

events, and hope that we take those lessons to heart.

The brightest spot in the war in Iraq is the performance of our troops. Day after dangerous day, they do their duty. They patrol, they seek out insurgents, they struggle to provide a secure environment for the rebuilding of that nation. Day after day, they face down their own fears and travel those lethal roads to take the battle to the enemy. However one may feel about the path that led us to Iraq, we can feel nothing but love, pride, and respect for our men and women in uniform. Whatever the circumstances under which we sent them there, through misread intelligence or misleading rhetoric, the U.S. military has gone, and gone again and again, and performed their duties with courage and dedication.

Even the scandal that now haunts the White House, and which is beginning to wash over the President's closest advisors, may give us cause for celebration, and not for any partisan reasons. As Americans, we may be thankful for living in a nation in which no man is king, to rule at his own whim and to undermine his detractors at will and without consequence. We may be thankful for our system of government, with its checks and balances between the three branches of government firmly established in our Constitution. And we may celebrate the wisdom of guaranteeing freedom of expression and the existence of a free press.

Though the wheels of government may sometimes grind exceedingly slowly, we can be grateful that they still can be pushed and cajoled into conducting their oversight functions and asserting those checks and balances. That is what keeps this country strong. President Abraham Lincoln said "Let the people know the truth and the country is safe." Whatever may be the final outcome of the investigation into possible retribution by the White House against Ambassador Wilson and his wife for Wilson's role in unmasking a fraud in the government's case for going to war in Iraq, the Nation is safer and better off for having the means for citizens, acting through their elected officials and their legal system, to challenge possible abuses of power.

So even in these dark days, there is cause for thanksgiving. I hope that the recent dip in gasoline prices will allow families to come together, pull out the good china and set a beautiful table overflowing with all the dishes that make this feast so memorable and so mouthwatering: turkey, roasted, grilled, smoked, barbecued or deep fried; stuffing in all its regional variations with herbs or oysters or sausage or cornbread; hams coated in pineapples and cloves or cured with smoke or sugar; cranberries served jellied or chopped, with oranges or not; green bean casserole with a crown of fried onions; yeast rolls or biscuits dripping with butter or gravy; sweet potatoes in

casseroles or with marshmallows and brown sugar; and pies—glorious pies with spicy pumpkin topped with whipped cream, and fruit pies in flaky shells, topped with cheese or ice cream. Americans know how to cook, and all the variations on our traditional Thanksgiving meal surely mean that this feast will never settle into routine.

Thanksgiving. Can there be a better day? It starts with parades to watch for the youngsters. Then the action in the kitchen heats up, competing with football games and the happy arrival of guests for our attention with a whole array of enticing aromas and clattering noises. The meal itself is wonderful, with family and friends around the table giving thanks and meaning it. And after the meal, in the warm glow of a full stomach, there is time for companionship as the leftovers are put away and the dishes are washed. The evenings are primed for walks in the cool weather, or short naps, or other sports, before the leftovers make their first reappearance. There are few days like this, devoted entirely to family without the distraction of, say presents at Christmas or Easter egg hunts. Thanksgiving is the one time we can really focus on all that we have to be thankful for just by looking around that table. My wife Erma and I have so much to be thankful for, and I know that she joins me in wishing a very happy thanksgiving to all Americans. May each of you, no matter how desperate your present circumstances may be, be blessed and see all that you have to be thankful for.

Mr. President, I wish you a happy Thanksgiving. I would like to close with a poem by Charles Frederick White, written in November 1895. His words serve to remind us that Thanksgivings past were not very different than today.

THOUGHTS OF THANKSGIVING

Thanksgiving Day is coming soon,
That long remembered day
When nature gives her blessed boon
To all America.
On that glad day, in all our land,
The people, in their wake,
Give thanks to God, whose mighty hand
Deals blessings good and great.
The roast goose, steaming on the plate,
The sweet potato cobbler,
The cranberry sauce, the pudding baked,
The seasoned turkey gobbler,
All these delights and many more,
From north, south, west and east,
Do all the nation keep in store
For this Thanksgiving feast.
Alas, for those who are denied
This blessed boon of God!
May all the needy be supplied
Like Israel by the rod.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kentucky.

TRIBUTE TO SENATOR SUSAN COLLINS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I rise this afternoon to pay tribute to one of the most effective and outstanding Members of the Senate, Sen-

ator SUSAN COLLINS of Maine. Today, Senator COLLINS cast her 2,942nd consecutive vote as a Senator, breaking the record of the former Senator from Maine, Margaret Chase Smith. In doing this, Senator COLLINS has maintained a perfect voting record since she was sworn in to the Senate in January 1997.

Senator COLLINS recently honored Margaret Chase Smith just a few weeks ago during a ceremony to unveil an official portrait of Senator Smith, a portrait entitled "The Great Lady From Maine" which now hangs proudly in the U.S. Capitol. As Senator COLLINS said in a tribute to Senator Smith at that unveiling:

For every woman serving in the Senate, Margaret Chase Smith blazed the path, but she was a special inspiration to me.

Senator COLLINS met Margaret Chase Smith as a senior in high school, participating in a Senate youth conference here in Washington. She remembers Senator Smith telling her to "stand tall for what I believed." Senator COLLINS continues to use this advice today as she chairs the Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee and working for the people of Maine.

I know I speak for all of my colleagues in the Senate when I congratulate her on this truly remarkable accomplishment.

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, freedom continues to advance in Afghanistan. Of course, they are a great ally in the war on terror. In fact, I recall visiting Afghanistan just a little over 2 years ago with the current occupant of the Chair, and we had an opportunity to see firsthand the progress they had made at that time, not to mention how far they have come since.

A few days ago the results of that country's historic parliamentary elections, held in mid-September, were officially certified. At the time that Senator BURNS and I were there, they had not yet had the election of the President, not officially. They have since had that election. Now they have had a parliamentary election. Those results are now certified. A joint Afghan and United Nations election commission has declared the winners in races for 249 seats in the lower parliamentary house, as well as members of 34 provincial councils around the country.

Afghanistan's continued progress toward democracy is obviously a victory in the war on terror. Four years ago, the ruthless Taliban regime ruled Afghanistan with an unyielding, murderous intolerance, and they laid down that country's welcome mat to all the terrorists to "come on in." I would like to remind my colleagues that 4 short years ago Afghanistan was ruled by a regime so intolerant that as part of an effort to erase any trace of Afghanistan's history before the rise of Islam in the seventh century, the Taliban destroyed two priceless Buddhist statues. These statues had been carved into the

face of a cliff outside the Afghan city of Bamiyan. These ancient wonders that had endured for centuries were instantly turned into dust. The Taliban was literally trying to erase history. But now the Taliban itself is history.

America's quick defeat of the Taliban, the rescue of the Afghan people out from under their wicked thumb and the quick transformation of Afghanistan into a burgeoning democracy in just 4 years is nothing short of amazing.

Today, a democratically elected parliament and a democratically elected, President Hamid Karzai, are charting a new course for their country. I am proud to say that a new day has dawned in Afghanistan. Where there was repression, now there is liberty.

For instance, reports indicate that 68 of the new legislators are women. Four years ago little girls weren't allowed to go to school, and women had no rights whatsoever. Four years ago women were second-class citizens, blocked from jobs and educational opportunities by the Taliban. These 68 women legislators make up over a quarter of their chamber. That is significantly higher than the proportion of women in our Congress in the United States.

Afghanistan will continue to make progress toward freedom and democracy. The provincial councils are now in the process of selecting 68 members of the House of Elders, which is the upper parliamentary house. Those selections will be completed soon. Then with President Karzai's selection of an additional 34 members to the upper house, the full Afghan Parliament is scheduled to convene for the first time in the third week of December.

I ask my colleagues to join me in saluting the people of Afghanistan as they move forward toward freedom and democracy. I ask all of us to join in pledging the full support of the United States as the people of Afghanistan continue to fight the last vestiges of an extreme terrorist element, and as they continue to stand with the grand coalition of free nations who are waging the war on terror.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri.

TRANSPORTATION, TREASURY, HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT, THE JUDICIARY, THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, AND INDEPENDENT AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2006—CONFERENCE REPORT

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to 1 hour of debate in relation to the conference report to accompany H.R. 3058, the Transportation-Treasury-HUD bill; provided further that Senator COBURN be in control of up to 30 minutes of debate; I further ask consent that the two managers have up to 15 minutes each and that following the use or yielding back of the time, and

when the Senate has received the conference report, it then be agreed to, with the motion to reconsider laid upon the table.

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

(The conference report is printed in the House proceedings of the RECORD of today, November 18, 2005.)

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, I thank all or our colleagues. This has been a long and interesting path that we have trod.

Today I stand in support of the Transportation, Treasury, HUD, Judiciary, and Independent Agencies fiscal year 2006 appropriations bill. This bill also includes the District of Columbia fiscal year 2006 appropriations act. Before getting into the details of the bill, I thank Chairman KNOLLENBERG and his ranking member, Mr. OLVER, on the House side. Particularly, I express my sincere appreciation to my ranking member, Senator MURRAY, for her hard work, thoughtful and bipartisan approach to crafting a good bill, and her unwavering commitment to getting the bill done on an expedited schedule as mandated by the leadership. As all who follow this place know, we have had some bumps on the road over the last several days which forced both House and Senate staff to work throughout a number of nights this week while completing a blitzkrieg schedule in order for us to be able to vote on this measure today. Despite these bumps, we have completed our work, and I compliment Congressman KNOLLENBERG on his commitment and perseverance to work with me to overcome these problems.

I do express my sincerest gratitude and thanks to our excellent staffs; on the Senate side, on the subcommittee, on my side, Jon Kamarck, Paul Doerrer, Cheh Kim, Lula Edwards, Josh Manley, and Matt McCardle; on Senator MURRAY's side, Peter Rogoff, Kate Hallahan, William Simpson, Diana Hamilton, and Meaghan McCarthy.

Obviously, we extend our thanks as well to the House side staffers.

Now, Mr. President, the staff had to work extremely hard, in a bipartisan manner, to make our recommendations and instructions a reality. This is not a simple bill. Yet it is likely a Rube Goldberg machine with many complex moving parts.

This bill is the first real appropriations product of a new subcommittee that grew out of the reorganization of the Senate Appropriations Committee earlier this year. It is a substantial and complex bill that will have a significant and positive impact on every State and community in the Nation as it covers, among other things, every mode of transportation, financial services, and IRS requirements as guided by the Department of Treasury; it funds the Federal Government's role in housing and economic role under HUD; it funds the Executive Office of the President, Federal judicial system, and funds other related agencies such as the General Services Administration,

Office of Personnel Management, and the Postal Service.

I believe that given the circumstances and our budget allocation, this is a good bill. We started with a budget that was severely underfunded in many of the important programs in the bill. These are programs which historically have been strongly supported by Members of this body. Thankfully, in most cases we have been able to restore many of the cuts and shortfalls, perhaps not as much as some Members would want and certainly some areas not as much as I want. But I think all Members will understand and appreciate our efforts to fund the programs and activities that enjoy the greatest support.

I wish to express a very special thanks to our chairman, Senator COCHRAN, who demonstrated his understanding and sensitivity to the needs of the Transportation-Treasury Appropriations Subcommittee.

While we received significantly less budget authority for the conference, without Chairman COCHRAN's help the House would have demanded a much harsher and unrealistic reduction in our allocation, with the results we saw that happened in regard to the Labor-HHS fiscal year 2006 funding bill yesterday in the House.

In particular, despite our fiscal limitations, we have worked diligently to ensure the transportation programs in this bill are adequately funded. One of my highest priorities in fashioning this bill was to provide the needed funding for the safety, construction, and maintenance of our highways, transit systems, and airports. Funding for our Nation's transportation infrastructure, and especially for our highways and road network, creates jobs and promotes economic growth. More importantly, it continues the continued maintenance and growth of our economic infrastructure by which we serve markets throughout the Nation and ultimately the world. The transportation system is the heart and arteries by which we pump our goods and products which guarantee our current and future prosperity in the national and international marketplace, and we cannot afford to shortchange this system.

We also removed the designation on the Alaskan bridges. The funds remain with Alaska to meet their priority needs. These bridges were grabbing unreasonable and unwarranted attention which was beginning, in many ways, to undermine the very good work and the very necessary projects in this highway bill.

In addition, this bill provides \$14.4 billion for the Federal Aviation Administration, which is approximately \$400 million more than the request. This recommendation includes \$14.3 million to hire safety inspectors and restore inspector staffing levels on an accelerated basis. It also adds \$4 million to restore engineering and inspector staffing at the Office of Certification so that new equipment and technologies