

I look forward to working with Dr. Murthy in his role as Surgeon General.

VOTE EXPLANATION

• Mr. RUBIO. Madam President, due to previous commitments in Florida today, I was unable to cast the following four votes:

Motion to invoke cloture on the nomination of Dr. Vivek Hallegere Murthy to be U.S. Surgeon General, as well as a final vote to confirm him. On both occasions, I would have voted no. I oppose Dr. Murthy's nomination because he has never served in the uniformed services, and one of the primary duties of the Surgeon General is to command the entire Commissioned Corps of uniformed public health officers. I am opposed to his advocacy efforts to weaken the constitutional rights of law-abiding Americans as enshrined in the 2nd Amendment to the Constitution;

Motion to invoke cloture on the nomination of Daniel Santos to be a Member of the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board. I would have voted no; and

Motion to invoke cloture on the nomination of Frank A. Rose to be an Assistant Secretary of State. I would have voted no.●

OMNIBUS APPROPRIATIONS BILL

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, I wish to clarify my understanding of the following report language included with H.R. 83, the Omnibus Appropriations Act:

The Secretary is directed to operate the marketing assistance loan program in a way that encourages redemption and minimizes forfeitures of loan commodities to the Federal government, and enables the orderly marketing of loan commodities throughout the year. Further, the Secretary shall ensure that the marketing assistance loan program remains a viable tool for all producers to use in marketing loan commodities freely and competitively.

The Senate Agriculture Committee has confirmed this language simply intends to encourage USDA to better inform farmers of the status of any marketing loan gains they may receive during a marketing year for eligible commodities.

Furthermore, it was also conveyed by minority staff of the Senate Agriculture Committee that the referenced language in no way seeks to change implementation or enforcement of Section 1603 of the Agricultural Act of 2014.

• Mr. WYDEN. Madam President, I wish to thank Chair MIKULSKI for her tireless work in keeping our government open for another year. I understand Chair MIKULSKI and Ranking Member SHELBY have worked hard on this bill.

In the big picture, this bill continues to honor our commitment to our veterans by allowing advance funding for Veterans Administration accounts so they are locked in a year in advance, ending uncertainty. This bill also pro-

vides desperately needed funds to respond to and prepare for Ebola at its epicenter. This bill keeps faith with the American people who dream of a better life by increasing Pell Grants and making college more affordable. It creates jobs by strengthening our infrastructure, building roads and bridges, to keep the economy moving, and helps develop our economy by investing in research in agriculture, health, and geosciences, among other areas.

I am glad that the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program was fully funded at \$40 million. The program is one of the successes in collaboration and forest management and deserves strong support. The Land and Water Conservation Fund—LWCF—also received sustained funding at the same level as last year. Although this is only one-third of the total authorized for LWCF, I am pleased that the program received consistent funding and I remain hopeful that we will fully fund this program in the future. I am also glad that the National Park Service received \$10 million for the Centennial Challenge. As the National Park Service moves into celebrating its centennial, it is so important that our parks receive the care and attention they need.

However, I also have to voice my disappointment over a number of provisions included in H.R. 83, as well as several provisions that were blocked from inclusion in H.R. 83. Keeping the government running is imperative but it should not come at the cost of stripping the rights of voters, further chipping away at what is left of our eroding campaign finance laws, and rolling back Dodd-Frank protections meant to reduce taxpayer risk from “too-big-to-fail” entities, just to name a few of the objectionable provisions in this bill.

One such provision greatly expands donations to the Republican and Democratic parties by allowing a tenfold increase in the maximum amount that donors may contribute to their political party's various national committees in one election cycle. The donation amounts skyrocket from \$32,400 to \$324,000 per year and ultimately up to a total contribution of \$1.5 million to a party per each 2-year election cycle. At a time when more and more Americans are convinced our political system is rigged toward the rich, this provision only confirms that view.

This bill also contains a provision that will put taxpayers back on the hook for big banks by rolling back the regulatory protections that Congress put into place in response to the financial crisis that devastated our economy in 2008. With the Dodd-Frank Act, Congress sought to ensure that high-stakes gambling on Wall Street by reckless risk takers would not threaten the livelihood of the American taxpayer. As part of this effort, Dodd-Frank included a provision known as the “swaps push out” which requires Federally insured banks to separate out

their riskiest activities into subsidiaries. This way, the risky trading activities that contributed to the meltdown would be separated from the insured banking entity and ensure that banks—not taxpayers—would be responsible if risky trades fail. Today, this spending bill repeals that provision and once again potentially leaves the taxpayer on the hook for Wall Street gambling gone wrong.

I am particularly dismayed that last-minute partisan maneuvering has left America's rural counties in the dust. Two funds that are lifelines for cash-strapped rural counties and school districts struggling to fund basic education, road improvements, law enforcement, and other public services were hurt by this bill. First, House Republican Leadership blocked repeated efforts to include the Secure Rural Schools—SRS—funding program, though it came with offset funding. Instead, they split it from the Payment in Lieu of Taxes program—PILT—funded PILT, and left SRS behind. This is a problem for two distinct reasons. First, PILT is a laudable program for rural counties around the country who host our public lands. But so is SRS, which funds education, roads and critical services in more than 700 counties across the country, and these counties will now be forced to lay off teachers, close libraries and jails, and lay off sheriffs. Second, PILT's formula is connected with SRS funding levels, in fact, and while this bill includes funding for PILT, in the absence of Secure Rural Schools, the funding level for PILT provided in this bill actually reduces PILT payments as compared to last year. We have seen this movie before and it never ends well—a last-minute scheme worked out largely in private to solve a complex problem without the full and public consideration of Congress—leads to mistakes. This is one of those mistakes that will reverberate across rural America. I am disappointed this mistake was not averted simply by providing SRS funding.

Speaking of hampering rural America, there is another provision missing that would help the rural West and one missing that would help the rural West were it included. This package fails to include the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act—a bill I introduced with my colleague Senator CRAPO and 17 additional bipartisan cosponsors, and which was also a strong bipartisan measure in the House. This legislation would have solved the problem of paying for the ever-increasing costs of fighting wildland fires without decimating the agencies' core budgets, where they get the money to pay for their essential work—including the forest restoration work that can help us get ahead of these infernos. Our commonsense solution would have paid for these natural disasters like other natural disasters are paid for, instead of cannibalizing the agencies' budgets.

In addition, this bill interferes with the work that private landowners are