENDEZ, BOOZMAN, SCHUMER, and COLLINS, would raise the number of GME positions by 14,000 over the next 7 years. Consistent with legislation that passed the House last Congress, I believe that a significant percentage of these additional slots should be dedicated to primary care and mental health care.

As you know, the Medicare GME Program is within the jurisdiction of the Finance Committee, and the other programs I mentioned are within the jurisdiction of the HELP Committee.

I ask my good friend and colleague from Oregon, will you commit today that as chairman of the Finance Committee, you will do everything within your ability to pass bipartisan legislation in the Senate that includes a major expansion of the Medicare Graduate Medical Education Program?

Mr. WYDEN. I thank my colleague for all his leadership, and I am certainly planning to speak on the very strong merits of what you described. And if you would like to continue, we will go through that shortly.

Would the gentleman like to yield to me?

Mr. SANDERS. Sure.

Mr. WYDEN. I thank my colleague for being our leader here in the Congress and, frankly, for this Nation because he has consistently made the point that given the demographics of where we are going to have so many more older people, where we have so many young people at risk, we desperately need Chairman SANDERS to do what he is talking about, which is to address this massive shortage of healthcare workers in America.

Addressing healthcare workforce shortages means we are going to have to have fresh, big league ideas to get these workers all across our country, and it is vitally important that we address several of the biggest ideas Chairman SANDERS and I are talking about.

For example, expanding funding for the Medicare Graduate Medical Education Program—what is called GME—would grow the number of doctors, especially primary care physicians and psychiatrists.

This evening, Chairman SANDERS, I want to make it clear that our two committees—yours doing important work, what is known as HELP, and ours on the Finance Committee—we are committed to bipartisan legislation that is going to increase investments in the Medicare Graduate Medical Education Program. We are also going to focus on incentivizing healthcare providers to partner with schools to train and develop healthcare professionals from medical assistants to advanced practice nurses.

We are also going to have to address expanding the number of behavioral health providers because we know we have an enormous mental health program challenge in America. We have to increase access to maternal health programs in rural areas and invest in the direct care workforce to ensure the health and safety of older Americans and those with disabilities.

What Senator SANDERS is talking about is an all-hands-on-deck approach with our two committees, the two lead committees in the healthcare area working together to increase the number of workers.

Tonight, Chairman SANDERS, as chair of the Finance Committee, I want to make clear that I intend to work very closely with you on these issues. We are going to be partners in the effort in the Finance and HELP Committees to bring forward legislation in the fall to address the healthcare workforce crisis in America. And I want to hear the rest of your remarks and hope then we can have a lifting of the objection and pass the bill.

Mr. SANDERS. My remarks will be brief.

I just want to thank the chairman, Senator WYDEN, of the Finance Committee, for his commitment and for his leadership on these issues. I look forward to working with him to expand access to primary care in America and address the major shortage of healthcare workers in America.

Mr. President, with that commitment, I will not object.

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

The bill (H.R. 2544) was ordered to a third reading, was read the third time, and passed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Delaware.

NOMINATION OF JULIE A. SU

Mr. COONS. Mr. President, I rise to share with my colleagues and with our country my enthusiastic support for Julie Su, my gratitude for her ongoing work as Acting Secretary of Labor, and my support for President Biden's nomination of Julie Su to lead the Department of Labor.

Throughout her career, Julie has worked tirelessly to level the playing field for American workers as an advocate for trafficked garment workers, running our Nation's largest State-level labor department.

Two years ago, this Senate confirmed her to serve as Deputy Secretary of Labor. And as Deputy to Secretary Marty Walsh, Julie helped lead a resurgence in workforce training: expanding apprenticeships in in-demand industries like trucking, teaching, and cyber security; building pathways to jobs and advanced manufacturing and clean energy technology and semiconductors; ensuring that our country has the workforce we need to meet the needs of our economy and ensuring that those jobs are good jobs.

Julie has now led the Department for 5 months and has continued her focus on creating good jobs, empowering workers, and enforcing our labor laws.

Last month, she worked tirelessly to help avert a strike at our west coast ports, bringing labor and management together to reach an agreement that kept our ports up and running and our economy moving forward.

This is the kind of leadership that we need on labor issues, in the Department of Labor and across our country. Someone who will persevere through difficult, tense negotiations. Someone who will work through challenging issues and drive outcomes that are good for workers, businesses, and our country.

Julie has done this hard work even while facing unwarranted attacks on her record—a coordinated campaign of misrepresentation about a dedicated public servant. I am confident that her toughness and drive to serve will allow her to endure this opposition and continue to do right by the American people and American workers.

In her time as Deputy Secretary, and now as Acting Secretary, Julie Su has proven to this Senator and to the Senate as a whole that it was wise for President Biden to nominate her and for the Senate to confirm her 2 years ago.

I urge my Senate colleagues to once again support Julie Su and empower her to lead the Department with the

experience, expertise, and deeply held values she brings to the job.

NOMINATION OF JACK A. MARKELL

Mr. COONS. Mr. President, I rise this evening to speak about 17 nominees who will be confirmed in the wrap-up of this evening's session—17 nominees to serve as Ambassadors for the United States around the world or to represent us in international organizations.

I am grateful that we have been able to reach an agreement with those Senators who have been blocking their confirmation. I, frankly, wish we had been able to clear even further. There are 38 ambassadorial or senior position nominees waiting for action on this floor, and it is my hope that when we return in September, we will clear the remaining ones.

But this evening, I wanted to speak about one nominee in particular, the Honorable Jack Markell, who has been nominated and will this evening be confirmed to serve as U.S. Ambassador to Italy and San Marino.

I have known Jack and his wife Carla for more than three decades. As Jack liked to say when he was Governor, Delaware is a "State of neighbors," and no one better epitomizes that friendly attitude, that commitment to one another's well-being more than our former Governor Jack Markell.

As treasurer, as Governor, as a businessman, now as Ambassador to the OECD—the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development—Jack is used to working cooperatively with others to get things done and to do things the right way.

As Governor, he steered our State through an incredibly difficult and demanding fiscal crisis, getting us back on track. Along the way, he expanded opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities. He created a national model for workplace experience and college credit opportunities, and he launched a much lauded kindergarten language immersion program.

As the White House Coordinator for Operation Allies worldwide, he facilitated the vetting and resettlement of Afghans who served alongside us during 20 years of conflict; and now as ambassador to the OECD, he has worked with our partner nations to emphasize energy security, sustainable development goals, and to support Ukraine against a brutal Russian invasion.

Italy is, obviously, a key NATO ally. And Italy is facing some of its biggest challenges in decades and has come out the stronger for it. Italy is a committed partner in NATO to the United States and to Ukraine as a nation fighting on the front lines of freedom.

Earlier today, I had the honor of joining our leader Senator SCHUMER and the Republican Leader Senator MCCONNELL in a meeting with Prime Minister Meloni of Italy during her visit to the United States, on a day when she met with our President, Joe

Biden, to talk about how we can further deepen and strengthen the transatlantic alliance.

And I was grateful to hear the strong bipartisan support of this Chamber's two leaders for the continued effort to arm, to equip, to support Ukraine in its important fight against Russian aggression.

I am also thrilled that in just a few moments, this Chamber will confirm the nomination of Jack Markell to serve as our ambassador to Italy and San Marino. This position has been vacant for more than 2 years, and we cannot ignore such a vital post any longer. In these uncertain times, the United States has found greater strength in allies and partner nations, and Jack is the consummate bridge-builder who understands how important alliances are.

He will bring a little bit of the "Delaware Way" of working across the aisle, of finding commonsense solutions, and of solving real problems to his new post in Rome. So to a dedicated and capable public servant with experience to match, to a friend of decades, congratulations to Governor Markell, Ambassador Markell, as you embark on this next chapter in service to our Nation.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

MILITARY PROMOTIONS

Mr. LEE. Mr. President, as we wrap up our work in the National Defense Authorization Act, we need to address an issue, an issue that has been the focus of a lot of controversy. It has been the focus of a lot of heated words. Now, I understand heated words happen around here. It occurs; people feel passionate about things. But when heated words become untrue words, defamatory words, fighting words, sometimes the record needs to be corrected. This is one of those times.

Moments ago, the President of the United States—who, to put it mildly, has not had a good week—made some comments that I regard as not only insensitive, inflammatory, but also downright misleading and unfair. He has made them about and directed them toward a Member of this body, our friend and colleague, the Senator from Alabama, Senator TUBERVILLE.

These attacks against Senator TUBERVILLE have been relentless. Relentless all because he has chosen to take a stand, a stand against what he properly, legitimately, understandably perceives as a violation of the spirit—if not also the letter—of the law. The law in question is codified in 10 U.S.C. section 1093.

And 10 U.S.C. 1093, in a nutshell, says that the U.S. Department of Defense may not spend Department of Defense funds to perform an abortion, and it may not use a Department of Defense property, facility, to perform an abortion.