



U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON  
COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND  
TRANSPORTATION

---

---

ACTIVITY REPORT

A SOUTH DAKOTA PERSPECTIVE FROM  
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN JOHN THUNE

---

---

FEBRUARY 2018



MR. WICKER

MR. THUNE  
CHAIRMAN

# A MESSAGE FROM CHAIRMAN THUNE

February 2018

Since 2004, I have had the privilege of representing South Dakotans in the U.S. Senate. For over a decade, my service has included the responsibility, and opportunity to serve on the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation. Over the past three years, I have also had the honor of serving as chairman.

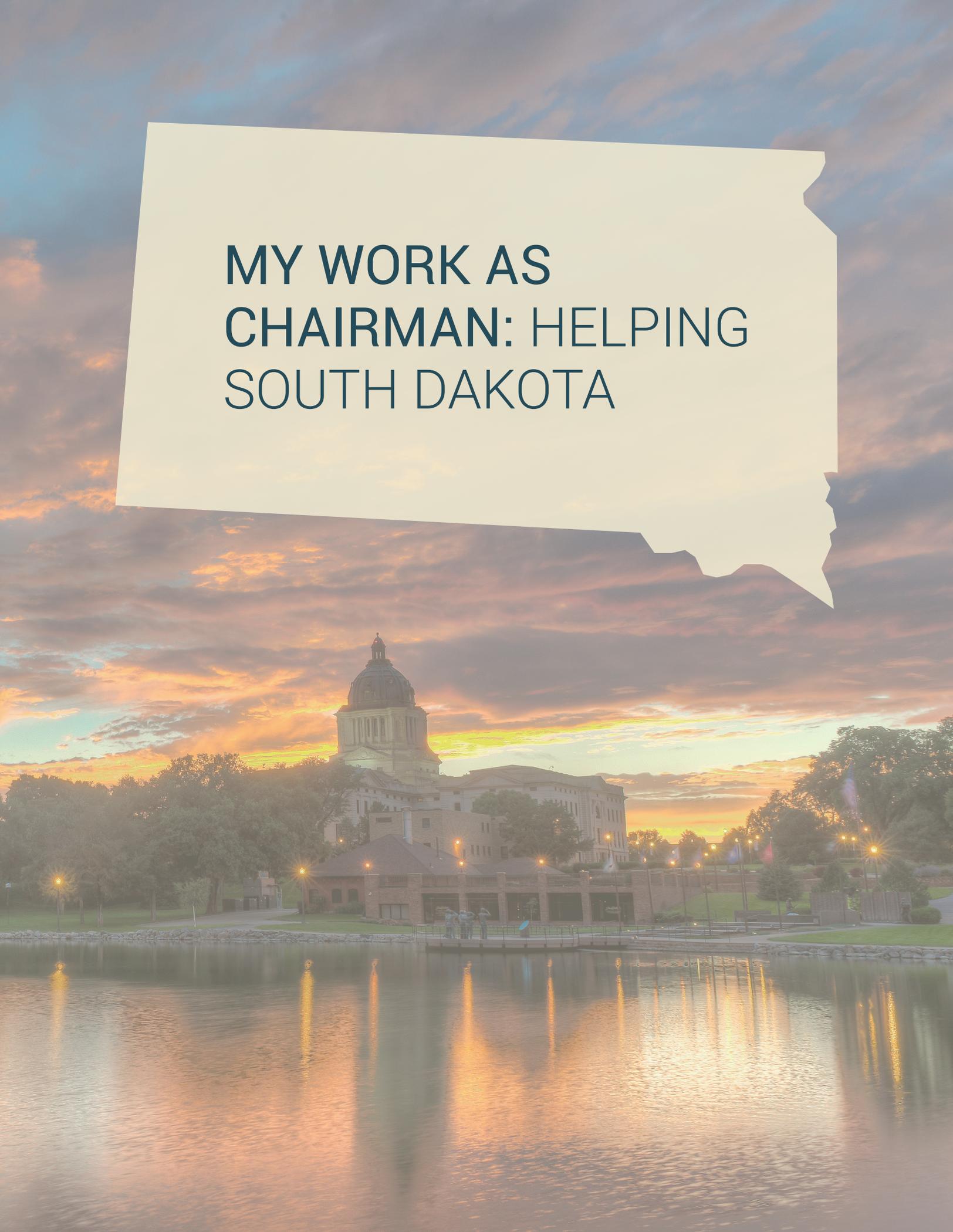
Serving as chairman of the Commerce Committee provides me a unique opportunity to create real change and achieve substantive results for communities in South Dakota. Additionally, my work on the Commerce Committee has positively impacted the everyday lives of all Americans in broad sectors of the economy such as aviation, the internet, highways, railroads, and mobile phone service. While my work on other Senate committees, which set tax and agriculture policy, as well as my other duties as your Senator benefit our state, many of my Commerce Committee accomplishments have led to specific results for South Dakota.

In this report, I wanted to share some of these examples of how the time I put into my duties at the Commerce Committee helps our state. I hope you find this report informative.

Kindest regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John Thune". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.



A photograph of the South Dakota State Capitol building in Pierre, South Dakota, taken at sunset. The building's central dome is prominent, and the sky is filled with colorful clouds in shades of orange, yellow, and blue. The scene is reflected in a calm body of water in the foreground. A white, torn-edge paper overlay is positioned in the upper left quadrant, containing the text.

# MY WORK AS CHAIRMAN: HELPING SOUTH DAKOTA

# Expanding Cybersecurity Research at Dakota State University

---

Malicious hacking is a threat to our nation's security and economy. Facilitating policies that promote cybersecurity research, education, and partnerships between the federal government and the private sector are among the responsibilities we work on at the Commerce Committee. As chairman I have twice brought official committee events to campus at DSU, which offers specialized programs in cyber operations and IT management, and works to prepare the next diverse and dedicated generation of cybersecurity professionals. These events bring national exposure to the good work happening in Madison and a unique look into policy discussions for the campus community.

To promote the university's role in this growing field and to harness expertise for the national benefit, in 2016 I encouraged the National Security Agency to enhance its partnership with DSU through the construction of a Sensitive Compartmented Information Facility, which will allow researchers to work with highly classified information on site. Groundbreaking for this new facility in Madison is scheduled to begin later this year. I also worked to enact a law that updates and improves the National Science Foundation's CyberCorps Scholarship for Service program. This program has benefited DSU more than any other school in the nation. It currently supports over 30 DSU scholars.



Chairman John Thune (center), Chris Murphy, Lead Counsel & Chief Privacy Officer, General Motors (left), and Dr. José-Marie Griffiths, President, Dakota State University (right), at a cybersecurity roundtable at Dakota State University on October 13, 2017

# Promoting Internet Enabled Health Care Solutions for Rural South Dakota

---

Skilled nursing facilities in South Dakota provide around the clock recovery assistance services for patients following a hospital stay. Due to the rural nature of many of our state's facilities, providers rely on critical technology, including telehealth, to ensure patients have access to the quality health care services they need. These information technology advancements require a high-speed internet connection.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC), which falls under the jurisdiction of the Commerce Committee, operates programs to promote the deployment of internet services in rural areas, ensuring that costs of connectivity are similar to healthcare facilities in more urban areas. Because skilled nursing facilities were not eligible to participate in these programs, I authored and used my chairmanship to enact the Rural Health Care Connectivity Act (S. 1916). Passage of this legislation opens more affordable internet service options for dozens of skilled nursing facilities across South Dakota.



Skilled nursing facility in Corsica that stands to benefit from the Rural Health Care Connectivity Act



# Resolving Freight Rail Service Disputes

---

Much of South Dakota's economy and many jobs rely on railroad shipments to and from our farms, ranches, and businesses. The Surface Transportation Board (STB), created by Congress in 1996, falls under the Commerce Committee's jurisdiction and oversees business dealings between railroads and their customers, while helping to settle disputes.

In 2015, the committee passed legislation I authored to reform this agency for the first time, improve operations, and create new tools for mediating disputes. While this legislation certainly has a national effect, the experiences of South Dakota rail customers were front and center in shaping reforms now in place at the STB. In fact, in 2016, I held a committee hearing in Sioux Falls on implementation of the new law, at which members of the STB got to hear firsthand from South Dakota shippers, including the South Dakota Corn Growers Association. This will benefit South Dakota for years to come.



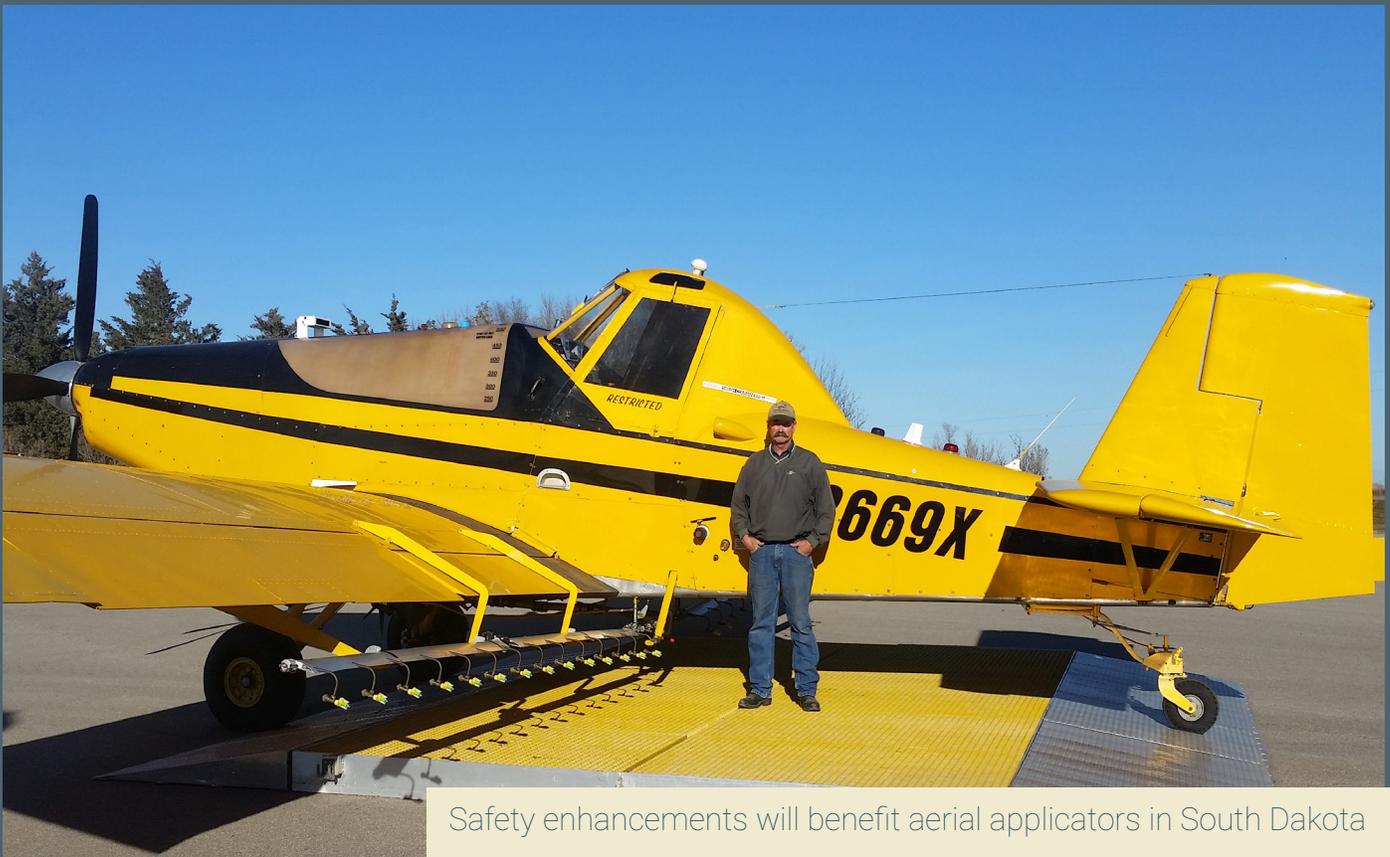
Chairman John Thune meeting with Ellsworth Air Force Base Airmen

# Enhancing Ellsworth Air Force Base's Strategic Value

---

Ellsworth Air Force Base is an integral part of the community in Rapid City. One of the reasons the base is a unique and invaluable asset for national security is its proximity to the Powder River Training Complex, an airspace designated by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) as a special training area for Ellsworth's two B-1B bomber squadrons and other military aircraft.

While I worked closely with the Air Force for many years to enhance the utility of this training space, and the related value of Ellsworth as an essential military base, becoming the chairman of the committee that authorizes the FAA afforded me a special position to work with the agency to secure final approval to quadruple the size of the Powder River Training Complex in 2015. Today, this unique airspace spans over 35,000 square miles across the Dakotas, Montana, and Wyoming and has hosted numerous Large Force Training Exercises.



Safety enhancements will benefit aerial applicators in South Dakota

# Improving Safety for Agricultural Aviation and Maintaining Commercial Service

---

Every few years, the Commerce Committee is charged with writing legislation authorizing the FAA and updating federal aviation policies. While this legislation is certainly an opportunity to advance national safety issues, help our aviation sector remain competitive, and enhance protections for consumers, it is also an opportunity to address issues that are especially important for states like South Dakota.

Over the years, the National Transportation Safety Board has identified several fatal collisions between small aircraft and towers that lacked easy-to-spot markings. In 2016, a provision I authored and included in the reauthorization gave the FAA new direction to add warning markings and lighting to certain tower structures that pose a threat to low-flying aerial applicators and add these structures to a national registry.

I also included a provision helping smaller airports, like Pierre Regional Airport, from losing federal infrastructure funding. This temporary change was necessary to ensure that smaller airports do not fall victim to a vicious cycle of degradation, further suppressing passenger traffic.

# Supporting a Successful Program to Stop Impaired Driving

---

Since 2005, South Dakota has employed a successful initiative called the 24/7 Sobriety Program, using various monitoring technologies and testing to ensure chronic driving while intoxicated (DWI) offenders change their behavior and avoid additional arrests. The program keeps the public safe and often saves taxpayers the financial burden of prolonged incarceration as many participants never fail checks.

Despite its success, this program pioneered in South Dakota was not eligible for federal support as some other efforts to combat impaired driving are. As chairman of the committee with responsibility for federal highway safety efforts, I was able to change that through legislation. Today, South Dakota law enforcement can receive federal support and other states can gain assistance in spreading the use of this successful safety program. Additionally, states like South Dakota that pursue new and innovative solutions to improve safety are not blocked from federal funding and forced to use a one-size-fits-all remedy pushed down from Washington, D.C.



Chairman Thune with law enforcement officers at a town hall in Mobridge



# Combatting Human Trafficking

---

Human traffickers prey on the vulnerable, often children or foreign nationals, sexually exploiting them for profit. It's a problem present in all 50 states that's often hidden in plain sight within communities. In South Dakota, our interstate highways and seasonal events attract operators of human trafficking.

Trucks are sometimes involved in trafficking and to help crack down on this scourge, President Trump recently signed into law a bill I authored at the Commerce Committee called the "No Trafficking on Our Roads Act." Under the new law, individuals convicted of severe human trafficking offenses will be permanently barred from obtaining a commercial drivers' license to drive a truck or bus.

# Researching Weather Forecast Improvements

---

For South Dakota farmers, and many others who carefully monitor weather conditions, accurate predictions of an unusually cold spring or rainy fall could prevent losses and unnecessary expenses. To realize this vision, we need to make strides in seasonal weather forecasting.

As a result of a Commerce Committee provision I authored in legislation, the National Weather Service has been directed to research and create usable, reliable, and timely seasonal and subseasonal forecasts for periods between two weeks and two years. This program will put the National Weather Service's research into practical effect following the model of the weather service's successful drought forecasting program.



# Providing Tribal Highway Safety Grants

---

Over the past two years, the Oglala Sioux Tribe and Standing Rock Sioux Tribe have received incentive safety grant funding for roadway speed enforcement, office equipment, and educational radio initiatives to promote safe highway travel. Federal funds awarded by the state of South Dakota for tribal incentive safety grants were authorized through a provision approved by the Commerce Committee in 2015.





# Addressing Unique Needs for Agricultural Transportation

---

Too often, Washington takes a cookie cutter approach to rules and regulations without fully understanding the unique circumstances of rural or agricultural communities. As chairman of the committee that was a primary author of one of the largest transportation infrastructure bills in U.S. history, I included specific provisions adding common sense into well-intentioned rules.

I proposed provisions, signed into law in 2015, giving states like South Dakota new authority to issue rule waivers for certain farm vehicles without risking the loss of federal funds. Additionally, these provisions allowed states to waive requirement for special hazardous materials licensing for diesel tanks on custom harvesters that collect grains from fields, as well as regulatory relief for truckers who haul bees or livestock and need additional flexibility in operating to protect perishable loads.

# Helping a South Dakotan Gain Olympic Recognition

---

While my three regional South Dakota offices routinely help citizens dealing with the federal bureaucracy, requests to help navigate an international athletic organization are rare for any member of Congress. Because the Commerce Committee exercises jurisdiction over sports policy and athletic organizations like the U.S. Olympic Committee, I was able to help a South Dakotan receive his Olympic medal.

Derek Miles finished fourth in the pole vaulting competition at the 2008 Beijing Olympics. In light of the international scrutiny on clean competition, officials began retesting samples from previous Olympic Games. This process led to the disqualification of one of Derek's competitors due to a failed drug test, making Derek the rightful owner of the bronze medal. Olympic disqualifications involve complicated processes and appeals. As a result of these complications, the International Olympic Committee had not awarded Derek Miles his medal.

We worked through the Commerce Committee to obtain the bronze medal on Derek's behalf. And, in April 2017, I had the great honor of presenting him with his bronze medal at a ceremony with family, friends, and colleagues where he works as an assistant track coach at the University of South Dakota. It was Derek's day, but also a unique highlight of my career in public service to celebrate his achievement.



Chairman Thune presents the Olympic bronze medal to Derek Miles during a ceremony at the University of South Dakota in April 2017

# COMMERCE COMMITTEE 2017 BY THE NUMBERS

---

- 10 PROPOSALS ENACTED INTO LAW
- 20 ADDITIONAL PROPOSALS PASSED THE SENATE
- 47 BILLS APPROVED BY THE COMMITTEE
- 20 CONFIRMED NOMINATIONS
- 13 NOMINATIONS AWAITING SENATE CONFIRMATION
- 63 HEARINGS
- 8 LEGISLATIVE MARKUPS



# 115TH CONGRESS

## COMMITTEE BILLS SIGNED INTO LAW

---

**S. 442, National Aeronautics and Space Administration Transition Authorization Act of 2017**

Lead sponsor: Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas)

Committee cosponsors: Sens. John Thune (R-S.D.), Bill Nelson (D-Fla.), Tom Udall (D-N.M.)

**S. 754, Cyber Scholarship Opportunities Act of 2017 (H.R. 2184)\***

Lead sponsor: Sen. Tim Kaine (D-Va.)

Committee cosponsors: Sens. John Thune (R-S.D.), Bill Nelson (D-Fla.), Roger Wicker (R-Miss.)

**S. 1096, Maritime Administration Authorization and Enhancement Act for Fiscal Year 2018 (H.R. 3201)\***

Lead sponsor: Sen. Deb Fischer (R-Neb.)

Committee cosponsor: Sen. Cory Booker (D-N.J.)

**S. 83, Promoting Women in Entrepreneurship Act (H.R. 255)\***

Lead sponsor: Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.)

Committee cosponsor: Sen. Dean Heller (R-Nev.)

**S. 42, Inspiring the Next Space Pioneers, Innovators, Researchers, and Explorers (INSPIRE) Women Act (H.R. 321)\***

Lead Sponsor: Sen. Dean Heller (R-Nev.)

Committee cosponsor: Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.)

**S. 570, Weather Research and Forecasting Innovation Act of 2017 (H.R. 353)\***

Lead sponsor: Sen. John Thune (R-S.D.)

Committee cosponsor: Sen. Brian Schatz (D-Hawaii)

**S. 61, Dungeness Crab Fishery Management (H.R. 374)\***

Lead sponsor: Sen. Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.)

**S. 1393, Jobs for our Heroes Act**

Lead sponsor: Sen. John Cornyn (R-Texas)

Committee cosponsors: Sens. John Thune (R-S.D.), Bill Nelson (D-Fla.), Jim Inhofe (R-Okla.), Dan Sullivan (R-Alaska), Tammy Duckworth (D-Ill.), Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.), Maggie Hassan (D-N.H.)

**S. 1532, No Human Trafficking on Our Roads Act**

Lead sponsor: Sen. John Thune (R-S.D.)

Committee cosponsors: Sens. Bill Nelson (D-Fla.), Dean Heller (R-Nev.), Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.), Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.)

**S. 1536 Combatting Human Trafficking in Commercial Vehicles Act**

Lead sponsor: Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.)

Committee cosponsors: Sens. John Thune (R-S.D.), Bill Nelson (D-Fla.), Dean Heller (R-Nev.), Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.)

\*KEY ELEMENTS  
INCLUDED IN  
ENACTED BILL  
NOTED



# OTHER COMMITTEE BILLS PASSED BY THE SENATE

---

## **S. 19, MOBILE NOW Act**

Lead sponsor: Sen. John Thune (R-S.D.)  
Committee cosponsor: Sen. Bill Nelson (D-Fla.)

## **S. 81, Senior Fraud Prevention Act of 2017**

Lead sponsor: Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.)

## **S. 88, Developing Innovation and Growing the Internet of Things (DIGIT) Act**

Lead sponsor: Sen. Deb Fischer (R-Neb.)  
Committee cosponsors: Sens. Cory Gardner (R-Colo.), Brian Schatz (D-Hawaii)

## **S. 89, The Delta Queen Bill**

Lead sponsor: Sen. Claire McCaskill (D-Mo.)  
Committee cosponsor: Sen. Roy Blunt (R-Mo.)

## **S. 96, Improving Rural Call Quality and Reliability Act**

Lead sponsor: Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.)  
Committee cosponsor: Sen. John Thune (R-S.D.)

## **S. 102, Securing Access to Networks in Disasters (SANDY) Act**

Lead sponsor: Sen. Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.)  
Committee cosponsors: Sens. John Thune (R-S.D.), Bill Nelson (D-Fla.)

## **S. 110, The Digital Coast Act**

Lead sponsor: Sen. Tammy Baldwin (D-Wis.)  
Committee cosponsors: Sens. Dan Sullivan (R-Alaska), Cory Booker (D-N.J.)

## **S. 123, Kari's Law Act**

Lead sponsor: Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.)  
Committee cosponsors: Sens. John Thune (R-S.D.), Ted Cruz (R-Texas), Deb Fischer (R-Neb.), Brian Schatz (D-Hawaii)

## **S. 129, The National Sea Grant College Program Amendments Act of 2017**

Lead sponsor: Sen. Roger Wicker (R-Miss.)  
Committee cosponsors: Sens. Dan Sullivan (R-Alaska), Bill Nelson (D-Fla.), Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.), Brian Schatz (D-Hawaii)

## **S. 134, Spoofing Prevention Act**

Lead sponsor: Sen. Bill Nelson (D-Fla.)  
Committee cosponsors: Sens. Roy Blunt (R-Mo.), Tammy Duckworth (D-Ill.), Deb Fischer (D-Neb.), Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.)

**S. 141, Space Weather Research and Forecasting Act**

Lead sponsor: Sen. Gary Peters (D-Mich.)

Committee cosponsors: Sens. Bill Nelson (D-Fla.), Cory Gardner (R-Colo.), Roger Wicker (R-Miss.), Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.)

**S. 174, Federal Communications Commission Consolidated Reporting Act**

Lead sponsor: Sen. Dean Heller (R-Nev.)

Committee cosponsor: Sen. Brian Schatz (D-Hawaii)

**S. 396, A bill to make technical amendments to certain marine fish conservation statutes, and for other purposes**

Lead sponsor: Sen. Bill Nelson (D-Fla.)

Committee cosponsor: Sen. Jerry Moran (R-Kan.)

**S. 756, Save Our Seas Act of 2017**

Lead sponsor: Sen. Dan Sullivan (R-Alaska)

Committee cosponsors: Sens. Jim Inhofe (R-Okla.), Ed Markey (D-Mass.), Gary Peters (D-Mich.), Brian Schatz (D-Hawaii), Tom Udall (D-N.M.)

**S. 770, MAIN STREET Cybersecurity Act**

Lead sponsor: Sen. Brian Schatz (D-Hawaii)

Committee cosponsors: Sens. John Thune (R-S.D.), Bill Nelson (D-Fla.), Cory Gardner (R-Colo.), Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.), Catherine Cortez Masto (D-Nev.), Maggie Hassan (D-N.H.)

**S. 875, A bill to require the Comptroller General of the United States to conduct a study and submit a report on filing requirements under the Universal Service Fund programs**

Lead sponsor: Sen. Dan Sullivan (R-Alaska)

**S. 1015, National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act of 2017**

Lead sponsor: Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-Utah)

Committee cosponsors: Sens. Dean Heller (R-Nev.), Dan Sullivan (R-Alaska), Brian Schatz (D-Hawaii), Tom Udall (D-N.M.)

**S. 1425, Coordinated Ocean Monitoring and Research Act**

Lead sponsor: Sen. Roger Wicker (R-Miss.)

Committee cosponsors: Sens. Dan Sullivan (R-Alaska), Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.), Maggie Hassan (D-N.H.), Ed Markey (D-Mass.), Gary Peters (D-Mich.), Brian Schatz (D-Hawaii)

**S. 1057, Harmful Algal Bloom and Hypoxia Research and Control Amendments Act of 2017**

Lead sponsor: Sen. Bill Nelson (D-Fla.)

Committee cosponsors: Sens. Dan Sullivan (R-Alaska), Gary Peters (D-Mich.)

**S. 1426, United States Center for Safe Sport Authorization Act of 2017**

Lead sponsor: Sen. John Thune (R-S.D.)

Committee cosponsors: Sens. Dan Sullivan (R-Alaska), Jerry Moran (R-Kan.), Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.), Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.), Gary Peters (D-Mich.)

To read more about these bills, visit [congress.gov](http://congress.gov).

---



# COMMERCE COMMITTEE KEY OPPORTUNITIES FOR 2018

- Enacting policies to expand internet access and support a vibrant internet ecosystem
- Advancing a federal framework for self-driving vehicles and unmanned aircraft systems
- Addressing our nation's infrastructure needs
- Updating aviation policies and enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of transportation security
- Exploring new and innovative technologies and their impact on our economy

