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Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable PETER WELCH, a Senator from the State of Vermont.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Eternal God, we praise Your Holy Name. Even when we don't understand the unfolding of Your providence, we place our trust in You.

Show our lawmakers the path they should choose. Rescue them from the traps of their enemies, and remove their fears with Your might. Continue to renew their strength. Protect our legislators with Your might, reassure them with Your presence, and comfort them with Your goodness.

Lord of Heaven's army, we give our lives to You, for no one who depends on Your compassion will ultimately fail.

We pray in Your merciful Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Presiding Officer led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

APPOINTMENT OF ACTING PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will please read a communication to the Senate from the President pro tempore (Mrs. MURRAY).

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, October 25, 2023.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby

appoint the Honorable PETER WELCH, a Senator from the State of Vermont, to perform the duties of the Chair.

PATTY MURRAY,
President pro tempore.

Mr. WELCH thereupon assumed the Chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of H.R. 4366, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant 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.

Pending:

Schumer (for Murray/Collins) amendment No. 1092, in the nature of a substitute.

Murray amendment No. 1205 (to amendment No. 1092), to change the effective date.

Schumer motion to commit the bill to the Committee on Appropriations, with instructions, Schumer amendment No. 1230, to change the effective date.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, yesterday morning, Democrats and Republicans reached an important agreement to move forward on three bipartisan—underline bipartisan—appropriations bills: MILCON-VA, Agriculture, and Transportation-HUD.

We will begin voting on amendments as soon as this afternoon and keep going through the rest of the week and into the next. It is my hope that with bipartisan cooperation, we can wrap up our work on these bipartisan appropriations bills sometime next week.

And this will be the Senate working as it should, both parties cooperating, debating amendments, working through differences, without grinding the legislative process to a halt. Democrats promised our Republican colleagues that their voices would be heard, and we are making good on that promise. Forty amendments will be considered, many of them bipartisan, on issues ranging from telehealth funding for veterans, fixing infrastructure hit by natural disasters, to investments in rural America.

We worked closely with Republicans to put these appropriations bills together. If passed, the bills will make a huge difference for American farmers, for our infrastructure, for housing, and for our military bases and veterans.

Bipartisanship isn't easy. On the contrary, these days it is exceedingly difficult, but we are moving forward thanks to the good work of our appropriators, especially Chair MURRAY and Vice Chair COLLINS. They have set the tone from the start here in the Senate that bipartisanship should lead the way.

It was true in the Appropriations Committee; I hope it remains true here on the floor because we are going to need bipartisanship in all that we do

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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during this time of divided government.

Bipartisanship will be essential for passing these appropriations bills; bipartisanship will be essential for keeping the government open in less than a month; and bipartisanship will be essential for passing the President's national security request.

I would say to my colleagues in the House, my Republican colleagues, if you try to do things not in a bipartisan way, it is going to lead to cul-de-sacs, gridlocks, and other things that hurt the American people.

Both parties recognize we must support our allies in Israel against Hamas. Both parties recognize that we must support our friends in Ukraine against Putin. Both parties know that we must fight the scourge of fentanyl coming through the border, outcompete the Chinese Government, and support Taiwan.

So to my Republican colleagues, House and Senate, let's work together to ensure that passing the supplemental remains bipartisan because only things that win support from both sides will make it to the President's desk.

I thank my colleagues on both sides who have shown that bipartisanship is still the key to getting things done here in the Senate. And, now, because of that bipartisanship, the appropriations process is finally—finally—moving forward.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Mr. President, on our AI Insight Forum, yesterday, the Senate held our second bipartisan AI Insight Forum. This one was focused on our North Star for AI, and that is innovation.

It was an amazing 3 hours. We learned so much about all the things we need to do on AI as well as things we still don't know. The biggest takeaway from our AI Insight Forums so far is that government has to be involved on AI, and that was the consensus among everybody yesterday, just as it was a few weeks ago. Democrats, Republicans, liberals, conservatives, and everyone in between knew that government had to be involved.

But after yesterday's conversation, I will add a few more things we agreed to. First, as you know, at the last forum, everyone agreed that the government had to be involved, but after today's forum, there was universal agreement that Congress had to be prepared, not just to be involved but to invest significant resources in AI innovation, both inside the government and outside, helping companies and universities and others because the government can do things in terms of dollar investments that others simply can't. The awesome power of the Federal Government and its ability to provide resources is way beyond the capability of any one company, university, et cetera.

One number mentioned yesterday was about \$32 billion in nondefense Federal spending, which is what the bi-

partisan National Security Commission on AI said we need in their 2021 report. It doesn't have to happen all at once, but it is important we prioritize these investments now and continue over time. Just about everybody in the room agreed that \$32 billion is really a floor not a ceiling, so we are going to need—if we want to stay No. 1 in AI, if we want to get our arms around it, if we want to make sure the good is maximized and the bad is minimized, we are going to need significant Federal dollars.

AI is another reason that we must fully appropriate the funds authorized in the CHIPS and Science Act, and that came up many times. There are many things that we authorized in the CHIPS and Science Act that haven't been appropriated. We have to do those things if we want to stay in the lead economically and in AI.

The second point that was made was that Congress doesn't have a lot of time to act because AI moved so fast and is growing in its complexity. We need to be proactive, not reactive. That is one reason we have made these AI Insight Forums a priority.

A third point that was made was our race against the Chinese Government. China is not waiting to invest in AI, just as they didn't wait on science and chips. With the CHIPS and Science bill, we met them—maybe even exceeded them—by putting in some real investments. We must do the same thing with AI or we will fall behind. And many of the speakers noted that if China gains the lead in AI, they will become the No. 1 economy in the world. They will set the values—authoritarian, not democratic values—and Americans will suffer.

So this investment in AI must be done; otherwise, we will fall behind China, something we don't want to do, and both parties agreed that is the case.

And particularly a point made by some of my Republican colleagues, we will fall behind on national security. If China gets ahead of us in AI and applies that to national security and we don't do what we are supposed to do, we will really have some problems. So that is point 3.

And point 4, just to reiterate, is that we need innovation. We need the government to help create innovation, both on the transformational side—creating new vistas, unlocking new cures, improving education, strengthening national security, protecting global food supply—but also, and this is harder, on sustainable innovation. That means to minimize the harms that come from AI like job loss, racial and gender bias, and economic displacement because if we don't have some guardrails, the whole thing, the whole AI enterprise, could go off the rails, and that would be of real detriment to this country and to our world.

The private sector does a good job on positive transformational innovation. They need some help. The government

needs to be involved, particularly in setting an ecosystem that works, in providing some of the resources to smaller companies so they are not dwarfed by the larger companies. But only the government can provide the guardrails for sustainable innovation.

It is not reasonable to expect all companies to act on their own and even less reasonable that they would act in concert, even if a few do. The challenge will be a balance between placing guardrails and preserving innovation.

It is a tough challenge, but, you know, as Theodore Roosevelt said, we are in the arena. And if not us, who? No one will do it.

So, again, yesterday was an exciting, illuminating, eye-opening conversation. Thank you to all the Senators who came yesterday from both sides of the aisle. And let's note, we are still just at the beginning. We will continue to hold bipartisan AI Insight Forums in the weeks and months to come and encourage the relevant committees to begin drawing up bipartisan legislation.

NEW YORK

Mr. President, on the Second Avenue subway, New York City is in the midst of an infrastructure renaissance, from the Gateway Tunnel to East Side Access to Penn Station Access. Today, I have even more great news for New York. I am proud to announce that the Second Avenue subway will receive \$3.4 billion in Federal funding to advance to phase 2 of its construction.

I have worked myself to the bone for years fighting for Federal funding for the Second Avenue subway, and I want to thank my colleague who has been along my side as we do this, and that is Congress Member ADRIANO ESPAILLAT, who represents the area in Congress, and he, too, has been a champion for funding.

Thanks to the investments we made in our bipartisan infrastructure law, Second Avenue subway has now received the largest capital investment grant in the history of the program, the CIG Program. So this is no longer abstract. Billions of dollars passed in Congress, but now it is across the country like here in New York and in East Harlem, in particular, it is becoming real—real in terms of jobs and real in terms of better transportation.

The Federal funding will mean tens of thousands of good-paying jobs in New York, and expanded services will benefit more than 300,000 riders on the Second Avenue subway every single day. That is more people than most cities have so it is important to do.

Most importantly, the subway will now expand into East Harlem, which has desperately needed better access to public transportation. When work on the Second Avenue subway is complete, people in East Harlem will have an easier time getting to work, going to the doctor's office, getting to school, and so much more. And it is not just an easier time. The studies show when there is transit, people get better and

more high-paying jobs because they can find these jobs and then get to them easily and don't say: Well, it is such a long commute, I can't go work there.

So thanks to President Biden, thanks to our Democratic and Republican bipartisanship action in the Senate, which I was so proud to help lead, New York continues to reap the benefits of our agenda: stronger infrastructure, more manufacturing jobs, lower prescription drug costs, and more opportunity.

I thank the administration for awarding New York this game-changing Federal grant, and we will keep going to improve life for New Yorkers as we are doing for all Americans.

I yield the floor.

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.

Mr. MCCONNELL. 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.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The Republican leader is recognized.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, government funding is set to run out in 23 days. We have a responsibility to keep the lights on and to avoid the disastrous effects of a shutdown.

We also need to make serious headway toward the full-year funding process the Nation actually deserves. This week, thanks to a lot of hard work from Senator COLLINS, Senator MURRAY, and our colleagues on the Appropriations Committee, the Senate will finally take an important step in the right direction. As we continue to review the President's request for urgent supplemental appropriations—and make necessary changes—Senate Republicans stand ready to vote on a robust package of amendments to this full-year appropriations measure and pass it quickly out here on the floor.

ISRAEL

Mr. President, now on another matter, it has been 18 days since the brutal terrorist attacks of October 7, 18 days since savages confronted the world with the depths of human depravity, since one of the oldest forms of hatred in human history reared its ugly head, since radical Islamic terrorists reminded us they pose a persistent threat to the civilized world.

In our shock, the West vowed solidarity. We pledged not to look away from the horrors Israel was grieving. We reaffirmed Israel's right to defend itself, and we promised to stand with our ally as it fought back against pure evil.

But in the last 18 days, silence, amnesia, cowardice, and outright hate have begun to take their toll. All too quickly, the West's resolve has shown signs of weakness.

First, we saw the most elite corners of higher education rush to blame Israel for the deaths of its own children. We saw college administrators tie themselves in grotesque moral knots to avoid acknowledging reality, even in the face of alumni revolts.

Last night, for example, at George Washington University, here in the Nation's Capital, student activists projected anti-Semitic messages on the side of the campus building named for a pair of Jewish benefactors. They issued a call to "free Palestine from the river to the sea."

For anyone unfamiliar with Israel's geography, that is a call for the destruction of the Jewish State.

But, just a few blocks away, the Biden administration is in denial. After protestors in Time Square displayed the Nazi swastika and an Israeli student at Columbia University was beaten with a stick, the White House Press Secretary replied to a question about rising concerns of anti-Semitism that "we have not seen any credible threats." That is the White House Press Secretary. Even more absurd was how, in the very next breath, without even uttering the word "Jew," she pivoted abruptly to condemning Islamophobia.

Seriously, after thousands of Jews have been tortured and murdered, after hundreds have been taken hostage, after the sight of Jewish bodies paraded through Gaza was met with rejoicing from Arab capitals to London—after all of this—President Biden's Press Secretary reverted to the disgraceful "both sides" talking points.

Of course, as I have discussed before, the media organizations who engage with her deserve their own share of shame. Some in the press are already indulging the same tired language designed to sap the free world's sense of moral clarity. Headlines are already warning about the indiscernible "cycle of violence" and amplifying morally bankrupt calls for a cease-fire.

For anyone who needs a reminder, a cease-fire is what Israel thought it had with Hamas and with Palestinian Islamic Jihad earlier this summer. A cease-fire today is an amnesty for Hamas, a free path for terrorists from the same savage tribe as ISIS and al-Qaida.

So less than 3 weeks after the deadliest slaughter of Jews since the Holocaust, too many prominent corners of our society already need a reminder—a reminder—of the terrorist horrors that actually started the war.

Yesterday, I welcomed a group of important visitors to my office, among them were family members of Israelis being held hostage by Hamas. Two had survived the attacks and witnessed the terror firsthand. I would like to share with our colleagues two of their stories.

First was Netta, a 20-year-old student who lived in a kibbutz in southern Israel. Netta told me that he woke up on October 7 to the sound of sirens. He

talked about how he armed himself with a kitchen knife, barricaded himself in an interior room, and leaned against the door as terrorists ransacked his apartment. Netta told me about how he realized hours later, when his mother stopped replying to his texts, that his parents had been taken hostage by Hamas.

I also heard from a young woman named Maya who was at the music festival that morning with her friends. Maya described to me yesterday the sounds of rockets interrupting the party at sunrise. She described how she cried the first time she saw a victim lying in the road as she fled, not knowing if he was alive or dead. She recalled how she turned left on a road in search of safe haven while many of her friends—two of whom would be murdered—turned right. She told me how she called her father to say, "I love you, and I don't know if I will make it out," and how she waited hours in a kibbutz shelter, assuming that her "time was coming."

She remembers how news spread in message groups about which of her friends had made it out alive, and how friends witnessed bodies blown apart by grenades. Maya told me she is haunted by the images her friends shared of Hamas desecrating bodies and by how they seemed to enjoy it. She said she feels guilty for encouraging her friends to join her at the music festival that Saturday.

This is why Israel fights.

The attacks of October 7 confronted the world with the sort of horrors Jewish communities have no choice but to remember for generations. From European villages caught in pogroms to the horrors of Nazi Germany, to Israeli kibbutzim burned and bloodied by Hamas terrorists. For decades, the free world refrain has been: "Never forget. Never again."

God help us if we do not mean what we say.

There is no room for false moral equivalency. Let me repeat that: There is no room for false moral equivalency.

We must not forget who is responsible, and we must hold them accountable. Terror and self-defense are not the same thing. One side started the war, but the other side will finish it. And the United States must give Israel the time, space, and support to bring innocent people home and bring murderous terrorists to justice.

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.

Mr. COTTON. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

40TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE GRENADA INVASION

Mr. COTTON. Mr. President, today marks the 40th anniversary of the U.S. invasion of Grenada. This short and

largely overlooked conflict is one of the most successful military interventions in history. In just 4 days, President Ronald Reagan toppled an anti-American regime, rolled back communism in the hemisphere, and saved American lives. In the years that followed, we built a strong, genuine, and enduring partnership with the people of Grenada.

But this success was far from certain. It was only possible because of President Reagan's decisive and overwhelming military response to a crisis on the island. The seeds of this crisis were sown—like many others—during Jimmy Carter's disastrous Presidency. Under President Carter, communism began to metastasize in Latin America, and in the especially pivotal year of 1979, both Nicaragua and Grenada fell to communists.

As he returned from Managua, Fidel Castro boasted, "Now there are three of us." The Cuban dictator had big plans to add more captive nations to his anti-American axis in the hemisphere.

Grenada is a small island located in the southeast Caribbean and strategically vital to both Cuba and Soviet Russia during the Cold War. Barely 150 miles off the coast of Venezuela, the island could serve as an offshore arms depot for communist rebels in Latin America and other Caribbean nations. Russia could also use Grenada as a base to launch submarines into the Caribbean Basin.

Most concerning was Grenada's proximity to Africa, which made it the potential final link in a chain of communist air bases from Southern Russia to North Africa, to West Africa, to Grenada, and then finally to Cuba. Soviet bombers and heavy-cargo planes could fly between these lily pads of bases for refueling and largely beyond American detection.

This grave threat materialized when Grenada welcomed hundreds of Cubans to construct a massive airport with a 9,000-foot runway. What Ronald Reagan called a "suspiciously huge" runway was far larger than anything Grenada's commercial aviation required. It was, curiously enough, just big enough to support the largest Soviet bombers and cargo aircraft.

This airbase posed a two-way threat. Russia could use Grenada as a launching pad in the hemisphere to arm Cuba and other Latin American communists. Going the other way, Castro could export revolutionaries to the bloody war in Angola and elsewhere in Africa.

Tensions boiled over into crisis in October 1983 when an even more radical, bloodthirsty gang of communists toppled the ruling communists in Grenada. The new government killed the former Prime Minister and instituted a 24-hour shoot-on-sight curfew that threatened hundreds of American medical students on the island. The Reagan administration feared a replay of the Iranian hostage crisis, and the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean

States pleaded with the administration to intervene and prevent communism from spreading further in the region.

Within days, Reagan had concluded that we had "no choice but to act strongly and decisively," as he put it, and he authorized an invasion. This wasn't an easy decision. We had only spotty intelligence on Grenada's forces and capabilities and the presence of Cuban or other communist forces, we had little time to execute the mission, and many in Washington still hesitated to use military force due to Vietnam syndrome. But Reagan was undaunted.

Then a disaster halfway around the world threatened to derail the operation. Just after Reagan authorized the invasion planning, a suicide bomber killed 241 marines in their Beirut barracks. Although heartbroken and enraged by the attack, Reagan didn't let the crisis in Lebanon crowd out the crisis in our backyard. He declared:

There are Americans there and they are in danger. We are going.

This is an important point. Contrary to liberal smears, Reagan did not authorize the Grenada invasion as cover for his withdrawal from Lebanon or to flex his muscles after the Beirut bombing. He authorized the invasion planning before the bombing happened in Beirut. The historical record on this is absolutely clear. Unlike Democratic Presidents, Reagan didn't act tough to conceal his true weakness; Reagan was tough on America's enemies and tough in defense of America's interests.

On October 25, barely a week after the coup, around 8,000 American troops embarked on Operation Urgent Fury. They had a clearly defined mission: save the endangered Americans, depose the communist regime, and reestablish order on the island. Our troops had some setbacks, but they adapted, overcame, and prevailed.

The incomplete intelligence and short timeframe for preparation hampered the operation yet vindicated Reagan's judgment. Military leaders anticipated only 200 Cuban construction workers on the island. In reality, 700 well-armed Cuban soldiers awaited American forces. Our troops also discovered huge weapons caches at the airbase, enough to arm the Cuban forces and thousands more communist rebels. Reagan had acted just in time.

The war ended after 4 lopsided days. Our troops took fewer than 150 casualties, while the communists suffered nearly 500 casualties, and more than 600 Cubans surrendered. Our citizens on the island were safe. Reagan hit hard, he hit fast, and America won.

Fidel Castro's dreams of hemispheric revolution soon turned to ash. Reagan destroyed communism in Grenada and besieged the communist regime in Nicaragua. A year after Reagan left office, Nicaragua ousted Daniel Ortega in a democratic election, made possible by American pressure.

The Grenada operation was the first successful military rollback of communism during the Cold War. We had

eliminated a deadly threat on our doorstep, and we had liberated a grateful people, who enjoy freedom and democracy to this day.

Reagan worked to stabilize the island and later traveled there in 1986. Tens of thousands of Grenadians lined the streets and welcomed Reagan as a liberator. Grenada's Prime Minister described Reagan as "our own national hero" and "our rescuer after God." Reagan passed banner after banner that read "God Bless America" and later wrote that "I probably never felt better during my presidency than I did that day."

What Reagan felt that day was the joy of American success, made possible by American strength and confidence. This success stands in stark contrast to other interventions, like the one we saw in Somalia 10 years later under Bill Clinton.

I spoke here 3 weeks ago to mark the 30th anniversary of the Battle of Mogadishu. While Reagan delivered a crushing and decisive blow against a regime that threatened American interests, Bill Clinton used insufficient forces for an ill-defined, expansive mission in a nation where our interests weren't at stake. He then cut and ran after the first sign of resistance, emboldening our enemies, including Osama bin Laden.

No two interventions were more different in rationale, execution, or result, and they offer important lessons for today.

The most profound is that weak interventions with vague and self-righteous missions usually fail. Strong military action with well-defined missions focused on America's interests usually succeed.

We must never confuse the U.S. Army for the Salvation Army. Our military is not a charitable organization, and it is not a tool of mankind. It is the most fundamental instrument of our national power and ours alone, and it should be used to pursue American interests and American interests alone. It is not the military's responsibility to right every wrong in the world or to be an avenging angel of liberal democracy.

One of America's great statesmen, John Quincy Adams, once wrote that America is "the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all. She is the champion and vindicator only of her own." Indeed, he famously observed that America "goes not abroad, in search of monsters to destroy."

I have to observe, though, that Adams wrote that we do not "search" for monsters to destroy, but the architect of the Monroe Doctrine and chief defender of Andrew Jackson's conquest of Spanish Florida was no pacifist. When monsters rear their heads and challenge America, especially in her own hemisphere, America must indeed not hesitate to destroy those monsters. From Tripoli to Berlin, to Tokyo, to St. George's, we have done it before, and we must be prepared to do it again.

When we must go abroad to destroy monsters, we must use overwhelming force. If Washington is unwilling to use the force necessary to win, we ought not use force at all. It is unfair and cruel to both American troops pursuing the mission and to our friends in the nation where the mission is being conducted.

As we look for examples to follow in this new moment of international crisis and chaos, we should look to Reagan, not to Clinton. We need more Grenadas and no more Somalias.

On this 40th anniversary of the invasion of Grenada, I would also like to recognize and thank the veterans of that conflict, along with their families, for their invaluable service. They made our country proud and helped bring communism to its knees in this hemisphere. God bless them all, and God bless the United States of America.

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.

Mr. THUNE. 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.

ISRAEL

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, early yesterday morning, I returned from a whirlwind trip to the Middle East as part of a bipartisan codel, or a congressional delegation, to Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt. The trip was a direct response to Hamas's savage attack on Israel. The codel, led by my friend Senator LINDSEY GRAHAM, brought together 10 Senators from both parties to show the United States' support for Israel and to demonstrate U.S. commitment to protecting our now-threatened national interests in the region.

Our message was united: The United States stands with Israel. Iran is on notice, and it must stand down; and we need to get hostages freed and Americans out of harm's way.

We are committed to seeing Hamas defeated so that a new chapter of prosperity for Israel and its Arab neighbors can begin, of which normalized relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia would be a keystone.

Our engagements on the ground included frank and candid discussions with heads of state, Prime Minister Netanyahu, and our U.S. Embassy teams on the ground. Our day in Tel Aviv began with meeting the families of hostages being held in Gaza, including Americans who shared their painful stories. As a parent and grandparent, it is heartbreaking to see and hear the grief of these family members.

Later that day, we met with Israeli defense officials for an update on the war. We were shown video evidence of the unnerving atrocities committed by Hamas terrorists—horrific images that I will not soon forget. Our meetings made clear the absolute imperative to see Hamas defeated.

Hamas's attacks have been likened to Israel's own September 11; but Prime Minister Netanyahu made a point that is especially chilling for Americans but that every critic of Israel must hear. He pointed out that, on 9/11, our enemy was thousands of miles away. In Israel, their enemy is only a kilometer away.

For more than 15 years, Israel has had to live every day with a terrorist organization on its border whose sole mission in life is to kill Jews and to wipe Israel off the face of the Earth; and during that time, Hamas has loomed as a persistent threat to Israel, attacking, kidnapping, and killing Israelis. But the barbarism and brutality that Hamas displayed in its October 7 attacks took its evil to new heights, and now Israel knows what it has to do: It has to wipe Hamas off the face of the Earth.

For the Israelis, this is existential. Israel's cause is just, and its resolve is firm, and it should have every peace-loving nation in the world on its side. Now, how Israel goes about that mission matters, and it needs to be done in a way that minimizes civilian casualties.

The Palestinians living in Gaza are also victims of Hamas's reign of terror. Hamas has made it clear that the only value it places on the lives of Palestinians is to use them as fodder to direct attention away from its atrocities and to try and turn public sentiment, especially in Western media and the Arab street, against Israel. Case in point: Hamas's disproven claim that Israel struck a hospital, which sparked protests and riots in a number of countries.

Israelis know that there are innocent Palestinians trapped in this fight and that civilian casualties and a humanitarian crisis could drive more Palestinians toward extremism. That is why Israel is taking measures to protect innocents in Gaza, although its efforts are being undermined by Hamas, which has discouraged Palestinians from complying with Israel's evacuation order.

The United States and other peace-loving nations in the region and beyond need to give Israel space to take the fight to and eradicate Hamas, because if Hamas and its reign of terror are allowed to continue, no nation in the region or beyond will be able to live in peace and security. It really is that simple.

And one final but important point: Hamas might claim to represent Palestinians, but its violent actions do nothing—nothing—to benefit the Palestinian people. The only people who benefit from this brutal bloodshed are the ayatollahs in Iran, whose goal is to bring chaos, violence, and death to all who don't share their extreme and militant religious ideology, which, I might add, includes wiping Israel off the face of the Earth.

Look no further than Hamas if you want to see Iran's influence, as 90 percent of their military budget comes

from Iran, or Hezbollah, the terrorist organization on Israel's northern border with Lebanon, which is also armed and financed by Iran. Then there are the Houthis in Yemen who, in the aftermath of October 7, fired missiles and drones headed for Israel—again, likely at the direction of Iran; the Shia militias, who are attacking American soldiers in Iraq and Syria; the killing by Russians of innocent civilians in Ukraine with drones supplied by Iran. Through its proxies, Iran is literally getting away with murder.

To the Iranian regime, we say: We are on to you.

In addition to working with regional partners to get American hostages and citizens out of Gaza, the Biden administration must clearly articulate to the Iranians that, if they do not stand down or if they green-light the escalation of this war, the United States and our allies will be forced to respond forcefully. The movement of U.S. firepower to the region should make that point very clear to Tehran.

The attacks on October 7 represent a kind of evil that the world hasn't seen in generations, and it must be confronted and contained. If it is not, we could see death and destruction on a scale akin to the horrors of the last century. History is watching.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

H.R. 4366

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I have been working incredibly hard alongside my colleagues to make sure we have an open, bipartisan appropriations process and to keep this process moving, which is why I am glad to say that in a moment, I will call up and ask for unanimous consent to adopt by voice vote the first series of amendments to the appropriations minibus.

These are amendments that will further strengthen a package of bipartisan appropriations bills—bills, I should mention, that passed our committee unanimously. We worked hard in committee to ensure this package reflects input from Members across the aisle and across the country.

While we may not agree on everything, the votes we are taking now are an opportunity for Members on both sides to provide additional input on this bipartisan package, debate those ideas, and put them up for a vote. This is an important step forward as we work to pass this package in the Senate, keep the appropriations process moving, and in the coming weeks, deliver absolutely essential supplemental funding as well. I am delighted that we are going.

I will turn it over to my vice chair who has been working alongside of me to get this moving.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, let me start by saying that I am so pleased that we are finally—finally—voting on amendments to the three-bill package that Senator MURRAY and I, as well as the terrific members of our Appropriations Committee, have worked very hard to bring before the Senate.

This has been the result of many weeks—far too many weeks—of negotiations and would not have happened without the leadership of Chair MURRAY.

I also want to thank Leader SCHUMER, Leader MCCONNELL, our Republican whip, JOHN THUNE, and the chairs and ranking members of the three subcommittees—Senators HEINRICH and HOEVEN, Senators MURRAY and BOOZMAN, Senators SCHATZ and Senator HYDE-SMITH—for their hard work. These are bills that really make a difference to the American people.

As our colleagues know, we are considering the Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies bill; the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs bill; and also the Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies bill.

So we finally are making progress, and I look forward to the robust—no one could say that this is not a robust amendment process.

Again, my thanks to Chair MURRAY. It has been a great pleasure to work with her.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

MOTION TO COMMIT AND AMENDMENT NO. 1205
WITHDRAWN

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the motion to commit H.R. 4366 and amendment No. 1205 be withdrawn.

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

AMENDMENT NOS. 1250, 1185, 1216, 1221, 1283, 1117, 1120, 1175, 1264, 1202, 1270, 1116, 1113, 1351, 1134, 1220, 1277, 1140, 1131, 1203, 1133, 1139, 1255, 1352, AND 1115

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, as provided under the order of October 24, I call up the following amendments to Murray-Collins substitute amendment No. 1092 en bloc: Moran No. 1250, Daines No. 1185, Sullivan No. 1216, Sullivan No. 1221, Peters-Cornyn No. 1283, Rosen No. 1117, Schatz No. 1120, Booker-Tuberville No. 1175, Tillis-Welch No. 1264, Reed No. 1202, Britt No. 1270, Kelly-Tillis No. 1116, Hirono-Moran No. 1113, Warnock-Cornyn No. 1351, Smith-Ricketts No. 1134, Rosen-Crapo No. 1220, Cardin No. 1277, Padilla No. 1140, Shaheen No. 1131, Klobuchar-Moran No. 1203, Kelly No. 1133, Padilla No. 1139, Ossoff-Braun No. 1255, Merkley-Crapo No. 1352, and Stabenow No. 1115.

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

The amendments are as follows:

AMENDMENT NO. 1250

(Purpose: To prohibit the use of funds appropriated by division A to change rates for reimbursement for transportation via a special mode of transportation under the laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs and to reduce certain amounts available to the Department of Veterans Affairs)

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

SEC. ____ . PROHIBITION ON USE OF FUNDS TO CHANGE RATE OF REIMBURSEMENT FOR TRANSPORTATION VIA SPECIAL MODE OF TRANSPORTATION.

During the period beginning on October 1, 2023, and ending on September 30, 2024, no funds appropriated by this division may be obligated or expended to change rates for reimbursement for transportation of a veteran or other individual via a special mode of transportation under the laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs from the rates in place as of January 1, 2023.

SEC. ____ . REDUCTION OF AMOUNTS FOR DEPARTMENTAL ADMINISTRATION—GENERAL ADMINISTRATION ACCOUNT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

The amounts otherwise made available by this division for the Departmental Administration—General Administration account of the Department of Veterans Affairs are hereby reduced by \$43,500,000.

AMENDMENT NO. 1185

(Purpose: To require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to submit to Congress an earned value analysis of the Veterans Electronic Health Record system of the Department of Veterans Affairs)

On page 41, line 6, insert after the colon the following: “*Provided further*, That the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to Congress a report containing an earned value analysis of the Veterans Electronic Health Record system, which shall include a graphic performance report, a schedule and cost performance indexes, an estimate at completion and budget at completion, and a variance analysis for cost and schedule.”.

AMENDMENT NO. 1216

(Purpose: To prioritize the use of funds for certain telehealth services and mental health programs for veterans)

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

SEC. ____ . PRIORITIZATION OF USE OF FUNDS FOR CERTAIN TELEHEALTH SERVICES AND MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAMS FOR VETERANS.

The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall prioritize the use of any amounts provided to the Department of Veterans Affairs under this division for telehealth services or mental health programs, including for suicide prevention outreach and treatment programs or the Veterans Crisis Line established under section 1720F(h) of title 38, United States Code, in States with the highest rate of suicide among members of the Armed Forces and veterans.

AMENDMENT NO. 1221

(Purpose: To prohibit the use of funds to procure seafood from China for use in school meals)

In section 747 of division B, insert “or seafood” after “poultry products”.

AMENDMENT NO. 1283

(Purpose: To provide funding for the emergency and transitional pet shelter and housing assistance grant program)

At the appropriate place in title VII of division B, insert the following:

SEC. ____ . (a) There is appropriated \$3,000,000 for the emergency and transitional

pet shelter and housing assistance grant program established under section 12502(b) of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (34 U.S.C. 20127).

(b) Notwithstanding any other provision of this Act, the total amount rescinded in section 745 is increased by \$3,000,000.

AMENDMENT NO. 1117

(Purpose: To make amounts available to the Veterans Health Administration to sustain and increase telehealth capacity and associated programmatic efforts)

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

SEC. ____ . TELEHEALTH CAPACITY OF VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION.

Of the amounts made available to the Department of Veterans Affairs for fiscal year 2024 by this Act or any other Act under the “Veterans Health Administration – Medical Services”, “Veterans Health Administration – Medical Community Care”, and “Veterans Health Administration – Medical Support and Compliance” accounts, \$5,180,336,000 shall be made available to sustain and increase telehealth capacity, including in rural and highly rural areas, and associated programmatic efforts.

AMENDMENT NO. 1120

(Purpose: To extend the period of availability for fiscal year 2021 national infrastructure investments)

At the appropriate place in title I of division C, insert the following:

SEC. 110. The remaining unobligated balances, as of September 30, 2024, from amounts made available for the “Department of Transportation—Office of the Secretary—National Infrastructure Investments” in division L of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021 (Public Law 116–260) are hereby permanently rescinded, and an amount of additional new budget authority equivalent to the amount rescinded is hereby appropriated on September 30, 2024, to remain available until September 30, 2027, and shall be available, without additional competition, for completing the funding of awards made pursuant to the fiscal year 2021 national infrastructure investments program, in addition to other funds as may be available for such purposes: *Provided*, That no amounts may be rescinded from amounts that were designated by the Congress as an emergency requirement pursuant to a concurrent resolution on the budget or the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985.

AMENDMENT NO. 1175

(Purpose: To increase funding for rural decentralized water systems)

In the matter under the heading “RURAL WATER AND WASTE DISPOSAL PROGRAM ACCOUNT” under the heading “RURAL UTILITIES SERVICE” in title III, in the second undesignated paragraph, strike “, and of which not to exceed \$5,000,000 shall be available for the rural utilities program described in section 306E of such Act: *Provided*,” and insert “: *Provided*, That not to exceed \$20,000,000 of the amount appropriated under this heading shall be available for the rural utilities program described in section 306E of such Act, of which not less than \$10,000,000 shall be used to provide subgrants to eligible individuals for the construction, refurbishing, and servicing of individually owned household decentralized wastewater systems: *Provided further*,”.

AMENDMENT NO. 1264

(Purpose: To require a review regarding veterans who engaged in toxic exposure risk activities while serving in Kosovo)

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

SEC. _____. REVIEW OF VETERANS WHO ENGAGED IN TOXIC EXPOSURE RISK ACTIVITIES WHILE SERVING IN KOSOVO AND THE HEALTH EFFECTS OF SUCH TOXIC EXPOSURE RISK ACTIVITIES.

(a) **REVIEW REQUIRED.**—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall conduct a review of the following:

(1) Data regarding the mortality of covered veterans.

(2) Any data on toxic exposure experienced by covered veterans that is both relevant and available, including toxicology studies.

(3) The type of toxic exposure risk activities covered veterans engaged in while serving in the active military, naval, air, or space service in Kosovo.

(b) **COVERED VETERANS.**—For purposes of subsection (a), a covered veteran is a veteran who—

(1) served in the active military, naval, air, or space service in Kosovo; and

(2) as part of such service, engaged in a toxic exposure risk activity.

(c) **MANNER AND SUITABILITY OF REVIEW.**—The Secretary shall carry out the review required by subsection (a) in a manner such that the findings of the Secretary with respect to the review are suitable and applicable under subchapter VII of chapter 11 of title 38, United States Code.

(d) **DEFINITIONS.**—In this section:

(1) **ACTIVE MILITARY, NAVAL, AIR, OR SPACE SERVICE.**—The term “active military, naval, air, or space service” has the meaning given such term in section 101 of title 38, United States Code.

(2) **TOXIC EXPOSURE RISK ACTIVITY.**—The term “toxic exposure risk activity” has the meaning given such term in section 1710(e)(4) of such title.

(3) **VETERAN.**—The term “veteran” has the meaning given such term in section 101 of such title.

AMENDMENT NO. 1202

(Purpose: To appropriate amounts for shellfish research, with an offset)

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

SEC. _____. (a) For an additional amount for “Agricultural Programs—Agricultural Research Service—Salaries and Expenses”, there is appropriated, out of amounts in the Treasury not otherwise appropriated, \$1,000,000, to remain available until expended, for research on East Coast shellfish.

(b) Notwithstanding any other provision of this Act, the amount made available by this Act under the heading “Farm Production and Conservation Programs—Farm Service Agency—State Mediation Grants” in title II shall be \$6,000,000.

AMENDMENT NO. 1270

(Purpose: To provide appropriations for certain research using plant genomics, with an offset)

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

SEC. _____. (a) For an additional amount for “Agricultural Programs—Agricultural Research Service—Salaries and Expenses”, there is appropriated \$1,000,000, to remain available until expended, for cooperative agreements with qualified nonprofit organizations to expedite research using plant genomics to develop drought- and disease-resistant peanut varieties and other crops.

(b) Notwithstanding any other provision of this Act, the amount appropriated by this Act under the heading “Agricultural Programs—Processing, Research, and Marketing—Office of the Secretary” in title I for the Office of Communications shall be reduced by \$1,000,000.

AMENDMENT NO. 1116

(Purpose: To require medical facilities of the Department of Veterans Affairs to share certain data with State cancer registries)

At the end of division A, add the following:

TITLE V—COUNTING VETERANS’ CANCER ACT OF 2023

SEC. 501. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Counting Veterans’ Cancer Act of 2023”.

SEC. 502. FINDINGS AND PURPOSE.

(a) **FINDINGS.**—Congress finds the following:

(1) According to 2017 data from National Program of Cancer Registries of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, approximately 26,500 cancer cases among veterans were not reported to State cancer registries funded through such Program.

(2) Established by Congress in 1992 through the Cancer Registries Amendment Act (Public Law 102-515), the National Program of Cancer Registries under section 399B of the Public Health Service Act (42 U.S.C. 280e) collects data on cancer occurrence (including the type, extent, and location of the cancer), the type of initial treatment, and outcomes.

(3) The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention support central cancer registries in 46 States, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, certain territories of the United States in the Pacific Islands, and the United States Virgin Islands.

(4) The data obtained by registries described in paragraph (3) combined with data from the Surveillance, Epidemiology, and End Results Program of the National Cancer Institute and mortality data from National Center for Health Statistics of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention comprise the official United States Cancer Statistics.

(5) The United States Cancer Statistics reflect all newly diagnosed cancer cases and cancer deaths for the entire population of the United States, except for unreported veterans.

(6) Federal law requires the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Cancer Institute to collect cancer data for all newly diagnosed cancer cases, but that currently cannot be achieved due to frequent lack of reporting by medical facilities of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

(7) Releasing all data from medical facilities of the Department to State cancer registries will provide more complete data for health care providers, public health officials, and researchers to—

(A) measure cancer occurrence and trends at the local and national level;

(B) inform and prioritize cancer educational and screening programs;

(C) evaluate efficacy of prevention efforts and treatment;

(D) determine survival rates;

(E) conduct research on the etiology, diagnosis, and treatment of cancer;

(F) ensure quality and equity in cancer care; and

(G) plan for health services.

(8) Capturing cancer data from medical facilities of the Department in State cancer registries and the United States Cancer Statistics can benefit veterans by—

(A) improving the ability to identify cancer-related disparities in the veteran community;

(B) improving understanding of the cancer-related needs of veterans, which can be incorporated into State Comprehensive Cancer Control planning for screening and treatment programs funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; and

(C) increasing opportunities for veterans with cancer to be included in more clinical trials and cancer-related research and anal-

ysis being done outside of the health care system of the Department.

(b) **PURPOSE.**—It is the purpose of this Act to improve care for veterans by ensuring all data on veterans diagnosed with cancer are captured by the national cancer registry programs supported by the National Program of Cancer Registries of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Surveillance, Epidemiology, and End Results Program of the National Cancer Institute.

SEC. 503. REQUIREMENT THAT DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS SHARE DATA WITH STATE CANCER REGISTRIES.

(a) **SHARING OF DATA WITH STATE CANCER REGISTRIES.**—

(1) **IN GENERAL.**—Subchapter II of chapter 73 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new section:

“§ 7330E. Sharing of data with State cancer registries

“(a) **SHARING BY THE DEPARTMENT.**—

“(1) **IN GENERAL.**—The Secretary shall share with the State cancer registry of each State, if such a registry exists, qualifying data for all individuals who are residents of the State and have received health care under the laws administered by the Secretary.

“(2) **REQUIREMENTS RELATING TO DATA SHARED.**—In sharing data under paragraph (1) with a State cancer registry, the Secretary shall comply with the requirements for non-Department facilities to report data, in a manner that is as complete and timely as possible, without requiring a data use agreement in place between the Department and each State cancer registry—

“(A) to State cancer registries that are supported by the National Program of Cancer Registries of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention under section 399B of the Public Health Service Act (42 U.S.C. 280e);

“(B) to State cancer registries that are supported by the Surveillance Epidemiology and End Results Program of the National Cancer Institute authorized under the National Cancer Act of 1971 (Public Law 92-218); and

“(C) to State cancer registries as set forth in relevant State laws and regulations that authorize a cancer registry.

“(b) **QUALIFYING DATA DEFINED.**—In this section, the term ‘qualifying data’, with respect to a State cancer registry, means all data required to be provided to the registry pursuant to the authorities specified in subparagraphs (A) through (C) of subsection (a)(2).”

(2) **CLERICAL AMENDMENT.**—The table of sections at the beginning of subchapter II of such chapter is amended by inserting after the item relating to section 7330D the following new item:

“7330E. Sharing of data with State cancer registries.”

(b) **SHARING BY STATE CANCER REGISTRIES.**—The Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shall assist State cancer registries described in subparagraphs (A) and (B) of section 7330E(a)(2) of title 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (a)(1), in facilitating, to the extent allowed under State laws regulating the cancer registry program, the sharing with the Secretary of Veterans Affairs of data in the possession of each such registry regarding diagnosis of cancer for each veteran—

(1) enrolled in the system of annual patient enrollment established and operated under section 1705(a) of such title; or

(2) registered to receive care from the Department of Veterans Affairs under section 17.37 of title 38, Code of Federal Regulations, or successor regulations.

AMENDMENT NO. 1113

(Purpose: To provide funding for competitive grants for construction of agricultural research facilities and related activities, with an offset)

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

SEC. _____. For an additional amount for “Agricultural Programs—National Institute of Food and Agriculture—Research and Education Activities”, for competitive grants to assist in the facility construction, alteration, acquisition, modernization, renovation, or remodeling of agricultural research facilities, as authorized by the Research Facilities Act (7 U.S.C. 390 et seq.), there is hereby appropriated, and the amount otherwise provided by this Act for “Agricultural Programs—Processing, Research, and Marketing—Office of the Secretary” is hereby reduced by, \$2,000,000.

AMENDMENT NO. 1351

(Purpose: To require the Secretary of Transportation to report on the Federal Aviation Administration’s workforce development programs)

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

SEC. _____. Using amounts made available for the Federal Aviation Administration under this Act that are not otherwise obligated, the Secretary of Transportation shall submit a report to the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations on whether, and the degree to which, the Federal Aviation Administration’s workforce development programs authorized in section 625 of the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2018 (Public Law 115–254) have: (1) helped to expand the pool of prospective applicants to the industry; (2) strengthened aviation programs at minority-serving institutions, public institutions of higher education, women-focused institutions, and public postsecondary vocational institutions; and (3) encouraged the participation of populations that are underrepresented in the aviation workforce, including women, minorities, and individuals in economically disadvantaged geographic areas and rural communities. In submitting this report, the Federal Aviation Administration shall also provide recommendations on how it can better use its workforce development grant programs to: (1) expand the pool of prospective applicants to the industry; (2) strengthen aviation programs at minority-serving institutions, public institutions of higher education, women-focused institutions, and public postsecondary vocational institutions; and (3) encourage the participation of populations that are underrepresented in the aviation workforce, including women, minorities, and individuals in economically disadvantaged geographic areas and rural communities.

AMENDMENT NO. 1134

(Purpose: To require the submission of a report on improving staffing at the Farm Service Agency and the Natural Resources Conservation Service at the county level)

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

SEC. _____. Not later than 90 days after the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Agriculture shall submit to Congress a report describing a plan for improving staffing at the Farm Service Agency and the Natural Resources Conservation Service at the county level, including recommendations for actions that Congress may take.

AMENDMENT NO. 1220

(Purpose: To provide funding for the suppression and control of Mormon crickets in western States)

On page 104 of the amendment, line 11, insert “, and of which \$6,000,000 shall be for the

suppression and control of Mormon crickets in western States” before the semicolon.

AMENDMENT NO. 1277

(Purpose: To provide funding for invasive catfish control)

On page 104 of the amendment, line 11, insert “, and of which \$750,000, to remain available until expended, shall be for invasive catfish control” before the semicolon.

AMENDMENT NO. 1140

(Purpose: To improve housing assistance for veterans experiencing homelessness)

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

SEC. _____. IMPROVING HOUSING ASSISTANCE FOR VETERANS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS.

In carrying out the program under section 8(o)(19) of the United States Housing Act of 1937 (42 U.S.C. 1437f(o)(19)) (commonly referred to as “HUD-VASH”), the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall—

(1) coordinate with the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development to establish pathways that would allow for temporary, transitional case management in areas in which public housing authorities have vouchers under the program that are available, allocated, and accompanied with case management resources provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs, but underutilized due to a lack of referrals from the Department; and

(2) not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, finalize guidance regarding approval of a public housing authority to be a designated service provider.

AMENDMENT NO. 1131

(Purpose: To require a report on the use of third-party contractors to conduct medical disability examinations of veterans)

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

SEC. _____. REPORT ON USE OF THIRD-PARTY CONTRACTORS TO CONDUCT MEDICAL DISABILITY EXAMINATIONS.

(a) REPORT REQUIRED.—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to the appropriate committees of Congress a report on the use of third-party contractors to conduct medical disability examinations of veterans for purposes of obtaining compensation under laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

(b) CONTENTS.—The report submitted pursuant to subsection (a) shall include the following:

(1) The number of contractors described in subsection (a) in each State who are used as described in such subsection.

(2) The requirements for performance and quality in the contracts governing the use described in subsection (a), including qualifications contractors described in such subsection are required meet for such uses.

(3) The average mileage veterans described in subsection (a) are required to travel to attend a contract medical disability examination described in such subsection, disaggregated by state;

(4) The number of veterans described in paragraph (3) who are required to travel beyond the mileage requirement in a contract described in paragraph (2).

(5) A description of the process at the Department for handling complaints of veterans about the use of contractors as described in subsection (a).

(c) DEFINITION OF APPROPRIATE COMMITTEES OF CONGRESS.—In this section, the term “appropriate committees of Congress” means—

(1) the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs and the Committee on Appropriations of the Senate; and

(2) the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs and the Committee on Appropriations of the House of Representatives.

AMENDMENT NO. 1203

(Purpose: To make funds available for the aeronautical information management program)

At the appropriate place in title I, insert the following:

SEC. _____. Of the funds made available in this Act under the heading “Department of Transportation—Federal Aviation Administration—Facilities and Equipment”, \$29,350,000 shall be for the aeronautical information management program, which includes Federal notices to air missions (“NOTAM”) sustainment, enhancements, and modernization in support of the NOTAM Improvement Act of 2023 (49 U.S.C. 40101 note).

AMENDMENT NO. 1133

(Purpose: To require a report relating to rural community facilities direct loan applicants)

In the matter under the heading “Rural Development Programs—Rural Housing Service—Rural Community Facilities Program Account” in title III of division B, strike the period at the end and insert “: *Provided further*, That not later than 60 days after the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Agriculture shall submit to the Committee on Appropriations of the Senate and the Committee on Appropriations of the House of Representatives a report on community facilities direct loan applicants for which there was a completed favorable analysis for eligibility but that were subsequently determined to be ineligible due to population calculation changes or other modeling errors, including a description of actions taken by the Department of Agriculture to minimize disruption to community planning initiatives and prevent future inaccurate determinations.”.

AMENDMENT NO. 1139

(Purpose: To provide for the development of emergency evacuation route planning guidelines and best practices)

At the appropriate place in title I of division C, insert the following:

SEC. _____. EVACUATION ROUTE PLANNING.

Using amounts made available for the Federal Highway Administration under this Act that are not otherwise obligated, the Secretary of Transportation, in consultation with the Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, shall develop and publish guidelines and best practices for States, Indian Tribes, and units of local government to use when conducting local emergency evacuation route planning, including routing of emergency response supplies, equipment, and workers, as part of natural disaster preparedness efforts.

AMENDMENT NO. 1255

(Purpose: To provide funds for the Office of Women’s Health of the Department of Veterans Affairs to expand access of women veterans to mammography initiatives and equipment)

On page 75, line 23, strike the period at the end and insert the following: “, of which \$10,000,000 shall be made available for the Office of Women’s Health of the Department of Veterans Affairs established under section 7310 of title 38, United States Code, to be used by the Secretary to expand access of women veterans to—

(1) mobile mammography initiatives; (2) advanced mammography equipment; and

(3) outreach activities to publicize such initiatives and equipment.

AMENDMENT NO. 1352

(Purpose: To increase the set-aside for multi-benefit projects under the watershed and flood prevention operations program)

On page 121, lines 23 and 24, strike “\$10,000,000 shall be allocated to irrigation modernization projects and activities located in Western states” and insert “\$20,000,000 shall be allocated to multi-benefit irrigation modernization projects and activities”.

AMENDMENT NO. 1115

(Purpose: To provide funding for the Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production Program)

On page 120, line 15, strike “2250a.” and insert “2250a: *Provided further*, That of the total amount available under this heading, \$8,500,000 shall be for necessary expenses to carry out the Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production Program under section 222 of subtitle A of title II of the Department of Agriculture Reorganization Act of 1994 (7 U.S.C. 6923), as amended by section 12302 of Public Law 115–334.”.

Mrs. MURRAY. I know of no further debate on those amendments.

VOTE ON AMENDMENT NOS. 1250, 1185, 1216, 1221, 1283, 1117, 1120, 1175, 1264, 1202, 1270, 1116, 1113, 1351, 1134, 1220, 1277, 1140, 1131, 1203, 1133, 1139, 1255, 1352, AND 1115

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

The amendments (Nos. 1250, 1185, 1216, 1221, 1283, 1117, 1120, 1175, 1264, 1202, 1270, 1116, 1113, 1351, 1134, 1220, 1277, 1140, 1131, 1203, 1133, 1139, 1255, 1352, and 1115) are agreed to en bloc.

Mrs. MURRAY. With that, I ask that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

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

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I now ask that following disposition of the Looman nomination, the Senate vote on Vance No. 1210 and, finally, that there be 2 minutes for debate, equally divided, prior to each amendment vote.

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

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant executive clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant executive clerk read the nomination of Jessica Looman, of Minnesota, to be Administrator of the Wage and Hour Division, Department of Labor.

VOTE ON LOOMAN NOMINATION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Looman nomination?

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant executive clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from California (Mr. PADILLA) is necessarily absent.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Texas (Mr. CRUZ) and the Senator from South Carolina (Mr. SCOTT).

The result was announced—yeas 51, nays 46, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 265 Ex.]

YEAS—51

Baldwin	Heinrich	Rosen
Bennet	Hickenlooper	Sanders
Blumenthal	Hirono	Schatz
Booker	Kaine	Schumer
Brown	Kelly	Shaheen
Butler	King	Sinema
Cantwell	Klobuchar	Smith
Cardin	Lujan	Stabenow
Carper	Manchin	Sullivan
Casey	Markey	Tester
Coons	Menendez	Van Hollen
Cortez Masto	Merkley	Warner
Duckworth	Murphy	Warnock
Durbin	Murray	Warren
Fetterman	Ossoff	Welch
Gillibrand	Peters	Whitehouse
Hassan	Reed	Wyden

NAYS—46

Barrasso	Graham	Paul
Blackburn	Grassley	Ricketts
Boozman	Hagerty	Risch
Braun	Hawley	Romney
Britt	Hoeven	Rounds
Budd	Hyde-Smith	Rubio
Capito	Johnson	Schmitt
Cassidy	Kennedy	Scott (FL)
Collins	Lankford	Thune
Cornyn	Lee	Tillis
Cotton	Lummis	Tuberville
Cramer	Marshall	Vance
Crapo	McConnell	Wicker
Daines	Moran	Young
Ernst	Mullin	
Fischer	Murkowski	

NOT VOTING—3

Cruz	Padilla	Scott (SC)
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The nomination was confirmed.

(Ms. SMITH assumed the Chair.)

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HICKENLOOPER). Under the previous order, the motion to reconsider is considered made and laid upon the table, and the President will be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will now resume legislative session.

The Senator from Ohio.

AMENDMENT NO. 1210 TO AMENDMENT NO. 1092

Mr. VANCE. Mr. President, I call up my amendment No. 1210, and ask that it be reported by number.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Ohio [Mr. VANCE] proposes an amendment numbered 1210 to amendment No. 1092.

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: To prohibit funds appropriated for the Department of Transportation for fiscal year 2024 from being used to enforce a mask mandate in response to the COVID-19 virus)

At the appropriate place in title I of division C, insert the following:

SEC. _____. None of the funds appropriated or made available by this division for the Department of Transportation for fiscal year 2024 may be used to enforce a mask mandate in response to the COVID-19 virus.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. There are 2 minutes equally divided on this amendment.

Mr. VANCE. Mr. President, we are, unfortunately, in a world where COVID will be with us for the rest of our lives. That is not a good thing. It is not a thing to celebrate, but it is a thing to accept.

What we do not have to accept and what we do not have to make part of our lives is the never-ending cycle of public health panic that greets the rise of a respiratory virus that there is very little we can do to stop or control. What we do not have to accept is airline passengers fighting amongst each other and fighting with flight attendants because the flight attendants are asked to enforce a mask mandate. What we do not have to accept is that we respond to a public health problem with panic and with fear.

We know, of course, that the era of mask mandates caused a lot of problems. It caused problems for our kids. It caused developmental delays for school children. It caused a lot of rancor and a lot of division within our common American family.

If people want to wear masks, of course, they should be able to. But if people don't want to wear masks on airplanes, on transit, they should have that option as well, and that is all that my amendment does. It is narrowly scoped. It applies for the next 11 months, and it applies to transportation cases. And I think it is reasonable to not ask the American people to reenter the era of mask mandates. My amendment does that, and I ask that my colleagues support it.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Hawaii.

Mr. SCHATZ. Mr. President, just to point out, this amendment only applies to surface transportation, Amtrak and passenger rail in particular. I think it is counterproductive. I understand the point that the Senator from Ohio is making. But the problem right now—look, I don't think President Biden or the head of Amtrak or Secretary Buttigieg or anyone else is, at all, planning to implement any kind of mask mandate in the foreseeable future.

But he said something that I agree with, which is that COVID is going to be with us for the foreseeable future and there will be new variants. And if it looks the same, it looks same. But if