

mention the massive cost of hosting millions of Ukrainian refugees.

But, like America, our allies are not in the business of philanthropy. As far away as Tokyo and Seoul, leaders are making a sober calculation about their interests. Our friends are making historic new investments in growing their arsenals and modernizing their militaries.

More than half of our NATO allies are now on track to hit the alliance's 2 percent spending target by the end of next year. Sweden, not yet a full-fledged NATO member, is increasing its defense spending next year by nearly 30 percent to invest in modern capabilities and meet its 2 percent of the GDP target. Lithuania, which spent less than 1 percent of its GDP on defense back in 2014, is set to spend over 2.5 percent next year.

To bolster their security, many of our allies are buying American. Since Russia's escalation began last February, our allies and partners across the globe have purchased over \$120 billion in advanced, American-made weapons systems.

Germany, Switzerland, Finland, and the Czech Republic have all moved quickly to sign contracts to purchase F-35s. Indonesia has signed up for nearly \$14 billion in F-15 fighter aircraft made in St. Louis, MO. Bulgaria—an economy roughly the size of the State of Maine—has spent \$1.5 billion on Stryker combat vehicles that are produced in Lima, OH, and Anniston, AL. Poland has ordered \$12 billion worth of Apache helicopters produced in Mesa, AZ, and is planning to buy 486 HIMARS launchers. They will have the biggest HIMARS inventory in the world.

Here is the most important part: When our friends and allies "Buy American," they are buying into a closer security relationship with the United States. They are building more interoperable militaries to strengthen deterrence. They are also lowering costs for the American taxpayer as we rebuild our own capabilities. They are sharing the burden of collective defense.

These investments are not a coincidence; they are a demonstration of the confidence our allies have in American leadership. But make no mistake, that confidence is perishable. As we saw with the disastrous retreat from Afghanistan, America can lose trust far more quickly than we can earn it.

If we pull the plug on our commitment to stand with Europe, our largest trading partner, I can guarantee it will shred our credibility as a security partner worldwide. It will make it harder to convince our allies to stand together against Chinese aggression—the single biggest threat to our own security and prosperity.

TRIBUTE TO MIKE DUNCAN

Mr. President, today, I join folks in my home State in thanking Mike Duncan for his decades-long service to the Kentucky Republican Party as he steps down as our national committeeman.

In Washington, it is rare to find an individual equally skilled at navigating the worlds of business and politics, but my good friend Mike is just that rare hybrid. Despite his success in standing up a chain of community banks, Mike chose to commit his considerable talents to public service. He would serve terms as Governor of the U.S. Postal Service, chairman of the Republican National Committee, and chairman of the Tennessee Valley Authority, on top of a number of impressive positions under five Republican Presidents. In my home State, Mike has served as a national committeeman for the Kentucky GOP since 1992, advising the Republican leaders at the local, State, and national levels his entire career.

Early on, Mike had a gift for giving that he shared generously with the people of my home State. When Mike and his wife Joanne first moved to East Kentucky, they committed to spending at least 1 day a week doing something to benefit their community.

Since then, Mike has devoted decades to student mentorship, training young people in Appalachia, and sponsoring their continued education. His lifetime of civic service has been recognized by a number of prestigious organizations.

Somehow, between raising a family and serving his country, Mike found time to develop a close circle of friends, which I am grateful to be a part of. Mike has been a trusted source of counsel, and I am thankful to always have him in my corner.

So as Mike steps away from his national role, I am grateful he will continue to be a leader in our State party and in his own community.

Thank you, Mike. Thank you for your decades of friendship and your service to our country. Elaine and I wish you and Joanne all the best.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Washington.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

APPROPRIATIONS

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I urge all of our colleagues who have come to me and to the Senator from Maine to talk about the need for regular order to vote yes now on this motion to proceed. I will have more to say about what we all need to do to keep this process moving, but this vote is important if we want to make sure that Senators will have the opportunity to speak out for their values and their constituents.

So I urge a yes vote on the motion to proceed, and let's get going on an agreement, as soon as possible, so Sen-

ators can vote and debate and act on amendments. That is what regular order is, and that is what everyone has told me is exactly what they want and what I have been hearing all year from Senators on both sides of the aisle.

Let's keep up the bipartisanship. Let's get to work.

VOTE ON MOTION

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, all postcloture time is expired.

The question is on agreeing to the motion to proceed.

Mrs. MURRAY. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. 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. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Illinois (Ms. DUCKWORTH) and the Senator from New Mexico (Mr. LUJÁN) are necessarily absent.

The result was announced—yeas 91, nays 7, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 228 Leg.]

YEAS—91

Baldwin	Grassley	Reed
Barrasso	Hagerty	Risch
Bennet	Hassan	Romney
Blackburn	Heinrich	Rosen
Blumenthal	Hickenlooper	Rounds
Booker	Hirono	Rubio
Boozman	Hoeven	Sanders
Britt	Hyde-Smith	Schatz
Brown	Johnson	Schumer
Budd	Kaine	Scott (SC)
Cantwell	Kelly	Shaheen
Capito	Kennedy	Sinema
Cardin	King	Smith
Carper	Klobuchar	Stabenow
Casey	Lankford	Sullivan
Cassidy	Lee	Tester
Collins	Manchin	Thune
Coons	Markey	Tillis
Cornyn	Marshall	Tuberville
Cortez Masto	McConnell	Van Hollen
Cotton	Menendez	Vance
Cramer	Merkley	Warner
Crapo	Moran	Warnock
Daines	Mullin	Warren
Durbin	Murkowski	Welch
Ernst	Murphy	Whitehouse
Feinstein	Murray	Wicker
Fetterman	Ossoff	Wyden
Fischer	Padilla	Young
Gillibrand	Paul	
Graham	Peters	

NAYS—7

Braun	Lummis	Scott (FL)
Cruz	Ricketts	
Hawley	Schmitt	

NOT VOTING—2

Duckworth	Luján
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The motion was agreed to.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, VETERANS AFFAIRS, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2024

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. CORTEZ MASTO). The clerk will report the bill by title.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 4366) making appropriations for military construction, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2024, and for other purposes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

AMENDMENT NO. 1092

(Purpose: In the nature of a substitute.)

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I call up substitute amendment, No. 1092, and ask that it be reported by number. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the amendment by number.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from New York [Mr. SCHUMER], for Mrs. MURRAY and Ms. COLLINS, proposes an amendment numbered 1092.

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I ask to dispense with further reading of the amendment.

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

(The amendment is printed in the RECORD of September 7, 2023, under "Text of Amendments.")

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

AMENDMENT NO. 1205 TO AMENDMENT NO. 1092

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, I call up my amendment, No. 1205, and ask that it be reported by number.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the amendment by number.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Washington [Mrs. MURRAY] proposes an amendment numbered 1205 to amendment No. 1092.

Mrs. MURRAY. 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:

At the end of division C, add the following:

SEC. 422. EFFECTIVE DATE.

This Act shall take effect on the date that is 1 day after the date of enactment of this Act.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

MOTION TO COMMIT WITH AMENDMENT NO. 1207

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I move to commit H.R. 4366 to the Appropriations Committee, with instructions to report back forthwith with an amendment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from New York [Mr. SCHUMER] moves to commit the bill H.R. 4366 to the Appropriations Committee with instructions to report back forthwith with an amendment numbered No. 1207.

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: To change the effective date)

At the end of division C, add the following:

SEC. 422. EFFECTIVE DATE.

This Act shall take effect on the date that is 8 days after the date of enactment of this Act.

Mr. SCHUMER. I ask to dispense with further reading.

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

Mr. SCHUMER. 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 (Mr. KING). Without objection, it is so ordered.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—H.R. 4366

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the substitute amendment No. 1092 be considered an Appropriations Committee amendment for purposes of rule XVI, with no other rule XVI points of order waived by this agreement; that H.R. 4366, H.R. 4368, as reported in the House of Representatives on June 27, 2023, and H.R. 4820, as reported in the House of Representatives on July 24, 2023, serve as the basis for defense of germaneness under rule XVI for any floor amendments and that it be in order for floor amendments to amend the substitute in more than one place; further, that it be in order for the following amendments to be made pending and that, at a time to be determined by the majority leader in consultation with the Republican leader, the Senate vote on the following amendments to the Murray-Collins substitute amendment No. 1092, with 60 affirmative votes required for adoption and with no further amendments or motions in order to the amendments: Paul No. 1157, Vance No. 1125, Ernst No. 1123, Blackburn No. 1155, Lee No. 1121, Stabenow No. 1115, Peters-Cornyn No. 1122, Rosen No. 1117, Padilla No. 1139, and Schatz No. 1120.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Maine.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I am both surprised and disappointed that the Senator from Wisconsin is objecting to this unanimous consent agreement. The Senator from Wisconsin has repeatedly said—and I agree with him—that we should not end up with an omnibus bill—a 4,000-page bill—at the end of the year, with little consideration and having been largely drafted by a small group of people.

So why is the Senator from Wisconsin objecting to proceeding to three appropriations bills that were reported unanimously—unanimously, each one of them—by the Senate Appropriations Committee after a great deal of work? Furthermore, the Senator is objecting to Republican amendments being offered to this package—amendments by Senator PAUL, Senator VANCE, Senator ERNST, Senator BLACKBURN, Senator LEE—and that is just the first tranche of amendments.

Negotiations are ongoing, and there will be additional amendments; but if we cannot proceed to consider this bill and the other two appropriations bills unanimously reported by the Senate committee, then those amendments offered by some of our Members cannot be considered.

Is the Senator from Wisconsin opposed to the amendments that are offered by Senators PAUL, VANCE, ERNST, BLACKBURN, and LEE? Because, by objecting, he is preventing them from being considered by the full Senate.

We have worked very hard to clear amendments for consideration by this body, but if we can't even get passed the procedural amendments that allow us to bring the Transportation and Housing appropriations bill and the Agriculture appropriations bill to add to the MILCON-VA bill, then the Senate is broken once again.

Senator MURRAY and I, along with all the members of the Appropriations Committee, have worked so hard to achieve bipartisan consensus. We held nearly 50 hearings and briefings, asking tough questions, reviewing the President's budget request, evaluating the numbers in the budget. And we worked hard to develop, draft, and approve all 12 of the appropriations bills for the first time in 5 years.

How can a Member stand up and object and, at the same time, say: Oh, I don't want an omnibus bill. Well, that is what we are heading for.

We lost last week. I wish that the Democratic leader had brought this to the floor last week. We are now losing this week, and needlessly so.

There has been a great openness by my Democratic colleagues to consider Republican amendments. We just asked unanimous consent for the first five to be considered. Yet that is objected to.

Members cannot have it both ways. They cannot block floor consideration of appropriations bills that were unanimously reported by the committee and yet maintain that they don't want an omnibus bill. It is one or the other, or a government shutdown—even worse.

So I would ask my colleague from Wisconsin to think through this and think about the fact that he is blocking Republican amendments from getting a vote on the Senate floor. He is setting us up for either an omnibus bill or a government shutdown, and none of those outcomes serve the American people well.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, let's be clear. To all of my colleagues who told me and Senator COLLINS and the American people that we have to get back to regular order, that is exactly what we are working to do here. We have been working in good faith to set up amendment votes and to get the ball rolling on this bill. Now there are a few colleagues on the other side of the aisle who are dismissing all of this out of hand, any kind of reasonable agreement to move this process forward, and blocking all of the agreements we put together to move forward.

Listen to this. If we all want regular order, a key part of this is allowing Senators to come down, have amendments voted on, and moving forward

with an amendment process so Senators can make their voices heard on our funding bills. So we can't move at a glacial pace, and we can't have Senators obstructing this process needlessly.

I do hope they reconsider and work with us on a timely, serious process so all Senators, especially those who do not serve on the Appropriations Committee, can come here and speak up for their values and their constituents.

I know colleagues are ready to bring forward amendments, some of which I don't agree with and will likely vote against, all of which I am prepared, with my colleague from Maine, to discuss and debate. But the Senate should be allowed to work its will and to debate these issues here on the floor, and the American public should be able to see for themselves where their elected leaders stand on those issues as we consider the legislation that will fund the U.S. Government.

That is regular order, but that cannot happen until everybody in this body gets serious about coming to this agreement about how we move this process forward, period.

Now, I want to be clear. While there are a few Senators who are determined now to derail this process—this bipartisan process—the vast majority of our colleagues on both sides of the aisle have put forward serious efforts into crafting these genuine bipartisan bills. I know that because the Senator from Maine and I took great pains to make sure everyone could weigh in here. We made extraordinary progress in the Senate Appropriations Committee. I have heard about it from so many of you, on both sides of the aisle, all week.

How did we do it? We agreed early on to have an open, bipartisan process for our funding bills—exactly what many Senators have been calling for. We said: Let's stick to the bipartisan debt limit deal, which we all passed in July, and let's keep out partisan poison pills, and let's give Members a chance to weigh in and make their constituents' voices heard. In other words, let's show the American people Congress can actually work.

Let's be clear. The bills we are considering aren't Democratic or Republican spending bills. They are bills both sides—Democrats and Republicans—wrote after a lot of negotiation and compromise. Together, this package that we have reflects input from Senators from across the country and across the political spectrum, working on behalf of the people who sent them here. That is exactly why all of these bills in this package passed our committee unanimously.

The American people are watching. They are wondering can Congress still work, if we can actually come together and reach common ground, even on something as fundamental as funding our government. They do not want to see grandstanding or chaos. They want to see results. The vast majority of

this body wants to show them that we take this job seriously, that we take their problems seriously, which the Senator from Maine and I greatly appreciate.

I hope that the few holdouts who are now keeping us from moving forward and reaching an agreement so we can line up amendments and votes will see reason. Let us show the American people that Congress is still capable of working in good faith to help people and solve problems, just like they sent us here to do.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, so ordered.

H.R. 4366

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. President, I am very happy to join Senator MURRAY today in presenting the fiscal year 2024 and 2025 appropriations bill for the Department of Veterans Affairs and for the Department of Defense military construction.

I am proud to be a part of this first minibus as we continue the fiscal year 2024 appropriations process and the return to regular order. As in years past, this subcommittee crafted the bill in an open and bipartisan way, and I expect to continue that today as we consider this bill on the floor.

This bill takes into consideration the needs of our veterans, their families, and our servicemembers, and, within that framework, we have created a thoughtful and responsible path for both Departments and our related Agencies.

This bill provides \$154.352 billion in discretionary spending, which is \$184 million over last year's level. Within that, the Department of Veterans Affairs is provided \$134.8 billion in discretionary funding, which is \$85 million over last year's level. Included in that level is \$121 billion for veterans' medical care, a \$2.3 billion increase over last year.

This bill funds priority accounts to prevent veteran suicide, increase rural access to healthcare, and support critical mental health programs. It helps to prevent veterans' homelessness and provides funding for innovative medical research.

The bill provides \$19.07 billion to support military construction and family housing needs and funds a total of 163 major military construction projects, which we desperately need.

This bill will give the Department of Defense the resources it needs to project power globally, enhance our warfighting capabilities, and train the forces. This bill also provides \$1.9 billion to improve the quality of life for servicemembers and their families.

I also want to note that the bill includes \$471.3 million for our related

Agencies, which include the American Battle Monuments Commission, the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims, Arlington National Cemetery, and the Armed Forces Retirement Home.

I want to thank Chair MURRAY and Vice Chair COLLINS for their leadership with the total committee, and also I want to specifically thank Chair MURRAY and her staff and my staff for the hard work they have done in crafting this bill to get us to where we are at today. So we appreciate them.

Also, we will be encouraging votes so that we can actually get these bills across the finish line.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I want to thank Senator BOOZMAN for being such a great partner and for his work on this bill and all the appropriations bills. I look forward to working with him as we continue to try to bring this up and get it rolling and moving on the floor. So I thank him very much.

Mr. President, as I said, we are working in good faith to set up amendment votes and get this ball rolling on the bipartisan appropriations package that the senior Senator from Maine and I assembled, along with all of our colleagues on the Appropriations Committee, so we can return the Senate to regular order for the first time in a long time, which many of our colleagues have called for.

In the meantime, today, I want to talk about the Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies bill that is included in this funding package and why the investments in this bill are so important for our military readiness, for our military families, and especially for veterans across our Nation who have sacrificed so much for us.

As chair of the MILCON-VA Subcommittee, I worked closely with the senior Senator from Arkansas, who just spoke, to get input from our colleagues on both sides of the aisle and draft the strongest possible bill, even under tough top lines from the debt limit deal. I am very pleased that the bill we put together, which did pass our committee unanimously, makes crucial investments and gets our military and our veterans the support they need.

This bill provides \$19.1 billion for military construction—that is an increase over the fiscal year 2023 level—and supports hundreds of construction projects at base installations so we can improve the quality of life for our servicemembers and families, modernize maintenance and training facilities, and make military installations more resilient against growing threats like climate disasters.

The \$2.4 billion for quality-of-life improvements in this bill will support projects like building new barracks and housing and, just as critically, maintaining existing housing so that the

homes military families are living in right now do not fall into disrepair. I am proud that our bill provides funding for eight new child development centers so we can expand childcare access for our military families. These types of quality-of-life investments are essential to our recruiting and retention and overall readiness. More importantly, they are what our troops deserve and what we owe them for the sacrifices they make.

This bill also funds other essential military construction projects like training and vehicle maintenance, improving energy resilience on bases, and making sure that our installations are better prepared to face severe weather events because, as our generals and admirals have made crystal clear, climate change is a national security threat, and we absolutely cannot afford to let it undermine our troops and our military readiness.

The bill we are considering also includes investments to strengthen our alliances and partnerships around the world, including by supporting NATO infrastructure projects and providing funding to strengthen our global presence, including over half a billion for this work in the Indo-Pacific.

I am also glad we were able to include funding to address PFAS and other toxins—forever chemicals—at former installations that could put our communities and military families especially in harm's way. PFAS are a serious health hazard, and they have been found in the water supply at hundreds of military bases across our country, including in my home State.

Then, of course, there is the VA funding in this bill, which is just as essential. I am someone who previously chaired the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee. I specifically asked to be assigned to that committee as soon as I came to Congress, and I am really honored to have been the first woman ever to serve on that committee because, as the daughter of a World War II veteran, I take our Nation's commitment to care for our veterans personally.

When my father was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, which eventually forced him to stop working, his VA benefits were crucial to making sure he could get the care he needed. So I know firsthand how essential VA care is for veterans and their families, and I am constantly meeting with veterans in my State about their experiences too.

Living up to our obligation to those who served our country is simply non-negotiable for me. I know many of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle feel the exact same way, and that is especially true for my partner across the dais on our subcommittee, the senior Senator from Arkansas. We have worked closely together for many years on the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, so I knew when we started on this bill that he was someone who cares deeply about our men and women in the military and takes our obliga-

tions to our veterans seriously. In other words, he is exactly the kind of partner you want across the table to negotiate a bill like this with.

I am pleased to say we were able, together, to draft a bill that ensures that we keep our promises to servicemembers and veterans by fully funding the VA's budget request.

That means increasing funding for mental health and suicide prevention programs since we know, tragically, that suicide is the leading cause of death for veterans, especially our younger veterans.

It means increased funding for rural healthcare so veterans in every corner of the country can get the care they need, homelessness prevention programs that help with the challenges of returning to civilian life, and for the caregivers program, which I fought to expand along with so many of my colleagues last year.

Of course, it means increased funding for women veterans' care. Women are the fastest growing demographic of our veterans.

I am also especially pleased to say this bill includes funding to expand the childcare pilot program that I helped establish because, as I always remind my colleagues, we have a childcare crisis in this country, which is why I worked to include funding to expand childcare sites at our VA facilities so lack of childcare doesn't keep our veterans from getting the care they need.

In addition to the VA funding in here, let's not forget that last year we actually passed the largest expansion of VA care in decades by passing the bipartisan PACT Act, and earlier this year, Congress worked to live up to that expansion by passing more than \$20 billion in funding for the Toxic Exposures Fund, as part of the Fiscal Responsibility Act. This is already making a difference for veterans who were exposed to burn pits and other toxins.

Another crucial investment in this bill is the funding increase for VA infrastructure because we cannot let veterans' healthcare be undermined by the challenges related to VA's aging medical facilities or, for that matter, jeopardized by botched rollouts like we saw with the electronic health record modernization program. I was glad to see that the VA did put a pause on the rollout of the EHR earlier this year—something I had been pushing them to do—and we made sure that pause was reflected in our funding bill because I was raising the alarm from day one about how the botched EHR rollout was hurting Washington State veterans. It is a challenging situation now with EHR. We can't just flip on a switch and fix it, much as I wish we could.

But I am watching closely to make sure we see changes that provide real results for our veterans and our VA providers because, at the end of the day, these investments are not just about programs and contracts; this is about our promise to get our veterans

the benefits they earned and need to stay healthy—prescriptions, mental health care, cancer screenings, and so much more—and to make sure every woman and man who serves our country in uniform gets the support and the training and the equipment they need to be at their best.

Before I wrap up, I also want to say a little bit more about some of the items in this bill I fought hard for that are especially important in my State.

When it comes to military construction, there are several projects that I worked very hard to get funding for, like new barracks and a parachute rigging facility at Joint Base Lewis-McChord; bulk storage tanks at the fuel supply in Point Manchester; updated electrical infrastructure at the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard to help prevent unexpected power outages; and funding to advance other projects across my home State, like equipment, maintenance, and platoon training facilities.

When it comes to support for our veterans and our VA facilities, I pushed to make sure this bill includes funding to help the American Lake VA Medical Center upgrade its facilities and provide quality care and funding for the Tahoma National Cemetery and its work to ensure we honor the veterans we have lost.

It is worth noting that while those are some of the projects I am most excited about in my State, we made sure that all Senators on both sides of the aisle could weigh in on this bill, and I know many other Members worked very hard to support similar projects and get funding that is important to their States.

So I urge my colleagues to come to the floor and talk about some of the projects you have in this bill and why this funding is so important to your families back home. I also invite them to talk to me and the Senator from Maine about amendments and ideas for how we can make these bills better. Our staffs are working around the clock, and so are we.

We do want to set up a managers' package. We do want to set up votes on amendments. We want to get this funding package passed in the Senate and passed into law because—let's be clear—this is a bill that can actually be passed into law, and that is because of all of the hard work and careful consideration and, in many cases, compromise that went into producing this bipartisan bill.

This is a responsible bill that we wrote together, Democrats and Republicans. How? By listening to our communities and listening to each other so we can help people solve problems. That is how this process should work. That is what we were all sent here to do.

So let's work together and show the American people that Congress can do its job, that it can actually give our communities the resources they need in a timely and responsible way and help people and solve problems.

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

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

BIPARTISAN PRIMARY CARE AND HEALTH
WORKFORCE ACT

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, let me begin by thanking Senator MARSHALL of Kansas for his very hard work on the bill that we have introduced today after being on the floor with me this afternoon to briefly discuss it. And I also want to thank his staff and my staff for putting in an enormous amount of time on this bill over the last several months.

Most Americans understand that our healthcare system is broken. We are spending nearly \$13,000 a year per capita on healthcare. That is an astronomical sum of money, almost twice as much as most other countries. And yet despite all of that spending, some 85 million Americans are uninsured or underinsured. And there are estimates out there, believe it or not, that some 60,000 Americans die each year because they do not receive the healthcare they need when they need it. And our life expectancy as a nation is actually in decline, despite all of that spending.

Frankly, as broken as our general healthcare system is, our primary healthcare system is in even worse shape. As everyone knows, I don't think there is any debate on this, we face a major shortage of doctors, nurses, mental health professionals, and dentists. And those shortages will only grow as a result of the COVID burnout that many providers experience and the aging of our healthcare workforce.

According to the most recent estimates that I have seen, over the next decade, our country faces a shortage of over 120,000 doctors, including a huge number of primary care physicians. The nursing shortage may be worse. Over the next 2 years alone, it is estimated that we will need more than 200,000 nurses. And despite the very serious mental health crisis we face, we are facing a massive shortage of mental health providers—psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, et cetera.

Now, that is not the point that BERNIE SANDERS is making or Senator MARSHALL has made. This is a point of view of virtually every major medical organization in the country.

And on this matter, let me quote from a recent Washington Post op-ed by Elisabeth Rosenthal, a contributing editor at Kaiser Family Foundation Health News. This is what she writes—and I hope our colleagues hear this:

American physicians have been abandoning traditional primary care practice—internal and family medicine—in large numbers.

Those who remain are working fewer hours. And fewer medical students are choosing a field that once attracted some of the best and brightest because of its diagnostic challenges and the emotional gratification of deep relationships with patients. The percentage of US doctors in adult primary care has been declining for years and is now about 25%—a tipping point beyond which many Americans won't be able to find a family doctor at all.

She writes:

Already, more than 100 million Americans don't have usual access to a primary care doctor—a number that has nearly doubled since 2014.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD the full article.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the Washington Post]

THE SHRINKING NUMBER OF PRIMARY-CARE
PHYSICIANS IS REACHING A TIPPING POINT

(By Elisabeth Rosenthal)

I've been receiving an escalating stream of panicked emails from people telling me their longtime physician was retiring, was no longer taking their insurance or had gone concierge and would no longer see them unless they ponied up a hefty annual fee. They said they couldn't find another primary-care doctor who could take them on or who offered a new-patient appointment sooner than months away.

Their individual stories reflect a larger reality: American physicians have been abandoning traditional primary-care practice—internal and family medicine—in large numbers. Those who remain are working fewer hours. And fewer medical students are choosing a field that once attracted some of the best and brightest because of its diagnostic challenges and the emotional gratification of deep relationships with patients.

The percentage of U.S. doctors in adult primary care has been declining for years and is now about 25 percent—a tipping point beyond which many Americans won't be able to find a family doctor at all.

Already, more than 100 million Americans don't have usual access to primary care, a number that has nearly doubled since 2014. The fact that so many of us no longer regularly see a familiar doctor we trust is likely one reason our coronavirus vaccination rates were low compared with those in other countries.

Another telling statistic: In 1980, 62 percent of doctor's visits for adults over 65 were for primary care and 38 percent were for specialists, according to Michael L. Barnett, a health systems researcher and primary-care doctor in the Harvard Medical School system. By 2013, that ratio had exactly flipped and has likely "only gotten worse," he said, noting sadly, "We have a specialty-driven system. Primary care is seen as a thankless, undesirable backwater." That's "tragic," in his word—studies show that a strong foundation of primary care yields better health outcomes overall, greater equity in health-care access and lower per capita health costs.

One explanation for the disappearing primary-care doctor is financial. The payment structure in the U.S. health system has long rewarded surgeries and procedures while shortchanging the diagnostic, prescriptive and preventive work that is the province of primary care. Furthermore, the traditionally independent doctors in this field have almost no power to negotiate sustainable payments with the mammoth insurers in the U.S. market.

Faced with this situation, many independent primary-care doctors have sold their practices to health systems or commercial management chains (some private-equity-owned) so that, today, three-quarters of doctors are now employees of those outfits.

One of them was Bob Morrow, who practiced for decades in the Bronx. For a typical visit, he was most recently paid about \$80 if the patient had Medicare, with its fixed-fee schedule. Commercial insurers paid significantly less. He just wasn't making enough to pay the bills, which included salaries of three employees, including a nurse practitioner. "I tried not to pay too much attention to money for four or five years—to keep my eye on my patients and not the bottom line," he said by phone from his former office, as workers carted away old charts for shredding.

He finally gave up and sold his practice last year to a company that took over scheduling, billing and negotiations with insurers. It agreed to pay him a salary and to provide support staff as well as supplies and equipment.

The outcome: Calls to his office were routed to a call center overseas, and patients with questions or complaining of symptoms were often directed to a nearby urgent care center owned by the company—which is typically more expensive than an office visit. His office staff was replaced by a skeleton crew that didn't include a nurse or skilled worker to take blood pressure or handle requests for prescription refills. He was booked with patients every eight to 10 minutes.

He discovered that the company was calling some patients and recommending expensive tests—such as vascular studies or an abdominal ultrasound—that he did not believe they needed.

He retired in January. "I couldn't stand it," he said. "It wasn't how I was taught to practice."

Of course, not every practice sale ends with such unhappy results, and some work out well.

But the dispirited feeling that drives doctors away from primary care has to do with far more than money. It's the lack of respect for non-specialists. It's the rising pressure to see and bill more patients: Employed doctors often coordinate the care of as many as 2,000 people, many of whom have multiple problems.

And it's the lack of assistance. Profitable centers such as orthopedic and gastroenterology clinics usually have a phalanx of support staff. Primary-care clinics run close to the bone.

"You are squeezed from all sides," said Barnett.

Many ventures are rushing in to fill the primary-care gap. There had been hope that nurse practitioners and physician assistants might help fill some holes, but data shows that they, too, increasingly favor specialty practice. Meanwhile, urgent care clinics are popping up like mushrooms. So are primary care chains such as One Medical, now owned by Amazon. (Jeff Bezos, Amazon's founder, owns The Post.) Dollar General, Walmart, Target, CVS and Walgreens have opened "retail clinics" in their stores.

Rapid-fire visits with a rotating cast of doctors, nurses or physician assistants might be fine for a sprained ankle or strep throat. But they will not replace a physician who tells you to get preventive tests and keeps tabs on your blood pressure and cholesterol. The doctor who knows your health history—and has the time to figure out whether the pain in your shoulder is from your basketball game, an aneurysm or a clogged artery in your heart.

Some relatively simple solutions are available, if we care enough about supporting this

foundational part of a good medical system. Hospitals and commercial groups could invest some of the money they earn by replacing hips and knees to support primary-care staffing; giving these doctors and patients more face time with each other will be good for their customers' health and loyalty if not (always) the bottom line.

Reimbursement for primary-care visits could be increased to reflect their value—perhaps by enacting a national primary-care fee schedule, so these doctors won't have to butt heads with insurers. And policymakers could consider forgiving the medical school debt of doctors who chose primary care as a profession.

They deserve support that allows them to do what they were trained to do: diagnosing, treating and getting to know their patients.

The United States already ranks last among wealthy countries in health outcomes. The average life span in America is decreasing, even as it increases in many other countries. If we fail to address the primary-care shortage, our country's health will be even worse for it.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, now, what this article points out is certainly not news to the people in America. In Vermont and all over this country, our people often have to wait months in order to get an appointment with a doctor; and in some cases, they have to travel very long distances to get the healthcare they need.

And let us be clear: There is no debate upon this. Some people think we don't have to act on it now; let's do it next year, next year, following year. Wrong. The crisis is only going to get worse, and every day we delay it, it becomes even worse.

Now, why is this happening? Well, there are a lot of reasons why. One of the reasons is that it turns out that the United States—despite all of our spending on healthcare—spends about half of what other nations do on primary healthcare. We spend approximately 7 percent; most of the country spends at least twice as much.

And the absurdity of that situation is that everybody knows that “an ounce of prevention is worth more than a pound of cure.” And if there is anything that Senator MARSHALL and I are talking about, that is exactly what we are talking about. You spend money—we are spending money to save money. Keeping people healthy saves money. In other words, common sense tells us that if we can prevent disease, do a better job keeping our young people healthy, if people can access the medical care when they need it not when they are just very, very sick—if we can do those things, we can keep them out of the hospital. And hospital costs are just extremely, extremely high.

Common sense also tells us that it is literally insane that millions of Americans with nonemergency healthcare needs get their primary care in a hospital emergency room, which, in some cases, is 10 times more than the care provided them in a community health center.

Let me just give one other example of the irrationalities of our current system. In my own small State of Vermont, last year, our major hos-

pitals spent \$125 million in 1 year on traveling nurses because we don't have enough local nurses to support the needs of the hospital and many other facilities in Vermont. Meanwhile, young people want to become nurses. They are applying to nursing school, but the nursing schools don't have the faculty to educate them.

I recently talked to a Senator who told me that, in her State, some 1,100 young people were applying for a space in nursing school; the school could only provide 80 openings.

So we have a nursing crisis. We are not addressing it. Hospitals are spending three, four times as much money on traveling nurses as they are on homegrown nurses because we are not educating our young people at nursing school. This may make sense to somebody; it does not make great sense to me.

The legislation that Senator MARSHALL and I have introduced today does not solve, by any means, all of the healthcare crises we face. But if this legislation is passed, it will not only save us substantial sums of money, not only provide a medical home for millions more Americans, not only significantly increase the number of doctors and nurses that we desperately need, but it will go a long way toward transforming primary healthcare in America—something that is so long overdue.

With that, I want to turn the floor over to Senator MARSHALL.

And I would say this, that Senator MARSHALL has a unique perspective on this. Not only is he a Senator from a rural State, he is also a practicing physician and has interesting insight into the crises in healthcare that many of us don't.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas.

Mr. MARSHALL. Thank you so much for sharing this moment with us. You know, one of my mentors here on the Hill has a saying that some Senators come here to make a point and others come to make a difference. The first time Senator SANDERS and I sat down together, he said: ROGER, do you want to make a difference?

We have worked so hard on this issue together, developing rapport, confidence in each other, in our staff—they have all done an incredible job—as we try to get through this riddle from healthcare challenges throughout this great Nation.

I think as both of us travel back to our home States of Vermont and Kansas, what we found is that not everybody has meaningful, affordable access to primary care. So we went out and tried to find the best actors, what is the best outcome, who is making a dent? And I think we both discovered that our community health centers were doing a great job. They had taken many pilot programs, and they were improving them.

I am not sure what Senator SANDERS would talk about some of his, but what I saw was this meeting patients where

they are a concept, integrating all the different elements of primary care—not just your blood pressure, not just your Accu-Chek, but also your mental health. Dental needs, as well, are just a few more things we are seeing being integrated into the community health centers—nutrition coaching, something that has seldom been done in clinics before. So I think we saw these community health centers as doing a great job. And we asked each other: How can we improve upon that?

And Senator SANDERS and I agreed on this lofty goal that we could get more Americans into these clinics, and that was a great solution for primary care. So for the past 3 months, we have had a very thoughtful approach to this problem. And even before then, our committees had multiple hearings with different folks as they tried to address the problem as well. And then we had multiple Zooms and meetings with folks back home: How do we solve this primary care problem and, again, this mental health epidemic slapping us in the face every time we go back?

And, certainly, I think most of our committee would agree that the community health centers are a great solution, but they need to be bolstered and need to continue that mission across this great Nation.

So I am proud of the work that we have done on the community health centers in this legislation—again, thoughtful legislation. And our goal is to make sure it doesn't cost American taxpayers any more.

Again, Senator SANDERS and I both said many times this country is spending plenty of money on healthcare, but maybe we need to refocus a little bit more of it to primary care. That is what we have done with this legislation, again, with a thoughtful approach. And our goal, again, is to make sure it is all paid for and it doesn't cost the American taxpayer any more.

I think the other big issue that we found in common with folks back home is a nursing shortage and a primary care doctor shortage. If there is one thing that this bill would do, it would turn around the nursing crisis in a matter of just 3 years.

My own wife is a community college graduate nurse. Ninety percent of the nurses in our hospitals in Kansas, especially the rural hospitals, are 2-year community college graduates. So what we have done with this legislation is bolster more money for nursing programs. And the other program, like Senator SANDERS said, the other challenge, is colleges cannot afford the faculty, the nursing faculty. So we have some money to help bolster that program up as well.

We have young men and women standing in line for incredible jobs in healthcare, but we don't have the faculty to bring them in. So we help with scholarships. We help with the faculty. That alone will change the dynamics across America if we have more nurses who are just the glue to this healthcare

system. And then the next challenge of the attack here is just a shortage of primary care doctors in so many ways as well.

So the legislation addresses that. It is great steps forward. I have been very proud, again, to work with Senator SANDERS and his team, finding common ground. And I think we made incredible strides.

Senator SANDERS and I have talked many times about our community health centers. I might just ask him about the successes that you are seeing in your community health centers and what your vision going forward looks like.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, this is an issue I have worked on since I have been in Congress. And one of the results of that—working with others—is that, in my State of Vermont, I think—I think—we are leading the Nation in terms of the number of people per capita who participate in the community health center program.

Senator MARSHALL, my understanding is that in Vermont, one out of three Vermonters get their primary healthcare or dental care at a community health center. And one of the things that I love about community health centers is that they really are community health centers. In Vermont, they are not just for low-income people, as important as that is. They are for everybody in the community. We used to have a Supreme Court Justice of the United States of America who vacationed in Vermont. Guess where he went? To a community health center.

My understanding is, the Governor of the State of Vermont gets his primary healthcare at a community health center, and that is what I love about them.

And as you well know and as you mentioned, what they do is not only provide primary healthcare, many of them provide dental care, which is a huge issue. Many of them provide mental health counseling, which, as you indicated, we have a major crisis in. And they also provide lower cost prescription drugs.

What they say is that, regardless of your income, if you have Medicare, come on in; if you have Medicaid, come on in; if you have private insurance, fine; if you have no health insurance, we will work on a sliding scale.

By expanding these community health centers all over America, we are going to provide millions of people the opportunity to get the healthcare they need. That is what exists in Vermont right now, and we want to see that expanded all over the country.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas.

Mr. MARSHALL. Senator SANDERS and I discussed this vision of what primary care looks like in the future, making sure we are meeting patients where they are.

Some of our community health centers back home are bringing in the food

bank; they are bringing in the WIC Programs, social services, basic mammography. We lose track of the patients when we have to say: Come back in a month for your mammogram. Instead, it is a great thing to say: Let's get it done today.

One of the biggest underserved areas of medicine is dental. I know that one of Senator SANDERS' visions, specifically, in this legislation is to address the dental crisis. As an obstetrician myself, the only known cause of preterm labor is poor dental health, caries, cavities, whatever you want to call it. There are lots of links to having cavities and poor gum health to having heart attacks as well. It is a way underrecognized challenge for primary care.

I can't tell you how many times I have been called at 10 at night or 2 in the morning on a Saturday with one of my OB patients who is obviously very pregnant, but she has a cavity, and now, it turned into an abscess. I can't get her into a dentist. I call all my buddies. It is Saturday, 10 p.m., and all my buddies, the dentists, are gone.

Share your vision on dental and how this bill impacts that.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. SANDERS. Thank you very much for raising the issue of dental crisis in America. I can tell you that in Vermont, we have a crisis. We made progress, but we have a serious problem. The cost of dental care is very, very high. In the southern part of my State, Bennington County, if you are a poor child, you are probably on Medicaid. You probably can't find a dentist.

What we have done in this bill is put \$3 billion one time—just one time—into capital improvements for community health centers. That is long overdue because if you want to expand community health centers, they need money for their own expansion and infrastructure.

Building a dental operatory—and that is the dental chairs and the good equipment that dentists need—is a very expensive proposition. So by putting \$3 billion into capital improvements, much of which I suspect will be going to those dental operatories, we are going to be able to provide communities all over this country with the ability to access dental care in a way they are not doing it today.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PETERS). The Senator from Kansas.

Mr. MARSHALL. I want to turn this discussion to what our vision is for these primary care community health centers.

I think we all realize we have an obesity epidemic in this country, too, and a type 2 diabetic epidemic in this country that we need to address on the front end.

I am so happy to see some of my community health centers coming in and doing nutrition classes. They are doing cooking classes. I think so many

folks of our current generation maybe learned how to do some cooking, but fast foods were a little bit too easy. It is that out-of-the-box thinking you get with different programs. I call it coaching. We need to be coaching folks up and teaching them but also give them the opportunities. So whether we are on the Ag Committee and working on food programs, we try to bring all these pieces together in the program as well.

I know Senator SANDERS is also certainly committed to helping us address this. He has been a leader on this issue, trying to take care of folks with diabetes as well.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. SANDERS. Senator MARSHALL raised this issue from almost the first time we sat down and seriously discussed it. If we are going to talk about prevention, we have to talk about obesity, among other things, because we are looking at a major—you tell me if I am wrong, Doctor—we are looking at a major diabetic epidemic in this country that will not only cost massive amounts of suffering, but it is also going to be a very expensive healthcare bill. Certainly, one of many of the contributing factors is obesity. What Senator MARSHALL has talked about from the very beginning is we have to do a better job in nutrition education. Community health centers are very well situated to be able to do that.

At Senator MARSHALL's insistence—and I was delighted to work with him—we have language in here that will make it easier for community health centers to work on nutrition programs in a variety of ways with their clients.

Mr. MARSHALL. I might close with a couple of thoughts. Again, we came in with the lofty expectations that we could make a difference in primary care for people across the Nation. I think our bill accomplishes just that.

Again, I can't thank the staff enough for their support through this. Senator SANDERS and I spent most of the August recess—and our staff spent every moment of every hour of every day on this August recess—working on this legislation. I think it is a good product. I think there is always opportunity for improvement. We are welcome to those ideas.

I appreciate the Senator using traditional Hyde protections at the appropriate places, so we maintained that, which is important to many folks, including to myself. I think we addressed primary care issues. I think we have a plan to increase the nursing workforce. Again, in 3 years' time, we can turn that problem around and long-term address some of the primary care issues. Addressing dental, as well, I think will be a huge improvement.

At the end of the day, you cannot overestimate how much money this will save in programs like Medicare and Medicaid and the health insurance back home and help drive the cost of healthcare down for people. I am glad

to see us try to emphasize maybe some better ways to spend the American taxpayer moneys.

But most importantly to me, the physician, is just this is the right thing to do. This is absolutely the right thing to do. It is a chance to improve the health of Americans. I am just proud to stand here beside Senator SANDERS and introduce this legislation. Thank you.

Mr. SANDERS. Let me thank Senator MARSHALL and his staff so much for their hard work and say, as he just said, we think there are other ideas that can improve it. We are open to new ideas. We hope to be marking up and intend to be marking up this bill next Thursday. We look forward to talking to all of the members on the Health, Education, Labor, and Pension Committee for doing what is really important.

Senator MARSHALL started his remarks off by saying, I think, exactly the right thing. We can come here and all give great speeches. We can all talk about how next year, we are going to get to something or, 5 years from now, we will get to something.

Everybody in America—in Vermont, Kansas, and all over this country—understands we have a primary healthcare crisis. This is the greatest country on Earth. We spend more money on healthcare than any other country. It is not asking too much that when you get sick, you are able to find a doctor, that you are able to find a dentist. It is not asking too much that when you are in a hospital, there are enough nurses there, that our young people who want to become nurses are able to get that education so they go out and get really good jobs. That is not too much. That is all we are doing in this legislation. We are looking at the real world as it exists.

Senator MARSHALL is a physician and understands that world quite well. We are looking at that world saying: You know what, let's not wait 5 years from now. We have a crisis today. Let's deal with it. 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.

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

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

The Senator from Ohio.

UNITED AUTO WORKERS NEGOTIATIONS

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, I hope my colleagues will join me, as I know the Senator from Michigan, the Presiding Officer, does, in standing in solidarity with thousands of UAW workers in Ohio and Michigan and around the country who demand that automakers—a simple demand really—respect the work they do to make these companies successful. There is still time, the rest of the day and, really, beyond this, for the Big Three to avert

a strike, which we know is always a last resort for workers.

My wife is the daughter of a utility worker in Ashtabula, in the far northeast corner of the State. She, first of all, credits her dad's union card with saving her life. She was 16 years old and had an asthma attack, I believe at school, and was picked up in an ambulance and taken to the Cleveland Clinic and spent more than a week there—something she could not afford without her dad's union card and her dad's healthcare benefits from the utility workers union and from that company.

She also said that, twice during her growing up, the union struck because their backs were against the wall; they thought they had no choice. She acknowledges that the workers never really recover the lost wages from a strike.

These UAW members in Michigan and Ohio, in Toledo, in Cincinnati, in Dayton, and all over our State and in other States, they want to be on the job. They don't want to strike. They don't want to be on the picket line. But when companies refuse to recognize the work they do, workers are backed into a corner.

It is why union cards matter. A union card means workers can stand together for fair pay and benefits, for better working conditions, for safer workplaces, for control over their schedules, for a voice in their company, and a voice in their community—because, to be clear, autoworkers surely are the engines behind these companies' success. GM, Ford, and Stellantis—people around the country know Stellantis as the old Chrysler—the Big Three wouldn't be making a dime, of course, in profits without the workers who actually make their cars and trucks.

Remember, autoworkers—this is the most important thing. Autoworkers stood up and made sacrifices a decade ago, especially at GM and Chrysler—Stellantis—because those companies were in trouble. And taxpayers stood up, and government stood, finally, on the side of those companies, and the workers made sacrifices to help the American auto industry when times were tough.

Who remembers the depths of the recession? UAW workers stood behind the Big Three when a whole lot of politicians in this town wanted to abandon these companies. Now that times are good, all that workers are asking for is their fair share.

Let's be clear, times now are very, very good for these companies and very, very, very good for these CEOs. We know auto executives—I don't know how many. But I know auto executives in all three companies—many, many of them—make more than a million dollars a year. Some of them make tens of millions of dollars a year.

Together GM, Ford, and Stellantis brought in \$21 billion—that is with a "b," a thousand million—\$21 billion in profits the first half of the year alone.

Think about that. These companies were struggling a decade ago. They

were in real trouble. They were losing money. They were in trouble during the recession. Workers gave them major kinds of givebacks, gave them major kinds of concessions. They took less money for themselves and set up a three-tiered rate structure that hurt workers, but they had to do it to save these companies. They agreed to do that.

But, now, times are really, really good for these companies. Again, GM, Ford, and Stellantis together brought in \$21 billion of profits just in the first half of 2023, but they don't want to share those profits with these workers.

And who makes these profits possible? Again, the history: These companies were in trouble. The government helped them. Workers gave up a lot. Workers sacrificed. Workers gave back money they shouldn't have had to give back because they wanted to save the companies. Now, the companies are doing well. Now, the executives are doing very, very well with \$21 billion in profits, and the company is not willing to appreciably share in those profits.

The CEO of GM makes 362 times what its median worker makes. With Ford, it is only a modest 281 times that. Think of that. The GM CEO—a company that, when struggling, was saved because of worker concessions—is making 362 times what the median—not the lowest paid worker but the median—worker of that company makes. So, frankly, I hesitate to call names, and I am really not. I don't want to hear whining from companies that they can't afford to pay workers what they are worth. And that goes for all workers, all autoworkers making all kinds of vehicles—cars and trucks and SUVs.

I know what the future is. I know these companies. These companies plan to be overwhelmingly making batteries, making electric vehicles. That is their decision, to be sure. But I don't want those—because some politicians whine about, "Well, we don't want electric vehicles"—these are the companies' decisions, the companies' plans, the companies' futures. But I don't want those jobs—those politicians that whine, if they get their way, they are going to see these electric vehicles made in Japan and China and Taiwan and overseas.

We went through that already. We know what my hometown of Mansfield, OH, looked like. I know what Dayton, OH, looked like. I know what Hamtramck and cities in the Presiding Officer's State looked like. I know what happens to those counties, those workers. And do you know what? I know what happens to those cities, those communities.

I grew up in Mansfield, OH, a town of 50,000. I went to Johnny Applesseed Junior High School. That was really its name—Johnny Applesseed Pioneers. And I went to school with sons and daughters of autoworkers at GM, rubberworkers at Mansfield Tire, electrical IUE members at Westinghouse—there were several thousand at one

point—machinists at Tappan Stove, and the sons of daughters of pipefitters and plumbers and electricians and bricklayers, millwrights, insulators, and laborers and—I am forgetting others—and operating engineers.

And do you know what? Within 10 or 20 years, most of those jobs were gone. They were gone because companies, always looking for lower wages, wanted to go to non-union States.

First, they went to Alabama. That wasn't good enough. So then they jammed, and I mean "jammed"—sorry to say it this way—by buying off a whole lot of politicians—they jammed these trade agreements, like NAFTA, through the Congress, and then it got worse.

It wasn't just the companies going to Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Georgia, South Carolina, and Tennessee. Then they weren't greedy enough; they wanted even cheaper labor. Then they went to China and Mexico. That means that in my community of 50,000, where I grew up, you just don't see the prosperity there that you did when I went to school with those kids.

So, as I said, we have heard a lot of politicians blaming electrical vehicles for the dispute, as if, somehow, corporations wanting to squeeze their workers was a new development.

I will make it clear. I don't care what kind of car Americans drive. My wife and I drove Chevy Cruzes for a while, and they were made in Lordstown, OH, by GM, about an hour and a half from our home. Now, we each drive a Jeep Cherokee, made about 2 hours from our home, in the other direction, in Toledo. So people can drive what they are going to drive. I always hope, and I know the Presiding Officer thinks the same way, that people buy union-made cars made in the United States. But I see what happens when both parties—both parties—frankly, unfortunately, it wasn't a partisan thing. My party was almost as guilty as Republicans on this—the push for NAFTA—which sent thousands of jobs overseas.

We fought them. When politicians said, "Let these companies die; they are not worth saving; foreign automakers can do this better," we fought them every step of the way.

Now, today, for anyone who doubts that autoworkers in Ohio are the future of this industry, for anyone who wants to give up on these plants or force workers to settle for less, we will fight the way I fought NAFTA my first year in Congress, the way I fought permanent normal trade relations, the giveaway to the Chinese—not Chinese workers, but giveaway to Chinese Communist Party officials and corrupt leaders—a different kind of corruption from American leaders who sold them short, but nonetheless.

We know this industry is changing. Forty years ago, when Jeep rolled out the Jeep Cherokee—Chrysler now—most people had never heard of an SUV. Now they dominate the market. Twenty-three years ago, hybrids came

along. Whatever the auto industry looks like in 20 years, in 50 years, in 100 years—I am not an auto expert. I don't know what they are going to look like 20 or 50 or 100 years from now, but I do know this: Ohio autoworkers, American innovation will be leading it, if we let them, if we reward these workers and don't let companies searching for cheap labor and going to anti-union States, moving overseas—as long as we don't let them run the show.

I was in Lordstown a couple of weeks ago. That is where the Chevy Cruze plant was, near Youngstown. I was at UAW Local 1112. I have been to that union, I don't know, 50 times in my life, with my friend Dave Green, a UAW superstar who came up through that plant. There were two locals at that plant. I don't remember if he came from 1112 or the other one. These are the workers now at the new Ultium cell battery plant. Many of them worked for the Cruze plant before GM closed it. There are reminders everywhere of what bad trade deals did to the Mahoning Valley.

But, do you know what? GM was paying. This was a joint venture. This was GM and a Korean company called LG. This was a joint venture, 50-50. Those workers at this Ultium plant were making \$16 an hour. And I said to GM: Well, how can you do this?

They voted for a union, by the way, the UAW there, just recently, by a 90-plus percent vote.

I said to GM: How can you pay them \$16 an hour when you have the national UAW contract? It is much more generous than that and negotiated, earned together.

They said: Well, we can't do anything because this is a jointly owned plant, and we are just half of it.

Well, they are General Motors. Of course, they can do something about it, and, of course, they need to do something about it.

Well, we were able—I hate to say it. We were able—partly by shining a light on General Motors and what they had done and what their history is—we were able to get a \$4- to \$5-an-hour raise working with Dave Green of UAW Local 1112 and getting thousands of dollars in stock buybacks for those workers that had been there a year or more.

These workers are, again, at the forefront of their industry, and they are not getting paid like it. America should continue to lead the global auto industry, but the Big Three can't do it without their workers. There is still time for this to happen, for these autoworkers and auto companies to agree to a fair contract. There is still time for these great American companies to do the right thing.

It means something we probably don't do enough of here. It means listening to their workers. It means foregoing strike-busting tactics, like we saw the last time, when UAW workers were forced to picket. In 2019, GM cut off striking workers' health insurance,

a bad-faith tactic that not only hurts their most vulnerable asset, their workers, but it hurts their families and really hurts their communities.

I was at Local 14 in Toledo, talking to one worker. Here is what happens when an auto company uses its prowess and its power and its anti-union fervor, when they do that and take away healthcare. There was one worker whose healthcare was cut off at the Local 14 in Toledo, at the Chrysler plant. His 4-year-old daughter Chesney needed surgery, but she couldn't get it because GM canceled the family's health insurance.

They are workers who had a contract. They paid in. They were picketing because they didn't think over these 10 years GM and Chrysler and Ford lived up to their side of the bargain.

I have a bill with Senator CASEY, who sits next to me, to make sure it doesn't happen again, the Striking Workers Healthcare Protection Act. We shouldn't need that. We shouldn't need for companies to be strong-armed or forced by government to honor the dignity of work. That shouldn't be necessary when these iconic companies have done so well, paid good dividends, and rewarded their executives with compensation nobody would have dreamed up a generation ago. We shouldn't have to do that. But until these companies understand, "You should respect the dignity of work," if they don't, then maybe it is time that government says: OK, we are going to have a Striking Workers Healthcare Protection Act. It is time to do the right thing, to bargain in good faith, and to agree to a contract that indeed honors the dignity of work.

I yield the floor.

CONFIRMATION OF MICHAEL C. CASEY

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Virginia.

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I want to thank my good friend the Senator from Oklahoma, who is also a member of the Intelligence Committee, a subject of which I am going to speak to, and I appreciate the courtesy of allowing me to go first.

Today, Mr. President, I rise to say a few words about someone who has been an essential part of the Senate community for many, many years.

I am proud to note that earlier this week—as a matter of fact, on Tuesday evening—with the support from the Senator from Oklahoma, the Senate unanimously confirmed the nomination of Mike Casey to serve as Director of the National Counterintelligence and Security Center. We know, at a time when the United States is facing tremendous foreign intelligence and security threats, it is important to have a Senate-confirmed leader as the head of the NCSC, which is charged with protecting against insider threats, supply chain risks, and other counterintelligence issues.

The truth is, the position has been vacant since the end of the last administration. So, as chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee, I am glad that we will finally now have a Senate-confirmed leader in place to lead the efforts to protect against foreign threats, to protect U.S. critical infrastructure, to advance the counterintelligence and security mission, and—maybe most importantly—to be on constant call of the Senate Intelligence staff to make sure that efforts to reform security clearances is at the top of the agenda.

But while I recognize that this is a great step for our country and our national security, it is a real loss to me personally, to members on both sides of the aisle on the Intelligence Committee, and to our staff, because we are losing Mike Casey, who has been the staff director for the last 8 years. And while he doesn't look Medicare-eligible, the truth is, he has been working up here for 28 years, starting in the House of Representatives and, eventually, joining the staff of the House Armed Services Committee before Senator FEINSTEIN brought him over to the upper Chamber as staff director for the Senate Intel Committee in 2016.

I have worked extraordinarily closely with Mike over my years as a member of the committee but particularly when I bumped up to the position of vice chair. I think a lot about our kind of bonding and, in many ways, I think of the committee's bonding when, under the able leadership of then-chairman Richard Burr, the committee took on the responsibility of the investigation into the outside interference of the 2016 national elections. Our staff and, at that point, the majority committee's staff worked so seamlessly together.

While we got a lot of grief from folks all across the political spectrum—and a lot of this was due to Mike Casey—one of the things that I was most proud of was, as a variety of people came before the committee to testify on what could have been, otherwise, a totally partisan matter as it was in the House of Representatives, witness after witness said they didn't know, as they were being questioned, whether they were being questioned by majority or minority staff. A lot of that was due to Mike Casey's leadership.

The truth, as well, is that Mike—I had to push him at times. You know, he used to think that the job of the Intelligence Committee was basically just to do oversight on the 17, 18, 19—depending on the week—number of IC Agencies that we oversee. He didn't realize that, actually, the IC's responsibility—and I know sometimes the Presiding Officer and I have had clashes—was literally everything that touched technology in our country.

Again, Mike, while sometimes reluctant, has stepped up to that task. And I am proud of the fact that it was our committee that initially worked on the CHIPS bill and that it was our committee that first pointed out some of

the challenges with 5G and Huawei as well as some of the more recent work.

One of the ways we were able to do that—and we have got a lot of the committee staff behind us—is because, literally, Mike Casey knew everyone in the IC and the DOD. He knew where they were. He knew where the bodies were buried, both literally and figuratively, and could make sure that, as we tried to go off into other directions, that basic core function of oversight was never, never undermined. Again, he did this always—after a little nudging—in a bipartisan way.

I am extraordinarily proud of that and proud of the service that he has provided in educating me on a lot of issues that I was not that familiar with as I came on to the committee and in keeping our Intel Committee staff together. That bipartisan nature has continued under his leadership in our workings with Vice Chair RUBIO and his team as well.

So, while we say goodbye to Mike, we also wish him well as he embarks on his critical new role. As Director of the National Counterintelligence and Security Center, Mike will face many of the same challenges we have wrestled with on the Intelligence Committee.

As we all know, the truth is that national security is no longer simply about who has got the most tanks and guns and ships and planes. It really is about who is going to lead in artificial intelligence, quantum computing, 5G, cyber security, synthetic biology. All of these are areas in which Mike, in his new job, will also have to point out threats, both external and internal, to America's leadership.

He will—as I mentioned, he is committed—respond to our staff member John Rosenwasser at any moment, day or night, 7 days a week, 24 hours a day, to make sure that we finally finish security clearance reform and make sure, in terms of insider threats, that we don't see repeats of what has happened, unfortunately, too many times. So while Mike Casey might be leaving our staff, it is safe to say he will not be leaving my speed dial.

We will miss you, Mike.

Most importantly, I give him these final words of advice: Don't screw it up.

I yield the floor to my good friend, the Senator from Oklahoma.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

MR. LANKFORD. Mr. President, I do appreciate the leadership on the Intelligence Committee and for the leadership that has been there.

I would concur. You have a spot to be able to lead and a task to be able to be done. You have studied this, so that must mean you know it. We look forward to your leadership in the days ahead. I appreciate that very much.

NATIONAL DEBT

MR. PRESIDENT, I do want to speak on a very different subject as well, and it is a subject that we are all going to face in the days ahead. It is this wonderful issue of a government shutdown.

We seem to forget, at times in this body, the issues that press around us, but the one that seems to get slipped under the rug most of the time is that of national debt: where we are and how we are going to try to address this in the days ahead. The conversation comes up—it seems to be on a regular basis now—about are we going to have a government shutdown; and the conversation of a government shutdown ends up being a very small portion of the very large debt that we face.

The challenge is, how do we actually address that based on its size? Well, let me just give you a little bit of context as to what I am talking about.

We are, right now, preparing, within days, to cross into \$33 trillion in total Federal debt—\$33 trillion. To give some context of that acceleration of Federal debt and what is happening during this time period, from the time of Andrew Jackson—who was the last President who was President when we had no debt at all. From the time of Andrew Jackson until Ronald Reagan, our Nation accumulated \$1 trillion in total debt. From Andrew Jackson to Reagan, there was \$1 trillion in total debt. From Reagan to the present, now we are \$33 trillion in total debt. We are in a rapid acceleration of debt that has not slowed.

To give you again the picture of where things have gone just in the last several years, if you go back 20 years ago to 2003, our total spending was just over \$2 trillion. If you go back to 2013, which was 10 years ago, our total spending was less than \$3.5 trillion. Our spending this year will be right at \$6.5 trillion. So in the past 20 years, our spending has increased from just over \$2 trillion to \$6.5 trillion.

To give you the acceleration in spending just in the last few years, if I were to go back to 2018—before COVID, the 2018 time period—our total spending was just over \$4 trillion. This year's estimated spending is just under \$6.5 trillion. That is \$2.5 trillion of accelerated spending just from 2018 until now. Again, to set this in context, the revenue that is coming into the Federal Treasury this year is estimated at \$4.8 trillion—\$4.8 trillion. We are spending an estimated \$6.4 trillion.

Now, I know these are a lot of numbers, but let me give you one just as a takeaway. We have almost \$1.5 trillion of deficit—that is, overspending—just this year. By some estimates, depending on what happens in the next few weeks, it could be almost \$2 trillion in total overspending just this year.

To put this in context, with the record revenue that is coming in this year at about \$4.8 trillion, if we were spending the same this year as we did in 2018, which is a short 5 years ago—if we were spending the same this year as we were in 2018, prior to COVID, we would have a \$700 billion surplus this year rather than an almost \$2 trillion deficit this year. Because of the record amount of revenue coming in this year compared to what our spending was 5

years ago, we would have been in surplus this year; but we are not, and it is \$1.5 trillion over that.

We have a very serious issue. We should have very hard conversations about our revenue, about our spending, about the direction in which we are actually heading, and about how we get out of a \$33 trillion debt. This is not going to take 1 year or 2 years.

There are folks I have talked to recently even who have talked about the time in the early nineties—when we were at a balance of around \$100 billion—of the work that was done by the Bush administration and the Clinton administration—two administrations in a row—to be able to get us back to a balance. Two administrations in a row had to work on that. But here is the frightening thing: Our overspending this year is more than the total spending during the Clinton administration—just our overspending this year. This is not going to be a simple process to be able to come out of. This is not even going to be two administrations in a row making agreements to be able to get back to balance. This is going to take decades. My concern is that many here are not willing to start the first year of decades of work to be able to get us out. So we have work to do on this.

Myself and Senator MAGGIE HASSAN, a Democrat from New Hampshire, sat down several years ago and started having a conversation about how do we end government shutdowns and actually get into a real dialogue about how do we actually deal with debt and deficit issues. From those productive conversations, she and I created a piece of legislation that is designed just to prevent government shutdowns. All of the conversation right now among the media seems to be about if a government shutdown is coming at the end of this year. We should not have one at the end of this month, at the end of the fiscal year. We should continue to be able to keep going, but we should also have a debate of what direction we are going to go.

So Senator HASSAN and I came up with a very simple proposal. It is not a partisan proposal. It is a completely nonpartisan proposal. It is a simple proposal, quite frankly, that is equivalent to two things I had growing up. One was, if you don't finish your homework at school, you have to actually stay after class to be able to finish it. If you don't finish all of your work that you had to get done there, stay after class; keep finishing it; and when you are done, you can leave. The second one was, when my older brother and I would get into an argument—which, of course, as brothers, we never did get into an argument—but in that rare moment we got into an argument, my mom would put the two of us in a room and say: You guys settle this, and when you are done, you can come out.

We slammed those two ideas together into one simple proposal on how to end government shutdowns. If we get to the

end of the fiscal year and the appropriations work is not done, like it is this year, we stay in session 7 days a week, and the only bills that can actually come up, that actually can be called up during that time period, are appropriations bills. The second part of it is, there is no travel for anyone, so we couldn't fly home and fly back. No official or campaign funds could be used to be able to travel.

So we are in session 7 days a week. The only bills that are allowed to be brought up are appropriations bills. There is no travel.

The next part of it is simple. There is what is called a continuing resolution to maintain the government to be open so that the American people and Federal workers are held harmless. It puts the pressure on this room, not on Federal workers who are working for FAA, not on people who are working for the Housing Administration, not on our Border Patrol. Those individuals don't get a vote on this. They should not feel the pressure of a government shutdown.

We can keep the system moving while we still have our arguments to be able to resolve those things.

Why is this so important? A couple of reasons. One is, we are the United States of America. We should actually have an organized system because the rest of the world watches us to try to figure out how to do government. When we look dysfunctional, the rest of the world says: How are we going to figure this out if even the Americans can't figure this out? We, as Americans, lose track of that at times, but the rest of the world is watching us.

We should have our arguments. We are a representative republic. Every single voice counts, and we don't all agree. Great. Bring it. That demonstrates us at our best. But let's actually resolve those issues rather than having government shutdowns and chaos ensuing, because we need to set a better example for the world.

The second issue is much closer to home. We need to stop having government shutdowns because the American people are calling Federal Agencies and expecting someone to answer the phone, expecting to get help with passports or permits or whatever process it may be that they have to interact with the Federal Government. They need to be able to get somebody to answer the phone to be able to resolve that. This puts the American people struggling to be able to just get basic answers.

The third is the Federal workforce. We have millions of people who work in the Federal family. They work all over the country. When there is a government shutdown, there are two sets of things that actually occur. If you are a contractor, you are just out. Those contractors may be doing janitorial services in one of our buildings or they may be supplying food services to someone. They are just out. They don't get repaid; they just lose money, period.

Those who are actually on the Federal payroll—they don't get their check during that time period. They have this crazy, weird, essential, non-essential, some people laid off, some people not, but everyone is in chaos in that process.

For those folks who are in the Federal family, even though they may be declared essential or nonessential, do you know what—their car payments still come in, their mortgage still comes in, they still have to put food on the table, but they are not getting a check during the time of a government shutdown. So those individuals who live paycheck to paycheck, like many Americans do, suddenly have a gap—not by fault of their own but because this body couldn't resolve what we were going to do on the budgeting issues.

The fourth issue I have already partially mentioned, and that is the contractors. Let me just give you an example of what this means. Our southern border right now has the worst border crisis that we have ever faced as a nation. To give you a perspective on it, in the last few days, we have had up to 9,000 people illegally crossing our border a day—a day in the last few days. We have one border crossing area just in Tucson where they had 2,000 people who crossed in a day. Those folks are being cut loose and released into the country. It is chaos along our border.

Our Border Patrol and CBP and all those folks who are in law enforcement are doing their best to be able to help watch for safety and security of Americans while literally thousands of people are being cut loose into the country. They depend on some folks who are contractors in that area to help sometimes with transportation, with processing, with food, with medical care—all those things. Those contractors are very important to be able to help our Border Patrol in the chaos of what is actually happening. When there is a government shutdown, those contractors aren't going to be there, and the chaotic border we have now will be even more chaotic at that moment. That should not happen because we can't resolve our differences here. We need the national security on that.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, would the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. LANKFORD. I would yield to Senator CORNYN.

Mr. CORNYN. I just want to ask the Senator from Oklahoma—9,000 a day. I had to get out my calculator to figure out what that means. Are you talking about 3 million, 3.285 million—

Mr. LANKFORD. That is possible.

Mr. CORNYN.—a year—

Mr. LANKFORD. That is possible.

Mr. CORNYN.—if the current rate—

Mr. LANKFORD. If the current rate sustains, yes.

Yielding back my time for Senator CORNYN and for others as well, 2 weeks ago, our Nation crossed a threshold that most people just missed. We have just over 6 million people who have illegally crossed our southern border in

less than 3 years under the Biden administration—just over 6 million people. That 6 million number is the same as both terms of the Obama administration and the Trump administration combined. The Biden administration has allowed more people to illegally cross our border in less than 3 years than the previous 12 years along our border.

Border Patrol needs help right now. They don't need a government shutdown; they need help coming alongside them.

So what Senator HASSAN and I have done is proposed a very simple proposal. Let's stop government shutdowns. Let's end those. Let's not have the drama and the countdown clocks on 24-hour cable news TV. Let's have the arguments we need to have. Let's talk through the appropriations that need to be done. That is work we are required to do. But let's hold the Federal workers harmless in the process, and let's hold Federal contractors harmless in the process so we can settle the issues and do real planning.

This ending-government-shutdowns bill is very straightforward. We just want to prevent government shutdowns. We just want to be able to stop the chaos and actually show the American people that this body can have the arguments, resolve our differences, and move forward.

This is something we should be bringing to a vote. This is something that has wide bipartisan support. Let's resolve this piece while we still have more to be done.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SCHATZ). The senior Senator from Texas.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, here we are, 16 days before the end of the fiscal year, and the Senate has finally begun—we are not finishing; we are just beginning—taking up the annual appropriations process.

Just to remind everybody, there are 12 individual appropriations bills. There is no time for us to finish this process before the end of the fiscal year, which is actually part of the majority leader's plan. He never intended to have a normal process by which the appropriations bills would be considered because what we call the regular order around here means you take them up one at a time, all 12. It is a transparent, open process where the American people can see it, where every Senator—all 100 Senators—gets to participate in crafting those bills. If they believe the spending needs to be cut in a certain area, they can offer an amendment to do that. If we need different priorities in the spending bills, well, you can do that by offering an amendment and getting it passed.

Earlier today, the Senate voted 91 to 7 to begin debating this legislation that funds military construction projects and supports America's veterans. This bill is important because it bolsters our military readiness by in-

vesting in new and existing facilities at our military bases around the world. That includes, in Texas, places like Fort Bliss, Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland, and Fort Cavazos. It also helps us fulfill the promise we made to America's veterans by investing in mental health care, telehealth, housing, and other critical services.

Today, Texas is the proud home of 1½ million veterans, and this is one important way we keep our commitment and honor their service and the many sacrifices they have made for our country.

This legislation passed the Appropriations Committee earlier this summer with unanimous support. Every Democrat, every Republican voted for it—all 28 members. But this is just 1 of 12 funding bills the committee passed this summer with strong bipartisan support.

Earlier this week, the majority leader, the Senator from New York, spoke about the Senate appropriations process thus far, and he referred to it as “the gold standard in good governance.” When I read that, I nearly fell out of my chair. He calls this process, which is doomed to failure because of his refusal to bring these bills to the floor on a timely basis, the gold standard of good governance.

Given the fact that we are 16 days from a government shutdown unless the House and the Senate can agree on a continuing resolution, I would say this is far from the “gold standard.” As a matter of fact, I think you could say we have sunk about as far as we can.

But it is important to remember that this funding deadline didn't surprise us. It didn't pop up out of nowhere. It arrives every year on September 30. So the majority leader had plenty of time to plan, prepare, and to carve out time to pass all 12 appropriations bills, just like the rules contemplate. But here we are, September 14, 16 days ahead of the funding deadline, and the Senate has not passed a single funding bill for the government.

If the majority leader's gold standard comment had been in reference to the committee process, I would have agreed with him. The Appropriations Committee did their job. Senator MURRAY, the chair of the Appropriations Committee, Senator COLLINS, the ranking member, and all 28 Senators on a bipartisan basis did their job on a timely basis—the first time they have done that in 5 years. But the committee's productivity was no accident. The chair and vice chair of the committee, Senator MURRAY and Senator COLLINS, promised to return to regular order, and that is exactly what they delivered.

Our colleagues on the Appropriations Committee worked across the aisle, which is the way you are supposed to work around here, to pass all of these bills by the end of July. They put the Senate in a strong position to debate, vote, amend, and then finally pass appropriations bills before the end of this month. So the committee process cer-

tainly was the gold standard of good governance, but that outstanding product has been squandered. You might even say this whole process was designed to fail because the majority leader refused to bring those bills to the floor on a timely basis.

Let's look at the MILCON-VA—Military Construction-VA—funding bill as an example. This legislation was approved by the committee on June 22, more than 2½ months ago. The majority leader, the Senator from New York, could have brought this legislation to the floor anytime between then, June 22, and now. He could have said, well, this is important work, so we maybe need to shorten the Senate's 2-week recess for the Fourth of July so we can get our work done, or he could have scheduled a vote during the July 4th period instead of working on nominations.

He could have canceled or—my preference would have been—delayed the 5-week August recess. If we had to cut that back to 4 weeks, do you think anybody would have suffered? Well, it would have given us an extra week to actually get our work done. But that didn't happen.

He could have adjusted the Senate work schedule in any number of ways and would have gotten cooperation from the minority leader, Senator MCCONNELL, because we all understand—or at least most of us understand—the importance of getting our work done on a timely basis. But, as we know, none of that happened.

Days, weeks, months have passed as the Senate did nothing—nothing—to advance any of the 12 bipartisan appropriations bills. And I want to be just crystal clear: It didn't have to be that way.

Again, this end-of-the-fiscal-year deadline is not a surprise to any of us. It is not as if the appropriations bills weren't ready on time—they were—or that the Senate has been preoccupied with other priorities. The majority leader is the only person who can set the agenda of the Senate. He is the only one who could call up these bills and schedule a vote, but he has done nothing but squandered the opportunity.

I know that many of our colleagues are frustrated that the Senate has not obtained consent to consider two additional funding bills as part of a so-called minibus, bundling three bills together, but that is the rule. Rule XVI of the Standing Rules of the Senate requires a unanimous consent vote before you can bundle those individual appropriations bills together. But the majority leader knew that. He knew what the Senate rules were, and all along he was taking the risk that one Senator—maybe a handful of Senators—would want to consider the bills one at a time, which is the normal process. It is just not normal to do it starting 16 days before the end of the fiscal year.

Well, while the majority leader has preached the virtues of regular order,

he has refused to actually engage in a process where we can be successful. As a matter of fact, he knows, by delaying the appropriations bills to this point, that we will not be successful because he has undermined it; he has sabotaged it.

Now, you might ask: Why would the majority leader do that? Well, two reasons. One is when you do a continuing resolution, it actually maximizes the power of the leadership because they are the ones that actually negotiate it, and then rank-and-file Members get to vote up or down. But the other reason he did it was because he wants to point to the House and claim that somehow they are trying to shut down the government.

Now, admittedly, the House is having their challenges, but Speaker MCCARTHY has pulled a rabbit out of the hat more than once this year, and I am hoping he can do so again. But if we do have a shutdown because the House and the Senate can't agree, it will be a Schumer shutdown—a Schumer shutdown.

Well, Members on both sides of the aisle want an opportunity to participate in the process. They want an opportunity to shape this legislation, even at this late hour, to do as much as we can in the truncated time that the majority leader has allowed us. So I urge the leader to let the Senate vote on this underlying bill, the MILCON-VA bill. It is important. We shouldn't act like it is a throwaway or inconsequential. We ought to do our work, even under the impossible timeframe that the majority leader has given us.

I think it is dangerous when Congress circumvents the normal process when it comes to funding the government. It is no secret that our debt is about 100 percent of our GDP. We are going to spend more money just paying interest to bondholders on our debt that is at some point more than we spend on national defense. Interest rates are high, we know, because the Federal Reserve is fighting inflation caused by too much reckless spending, but, as a result, we are also paying more money to our creditors to finance our national debt. And I think that is another symptom of the broken system by which we fund the government.

It has become all too common for short-term funding bills and large spending packages to be negotiated by a handful of leaders and rushed through both Chambers before the clock runs out. There is a growing sense of frustration among Members of this body on both sides of the aisle and a strong appetite to return to a normal, regular, transparent, participatory process, one that will give us at least a chance to try to get our fiscal house in better shape. But we have no chance to do that when, in essence, the majority leader creates an emergency situation, claims that he is the gold standard, and tries to blame the House and say they want a shutdown.

Well, I am not for a shutdown. I agree with the Senator from Oklahoma. The same problems that cause you to shut down the government are always there staring you in the face when you reopen. So we need to do our work. We need to solve those problems and avoid a shutdown, but it is really hard to do when the majority leader of the U.S. Senate, the only one who can schedule votes on the floor and the agenda of the Senate, sabotages the process.

The majority leader has purposely wasted more than 80 days that could have been spent debating funding bills and left the Senate with only two options: shut down the government or kick the can down the road with a continuing resolution. Of course, that is just a temporary measure, and then, when that expires, we have to deal with the consequences of that by figuring out, OK, how do we continue to fund the government at some appropriate level.

He knows we can't move 12 appropriations bills through the Senate and the House in the next 16 days, so this exercise will certainly end with another spending bill that is crafted at the last minute and jammed through both Houses. If this is the gold standard for anything, it is a gold standard for political theater. This is drama scripted by the majority leader. He is trying to put on a show or, I would say, a pretense of regular order in the Senate so he won't get the blame if the government shuts down; he can blame his political opponents in the House.

Well, suffice it to say, I am disappointed we find ourselves where we do, especially in light of the hard work done by our colleagues on the Appropriations Committee. They have done their job, but the majority leader has blown that up.

This is not an accident. This is by design. If the government shuts down at the end of the month, the majority leader won't be able to escape the blame for what will be a Schumer shutdown. Despite the political theater and the Kabuki dance, he will have to own that shutdown because he will have been the primary author of it.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

The majority leader.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 265.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of Vernon D. Oliver, of Connecticut, to be United States District Judge for the District of Connecticut.

Thereupon, the Senate proceeded to consider the nomination.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Executive Calendar No. 265, Vernon D. Oliver, of Connecticut, to be United States District Judge for the District of Connecticut.

Charles E. Schumer, Richard Blumenthal, Margaret Wood Hassan, Mark Kelly, Jack Reed, John W. Hickenlooper, Elizabeth Warren, Tammy Duckworth, Jeff Merkley, Richard J. Durbin, Jeanne Shaheen, Benjamin L. Cardin, Mazie Hirono, Tina Smith, Edward J. Markey, Tim Kaine, Tammy Baldwin, Christopher Murphy.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. SCHUMER. I move to proceed to legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. SCHUMER. I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 37.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of Rita F. Lin, of California, to be United States District Judge for the Northern District of California.

Thereupon, the Senate proceeded to consider the nomination.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Executive Calendar No. 37, Rita F.