



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 118th CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

Vol. 170

WASHINGTON, WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2024

No. 188

Senate

(Legislative day of Monday, December 16, 2024)

The Senate met at 10 a.m., on the expiration of the recess, and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mrs. MURRAY).

PRAYER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Today's opening prayer will be offered by Lisa Wink Schultz of the Senate Chaplain's Office here in Washington, DC.

The guest Chaplain offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

As the Senate enters a new season of change, with Senators and staff coming and going, we thank You that You are the changeless one. May those who are leaving remember Your promise that You go with them and that You will never leave them or forsake them. May they have courage to face the future without fear.

Today, we honor the Secretary of the Senate, Ann Berry. Lord, thank You for her 45 years of faithful work. As she retires, give her a sense of accomplishment and joy. Give our Senators wisdom and understanding. May the works of their hands and the meditations of their hearts be pleasing to You.

We pray in Your holy Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore 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.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

WILDLIFE INNOVATION AND LONGEVITY DRIVER REAUTHORIZATION ACT—Continued

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will report the unfinished business.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

House message to accompany H.R. 5009, a bill to reauthorize wildlife habitat and conservation programs and for other purposes.

Pending:

Schumer motion to concur in the amendment of the House to the amendment of the Senate to the bill.

Schumer motion to concur in the amendment of the House to the amendment of the Senate to the bill, with Schumer amendment No. 3317 (to the House amendment to the Senate amendment to the bill), to add an effective date.

Schumer amendment No. 3318 (to amendment No. 3317), to add an effective date.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. WELCH). The majority leader is recognized.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, so last night, I think as everyone knows by now, congressional leaders released the text of bipartisan legislation that will keep the government open, deliver critical disaster relief, extend vital healthcare programs, and protect our farmers.

With this agreement, we are now on our way to avoiding a government shutdown. The sooner Congress acts, the better. As always, bipartisan cooperation must lead the way.

We can't have last-minute delays or grandstanding or else the American people won't get the funding they deserve or else we could risk a shutdown.

Now, there are many good things in this bill that Democrats worked hard

for and achieved. Democrats have insisted these agreements must not have cuts, and this bill has no cuts.

Democrats have warned we can't have poison pills, and this bill has no poison pills. And Democrats pushed hard to make sure this agreement included millions for childcare, workforce training, job training, funding to rebuild the Key Bridge, and more.

There are three things in particular that I pushed hard—very hard—for and that I am glad to see in the bill. Policies to outcompete China, including outsourcing, policies on artificial intelligence, and policies to bring manufacturing back to America, including chip production.

The package includes new restrictions I pushed for to restrict the flow of U.S. investment to CCP development of technologies like AI and chips. I am also very pleased this agreement helps alleviate supply chain disruptions, alleviates price spikes, and increases chip investment in the United States.

I also pushed especially hard to get a strong disaster relief package into the bill, and I am really glad we got that done too. Federal disaster relief programs are about exhausted, and I have warned that doing nothing would come back to haunt us. Communities across the Southeast, across the Northeast, and, in fact, across America still need help rebuilding from the aftermath of hurricanes, flooding, wildfires, and other acts of Mother Nature that have grown far more powerful because of climate change. So it is very good news this disaster package got into the bill.

And there are other good things in the bill too. We permanently secured 9/11 responder and survivor health funding. We secured important provisions related to Haiti, extended protection for farmers, dealt with the nature of lithium ion batteries that might explode on bikes, and much, much more.

Now, clearly, this CR isn't perfect. It does not include everything Democrats

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



Printed on recycled paper.

S7121

called for and includes some provisions we wouldn't have added. But this CR is a sound and bipartisan and necessary compromise that will keep the government open and deliver many, many good things for the American people.

So now time is of the essence. The sooner Congress acts the better. If we want to avoid an unnecessary government shutdown right before Christmas, Republicans must work with Democrats to pass this CR quickly.

H.R. 5009

Mr. President, now on the NDAA, later this morning, the Senate will hold a vote to pass the annual Defense authorization bill, the NDAA. Congress has passed the NDAA on a bipartisan basis for over six straight decades, and this year will be no different. Many feared that it would be, given the polarization, given the late date, but, no, we are passing the NDAA, and that is a very good thing.

The NDAA isn't perfect, but it still includes some very good things that Democrats fought for. Just like in the CR, it has strong provisions to stand up against the Chinese Communist Party, here on a national security basis. It boosts our use of AI for national defense. This is one of the things our forums on AI talked about early on, and it is now in the bill. And it expands tech innovation here at home by expanding money to tech hubs.

I am particularly glad that the NDAA expands the Tech Hubs Program that I created with Senators YOUNG, CANTWELL, and others in the bipartisan Chips and Science Act. And these funds are going to transform communities in Upstate New York, the Midwest, and across the country that hadn't been focused on tech and are now going to become the epicenters of innovation and of manufacturing—high-end manufacturing. This is something these rural areas, these smaller cities across Upstate New York and the Midwest, needed, and they are getting some more. They are getting some more dollars in this regard so there will be more tech hubs.

Again, I thank my colleagues on both sides of the aisle for the good work on the NDAA, especially Chairman REED and Ranking Member WICKER.

DRONES

Mr. President, on drones, this afternoon, I will come to the Senate floor to stand with Senator PETERS to take up legislation to respond to the recent reports of unusual drone activity.

I am proud to cosponsor this bipartisan legislation, which the FBI, DHS, DOD, and FAA all support. Let me say that again. This legislation is supported by just about every group—every Federal group—concerned: the FBI, the DHS, the Department of Defense, and the FAA. The Senate should pass our bill without delay.

Our bill, among other things, explicitly authorizes State and local authorities to conduct drone detection and helps them better coordinate with Federal law enforcement Agencies to keep

communities safe. The utter confusion surrounding these drone sightings shows that the Feds can't respond all on their own. The Federal Government needs help from local officials detecting these drones.

But, right now, the locals have neither the authority nor the resources to act. Our bill will fix that. All the Federal Agencies involved say they need local help. Drones are relatively new, but they are all over the place. And many of them—you don't want to tell people they can't fly drones for recreational use and many other commercial uses. So it is a difficult area, and we don't have broad-reaching Federal legislation on drones, even though we do say they can't be near airports and be near military facilities and can't fly below 4,000 feet. That is about it.

So there is a desperate need, until the Federal Government does more on this new issue of drones, for the locals to participate. The Feds want the locals to participate. There is no reason they shouldn't. So I hope the Senate will pass our bipartisan drone legislation later today.

SOCIAL SECURITY FAIRNESS ACT

Mr. President, on Social Security, finally, before I pay tribute to two of our retiring colleagues, the Senate will take a very important vote this afternoon to ensure that no American who has chipped into Social Security is wrongly denied well-earned benefits.

This afternoon, we will vote on whether or not to take up the Social Security Fairness Act, a bill repealing two flawed policies that eat away at the benefits of many Americans who, at some point or another, worked as teachers, firefighters, postal workers, and other public sector workers. When we vote today, retirees deprived of their benefits will be watching closely. Every Senator will decide who will vote to secure their benefits and who will stand in the way to waste this golden opportunity to make a law.

TRIBUTE TO KYRSTEN SINEMA

Mr. President, now, two of our departing colleagues will deliver their farewell addresses on the floor, Senator BOB CASEY and Senator KYRSTEN SINEMA.

I will start with a few words about Senator SINEMA. I was proud to work with her on many different issues. And whenever we did team up together, it was a potent team, and we got a lot of good things done.

But as I am sure KYRSTEN would be the first to say, we also disagreed a lot. KYRSTEN is independent. That is how she has always been. I respect that.

So whether we agreed or disagreed, I never questioned two things: one, that she cared deeply about her work; and, two, that she would always stay true to herself and to the people of Arizona who elected her.

During her time in the Senate, KYRSTEN has had a hand in passing some of this majority's biggest accomplishments—the bipartisan infrastructure law, the Chips and Science Act,

the PACT Act, the gun safety act, and the Respect for Marriage Act, and others as well.

She was also a trusted negotiator. She had a keen ability to find consensus, even on the toughest issues, when it wasn't easy, but she always kept at it. Our caucus, on numerous occasions, partnered with her—usually at crunch time—to work with Republicans to help get bills over the finish line. And that is when KYRSTEN was at her best, when it was time to reach an agreement.

I will always respect KYRSTEN for her excellent work in these hard moments. I know many Senators on both sides will feel the same.

So we thank Senator SINEMA for her service, her contributions, her commitment to Arizona, and wish her well in whatever comes next.

TRIBUTE TO ROBERT P. CASEY, JR.

Mr. President, this afternoon, our dear friend BOB CASEY will also come to the floor to deliver his farewell speech after many, many distinguished and very successful years serving the people of Pennsylvania.

Now, with a career as distinguished as BOB's, there are many things you can say about what he meant to his beloved home State. And he loved and breathed Pennsylvania. It is a big, diverse State, and he knew every corner of it and was loved and respected in every corner of it.

Here is what his people called him: "a champion for Pennsylvania workers," "a champion for middle class families," "a champion for children," "a champion for seniors," "a champion for disability rights," "a champion for clean energy and the environment," "a champion in the fight against corporate gouging." These are just some of the ways that people described BOB.

During his 18 years in the Senate, there are very few issues that he didn't champion. It is not hard to understand where he got such a strong work ethic. Like Joe Biden, he is from Scranton, where hard work is the rule, not the exception. If you combine that work ethic with an innate sense of public service, as the son of a Governor, as somebody who deeply cares about the people he represents and is genuine—and it comes out of every pore of his body—you will get a fighter who works as hard as the people he represents; you will get BOB CASEY.

When Pennsylvania coal miners suffering from black lung disease needed help, he successfully fought to get their benefits and made sure they got medical help.

He was an amazing advocate for our Nation's children, always making sure that they had the support they needed to reach their full potential.

He championed efforts to expand access to early childhood healthcare, childcare, child nutrition, family tax benefits; and was one of the biggest advocates for extending the CHIP, or the Children's Health Insurance Program, which kept so many kids healthy—millions of poor kids healthy.

And he will go down as one of the Senate's greatest champions ever, in all of history, when it comes to disability policies. When our former colleague Tom Harkin retired, many people wondered who would carry on as the voice for Americans with disabilities? Without hesitation and with amazing success, BOB stepped up to the plate. In the years since, he has been instrumental in passing legislation to advance the rights of people with disabilities and help them live free from discrimination.

He didn't have any connections—personal connections—to the disability community, nor was he trying to score political points. He did it all simply because it was the right thing to do.

And he was one of the most beloved Members of our caucus. People love BOB—everybody. No one ever said a bad word about BOB CASEY. Why? Why? Because he cared so much, was so hard working, was so effective, and was one of the most genuine people that we have ever, ever seen in this Senate, not just now but throughout history.

He leaves a deep impression on every one of us. He does. And the guy had it all, and in such a nice way.

He got things done. He was hard working. He didn't take no for an answer. But when he came back at you, time and time again, because he was so committed, so well prepared, so sincere, and so nice, you always said yes. It is one of the reasons he was so effective.

So that sums up the man, BOB CASEY.

And let's not forget he always did the right thing, even in difficult political situations. I would talk to him: We need your help here, BOB. We need your vote there.

He would struggle with it. He knew it might have bad political consequences, but he inevitably did the right thing.

He is as good, as decent, as honorable as any Senator I have worked with in this Chamber.

He has a beautiful wife Terese. To the entire Casey family, I say to all of them: Thank you for sharing BOB with us all these years. Thank you for backing him up, despite some tragedies your family has had.

And, BOB, thank you. Thank you for your leadership. Thank you for your friendship, and, simply, thank you for being you.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREEMENT—EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. SCHUMER. I ask unanimous consent that notwithstanding rule XXII, the cloture votes with respect to the Cheeks and Murillo nominations occur upon the disposition of the motion to proceed to H.R. 82.

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

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The Republican leader is recognized.

WRDA

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, last week, the House passed the Water Resources bill with broad bipartisan support. Today, it is the Senate's turn to act.

Thanks in large part to the leadership of Ranking Member CAPITO and her team, the sensible legislation before us will strengthen our Nation's water infrastructure from the Everglades, to the Port of Los Angeles, to the inland waterways that course through Kentucky.

It is good news for communities across the country. From clean drinking water, to ecosystem maintenance, to storm resiliency, to navigable waterways for trade and commerce, the bill before us takes a comprehensive approach. Because our communities understand their challenges better than any bureaucrat in Washington, this bill will provide the flexibility to tailor solutions to each community's unique needs.

I am also pleased it will authorize several projects important to the health and well-being of Kentuckians. One will build out infrastructure for water and wastewater treatment in Appalachia—always a concern of rural communities across America's heartland. Another will help secure safe and reliable drinking water for the growing number of families in Scott County. Finally, another will update Greenbrier Lake Dam, which supplies water for Kentuckians across Montgomery County.

So far, an impressive, broad coalition has thrown their support behind this bill, from ports and shippers, to farm groups and unions, to dozens of industry leaders who rely on our waterways to move goods, protect jobs, and keep costs low for the American people.

I appreciate the House's work to move this must-pass bill forward in bipartisan fashion. Obviously, I hope the Senate will do the same today.

BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

Mr. President, President Biden's decision earlier this month to pardon his son may well have set a unique and unfortunate precedent. But abuse of the Presidential pardon doesn't stop there.

Last week, the President went on to commute 1,500 sentences, and the way liberal activists see it, he should have done even more.

More than 20 liberal, retired judges—including the Boston radical who recommended the disgraced, pro-crime U.S. attorney Rachael Rollins—have now urged the President to turn his eye to Federal death sentences. They claim that the Federal death penalty is "rife with fundamental problems," including race discrimination and poor representation of defendants.

But this is not just some theoretical recommendation about systemic injustice. If the President heeded these former judges' call, it would mean commuting the death sentences of the mass murderer who slaughtered Black churchgoers at Mother Emanuel in Charleston and the perpetrator of the massacre at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh. Are these men the victims of systemic racism? Did they have inadequate counsel? Of course not. They are mass murderers, guilty beyond any doubt whatsoever.

Let's be clear what commuting these sentences would mean. It would mean that the laws passed by Congress and applied by our judges and juries have no value. It would mean that progressive politics is more important to the President than the lives taken by these murderers. It would mean that society's most forceful condemnation of White supremacy and anti-Semitism must give way to legal mumbo jumbo.

The irony of claims of systemic racism causing the President to spare Dylann Roof is ludicrous—ludicrous—to the point of tragedy.

This is no legacy a President should seek.

TRIBUTE TO KYRSTEN SINEMA

Now, Mr. President, on an entirely different matter from the President's unfortunate legacy, I would like to close with just a few words about another of our departing colleagues, the senior Senator from Arizona. It is, perhaps, unconventional for the leader of one party to pay formal tribute to a departing Senator who caucused with the other side, but then KYRSTEN SINEMA has never had trouble with bucking a trend.

For one thing, she has spent her 6 years in this body earning levels of influence, respect, and command of policy that are uncommon among Senate freshmen. She has thrown herself into worthwhile projects, done the heavy lifting of legislation, and kept at it when longer tenured colleagues might have thrown in the towel. Needless to say, Senator SINEMA's maverick streak extends to her efforts to broaden the Senate's fashion horizons as well.

But the cornerstone of our colleague's legacy in this Chamber will be her willingness to defend the Senate, the Senate itself, when saying nothing would have been a great deal easier. Arizona's senior Senator stood up in the face of a grave threat to this institution's defining characteristic, and she said no—no—and in doing so, she sent a message that will resonate long after her departure from the Chamber.

I admire our colleague for the courage, wisdom, and clarity that have guided her service for the people of Arizona and for the entire Nation, and I wish her the very best in her next chapter.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic whip.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, our country demands much of the Senate

Judiciary Committee on which the Presiding Officer serves, and it has been my honor to serve as chair of that committee for the last 4 years. We have worked hard to defend freedom, advance justice and equality, and balance our Federal judiciary.

During my time as chair these last 4 years, we have held 145 full committee hearings, 88 subcommittee hearings, and 86 executive business meetings. We advanced 373 Executive and judicial nominees, and we reported 56 bills out of committee. We confirmed highly qualified, diverse judicial nominees who will be a frontline defense of the rule of law for a generation. Our efforts over the last 4 years have filled the vacancies of one-fourth of the members of the Federal judiciary. We also revitalized the committee's critical oversight rule over the executive branch Agencies under our jurisdiction. We made progress on issues critical to Americans, including protecting children online, supporting women who have faced sexual harassment and assault in the workplace, and implementing critical gun violence prevention reforms.

I want to thank all of the Senate Judiciary members, particularly the Democrats, for their hard work in ensuring equal justice for all and defending our democracy.

I would be remiss not to acknowledge our former colleague, the late-Senator Dianne Feinstein of California. Dianne was a trailblazer and champion for LGBTQ Americans, reproductive rights, and gun violence. We honor her legacy by continuing our efforts on those critical issues.

I am also particularly thankful for the Republican ranking member, LINDSEY GRAHAM, and my Senate Judiciary Republican colleagues who were willing to work across the aisle to advance judicial nominees and bipartisan legislation. Over 80 percent of all of the judges approved by the Senate, reported out of the committee, have been approved by a bipartisan rollcall.

Perhaps our most impactful work has been in confirming these highly qualified, independent, and evenhanded judges. Aside from their exceptional qualifications and respect for the rule of law, they represent historic demographic and professional diversity.

Under President Biden's leadership, the Senate has confirmed more Black women to the Federal circuit courts than all prior Presidents of the United States combined, including the first-ever Black woman to serve on the Supreme Court—Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson. We have confirmed a historic number of Asian Americans, Latinos, and LGBTQ judges. We have also confirmed more circuit judges who have experience as public defenders than all prior Presidents combined.

During the last 4 years, Senate Democrats have confirmed 233 judges to lifetime positions, and if we confirm 2 more to the Federal bench this week, which is our plan, we will have surpassed the previous administration's

record. The confirmations of these highly qualified, diverse judges will help ensure the fair and impartial administration of justice in our Nation. These judges are already making significant contributions to protecting freedoms and democracy.

Since becoming chair of the committee in 2021, I have also made it a priority to revitalize our tradition of oversight of executive branch Agencies within the committee's jurisdiction. We need to make sure these Agencies are serving the interests of the American people, and we have regularly scheduled hearings for this type of oversight. We have had meetings with the Attorney General, officials in the Department of Justice, the FBI, the Bureau of Prisons, and the Department of Homeland Security, making sure that every member on both sides of the table had a chance to question the leaders of these Agencies on a regular basis.

Over the past 4 years, we have made progress in advancing key legislation. Important bills we enacted into law include legislation barring forced arbitration for sexual assault and sexual harassment cases; legislation I authored to sustain the Federal Crime Victims Fund; legislation that I also authored to eliminate the Federal statute of limitations for child sex abuse cases; and my legislation with Republican Senator GRASSLEY to allow the Justice Department to prosecute war criminals. We showed that, when we are willing to come together on a bipartisan basis, we can make progress.

We also unanimously reported several bills to help stop the exploitation of kids online. Earlier this year, I held a full committee hearing to demand that the CEOs of social media giants Discord, Meta, Snap, TikTok, and X—formerly known as Twitter—come before the hearing. It highlighted the ongoing risks that social media poses to our kids and the immediate need for Congress to act. We didn't get it done in this session, and we must get it done in the next. I believe that Senator GRAHAM, who will continue to serve on the committee, will join me in that effort.

The committee has also led the effort to address the Supreme Court's ongoing ethics crisis. This troubles me. It used to be that issues of ethics before the Court were bipartisan issues in the Senate—not so anymore. At a time when the worst reports are coming out of the Supreme Court of lavish gifts for Supreme Court Justices, this has become a partisan issue—the Democrats calling for change and the Republicans resisting.

I don't know what happened to that bipartisan consensus on ethics, but in looking at the evidence that we have uncovered through committee staff work and subpoenas, it surely is demanding of us to do something. Ensuring that all Supreme Court Justices are subject to an enforceable code of conduct is critical to establishing the American people's trust in the Court.

More than 12 years ago, I asked, in writing, Chief Justice Roberts to adopt a binding code of conduct for all Supreme Court Justices—12 years ago. Last year, the Judiciary Committee reported the Supreme Court Ethics, Recusal, and Transparency Act to the full Senate. It is a work product of one of our members, SHELDON WHITEHOUSE. It is an excellent bill, and I was happy to support it. The bill would require Justices to adopt an enforceable code of conduct so that the highest Court in the land—the Supreme Court—doesn't have the lowest ethical standards of all courts in America.

Our work didn't stop there. We worked on defending reproductive healthcare, curbing gun violence, and dealing with the major issues that are on the minds of the American people.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the work of the Senate Judiciary Committee's eight subcommittees, which held dozens of hearings on matters under the committee's jurisdiction. I want to thank Chairs BLUMENTHAL, BOOKER, BUTLER, COONS, KLOBUCHAR, OSSOFF, PADILLA, WHITEHOUSE, and Senators HIRONO and WELCH for their hard work and leadership in this effort.

Once again, thanks to all the members of the Senate Judiciary Committee for their cooperation. It has been the honor of a lifetime.

POLIO VACCINE

Mr. President, I want to make one other short statement.

I remember polio. I remember it as a kid. It scared the hell out of us. Nobody knew what was happening. A kid could wake up in the morning, go to school, look as healthy as could be, and die before dinner. That is what polio was all about—iron lungs, scary results, crippling kids, and we didn't know where it came from. Every conscientious mom had a theory. My mom said playing in rainwater from the freshly fallen rain in our neighborhood was dangerous for polio. That was her interpretation. No one really knew.

Then came the amazing news that someone had developed a vaccine to deal with polio. We couldn't believe it. No kid wants to take a shot, but to be protected from polio, you did it, and you were happy to do it. I did it when I was a kid in the 1950s. As a result of it, we brought polio under control in this country—a vaccine by Dr. Jonas Salk, from Pittsburgh—a man I will always revere because of the comfort that he brought to families who were concerned about polio.

Can you believe that we are now debating the polio vaccine again in this country; that the nominee proposed by President Trump for the Health and Human Services Department has raised questions about the efficacy and safety of vaccines, including the polio vaccine?

This morning, in the Chicago Sun-Times, a reporter named Neil Steinberg wrote an article about this issue. He quoted a statement that was made very recently by Katie Miller. She is

the transition spokesperson for RFK, Jr., Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., who is President Trump's nominee for HHS, which has jurisdiction over many health Agencies and certainly has the lion's share of responsibility when it comes to vaccines.

Here is what Steinberg wrote:

Mr. Kennedy believes the Polio Vaccine should be available to the public and thoroughly and properly studied—

His spokesperson said, "Thoroughly and properly studied," what a great idea—

Let's look into it! How about taking 1,349,135 [kids across America] and submitting them to a blind trial at 244 [different] test areas around the country. [Half will receive] the cherry-red vaccine, and half a placebo, or nothing. [Then we can really find out. We can really study and see if this vaccine is any good, the polio vaccine.]

Oh, wait. [That is exactly what we did] in the spring and summer of 1954—[70 years ago]. To this day, it's the largest medical experiment in the United States history. Thousands of doctors, nurses, principals, teachers, parents, and other volunteers banded together, working for free—the government wasn't paying because that smacked of socialized medicine.

Gosh, Neil—

Neil Steinberg—

—you might ask, being yourself an inquisitive sort, just like me, why did thousands of doctors, nurses, principals, [and others], all supposedly with busy lives, drop everything to help run this giant medical test [in America] for no compensation? Possibly because polio was scything through their children: more than 57,000 cases in 1952, with over 3,000 deaths. A child could be healthy at breakfast and dead by dinner. That catches the attention of the neighbors and dials up public spiritedness.

For RFK, Jr., to say that we have to study the polio vaccine at this point is not only sad, it is shocking—shocking that a person seeking the highest level Cabinet position under the Trump administration is willing to be so fast and loose with the scientific truth—1,300,000-plus cases. We were administering it, testing it before we moved forward with it 70 years ago—nothing in the meantime to suggest it be otherwise. It is safe and efficient and effective.

What about all the other vaccines? Polio is the one I am focusing on today. What about all of the other vaccines that have spared children—measles and rubella and so many other diseases and problems that can be dangerous to them? Now we are going to debate those all over again in the 21st century because RFK, Jr., has his own theories on vaccines?

Listen, I am willing to meet with RFK, Jr., and ask him, point blank, what his position is. And I will tell you this: If he is going to be the scourge against vaccinations across America, he is in for a fight, because what is going to happen, sadly, is a lot of innocent children and innocent people are going to be hurt as a result of it.

Coincidentally, just before the 1954 test began—1.3 million people—radio commentator Walter Winchell went on

the air to warn the vaccine may be a killer and that the authorities were stockpiling little white coffins just in case. The next week, 10 percent of the kids were pulled out of the experiment by worried parents. We have been through this before, and, thank God, cooler heads and smarter minds prevailed. If we have to go through it again, it is worth the fight.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that this article be printed in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD.

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

[From the Chicago Sun-Times]

KENNEDY CALLING FOR STUDY OF POLIO VACCINE ISN'T SKEPTICISM, IT'S REJECTIONISM
(By Neil Steinberg)

Study! I love to study. A pot of coffee, a comfortable chair and a deadline that isn't today—nothing makes me happier than to dive into a subject, stacks of books around me, obscure databases on the screen. It's perhaps the most appealing aspect of my job.

One day, I'm digging into the circumstances behind Oscar Wilde's famous line about the Water Tower ("a castellated monstrosity with pepperboxes stuck all over it"—not a quip, as commonly described, but premeditated provocation). The next, I'm exploring solar eclipses (if you are ever stumped as to where helium was first detected, remember helios is Greek for "the sun," where the gas was noticed spectrographically during an eclipse in India in 1868).

So study is good. However, I also know that "study" can be a code word for wanton dismissal of facts that don't serve your personal narrative, and I'll give you an example. If someone says they are studying the Holocaust, trying to determine what really happened, then you can be sure you are not dealing with a scholar, but an antisemite. Your immediate answer should be along the lines of: "Well, I hope your 'study' involves reading a few of the thousands of meticulously documented books outlining the precise enormity of the crime, you odious bigot. Sticklers for bookkeeping, those Germans were. Fifteen minutes in a library should lay it out pretty clearly."

With anti-vax advocate Robert F. Kennedy Jr. up for the role of secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, Senate minority leader MITCH MCCONNELL, whose spine occasionally stiffens before going soft again, warned that nominees hoping for Senate approval should "steer clear" of undermining the polio vaccine.

Prompting a classic weasel response from Katie Miller, RFK Jr.'s transition spokesperson.

"Mr. Kennedy believes the Polio Vaccine should be available to the public and thoroughly and properly studied," she said.

Proper study! What a good idea. Let's look into it! How about taking 1,349,135 children and submitting them to a blind trial at 244 test areas around the country, with half getting the cherry-red vaccine, and half a placebo, or nothing. Then we'll really find out if this vaccine is any good.

Oh wait, we did that. In the spring and summer of 1954. To this day, it's the largest medical experiment in United States history. Thousands of doctors, nurses, principals, teachers, parents and other volunteers banded together, working for free—the government wasn't paying because that smacked of socialized medicine.

Gosh Neil, you might ask, being yourself an inquisitive sort, just like me, why did

thousands of doctors, nurses, principals, etc., all supposedly with busy lives, drop everything to help run this giant medical test for no compensation? Possibly because polio was scything through their children: more than 57,000 cases in 1952, with over 3,000 deaths. A child could be healthy at breakfast and dead by dinner. That catches the attention of the neighbors and dials up public spiritedness.

The vaccine worked. Now that kids don't die of polio, alas, we've forgotten they ever have. Society has atomized into a buzzing cloud of random individuals, bouncing off one another. Respect for authority that isn't Donald Trump has evaporated, and many in our country are deciding: Screw this medical authority business, I alone will determine what is good for my children. Ignorant rejectionism has put on the trappings of genuine academic skepticism and wanders the land, gaining converts.

Nor should we overlook the first part of Miller's sentence: "Mr. Kennedy believes the vaccine should be available to the public . . ."

Well gosh, that's big of him, considering that he's spent years urging gullible people to swallow the lie that vaccines cause autism.

People are sheep. The recent election proved that. After Kennedy soft-pedaled a measles outbreak in American Samoa in 2019 and cast doubt on the efficacy of vaccines, he was accused of causing dozens of people to die needlessly.

Baseless undermining of medical advances is nothing new. Just before the 1954 test began, radio commentator Walter Winchell—the Fox News of his day—went on the air to warn the vaccine "may be a killer" and that the authorities were stockpiling "little white coffins" just in case. The next week, 10% of children were pulled from the experiment by worried parents.

They were worried about the wrong thing. The vaccine wasn't the killer; polio was. That's as true today as it was in 1954. History will some day gape in shock that a leader could try to lure us back into the past. Actually, we don't have to wait for history to pass judgment. It's pretty shocking right now.

Mr. DURBIN. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican whip.

TRIBUTE TO RYAN NELSON

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I come to the floor today to pay tribute to my longtime chief of staff Ryan Nelson, who has decided to step down in the new year.

It is difficult to know where to start to pay tribute to a man who has been indispensable to everything I have ever done in Congress; so perhaps I should start at the beginning, back in 1996, during the Republican primary for South Dakota's lone House seat.

I was a green candidate running on a shoestring budget, and one morning, a campaign volunteer showed up at my door and announced that he was my driver. His name was Ryan Nelson. That day, we headed to an event in Arlington, SD. Unbeknownst to me, my new driver proceeded to lock his keys in the car. This might have caused some campaign volunteers to panic, but not Ryan. He made his way over to a filling station, found someone who could get into the car and retrieve the keys, all without my knowing that anything had ever happened. That resourcefulness turned out to be a pretty

good indicator of what was to come—not the “locking the keys in car” part but the seeing a problem and solving it before I even had a chance to become aware of it.

Ryan kept driving me around the State, and we ended up winning the primary. Ryan came to a crossroads, both metaphorical and literal. You see, Ryan was originally just filling time on the campaign. He was scheduled to leave for the Kansas City police academy the day after the primary. He was driving out of his hometown in Gettysburg, SD, when he came to that literal crossroads. You would have to go one way for the police academy and the other way to stay with the campaign. He chose to stay with the campaign. And among the many blessings I have been given over the course of my career, I have to count that as one of the greatest.

Ryan has now been with my team for 28 years. He has helped build my staff and guide my operations, mentored generations of Thune employees, and been a constant source of insight and wisdom. There is no one that I trust more.

Ryan’s knowledge is deep and broad. He has an intuitive understanding of politics and an encyclopedic knowledge of South Dakota, and he is deeply connected to the needs of our State.

I relied on those qualities throughout my career, and not just on those qualities but on his character. Ryan is someone who got into politics for all the right reasons. He is not interested in personal glory. In fact, I think everyone who knows Ryan would agree that there is no one who more persistently dodges the spotlight. He got into politics to serve. He cares about our State. He cares about our country. And he has done everything he can throughout his career to ensure a brighter future for both.

I suppose Ryan is, technically, my employee—for a few more days, at least—but that is not a word I think of when I think of Ryan. I think of words like “ally,” “partner,” and “friend,” and not just to me but to my whole family. Ryan has cared as deeply for the well-being of my wife Kimberley and of our daughters Brittany and Larissa, as he has for mine.

When I think back to long days on the campaign trail when our family was young, I think of Ryan joking with the girls, jollyng them along, and keeping an eye out for when they needed a break.

The long days on the trail used to sometimes wear on my younger daughter Larissa especially, and Ryan used to keep up her spirits by promising her her favorite chicken alfredo at the end of the day. And, of course, being Ryan, he never failed to deliver. In fact, “chicken alfredo” is still a family joke.

I know some of my daughter’s favorite memories are of days spent with Ryan and his wife Carmen, on the campaign trail or at the lodge then run by Ryan’s dad. We used to regularly spend

time there as a family, and the girls loved nothing more: doing puzzles, watching movies, riding on the four-wheelers, hunting, and then all gathering for a good meal at the end of the day.

Ryan always made sure the girls’ favorites were on the menu. Of course, as devoted as Ryan has been to the Thune family, his greatest devotion is to his own family—to Carmen and to their sons Parker and Mitchell. When I decided to run for leader this year, he said that he would do everything he could to help—as he always has—but that he wouldn’t miss his son’s football games. And he hasn’t.

I am fairly sure that he has only missed one of his son’s games in all the time they have played.

While it is hard to think of his not being my chief of staff, I am happy that he will have more time to spend with Carmen and with their boys.

There is so much more that I could say about Ryan. It is hard to give a speech about him without mentioning his love of football. Between his own days as a standout high school and college player and his son’s time playing the game, Ryan brings a wealth of football knowledge to the table.

Then, there is his dry sense of humor and love of a prank or two, his deep faith, his loyalty, and his work ethic. It is hard for me to believe that his time in my office is drawing to a close.

The Apostle Paul says, in 1 Corinthians 4:

It is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.

There is no one who has been more faithful to his trust than Ryan Nelson. I am more grateful than I can ever say for his service, and I pray that God will richly bless him and his family in the new days ahead.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HICKENLOOPER). The Senator from Arizona.

FAREWELL TO THE SENATE

Ms. SINEMA. Mr. President, I stand here today, closing out my time in Congress, and I am reminded of the gravity of this place, the storied history of the Senate, one in which we are all honored to contribute, and the guardrails that serve as the foundation of this body and our democracy. Those guardrails—the Constitution, our oath of office, the rules of the Senate, and the norms of collegiality, integrity, and respect—these are the pillars that have ensured our democracy could endure. They exist for a reason: to cultivate relationships so we can move history forward, to temper the excesses of greed, and to curb the hunger for power.

As our country has become more and more divided and as our politics has devolved into a constant series of all-or-nothing battles, we find ourselves bumping into these guardrails with more frequency. In recent history, both parties have wrestled with the importance of norms and rules, and both par-

ties have viewed these norms and rules as outdated, constraining, or simply obstacles to their short-term victories. Many now blame these guardrails for blocking critical progress instead of recognizing that it is us—our actions, our words, our incivility, and ultimately our unwillingness to compromise—that prevent reasonable solutions from advancing.

When holding political power and feeling the hunger and pressure for an immediate partisan win, it is easy to view the legislative filibuster as a weapon of obstruction. It is tempting to prefer elimination of the filibuster to compromise. It certainly feels faster, easier, and more satisfying—at least in the short term, that is—but there are dangers to choosing short-term victories over the hard and necessary work of building consensus.

To give in to the temptation of the short-term victory means giving in to the chaos caused by the constant ricocheting of laws or it means you labor under an illusion that by eliminating the filibuster, you will maintain political power forever, effectively ending our two-party system. That is a fallacy, and worse, it is scary. One-party rule is not democracy; that is autocracy. That is not the system our forefathers envisioned, and it is not what our country deserves.

The beauty of America is in the push and the pull. Our democracy ensures that no one person, no one party, has too much control. The checks and balances built into our government protect us all. When we work together, listen, compromise, and forge moderate movements forward, we are doing exactly what our forefathers intended: We are crafting solutions with broad support to protect against those wild ricochets of policy changes and the whiplash that could be caused by the overreach of a temporary partisan majority.

Over the past 6 years, I have had the honor of serving with lawmakers on both sides of the aisle who chose to do the hard work and who took the time to build relationships and build that consensus. Together, we accomplished real results for the constituents we serve across this great country.

I am so grateful for the colleagues who took those risks with me. Not many are willing to step out of their comfort zones and risk political capital for the sake of a deal that may not pay off immediately, but to those who did, thank you. And to their staff, thank you for your dedication and your service and for answering random calls from a Senator, even though it was a little unorthodox, when I was just looking to get a deal done and solve a problem or two.

Beginning with my good friend and our former colleague Senator Rob Portman and the other Members of our bipartisan group of 10, including the wonder women of the Senate—Senators SUSAN COLLINS, LISA MURKOWSKI, JEANNE SHAHEEN—and our guys—Senators MITT ROMNEY, JON TESTER, BILL

CASSIDY, MARK WARNER, and JOE MANCHIN—we painstakingly crafted a historic infrastructure law, delivering Americans better broadband, new roads and bridges, cleaner air and water, and more job opportunities.

Later, working with Senators MITT ROMNEY, TAMMY BALDWIN, SUSAN COLLINS, and THOM TILLIS, we passed the Respect for Marriage Act, giving Americans of all backgrounds peace of mind, protecting marriage and religious freedoms.

Teaming up with Senator TODD YOUNG, we saved the Chips and Science law spearheaded by Senators JOHN CORNYN, MARIA CANTWELL, and ROGER WICKER. We saved it from partisan collapse, and now America and Arizona can lead the way in semiconductor manufacturing, and our country is safer and more secure.

Bringing Senators JOHN CORNYN, CHRIS MURPHY, and THOM TILLIS together to tackle the intractable issue of gun violence, we not only saved lives; we improved our country's mental health care.

As everyone involved in each of those deals knows, the results weren't easy. It was a product of months of hard conversations, many tough decisions, many tradeoffs, and constant back-and-forths that pushed us toward those solutions and that progress.

While those are the highlights, we have also witnessed what happens here in this Chamber when we give in to the temptation of taking the easy way out and abandoning those guardrails.

In 2013, judicial nominees weren't confirmed at a fast enough pace for the majority, so one party lowered the 60-vote threshold to a simple majority. And while one political party started it, the other finished it, and now all Federal judges, including Supreme Court nominees, are confirmed with just 51 votes.

Just 9 short years after that, half the country was shocked and disappointed when the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*. But it was no surprise at all. It was a foreseeable, predictable result of eliminating the Senate standard that requires broad bipartisan support for judicial nominees. No longer is the majority party required to nominate mainstream judges who earn support from across the global spectrum. Now it is just a race to get your guys into the spots while you have power. Yet some wonder why public trust in our judiciary is at an alltime low.

Even still, with the consequences of those shortsighted decisions clear for all to see, the clamor to similarly destroy the Senate's process of passing legislation persists. Surely I am not the only one to see the absurdity in all of this.

The political winds have now shifted, and yet the filibuster endures to ensure that the tyranny of the majority does not overrule the rights of the minority, regardless of who sits in the seat of power.

Now, as we approach the 119th Congress, Republicans will control the

Presidency, the Senate, and the House. Sadly, I am already hearing rumors of a hunger to subvert these norms—indeed, to use reconciliation as a tool to circumvent the filibuster. But the end result of that shortsighted action would be the same. As history has shown, abusing or eliminating one tool for short-term gain means the other party will do the same when it regains political power. It is a devolution, and I can't think of anything more dangerous to our dear democracy than the unwillingness to question our own preconceived ideas, to examine our own biases, or to learn from those who think differently from ourselves.

What I have tried to demonstrate in these 6 years is that you don't have to burn down the rules and the norms to achieve what you want. You can just do the hard work. You can build relationships. You can choose to focus on consensus, not division. You can be an independent thinker and put your State, your constituents, and your country ahead of party leaders and activists—because you can get it done.

Over my time in the Senate, I have partnered with more than a few unlikely allies—from the very most progressive to the very most conservative—to break through gridlock and find some solutions. While I can't detail each and every one of those unique relationships here today, I will highlight a few:

My infamous Barbenheimer partner, MIKE LEE—I know we are a bit of an odd couple, but we have gotten a lot done together. My dear friend JAMES LANKFORD, whom I had the honor of sharing the Border Subcommittee with throughout my last 6 years in the Senate and with whom I spent many, many hours working on a solution that, while it isn't law today, perhaps parts will become law one day. Senator RAND PAUL. CYNTHIA LUMMIS. The list goes on and on. And at the very, very dear risk of damaging their careers: CHRIS MURPHY, BRIAN SCHATZ, PATTY MURRAY.

I hope I haven't ruined your careers. (Laughter.)

It has been an honor to work with so many incredible people in the U.S. Senate over these last 6 years.

One thing I learned early on in my very first days—actually, Senator JIM RISCH taught me this—is that we don't have to agree on everything; we just have to agree on some things. It is not worth getting angry about the things with which you disagree; it is better to focus on those areas where you can agree.

So over these last 6 years, I have been grateful to embrace the diversity of opinions in this body, to find solutions that reflect the complexity of our country and our democracy, and to deliver meaningful, measurable results: to bridge divides between Tribes and Federal stakeholders to designate land around the Grand Canyon; to secure historic resources, strengthening western water, safeguarding Arizona fami-

lies, and making sure that all of us throughout this country can grow and thrive for generations to come. We have worked together and cleared the way for historic settlements, land transfer deals, water deals, providing economic certainty, all by listening to one another—not to debate or to rebut but to understand.

It is this very marketplace of the diversity of ideas that makes our country great, the knowledge that with dialogue and competition, we are driven to be more thoughtful and more creative. That is why, despite the challenges facing our country, I remain hopeful.

America is still the freest, most creative and innovative place in the world. We are the birthplace of emerging technologies in medicine, artificial intelligence, energy, and robotics, all revolutionizing our global economy. And the opportunities created by American ingenuity are limitless.

We must not let our politics hold us back, for America is still the shining city on the hill, and it is up to each of us to protect it and to strengthen it. We cannot afford to let political differences stand in the way of what tomorrow may bring. We must hold firm to those guardrails, our shared commitment to the principles that our forefathers built this great country upon, and the ability and the willingness to see the decency in each other, our fellow citizens. We must choose the better angels of our nature.

Speaking of the better angels, over the past 12 years, I have had the honor of working with some incredible people in both the House and the Senate. I don't mean the Senators and Members of Congress I served alongside, although that has been an incredible privilege. I have the deepest respect and gratitude for my current and former colleagues. But I speak now of our staff. From the minority and majority floor staff to the cloakrooms, the Sergeant at Arms, the cafeteria workers, the Parliamentarians, the police officers, the elevator operators, the Architect of the Capitol employees, who never, ever fail to give a kind word in the basement of this building—you all are the unsung heroes of the Capitol. You are here long before we arrive each day. You are here long after we head home for the night. So thank you.

To my own staff, many of whom are here today, from my very first days in the House to my very last days here in the Senate, thank you. You are the backbone of everything that we have delivered for Arizona and for this country. I am so grateful that all of you chose to serve alongside me and help us deliver real results for my beloved State and our country. I could not be more proud of what we accomplished.

As I leave this floor after 6 years in the Senate, I cannot help but continue to think of President Abraham Lincoln's words as he closed his first inaugural address. He called for unity in a deeply divided country, and his words ring true today:

I am loathe to close. We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.

Thank you. I yield the floor.

(Applause, Senators rising.)

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

TRIBUTE TO KYRSTEN SINEMA

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I rise to recognize the truly extraordinary contributions to the U.S. Senate, to her home State of Arizona, and to our country of my friend and colleague Senator KYRSTEN SINEMA.

The qualities that took KYRSTEN from a difficult childhood to college, law school, the Arizona Legislature, and the U.S. Congress are evident to all of us who have had the privilege to work alongside such a remarkable leader. Her strength, courage, and fierce independence are inspiring. Her belief in the power of hard work and the importance of lending a hand to those in need guides her approach to public service.

Most of all, I will never forget her persistence in forging compromises that benefit the American people. It truly is remarkable. KYRSTEN always puts country over party.

I had the privilege of working with KYRSTEN on consequential legislation. She was the negotiator of the Electoral Count Reform and Presidential Transition Improvement Act to ensure the orderly transition of Presidential power. She was the lead Democratic negotiator of the bipartisan infrastructure act, the most significant investment in our infrastructure since the Interstate Highway System in the fifties.

KYRSTEN's work to craft the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act is yet another example. She coauthored the provisions to better prevent domestic abusers from having access to firearms.

She was vital to the success of the Respect for Marriage Act, which defends same-sex marriages while at the same time strengthening and respecting religious liberties.

KYRSTEN also believes in protecting our institutions, and she spoke eloquently today of the importance of the filibuster and made such a compelling case. Standing up to intense pressure, her strong defense of the filibuster preserved the rights of the minority.

I have been here when Republicans have been in the majority and when they have been in the minority. She reminded us that working together across party lines inevitably produces better legislation that is more carefully thought out and drafted.

In a powerful speech that Senator SINEMA gave to a college on a college campus, 2 years ago, she said this:

Imagine what more we could accomplish for our country if, rather than staying in comfortable partisan corners, more leaders

reached out in a genuine desire to craft durable, bipartisan solutions to our country's most difficult challenges.

That is exactly what KYRSTEN SINEMA has done. She is that kind of leader. I thank her for her service, for making such a difference in the U.S. Senate, for her country, for the Senate, and for her home State. And I wish her all the best in her next endeavor.

Thank you, Mr. President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

Mr. ROMNEY. Mr. President, I don't think I have had a better friend in the U.S. Senate than Senator KYRSTEN SINEMA. We are best friends. I would not have predicted that at the outset. By all appearance, we are about as different as we can be. But actually, our roots are very much in the same soil. We have grown up with the kinds of values that have shaped our lives and our public service.

When she first came to the Senate floor, her appearance was quite striking and her personality was, in a similar vein, highly noticeable. And I turned to one of my Senate colleagues, and I said: What do you think about that new Senator from Arizona?

And he said: I can tell you right now, she is going to be trouble.

She obtained the nickname "Trouble" at that point and has carried it ever since, at least in my lexicon.

The truth is, she has been so far from trouble, it is hard to imagine a less appropriate name. Why is that? One, I believe she has been the most productive U.S. Senator in the last 6 years of anyone in this body.

Now, there may be a competition, here and there, from other people, but I don't think so. If you look at all the legislation of significance that has been passed over the last 6 years, she has been critical to it, generally leading it, at least a co-chair, in virtually all of that legislation.

At the same time, she gets along with everybody. I think those are related. There are some Members of my own caucus which I believe are an acquired taste—which I haven't acquired yet—and yet she has, from the outset, been able to make friends with people who are dramatically different in politics but also different in personal style. She likes some very difficult-to-like people. As a result of those friendships, she has been able to get people to come across the aisle, from time to time, when it was critical to get things done.

But if I had to say what has distinguished her most as a Member of this body—not just the fact that she has been the most productive and has been able to get people on both sides of the aisle to work through tough issues and to make the Senate work when we were stalled—what I think sets her apart most is the degree of her principle and character. She is an individual who was raised in a home with principles, went to institutions, including my alma mater, Brigham Young University. She graduated a lot faster than I did and

made it through that university in a short period of time.

But, at one point, my colleagues asked me: Is she going to be able to stand up to the pressure that is going to be placed on her for preserving the institution of the Senate, because there is going to be enormous political pressure rained upon her, and will she be able to resist that pressure? I volunteered at our caucus lunch to go sound out whether she would have the capacity to overcome what was a groundswell on her side of the aisle to take action which would have devastated, in my view, the institution of the Senate.

I approached her and said: KYRSTEN, will you be able to vote no? Will you be able to defend the principle that has made the Senate work over these decades?

And she said: MITT, you ought to know me by now. I was raised with the same values you have. I am a person of principle, and I stand by my principles.

And I have watched her time and again do that very thing.

I spoke with one of the leaders in my party, and I said: How is the Senate going to work without KYRSTEN SINEMA to bridge the divide that often exists between us? And he said: I am not sure it will be able to work without her. How in the world she is not coming back as a United States Senator is one of the great mysteries to me. She should be coming back. We need her in this body. She has been an essential Member of this body.

I will just close with this: I used to love reading books by Louis L'Amour. He writes about the American West. I read them all; I probably still love them. I am getting old enough to forget his earlier books, so I could read them again and still love them. But he had an expression about people that were just really individuals you could count on, rely on, people of character and capacity and principle. He said they had "sand."

And if there is someone who has sand in this body, it is KYRSTEN SINEMA. She is going to continue to make a huge imprint on the United States of America. It has been an honor to serve with her.

I feel we have been blessed by having her in this body.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic whip.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, one of my jobs in this Congress is chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee and considering hundreds of nominees for lifetime appointments to the Federal bench. It has been quite a process. About 80 percent of those who have gone through have been on a bipartisan basis, which is a good thing, but there have been ups and downs.

There is only one Senator who is able to bring two nominees from her State through the committee without the usual waiting periods because she asked on the other side for permission to move forward. They trusted her;

they liked her; and they gave her an exception. In both instances, KYRSTEN SINEMA has delivered for the State of Arizona when it comes to Federal judges on an expedited basis, pure and solely by her personality and charm and ability, I might add.

I also want to say a word, I have invested a large part of my Senate career on the immigration issue, and I thank her for her valiant effort trying to put together a bipartisan effort on that whole immigration issue. I know it was a hard break for you not to be able to do that, and I think you really held the key to bringing together both sides in a way that I have never seen in the Senate.

So thank you for trying, thank you for your effort. Congratulations on your achievements. I wish you the very best.

H.R. 5009

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. President, the National Defense Authorization Act under consideration by the Senate today provides crucial resources to our Armed Forces and our national defense. This year's defense bill invests directly in the men and women in uniform through a significant pay raise for junior enlisted members along with improvements in housing, healthcare, and support for all servicemembers and their families. The bill also provides funding authorization for the many Federal Agencies in Maryland whose missions support our national defense, including resources for critical projects taking place at Fort Meade and Aberdeen Proving Ground, as well as the construction of a contained burn facility at Naval Surface Warfare Center Indian Head, protecting air quality in our local communities. I also worked with my colleagues to expand the scope of the SERVE Act, which I helped pass into law in the FY22 NDAA, by ensuring that high school students applying to attend the Merchant Marine Academy do not lose the opportunity to be nominated because of a vacancy in the office of one of their U.S. Senators or Representative in the U.S. House. The bill also includes the State Department Authorization Act and takes meaningful steps to improve the quality of life for our diplomatic corps and their family members, such as greater flexibility for foreign service families' housing arrangements and fairer pay for locally hired foreign service staff.

There are many important provisions in this legislation, and I support funding a robust national defense that meets the challenges of emerging threats and an increasingly unstable world. Maryland is the proud home of tens of thousands of military personnel and civilians working in the defense sector, as well as critical military installations, and I am glad that this legislation invests over \$200 million in our State's critical assets to address the security challenges of today and tomorrow. Maryland's bases are innovating in fields from cybersecurity to energetics and are conducting critical research to protect our military.

Protecting our national security goes hand-in-hand with advancing U.S. innovation and competitiveness. Maryland has a key role to play in developing the technologies of the future that will keep our Nation at the cutting-edge. Today's bill authorizes the Department of Commerce to utilize up to \$500 million from spectrum auction proceeds for the Regional Technology and Innovation Hubs ("Tech Hubs") program, which was established in the bipartisan CHIPS and Science Act of 2022, to fund designated Tech Hubs and to expand the program. In 2023, the Baltimore Region Tech Hub was designated as one of the 31 inaugural Tech Hubs, and this funding could further its efforts to become a global leader in advancing biotech and equitable artificial intelligence to improve national health outcomes.

While I support important investments in our national defense, I remain concerned about the continued growth in defense spending, especially when the Pentagon as a whole continues to fail independent audits, with only half of the Department's 28 Agencies passing their own individual audits. While I do not believe that across-the-board cuts are the best way to reduce spending, I do believe we need to put our defense dollars to much more strategic use and make the hard choices necessary to right-size our defense spending. As we discuss ways to achieve greater government efficiency, we must apply the same standard to the Department of Defense, which represents over half of total Federal discretionary spending.

Today's bill also includes harmful language unfairly targeting transgender youth and their families. It is not Congress's place to decide what health decisions our military families make; these decisions should be left to servicemembers, their families, and their doctors. It is especially galling that this bill restricts some healthcare and fails to expand access to IVF to help military members struggling with infertility. We should be supporting our military families, not limiting their access to care. Given these concerns, I supported Senator BALDWIN's amendment to remove section 708 entirely, and I am disappointed this language remains in the final bill.

In addition, despite promises to the contrary, the new definition for what is considered an "electronic communications service provider" that was included in the April 2024 reauthorization of section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) was not amended in this bill. This new definition, while intended to clarify the term to account for changing technology, broadly includes "any other service provider who has access to equipment that is being or may be used to transmit or store wire or electronic communications." This overly broad definition, among other reasons, is why I voted against the reauthorization of section 702 of FISA. While I accept the

representations from proponents that this language is not intended to open the door to requiring a slew of service providers to comply with government demands to intercept communications, its plain language is very broad. I, along with other Members who were concerned with this provision, were told by our colleagues that this language would be altered in the final bill. I appreciated that the Senate's version of the Intelligence Authorization Act included revised language addressing this concern, but that provision unfortunately wasn't included in the final NDAA, and I am deeply disappointed with this outcome.

Ensuring that our men and women in uniform have the tools they need to defend the United States is critical. Like any bill, this package isn't perfect, but overall, I believe it will meaningfully advance our national security goals, support our defense workforce, and invest in crucial priorities for Maryland. That being said, I have serious concerns with several important issues within this legislation. We must right-size our defense spending. We must protect our military families and their access to healthcare. And we must protect Americans from the possible misuse of surveillance authorities. I will continue to work with my colleagues in the next Congress to address these serious concerns.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Mississippi.

Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that Senator REED, Senator SCHUMER, and I be allowed to speak for up to 10 minutes each prior to the scheduled rollcall vote.

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

Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, the Senate will soon consider the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2025.

The NDAA is among the most important bills Congress considers each year. It is a primary way of fulfilling our most solemn obligation: our constitutional duty to provide for the common defense.

Congress has come together to pass the NDAA each year for more than six decades—63 years to be precise. Today, we continue our streak of earned success.

In our best moments, we worked out the NDAA in an open and aboveboard process. Here I must say that I am frustrated with the majority leader's decision to thwart that regular order this year. He did not bring the bill to the floor, thus denying Americans the opportunity to witness their elected representatives make decisions in the open on critical national security issues.

Still, we continued in the spirit of honesty and collegiality. The numbers bear that out. The Armed Services Committee considered nearly 3,000 requests submitted by all Senators. We considered 618 amendments at markup, adopting 327 of those amendments. We

then processed over 90 amendments during the informal conference process.

These statistics tell the story of the hard work and professionalism that characterized the construction of this bill.

We are currently experiencing the most dangerous national security moment since World War II. One need only scroll through the headlines summarizing this year's world events. Congress needed to respond in kind. At every possible opportunity, we should be sending a signal of peace through strength of strong deterrence.

Accordingly, the Senate Armed Services Committee took an honest look at growing capability and aggression by our adversaries. We decided that this year was the time to change our course and move our military toward the generational defense investment it deserves.

That vital committee action included an upgrade of \$25 billion for our missile defense, shipbuilding, and counter-drone technology, among other modernization programs—\$25 billion.

This should have been part of the bill today. Regrettably, we missed an opportunity to strengthen the President-elect's hand as he takes office in a precarious world situation.

I hope and expect we will see bipartisan support for much-needed investment early in 2025. And yet as I note what is missing from the bill, I am happy to recognize the immense accomplishments that Members have included in NDAA. We secured a significant 14.5 percent pay raise for our junior enlisted servicemembers, as well as a 4.5 percent increase for all other servicemembers.

We made investments in junior ROTC and recruitment capabilities, both of which will help solve the military's manpower crisis.

This bill stops the Department of Defense from paying for puberty blockers and hormone therapies for children.

We blocked the teaching of critical race theory in military programming, and we froze diversity, equity, and inclusion hiring at the DOD. In fact, we defunded DEI.

The NDAA authorizes critical investments across the board. We accelerated ongoing nuclear deterrence efforts; we moved forward in shipbuilding programs for our destroyers and submarines; finally, we learned from the wars going on around us today, using real world experience, we found ways to strengthen security assistance for frontline allies in the Pacific, the Middle East, and in Europe.

So let me say again, this is a good bill. It is a piece of legislation in which I take pride. As always, I am grateful to have the opportunity to advance our national security. And as I speak of gratitude, I want to extend special thanks to my friend, Chairman JACK REED. I also want to thank his team on the Armed Services Committee, ably led by staff director Liz King.

I thank my Republican and Democratic colleagues on the committee as

well; each made important contributions to the bill. This is especially true of our subcommittee chairs and ranking members, and I will recognize those on my side of the aisle: Senator TOM COTTON, ranking member of Airland; Senator DEB FISCHER, ranking member of Strategic Forces; Senator MIKE ROUNDS, Cybersecurity ranking member; Senator JONI ERNST, Emerging Threats and Capabilities ranking member; Senator RICK SCOTT ranking member of Personnel; and Senator DAN SULIVAN, ranking member of Readiness.

I also want to thank my Armed Services Committee staff. These patriotic individuals burned the midnight oil for months, literally. They delivered a product that this body can be proud of, one that does much to advance American interests.

The American people would be astounded to see how hard and how long these staff members work. And I can hardly mention my staff without thanking my intrepid staff director John Keast. John and his superb team know how to get the job done, and I want to recognize John Keast and his staff by name.

They are Rick Berger, Brendan Gavin, James Mazol, Greg Lilly, Adam Barker, Zach Barnett, Kristina Belcourt, Jack Beyrer, Cody Emerson, Isaac Jalkanen, Kevin Kim, Eric Lofgren, Katie Magnus, Jonathan Moore, Sean O'Keefe, Brad Patout, Katie Romaine, Eric Trager, Adam Trull and Olivia Trusty.

This year's NDAA will further the cause of our national defense, but it cannot do all that we need. This bill—this will be the final vote on this bill. It has passed the House. We have invoked cloture, and this vote will send this bill to the President.

Let this piece of legislation be an exhortation that Congress can no longer leave the job of national defense half finished. We have no choice but to move ahead and to move ahead early next year with a generational investment in our military.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I rise to express my support for the fiscal year 2025 National Defense Authorization Act. I am glad that we will soon be voting on final passage of the bill, and I expect it to pass with strong support.

First, I would like to acknowledge the great work and leadership of my colleague Senator ROGER WICKER; also our colleagues in the House, Chairman MIKE ROGERS and Representative ADAM SMITH. Their partnership has been crucial for the success of this bill. The hallmark of the Senate and House Armed Services Committee has long been bipartisanship, and I am glad that we have continued that tradition for the 64th consecutive year.

I would also like to thank the Members of the Senate and House Armed Services Committees who helped produce this bill, as well as Leader SCHUMER, Leader MCCONNELL, Speaker

JOHNSON, and Leader JEFFRIES, who facilitated a thorough debate and enabled all Members to engage in the process.

We were able to negotiate hundreds of bipartisan provisions between both Chambers over the past 2 months. This is a strong, forward-looking bill that we can all be proud of. This NDAA is laser-focused on the threats we face.

First and foremost, it recognizes the urgent challenge that China poses to our national security. Beijing continues to escalate its aggressive behavior both militarily and economically against the United States and our allies, and we must respond with resolve.

This NDAA makes strong progress in that regard. Among many other efforts, it authorizes \$15.5 billion for the Pacific Deterrence Initiative. It establishes a joint force headquarters in Japan, and it strengthens a number of our regional networks, including AUKUS, the Quad, our trilateral partnership with South Korea and Japan, our alliance with the Philippines, and our partnership with Taiwan. These are momentous accomplishments.

The NDAA also addresses the evolving threats from Russia, Iran, North Korea, and transnational criminal organizations.

It authorizes full funding for the European Deterrence Initiative, provides support for our security cooperation missions with Israel, and improves our counterdrug capabilities in the Western Hemisphere.

Importantly, the bill authorizes record-level investments in key technologies, like hypersonics and artificial intelligence, and significantly increases resources for uncrewed systems and counter-UAS development.

Indeed, our drone capabilities, both defensive and offensive, must be improved quickly as we are seeing every day.

The bill also makes substantial progress toward modernizing our ships, submarines, aircraft, and combat vehicles.

Most importantly, this NDAA provides a historic level of support for our troops and their families. We have included the largest pay raise for junior enlisted servicemembers in decades, expanded eligibility for the Basic Needs Allowance, and authorized increased funding to repair barracks around the world.

Now, I acknowledge the concerns that some of my colleagues have about the bill. A number of Senators hoped to see a higher top line to match the threats we face around the world. Their concern is well-reasoned. However, I would point out that the Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2023, which was demanded by House Republicans, clearly set forth the top-line cap and the budgetary consequences that would result from breaking it. The top line we ultimately negotiated adheres to that law. Nonetheless, I am confident that this bill will provide robust capabilities for the Department.

In addition, I share many of my colleagues' frustrations that the bill includes a provision that would prohibit gender-affirming healthcare for minors in certain circumstances. I voted against this provision in committee, and I disagree strongly with including such a, frankly, I think misguided provision in the Defense bill. We will continue to work to ensure the healthcare rights of all military personnel and their dependencies.

Ultimately, though, we have before us a very strong National Defense Authorization Act. I am confident it will provide the Department of Defense and our military men and women with the resources they need to meet and defeat the national security threats we face.

Now I would like to take an opportunity to recognize the staff who have made this bill possible. Senator WICKER has already pointed out the extraordinary members of his staff and rightfully commended them for their excellent work. I specifically want to recognize, first, the director of the Democratic staff Elizabeth King and the director of the Republican staff John Keast. They did a superb job. They have led their staffs with professionalism and skill.

I would also like to thank members of the Armed Services Committee staff on my side of the aisle: Jody Bennett, Carolyn Chuhta, Jon Clark, Jenny Davis, Jonathan Epstein, Jorie Feldman, Kevin Gates, Creighton Greene, Chad Johnson, Gary Leeling, Maggie McNamara Cooper, Mike Noblet, John Quirk, Andy Scott, Cole Stevens, Meredith Werner, Alison Warner, Isabelle Picciotti, Leah Brewer, Sean Jones, Joe Gallo, Ryan Bates, Sean Jones, Brittany Amador, Sofia Kamali, Noah Sisk, and Zachary Volpe.

Also, I want to thank the floor staff and the leadership. We can't get anything done around here without the floor staff and the leadership.

Thank you, Senator SCHUMER.

Mr. SCHUMER. In that order of importance, in my opinion.

Mr. REED. As the majority leader points out, the floor staff is the most important component of what we do.

You have been part of this process for the last several weeks and have done a remarkable job getting us to this point, and I thank you very much.

Mr. SCHUMER. Thank you.

Mr. REED. Finally, I urge all of my colleagues to support this bill.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HEINRICH). The Democratic leader.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, first, let me commend JACK REED for his great leadership as head of the Armed Services Committee. He is an amazing leader. He knows the military like no one, from his service there. He is a West Point graduate—great New York institution. Sorry they lost. I was on their side. He can explain things. He has just done an amazing job, and he is steadfast and intrepid and on the merits, and everyone respects him. That is

why we have gotten—this was a difficult year to get this bill done. Some thought we wouldn't be able to with the polarization, the late hour, and everything else, but because of this man, we did, and he deserves all of our thanks.

I want to thank Senator WICKER as well. He is a big, strong fighter for the military and did a great job as well.

So I thank both of you. This is the kind of bipartisan way we should do this.

Now, today, for the 64th consecutive year, the Senate passes a bipartisan National Defense Authorization Act to protect the American people and strengthen our security—64th year. Pretty good. Pretty good.

The NDAA is not perfect, but it still makes several important advances Democrats fought for to secure America's national defense and take a strong stand against the Chinese Communist Party. I am particularly glad that the NDAA expands the Tech Hubs Program that I created in the bipartisan Chips and Science Act, along with Senators YOUNG, CANTWELL, and others, and I thank our leaders for understanding the importance of that issue. It will help make tech innovation more achievable in the Midwest, across the country, and—near and dear to me—in Upstate New York.

The NDAA will also strengthen America's leadership on AI by expanding our AI infrastructure within the Department of Defense—something that our bipartisan AI forums from last year stressed was critical, and now we are getting it passed into law.

The NDAA gives our troops a raise, authorizes funding for military families to pay for childcare, extends programs for military spouses to find good-paying jobs, and expands mental health services for parents.

Again, I thank the staffs as well. They are great, professional, and excellent. I thank Senator REED. I thank Ranking Member WICKER and the members of the Armed Services Committee.

This is a good day for the strength of America.

MOTION TO CONCUR WITH AMENDMENT NO. 3317
WITHDRAWN

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the pending motion to concur with amendment No. 3317 be withdrawn.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

VOTE ON MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion to concur.

The yeas and nays were previously ordered.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Ohio (Mr. VANCE).

The result was announced—yeas 85, nays 14, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 325 Leg.]

YEAS—85

Barrasso	Graham	Peters
Bennet	Grassley	Reed
Blackburn	Hagerty	Ricketts
Blumenthal	Hassan	Risch
Boozman	Hawley	Romney
Britt	Heinrich	Rosen
Brown	Hickenlooper	Rounds
Budd	Hirono	Rubio
Cantwell	Hoeven	Schatz
Capito	Hyde-Smith	Schmitt
Cardin	Johnson	Schumer
Carper	Kaine	Scott (FL)
Casey	Kelly	Scott (SC)
Cassidy	Kennedy	Shaheen
Collins	King	Sinema
Coons	Klobuchar	Smith
Cornyn	Lankford	Sullivan
Cortez Masto	Lujan	Tester
Cotton	Lummis	Thune
Cramer	Manchin	Tillis
Crapo	Marshall	Tuberville
Cruz	McConnell	Van Hollen
Daines	Moran	Warner
Duckworth	Mullin	Warnock
Durbin	Murkowski	Whitehouse
Ernst	Murphy	Wicker
Fetterman	Murray	Young
Fischer	Ossoff	
Gillibrand	Padilla	

NAYS—14

Baldwin	Markey	Stabenow
Booker	Merkley	Warren
Braun	Paul	Welch
Kim	Sanders	Wyden
Lee	Schiff	

NOT VOTING—1

Vance

The motion was agreed to.
(Mr. HICKENLOOPER assumed the Chair.)

SOCIAL SECURITY FAIRNESS ACT OF 2023—MOTION TO PROCEED

The PRESIDING OFFICER. (Ms. CORTEZ MASTO). Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of the motion to proceed to H.R. 82, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows.

Motion to proceed to Calendar No. 693, H.R. 82, a bill to amend title II of the Social Security Act to repeal the Government pension offset and windfall elimination provisions.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 1631

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, in a few moments, my friend Senator PETERS will offer legislation that responds to the reports of unusual drone activity, and I thank him for his great work and leadership on this. I am proud to be a cosponsor of this bipartisan drone legislation, which the FBI, the DHS, the FAA, and the DOD—the Department of Defense—all support. The Senate should pass our bill without delay.

Our bill, among other things, explicitly authorizes State and local authorities to conduct drone detection and helps them better coordinate with Federal law enforcement Agencies to keep communities safe.

The people in New York and New Jersey have a lot of questions, and they are not getting good enough answers.