

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I had a conversation with the Republican leader. We have a very important briefing today at 3:30, and it will be in the classified area of the Visitor Center. We are going to have Secretary Burns, General Clapper will be there, the head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Secretary Panetta will be there to talk about a number of countries around the world on which we need to focus our attention. I hope we have very good attendance at this meeting. It will be very important that we have Senators listen to what these gentlemen have to say, so I ask unanimous consent that we be in recess today from 3:30 until 4:30.

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

Mr. REID. Mr. President, the experiment we have just completed on these appropriations bills has worked out extremely well. One reason it has worked out as well as it has is because of Senator KOHL. Senator KOHL has been in the Senate more than two decades, and those of us who have watched him know he doesn't spend a lot of time talking, but he spends a lot of time getting things done, and this legislation was an example of how good he is. Also, Senator BLUNT—this is a new experience for him, but he had been in the House for many years and was part of their leadership and actually hit the ground running and has been a great partner in helping us move this legislation forward. So I congratulate both these fine Senators.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wisconsin.

Mr. KOHL. Mr. President, upon passage of this bill, I want to take a moment to thank my ranking member, Senator BLUNT, for his guidance and support throughout this process. He and his staff, Stacy McBride and Mary Koskinen, were extraordinarily helpful to me and my staff as we put this bill together. I also thank my staff—Galen Fountain, Jessica Frederick, Dianne Nellor, Bob Ross, and Chad Metzler—for their excellent work.

This is an austere bill. As I have stated before, almost every category of funding is lower than last year and much lower than the year before. We have had good debate on the floor about various provisions in the bill, and we have taken many votes. The process has been open and transparent. We have followed the regular order, and this bill was considered on the Senate floor. We can now conference this bill with the House and hopefully send it to the President shortly after that.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 4:30 p.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The Senator from Missouri.

PASSAGE OF H.R. 2112

Mr. BLUNT. Mr. President, I wish to take a moment to thank Senator KOHL. The comments the majority leader made about him were certainly proven right in all of our relationships. I thank him for his guidance and encouragement throughout this process. We have had open communication and worked together to address the amendments brought forward by our colleagues. While we didn't agree on every single thing in the bill, we certainly agreed to be agreeable about that and see if we couldn't produce a work product people have a right to expect of the Senate. So the passage of these three bills is significant.

I certainly wish to thank Senator KOHL's staff—Galen Fountain, Jessica Frederick, Dianne Nellor, and Bob Ross—for their contributions, and I thank my staff: Stacy McBride, Mary Koskinen, Brian Diffel, Zach Kinne, and Christina Weger.

Because this has been a process that has involved two other subcommittees, I wish to express my thanks to my colleagues for their hard work and cooperation on the other parts of this bill: Senators MIKULSKI and HUTCHISON and their staffs on the Commerce, Justice, Science Subcommittee and Senators MURRAY and COLLINS and their staffs on the Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development.

The floor staff has worked hard over the course of the last several days. Often, that work goes unnoticed. But managing this bill has not been easy. It was a little different from many of the appropriations bills that have been brought to the Senate floor, and certainly the floor staff has been of tremendous help to me and to the committee staff.

This has been a long process. A dozen amendments that affect the agriculture division of this bill have been accepted over the course of the debate. I am glad we have had an open debate and hope we can swiftly move to conference with the House and send this work product on to the President so that we can get these appropriations processes started as close to the regular time as we possibly can, based on the moment in which we find ourselves, and look forward to working with the Appropriations Committee as we bring other bills to the floor.

Again, I close my remarks on this bill by expressing my personal appreciation to Senator KOHL and his willingness to work with a new Member of the Senate in putting this product together and bringing this bill to the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I thank the distinguished Presiding Officer, and I also compliment both Senators who just spoke, Senator KOHL and Senator BLUNT, for their excellent work.

Like everybody here, I have followed these votes and the negotiations and

did vote, and I am encouraged by the progress made on the Transportation-HUD appropriations bill which the Senate has now approved. It funds our Nation's ongoing transportation investments. It also includes crucial emergency disaster funding for Vermont and the other States struggling to recover from Hurricane/Tropical Storm Irene and other natural disasters.

This bill is part of the response needed from Congress by thousands of Vermonters and millions of other Americans. It is vital not only for the economy of Vermont and other States whose roads and bridges were decimated by the storm, but for the Nation's economy. I commend the chair, Senator MURRAY, and the ranking member, Senator COLLINS, for their hard work and dedication toward ensuring appropriate funding for disaster relief, particularly in Irene's aftermath.

I have said many times on the Senate floor that Hurricane Irene was devastating to our small State of Vermont. I was born in Vermont, as were my parents, and I have never seen destruction of this magnitude. The only thing that even compares are stories of floods in Vermont that my grandparents used to tell me about when they were younger.

The flash floods caused by the storm destroyed homes and farms, businesses, bridges, and roads. Roads and structures that have stood for over a century were wiped out in a matter of minutes. I helicoptered over Vermont with Governor Shumlin and General Dubie, the head of our Vermont National Guard, the day after our storm, and none of us could believe the things we were seeing. With the repair costs estimated to be over \$100 million, our little State has been stretched to the limit.

As the rain stopped, Vermont moved immediately and we had crews working to repair the damage. We didn't wait for anybody else; we just started moving—neighbors helping neighbors, our State and local governments, our National Guard, Red Cross, working together. However, we do need the traditional helping hand of Federal disaster recovery loans and grants to help those whose lives were upturned by Irene. Federal disaster recovery aid has always been available to other States after disasters such as this. We need it now in Vermont. This bill is an essential part of the work that Congress should be doing in response to major events such as Irene, pulling together as a Nation to heal these wounds.

The Senate, as the Presiding Officer will recall, reconvened after Labor Day. Those of us on the Appropriations Committee worked on this bill and other disaster relief legislation, which have been top priorities for Vermont and for many other States. Many other committees were involved in this important work. The Vermont delegation worked together on this bill and other Senators came together to help make

progress week by week. One by one, we have overcome a series of legislative obstacles and have been able to turn the lights from red to green.

Our legislative process this year has been unduly cumbersome and unresponsive; different than I have ever seen in the years I have spent here in the Senate. However, the progress we have achieved here in the Senate is a testament to the determination of many in this body who have been willing to set aside ideological imperatives and partisan differences to work together as Republicans and Democrats to accomplish the work that the American people and our constituents expect from their government.

Now, in Vermont and the other New England States, winter is not just on the horizon, it is on our doorstep. In our State last weekend, we had more than 1 foot of snow in some parts. I mention this because if you are going to repair roads and bridges, time is a significant factor, and time is slipping away.

We all know that roads and bridges are the circulatory system for commerce in the daily lives of living, breathing communities and their citizens—where people have to go to work, school or be together with their families. With many of the Federal aid disaster programs underfunded, I am especially pleased that this bill contains the \$1.9 billion that I and others worked to include to replenish the Federal Highway Disaster Relief Fund. This fund will help rebuild Vermont's vital roadways. These roadways are critical to rebuild our economy, distribute aid, and bring people to hospitals and to schools. It is of the utmost importance that this Federal aid reaches Vermont sooner rather than later, as our winters can be extremely harsh. I look at Washington, DC, which will close down with 3 inches of snow. We call that a dusting in our State. Many times we have a foot of snow overnight. Schools will still be open, commerce still goes on, but we can't rebuild roads with a foot of snow on them. We have to be working to rebuild now and we have to be prepared to work immediately when the snow stops.

I have talked with Senator SANDERS, Congressman WELCH, and Governor Shumlin, who has spent every single day working on this. My wife Marcelle and I have driven around the State. We have talked to community leaders, to those who have worked on disaster relief, and others. It is very clear, given the mammoth, unprecedented destruction of this storm, certain waivers are needed to allow States to access funds for repair work they need without going through all kinds of burdens for repairs.

I mention these waivers because if we are going to ensure that Vermont and other States can promptly design and begin emergency and permanent repairs, we have to do it now. We put the waivers into this bill, and I hope the

other body will understand we need them preserved. This bill, an investment in America's crumbling and damaged roads and bridges, is a crucial step. It will help restore the economic vitality of our country.

I am also pleased the legislation includes emergency community development block grant funding. Right now, HUD has no funding available. They cannot address the housing needs of Vermonters affected both by Hurricane Irene and the flooding of this past spring. These disaster recovery programs are woefully underfunded.

I cannot think of the number of hours that I and other members of the Appropriations Committee have worked on this, the evenings, the phone calls, the weekends, touching base, but it is all worth it. If this bill will now be accepted by the other body, we can go forward and we can start doing the rebuilding we need.

Vermont is a very special place, not just because it is my home but because of the spirit of its people. This is a State that has always supported help for other States and Americans all over the country facing similar disasters. We need that help now, and this bill is a major step forward for that help. I thank everybody involved with it. Now all we have to do is get it through the other body, get it on the President's desk, and continue the recovery work we are doing both in Vermont and other States damaged by Irene.

As we talk about the money, I will not resist the temptation to repeat what a Vermonter told me. I have said it before on the Senate floor. We spend unlimited sums to rebuild buildings and roads and bridges in Iraq and Afghanistan and somebody else comes along and blows them up. We build them in America for Americans by Americans and we Americans will keep them safe.

I yield the floor.

RECESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands in recess until 2:15 p.m.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 12:34 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. WEBB).

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate is in a period of morning business.

The Senator from Florida.

ELECTION LAW

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I wish to inform the Senate of something that has just happened to a civics teacher in my State of Florida who tried to help her students register to vote. It was nothing new for this teacher, Jill Cicciarelli, to be prepping

17-year-old students for the privilege and responsibility of voting in a democracy. She has been doing this for a number of years. But it turned out that when Jill organized a drive at the start of the school year to get students preregistered to vote, she ran afoul of Florida's new election law.

How could that be? But, sure enough, the law, which is basically an attempt at voter suppression, causes her to face hefty fines. For what? For helping students to register to vote. As ridiculous as that sounds, that is what the law says.

But there is more, unfortunately. There is a lot more. I met with Jill Cicciarelli and her students last week. They are extremely concerned, and they are extremely surprised that a good government attempt to register students so they will be ready to vote in the next election has run afoul of the law. They were not happy; but, interestingly, neither was their elected Supervisor of Elections in Volusia County who, under the law, was required to report the teacher and the students to the State authorities.

The Supervisor of Elections, Ann McFall, has now publicly, openly criticized the parts of the law as being egregious and unenforceable. She has done that speaking out, she has done it in an op-ed and in the local newspaper. She has been unambiguous in her criticism that not only is it egregious in the substance of the law, but that the burdens they place on the Supervisors of Elections are unenforceable.

I have written to Governor Scott. I have talked to him personally, asking him to support the revamping or the repeal of this law. I have also just asked the Senate Judiciary Committee to conduct a congressional investigation to see if Florida's law was part of an orchestrated effort that resulted in voting law changes in 14 States thus far this year. These new voting laws could make it significantly harder for more than 5 million eligible voters in many States to cast their ballots in next year's election in 2012, and that is according to the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University School of Law.

Last month they completed the first comprehensive study of the impact of those State laws. The Florida law is probably the strongest of all the 14 States. It requires third parties who sign up new voters to register with the State first and then to submit applications from the new voters for registration within 48 hours. For almost four decades, the Florida law has been that they had 10 days in which to submit the names—for four decades. Now it is within 48 hours.

Can anybody say with a straight face that Florida isn't taking a step backwards in making it harder to vote and harder to register to vote and harder to have a person's vote count as they intended, especially a step backwards when it involves protecting one of our most fundamental rights, the right to vote?