

SUPPORTING OUR NATION'S VETERANS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, we can tell a lot about how a Senator feels about our veterans by seeing how they vote on issues dealing with veterans. We can tell a lot about a Senator by how he or she treats our Nation's veterans. Are they committed to giving our veterans the care and help they deserve and need or do they see American servicemembers as political footballs to be used for partisan fights?

I was disappointed yesterday to see my Republican colleagues try to actually manipulate a good veterans bill, a noble bill, and it was done for political purposes.

The senior Senator from Washington, who has worked so hard on veterans issues for years now in the Senate, crafted a bipartisan piece of legislation to help veterans to do a number of things—basically, to help with their families. It is a tragic reality that thousands of veterans and servicemembers struggle with issues related to reproductive health, including fertility, some as a result of injuries sustained in combat. Senator MURRAY's bill would give the Veterans' Administration the resources it needs to attend to our veterans' reproductive health. The legislation would also help facilitate adoptive services for wounded veterans who want a family of their own.

Senator MURRAY's bill was to be marked up. That means it would be finalized in committee before it was reported from that committee to the floor. That is one of the opportunities we have to get legislation on the floor. But in a cynical, duplicitous move, a handful of Republicans on that committee were determined to manipulate the legislation. Instead of working with Senator MURRAY and others on the committee to pass a good bill as is, the junior Senator from North Carolina and other Republicans tried to attach so-called poison pill amendments to the bill. Senator MURRAY, to her credit, saw immediately what this charade was all about as a political stunt and requested that the chairman pull her bill from consideration, which did happen. The Senator from Washington didn't want a good, bipartisan bill hijacked by a few Republicans looking to get their names on FOX television.

This episode says a lot about today's Republican Party. This is an attack on families, it is an attack on the health of women, and it is an attack on our veterans.

Every servicemember who puts on the uniform of the United States armed services deserves everything we can give them because they take an oath to defend our Nation. It is not a pledge taken lightly by these men and women who serve. They understand what is being asked of them. They know that at any given time they may have to sacrifice everything for this country.

We here in the Senate take a similar oath when we are sworn in to office, but we also make an unspoken, yet

equally solemn, vow—to do everything in our power to support these veterans. We aren't called upon to make the ultimate sacrifices they are, but we have to recognize that they need our help. That means we do anything we can to give them the care they deserve. That means we always put their well-being above partisan politics.

The Republicans in this ploy yesterday put FOX News ahead of the welfare of the veterans community. This is, in fact, a reality. It is too bad for the veterans community.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

HIRE MORE HEROES ACT OF 2015— MOTION TO PROCEED

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of the motion to proceed to H.R. 22, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to Calendar No. 19, H.R. 22, a bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to exempt employees with health coverage under TRICARE or the Veterans Administration from being taken into account for purposes of determining the employers to which the employer mandate applies under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, first let me say it is important that we fund the highway trust fund and that we have a long-term commitment to the infrastructure of our country—the jobs, the economy, the neighborhoods.

I see the distinguished Senator from Oklahoma coming to the floor. He leads the committee that oversees transportation. He and my friend from California have put forward a 6-year authorization on policy that I think we should commend them for. I am proud to be a part of the group. Certainly Democrats have been united in saying we need a sense of urgency, we need to get beyond month-to-month highway trust fund renewals, and we need to make a commitment to a long-term approach, just as every other country has done in a global economy, so that we can continue to compete and win as it relates to our roads, bridges, ports, rails, and all of the other parts of our infrastructure.

What concerns me about the bill in front of us, though, is that, while we are on the one hand wanting to make sure we have good infrastructure for our communities, including safe roads, safe bridges, and other investments, one of the ways it is funded in this bill—and I believe strongly that we need to fix this before it moves forward, and I will do whatever I can to make sure we do, along with colleagues on both sides of the aisle who care about this—is a small provision that actually takes money away from communities and neighborhoods working very hard to come back from blight.

We have communities all across Michigan—this is called the Hardest Hit Fund. There are communities all across Michigan. I don't have the full list in front of me right now, but I will do this off the top of my head. We have Detroit, Pontiac, Flint, Saginaw, Lansing, and Grand Rapids. Here is the list: Highland Park, Jackson, Inkster, Ecorse, Muskegon Heights, River Rouge, Port Huron, Hamtramck, Ironwood, and Adrian. These are all communities that are working very hard, through public sector and private sector efforts, to rebuild neighborhoods, to take down drug houses on a block where children are walking by on the way to school, and to rebuild with a new park or new housing.

This is a program that has worked. In one of America's great cities that have gone through a lot of challenges called the city of Detroit, there is a huge effort going on right now, including public sector and private sector foundations. We have CEOs running towards the city of Detroit. It is really an amazing thing to see, what the private sector is doing. They are engaged in an effort to save and rebuild neighborhoods that can be saved by going into neighborhoods where the majority of houses are where senior citizens have lived for generations. Young couples have bought a house, but maybe there are two or three houses on a block that are empty and that are places where crime is occurring, such as drug houses. We take those down. What is happening in the city of Detroit is that home values are going up and things are beginning to turn around because of this strategy.

Unfortunately, in this bill, monies that have been allocated to cities across the country in States across the country—I believe we have a list of States. States across the country have been allocated funds to fix issues, to fix houses, to rebuild neighborhoods. In this bill, money we are counting on, money that has been allocated for this purpose will be taken back. Can my colleagues imagine that?

Here is the way this works. We have construction going on. Let's say they are removing asbestos from a home or taking houses down. The contractor does the work, and the city pays the contractor and then turns the bill in to the U.S. Department of the Treasury. They are counting on the fact that

they will be paid because we, the Federal Government, have given them in writing our word that they have a certain amount of dollars allocated.

This bill, unfortunately—and I am hopeful that this was not done on purpose and that we will be able to fix this—actually says that you incur that bill from the private contractor, but we are not going to pay it anymore. It is one thing if we want to debate whether this program makes sense going forward, but for allocations that have already been made for South Carolina, Illinois, and Ohio—and my good friend, ROB PORTMAN—

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, will the Senator yield?

Ms. STABENOW. I will be happy to yield to the distinguished chairman.

Mr. INHOFE. I have been listening. I say to my good friend that I am concerned about that.

As the Senator from Michigan knows, there are several titles in this bill. I chair the Environment and Public Works Committee, which is about 90 percent of the bill. But what the Senator is referring to here is in the banking title of the bill.

I understand—and I can't say this for certain—that there are a couple of amendments that address this. One amendment may be that of the Senator from Michigan.

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, I say to the chairman that Senator PORTMAN and I will have an amendment.

Mr. INHOFE. OK, it was my understanding that was the case. I have checked with the leaders of the banking committee, and I think they are anticipating that could happen. So I appreciate it, and I just wanted that clarification as to where that problem that you point out does exist in the bill.

Ms. STABENOW. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, for that clarification.

I do want to indicate very clearly that for communities around this country, this is a big deal. This is certainly a big deal for Michigan, and I can't in any way support any effort going forward unless this is fixed. It is a small amount of dollars in the larger scheme of funding this bill, and if it means that we fund the highway bill one less month rather than devastating communities such as Cleveland, Detroit, Flint, and cities in Illinois and South Carolina, Nevada, California, Kentucky, and across the country, then so be it. But I can't be any part of something that takes a huge effort and stops it in its tracks when it is so important to rebuild.

I just want to share one example of why this is so important. I know the chairman is waiting to speak, so I won't be long. But I do want to show that in every rebuild community—let me just give you one story.

In Detroit in October of 2009—this was in the paper—a 14-year-old girl on her way to high school was pulled behind a garage in a blighted neighbor-

hood. In 2012, Detroit neighbors organized to try to protect schoolgirls from being assaulted on their way to school. One volunteer told the Detroit Free Press of rescuing a 13-year-old girl who was attacked in an abandoned garage. In 2012, a man who lived near Detroit looks for girls who are walking alone—girls walking to school, doing the right thing. We want them to go to school. We want them to get an education. The man abducted them at gunpoint and took them to vacant buildings and assaulted them. One man was accused of assaulting seven women. In 2012, a young woman was pulled into an abandoned house just two blocks from Denby High School and sexually assaulted—two blocks from school. She was trying to go to school when she was sexually assaulted. The Detroit Free Press interviewed an 18-year-old young woman who walked every day to school. She said she passed 88 vacant homes, and she knew other girls her age had been attacked in the neighborhood. This is getting fixed. This is getting fixed. Those buildings are coming down and in some cases what we have are landlords fixing them up. They are going in and taking back the house and rebuilding the house. People are buying homes. They are coming back into the neighborhoods. In some cases small businesses are buying these homes.

We have rejuvenation going on like I have never seen before. It is dependent on the blight funds that we, through the Department of Treasury, have made available. I am not debating whether we should add more. I would love to add more. We need more funds. We need a more robust program. What I am saying is that it is outrageous if we are in a situation where there is money that cities are already counting on and spending with the private sector, with neighborhoods, with church groups—everybody is involved in this—and they are in the middle of a project and they are told: You know what; the good news is we are going to fix the road in front of your house. The bad news is your neighborhood is going to fall apart because we are not keeping our commitments as it relates to blight.

I will be speaking more as we go. I want to certainly yield to our distinguished chairman. I appreciate the work of EPW, as I said earlier, in the policy. But this is critical to get done. This absolutely has to be out of this bill, and I hope it will be. I hope it will be.

Thank you, Mr. President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, it is my understanding that the Senator from Indiana, Mr. COATS, is going to want some time to speak, and I am very flexible today. I just want to visit about the bill. We have so many parts of this, and I think that people have not really had a chance, and a lot of Members have not really gotten into the bill to see how far it goes and what it does.

This is the sixth one of these that I have had since I have been here in the House and the Senate. We had one in the House first. This bill, I think, is really good.

People forget that the last big bill we had was in 2005. It was a 5-year bill and it is very similar to the bill before us today. There were projects that took place that were in that bill that are now complete. In my State of Oklahoma, we had a bridge in terrible condition in Oklahoma City. In fact, we had a terrible accident. A lady with her three small children was driving under the bridge and concrete dropped and killed her. This has happened. I spoke yesterday about all the bridges and the problems that exist around this country with all of our deficient bridges. So it is serious.

Since 2009 we have not had a long-term bill. This is it. We have been operating on short-term extensions. There have been a total of 33 short-term extensions. On short-term extensions you can't get anything done. You cannot have any major reforms.

In this bill we have reforms in the NEPA system, the environmental system. We are giving latitude for road construction in terms of endangered species. There might be some little critter 6 feet down that some people don't want to disturb. Anyway, we are making exceptions. So we are really going to be able to get these projects going, and this is the first time since 2009 that we are doing it the right way.

Yesterday there were some provisions about which what we have tried to do is take them one at a time to show how much daylight is in this bill so that people know how their money is being spent. Every project that is out there can now be monitored.

What I would like to do is talk about the background of this. People don't realize that this was started in 1956 by the great General Dwight D. Eisenhower, who became the President of the United States. This Senator can say, as one of the most conservative Members of the Senate, I believe the Federal Government has grown larger and more invasive than our Founding Fathers ever envisioned, and our country could benefit from a smaller and more efficient government. I have observed that in government, if there is a problem out there, the government comes along and starts some kind of agency to deal with the problem and then the problem goes away, but the agency continues. In fact, they become part of the problem. Right now I am having a problem with one of the big bureaucracies, the FAA, on legislation that I proposed and that we passed 2 years ago, and now we have an extension of that.

When looking at the budgets of the various bureaucracies—and in that case I don't have the exact figures—it has almost doubled what it was in 1986, yet the workload is less. We have to keep in mind this is going on. This is what people are complaining about.

What they are not complaining about is what the Constitution says we are supposed to be doing.

The Constitution is very clear. It says in article I, section 8 what we are supposed to be doing as Members of the Senate and the House—No. 1, defending America, and No. 2, building and maintaining roads and bridges. Sometimes we need to get out that old worn out document and reread it and find out that this is what this bill is all about. No one else is doing it for us.

There are a lot of ideas that people have, and there are a lot of conservative groups, for example, that are saying we need devolution.

I will tell the Presiding Officer something that in all his infinite wisdom he doesn't know, and that is that 20 years ago I was the father of devolution. It is more fun to stand on the steps and say all we have to do is do away with all the Federal gas taxes and move them to the States and let the States take care of these. I would suggest that some people are in States such as South Dakota where there is a lot of land and not a whole lot of people, and that just wouldn't work. Here is the problem with that issue. In order to make devolution work—and, again, this Senator was the guy that as beautiful as it was on the stump, it was fun to talk about until I found out it was wrong. First of all, it is easy to repeal all the Federal taxes, but then you have to assume that all 48 States will agree to pass a tax increase, and that isn't going to happen. I think we all know that.

I want to mention something that is important, and that is to give the history of this. There are two areas where I believe the Federal Government has to be involved, as I mentioned, and that are consistent with the Constitution. This is both a conservative and constitutional understanding of the role of the Federal Government. President Eisenhower's Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 authorized construction of a 41,000-mile national system of interstate and defense highways. This chart I have in the Chamber shows the blue lines as the original highways, and the red came along later, which is the National Highway System. So you have the Interstate Highway System and the National Highway System. The blue is the Interstate Highway System, consisting of 41,000 miles of highways. This is actually a map of Eisenhower's Interstate Highway System back in 1956.

In order to finance this massive undertaking and to fund the remainder of the Federal-Aid Highway Program, the Highway Revenue Act of 1956 created the highway trust fund. That is what we have been talking about for a long period of time now. It provided that revenues from certain highway user groups be credited to the highway trust fund.

Interestingly, I can remember when the biggest problem with the highway trust fund was that it had too big a

surplus. It was huge. I remember the Clinton administration tried to take \$12 billion out of the highway trust fund for another program, and they were successful. It took me 3 years to get it back. That is because it was a target that had a lot of money in it. Well, the dedicated funding mechanism provided certainty for the Federal highway program. The 13-year authorization of the Highway Revenue Act gave the States the necessary certainty to plan and construct highway projects.

Since 1956, Congress has regularly reauthorized the Federal-Aid Highway Program. Eisenhower's highway act of 1956 was implemented to solve many problems we are experiencing now as our infrastructure deteriorates.

Keep in mind that it was all built on a 50-year basis and that it would last 50 years. Well, that was about 70 years ago. It is beyond its maintenance period now, and that is why it is so critical today.

The act originally in 1956 was implemented to solve the problems that we are experiencing now as our infrastructure deteriorates. Most notably, billions of dollars have been wasted on detours, traffic jams, and inefficiency in the transport of goods.

Not only did Eisenhower understand the constitutional order as intended by the Framers, but he demonstrated the terms and conditions of the Constitution in the implemented Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956. The original principles of the Constitution and the Federal-State relationship exist to ensure liberty while maintaining security. Eisenhower was the President, but he was also a general. He was a star. He knew about the military. His original concern was not with the economy as much as it was with the military. This was following World War II, and he was anticipating that something else could happen. He wanted to make sure that we could move our goods and services around for military defense purposes. The principles were made operational via the interstate highway act of 1956, and this chart has the stated purpose of the act by the President. He said: "The obsolescence of the Nation's highways presents an appalling problem of waste, danger and death."

This is a statement he made at that time. Unfortunately, Congress has forgotten that passing fully funded, long-term transportation legislation is one of the unique responsibilities and has instead fallen into a pattern of passing short-term extensions. Now, I have already talked about how many extensions have been passed since 2009—33 of them. In those extensions, you don't get any of the reforms, you don't have any of the opportunities to build roads cheaper and repair the bridges much cheaper. Now we can do that.

So he said: "Adequate financing there must be, but contention over the method should not be permitted to deny our people these critically needed roads." The need for a Federal invest-

ment is dire. Just look at the current condition of our roads and bridges. What was once the best transportation system in the world is now rapidly deteriorating as we struggle to maintain the existing condition of our infrastructure. Our global competitors are outpacing us in their infrastructure investment. I think we have another chart on that.

The interstate system is just as much about defense as it is interstate commerce: "The obsolescence of the nation's highways presents an appalling problem of waste, danger and death."

This was what the President said at that time. He is right. The condition of our roads currently has impacted the quality of life for all Americans. Fifty-four percent of America's major roads are rated poor or mediocre, according to the U.S. Department of Transportation.

This has become a matter of life and death: 32,700 Americans died in traffic crashes in 2013, with 1 of 3 fatalities related to poor road conditions, according to the Federal Highway Administration. We all remember back in 2007, up in Minnesota—it got a lot of attention up there at that time when they had the bridge collapse, the people who died, the people who were injured. It is something that could have been avoided if we had kept up-to-date on all of our bridges.

As I said yesterday, I talked about all of the bridges we have—not all of them, just some of the ones that are used more than any others. This shows the structurally deficient bridges. The darker the color the worse the bridges. There is my State of Oklahoma. You can see the entire northeast quarter of the State has a lot of the deficient bridges.

I was talking to the Senator from Missouri, Mr. BLUNT, yesterday. He talked about in Missouri—the problems we have in Missouri and Oklahoma. There are a lot of structurally deficient bridges in both states. The DRIVE Act is addressing that but also the very large bridges that are causing unnecessary deaths. Our national interstate system needs to be completely reconstructed. Right now, the 47,000—this is critical here. The 47,000-mile interstate system is about 60 years old. Many of the first segments, including segments in Oklahoma and Missouri and Kentucky, are now well beyond their 50-year design life.

When Eisenhower successfully passed the Federal-Aid Highway Act in 1956, both the House and the Senate were controlled by Democrats, while he was a Republican. The measure was met with widespread bipartisan support. There is no such thing as a Republican bridge or a Democratic road. This is something that should be blind to partisan politics, but nonetheless he was very active and he considered that one of his top priorities.

In fact, during the debates in Congress in 1955 and 1956, there had been no

opposition to the interstate system. The DRIVE Act, that is what we are going to be voting on—we have already voted on a motion to proceed to it, so we have crossed that bridge. We are now going to be considering amendments. The DRIVE Act is a long-term investment vision with new reforms that will provide States with certainty and flexibility needed to revamp our National Highway System.

We are going to—this is the only opportunity we are going to have to get this done. We are going to try to finish this bill by the end of next week. So that will be quite an undertaking. I would invite and hope that all of our Members will bring their amendments down. We will be considering amendments. We can't consider them unless they come down. What I don't want to happen is to be standing here begging for amendments to come down, and then 2 weeks from now, right before it comes time, find that we have to pass a procedure not to allow amendments.

We don't want that to happen. So we are saying get your amendments down here early. We know there are some of them—there has been a lot of publicity on this—that are not germane. Yet we are going to go ahead and consider them. We are going to open the amendment process. That is one thing I think the Republicans do better than Democrats because during the years the Democrats controlled this Chamber, we just had a handful of amendments at that time. We passed that 8-year record in the first month by encouraging people to bring down amendments. So I am asking the Democratic and Republican Senators to do that.

This is going to be the most significant bill—now that we have passed the Defense authorization bill. That is not all behind us yet. We are still meeting on that. In fact, we had a meeting this morning, but nonetheless it was passed from the committee and from the floor. Now the most important legislation that is left for the rest of the year is this bill we are talking about now. There is going to be a lot of legislation that is going to be introduced.

In my committee, the Environment and Public Works Committee, a lot of people think of that, and I know the Presiding Officer is an active member of that committee. It is not just public works. It is not just roads and highways and bridges. The other part of it, the environment and public works, includes all of the overregulation.

Right now, if you go back to your States—I don't care what State it is—and you talk to people on the streets who are in business, they will tell you the greatest problem we are having right now is overregulation by the EPA. The Environmental Protection Agency is passing regulations right now. I mean, look at the cap-and-trade legislation. That would constitute the greatest tax increase in history. Yet they tried to pass it as legislation. Now they are trying to do it as regulations.

The waters of the United States. That is an issue that if you talk to

your farmers—I don't care if it is in South Dakota, Oklahoma, Missouri or any of the rest of the country—and you ask what is the biggest problem you are facing right now, it is nothing that is found in the farm bill. It is the overregulation by the EPA. They will single out the waters of the United States bill or rule that they are trying to put through. I recall so vividly, just a few years ago, when two Members authored bills to take the word “navigable” out. I am sure there are some who have forgotten the fact that the regulation of water in the United States has always been left to the States, except for navigable waters. I understand that. Even being a conservative, I understand the Federal Government needs to be regulating those.

What the liberals tried to do is take the word “navigable” out so the States would have no say in the regulation that is out there. So not only did we defeat the legislation, but both Senator Feingold and Congressman Oberstar, who were the sponsors of the bill, were defeated in the next election too. We have all these things. We have endangered species. These are all part of this committee. So it is overregulation that is consuming most of our time.

Repairing our roads and bridges is an area where everyone agrees. You have to keep in mind, this bill passed—our bipartisan bill—unanimously out of committee, not one vote against.

I am prepared to yield the floor because I understand the Senator from Indiana is here.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Indiana.

Mr. COATS. Mr. President, I want to thank my colleague from Oklahoma for his recent statement. I also understand he is willing to help relieve me a little bit, as I am the next Presiding Officer. I appreciate that. I will relieve him of that responsibility as soon as I finish my remarks.

WASTEFUL SPENDING

As many know, I have, since February, been coming to the Senate floor—now 18 different times—to highlight waste, fraud, and abuse within the Federal Government. The Senator from Oklahoma was talking about his committee, which he runs in such an efficient and effective way—I am particularly taken with the overregulation under this administration. It resonates with me. It is killing our farmers. It is killing our small businesses.

We are all for safe, sound, cost-effective regulations that address safety and health. No one is trying to undo those, but we have an agency that is running amuck with ideological determinations on the basis of what “they think is best” for the country, regardless of what numbers come up, what impact they have—what negative impacts. No one has better led this effort than the Senator from Oklahoma, Mr. INHOFE. I thank him for that.

But today I have come to talk about waste, abuse, and fraud. I have been

down here 18 times since February, once a week. I could be down here every day. I could be down here every hour. It is astounding the amount of taxpayers' hard-earned dollars that has to pay for what has been categorized by neutral agencies—not on a partisan basis at all—as total waste, total fraud, and total abuse.

So here I am again, trying to do the best we can to make this government more effective, more efficient, and more focused on the essential things it needs to do—wiping out, eliminating the abusive use, the wasteful use, and the fraudulent use of hard-earned tax dollars.

Today, what I would like to speak about relates to the so-called Affordable Care Act. I think we found that a better title would have been the “Unaffordable Care Act.” But last week in the Senate Finance Committee, we had the Director from GAO—a member from GAO, Mr. Bagdoyan. He is the Director of Audit Services at the Government Accountability Office.

It was a fascinating hearing, but he came to report to us about abuses that are taking place or could take place with the Affordable Care Act enrollment. It is amazing. I would like to go over that. His audit team—this is his job. His job is to audit the spending of taxpayer dollars. In this case, they looked at the Affordable Care Act enrollment process. They wanted to see whether the procedures that had been agreed to, to prevent people from abusing this in a fraudulent way—if they had been implemented at the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid, CMS.

So what they did is run an undercover so-called secret shopper investigation to test the internal controls of healthcare.gov to review how the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services handle this new program. Particularly, this investigation was designed to determine how effective the administration's Federal health insurance exchange is protecting against fraudulent applications. So it is a very narrowly focused test and a very legitimate test to see if the agreed-upon measures and criteria for qualifying to enroll in health care, the ObamaCare bill, have been put in place.

There are millions of people who have selected ObamaCare plans through healthcare.gov. Eight million Americans in 34 States have selected plans, and 87 percent of those have qualified for premium subsidies. That alone adds up to tens of billions in subsidies each year, all coming through healthcare.gov. That is an issue in and of itself. I am not here necessarily to address that. We can address that at another time.

But the key question was, if applicants misrepresent themselves with fake facts in order to receive those subsidies, would the folks at healthcare.gov find those, catch them, and keep them from qualifying. Unfortunately, the answer is a resounding

no. The GAO, the Government Accountability Office, found that 11 out of 12 fake applications received approval. For this investigation, GAO created false identities and used them to apply for premium tax subsidies through the Federal health insurance exchange. They used fake documents or, in several cases, no documents at all. It was just a test. So they would learn that either those applications would be turned down or that those restrictions which were designated—that those running healthcare.gov knew what they needed to do and did what they needed to do.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services accepted 11 out of the 12, accepted the fake documents, for some didn't even attempt to verify their authenticity, and as a result they enrolled those applicants. They granted them thousands of dollars in premium tax subsidies. Specifically, CMS awarded \$30,000 in advanced premium tax credits to 11 of those 12 fraudulent applicants in 2014 alone.

As 2015 began, CMS then terminated coverage for 6 of those 11 fake individuals, noting that they had not properly registered or provided necessary documents. So it seemed then that, OK, the program turned out to work and CMS finally caught on to the fact that they were issuing subsidies for fraudulent applications. Well, that optimism was very short-lived because GAO then called CMS pretending to be those individuals who had been turned down, and in five of the six cases, they were able to get their coverage and subsidies restored without submitting any paperwork.

The system handles millions of applications with billions of dollars of subsidies, and they did not design a mechanism to identify fraud even though they had been told they were not identifying the fraud and not putting the measures in place to do so.

Part of the problem is that the law is so gargantuan, it is nearly unworkable. But there is no excuse for these compliance numbers when billions of taxpayer dollars are at stake.

Unfortunately, the administration continues to measure success by the number of people who have signed up for ObamaCare. Last year, the administration rejoiced when reaching its enrollment goal and lauded it as proof the exchanges were working just fine. However, given the results of this investigation, I wonder what percentage of those enrollees were real people providing real information and how many were people providing no information or false information.

When the test revealed that 11 out of 12—that is a pretty high percentage. You can multiply that out over what you think might be happening in the enrollment process, and there could be very substantial amounts of taxpayer money being paid in subsidies to people who do not qualify.

Careful oversight of these programs for Federal benefits is of utmost impor-

tance, whether it is CMS on ObamaCare or whether it is any other agency in government that is providing benefits to individuals. I have listed many of those in my "Waste of the Week" speeches.

This government needs to—must and Congress must do better in terms of oversight to make sure taxpayer dollars are spent effectively and efficiently, and if not, returned to the taxpayers so they don't have to send them here to be wasted in the first place.

Clearly GAO used only a small number of claims, but imagine what hasn't been looked at or identified and what those numbers would be. This is a canary in a coal mine. If this isn't an alarm bell of dysfunction, I don't know what it is.

Today I am not going to speculate on how much money has been wasted because of the acceptance of false applications, but I will put \$30,000 of documented abuse of subsidies that were paid for under the GAO investigation. So it is just a little bump on our gauge as we head toward \$100 billion, and I have been told that next week's waste of the week will take us to our goal of \$100 billion. We had hoped to reach that goal by the end of this year. We are way ahead of time. And, as I said, I could come down here every day or maybe every hour, given the waste we are finding in this misuse of taxpayer money.

I thank the Chair again for helping me out on the time situation. I look forward to relieving the Presiding Officer in the chair.

With that, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, we have so many elements of the bill that is under consideration now, the DRIVE Act. It is enjoyable to talk about it. Yesterday we talked about the transparency, the fact that we have a way that the public can know every dime.

I was watching as the Presiding Officer was giving a presentation on waste in government. That is not the case here. If all government agencies had the transparency we are going to have with the DRIVE Act, where everyone is going to know on a day-to-day basis the progress of every bridge, every highway that is being done, the renovations, then we wouldn't be having that problem. We are doing it right.

You know, I look at these different parts of the bill. It is so big, you can talk about it for a long period of time. Yesterday we went over not all of the deficient bridges in the country but quite a few of them, and when people stop and realize that people die unne-

cessarily because of deficiencies in our bridges—it is a serious thing.

But one of the parts of this bill that people are not aware of as much as they should be is the freight section of the bill, transporting freight around. We talked about the history. We talked about the fact that the first bill that came along for a transportation reauthorization bill back in 1956 was primarily for military purposes. Now we realize the deficiency—we are compared to China, compared to other countries in not keeping up our highway system.

Today the National Highway System carries more than 55 percent of the Nation's highway traffic and 97 percent of the truck freight traffic. Of the 4 million miles of public roads, the National Highway System represents 5.5 percent of the Nation's most heavily traveled miles of road. That 5.5 percent carries 97 percent of the freight.

Americans depend on a well-maintained National Highway System that provides critical connections between urban and rural communities. American businesses pay an estimated \$27 billion a year in extra freight transportation costs due to the poor condition of public roads, which increases shipping delays and raises prices on everyday products. Recognizing that it is the foundation of the Nation's economy and the key to the Nation's ability to compete in the global economy, it is essential that we focus efforts to improve freight movement on the National Highway System.

You know, in all the bills—and I have been involved in six of these over the years—we have never really singled out freight to be addressed. Yet there is no one in here who hasn't gone down our roads and highways and seen the congestion and the traffic and trucks idling here and there and everyone being late, and there is a tremendous cost to that.

The DRIVE Act includes two new programs to help States deliver projects that promote the safe, efficient, and reliable transportation of consumer goods and products. The first new program is the National Freight Program. The National Freight Program is distributed by a formula that will provide funds to all States to enhance the movement of goods, reduce costs, and improve the performance for businesses.

It is kind of interesting because one of the good features about a transportation system and the way we have been doing it with our Transportation reauthorization bill is that we rely on the States to decide what their priorities are. This infinite wisdom in Washington where they think they know more than we know in the States is not true at all. So this is one of the rare areas where we go to States and say: Look, you guys, you decide what you think your priorities are in Indiana or in Oklahoma. So we have a formula to address that.

The problem with that is when you get to moving freight, they do not have

that as a high priority because most freight moves through a State and they do not consider that to be a local problem. They are more concerned about passenger cars. So it doesn't appear in their priorities. Well, it does appear now.

So we have the first new program, the National Freight Program, which is a different type of formula, and it addresses the movement of freight through States. The program will expand flexibility for both rural and urban areas to designate key freight corridors that match the regional movement of goods on roads. It will improve the efforts to identify projects with a high return on investment through State freight plans and State advisory committees.

The second program is the Assistance for Major Projects Program. It creates a competitive grant program to provide funds to major projects of high importance to the community, to the region, and to the Nation. The program includes a set-aside for rural areas and ensures an equitable geographic distribution of funds.

These new freight programs will only exist if the DRIVE Act is enacted. That is what we are talking about now—the DRIVE Act. And it will be enacted by Congress, I am very confident.

I can't imagine, by the way, Members not listening to the people back home. Right now, if you go back to any of the States—I don't care what State it is—and you talk to the State departments of transportation, they will be listening to not just the road builders and suppliers but the people who are driving on the roads. It is the most popular thing in America. So I can't imagine having the opportunity to have a 6-year program and getting justification for voting against it.

I think it is time to be innovative and forward-thinking in how the Federal programs use tax dollars to responsibly partner with the States to improve the National Highway System, and the DRIVE Act is the answer.

Let's talk about Fort Lee, NJ. Here is the George Washington Bridge, which connects Fort Lee, NJ, to New York City. It is the second worst freight bottleneck by congestion index in the Nation. Average speed slows to 29 miles an hour. Rush hour speeds in the morning and evenings slow to below 15 miles an hour. The nearby I-95 Cross Bronx Expressway is the most congested corridor in the country. The morning southbound commute is considered the worst of the worst in the country. The George Washington Bridge is the world's busiest motor vehicle bridge. That is what we are looking at.

Yesterday we were talking about the Brooklyn Bridge. Some of us here are old enough to remember the old Tarzan movies. Do you guys remember that? Do you watch the reruns? Johnny Weissmuller was his name. He had a lot of muscles and was a very strong guy. One of his movies was "Tarzan's New

York Adventure." In that movie he was being chased around the Brooklyn Bridge. The Brooklyn Bridge was built in 1883 and here we are today and we still have the Brooklyn Bridge. Anyway, Johnny Weissmuller crawled up on the top as the cops were chasing him with guns and all that and he dived off. Every time I drive over that bridge, I think I am going to be diving off there if it collapses.

Houston, TX, is home to 5 of the top 20 freight bottlenecks in the Nation. Texas is home to 9 of the top 25 freight bottlenecks. Freight bottlenecks cost the freight industry in Texas some \$671 million a year—that is just in Texas, the bottlenecks—and 8.8 million hours of delay.

I-45 at U.S. 59 is ranked third by the congestion index. I-45 at U.S. 610 North is ranked 15. Average speed slows to 39 miles an hour. Morning and evening rush hour speeds drop way below that.

Look at this. You can see that is a problem. That is why this is a very important part of the bill that is before us now.

I think we have an opportunity here. We have to sometimes remind people of what doesn't work. What doesn't work are short-term fixes or short-term extensions of previous bills that were passed. The last one we passed was in 2005. It was a 5-year bill. It expired at the end of 2009. At that time we should have started another transportation reauthorization bill, but we didn't do it. So we have had short-term extensions.

There is a guy named Gary Ridley out in Oklahoma who is recognized nationally. He has been here testifying several times before us as a nationally recognized scholar. He really understands transportation. If we look at the 33 short-term extensions we have operated under here in America after 2009 and before this bill, it wastes more dollars than a long-term reauthorization.

I think it is important for a lot of people to hear this because sometimes there are rating organizations that say: Well, we are going to oppose a bill because it is a big spending bill. Sure it is a big spending bill. You know, that old, worn-out document called the Constitution says what we are supposed to be doing here is defending America and building bridges and roads. So that is what this is all about, and we are going to do it. But for conservative groups to say they don't want to support this bill—they have dropped short of understanding the fact that the alternative is to have short-term extensions, which is an irresponsible use of dollars. The conservative position is to pass a funded highway reauthorization bill.

I know a lot of people will be talking about devolution. I can talk about this because going back 25 years ago, at that time a guy named Connie Mack, who was a House Member and later a Senator from Florida—he and I were the fathers of devolution. You didn't know that, did you? We are the ones who introduced the devolution bill. The idea sounded good on the stump be-

cause you could say: Well, we will just repeal all the Federal taxes and make State taxes out of them.

Well, it didn't quite work that way because you can't do that. If you repeal a Federal tax, then you have to pass a State tax. And how many people here are naive enough to believe that all 48 contiguous States would be willing to pass a sizable State tax increase? It is not going to happen. So that is why the National Highway System is so important. That is why Eisenhower started this back in 1956.

I have friends up in Wyoming. There are very few people in Wyoming, but there are a lot of roads that are part of our National Highway System. If devolution occurred in Wyoming, they would have to pass a 31-cent-per-gallon gasoline tax increase in Wyoming. It is not going to happen. We know it is not going to happen. So we are not going to have a uniform system unless we do it this way.

The opportunity we have now is the DRIVE Act. I know the House has made some statements that they want to do a 5-month extension. See, there we go again, another short-term extension. Their reasoning, I guess, is they want to get to the year's end and then couple that—because of the popularity of the highway bill—with some of the tax changes that are set to take place at the first of this coming year.

So I know some of my friends—because I have talked to them over in the House—have said: Well, we want a short-term bill because we don't think you are going to pass a long-term bill in the Senate.

Well, when they find out we are going to pass a long-term bill—we are going to pass this bill—that will change things. So I look forward to that, to the opportunity to get this passed and get it passed in a timely fashion.

By the way, we have to keep in mind that we are on a deadline. The deadline is the end of this month. The highway trust fund runs out of money at that time, so that is why it is important that we get this passed.

ORDER FOR RECESS

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate recess from 12:30 p.m. until 2:15 p.m. and that the time during the recess count postclosure on the motion to proceed to H.R. 22.

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

Mr. INHOFE. With that, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mrs. FISCHER. Mr. President, I rise today to speak about critical legislation before the Senate regarding our Nation's transportation regulatory framework and infrastructure.

As an active member of the Senate commerce committee and the Environment and Public Works Committee, I am proud of the work my colleagues and I have done to develop a strong, comprehensive bill that keeps our Nation moving by making our transportation system safer and more efficient, while also increasing our global competitiveness. As many may know, my father was the director of the Nebraska Department of Roads. Through his service—and by osmosis—I gained a deep appreciation for infrastructure projects and enabling them to move forward in Nebraska and elsewhere.

I have spoken with families, consumers, workers, and business owners all across the State of Nebraska. The message is loud and clear. Nebraskans want a long-term highway bill. Nebraskans want to bring certainty to local projects and increase safety on the roads and highways.

In the coming days, the Senate has the opportunity to provide our constituents with just that—a 6-year transportation bill that will help vital projects get up and running.

The bill enhances safety, makes much-needed regulatory reforms, and increases investment in our Nation's infrastructure.

I appreciate the work that Chairmen THUNE and INHOFE and Senator BOXER and their committee staff members have accomplished with the DRIVE Act.

The DRIVE Act will reauthorize surface transportation programs for 6 years—something I have long advocated—to provide certainty for States, businesses, families, and the traveling public. Most importantly, the bill advances key provisions to ensure that local infrastructure projects in my State will move forward with a better and more defined process from the onset.

Throughout the process of developing this bill, I worked with local stakeholders in Nebraska, including our State department of roads, highway builders, consultants, and transportation leaders. The meaningful changes I championed will provide better coordination between the Federal Highway Administration and States on streamlining environmental permitting and review and programmatic agreement templates when initiating new infrastructure projects.

More specifically, the bill will establish procedures, based on a template developed by the Transportation Secretary, allowing States, in addition to the Federal Government, to determine which State or Federal agencies must be consulted prior to beginning an infrastructure project.

In addition, the bill provides technical assistance to States that want to assume responsibility for reviews of categorical exclusion projects, which are a category of projects that don't have a significant impact on the environment, triggering a less arduous level of environmental review.

My provision would help States provide their own certification regarding the appropriate level of environmental review of certain projects, rather than wasting time and taxpayer dollars waiting for the Federal Government to provide the assessments.

Given Nebraska's challenges with starting and completing infrastructure projects, these elements of the DRIVE Act offer a major step forward for transportation projects in my State. I appreciate all of the input my office received from Nebraska's transportation stakeholders on these crucial issues.

The bill also includes major components of a bill I introduced earlier this summer called the TRUCK Safety Reform Act. The legislation offers important regulatory reforms to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, or FMCSA, and encourages stronger regulatory analysis, more transparency, and wider public participation in this regulatory process.

The bill also provides regulatory relief to agricultural producers in Nebraska, reforms research at the Department of Transportation to reduce duplication across the modal administrations, and it addresses the challenges of the CSA truck scoring program.

I am also pleased that the bill establishes a new freight program to prioritize, increase efficiency, and lower the cost of the movement of freight imports and exports throughout our Nation.

The freight program will help America's transportation system continue to facilitate expanding U.S. trade flows.

The DRIVE Act further incorporates performance-based regulations into our Nation's transportation system. Performance-based measures will offer States more flexibility in meeting the goals of infrastructure-related regulations.

Furthermore, the reforms to our transportation system will increase U.S. global competitiveness and strengthen safety on our Nation's roads. They will also provide certainty to States and local governments, businesses, consumers, workers, and families.

Although this bill does not include every single provision for which I initially advocated, I was willing to compromise. I was willing to compromise for the greater good of our country's transportation network. I truly appreciate Senator BOXER's willingness to negotiate in good faith.

I encourage all of my colleagues to support this essential legislation. It is time for us to address our Nation's transportation challenges.

I yield the floor.

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. COATS. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. FISCHER). Without objection, it is so ordered.

THE BUDGET

Mr. COATS. Madam President, I repeatedly have come down to the Senate floor to talk about our budget issues. Earlier this morning I talked about my 18th waste of the week—looking at waste, fraud, and abuse in terms of government spending and a waste of taxpayers' dollars.

The first 4 years of this 6-year term that I am enjoying and participating in, I have been consumed with the issue of our continuing deficit spending and increasing national debt.

I was part of a group working directly with the President in an effort for many months with his top people to reach an agreement on how to address our long-term budget situation. It is no secret that under this administration the national debt has almost doubled. It is staggering to think that over the 230 or 240 years of the life of this country we have gone from \$10.6 trillion to now \$18.8 trillion of debt. It is going to have consequences.

As chairman of the Joint Economic Committee, we recently released some information entitled "Ten Things to know about CBO's Long-Term Budget Outlook." This is something we spent a great deal of time debating years ago, but it has fallen under the radar. We are obviously dealing with issues that are important. This Iran deal that has just been signed by the administration deserves intense concentration and consideration in terms of how we address it. We also have the continuing economic malaise and slow recovery from the recession.

We have a number of issues we need to address, such as highway funding, health care, and so forth. These are all important issues. But underlying all of this is a fundamental issue that has not been addressed, and if it is not addressed, it will have significant and adverse consequences for the American people, not just for future generations but even for our own generation.

I keep trying to bring us back to this gorilla in the room that we ignore and keep thinking we will deal with it later. It has been passed on, and the so-called can has been kicked down the road election after election, through different Presidents and resulting in more and more negative consequences for the American people.

Our Joint Economic Committee just recently released ten things we need to know about the Congressional Budget Office's long-term budget outlook.

No. 1, the United States cannot rely on borrowing forever. This is not a complex issue. If you continue to borrow more money and don't pay your bills, eventually the tax collector is at the door. With the tax collector being at the door, this means eventually investors will demand higher and higher interest rates because we don't have the confidence the United States is going to be able to pay its bills.

No. 2, mandatory spending skyrockets. We all have known the spending for Medicare and Medicaid and entitlements is running amok and it needs to be addressed on a long-term fix.

No. 3, according to CBO, "The large amount of debt could also compromise national security by constraining defense spending in times of international crisis or by limiting the country's ability to prepare for such a crisis." Look at the world today. It is aflame. Yet we are cutting our defense at historically low rates of readiness in terms of dealing with this. So while the threat increases daily and is right there before us, we are slashing our spending on defense and national security because we cannot afford it due to the entitlements eating all of this up.

No. 4, bankruptcy looms for Social Security. We stand here and pretend like everything is fine and everybody is going to continue to receive their Social Security checks, no problem. CBO projects that bankruptcy looms for Social Security. The report that just came out from the trustees has basically said that within a relatively short period of time Social Security is going to hit bankruptcy. What does that mean? That means dramatic cuts in Social Security benefits to people who have counted on using Social Security to help for their retirement or dramatic tax increases to cover the deficit.

There is a portion of Social Security—the Social Security disability benefits—that the trustees said is going broke next year. We are more than halfway through 2015, and CBO projects that by the end of 2016 the Social Security disability fund will be going bankrupt. That is what has been said here. If you don't trust my words, read the—not my favorite newspaper but one that usually gets its facts right—the New York Times. Today's New York Times has a major article: "Social Security Disability Benefits Face Cuts in 2016, Trustees Say." I will quote a couple of items which are written in this issue:

Eleven million people face a deep, abrupt cut in disability insurance benefits in late 2016 if Congress fails to replenish Social Security's disability trust fund, which is running out of money.

That statement was issued by the administration.

Officials expressed concern about the program as they issued their annual report on the financial condition of Medicare and Social Security, which together account for 40 percent of all federal spending.

The trustees of Social Security . . . said the disability trust fund would be depleted in the last quarter of 2016. After that, they said, benefits would automatically be cut by 19 percent because revenues, largely from payroll taxes, would be sufficient to cover only 81 percent of scheduled benefit payments.

Folks, we have been warning about this for years, not doing anything about it, and we now have this report from the trustees who oversee these funds, and the report, as published by

the New York Times today, says this thing is going broke next year and cuts will be 19 percent because we don't have the money to pay for it. You would think the alarm bells would be sounding. You would think we would finally understand we are hitting the wall on spending and that we would finally step up and do something about runaway entitlement mandatory spending or everybody will end up paying the price.

I will add one more point from the New York Times:

The trustees, in their report, said that the squeeze on the disability program was "but the first manifestation of larger financial imbalances facing Social Security as a whole, as well as Medicare."

Where is AARP? Where are the people in retirement who say don't touch a penny of my Social Security or Medicare benefits, when the trustees say don't worry, we will not have to touch a penny of it; the program is going broke on its own.

For all of us who have been pleading to do something to address this issue, it is not even being talked about. Yet anybody who comes to the floor and says this kind of stuff is immediately pilloried by AARP: Oh, they are going to go off and cut our Social Security. No. It is going to automatically happen because we haven't addressed the issue. So don't criticize us for trying to address an issue that will cut your benefits by 19 percent or cause the program to go broke. Support those who have had the courage to stand and say: Folks, we have to do something about this. If you want to continue and guarantee Social Security benefits when people retire or give them Medicare coverage when they retire and need it, something has to be done now or there will be massive cuts. That is not just a Republican or conservative standing and saying that we are spending too much money and we have to cut back on that; the trustees who oversee the programs are warning us and saying you have to do something or everybody is going to take not just a haircut but a major cut.

A couple of other things came out on the budget term outlook. The Federal debt has nearly doubled since President Obama was elected. It now stands at 74 percent of the economy. The Federal debt has nearly doubled since the President was elected. What a legacy. Why in the world would a President of the United States with a responsibility to oversee the fiscal basis of what makes this country work and to commit to people that he will address problems as they occur—if this was a private business, it would be in bankruptcy. Nobody would buy the stock of this business. Nobody would buy bonds of this business. Nobody would invest in this business because it is totally dysfunctional and it is totally going broke. Yet the Federal Government has printing presses down in the basement and they keep printing out dollars. That decreases their value to cover our

debts, and they continue to tell people to go ahead and loan money to the States. We are also going to keep taking your taxes, but buy our bonds and don't worry because we are going to pay them back—not at this rate. We are heading toward the wall, we are in the crisis, and we are not doing anything about it.

No. 6, and the last point. Hopefully, CBO, the Congressional Budget Office, made correct assumptions. Their warnings are based on assumptions and hopefully we will make some efforts and prevent some of this, but if they are off by just three-quarters of 1 percentage point, it will result in a dramatic change of raising the Federal debt from 111 percent of the economy by 2039 to 159 percent of the economy. You know who has those numbers? Greece. Japan is careening toward that catastrophe.

If you want to see a model or example of what happens to a country that allows its debt to run unchecked and to hit the 100-percent mark of its total economy, just take a look at what is happening in Greece. None of us wants to see that happen, but we have far too few alarm bells sounding in this country because it is happening. This isn't just Republican or conservative propaganda. This is the Congressional Budget Office. It is not Republican, it is not Democratic, it is totally neutral. It is math. It is numbers. It has nothing to do with ideology. It has everything to do with numbers that ought to be driving us to deal with this issue, standing up to our constituents and saying, regardless of the political consequences, folks, just do the math. It is pretty simple math. If we don't do something, everyone is going to pay the price.

For those organizations—and I call out AARP—that scare people with mail and phone calls and everything else saying that they are going to cut your Social Security and take some money away from your disability benefits, that is not what we want to do. We want to guarantee what we have promised to people, but if we don't take these actions, it will automatically happen. So we need the support of everybody who has concern not just about my generation, who are retiring in record numbers, but about the future for our children and grandchildren. What is this country going to be if we can't take these steps?

I get exercised about this, and it is why I came back. It is one of the two main reasons I decided to run for the Senate again. I was worried about terrorist attacks and the nightmare of a marriage between weapons of mass destruction and terrorist groups impacting our country and the world. But while we seem to be struggling to address the terror issue and having some success—at least we are aware of it on a daily basis—we are letting this fiscal crisis go by without even talking about it. I think everybody is exhausted. We have had exhausting exchanges. We

have had bipartisan Democrats and Republicans working together and pleading with the President and the White House, starting with Simpson-Bowles, which was a bipartisan effort. The Gang of 6, the Committee of 12, the supercommittee were all bipartisan efforts.

I was part of the dinner group, which was an effort to plead with the President to do something together to address this problem and being turned down time after time after time. Now we are sailing toward the end of this Presidency, and obviously nothing is going to be done even though the Social Security trust fund is going to expire on the President's watch. They will come up with some gimmick and shift some money around and so forth, thereby just putting us further in debt and kicking the can down the road. They have to cover this because politically they will not allow this to happen, but they will do it in a way that makes our situation even worse.

As the President careens toward retirement and his legacy, one of those legacies will be questioned by people for years and years into the future: Why didn't we do something when we had the chance on a bipartisan basis with support from both parties? Why was the President so adamant about not doing anything to address this problem?

Time is running out. Social Security disability will collapse under the President's leadership before he escapes at the end of 2016. You can tell how frustrated I am, but I will keep coming down here and talking about this stuff and hopefully—well, we don't want it to happen under a crisis. We don't want to be days away from bankruptcy, so we move some money around in the Federal budget and so forth and so on, take it from Peter to pay Paul, put us further in debt, and then kick the can down the road.

I feel for the next President, whoever that might be. They are going to get a can of worms because we didn't do anything about this during this tenure.

With that, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

RECESS

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

Thereupon, the Senate, at 12:33 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. PORTMAN).

HIRE MORE HEROES ACT OF 2015— MOTION TO PROCEED—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, Vermonters—like many Americans—are frustrated. They are frustrated when they see short-term patches that do not make investments in our crumbling infrastructure. They are frustrated with seeing meaningful policy advance, while Congress bickers over how to pay for it—and at what expense to other critical programs.

Passing a long-term authorization to make needed improvements to our aging roads and bridges is a matter of common sense. It is a matter of safety. And quite frankly, for us in Congress, it's our job.

After 11 short-term extensions over the course of 3 years, Congress finally approved MAP-21 in 2012. Now, two short-term extensions later and faced with another expiration deadline, we have a choice: another patch, or pass a meaningful, long-term transportation authorization that will give our States the ability to build and repair roads, bridges, and byways, to promote rail safety and transit, and to invest in the critical infrastructure that supports our cities and towns, enables interstate and intrastate commerce, and creates jobs for American workers. The time to pass a plan for long-term transportation funding is now.

Vermonters take great pride in our historic downtowns and small communities. In our cities and towns, we have a culture of getting things done. We find a way to accomplish our shared goals. But, when those shared goals rely largely on a Federal funding stream that is unreliable at best, and uncertain at worst, it makes it impossible to double down on the investments needed to keep the cars, buses, and trucks moving on our roads. We can invest in bridges and roads overseas. We do it all the time. We decided to spend a couple of trillion dollars in Iraq. We didn't use any offsets; we just put it on the credit card. As one Vermonter said to me back home: We spend billions upon billions of dollars to build roads and bridges over there, and then they blow them up. Why don't we spend a little bit of that money here at home, and we will take care of those roads and bridges?

As much as we invest in bridges and roads overseas, we must do so right here at home. Look at this bridge show in this picture I have in the Chamber. It is located in East Montpelier, just about 5 miles from where I was born. It was built in 1936—the year my parents were married. It is in dire need of repair. Weather, the sometimes very harsh Vermont climate, age, and traffic volume—more than 4,400 vehicles cross it per day, 10 percent of which are trucks—have led to the deterioration of the bridge. It is one of nearly 300 long and short bridges in Vermont that have been deemed structurally deficient. The East Montpelier Bridge re-

mains open—at least for now. It will be replaced in 2018, with a price tag of \$7.3 million, about 2 minutes' worth of the money we wasted in Iraq. It is an issue of safety. It is an issue of economic certainty. It is a commonsense investment that has been delayed for too long because resources are far too scarce. I am willing to bet the same could be said of all 50 States represented in this body.

We all agree that a long-term transportation bill means safe bridges, paved roads, and completed railways. But it also encourages innovative projects that incorporate public health, environmental, and social incentives. Look no further than Burlington, VT. A picturesque town nestled on the shores of Lake Champlain, it is home to a variety of innovative entrepreneurs and businesses, from high-tech hubs to specialty food producers. As our businesses and communities grow, Vermonters depend on safe and reliable modes of transportation to keep them connected.

Church Street is a pedestrian-only street that welcomes locals and visitors to enjoy the many vibrant shops and restaurants. As businesses begin to sprawl beyond the limits of Church Street and settle into new homes along Pine Street, the city has invested in safe modes of travel to ensure accessibility. The Bike Path Rehabilitation Project and the Safe Streets Collaborative are projects that consider the needs of the community as a whole—either in a vehicle, on foot, or pedaling.

Main Street—the heart of any Vermont downtown—is home to small businesses and services such as post offices, grocery stores, medical offices, and banks. In a rural State such as Vermont, investing in our infrastructure extends beyond bridges and roads. It is sidewalk repair. It is establishing crosswalks. It is widening roads to provide for parking, and it is installing such basic things as street lighting, refuse receptacles and landscaping.

After many years of economic decline in downtown Barre—one of our larger cities—the city's Main Street was left with empty storefronts and lonely streets. The community introduced the Big Dig—a multiyear effort to revitalize Main Street and City Hall Park. With funding sourced from Downtown Transportation Grants and Federal funding sourced through the Agency of Transportation, 200 State employees were able to relocate into a new office building in the heart of downtown.

Look at the before and after pictures. The differences are stark. These are the kinds of Federal investments, coupled with investments from States and towns, that can revitalize communities across the country. This project brought life back into Main Street. Businesses filled vacant office spaces, restaurants opened their doors, and the sidewalks welcomed locals and visitors alike. The transportation funding went beyond just improving the physical infrastructure; it was an investment in