

actually on that when I was up there during STEVE DAINES' election recently. Transportation For America graded the deck of the Russell Street Bridge a 4 in a soundness scale of 1 through 10. The Russell Street Bridge was built in 1957 and carries 22,650 cars per day.

In light of these decaying bridges, the DRIVE Act will provide adequate infrastructure investment for our Nation's bridges. Senator BARBARA BOXER and I made that a top priority in the DRIVE Act, and I think it is something we need to keep in mind.

We have an opportunity to move to this bill this afternoon. The vote hasn't been scheduled yet. It needs to happen today. It will be a motion to proceed to the highway reauthorization bill, and it is one that will get us so that we can start working on amendments. We have a lot of amendments. A lot of people are using this. They know the bill has to pass. This falls into the category of a must-pass bill. Everybody knows, for the reasons I have been talking about for several days, it is going to have to pass. So there are a lot of people who have amendments that have nothing to do with bridges and nothing to do with the roads. That is OK. This is a vehicle they can use to try to get other programs through. In fact, I myself may be guilty of that. But nonetheless we can't do any of that until we get to the bill, so the motion to proceed has to be agreed to.

As soon as the motion to proceed is adopted, I would encourage all Members to come forth with their amendments so they can be heard before any deadlines pass.

With that, I yield the floor.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

AMENDMENTS TO VA BILL

Mr. TILLIS. Mr. President, we were sworn in—you and I both—in January, and I know we have both gone to our States and traveled across our States to get an idea of the pressing problems our States and our Nation face. One of the areas I have focused most of my attention on is veterans affairs, particularly the hospitals and the services we are providing veterans across the State.

I am concerned that we have a problem with priorities. I am concerned that maybe the focus isn't where it needs to be to make sure we take care of the most pressing problems for our veterans. Whether it is the Choice Act, whether it is just providing ambulatory care, PTSD, mental health, or a number of other things, we have short-

ages, and we need to get the Veterans' Administration focused on solving the most pressing problems.

I decided we needed to produce some amendments that would have been heard today in the Committee on Veterans' Affairs for a bill that would affect the VA. Why would I want to do that? Because when out of the blue a proposal for some \$500 million in unanticipated costs could potentially be considered today, I get worried. And I will talk later about the various things that make me worry about what would be lost if we were to reprioritize half a billion dollars, with all the things we already have on our plate that deal with the VA.

But the amendments some of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle were talking about earlier today were my responsibility. They referred—I guess in deference—to Republicans. The reality is that they were amendments that came out of my office, and I want to talk a little about what these amendments were. They were referred to as political games, but three of them were very focused on good government. One of them was to make sure we do not implement policy that moves a priority or moves something ahead of the line of the other critical priorities we have for our veterans. All it said was that we would not fund this project until we had certification that the most pressing priorities—which I will talk about in a few minutes—had actually been addressed.

Another amendment was just about reporting—how does this project work? All too often we pass policies here and we never measure the results. That is what is wrong with Washington. We don't think through the full consequences of a lot of the policies we implement. So it was simply to provide a reporting mechanism so we could follow up on this policy and see what it costs and the real benefits over time.

The last amendment is something I know the Presiding Officer has problems with because he is a very successful businessman. In business, we would never think about balancing the books for this year and next year based on what the business is going to do 10 years from now, but that is exactly what nearly half of the \$500 million that was to be used for this bill would have done. It is reaching all the way out to 2025 to assume that some savings achieved there could be used to pay for something today. That is not the way we need to be budgeting in Washington. We have an \$18 trillion deficit—or I should say debt—and a lot of that is this kind of thinking that has been going on in Washington for too long—and I might add, under Democratic and Republican leadership. We have to change.

The other amendments were fairly straightforward too. So three amendments on good government and accountability and responsible budgeting. The other three were things I think most Americans would agree with.

One would simply prevent taxpayer funds from being used—the whole bill, I should have mentioned, has to do with providing in vitro fertilization coverage for veterans. One of the amendments simply said: You cannot use taxpayer funds to do any form of sex selection with respect to determining which embryo may be able to come to life versus the other ones that couldn't. Another amendment has to do with something as simple as not having the VA work with organizations that take the organs of human aborted babies and sell them. Those are the sorts of amendments we were talking about. It wasn't to kill in vitro fertilization. I know of many friends and others who have actually benefited and brought babies into the world through in vitro fertilization. This was about making sure we did it in a responsible manner.

But the heart of my problem goes back to the long list of broken promises that sooner or later this Congress has to fulfill for our veterans. Let's talk a little about those. We are talking about taking half a billion dollars and spending it on some priority that is not even on the books today.

What about these priorities? I worry about the 120,000 claims currently in the VA backlog. These are people who served our country who are looking for medical help and who are in the backlog waiting for treatment. What about that priority?

What about the 22 veterans on average a day committing suicide, most of them related to PTSD? We passed the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention Act as a first step toward trying to address this chronic problem. At the time we passed it, we all acknowledged that the funding we gave it wasn't enough, but it was a start.

What about additional funding for men and women who are suffering from various traumas they experience in service to our Nation? That is a priority we need to be absolutely certain is provided for.

I also worry about the unemployment problems. I think 75 percent of the Iran and Afghanistan veterans are dealing with unemployment once they transition from military service into the private sector. What about initiatives to get them back to work, take care of them and their families?

I could go on and on.

At Camp Lejeune in my great State of North Carolina, we have identified something that occurred over many years—exposure to toxic substances which have been linked to cancer. I had a meeting just last week with the Secretary of the VA. Only 13 percent of the requests for coverage are being fulfilled. We think it should be closer to 50 or 60. What about the funding for those folks who contracted cancer as a result of toxic substances at Camp Lejeune? Don't they deserve to be somewhere higher in the priority list?

I could go on and on.

There are the wait times, the critical medical services they need.

Today, the promises we made to veterans should be our top priority. At some point in time, it may make sense to add another half a billion dollars for this medical treatment that has been proposed by my colleagues on the other side of the aisle but not until we are absolutely certain that the promises we have already made are going to be fulfilled. That is all we attempted to do today.

In some respects, I regret that my colleagues on the other side of the aisle considered it political. I don't consider it political. I don't think it is political when you are trying to live within your means or making sure the policies you are implementing actually work the way you intended or when you are actually spending money over the next year or two versus 10 years from now. I think that is responsible government.

The gimmicks and the old rhetoric in this Chamber need to stop. We need to start focusing on fulfilling promises first and foremost to the men and women who have served our country bravely and defended our freedom. That is what my proposed amendments were about, and that is what they will be about if this measure ever comes up again because if I can fulfill no other promise, my promise to the men and women who have served this Nation will be paramount in all the things I do in my service here over the next 5½ years in the U.S. Senate. This was a threat to my being able to fulfill that promise, and I am glad we are going to be able to move on.

I thank the Chair.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SCOTT). Without objection, it is so ordered.

DODD-FRANK REGULATIONS

Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. President, I come to the floor with a happy birthday message today. I come with wishes for a happy birthday for the fifth birthday of the Dodd-Frank regulations.

Where are we as a nation with this wonderful 5-year-old running around our Nation right now, pushing out birthday cake across every bank and financial institution across the country? Exactly how is that going?

Let me share a couple of things. Everyone in this Nation remembers extremely well 2008 and the financial collapse that happened. We remember Lehman Brothers closing down and causing panic. We remember Fannie and Freddie rules finally reaping the consequences of what the Nation assumed would happen at some point from all of these very low rates and from encouraging people to buy who can't afford to pay back a loan. We

knew what would occur. The rise of a conversation, something called too big to fail that we had never heard before, suddenly grows up, and we move as a nation in 2009 from trying to regulate financial institutions to actually running financial institutions. The regulations were considered too small, and for institutions that were big, it was determined that Big Business means Big Government needs to run it.

I would have to say there is not a lot about the efficiency of Washington, DC, that we would look across the fruited plain and say this is working so well in Washington, DC, we should run every big company as well. In the days of government shutdowns and \$18 trillion of debt and slow decisionmaking, there is a great need for private businesses to be pushed to be able to do things efficiently, to be able to manage our economy effectively. Clearly, there is a need for regulations, but I would also say that, clearly, the U.S. Government should not step into businesses and run them instead of just regulating the boundaries.

This is a free market, but sadly, in 2009, the U.S. Government went to running General Motors. We started running individual banks and insurance companies. We have to be able to shift out of that and we have to be able to find a way in the days ahead for that never to occur again.

I would say multiple things about this. Now, 5 years into Dodd-Frank, 400 new rules in the process of being promulgated, literally 12,500 pages of regulations that have now been spun out—12,500 pages of regulations—just dealing with 271 rulemakings.

So here is what we are up against: 271 rulemaking deadlines have passed. Of those, 192 of them have been met with finalized rules, and rules have been proposed that would meet 46 more. Rules have not yet been proposed to meet 33 passed rulemaking requirements. Of the 390 total rulemaking requirements, 247 of them have been met with finalized rules, and rules have been proposed that would meet 60 more. What am I trying to say with all of that? There is a lot coming out of this, and there is a lot more still to come.

I would challenge any person in this Chamber and any person across America that if you are having to run your business, and if as you started to run your business and a government regulator walked in with 12,500 pages and said, I need someone in your company to know all of these regulations, you would not respond with a smile and wish them a happy birthday. You would respond with great frustration and say: Why are you walking into my company with 12,500 pages of new regulations? Now, there are previous regulations this is stacked on top of. They say here is an additional stack of 12,500 pages that you need to know and follow.

This is the fruit of the Dodd-Frank regulations. I would say there are a lot of things we need to discuss with this

bill, but let me just highlight a few of those. First, let's get some common agreement. Can we all agree the community banks, the smallest banks across America—most of them in rural communities—did not cause the financial collapse in 2008? In fact, they didn't even contribute to the financial collapse in 2008. The smallest community banks across the country are vital accesses to capital for farmers, small businesses, Main Street folks, and folks who just do deposits to their savings and checking accounts. These are small community banks. For more than 1,200 U.S. counties, with a combined population of 16 million Americans, without those community banks, they would be severely limited to any kind of access to banking. Big banks tend to focus on the biggest loans and in big towns. Small community and traditional banks focus on smaller communities. In my State of Oklahoma, a person can go to every small town and find a school, a gas station, a church, and a bank, and often that bank is a very small community bank. They know everybody in town and everybody knows them. But the rules changed for them after Dodd-Frank, and it wasn't because that bank caused anything.

Regardless of the law's merit in any area—and we can have a great conversation about a lot of issues with Dodd-Frank—financial reform was to contain the systemic risk in the financial sector of very large companies, which were called the too big to fail, which I refer to often as the “too big to be free now,” because the Federal Government is stepping in to try to run all of these companies and say: You can't have a free market in that area; we are going to have to run you instead.

But these small bank failures are not a threat to the economy. They weren't supposed to be a target of Dodd-Frank, but they most certainly are. All of these banks now suffer the consequences. A study by the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis found that for banks that have less than \$50 million in assets, hiring two additional personnel reduces their profitability by 45 basis points, resulting in one-third of these banks becoming unprofitable. Why would I raise that? Because there are a whole host of regulators who say just hire one or two additional compliance people, and you can keep up with the 12,500 additional pages that have been rolled out. These small community banks can't keep up with that. The Mercatus Center surveyed 200 banks with less than \$10 billion in assets, and 83 percent found that their regulatory compliance costs increased by more than 5 percent, and the median number of compliance staff increased from one to two. They all had to add additional folks—not additional folks to make more loans, not additional folks to greet more customers as they walk in the door, additional folks in the back office simply filling out forms and turning them in.