

the administration, whether I am meeting with the President or other officials.

One of the biggest things we can do for our Nation's farmers and ranchers is secure trade deals that will open new markets for American agricultural products.

I support the President's efforts to secure more favorable treatment for American products and his determination to ensure that China honors the trade commitments it has made, but I believe we need to wrap up negotiations on these various agreements we are discussing as quickly as possible. Along with increased market access, farmers and ranchers need certainty about what international markets are going to look like.

I am committed to doing everything I can to advance trade agreements with Japan and with the European Union. I am also doing everything I can to move the United States-Mexico-Canada free-trade agreement through Congress in the near future. This agreement would benefit American agriculture, create jobs, and grow our economy, and we should pass it as soon as possible. We should be wary of any action that might jeopardize this trade agreement and the markets it will open for our producers.

Another issue of concern to farmers and ranchers is the implementation of the 2018 farm bill. Getting a pro-agriculture, pro-farmer bill to the President was one of my top priorities last year, and I am proud of the bill we delivered.

I took ideas and suggestions from South Dakota farmers and ranchers and developed more than 40 proposals aimed at making life better for American agricultural producers. Nearly 20 of my proposals were included in the final bill, including my new short-term, soil-building conservation program for farmers who don't want to tie up ground for 10 years or more in the Conservation Reserve Program.

Now that the farm bill is law, we have to make sure that it is implemented in a timely manner and as Congress intended. I have spent years pushing for an increase in the Conservation Reserve Program's acreage cap, and we finally got a substantial increase in last year's bill.

The Department of Agriculture needs to expedite both general and continual CRP signups to allow farmers to take full advantage of that cap increase. I have been strongly urging the Department to make sure that farmers can sign up in a timely manner. Taking millions of acres of environmentally sensitive land out of crop production in the next year could have a big impact on the farm economy by driving up commodity prices and increasing farmers' profits, but in order for this to happen, we need to make sure that farmers can get their least productive land enrolled in the CRP program and out of crop production by next year.

South Dakota farmers and ranchers are the lifeblood of our State, and I am

committed to doing everything I can to address their needs here in Washington. In addition to working on trade issues and farm bill implementation, I am working with the Department of Agriculture's Risk Management Agency to ensure that our farmers are treated fairly under crop insurance prevent plant and cover crop rules.

I have been working with the Agriculture Department to make certain the recently announced second round of Market Facilitation Program payments do not affect this year's planting decisions. I have also requested that this second round of MFP payments provide equitable assistance to all producers, especially those with failed and damaged crops or who were prevented from planting this year's crops due to adverse weather.

And, as I said, I will continue to push for trade agreements with China and other countries so that our Nation's farmers receive a check from the sale of their products overseas instead of from the Department of Agriculture.

I also recently led a letter to the President in support of Governor Noem's request for a major disaster declaration in South Dakota, and 2 weeks ago I voted in favor of the Additional Supplemental Appropriations Act, which would provide additional disaster funding for States and Territories harmed by last year's hurricanes and wildfires and this year's flooding. The bill also includes \$3 billion to provide assistance for farmers' crop losses from the 2018 and 2019 natural disasters.

Our Nation's farmers and ranchers have a tough, backbreaking job. Instead of air-conditioned and heated offices, they labor in the hot Sun, the cold rain, and the snow. They start their days before the Sun rises and often end them long after the Sun falls. Most Americans never think about the blood, sweat, and tears that have gone into that loaf of bread or that gallon of milk that they grab off the grocery store shelf, but we are all the beneficiaries of the hard work and the dedication of our Nation's farmers and ranchers. It is an honor to represent so many of these hard-working people here in the Senate.

To South Dakota's farmers and ranchers, I want to say I hear you. I know that things have been incredibly tough for you all over the past few years. I know that you are fighting through a lot of challenges, and I am committed to making sure that Washington addresses your priorities, and I will do everything that I can to make sure that you have access to the support and the resources you need to continue feeding our Nation and the world. I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

#### GUN VIOLENCE AWARENESS MONTH

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, this weekend another community was torn apart by gun violence. Once again, politicians do what so many politicians in this body do. They offer thoughts and prayers to the people of Virginia Beach, and then they move on. It is tragic, and it is obscene how routine this has become in our country and how routine that reaction from far too many politicians—from the White House on down—has become.

This month we mark Gun Violence Awareness Month, but in our country every month, every week, and every day we endure senseless gun violence. Congress has ignored for too long the millions of Americans who want reasonable gun safety measures instead of doing the bidding of the gun lobby.

We cannot say we are doing what it takes to keep our country safe until we are finally willing to pass common-sense laws to protect all Americans from gun violence. Many of us have tried.

I supported the original Federal assault weapons ban in 1994. I joined with many of my colleagues to vote to renew it after Sandy Hook. Weapons of war and assault weapons do not belong on our streets.

We have tried to pass legislation to close loopholes in our background check system so that people who buy guns on the internet or at gun shows have to go through the same background checks as law-abiding gun owners who buy their guns at stores in Ohio.

After the tragedy at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, we tried to pass legislation to prevent people on the terrorist watch list from buying guns. If you are too dangerous to get on an airplane—if the government says you can't ride in the plane because you are on the terrorist watch list—it should be too dangerous for you to buy a deadly weapon. But this body is so, so in the pocket of the NRA that they will not even pass legislation like that. The gun lobby, again, stood in the way. We know what happened each and every time. They stood in the way, despite the fact that the laws we are talking about would not undermine the rights of law-abiding gun owners.

I respect the rights of hunters, of collectors, and of responsible law-abiding gun owners. No one is trying to take away their guns. When our students aren't safe in our schools, it is clear that something has to be done. When workers aren't safe on the job, it is clear that we have to do something. When too many Americans don't feel safe going about their daily lives in their communities, we can't sit here and do nothing.

We will not give up on making our country safer. We will keep working until we get weapons of war out of our schools, out of our workplaces, out of our neighborhoods, and out of our

places of worship. Creating change in our country isn't easy. It requires going up against powerful special interests. Few are as powerful as the NRA. Change never starts in Washington. We make progress because of grassroots movements of Americans all across our country demanding action. From Marches for Our Lives to the Women's March, to the activism around the Affordable Care Act, Americans proved again and again and again the power of activism. Mothers and fathers, students and teachers all across this country who stood up and marched for gun safety are the people we sent here to serve, not the special interest gun lobby.

I hope my colleagues will not so easily forget what happened in Virginia Beach and at the Poway synagogue and in Pittsburgh and in Parkland and in Orlando and at the Capital Gazette in Annapolis and in Las Vegas and in Sandy Hook and in our neighborhoods around this country every month, every week, and every day.

#### NOMINATION OF SUSAN COMBS

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I have come to the floor to speak in strong support of the nomination of Ms. Susan Combs, of Texas, to be Assistant Secretary for Policy, Management, and Budget at the Department of the Interior.

This is one of five Assistant Secretary positions at Interior, and, as the title suggests, it is critical to the Department's ability to function. The individual who holds this position is responsible for overseeing everything from the annual budget request to financial management, procurement, and policy and program analysis.

The President's nominee, Susan Combs, is very well qualified. She has previously served as a State representative, as agriculture commissioner, and as comptroller in her home State of Texas. Over the years, Ms. Combs has worked extensively with the Department of the Interior, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which has helped her gain substantive expertise about a range of issues that she will face in her new role.

My only wish is that we could have confirmed Ms. Combs long ago. Instead, due to holds and delays here on the Senate floor, she ultimately had to be reported from the Energy and Natural Resources committee on three separate occasions—in 2017, in 2018, and again this year. She is not controversial. Each time, we reported her with bipartisan support. But she has now been forced to wait for a total of nearly 700 days for confirmation, meaning she will have held up for longer than she will be able to serve, at least in the current term.

I appreciate Ms. Combs' willingness to serve our country. I appreciate her patience over the course of nearly 2 full years, which is testament to just how broken the nominations process had become, and her commitment to see this through. I also thank Leader

McCONNELL for scheduling this vote and encourage every Member of this Chamber to vote in favor of confirmation.

Mr. BROWN. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Combs nomination?

Mr. BROWN. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Tennessee (Mr. ALEXANDER) and the Senator from Kansas (Mr. MORAN).

Further, if present and voting, the Senator from Tennessee (Mr. ALEXANDER) would have voted "yea" and the Senator from Kansas (Mr. MORAN) would have voted "yea."

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from New Jersey (Mr. BOOKER), the Senator from New York (Mrs. GILLIBRAND), the Senator from Massachusetts (Mr. MARKEY), the Senator from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS), and the Senator from Massachusetts (Ms. WARREN) are necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PERDUE). Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote or to change their vote?

The result was announced—yeas 57, nays 36, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 141 Ex.]

#### YEAS—57

Barrasso	Gardner	Paul
Blackburn	Graham	Perdue
Blunt	Grassley	Portman
Boozman	Hawley	Risch
Braun	Hoeven	Roberts
Burr	Hyde-Smith	Romney
Cantwell	Inhofe	Rounds
Capito	Isakson	Rubio
Cassidy	Johnson	Sasse
Collins	Jones	Scott (FL)
Cornyn	Kennedy	Scott (SC)
Cotton	King	Shelby
Cramer	Lankford	Sinema
Crapo	Lee	Sullivan
Cruz	Manchin	Thune
Daines	McConnell	Tillis
Enzi	McSally	Toomey
Ernst	Murkowski	Wicker
Fischer	Murphy	Young

#### NAYS—36

Baldwin	Harris	Rosen
Bennet	Hassan	Schatz
Blumenthal	Heinrich	Schumer
Brown	Hirono	Shaheen
Cardin	Kaine	Smith
Carper	Klobuchar	Stabenow
Casey	Leahy	Tester
Coons	Menendez	Udall
Cortez Masto	Merkley	Van Hollen
Duckworth	Murray	Warner
Durbin	Peters	Whitehouse
Feinstein	Reed	Wyden

#### NOT VOTING—7

Alexander	Markey	Warren
Booker	Moran	
Gillibrand	Sanders	

The nomination was confirmed.

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

The Senator from Louisiana.

Mr. CASSIDY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the remaining votes in this series be 10 minutes in length.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### CLOTURE MOTION

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

The senior assistant bill clerk read as follows:

#### CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Ryan T. Holte, of Ohio, to be a Judge of the United States Court of Federal Claims for a term of fifteen years.

Mitch McConnell, Roy Blunt, Joni Ernst, Steve Daines, Roger F. Wicker, John Thune, Roy Blunt, Thom Tillis, John Kennedy, John Boozman, Pat Roberts, Mike Rounds, John Cornyn, Richard Burr, John Barrasso, Lindsey Graham, Rick Scott.

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

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the nomination of Ryan T. Holte, of Ohio, to be a Judge of the United States Court of Federal Claims for a term of fifteen years, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Tennessee (Mr. ALEXANDER) and the Senator from Kansas (Mr. MORAN).

Further, if present and voting, the Senator from Tennessee (Mr. ALEXANDER) would have voted "yea" and the Senator from Kansas (Mr. MORAN) would have voted "yea."

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from New Jersey (Mr. BOOKER), the Senator from New York (Mrs. GILLIBRAND), the Senator from Massachusetts (Mr. MARKEY), the Senator from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS), and the Senator from Massachusetts (Ms. WARREN) are necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 60, nays 33, as follows: