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COMMITTEES:  
SPECIAL COMMITTEE  
ON AGING,  
CHAIRMAN  
APPROPRIATIONS  
HEALTH, EDUCATION,  
LABOR, AND PENSIONS  
SELECT COMMITTEE  
ON INTELLIGENCE

Dear Friends,

As 2019 ends and 2020 begins, I am pleased to report that Congress made progress on a number of issues important to Maine families despite the polarization in our country.

In a major win for surviving military and retiree spouses to whom we are deeply indebted, I was proud to co-lead the repeal of what is often referred to as the “Military Widow’s Tax,” an unfair offset of survivor benefits that has prevented as many as 67,000 surviving spouses—including more than 260 from Maine—from receiving the full benefits they deserve.

The high cost of health care and prescription drugs continues to be a top issue for families and seniors. To provide continued relief for more lower- and middle-income individuals, I led the charge to extend for another two years the medical expense tax deduction that I included in the 2017 tax law. Without this extension, nearly 20,000 Mainers and millions of Americans with high medical expenses, including many with preexisting conditions, would have faced an increased tax burden. In other good news, the CREATES Act I cosponsored became law. It will prevent pharmaceutical companies from blocking access to a sufficient supply of brand-name drugs needed for the studies that allow less expensive alternatives to enter the marketplace.

Improving people’s health and wellbeing remains my priority. On a per capita basis, Maine has the highest incidence of Lyme disease in the country. In August, I held a Senate hearing at the University of Maine’s Tick Lab on this growing public health crisis. A comprehensive public health strategy to combat this epidemic is needed, and the new law I authored will do just that.

In addition, I helped champion another \$2.6 billion increase for the National Institutes of Health, our nation’s premiere biomedical research institution, including significant boosts for Alzheimer’s disease and diabetes research. Last year, NIH funded more than \$111 million for research at 14 Maine institutions.

To help prepare the graduates of Maine Maritime Academy, I secured \$300 million for a new training ship, which will ensure rigorous instruction for MMA students for decades to come.

Significant federal funding was approved for work at Bath Iron Works and Portsmouth Naval Shipyard. Funding appropriated by Congress will pay for three new destroyers, make a down payment on an additional ship, and finance infrastructure improvements at PNSY.

As Chairman of the Transportation and Housing Appropriations Subcommittee, I have led efforts to improve our nation’s crumbling infrastructure and ensure that Maine’s housing needs are addressed. For Maine’s roads, bridges, airports, and seaports, tens of millions in federal funding will help make urgently needed upgrades and improve safety. Funding will also support housing assistance to low-income families and seniors and aid communities in reducing homelessness among our youth. The Community Development Block Grant program will assist numerous towns and cities in our State.

The Aging Committee I chair has continued its focus on financial security for our seniors. A new law I authored will make it easier for small businesses to offer retirement plans to their employees. Our Aging Committee’s Fraud Hotline fielded more than 1,200 calls this year. Congress passed a new law to crack down on robocallers who are often the perpetrators of these scams. And a new law I authored will expand the IRS’ Identity Protection PIN program nationwide to prevent identity theft tax refund fraud.

At the end of 2019, I cast my 7,262nd consecutive vote. In the New Year, I will keep working to deliver bipartisan solutions to the challenges facing Maine and the nation. If ever I can be of assistance to you, please contact one of my state offices or visit my website at [www.collins.senate.gov](http://www.collins.senate.gov). May 2020 be a good year for you, your family, your community, and our state.

Sincerely,



Susan M. Collins  
United States Senator