missed around here, I am happy he has found an exciting new opportunity. It has been said that lightning never strikes twice, but as in so many other things, Dave breaks the mold on this one as well. In fact, he was struck by lightning not once, not twice, but three times while on a rock climbing trip, but that hasn't discouraged him, and I, for one, am grateful for that commitment and tenacity.

My thanks also goes out to his wife Sandra, his son Evan, and his daughter Lauren for allowing me to keep their husband and father here many times late into the evening.

I know I speak for a lot of people when I say that Dave will be deeply missed, but he should know he goes forward with respect and the gratitude of many and the warmest wishes for all his future endeavors.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HOEVEN). The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Ms. HEITKAMP. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to engage in a colloquy with my great friend, Senator HEINRICH of New Mexico.

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

OIL EXPORT BAN

Ms. HEITKAMP. Mr. President, we rise today to talk about an issue we started talking about a year ago; that is, the oil export ban. What we were going to do is not only educate the public about this 40-year-old ban but also educate those colleagues in our caucus who do not have the level of experience that we have with the oil industry. I can tell you that it has been a journey.

I want to make this point because I always make this point when I talk about it: Fundamentally ignore all the other policy arguments. There is absolutely no reason in the world to restrict the export of a commodity that we produce in this country. Commodities traditionally trade on a global market. If we are not going to distort the market, they need to find their market. This is a 40-year-old ban that didn't make sense when they did it, and it made even less sense in an environment where States such as North Dakota were on the path to produce over 2 million barrels a day of light sweet crude from our shale formations.

At the end of the day, when we look at the effort and we look at the analysis, occasionally a good argument wins the day. I think that is what we are seeing as we are on the verge of this Congress—signed by the President—lifting a 40-year-old ban on the exportation of crude oil that is produced in this country.

I wish to make a couple of quick points about it on a policy matter.

First, many people say: Well, wouldn't that jeopardize our energy independence?

Closing off the market and making sure our commodities can't find a market encourages investment in other places than the United States of America, so it is counterintuitive.

They say: Wouldn't this actually raise our gasoline prices?

We had study after study that concluded one simple thing: Either it would have no effect or it would have a downward effect since gasoline prices were measured against Brent, which is the international pricing benchmark. When we look at what is good for consumers, what is good for jobs in States such as North Dakota and New Mexico, what is good for national security, and what is good for our allies—I spent a lot of time last year talking to people from the EU and talking to people in Eastern Europe about the significance of energy security and knowing that even though they didn't have a source of energy, they could buy energy from a country such as the United States of America.

I frequently referred to our oil as ''democracy oil.'' It is not oil produced by countries that we are at odds with, that we disagree with; this is oil that is absolutely an opportunity to use that soft power, to use that ability to export. That idea was shared not only by foreign policy experts from conservative think tanks but many well-recognized Democratic foreign policy experts. We are at the point of actually getting this done, and that is the good news.

We also know that frequently in the Congress a good idea doesn't happen in isolation; it happens when we are willing to sit down and go to negotiations. That is where my great friend from New Mexico came in, taking a look at whether there was an opportunity to actually get a deal done and what we could do to make this actually happen. So we partnered up pretty early in making the pitch together.

I wish to ask my friend Senator HEINRICH, would you please talk about the piece of this deal that supports the development of renewables and what that means for your State, which is also an oil-producing State, and what that means for jobs not only in a State such as mine, which has a large manufacturing facility that manufactures blades—plus, we think we are the Saudi Arabia of wind. I know there are probably 20 States that say that. In North Dakota, it is true. I am sure the Presiding Officer would agree that we are, in fact, the Saudi Arabia of wind.

I ask Senator HEINRICH, what does this mean for you in terms of renewables?

Mr. HEINRICH. I thank Senator HEITKAMP for her leadership on this issue.

I thank the Presiding Officer for his contributions to allow us to reach what has been an incredible example of a bipartisan, balanced energy package, something we haven't seen for quite a while.

I wish to recognize the many hours that Senator HEITKAMP spent in meetings of every complexion under the sun, educating our colleagues who don't have oil- and gas-producing basins, as we do, on the intricacies of what does this mean for price pressures, what does this mean for consumers, are the things that you intuitively might think actually not what you would see in the actual marketplace. There was meeting after meeting with the renewable energy associations, in the solar field, in the wind field, and with colleagues on both sides of the aisle. There were people such as the Presiding Officer or the energy committee chairperson, Senator MURKOWSKI of Alaska.

I thank the Senator for that work, and it has really been a pleasure to work with her in that effort.

This is a very big step for New Mexico. Obviously, at any time when oil is trading under $50 a barrel in a State where we have two big basins—the Permian Basin in the Southeast and the San Juan Basin in the Northwest, not to mention production in the Raton Basin that is coming on—it is a very big hit, not only to our job situation and to the families who rely on those jobs, but also to our public schools in the State of New Mexico. This opportunity to relax the oil export ban means something concrete for that industry and for those jobs in New Mexico. It also means something very concrete for the future of jobs in New Mexico as well.

The incremental work on the renewable side is one of the single biggest pieces of policy on clean energy that I have seen in my adult lifetime.

We are looking at two markets that have grown rapidly and that have produced, in solar's case, 200,000 jobs in the last few years. That would have taken an enormous hit if we would have allowed those incentives to go away. As a result of this package, we are likely going to see another 140,000 jobs in solar alone.

The incremental impact on the carbon front—the extension will offset 100 million metric tons of carbon dioxide annually. That is like 26 coal-fired powerplants.

These things impact small businesses across my State as well as across the country. But if you look at a small State such as New Mexico with 2 million people, we have close to 100 solar companies employing 1,600 people in these new fields, and it is growing rapidly. We have seen 358 megawatts of solar energy installed. We have 812 megawatts of wind energy currently installed and another 300 in the pipeline right now, with another 300,000 to 500,000 jobs associated with that in 2014 alone.

This is the single biggest piece of predictability within renewable energy

that we have seen in a very long time. We have learned the reality that one-plus-one-plus-one does not equal three. When you add a tax incentive one year, you take it away, and you add it back, the sum of those is not nearly as robust as when you have predictability over a period of time. That is what this does for our energy industries across the board.

I thank the Senator for all of her work on it. I wish to ask the Senator a question, in particular. This agreement obviously didn't happen overnight. I know we have been meeting for well over a year, and you have been thinking about it even longer than that.

I ask Senator HEITKAMP, would you talk a little bit about why you are so passionate about this issue and what specifically it means for the people of North Dakota.

Ms. HEITKAMP. Well, it wasn't that long ago that North Dakota became the second largest oil-producing State in the country. We are challenged in North Dakota because we don't have the mature infrastructure of Texas and the basin. We are challenged with transportation. But the amazing thing is, we produce the best crude in the world, light sweet crude. The problem with light sweet crude over the years is it wasn't the dominant crude that was produced in the United States. As a result, the refineries are basically geared up to refine heavy crudes. They are geared up to basically import crude from places such as Venezuela and some of the heavier crudes. That is what the refiners can do. And a lot of refineries that can handle light sweet crude are not on a pipeline system. So on top of producing this great-quality crude, we have additional transportation costs and we were seeing deductions.

When you add to that the challenge of producing something that could be so important for energy security in our country but also national security and helping our allies with their energy security in Europe—when you add the challenge of that product not being able to find a market, what that means is that this energy renaissance for the country that we are so proud that we participated in begins to basically dim. This idea that we can be energy independent starts dimming, and we start seeing people cut back on investment, and we start seeing people reduce their plans to invest in this country when they know they can go offshore and actually market their product.

So the bottom line is that this isn't going to raise oil prices overnight. Those folks who may have a prediction that this is going to result in a dramatic increase—I don't think they really understand the oil markets and what is happening right now. But what it does do is it takes a commodity that should always have had the opportunity to find its market and it applies free enterprise system principles and it applies capitalistic principles. When you produce something in this country, you ought to be able to find your market.

People say: It is remarkable you have been able to get this far. It tells the American public that the Congress can function if people come willing to make a deal.

I see my friend from New Jersey, who a lot of people would not have suspected played such an important role in our discussions and had such a willingness to learn. He impressed a lot of our friends in the oil industry with his rapid understanding of economics. I tried to tell them he was smart. They occasionally get fooled by press releases as opposed to actually meeting folks.

I think another great thing that has come as a result of this is certainly a willingness of the Democratic caucus to listen to this argument. There has been a building of relationships that I hope will allow us to have a reasoned debate about oil energy development in this country going into the future.

I say to Senator HEINRICH, I am going to ask you to close with an explanation of, when you look into the future, how critical this is to your school system and what you see in terms of the future of the industry as a result of this change in your State.

Mr. HEINRICH. I thank again Senator HEITKAMP. I just wish to say how important this is for the State of New Mexico, in part from the perspective that our economy has been incredibly challenged in the last few years. Coming out of the recessions, we have not seen the growth that many of our neighbors have seen.

One of the places where we have seen growth has been the solar industry. For the people working in the solar industry today, those are new jobs. Having certainty for our energy sector, which runs the gamut from the oil and gas basins that I talked about, to the incredible growth in solar energy, to the fact that we have a very strong wind component in the State—basically, the eastern side of our State is very much in the same wind-mapping zone as the Panhandle of Texas. This means predictability. It means jobs. It is one of the single biggest economic things that we could have done for the State of New Mexico since I have been in the Senate.

I think we have a lot to be proud of. We were also able to extend the Land and Water Conservation Fund, something that has been working for this Nation, across the country, for 50 years. That is very much tied to our leasing of oil and gas offshore.

Certainly, my colleague Senator UDALL knows that program inside and out. He has been an incredible champion for it. His father made it happen when he was Secretary of the Interior.

I conclude my remarks and thank you again for allowing me to engage in this colloquy. I thank our colleagues for being able to work on a bipartisan basis.

Ms. HEITKAMP. Mr. President, I know that we are up against the clock, and I promised my friend from the South that I would, in fact, conclude, but I saw someone I worked very closely with on this issue come onto the floor. I extend my great appreciation for the hours we spent together talking about this issue and the hours we spent with the senior Senator from Alaska, basically educating as the first step and then finally delivering a product that we can all be proud of. I extend my congratulations and my appreciation to the chairwoman of the energy committee for the work that she did and for her belief, along with my belief, that we could in fact get this across the finish line. I don't think anyone at any point, other than her and me, actually believed we could get it done this year. It is pretty remarkable that we did.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I thank not only the Senator from North Dakota but many others for the effort that has been made to get us to this point where we will soon have the opportunity to vote to lift a 40-year-old ban on export.

We are the only Nation in the world that produces oil that limits our ability to export that. It is a policy that 40 years ago may have made sense at that time, but it is so outdated. It is so past time that we recognize we are that energy superpower, and, as that energy superpower, act like one.

The Senator from North Dakota mentioned there were very few people initially who thought this could be done. In January of 2014, I gave a speech to the Brookings Institute, and I called for repeal of the ban. At that time, I was the first policymaker who really got out front and said what a lot were thinking but were thinking maybe this was way too soon.

A couple months later, I had the opportunity to lay out a framework or a pathway forward—a pathway that said we are not going to lay down legislation right now; we are going to build the case, and 2014 is going to be the year of the report. There were some dozen reports—very considered, substantive reports—that came out and said: This isn't going to increase the price of oil. This is going to be good for jobs and our economy. This is going to be great, important, and vital for our role around the world to help our allies and to help others who would like to rely on our energy resources rather than on Russia or Iran.

So that path was set. I think it set the table for where we are now, in 2015. We were able to introduce legislation, to have it heard by our committee, to move the bill out of committee, to see the House do the same and move it across the floor, and to get us then to the point where we could consider it in various legislative vehicles. It didn't quite work with NDAA. It didn't quite work with the Iran deal. It didn't quite work with the transportation bill. But now we are here with this omnibus package.

Again, recognizing that this is so substantive from a domestic policy perspective is something that I think the occupant of the Chair, as well as Senator HEITKAMP, as well as Senator HEINRICH from New Mexico—all producing States—can recognize the enormous gains. But I think we also need to consider the very real, very substantive difference that we will make when as an energy superpower are able to share our resources—whether it is oil, whether it is natural gas—to help whether it is our friends in Europe, whether it is Poland, which is 95-percent reliant on Russia for its oil, whether it is South Korea or Japan.

Alaska has been able to export its oil since 1996, when we received basically a waiver. We have seen the benefits that oil exports bring. Our State has had the ability to do so. Why should the rest of the country not see that benefit?

Again, since 1996, with our oil, we have exported our natural gas from Cook Inlet, and it has actually been the longest term export contract that this country has seen as far as natural gas. We have seen the benefit. We know that when we are the export trading partner, we as a nation benefit from it. Whether it is jobs, revenues, growth or prosperity, this is good, this is a win, and it is very important. Again, I appreciate the efforts of so many that have brought us to the place that we are today.

I think we acknowledge that, yes, there are heavy legislative lifts around here. But I think we work constructively to build the case, to try to depoliticize to the extent possible, to avoid the partisanship that can come into specific issues, by saying: Let's examine this from a policy perspective. Does it make sense to lift sanctions on Iran for their oil and keep in place a ban on our U.S. oil producers, effectively sanctioning U.S. oil producers? I think we got a lot of colleagues when we raised that question to them: Think about it from a policy perspective and whether it is good or outdated. This one is outdated, and it was time to go.

So I thank Senator HEITKAMP for yielding for just a moment and allowing me to speak very briefly to what I think is very significant for this country, both domestically and internationally. Let's let the United States of America be that energy superpower that we are.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Mississippi.

PASSENGER RAIL SYSTEM

Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, I rise first to commend the three Senators who have just completed their colloquy. They have been discussing an accomplishment this year that results from bipartisan efforts. I too would like to speak about a bipartisan effort that I have been engaged in with the Senator from New Jersey, who joins me on the floor today, which would be the passenger rail portion of the Transportation bill which the President has already signed.

So I ask unanimous consent that the Senator from New Jersey and I be allowed to engage in a colloquy concerning this legislation.

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

Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, I am so pleased to have worked with Senator BOOKER on the rail portion and on the entire Transportation bill. I am pleased it has passed the House and Senate and been signed into law by the President—a major accomplishment.

I would note that predecessors of ours from our States were part of the last major effort for a comprehensive rail bill. My predecessor, Trent Lott, along with the late Frank Lautenberg of New Jersey, were the authors of the Passenger Rail Reform and Investment Act, which was introduced in 2007, and much work on it was done before Senator Lott resigned at the end of 2007. It was actually passed in 2008. So I think it is quite appropriate that Senator BOOKER and I would be allowed to follow in their footsteps and participate in this legislation, which deals with making our rail system safer in the United States and more efficient and puts greater attention on planning and efficiency. I know that Senator BOOKER shares my enthusiasm for the accomplishment that this Congress has made in that regard.

Mr. BOOKER. Mr. President, I would first say thank you. I do share that enthusiasm. I appreciate the way the Senator began his remarks. This is a tradition of bipartisanship that goes beyond the Senator and me, but I want to say this about Senator WICKER because I am new to the Senate. I am here about 25 months now. But this last full year when I have been working on this passenger rail bill as the ranking member of that subcommittee, I have found him to be tough, to be balanced, to be strong and thoughtful about what is best for America, thinking about our country first, thinking about his great State, our country, how we are going to create jobs and how we are going to improve in an increasingly globally competitive environment. It has been an honor to work with him. I think what we accomplished together is extraordinary, and it is going to have a profound impact.

This bill makes critical investments in our rail infrastructure. It makes important safety reforms, and it helps to move our country forward, literally and figuratively.

Rail efficiency and safety is critical to our national success. It is a priority. This idea of protecting Americans is a priority of both Senator WICKER and me, and it is critical that we have rail safety, especially as we go forward. I have seen, unfortunately, in the past some very challenging accidents.

For me and my constituents in New Jersey, rail is incredibly important. We are part of the Northeast Corridor, which is probably the busiest rail corridor in the country. It is one of the most productive regions of our Nation, and, unfortunately, it has an inadequate infrastructure. More people use rail than fly in that corridor. The challenge is that the corridor itself has become a choke hold right around the New York-New Jersey region. One of the reasons is because the Hudson River crossing—the busiest river crossing in the United States of America—has tunnels that are inadequate and ineffective at this point. These tunnels were built back in 1910. Nobody in this body remembers those years, personally, but the tunnel began construction 1 year after the famous flights at Kitty Hawk were just getting off the ground in air travel. These tunnels were completed less than a decade before the start of the First World War.

So today, these tunnels are in horrible condition. The whole region is suffering as a result of it. I hear time and again from constituents about the urgency for investment in rail. Residents now, because of the delays, because of the challenges with New Jersey Transit, have to leave earlier for work, miss time with their families, miss dropping off their kids at school, lose out on productivity. The productivity losses in this region amount to hundreds of millions of dollars. So this is an urgent cause for us. That is why I was so grateful, really celebrating the fact that we have a partnership in the Senate that can actually get something done when it comes to rail travel.

For us in this region, we know the challenges. We have tunnels under the Hudson River that are clearly in a state of significant decay and disrepair that some engineers say have less than a decade on them. One single day of missing access to those tunnels for that artery could hurt our regional economy by about $100 million for one single day in wasted productivity.

So this spring Senator WICKER and I joined together to introduce this legislation, the Railroad Enhancement and Efficiency Act. That bill is making critical investments. The bill very critically would allow the Northeast Corridor to reinvest its profits into that region, which is going to be significant for helping to give us a 21st century competitive infrastructure. That is something I cannot understate the urgency of. The bill adds critical safety provisions that will help with positive train control.

Earlier, as was mentioned by Senator WICKER, the Chamber passed the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act, or FAST Act, a 5-year, $305 billion transportation compromise bill that, for the first time, includes the rail provisions that I am proud to say were in our Railroad Enhancement and Efficiency Act.

So this bill that passed the Senate will enable critical projects, such as the Hudson Tunnel plan. It is going to achieve incredible safety for our communities. I just want to again thank