

prepping me better on the Chicago White Sox. I didn't know it at the time, but Christina is a White Sox fanatic. And during the interviews, she wanted me to steer the conversation away from the Cubs to her team, the Chicago White Sox—what a loyal fan.

Christina hails from Lisle, IL, but her family roots go back to the south side of Chicago, in a neighborhood known as the Back of the Yards—which explains her fierce loyalty to the White Sox. Sports have always played an important role in Christina's life. At Northeastern, she cocaptained the rowing squad and was chosen as the National Scholar Athlete by the Collegiate Rowing Coaches Association. A dean's list honoree and honors program participant, Christina also was a finalist for the Walter Byers Scholarship, the NCAA's highest academic award, recognizing student athletes who promise to be future leaders. Boy, did they get it right. Whatever the next chapter holds for Christina, she will be a leader.

Following Christina's promotion to deputy communications director, I saw her leadership skills flourish. She became a role model and mentor to junior press staff, allowing them to develop professionally just as she had done over the years. It was a pleasure to watch her energy, motivation, and spirit of service rub off on so many others.

In 2013, Christina took on another challenge, enrolling in Georgetown University's master in business administration program. For many, this would distract from their day job, but not Christina. It wasn't uncommon for her to work a full day, go to class for 2 to 3 hours, and be back in the office at 10 p.m., ensuring that nothing was missed. Despite the long hours, juggling work and school, she never missed a beat.

Now, Christina is off to pursue a new adventure. She found herself a great partner in Brad Carroll. Their wedding is in a few months. They are moving back to the Midwest—Detroit will be their new home—closer to her family in the suburbs of Chicago. And I want to thank the whole Mulka family for sharing Christina with our office for the last 10 years—her parents, Diana and Tom, and her younger sister and brother, Stephanie and Nick.

Christina joined this office with a high school diploma, and she is leaving after many years of serving the people of Illinois with a college degree, a graduate degree, and many friends and colleagues who will miss her. I couldn't be happier for her as she moves on to the next chapter in her life with Brad.

I will close with this: While at Northeastern, Christina developed her interest in public service with the help of Michael Dukakis. Recently, at a Northeastern Capitol Hill alumni event, Christina ran into her old mentor. She told him about her engagement and upcoming move to Detroit. His face lit up, and he immediately encouraged her

to run for mayor. I am not surprised. To know Christina Mulka is to expect big things from her. I am proud of the work she has done and will do, but more importantly, I am proud of the person she has become. Congratulations on a job well done, and best of luck.

(At the request of Mr. REID, the following statement was ordered to be printed in the RECORD.)

#### VOTE EXPLANATION

• Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, I was unable to cast a vote on the motion to invoke cloture on the compound motion to go to conference on S. 2943, the National Defense Authorization Act. I missed the vote today because I was attending a funeral. Had I been present, I would have voted in favor of the motion. The final vote on this motion was 90 to 7, and my absence did not impact the outcome.

The National Defense Authorization Act specifies the budget and expenditures of the Department of Defense. This legislation is essential to support our men and women in uniform and to defend our Nation. I voted in favor of this legislation on final passage in the Senate.

Mr. President, I was unable to cast a vote on Senator SHAHEEN's motion to instruct the conferees on S. 2943, the National Defense Authorization Act, NDAA. This motion to instruct would increase the number of visas for the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa, SIV, program. I missed the vote today because I was attending a funeral. Had I been present, I would have voted in favor of the motion. The final vote on this legislation/motion was 84 to 12, and my absence did not impact the outcome.

The Afghan Special Immigrant Visa, SIV, program has served an important role in protecting Afghan allies who risk their safety, as well as the safety of their families, in order to help our troops serving in Afghanistan. This program is supported by two former commanders of U.S. Forces in Afghanistan, retired Generals McChrystal and Campbell, who both acknowledge how crucial the SIV program is to our national security and to our allies.

Mr. President, I was unable to cast a vote on Senator SULLIVAN's motion to instruct conferees on S. 2943, the National Defense Authorization Act. This motion would help implement President Obama's announcement to maintain troops in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as improve the capacity of the NATO Alliance. I missed the vote today because I was attending a funeral. Had I been present, I would have voted in favor of the motion. The final vote on this legislation-motion was 85 to 12, and my absence did not impact the outcome.

I support this motion to instruct conferees because the proposal would strengthen our fight against ISIS and our security partnership with European allies. Last week, President

Obama announced that the United States will maintain a force of approximately 8,400 U.S. military servicemembers in Afghanistan through 2017. These servicemen and women will continue to train and advise Afghan Forces and conduct counterterrorism operations. In order to maintain the progress that global coalition made against the Taliban during Operation Enduring Freedom and to prevent the spread of ISIS in the region, it is essential to authorize these operations.

As we work to fight terrorism abroad by increasing our efforts to build and lead the international coalition against ISIS, we must also confront the threat that Russia poses. That means we need to increase capacity and operational responsiveness of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO. At the NATO Summit in Warsaw this month, President Obama and our allies pledged to increase the capacity of the European Reassurance Initiative. This is essential to deter Russian aggression and ensure that one of our most vital defense alliances is able to respond to evolving threats. The U.S. troops who will participate in the increased rotational presence in Poland represent a necessary response to Russia's increased aggression and provocation in the region.

Mr. President, I was unable to cast a vote on the motion to invoke cloture on H.R. 5293, the fiscal year 2017 Defense Appropriations Act. I missed the vote today because I was attending a funeral. Had I been present, I would have voted against invoking cloture, as I did on July 6, 2016. The final vote on this motion was 55 to 42, and my absence did not impact the outcome.

Congress passed a bipartisan agreement, the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015, which outlines funding levels for 2016 and 2017. Attempts to circumvent the Bipartisan Budget Act are a violation of that agreement.

Mr. President, I was unable to cast a vote on the motion to invoke cloture upon reconsideration on the conference report to accompany H.R. 2577, Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations. I missed the vote today because I was attending a funeral. Had I been present, I would have voted against the motion to invoke cloture, as I did on June 28, 2016. The final vote on this motion today was 52 to 44, and my absence did not impact the outcome.

On May 19, 2016, I voted for the Senate version of the 2017 appropriations legislation to fund military construction and the Department of Veterans Affairs when the Senate passed that bill by an overwhelming majority of 89–8. However, this conference report does not reflect the Senate position and instead slashes \$500 million from our military and our veterans when compared to the funding levels included in the bipartisan Senate-passed bill.

This conference report also includes certain policy riders I do not agree with attached to the funding that the

Senate originally included to combat the Zika virus. The conferees also decided to offset these emergency funds by cutting funding for other important initiatives including funding that is continuing to be used to combat the outbreak of the Ebola virus. When faced with an emergency, whether it is a devastating weather event like a tornado or a hurricane or a public health threat, we come together as Americans to ensure that we are providing the necessary resources to our friends and neighbors in their time of need. Including controversial offsets to the Zika emergency response funding only causes unnecessary delay and prevents assistance from getting to the health care professionals, researchers, and others who need these resources to combat the Zika virus.●

#### NATIONAL BIOENGINEERED FOOD DISCLOSURE STANDARD

Ms. BALDWIN. Mr. President, I would like to engage in a colloquy with the Senator from Michigan, Ms. STABENOW, who serves as the ranking member of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry and is a lead sponsor of the GMO labeling bill, S. 764, approved by the Senate on July 7, 2016. I would like to seek a clarification regarding the intent with regard to a provision in the bill that relates to consistency with the Organic Foods Production Act and related rules and regulations.

Specifically, section 293(f) of the bill states that:

“[t]he Secretary shall consider establishing consistency between—

(1) the national bioengineered food disclosure standard established under this section; and

(2) the Organic Foods Production Act of 1990 (7 U.S.C. 6501 et seq.) and any rules or regulations implementing that Act.”

Given this provision, I would like clarification from my colleague that nothing in this legislation would require USDA to change the Organic Foods Production Act rules or regulations to comport with the new bioengineered food disclosure standard and definitions created by S. 764, as passed by the Senate on July 7, 2016.

Ms. STABENOW. I thank the Senator from Wisconsin for engaging on this issue and seeking clarification on this point. S. 764 amends the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1946. S. 764 does not amend the Organic Foods Production Act or its rules or regulations. More specifically, section 293(f) is only intended to require that USDA consider aligning the rules and regulations of the new GMO disclosure program established under this bill with the rules and regulations of the existing National Organic Program, not the inverse. Again, I will clarify that S.764 does not provide any authority to amend the Organic Foods Production Act or its rules and regulations.

In addition, I would draw to the attention of my colleague another sec-

tion of this bill, section 292(b), which states:

“(b) APPLICATION OF DEFINITION.—The definition of the term ‘bioengineering’ under section 291 shall not affect any other definition, program, rule, or regulation of the Federal Government.”

I believe this provision clarifies that nothing in the new bioengineered food disclosure standard established in this legislation would require USDA to take any action to change the existing Organic Foods Production Act rules and regulations.

#### JUDICIAL NOMINATIONS

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, we have a problem in our court system. We currently have 83 judicial vacancies, and 29 of these are considered judicial emergency vacancies because they have been vacant so long or because the case backlog is so severe. There is a simple reason we have this problem: Senate Republicans refuse to do their job and confirm judicial nominees. This is the case from the Supreme Court, with the outrageous and unprecedented obstruction of Judge Merrick Garland, to the Federal Courts of Appeals, where it took more than a year for Judge Felipe Restrepo to be confirmed to the Third Circuit, down to the District Courts, where the number of vacancies has skyrocketed under Republican leadership.

We haven’t always had this problem, and there is no good reason we have it now. Eight years ago this week, when Democrats controlled the Senate and President Bush was in the White House, there were a total of 39 vacancies in the court system. In the last 2 years of the Bush Presidency, the Senate confirmed 68 judges, compared to just 22 judges confirmed to date in President Obama’s final 2 years.

Pennsylvania currently has five pending judicial nominees. One, Rebecca Haywood, is an excellent nominee for the Third Circuit Court of Appeals. She is extremely well-qualified and deserves timely consideration and a vote. The other four are district court nominees, all distinguished judges nominated with bipartisan support from my colleague Senator TOOMEY. Two of these nominees, Susan Baxter and Marilyn Horan, passed out of the Judiciary Committee with unanimous support by voice vote. They are among the 24 judicial nominees on the Executive Calendar awaiting confirmation votes. These nominees have been vetted and unanimously deemed qualified by the Senate Judiciary Committee, and there is simply no legitimate reason to block their confirmation. They deserve an immediate vote.

Pennsylvania’s other two distinguished district court nominees, John Younge and Robert Colville, are equally qualified to be excellent Federal judges; yet, inexplicably, Senate Republicans have blocked them from even getting a committee vote. So they remain, for no legitimate reason, stuck

with the 26 other judicial nominees awaiting committee consideration.

This extreme level of obstructionism has serious consequences for Americans seeking access to the courthouse. In 2015, 361,689 cases were filed in the U.S. district courts, increasing the total number of pending cases by 3 percent in just a single year to 438,808. In Pennsylvania alone, 16,609 new cases were filed in our three districts in 2015. How are the courts supposed to give full and fair consideration to all of these cases if they are understaffed?

The glacial pace of judicial confirmations is, quite simply, hurting the system of justice in this country. The obstruction is not only preventing access to justice by creating huge backlogs of cases, but is also damaging the integrity of the judiciary by politicizing nominees who should remain independent and nonpartisan. Senate Republicans need to do their job and immediately schedule votes to confirm the pending judicial nominees in Pennsylvania and around the country.

#### EXTENDING ADVANCED ENERGY TAX CREDITS

Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, I wish to enter into a colloquy with the senior Senator from South Carolina in regards to the bipartisan efforts to extend the investment tax credits for advanced energy technologies.

As you know, the investment tax credit incentives for fuel cells and other small alternative-power technologies—including microturbines, combined heat and power, small wind, and thermal energy—in section 48 of the Tax Code expires at the end of this year. These advanced energy technologies are finally transitioning from development to commercialization and are playing a critical role in making energy in this country more resilient, reliable, and less vulnerable to fuel price hikes.

For example, fuel cells, which I know well from being produced in my home State of Delaware, are already being used to provide reliable power to first responders, manufacturers, and retail companies. Fuel cells ensure critical facilities continue to have electricity, even when grid power is unavailable. Fuel cells are U.S. invented, U.S. manufactured, and run on U.S. natural gas. This technology is a win-win for energy security, job growth, and the economy.

As you can imagine, these emerging alternative-energy companies require predictable tax credits beyond the end of 2016 for R&D, capitalization, and cash flow reasons. Delays in extending these tax credits could put hundreds of manufacturing jobs in my State, in my friend from South Carolina’s State, and thousands of jobs across the country at risk.

At the end of last year, it seemed our message about the urgency of extending all of these section 48 tax credits was heard loud and clear. During negotiations on the year-end tax extenders