

Iran or their family members on or after June 12, 2009"; and

Whereas the Iran Threat Reduction and Syria Human Rights Act of 2012 (Public Law 112-158) amends and expands the authorities established under the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act of 2010 (Public Law 111-195) to sanction Iranian human rights abusers: Now, therefore, be it

The preamble, as amended, was agreed to.

The resolution, with its preamble, as amended, reads as follows:

S. RES. 74

Whereas, in 1982, 1984, 1988, 1990, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2009, 2012, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2020, and 2022, Congress declared that it deplored the religious persecution by the Government of Iran of the Baha'i community and would hold the Government of Iran responsible for upholding the rights of all Iranian nationals, including members of the Baha'i faith;

Whereas, since 1979, Iranian authorities have killed or executed more than 200 Baha'i leaders and more than 10,000 Baha'is have been dismissed from government and university jobs;

Whereas June 18, 2023, marked the 40th anniversary of the execution of 10 Baha'i women by the Government of Iran, each witnessing the hanging of those hanged before her in a final failed attempt to induce abandonment of their faith after over 6 months of imprisonment and violent abuse, with the youngest only 17 years old;

Whereas, on December 19, 2023, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution (A/C.3/78/L.41) calling on Iran to carry out wide-ranging reforms and expressing serious concerns for its escalating human rights abuses, including—

(1) "severe limitations and increasing restrictions on the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion, or belief";

(2) "restrictions on the establishment of places of worship, undue restrictions on burials carried out in accordance with religious tenets, attacks against places of worship and burial";

(3) "increased harassment, intimidation, persecution, arbitrary arrest, and detention of, and incitement to hatred that leads to violence against, persons belonging to recognized and unrecognized religious minorities, including Christians (particularly converts from Islam), Gonabadi Dervishes, Jews, Sufi Muslims, Sunni Muslims, Yarsanis, Zoroastrians, and in particular, Baha'is";

(4) "denial of and restrictions on access to education, including for members of the Baha'i faith"; and

(5) "particular" persecution of members of the Baha'i community "who have been subjected to a continued increase in persecution, including attacks, harassment and targeting . . . on account of their faith and have been reportedly subjected to mass arrests and lengthy prison sentences, as well as the arrest of prominent members and increased confiscation and destruction of property";

Whereas, in the 2024 Annual Report of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom issued in May 2024, it is reported that in 2023—

(1) the Government of Iran "conducted individual and mass arrests of Baha'is across Iran taking them to undisclosed locations and imposing excessively long prison sentences";

(2) "security officials beat and brutalized Baha'is during raids and searches of private homes";

(3) "security forces arrested scores of Baha'is in cities including Hamadan,

Mehrshahr, Yazd, Karaj, Alborz, and Tehran";

(4) the "government has targeted Baha'i women in particular" and that "[a]pproximately two-thirds of Iranian Baha'i prisoners are women";

(5) authorities "targeted Baha'i cemeteries in Arak, Alborz, and Golestan"; and

(6) local "municipalities seized and confiscated Baha'i land, restricted Baha'i access to burial grounds, and declared intentions to sell Baha'i-owned property exclusively to Muslims";

Whereas the Iran section of the Department of State's 2022 Report on International Religious Freedom issued in May 2023 provides, in part—

(1) "[I]n July and August, security forces in cities across the country conducted multiple raids of Baha'i homes, confiscated property deemed 'illegitimate wealth', and arrested Baha'is in their homes or workplaces on unsubstantiated charges including 'causing intellectual and ideological insecurity in Muslim society.'";

(2) "Authorities reportedly continued to deny members of unrecognized religious minority groups access to education and government employment unless they declared themselves as belonging to one of the country's recognized religions on their application forms. UN experts reported universities rejected more than 90 Baha'i students between January and August."; and

(3) "Government officials and government-affiliated organizations continued to disseminate anti-Baha'i and antisemitic messages using traditional and social media.";

Whereas, in response to a surge in persecution in June and July 2022, involving the subsection of over 100 Baha'is to arrests, arraignments, sentencing, and raids on their homes and businesses across Iran, including the sentencing in June of 26 individuals in the city of Shiraz to a combined total of 85 years in prison, the Department of State's Office of International Religious Freedom issued a statement on August 2, 2022, indicating that "[a]mid a continued rise in arrests, sentences, and imprisonments, the U.S. urges Iran to halt its ongoing oppression of the Baha'i community and honor its international obligations to respect the right of all Iranians to freedom of religion or belief";

Whereas, on November 21, 2022, Mahvash Sabet and Fariba Kamalabadi, 2 former members of the informal 7-person leadership group of the Baha'is of Iran, who each served 10-year sentences from 2008 to 2018, and have been detained since July 31, 2022, in Evin prison, were sentenced to 10 years in prison each after a summary trial lasting 1 hour;

Whereas, on December 11, 2022, the Baha'i International Community organization stated that "Dr. Shirin Ebadi, the Nobel laureate and defence lawyer for Mahvash and Fariba during their first trial, said in 2008 that 'not a shred of evidence' was offered to prove the national security charges or other allegations. Nor was any new evidence forthcoming at this latest trial";

Whereas, on January 12, 2024, the Baha'i International Community organization reported increasing incidents of persecution accompanied by intensified violence perpetrated against the Baha'i community by the Government of Iran, for example—

(1) "since the beginning of October [2023] more than 200 incidents of persecution, including over 50 arrests and imprisonments, have occurred in various cities such as Shiraz, Yazd, Isfahan, Hamadan, and Karaj";

(2) government agents have perpetrated "increasingly violent home raids, disproportionately affecting women and the elderly, and have even resulted in hospitalizations and traumatic separations of mothers from

their children. Notably, over two-thirds of those arrested and detained have been women, predominantly in their twenties and thirties, highlighting the escalation of attacks against women in recent months."; and

(3) government agents have instigated a "conspicuous rise in hate speech, where Baha'is have been accused of being behind the September 2022 protests, promoting permissiveness, being against Islam and Shiism, being spies for Israel and the West, and being part of a political movement that seeks to undermine the state";

Whereas Iran is a member of the United Nations and a signatory to both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, among other international human rights treaties, without reservation;

Whereas section 105 of the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act of 2010 (22 U.S.C. 8514) authorizes the President to impose sanctions on individuals who are "responsible for or complicit in, or responsible for ordering, controlling, or otherwise directing, the commission of serious human rights abuses against citizens of Iran or their family members on or after June 12, 2009"; and

Whereas the Iran Threat Reduction and Syria Human Rights Act of 2012 (Public Law 112-158) amends and expands the authorities established under the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act of 2010 (Public Law 111-195) to sanction Iranian human rights abusers: Now, therefore, be it

*Resolved, That the Senate—*

(1) condemns the Government of Iran's state-sponsored persecution of the Baha'i minority in Iran and the continued violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;

(2) calls on the Government of Iran—

(A) to immediately release the imprisoned or detained Baha'is and all other prisoners held solely on account of their religion;

(B) to end its state-sponsored campaign of hate propaganda against the Baha'is; and

(C) to reverse state-imposed policies denying Baha'is and members of other religious minorities equal opportunities to higher education, earning a livelihood, due process under the law, and the free exercise of religious practices;

(3) calls on the President and the Secretary of State, in cooperation with responsible nations, to immediately condemn the Government of Iran's continued violation of human rights, and demand the immediate release of prisoners held solely on account of their religion; and

(4) urges the President and the Secretary of State to utilize available authorities to impose sanctions on officials of the Government of Iran and other individuals directly responsible for serious human rights abuses, including abuses against the Baha'i community of Iran.

CLOTURE MOTION

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

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. 846, Keli Marie Neary, of Pennsylvania, to be United

States District Judge for the Middle District of Pennsylvania.

Charles E. Schumer, Richard J. Durbin, Tammy Duckworth, Ben Ray Lujan, Patty Murray, Alex Padilla, Peter Welch, Jeff Merkley, Richard Blumenthal, Amy Klobuchar, Christopher A. Coons, Debbie Stabenow, Robert P. Casey, Jr., Elizabeth Warren, Margaret Wood Hassan, Jack Reed, Tim Kaine.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the nomination of Keli Marie Neary, of Pennsylvania, to be United States District Judge for the Middle District of Pennsylvania, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from New Jersey (Mr. BOOKER), the Senator from California (Mr. PADILLA), and the Senator from Arizona (Ms. SINEMA) are necessarily absent.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Texas (Mr. CORNYN), the Senator from Kansas (Mr. MORAN), the Senator from Florida (Mr. RUBIO), and the Senator from Ohio (Mr. VANCE).

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 48, nays 45, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 316 Ex.]

#### YEAS—48

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

#### NAYS—45

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

#### NOT VOTING—7

Booker	Padilla	Vance
Cornyn	Rubio	
Moran	Sinema	

The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 48, the nays are 45.

The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. BUTLER). The nomination is pending.

The Senator from Mississippi.

TRIBUTE TO MICHELLE BARLOW RICHARDSON

Mr. WICKER. Madam President, it is fitting that a daughter of Mississippi is

presiding at this poignant moment for me and for my entire staff.

I come to the floor today with a forced smile and a bittersweet message, a bit of official news I have not been eager to report, and that news is that Michelle Barlow Richardson, who sits at my side at this very moment and who has stood by my side for a quarter century, my chief of staff, will soon depart Capitol Hill. This closes a 25-year chapter of service to my office, to the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives, to the State of Mississippi, and to the citizens of the United States.

Anyone who knows Michelle has found out very quickly that Michelle is a Mississippi State Bulldog. She graduated from Mississippi State University in 1997 and then moved up east to Washington, DC, to begin work at my office. And she got right to work, beginning where many staffers do, as a legislative correspondent and then as an executive assistant. She set my schedule. She began to guide proposals into law, which is what we do here. Michelle would go on to higher rungs up the ladder, but she never lost her appreciation for every role on the team. And many members of the team join us in this Chamber at this moment. To this day, no task is too small for Michelle. She has not hesitated to climb into the trenches again and again.

Michelle is fiercely loyal. Her relationship to Mississippi State University is a prime example of this trait. When the MSU community sings their school's anthem at an event, they all sing, "Loyal friends we'll always be." Quite fitting. We even lost Michelle to Starkville briefly in 1999. At that point—only a couple of years out of college—she was given the very important job of fundraising for a project that ended up generating over \$4 million to endow a scholarship. That fund is helping students in Mississippi to this very day.

But luckily, in 2001, we got her back. As I reflect on the 23 years that have passed since then, I am filled with gratitude for Michelle. And I am beaming with pride over all the good work she has accomplished.

In Washington, DC—as you so poignantly know, Madam President—change is constant: a different Congress every 2 years, new leadership opportunities, Senators come and go, changing committee assignments. During these transitions, Michelle has been a steadfast presence, guiding my staff and me through numerous changes over the years.

A big change came in 2007, not long after Michelle had been promoted to be my chief of staff. Our office picked up and moved to this end of the Capitol when I was selected to fill the seat vacated by U.S. Senator Trent Lott. The success of that transition is due, in no small part, to Michelle's deep institutional knowledge, broad networks, and natural leadership skills.

The next year, to the extent permitted by the law and the rules, she helped lead my first statewide election campaign. She expanded a campaign and fundraising organization that she had developed in the First Congressional District, and she applied it to all of our great State of Mississippi.

Of course, when you get elected, you have to govern. And over here on the Senate side, Michelle once again rose to the challenge of a larger role in governing. She scaled up the size of "Team Wicker" from 18 people to 45 teammates across 5 offices.

Over the years, she also established a network of Senate chiefs of staff. In fact, it is known throughout Capitol Hill that Michelle Barlow Richardson has become the "dean" of the Senate chiefs of staff. That is what we are losing tomorrow when she moves to another capacity. Michelle has built a community where collaboration, information, and mutual support can flow.

Then, in 2016, we had another transition. I was elected to chair of the National Republican Senatorial Committee, and, as usual, Michelle was right there to help. Under her leadership, the office adjusted to new responsibilities and certainly new schedules.

A few years after that, I took up the gavel on the Senate Commerce Committee. Michelle helped build a team of policy experts who would craft smart legislation on the vast portfolio of the Commerce Committee—everything from the seabed to the stars.

President Ronald Reagan once said that "personnel is policy." Well, Michelle and the personnel she has cultivated have gone on to produce substantive and savvy policy. She has been pivotal to work that has brought billions of dollars in new jobs and new investments to Mississippi. Through years of legislative efforts, Michelle has been making connections, educating stakeholders, and holding our strong legislative principles—and holding our feet to the fire. Through every negotiation and late night, she has been motivating our staff.

In scaling up the staff from the House team to the much larger Senate team, over the years, Michelle has led literally hundreds of able staff members.

Her leadership left an incredible legacy. Michelle was good at identifying talent. She has challenged staffers to accomplish goals they did not know they were capable of reaching. She has embraced the burden of making tough decisions. She has delivered tough but constructive feedback directly and concisely, without ever making it personal. And a massive cloud of witnesses can testify to her influence. Many former Wicker staffers are now serving in leadership roles around the country. I am the one privileged to give this floor speech, but I know many could give speeches—and perhaps will give speeches—of their own, telling the stories of Michelle's influence in their lives.

Those who know Michelle Barlow Richardson know her for her strong devotion and friendship. That is especially true for my wife Gayle and me. Michelle's title has been chief of staff, but she has been so much more. She has been by our side in public service and in private moments and moments of joy and moments of pain.

Words are inadequate, and these remarks, in particular, are inadequate. We will miss Michelle's enthusiasm for all things Mississippi. We will miss the presence she—and occasionally her children—have brought to the office. We will even miss the Mississippi State University maroon and cowbell. But loyal friends we will certainly always be. We will remain grateful for her friendship, and we wish her, this public servant and American patriot, the very best.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

#### NOMINATIONS

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Madam President, if there is one thing we have learned from last month's election, it is that President Trump has a clear mandate from the American people to get this country back on track, and one of the things that Tennesseans talk to me most about is the need to restore law and order all across this country.

I am so encouraged by President Trump's nominees who are going to take the lead in reforming our Federal law enforcement Agencies, and, today, I want to touch on two of those who are reforming law enforcement Agencies.

I will tell the Presiding Officer, next week, I am going to come and talk about the nominees for our military and national security. I want to talk about the qualifications of Pete Hegseth, who is going to be a great Secretary of Defense; but, today, we are going to talk about Kash Patel at the FBI and Pam Bondi at the Justice Department.

Now, these two Agencies—I think everybody agrees—are in desperate need of a course correction. Under the Biden-Harris administration, they have repeatedly undermined the rule of law with a two-tiered justice system. Its rules are simple: If you break the law and you are a Democrat, then you are off the hook—that is the way they have operated—but if you are a conservative or you dissent from the left's radical agenda, the government will end up targeting you for your beliefs.

What we know is that, under Mr. Patel and Ms. Bondi, this abuse of power will come to an end, and few people are better qualified to get this job done and enforce the rule of law than Ms. Bondi and Mr. Patel.

As a former prosecutor for the Justice Department—and, by the way, he worked under Democrats and Republicans—Mr. Patel led the successful prosecutions of criminals that were tied to terrorist organizations like al-Qaida and ISIS.

On the House Intel Committee, he worked with Congressman DEVIN NUNES, the chair of that committee, to expose the FBI and the Justice Department's abuses during Russiagate, or the Russia hoax, as it became known.

In the first Trump administration, he served as the Deputy Director of National Intelligence. He served at the Security Council and the Defense Department as Chief of Staff.

This is a varied background. It is a credible background for the job in front of him of restoring law and order in our cities across this country, in countering terror threats, and in ending human trafficking, and that is the job of the FBI.

I will say this on the human trafficking: I am especially encouraged by his support for releasing the Jeffrey Epstein flight logs and black book. We know the abuse spanned decades from Mr. Epstein, and it harmed many vulnerable young girls, and we know a large network of high-profile, high-dollar predators participated in this horrific abuse on a global level. So, by releasing the flight logs, we can start to break apart the sex trafficking rings and ensure that the predators are put in jail where they belong. This effort will go a long way in restoring public confidence in the FBI and in ending the left's two-tiered justice system. On this front, he will work closely with Pam Bondi, who is President Trump's excellent choice for Attorney General.

Earlier this week, I had my official meeting with Ms. Bondi, whom I have known and worked with for over the past decade. Our meeting only reaffirmed my conviction that she will be fearless in rooting out corruption, taking on the deep state, and restoring the Justice Department to its core mission: enforcing equal justice under the law.

To be certain, her accomplishments speak for themselves. With more than 18 years of experience as a prosecutor, she became the first woman to serve as the attorney general of Florida in 2011. While there, she worked to protect the most vulnerable among us by taking on drug dealers and human traffickers.

During the first Trump administration, she also worked to end our Nation's drug epidemic as a member of the Opioid and Drug Abuse Commission. This experience will be invaluable to her as she leads this top law enforcement Agency.

Kash Patel and Pam Bondi are just two of Trump's incredible picks, but they are representative of the talent, experience, and determination shown by his Cabinet selections and nominees. As we head into the new year, I will look forward to supporting them and ensuring that they can get to work as soon as possible for the American people.

#### KIDS ONLINE SAFETY ACT

Madam President, although we have a busy end of year ahead of us, there is at least one thing Congress must do before the end of the year, and that is to

pass the very bipartisan Kids Online Safety Act.

Back in July, this Chamber passed KOSA by an overwhelming bipartisan majority. The vote was 91 to 3. The reason is very simple: Lawmakers on both sides of the aisle recognize that Big Tech must be held accountable for putting our children's safety at risk. They have put profit ahead of our children's safety, and they want to continue to do that.

KOSA puts the priority on safety by providing parents and kids with tools, safeguards, and the transparency that they need to protect against online harms. Among its provisions, the legislation would create a duty of care for online platforms to prevent and mitigate specific dangers to minors, including the promotion of suicide, eating disorders, substance abuse, and sexual exploitation.

Since KOSA's passage in the Senate, more and more evidence has emerged showing that this legislation is desperately needed. In October, for example, reports emerged showing that Chinese-owned TikTok purposefully developed algorithms to keep children scrolling as long as they could. Of course, the more time a child spends on the platform the more data TikTok can collect, then the more valuable that platform becomes.

While this happens, TikTok executives privately acknowledge that such addiction does lead to mental health issues, including a loss of memory and cognition. But do you know what? They don't care. When your child is online, they are the profit. They are a profit center for these platforms.

Now, other platforms, from Facebook to Instagram, have also developed addictive algorithms that expose children to unthinkable harms, including sexual abuse and lethal drugs. But, again, these platforms don't care. They do not give a ripping flip about your child.

This tragedy has got to come to an end, but for months, KOSA has been held up in the House because of blatant falsehoods that are being pushed by Big Tech lobbyists. We know who they are, and we know what they are saying. Let me just read some of these falsehoods to you.

They say that KOSA would censor free speech, and it will not. KOSA is a product design bill. It is not a contact bill.

There are some out there who say: Well, it is going to give all of this authority to the FTC. It does not. It does not increase the authority of the FTC. It is important to note that there is no new rulemaking power for the FTC in KOSA or any ability to create rules about content. So they are lying. The lobbyists and some of these House staffers who are listening to these lobbyists are spreading falsehoods. It should come to a stop. Our children deserve better.

We know that what KOSA will do is put in place tools for parents, and, of course, Big Tech is out here spreading

lies and having their lobbyists spread lies because they want to evade accountability on this. I have even heard this: I have heard of staffers in the House and lobbyists bragging that they have been able to kill KOSA, that they are going to keep this profit center going, that they have been able to kill this bill. It is absolutely disgusting that they would agree with Big Tech and put that number—that dollar figure—on our kids' heads.

Do you know, when we were doing the hearings on this, what did we hear from kid after kid who came in? They came in wearing a T-shirt, "270," saying: I am worth more than \$270. That is the value that some of these platforms have assigned to the amount of time a child spends on their platform. That is the profit they make.

You know, if you listen to some of these staffers and some of these lobbyists, you would think, my goodness, if we don't need to have some kind of protections in the virtual space, why do we have laws in the physical space to protect kids? Minors can't enter into a contract. Minors can't go buy alcohol and tobacco. If you have got a store that sells liquor and you sell to a kid, they will come, put the chains on your store, and close you down. It is the same thing with alcohol and the same thing with pornography.

The Presiding Officer and I are parents. I am a grandparent. We see what is happening to these precious children, and they are being subjected to drugs, to alcohol; they are being subjected to pornography; they are being subjected to sexual exploitation, and it is done 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days of the year, and yet Big Tech—they don't care. They do not care about protecting your children. So the only thing we are left to surmise is, if they don't protect them in the virtual space, they are, for sure, not going to support protecting them in the physical space. I would surmise that people who are against KOSA would do away with all of these laws that protect children.

Society has decided our precious children are worth the fight, that they are worth the protection. And it is disgusting—disgusting—when you hear these Big Tech platforms say there is a value to keeping that child scrolling, that there is a value to holding their eyes online—and when you hear it repeated by people in our Chambers—staffers—it is sickening.

This is not a political game. Protecting our children is something that we in the Senate have agreed to do on a bipartisan basis. This bill has been stuck in the House since July. We know why it has been stuck, and we know that falsehoods are being spread. This is a bill that deserves a vote on the House floor because what we do know is this: By an overwhelming bipartisan majority, Members of the U.S. House of Representatives support this bill. It is time for those who are standing in the way of passing this bill to put aside—to put aside—their objec-

tions and to allow protections for our children to take place in the virtual space.

Since 1998, there has not been any additional protection placed in the virtual space. Why is that? It is because Big Tech sees our kids as a product. They make a lot of money—a whole lot of money—when those kids are scrolling. It is killing our kids. Just as in the physical world we put in place laws to protect them, they deserve the same protections in that virtual space. 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. LANKFORD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

#### CORPORATE TRANSPARENCY ACT

Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. President, for over a year, I have worked to get rid of a rule that is driving every one of my small businesses in Oklahoma absolutely crazy. A lot of Americans have no idea what the beneficial ownership rule is, but if you own a small business in America, you definitely know.

To set the context for this, next week, we are supposed to take up the national defense authorization. In 2021, a small, little section was stuck in at the end in the large national defense authorization that was called the corporate transparency beneficial ownership act. That little bill was supposed to root out money laundering and fraud. What it has become has been a nightmare for every business owner in my State.

If you are a business owner that has a business that is a small business—let's say less than 20 employees, less than \$5 million in total revenue in a year—you now have to fill out this enormous set of forms and turn them in to the Federal Government to show your ownership structure to the Federal Government so they can track it.

I will tell you, there are quite a few business owners that don't own one business; they may own two or three businesses or they may own several LLCs if they are a builder or they are a property developer, if they do all kinds of property construction for small businesses and building for others. They will own several LLCs, and now they have a stack of forms they have to fill out. They have to fill out forms now that talk about their name, their birth date, their address, an ID number, and all of it. They want to know all the reporting for their legal address, their address, the jurisdiction of their information. They want to know all the senior officers of the reporting company. They want to know someone who has the authority over the appointment or the removal of those senior officers. This is my favorite: They want to know substantial

influencers over the decisions in the company. No one even knows what that means. Who is your substantial influence in your small business?

All those things all have to be compiled by business owners that literally do their own books, that do their own purchasing, that do their own payroll. They have plenty of other things to do other than the requirement to fill out forms.

Now, it wouldn't be such a big deal if it was just a form that dropped into their box, but it is a form dropped into their box, and it had this little note attached to it: If you don't fill this out or you fill it out wrong, it is a \$10,000 fine and up to 2 years in prison for not filling this form out—2 years in prison for not filling out this form outlining who influences you in your decisions in your small business.

When this was stuck into the national defense authorization in 2021, it was supposed to root out fraud and waste, but it has grown through regulations and is now poured out with a deadline that is literally a couple of weeks away.

I have fought for a year. Senator TUBERVILLE has a bill to be able to end this entirely. We got no traction on that. We couldn't even get a vote in this Senate to be able to stop this nightmare. So I brought a second bill to say let's just delay it so it is not happening this year, and we have worked for months to be able to get that delay in, and we have not been able to get a vote on that in this Senate.

While small businesses all over my State are furious about this, we have tried to just say: Somebody needs to show some common sense and to stop asking these questions. Thankfully, in the last 72 hours, a Federal judge has stepped in and has halted this nationwide, has prevented the Biden administration from actually implementing this rule that they created. In fact, this judge called this regulation quasi-Orwellian, also determined this—saying the "government is unable to provide the court with any tenable theory that [this regulation] falls within Congress's power. [It] appears likely unconstitutional." I absolutely agree.

I am grateful this judge has stepped in to be able to stop its implementation, but I am going to still ask this Senate to do the same thing we have asked all year; that is, to stop it entirely.

We should not be asking these questions of every small business in America. That is not our job, to ask every small business owner in America: Turn in who are the influencers on your decisionmaking or we will put you in prison for 2 years.

What in the world?

So I am grateful for the stop, but we also will not stop until we actually pull this entire thing out and say this is not our job. We have plenty of things that are our job that we are not doing. For

instance, next week—the national defense authorization, passed on a bipartisan basis through committee months ago, has yet to come to the Senate floor. It is time for it to be able to come, long past overdue. This sets our military strategy and what we are going to do for our vets and for the members of Active-Duty Reserves and National Guard. This should have been done a long time ago.

Those are the things we should already be doing. Going to business owners and telling them “Tell us who your influencers are” are things we should not be doing.

#### DEPARTMENT OF GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY

Mr. President, I left a meeting just now dealing with the newly named Department of Government Efficiency, where Members of the House and Senate gathered around Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy and asked questions of each other: What can we do to make government more efficient?

This shouldn't be a partisan organization. In fact, there are Democrats that have joined us in this conversation. I find no one in my great State of Oklahoma who says: You know what I really want from my government? I want them to be inefficient. I want them to waste my money. I want my government to spend money on things that really don't matter for the country.

Every person that I meet in my State—Republican, Democrat, or Independent—all say the same thing: The government should do its job and not somebody else's job. When you spend my money, spend it wisely.

We all know we need roads. We all know we need national defense. We all know we need border security. There are key things we all need to do. But there are some things that continue to be able to pop up where money is being spent that there is great frustration in my State and a great number of people that say: Why are we spending money on that?

We spent money 2 years ago, as a Federal tax dollar, and the people in my State of Oklahoma had to spend their hard-earned tax money on paying for drag shows in Ecuador. We have money that was spent on writing the book about humans, chimpanzees, and climate change in Sierra Leone. We spent some of our hard-earned tax dollars on doing a study about seatbelts and helmet usage in Ghana.

The folks in Oklahoma asked a very simple question. We want the pot holes fixed. We want efficient government. We want education taken care of. We want good schools. Why are we spending our dollars—that are limited dollars—on doing a helmet study in Ghana? Why aren't we doing that in the United States? Why aren't we taking care of us?

It is not that we are selfish; it is just that we all know we are \$36 trillion in debt. Every single year, I put out a book called “Federal Fumbles.” Every year, I bring it to this body. Every

year, we talk about inefficiency and waste in government.

I am grateful that there is a bipartisan conversation finally started that is spreading among this body and the House body and now the new incoming executive branch saying: Let's find areas of efficiency where we can be better at this.

The basic goal is this: Let's have a prosperous Nation that actually has economic growth and an efficient government that matches the efficiency of you our Nation. That shouldn't be an irrational goal. That should be something we could all agree on. Quite frankly, it is just Oklahomans saying: Don't waste my money. Spend it in the way you are supposed to spend it, and let me keep the dollars that I have earned. And when my tax dollars go away, don't make me be embarrassed how they are used.

That shouldn't be irrational. I am going to continue to press on this.

Five years ago, we passed a bill called the Taxpayers Right-to-Know Act. I worked with the Biden administration for the last several years. It has created something called the Federal Program Inventory. As crazy as it sounds, for the first time ever, we are actually building a list of all the Federal programs we have in the Federal Government. Many people don't know that we literally have so many programs that we don't know how many programs we have in the Federal Government. Just try to do an internet search and ask a simple question of AI: How many programs do we have in the Federal Government? It will give you an estimate because there is no master list of all the programs in the Federal Government.

So I passed a law called the Taxpayers Right-to-Know Act requiring Agencies to do something crazy: Make a list of all the programs that you do. Where is our money being spent? And that list is in the process of being built right now that will give us the ability to see where we have duplication in government. It will give the ability from one Agency to look at another Agency and say: I didn't realize we did the same thing.

That is happening all over our government right now.

Again, that is straightforward. But it gives us an opportunity to say: Make a list, prioritize the list, and then draw a line and say these things are not our priorities; these things are. And when you are \$36 trillion in debt, we should be talking about doing our priorities and not doing the things that are not a priority. This is what we should do in this body and to be able to have this kind of conversation.

So, for me, it is simple. Let's do the things that we should do. Let's don't do the things we shouldn't do because there are plenty of things that still need to get done.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. FETTERMAN). The Senator from Massachusetts.

#### SOCIAL SECURITY FAIRNESS ACT

Mr. MARKEY. Mr. President, I am actually joined here today with my Massachusetts staff, who is joining with my Washington staff, and they are in the Gallery today. The subject I am about to talk to is very near and dear to their hearts. It is near the top of the list of all the issues they think go to fundamental unfairness in our society, because right now, an entire generation of teachers and firefighters and postal workers and police officers and public servants of all stripes are being denied the Social Security benefits which they earned.

In 1983, the so-called windfall elimination provision slashed retirement benefits in the name of austerity. I was a Member of the House of Representatives in the U.S. Congress in 1983. I voted against the windfall elimination provision. I voted against Republicans. I voted against many Democrats who all were willing to slash the benefits of those hard-working teachers, firefighters, police officers, across the board—and have lost it for four decades—because I knew that I was voting for public servants and voting for their families.

I have been fighting for repeal of the windfall elimination provision as well as the government pension offset ever since, and I stand here today because we have an opportunity to finally see this repeal through to conclusion.

Senator BROWN and Senator COLLINS' Social Security Fairness Act would repeal the windfall elimination provision and the government offset provision. I am proud to cosponsor that bill, alongside 60 of my colleagues from both parties, and 60 is the number you need to pass a bill on the floor of the U.S. Senate. We can restore Social Security benefits for millions of workers now, and we should do it now.

Three million—unbelievable—three million public servants and their families around the country, including 130,000 in Massachusetts and their families, are counting on us to get them their earned benefits. They have already done the work, but a 1983 law denies them that check in the mail.

No one else in the country was targeted in that bill—just those public servants, those people who work for each and every one of us every single day.

A retired public school teacher in Chicopee, MA, wrote to me and explained that she had dutifully paid into Social Security for decades, earning her right to Social Security and a secure retirement. But late in her career, she answered the call to public service and dedicated her time to educating students in Massachusetts. That is the kind of action we should value and we should reward. Instead, she was blindsided 10 years later to learn that because of her public service and the modest public pension she accrued, her Social Security benefits would be cut by \$580 a month, which otherwise would be there on her kitchen table for

herself, for her family. Now, instead of a secure and dignified retirement, she has to worry about affording rent and medication and groceries.

If, instead of teaching, she had earned a private pension, she had worked in any other sector of the American economy or she was wealthy enough to live off of her investments, her Social Security would be safe. The only category is these people who were the public servants. They are the ones who got targeted in 1983.

Another constituent from Tyngsboro, MA, wrote me to say that after her father passed away, her mother, a retired school employee, lost over \$1,000 a month in Social Security. Now, in addition to mourning her husband, she also struggles to pay bills and meet her basic needs.

There are 3 million more stories of injustice and indignity just like this.

We know the Federal Government can be in the business of allowing windfalls. Major corporations hiking up prices on the American people while paying effectively no Federal taxes—that is a windfall. Private equity cronies making millions off the backs of workers while laying them off and gutting their pensions—that is a windfall. But make no mistake, allowing a third grade teacher, a town firefighter, and a mailman to receive their hard-earned retirement benefits is not a windfall.

Repealing these draconian policies is a matter of justice and dignity for millions of public servants. These workers served their communities and delivered for us every single day. In every city and town across the country—Massachusetts, the President's home State of Pennsylvania—State after State, the story is the same, and now it is time for us to deliver for them.

After four decades of fighting and organizing alongside unions and workers and retirees, Congress must repeal these policies once and for all. The Senate may be short on time, but public servants have waited long enough.

In the time remaining this year, we must deliver for those 3 million families in our country. They earned this benefit. We have to finally meet the obligation which has been accrued by the American people to those 3 million workers.

So let's vote to pass the Social Security Fairness Act. Bring home this win for public servants, their families, and our communities.

No matter where you live in America, when you see that firefighter on the fire engine, when you see that police officer rushing to protect a family, when you call the teacher to ask "How is my child doing?"—every time you make one of those calls, every time you see one of those people, just know that they are denied—they are denied the benefit which they have earned. They are denied it by an act of the U.S. Congress in 1983.

Why them? Why were they singled out? Why wasn't it billionaires? Why wasn't it private equity? Well, the

votes were there, and, unfortunately, too many Democrats voted for it as well.

It is time for us to rectify that historic injustice. It is time for us to provide fundamental fairness for each and every one of those families. This is the time; this is the place; we are the people who must get this done. It goes right to the heart of who we are as a people. If you believe in government, then you must believe in everything that teachers and firefighters and police and everyone else who is in our cities and towns provide for us every single day. And we must have that vote on the Senate floor. We must pass this legislation. We must finally give back to these families what they have earned by their service to us.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maryland.

SUDAN

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. President, I come to the floor today to discuss the terrible ongoing humanitarian situation in Sudan, and the atrocities that are being perpetrated against innocent civilians there every day and to discuss measures that the United States and the U.S. Senate can take to help end the suffering.

Since that brutal conflict erupted in April 2023, a staggering 11.8 million people have been displaced within Sudan or fled to neighboring countries. More than half the population—over 25 million people—face acute food insecurity, including 13 million children. And 1.5 million of them are at risk of or facing famine.

While the total casualty numbers have been difficult to determine, a new study from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine's Sudan Research Group estimates that more than 60,000 people died in the Khartoum region alone between April 2023 and June of 2024. That study found that 26,000 people have died as a result of violence. But it also highlighted another awful reality, that starvation and disease are increasingly becoming the leading causes of death reported across Sudan.

In a hearing in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in May of this year, U.S. Special Envoy to Sudan Tom Perriello suggested that the total death toll could be as high as 150,000 people.

Given the scope and scale of this human suffering, the United States and the international community should be doing everything in our power to end the carnage and end the suffering in Sudan. Toward that end, I want to commend America's Special Envoy to Sudan Tom Perriello for his tireless shuttle diplomacy and his ongoing efforts to seek and negotiate an agreement to end the conflict that is fueling this crisis. But he can't do it alone. And his job is made much more difficult when other parts of the U.S. Government fail to effectively use our leverage to support his efforts.

One thing we should not be doing is shipping advanced American weapons to any country that is fueling the misery and suffering and killing in Sudan, and yet that is what the Biden administration is proposing to do. They are proposing to send weapons to the United Arab Emirates at a time that the UAE is reportedly supplying weapons to a vile and murderous militia group in Sudan, a group called the Rapid Support Forces, or the RSF for short.

So I am here on the floor today urging my colleagues to prevent the sale of American weapons to the UAE until and unless the Biden administration provides us—the Senate, the Congress—with credible assurances that the UAE will not, in turn, supply additional weapons to the Rapid Support Forces in Sudan.

So let me step back for a moment to put all of this in context. About 3½ years ago in May of 2021, I traveled to Khartoum, the capital of Sudan, with my colleague Senator COONS. At the time, Sudan was experiencing a difficult transition to democracy after a popular revolution in 2019 succeeded in ousting the brutal regime of the dictator Omar Bashir. It wasn't easy, but there was hope for a brighter future.

Then the Sudanese Armed Forces—or the SAF—and the Rapid Support Forces—the RSF—who had backed the popular protests in 2019 and who had helped oust the dictator Bashir usurped the newly formed civilian-led government in 2021 and then proceeded to violently suppress mass protests.

Following pressure, both from the people of Sudan but also from the international community, to restore the civilian government and merge their forces, instead, a long-simmering rivalry between the SAF and the RSF erupted in April 2023, and Sudan descended into chaos and civil war.

Now, there is plenty of blame to go around, but one of the many drivers of the collapse of the fragile democracy was the refusal of the Rapid Support Forces, that militia group, to come under the umbrella of the Sudanese Armed Forces.

And the RSF has an especially sinister lineage. They have their roots in the Janjaweed militias that former dictator Bashir used to brutally crush rebellious tribes in the western Darfur region in the early 2000s. I think many who followed those terrible days remember that the United States determined that those mass killings constituted genocide.

The current leader of the RSF goes by the name Hemedti. He is a former Janjaweed militia leader who was complicit in those atrocities in Darfur, and he hasn't changed.

In the current conflict, the United States has charged the RSF with committing ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.

Reputable human rights organizations and news outlets have also reported widespread acts of sexual violence, including rape, by the RSF.



As our Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield noted in March of this year:

Children are starving . . . wasting, [and] dying. Far from their homes and their communities, millions of refugees are praying in over-crowded camps.

People in Darfur . . . wake up not to the call of prayer, but to the sound of gunfire, of shelling, of cries for help.

And the situation has not improved since then. Famine has taken hold in Darfur, and the RSF's siege of Al-Fashir city in Darfur has only exacerbated the already terrible humanitarian situation there.

So it should be clear that providing weapons to the RSF is tantamount to aiding and abetting ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, and yet that is what the UAE is reportedly doing.

Now, I should make it very clear that the UAE denies that it is arming the RSF. They say they are not doing it. Indeed, when I traveled to the UAE in July of this year, Emirati officials told me they were not sending weapons to the RSF. And yet numerous credible reports and sources indicate just the opposite. They reveal that the UAE is, in fact, supplying the murderous RSF militia with weapons that they use to commit atrocities.

In January, a U.N. panel of experts documented what they described as "credible" allegations that the UAE was violating the Darfur arms embargo, which was the embargo put in place in 2005 to stop the genocide at that time.

Their findings have been corroborated by credible human rights organizations and by an independent investigation by the New York Times, which found that the UAE smuggled weapons to the RSF under the guise of humanitarian aid. The front page story of the New York Times—and I have it here, Mr. President—is entitled "How a U.S. Ally Uses Aid as a Cover in War."

And they go on to point out that the UAE is expanding a covert campaign to back a winner in Sudan's civil war, and they point out that the UAE was smuggling in weapons and deploying drones.

Beyond the New York Times independent investigation, the Sudan Conflict Observatory group—which is a group funded by the State Department—also tracked 32 Emirati flights between June 2023 and May 2024 going into Sudan, and they concluded—again, this is a group funded by the U.S. Department of State. They concluded with "near certainty" that they constituted weapons transfers from the UAE to the RSF.

Now, the Biden administration has also acknowledged that the UAE has been supporting the RSF, although you have to read carefully between the lines to determine that.

Again, our Ambassador to the United Nations, Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield, said:

We are aware that both sides are receiving weapons and other support to fuel their ef-

forts to destroy Sudan, and yes, we have engaged with the parties on that, including with our colleagues from the UAE."

So the question is this: If the Biden administration acknowledges that the UAE is arming the RSF against our demands and our interests and that they are lying about it, why are we, the United States, not doing more to stop it?

I understand that we have a very important bilateral relationship with the UAE. They are an important security partner in the Middle East. Major American companies, like Microsoft, are talking about collaborating on building data centers for advanced AI in the UAE with companies like G42. They may also be cooperating with us on other important American priorities. But that is not a good reason to approve this sale of advanced weapons to the UAE at a time that the UAE is reportedly aiding and abetting ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity in Sudan.

That is why I have filed what is known as a joint resolution of disapproval—known by its shorthand, JRD—on the Biden administration's request to sell offensive weapons, including weapons worth \$1.2 billion to the United Arab Emirates. In the House of Representatives, Congresswoman SARA JACOBS has filed a similar resolution, and both of us have introduced additional legislation on this issue.

And I would submit that, if any Senator is serious about ending the suffering in Sudan, we should not be sending weapons to any country—in this case, the UAE—that is arming those engaged in ethnic cleansing there.

A lot of Senators have talked about the need to focus on ending the humanitarian disaster in Sudan, and they are absolutely right to do so. Many of us have been addressing this and talking about it for a very long time. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee had an important hearing on this matter in May of this year.

But, colleagues, you don't end the horrific suffering in Sudan by sending weapons to a country that is fueling the conflict in Sudan. That is why I am asking the Biden administration to provide us—the Senate, the Congress—with assurances that they have received credible commitments that the UAE will not send weapons to the murderous RSF in Sudan.

And I would submit that, given the fact that the UAE denies that they are engaged in such actions, they should be able to provide assurances that the Biden administration deems credible. And if President Biden believes that those assurances are credible, he should so inform the U.S. Senate as we consider their request for this arms sale.

As Representative JACOBS and I indicated in our letter to President Biden that we sent a short time ago, if we receive those assurances, we will, of course, take them into account as to how we decide to proceed on the joint

resolution of disapproval. I say that because our goal is not to prevent the sale of arms to the UAE. The objective is to ensure that the UAE is not fueling the very crisis and conflict in Sudan that we, the United States, are seeking to end.

Indeed, in September of this year, President Biden said:

The United States will not abandon our commitment to the people of Sudan, who deserve freedom, peace, and justice. We call on all parties to this conflict to end the violence and refrain from fueling it, for the future of Sudan and for all Sudanese people.

I will say that again: and to all people who are fueling it.

The Biden administration has rightly put pressure on the RSF by sanctioning several high-level commanders for their atrocities, but it has yet to use the full leverage at its disposal to hold their primary external backer, the UAE, accountable. Indeed, just days after the New York Times story about their independent investigation of UAE arms sales to Sudan broke, the President finalized a major defense partnership with the UAE. And now, as we see, the administration is pushing for a billion dollars-plus arms sale to the Emirati Government.

The title of an op-ed in the Washington Post not that long ago put it bluntly, and I just quote the title of that editorial: "Biden needs to pressure the UAE to help end Sudan's civil war."

That is exactly right. And that is what we are calling on the Biden administration to do. I support a mutually beneficial bilateral relationship with the United Arab Emirates, and I am certainly not seeking to permanently end arms sales to that country. But a partnership with the United States needs to account for U.S. interests and values and priorities, and we need to make sure that foreign governments that benefit from a security relationship with the United States understand the importance that we hold on those important issues.

The bottom line is that the United States should not be sending weapons to the UAE so long as it is aiding and abetting a group that is one of the primary drivers of the humanitarian disaster in Sudan, the RSF. And the RSF has committed atrocities and crimes. That is why the United States should pause offensive arms transfers to the UAE unless and until the Biden administration can provide the U.S. Congress with assurances that the UAE is not providing and will no longer provide materiel support that aids and abets the killing spree of the RSF.

I hope that the Senate will come together on this important question, and I hope the President and the Biden administration will agree that securing those assurances from the UAE is essential to our goal of achieving peace and stability in Sudan, just as the President indicated we should be doing.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maryland.

## LEGISLATIVE SESSION

## MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to legislative session and be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

## REMEMBERING JOHN A. SPRING

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, in 2004, the city of Quincy, IL, elected a new mayor. In musing on how he intended to lead, he said: "It's not about me. One person can't make everything happen. You've got to have a team." And while it may be true that great leaders need great teams supporting them, John Spring was the kind of leader, mayor, and community advocate you wanted leading your team. Today, it is with great sadness that I share the news of John's passing.

A native of Rock Island, IL, John graduated from Quincy College where he met his future wife Karen, who sadly passed away in 2021. They were married for 50 years. A theme that remained consistent throughout John's life was his dedication to serving his community. He first answered the call to service through teaching. John worked as a teacher in St. Louis and in the Quincy Public Schools, before he was hired at Quincy Notre Dame High School in 1976 as a biology teacher and assistant basketball and football coach.

His time at Quincy Notre Dame would provide him with one of his first leadership opportunities, when halfway through the school year, he was asked to put aside his teaching duties and serve as the school's first full-time director of development. He readily accepted the challenge. However, what John was not told when he was offered the job was that the school was in financial trouble, having borrowed more than \$100,000 from a local bank to cover operation costs. For many, raising that sum of money would be an overwhelmingly daunting task. But believing in the importance of investing in quality education for young people, John went to work. Soon after, the school's first fund drive—a way to raise money to cover the gap between the cost of running the school and the amount of tuition the school must charge—was born. It has since become a mainstay of Quincy Notre Dame's fundraising efforts.

Proving his leadership abilities and commitment to the school, John went on to become the executive director of the Quincy Notre Dame Foundation for 29 years. He loved the work. So, what might have compelled him to leave that role? A call to serve his community in another manner: as mayor. He first experienced Quincy's political scene as a member of the police and

fire commission, and when then-mayor of Quincy Chuck Scholz decided in the fall of 2004 not to run for a fourth term, John once again answered the call to serve his community. His vision was simple: making life better for everyone in the community.

John served as Quincy's mayor for 8 years. He was a community favorite. During his tenure, he focused on updating transportation infrastructure and regional partnerships as a way to foster long-term economic growth. And, surprising to no one who knew John, he found success. During his tenure, he led successful efforts to expand Amtrak service to the city, upgrade Maine Street, and implement a multiyear infrastructure plan. And during the 2008 recession that saw many communities suffer, under John's leadership, Quincy opened new businesses, lowered taxes, and helped the county report the second-best employment record in the State.

His contributions to the community did not go unrecognized. In 2018, John was inducted into the Quincy Notre Dame Hall of Fame, and recently, he was selected as a 2024 delegate to the Democratic National Convention in Chicago.

Like every good elected official ought to be, John was an attentive listener, a caring community member, and a truly decent man. In all things John did, he led with compassion, humility, and grace. He was a visionary leader who truly represented the best of us. Time and time again, his community called him to serve. And time and time again, he answered the call faithfully. Until the end, John would send my staff and me community updates and ideas to improve the lives of the citizens of West Central Illinois.

Loretta and I send our deepest condolences to John's children—Stacey, John, and Mike—and seven grandchildren as they cope with his tremendous loss. It was a privilege to call John a friend, and we will miss him dearly.

## RECOGNIZING 40 YEARS OF METRA

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, if you walk around the streets of Chicago and ask people about how they get to and from the city—or around it—each day, I am sure many of them would tell you: Metra. Metra transports us to Cubs games—in fact, its busiest ridership day was November 4, 2016, during the Cubs World Series victory parade—and it makes sure we can get to work on time. Simply put, the people of Chicagoland depend on Metra rail to get from point A to point B safely and reliably. And this year marks 40 years of Metra's service to our city.

Chicago has a rich history when it comes to rail. A century ago, Chicago was the envy of cities across the country, with the largest public transportation system in the world. But by the late 1960s, the system was failing. To put the system back on track, in 1974,

the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) created the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA). After a decade of reorganizing, restructuring, and reimagining what commuter rail could look like and who should be in charge of operating it, in 1985, Metropolitan Rail—or Metra—was born.

Since then, Metra has grown into a remarkable operation. With 243 stations on 11 rail lines, Metra is the fourth busiest commuter rail system in the country and the largest outside of New York City. Not only do I represent a State that has long been the railroad center of the country, but working railroads is a tradition in my family. I grew up in East St. Louis, IL, and both of my parents worked for the New York Central Railroad. My two brothers and I also worked for that same railroad. Because of this, I care deeply about making rail travel as good as it can be for Illinoisans. And Metra continues to deliver. It emerged from the pandemic with steadily improving customer satisfaction that hit 92 percent in 2022. Then, in 2023, Metra opened the year by securing its largest ever Federal grant through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law's Mega Program: \$117 million to rebuild 11 bridges along its Union Pacific North Line. And by the end of last year, Metra had seen the largest ridership increase of any transit agency in the Chicago region—a 37 percent increase—providing more than 32 million rides.

But Metra does more than just transport people; it responds to the needs of our city. Look no further than their All Stations Accessibility, or "ASAP" Program, an effort for which Metra was awarded more than one Federal grant to make its stations, trains, and platforms more accessible. While the Americans with Disabilities Act prohibits discrimination against Americans with disabilities and requires newly constructed buildings to be fully accessible, several legacy stations in Chicago remain inaccessible. Metra's ASAP initiative aims to make all stations accessible by 2038. Additionally, Metra ensures accessibility as it concerns affordability. In 1984, a one-way ticket to the farthest station cost \$5.80. Today, you can travel to the same stations for just \$6.75, which would cost \$17.50 if that 1984 price kept up with inflation.

Metra also has made a substantial commitment to sustainability. As the climate crisis impacts our planet, sustainable transportation has been an increasing sector of interest. Metra knows this, and they will be among the first in the Nation to operate zero-emission train sets. These train sets will allow Metra to retire some of its oldest, most polluting diesel locomotives and reduce their carbon emissions, making Chicago's transportation cleaner and more reflective of the city's value of sustainability.

A final example that demonstrates Metra's commitment to Chicago is