and our customers shouldn't suffer because of toxic leadership at the highest levels of our Postal Service.

I yield the floor to my colleague from the State of Maine.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

AUTO FOR VETERANS ACT

Ms. COLLINS. Madam President, last week, I was pleased to join my colleague from West Virginia, Senator JOE MANCHIN, in introducing the Advancing Uniform Transportation Opportunities for Veterans Act, better known as the AUTO for Veterans Act. I am pleased that Senators BOOZMAN, HASSAN, and BLUNT have joined as original cosponsors.

Our bill would lessen the financial burden on severely disabled veterans who require special adaptive equipment to drive a motor vehicle. It would do so by increasing access to the Department of Veterans Affairs automobile grant program.

The VA currently provides eligible veterans with a one-time grant of approximately $21,400 to be used to purchase a new or used automobile and necessary adaptive equipment, such as specialized pedals and switches. This grant is often used in conjunction with the VA's special adaptive equipment grants, which help our veterans purchase additional adaptive equipment, such as powered lifts, for example, for an existing automobile to make it safe and feasible for a veteran with disabilities.

Although veterans can receive multiple special adaptive equipment grants over the course of their lives, for some reason they are limited to just a single automobile grant. The current limitation fails to take into account that a veteran is likely to need more than one vehicle in his or her lifetime. In fact, the Department of Transportation reports that, in 2019, the average age of a household vehicle was 11.8 years, and a vehicle that has been modified structurally tends to have a shorter useful life.

According to the VA independent budget prepared by Disabled American Veterans, Paralyzed Veterans of America, and the VFW, the substantial costs of modified vehicles, coupled with inflation, present a financial hardship for many disabled veterans who need to replace their primary mode of transportation once their car or van or truck reaches its lifespan. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates that a new vehicle modified with adaptive equipment will cost anywhere from $20,000 to $80,000. These are significant costs for a veteran with disabilities to incur to replace his or her primary mode of transportation. That is why veterans should be eligible to receive a vehicle grant every 10 years and our legislation, the Collins-Manchin bill, would do just that.

A Maine veteran whom I know well, Neal Williams of Shirley, ME, used a VA automobile grant in 1999 to purchase an adaptive vehicle, a Ford Econoline van. He has also had to purchase several adaptive vehicles since 1999, with each one lasting over 250,000 miles until they simply were no longer roadworthy. His current vehicle now has over 100,000 miles, and soon he will need a new one. He told me that purchasing a new van will cost him well over $50,000, which is more than he paid for his home in rural Maine. This is an enormous burden on our disabled veterans who need to purchase expensive adaptive vehicles in order to drive safely or to drive at all.

Madam President, I feel like I am preaching to the choir here. Our Nation owes our veterans such an enormous debt. It is a debt that truly can never be fully repaid. Let's honor our commitment to our veterans by continuing to support their needs, including the needs of veterans who are disabled and need this adaptive technology for their vehicles long after they have been discharged or retire from Active Duty.

This is a simple bill, but it is a bill that would make such a difference for so many of our disabled veterans who need vehicles with adaptive equipment so that they can drive themselves and drive safely. The AUTO for Veterans Act is an important step that we can take to meet this need and help those who have made so many sacrifices to serve our Nation.

I urge all of my colleagues to join us in helping our Nation's veterans by supporting this bill.

Thank you.

NOMINATION OF MIGUEL A. CARDONA

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. President, after 4 years of Secretary DeVos' efforts to promote greater privatization of our education system and dismantle the civil rights of students, Miguel Cardona is the person we need to restore the promise of America's schools. A former public school teacher who went on to be a leader in the same district where he was once an English learner, Dr. Cardona has demonstrated a lifelong commitment to our public schools and the belief that all children are entitled to a quality education in a safe and nurturing learning environment. He also has a proven track record of effectively responding to the pandemic, helping students overcome the digital divide, and safely reopening schools as the Connecticut Education Commissioner.

The pandemic has upended our education system, disrupting learning and exacerbating inequities. From day one as Secretary of the Department of Education, Dr. Cardona will need to be prepared to meet the challenges facing our students and educators, from addressing learning loss and social, emotional, and mental health to reversing declining higher education enrollment rates and a sky-rocketing affordability crisis. Additionally, as deep disparities continue to shortchange low-income students, students of color, and students with disabilities, Dr. Cardona will be a key partner in working toward closing these funding and educational opportunity gaps.

I am proud to support Dr. Cardona's nomination, and I look forward to working together to at last make good on our promises to fully fund title I and IDEA, to expand access to quality early childhood education and community schools, and to ensure higher education is accessible for everyone.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, I rise today to voice my strong support for Dr. Cardona's nomination to serve as Secretary of Education.

Across the country, students, parents, and educators are in crisis. Every day without an experienced leader at the Department of Education is a day that we are losing precious ground. Back in my home State of Washington, I heard from a mother in Yakima whose children shared one iPhone to learn. I heard from a father of a high school freshman in Spokane, worried about the social and psychological toll the pandemic is taking on his son. I heard from students at the Lummi Nation, trying to focus on remote classes while in multigenerational households on a shared, spotty broadband.

I know there are so many similar stories from people in my State and across the country about how this pandemic is making life harder, the ways it has set back students from where they would be in a typical year, denied them access to critical school resources, deepened longstanding inequities, and so much more.

From early education to higher education, we need to make sure students and their families have the support they need to not only get a high-quality education but to make sure every student can try.

Democrats want to get students safely back in the classrooms for in-person learning as soon as possible. So I am glad the Biden administration put forward clear, science-based, public health guidance schools have long needed. There is no one solution that will ensure safety on its own as our country ramps up vaccine distribution.

Congress has to do its part and pass the American Rescue Plan to provide vital funding for schools—to secure adequate PPE, to reduce class sizes to increase social distancing, to improve ventilation and contract tracing, and to take all the steps they need to do so that they can safely reopen for in-person learning or provide high-quality distance learning if it is not safe in their community to return to the classroom and so that they can assess and address the damage this pandemic has done, especially the way it has deepened inequities that have hurt students of color, students of families with low incomes, students with disabilities, LGBTQ students, women, English learners, students experiencing homelessness, and so much more.

At this moment of crisis, Dr. Cardona is exactly the leader we need at the Department of Education to tackle these challenges. During his confirmation

hearing in the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, he demonstrated beyond a doubt that he has experience, principles, and the perspective that we need in this critical role. That is why Dr. Cardona was voted out of our committee by an overwhelming 17-to-5 margin with broad bipartisan support.

Dr. Cardona will come to the Department as a proven leader who will work with students, parents, caregivers, educators, school administrators, and State, local, and Tribal officials. Just as importantly, he will come to the Department as a former elementary school teacher, an adjunct professor, a principal, assistant superintendent, and former English learner himself who knows we have a responsibility to make sure every single student has access to high-quality public education.

At our hearing, he made clear he will fight against longstanding inequities and for every student, including those who have not had a champion at the Department for the last 4 years. He spoke about his commitment to accomplishing President Biden's goal of safely reopening the majority of our K–8 schools for in-person learning within his first 100 days in office.

He showed he understands the challenge the Department is facing is larger than just seeing schools and students and parents and educators safely through this pandemic. It is making sure we come back stronger and fairer. Accomplishing that means ensuring childcare and early education is available and affordable for every family; ensuring every student can get a high-quality public education no matter where they live or how much money they or their families have; rooting out longstanding inequities from our education system by tackling racism, sexism, ableism, and bigotry head-on; and ensuring that higher education is accessible, affordable, accountable, and safe for every single student.

We have a lot of work to do for our schools and students. We have an excellent candidate to get it done, and we have no time to waste. I urge all of our colleagues who have heard from a parent who wants to get their child back in the classroom safely—I am sure everyone has—to join us and vote to confirm Dr. Cardona as Secretary of Education.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. MURPHY. I ask unanimous consent to complete my remarks before the vote.

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

Mr. MURPHY. Madam President, I come to the floor to echo Chairwoman MURRAY's comments, to suggest and commend to my colleagues the nomination of Miguel Cardona to be the next Secretary of Education.

There is no one better suited for this job in this moment than Miguel Cardona, and I couldn't be more excited on behalf of my constituents, on behalf of the people of Meriden, CT, to be here on the floor to tell you just a little bit about why Miguel Cardona makes so much sense for this moment.

As Senator MURRAY laid it out for us, this is obviously a moment of crisis in American education. Kids have been distance learning or in and out of classroom settings for the last year. We have had so many children fall behind, especially those with learning needs. We have a lot of kids in crisis. For a lot of kids, home is not a safe place. There is trauma today amongst America's children, and our education system is going to have to bear a lot of the brunt of making sure that these kids are taken care of.

We have a crisis in higher education without students in the classroom, without sources of revenue flowing into institutions of higher learning. We need to make sure that we don't lose classroom slots in colleges and universities, which, of course, is the only thing that allows us to be able to see a bright economic future for our country—expanding access to higher education.

Miguel is made for this moment because he knows how important college is. He was the first member of his family to complete college. He knows how important community is. He came right back to his community of Meriden after completing college and went to work serving his community by taking a job teaching fourth grade in Meriden.

He proved early on that he would go above and beyond the call when it came to the needs of his students. He was a teacher at Israel Putnam Elementary School, room 160. If his kids didn't have what they needed, Miguel would reach into his pockets to make sure they had it. One year, he spent $450 of his own money—money that he probably didn't have as a first- or second-year teacher—to make sure every kid in his classroom had a notebook, a writer's handbook, and a box of crayons. One student told the story of a classmate who moved back to Puerto Rico and of Miguel's organizing a packet of letters from all of his classmates to be sent to him so that he could still have a connection back to Meriden.

He was such an amazing teacher that he was promoted just after a few years in the classroom. He was actually Connecticut's youngest principal when, at age 28, he took over Hanover. Soon thereafter, he was promoted to help run the city's school district, and he was promoted again to be the commissioner of education in Connecticut.

It has been his work over the last year that, I think, caught the attention of educational policy leaders and advocates all across the country because Connecticut was one of the first States to reopen its schools. We did it through a consensus-building exercise that Commissioner Cardona led. He brought together students and parents, administrators, teachers, and teachers unions to come up with a plan to safely reopen our schools. Connecticut reopened our schools faster than many people thought we could, ahead of the curve nationally. He was able to do that because consensus building is a skill that Miguel Cardona has been working on for a very long time.

In 2013, one of his jobs, while he was helping to lead the Meriden school system, was to implement a new teacher evaluation system. You know this can always be very, very controversial, a new system evaluating teachers' performances, but he brought everybody to the table and developed a model that became used statewide. His model and his consensus approach became the standard in our State. He is the Secretary of Education we need right now—somebody who has experience in our classrooms, somebody who knows the value of college, especially to first-generation college families, and somebody who knows how to bring people together.

This is an incredibly important moment for America's educational system. We need to maintain and expand our commitment to equity in our K–12 system to make sure that every single kid—no matter the level of income, no matter the ethnic background, no matter the race, no matter if one is disabled or not—gets a quality education.

This is a moment to invest in accountability in higher education and make sure that we are not wasting taxpayer dollars funding programs and degrees that don't work, that may make money for for-profit investors but that don't end up in skill sets that are going to power our economy. Miguel Cardona is the right person to meet this moment. He is whip-smart. He is a consensus builder. He is a passionate advocate for kids and for teachers and for parents. He is the perfect person for this job and for this moment.

Lastly, let me just share with you how I got to know Miguel Cardona, which, maybe, will serve as a final advertisement for his unique qualifications. This was my old congressional district, and Meriden was part and is still part of the Fifth Congressional District. One of the biggest weekends in Meriden has become the Puerto Rican Heritage Festival, but that festival had sort of hit hard times. It was a decade ago when, maybe, only a couple hundred people came to it until the Cardona family took it over. Miguel Cardona and his family took over the Puerto Rican Heritage Festival in Meriden, CT. Today, 6,000 or 7,000 people come to this festival. You can find Miguel Cardona, on that weekend, every hour of each day of the festival, driving around on his golf cart, organizing bus transportation, working on the entertainment acts, and making sure that Meriden is able, on that weekend, to be able to celebrate its Puerto Rican heritage but then to offer something really constructive, really fun, and really empowering for the community.

Even as commissioner of education, it wasn't beyond him or above him to invest in his community in that way. It is, I hope, an indication of who he is and whom he will remain if the Senate chooses to confirm him into this role, as I hope we will do with a big bipartisan vote today.

I yield the floor.

VOTE ON CARDONA NOMINATION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, all postcloture time has expired.

The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Cardona nomination?

Mr. MURPHY. Madam President, 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 legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Tennessee (Mrs. BLACKBURN), the Senator from Missouri (Mr. BLUNT), and the Senator from Kansas (Mr. MORAN).

The result was announced—yeas 64, nays 33, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 68 Ex.]

YEAS—64

Baldwin	Hassan	Portman
Bennet	Heinrich	Reed
Blumenthal	Hickenlooper	Romney
Booker	Hirono	Rosen
Brown	Johnson	Rubio
Burr	Kaine	Sanders
Cantwell	Kelly	Schatz
Capito	King	Schumer
Cardin	Klobuchar	Shaheen
Carper	Leahy	Sinema
Casey	Luján	Smith
Cassidy	Manchin	Stabenow
Collins	Markey	Tester
Coons	McConnell	Tillis
Cornyn	Menendez	Van Hollen
Cortez Masto	Merkley	Warner
Duckworth	Murkowski	Warnock
Durbin	Murphy	Warren
Feinstein	Murray	Whitehouse
Fischer	Ossoff	Wyden
Gillibrand	Padilla	
Grassley	Peters	

NAYS—33

Barrasso	Hawley	Rounds
Boozman	Hoeven	Sasse
Braun	Hyde-Smith	Scott (FL)
Cotton	Inhofe	Scott (SC)
Cramer	Kennedy	Shelby
Crapo	Lankford	Sullivan
Cruz	Lee	Thune
Daines	Lummis	Toomey
Ernst	Marshall	Tuberville
Graham	Paul	Wicker
Hagerty	Risch	Young

NOT VOTING—3

Blackburn	Blunt	Moran

The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HEINRICH). 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.

CLOTURE MOTION

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

The legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on Executive Calendar No. 8, Gina Marie Raimondo, of Rhode Island, to be Secretary of Commerce.

Charles E. Schumer, Sherrod Brown, Sheldon Whitehouse, Benjamin L. Cardin, Robert Menendez, Patrick J. Leahy, Alex Padilla, Jacky Rosen, Richard J. Durbin, Tammy Baldwin, Jack Reed, Chris Van Hollen, Richard Blumenthal, Tim Kaine, Martin Heinrich, Christopher Murphy, Maria Cantwell.

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 Gina Marie Raimondo, of Rhode Island, to be Secretary of Commerce, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Tennessee (Mrs. BLACKBURN).

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any Senators in the Chamber wishing to vote or change their vote?

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 84, nays 15, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 69 Ex.]

YEAS—84

Baldwin	Grassley	Paul
Bennet	Hassan	Peters
Blumenthal	Heinrich	Portman
Blunt	Hickenlooper	Reed
Booker	Hirono	Risch
Boozman	Hyde-Smith	Romney
Braun	Inhofe	Rosen
Brown	Johnson	Rounds
Burr	Kaine	Sanders
Cantwell	Kelly	Schatz
Capito	King	Schumer
Cardin	Klobuchar	Shaheen
Carper	Lankford	Sinema
Casey	Leahy	Smith
Cassidy	Lee	Stabenow
Collins	Luján	Sullivan
Coons	Manchin	Tester
Cornyn	Markey	Thune
Cortez Masto	Marshall	Tillis
Crapo	McConnell	Toomey
Daines	Menendez	Van Hollen
Duckworth	Merkley	Warner
Durbin	Moran	Warnock
Ernst	Murkowski	Warren
Feinstein	Murphy	Whitehouse
Fischer	Murray	Wicker
Gillibrand	Ossoff	Wyden
Graham	Padilla	Young

NAYS—15

Barrasso	Hawley	Sasse
Cotton	Hoeven	Scott (FL)
Cramer	Kennedy	Scott (SC)
Cruz	Lummis	Shelby
Hagerty	Rubio	Tuberville

NOT VOTING—1

Blackburn

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The yeas are 84, the nays are 15.

The motion is agreed to.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The bill clerk read the nomination of Gina Marie Raimondo, of Rhode Island, to be Secretary of Commerce.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia.

HONORING THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF JOHN ROBERT LEWIS AND COMMENDING JOHN ROBERT LEWIS FOR HIS TOWERING ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE NONVIOLENT STRUGGLE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS

Mr. OSSOFF. Mr. President, as if in legislative Session, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of S. Res. 82, submitted earlier today.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the resolution by title.

The bill clerk read as follows:

A resolution (S. Res. 82) honoring the life and legacy of John Robert Lewis and commending John Robert Lewis for his towering achievements in the nonviolent struggle for civil rights.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection to proceeding to the measure?

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the resolution.

Mr. OSSOFF. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the resolution be agreed to, that the preamble be agreed to, and that the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The resolution (S. Res. 82) was agreed to.

The preamble was agreed to.

(The resolution, with its preamble, is printed in today's RECORD under ''Submitted Resolutions.'')

Mr. OSSOFF. I yield.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

FEDERAL FUNDING

Ms. ERNST. Mr. President, from the streets of Portland and Seattle to right here in our Nation's Capital, lawlessness has ensued all too often across our Nation over the past year. I have consistently called it what it is—anarchy. And, folks, we need to be absolutely clear on this: Anarchy cannot be tolerated in our Nation.

The mayhem that we have seen over the last year has put our families, our communities, and our law enforcement in danger, and tragically it has led to death and destruction.

In what will probably come as no shock to the American people, a nonpartisan watchdog organization found that the Federal Government has spent more than $14 billion of our taxpayer money, our hard-earned dollars, on Federal contracts and grants in five major cities where civil unrest, also known as anarchy, goes unchecked and police are unable to do their jobs—14