

under the failings of this administration. This is the bill that supports veterans by funding the health care and the benefits they rely on. This is the bill. This is the bill that supports military families by funding the housing, schools, and health facilities that serve them.

The veterans legislation before us provides support for women's health, for medical research, and for veterans suffering from traumatic brain injury. It provides funding for design work at a new VA medical center in Louisville, for educational facilities at Fort Knox, and for a special operations headquarters at Fort Campbell, all in my State.

The bill contains important reforms aimed at supporting veterans in the wake of a true national disgrace—the VA scandal. The reforms funded in this bill will allow for greater national and regional progress in reducing VA claim backlogs, and they will deploy important protections for whistleblowers too.

Look, we need to remember that we have an all-volunteer force in this country. The young men and women who sign up to defend our Nation don't ask for a lot, but our Nation certainly asks a lot of them. These heroes shouldn't have to worry that their benefits or health care or the housing and support their families need might not be there.

There is a long tradition in the Senate of bipartisan support for our troops, our veterans, and their families. We saw that bipartisan tradition on full display just a few months ago when Republicans and Democrats came together in the Appropriations Committee to pass bipartisan legislation to fund our troops and support our veterans.

We ask a lot of the men and women who serve. They don't need a bigger IRS or political games like the Democrats' self-described filibuster summer; they need our care and our support. It is our turn to give back to them. Why don't we get back to the bipartisan tradition of supporting these bills so we can do what we need to do for our veterans.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

FOREIGN POLICY, BENGHAZI SELECT COMMITTEE, AND THE NEED FOR BIPARTISAN NEGOTIATIONS

MR. REID. Mr. President, it is hard for me, when I come here every day, to be patient and listen to my friend the Republican leader talk because he is talking about something that is not real. He is not talking about reality. He wants to get back to the bipartisan way we used to do things. I certainly agree with him, but having looked at

some 600 filibusters during the last few years conducted by my Republican friends, I think that speaks volumes.

To have the Republican leader come to the floor and criticize Obama about what is going on in the Middle East—that takes a lot of gall. We all know what happened in the Middle East a number of years ago that created all these problems. It was the worst foreign policy mistake in the history of our country—invading Iraq. For what? Look what we have now in Iraq. Look what we have in the entire Middle East. So it takes a lot of rearranging facts for the Republican leader to come to the floor every day—most days I just sit here, listen, and go on about my business, but I can't do that. It is just unfair. Everyone knows we need to look no further than President Bush's invasion of Iraq to find out what the real problem is in the Middle East.

He talks about the Defense authorization bill. If it is such a great piece of legislative action, why does all of our military think it is a bad deal? This would be as if you decided one day you are going to make your house payment and your car payment with money that doesn't exist. That is what they have done. That is what the Republicans have done. They have \$39 billion in the Defense authorization bill that doesn't exist. It is just on paper. It is a gimmick for short-term funding. And to have the audacity to come here and talk about—look at all the threats we are having with cyber security, cyber threats. We have a cyber bill we have tried to get on this floor. The Republicans blocked it when they were in the minority. Now when they are in the majority, they won't do a bill, period.

We have an order that is before this body now that allows us to go forward on cyber security. We already have a list of amendments to agree on. But the Republican leader won't bring it to the floor. To have him come to this floor and complain of Obama not doing anything about cyber—I would suggest my friend, every morning when he gets up, walk into the bathroom, put a little water on his face, wake up, and look in the mirror.

I will talk about this a little more in a minute, but I want to start what I have to say right now by reading a direct quote from the current House majority leader, and we are told he is going to be the next Speaker of the House of Representatives. Listen to this one, speaking about the Benghazi committee. This is what Congressman McCARTHY told FOX News:

Everybody thought Hillary Clinton was unbeatable, right? But we put together a Benghazi select committee, a select committee. What are her numbers today? Her numbers are dropping.

I might add, the person doing the interviewing—good job.

But there you have it. According to the odds-on favorite future Speaker of the House, the Benghazi select committee was put together to hurt Hillary Clinton politically, to make her

poll numbers drop. We have been saying this all along, but we have now had a gaffe. But it wasn't a slipup; he just told the truth. This is evidence of what we have been saying. The Benghazi committee is a political stunt meant to influence Presidential elections that will be coming up in about a year. It is no surprise that Congressman McCARTHY's own colleagues are now backpedaling on his comments as fast as they possibly can. Their elections will be in 1 week. They better take a look at whom they are going to put in as Speaker. The Republicans have taken a national tragedy—four Americans were killed—and turned it into the cheapest political farce imaginable. This is a shame. The very notion that an official House committee was used as a political tool is appalling. Even more disgraceful is the fact that they spent almost \$5 million on this select committee—dollars spent on this rightwing political hatchet job.

That is not all. In addition to this select committee, they have had six other committees investigating this. There are untold millions of dollars spent on this. Whose money are they spending? They are spending taxpayer dollars.

We hear my friend make references to how bad it is that we are concerned about nondefense stuff. Yes, we are. We are concerned about nondefense stuff. We think the nondefense part of this budget should also get some recognition. We are concerned about the FBI and the Federal court system. We are concerned about the Drug Enforcement Administration and all the immigration officials who need help. We are concerned about our forests that are burning down. We are concerned about the situation we have where we don't have enough money to build our highways or to repair our highways. Yes, we are concerned about that and rightfully so. To have a secure nation is more than having a lot of bombs and bullets and airplanes and tanks and ships. It is also having a population that is educated.

We sent a letter to Speaker BOEHNER asking that the Benghazi Select Committee be disbanded. Get rid of it. It is a disgrace. Do the right thing; get rid of this.

Senate Republicans are stuck in a deep rut. They have dug this hole. They are in it, and they don't know how to get out of it. The Republican leader continues bringing bills to the Senate floor that have no chance of passing. We have things out there we could be doing.

Four months ago we said to the Republican leader: Why don't we sit down and try to work something out on this budget for the long term. We have been ignored. They have ignored the need for a consensus budget framework and instead are trying to move a flawed appropriations bill based on the Republicans' partisan budget. The Senate spoke and, of course, the bill didn't advance.

The Republican leader tried to move the same measure again last week, even though the Senate already rejected it. And to no one's surprise, it failed.

How about this one? This year—this year—we have already had eight votes on the health of American women—eight votes. Everyone knows how those votes are going to turn out, but you can't satisfy this voracious appetite the Republicans have to bash women. Yet the Republican leader continues to schedule votes on legislation that can't pass the Senate.

I think C-SPAN will have to have a disclaimer each time that flips up there that says: This is not a rerun. This is the Republican Senate doing it again. We have already done it seven times. Once more won't matter that much.

Today the Republican leader wants to rerun the same show again, this time with another bill—military construction. This appropriations bill is still based on the Republican's faulty budget. The senior Senator from Montana, the ranking member of that subcommittee, said yesterday this bill "is shackled to an unwise and unrealistic budget that locks in destructive sequestration cuts and vastly underfunds programs vital to this nation's security and prosperity."

That is what Senator TESTER said yesterday.

It has no chance of getting 60 votes—none. I know that, and my friend the Republican leader knows that. So why are we wasting time on another vote that is destined to fail? Because they do not want to bring real legislation to the floor. Why aren't we spending our time coming to a real bipartisan solution that helps our veterans and helps the nondefense part of our country, which is so important?

The time to sit down and to begin real budget negotiations was a long time ago, but we will take it now. I am happy to learn the Republican leader said he wants negotiations—he said this a couple days ago—he wants negotiations to begin very soon. Well, isn't that nice. Democrats have been waiting for 4 months. So let's get to it.

Just imagine what we could have accomplished if the Republican leader had taken us up on our offer 4 months ago. The U.S. Government wouldn't have come within hours of a shutdown, hundreds of government agencies would not have had to spend time and effort preparing for a shutdown, diverting them from their main jobs.

If you want to see how close we were to a government shutdown take a look at what took place in the House of Representatives yesterday. We passed over here in the Senate a short-term continuing resolution to fund the government until December 11. It went to the House, and they voted on it yesterday. Three-fifths of House Republicans—151—voted for a shutdown. They voted against the continuing resolution. That says it all.

I have reminded people before, and I will do it again. The government was shut down here a couple of years ago for 17 days. We finally got it open. We passed something over here, and it went to the House. Two-thirds of the House of Representatives—Republicans in the House—voted to keep the government closed.

There are so many programs that are just not being taken care of. I will talk about a couple of them right now. There is something I have worked on since I came here—the Land and Water Conservation Fund. The Presiding Officer is from Nevada. He has represented the northern part of the State for many years in different elective jobs. He understands and knows Lake Tahoe very well. It is a beautiful lake that we share with California. Well, the Land and Water Conservation Fund helps us greatly because we were able to take some money out of that program and purchase land that was going to be used for subdivision that would have allowed more filth to go into Lake Tahoe. We were able to stop that with money from the Land and Water Conservation Fund. The money hasn't been coming in as we have wanted in the past, so we beefed it up and were able to do a lot of things.

Now, for the first time in 50 years, this program has been allowed to expire. It is gone. This program has been supported by Democrats and Republicans and by rural and urban communities. But on the Republicans' watch, one of the most important programs and one of the best programs for our Nation's parks—and one of the most broadly supported programs in the country—has been allowed to lapse. It is gone.

The program is funded by a portion of fees collected by offshore oil and gas drilling. Every day that it is not authorized, we lose out on collecting \$2.4 million of offshore oil and gas so it can be used for our beautiful natural resources that are in a state of disrepair. This Land and Water Conservation Fund has supported projects in every State, from protecting the rim of the Grand Canyon to securing access to the Appalachian Trail, and from Lake Tahoe to building neighborhood playgrounds in urban areas across the country.

In a last-ditch effort to sway their own leadership, several Republicans came to the floor yesterday and tried to pass a stand-alone extension of the program that would be dead on arrival in the House. The Republican leaders refused to extend the program in the continuing resolution, despite many Democrats and Republicans asking for it to be included.

One other program. The good Senator from Illinois—the senior Senator from Illinois, the assistant Democratic leader, served in the House of Representatives, as I did, with a man named Claude Perkins. He was a wonderful House Member. When we came to the House in 1982, he was a very senior per-

son. He was responsible for something called the Federal Perkins Loan Program. It wasn't reauthorized in the continuing resolution. What does that mean? As a result of that, the Nation's oldest student aid program has expired, leaving up to 150,000 students who are coming into college in the lurch.

The Perkins Loan Program offers low-interest, federally subsidized student loans for students with exceptional financial needs and also offers a variety of forgiveness options for those who choose to pursue public service professions. Last year, more than \$1.2 billion in new Perkins loans were made to about 540,000 new and returning college students around the country, including 500 low-income students from Nevada.

It is hard to believe the tea party-dominated House—and obviously the Republican Caucus here is heavily influenced by the tea party—has turned a blind eye to this. It is hard to believe the tea party-dominated House of Representatives passed an extension of Perkins unanimously, but Senate Republicans would not agree to do the same. Yesterday, Senate Republicans even blocked a bid to extend the program.

These are just two of the programs that expired at midnight last night. There are many more. It is a shame because they wouldn't have expired at all if we had sat down and negotiated a few months ago. So I say to my friend the Republican leader: Let's not waste another minute on politically motivated votes that are doomed to fail. Instead, let's focus the Senate's energy and attention on bipartisan negotiations to get our country on the right track.

Mr. President, would the Chair announce the business of the day.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business for 1 hour, with Senators permitted to speak therein, with the time equally divided, with the majority controlling the first half and the Democrats controlling the final half.

The Senator from Louisiana.

MILCON-VA APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. CASSIDY. Mr. President, I wish to speak on the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs appropriations bill that is now being considered. I will start by saying that this is 3601 Gerstner Memorial Parkway, Lake Charles, LA. This is the location for the new Lake Charles VA clinic—a clinic that has taken 13 years to get