

public interest. We have talked about Federal grants that were used to prove that massaging of rabbits—using rabbits as an example—makes them feel better after a strenuous workout. I think most of us could have figured that out without having to spend some \$300,000. I think it was even more than that—as a grant. Somebody came to the conclusion that this would be a worthy project and a good use of taxpayer dollars. That got a lot of attention.

Today I will talk about improper payments that were made to ambulance suppliers. Medicare coverage allows ambulance transports when a patient's medical condition at the time of transport is such that any other means of transportation would endanger the patient's health.

If something happens with the patient at home where the spouse decides to drive the patient to the hospital but then comes to the conclusion that, no, that could potentially endanger the person's health further and decides to call 911 instead for an ambulance and they decide they need to transport this person so he or she has medical care on the way to the hospital, then a person is eligible under Medicare for transportation by the ambulance if they can prove that is necessary. The transport has to be for a patient who has a condition that is covered under Medicare in order to get a ride home from the hospital. So the patient gets transferred both to the medical provider, usually the hospital, and is then transported back to his or her house if it is medically necessary.

As a further requirement to qualify for the reimbursement, the provider who is providing the ambulance service has to meet specific qualifications in addition to what I just said. It can only be transportation that takes you to a hospital, a skilled nursing facility or a dialysis facility for certain patients, and then the ambulance can take them back home after they have received the care. Unfortunately, even with these guidelines, fraud is taking place and millions of taxpayer dollars are being wasted.

A recent report by the inspector general from the Department of Health and Human Services, which oversees Medicare, found that Medicare made \$207 million in questionable ambulance service payments during the first half of 2012. Shockingly, these payments include \$30 million where Medicare paid for transportation even though the beneficiaries may not have received any Medicare services at either the time of pickup or dropoff or at the locations or anywhere else. Thus, we are talking about millions of taxpayer dollars that may have been spent on phantom transports.

These improper charges were made and sent to Washington and the ambulance services were reimbursed.

Can you imagine an ambulance with its lights flashing and going down the road on its way to the hospital while

cars pull over to the side of the road, as we are required to do, because presumably the person in the ambulance is in danger and their health is at risk? They need to get them to the hospital or maybe the person needs dialysis and doesn't have means of transportation. No, these may be empty ambulances with their lights flashing—cars pulling over. Then they bill the government and are getting reimbursements for the trip to and from the hospital. There has been \$207 million of documented improper billing for these services.

Let me give one example. One of those services is a Pennsylvania company that fraudulently billed Medicare \$3.6 million for transports, and the supplier recruited patients that did not require any transport. They made a deal with them. They said: Look, we are going to use your name to submit the billing for reimbursement. We know that you don't need the transportation for anything, but we need to document this so we can get our money back. So what we will do is give you part of the reimbursement. We will pay you some of the money that we get if you will allow us to use your name and identity—maybe your Social Security number or Medicare card number—and you will be in on the deal. So if you get a call from an inspector or somebody trying to verify this reimbursement, say: Yeah, I had to go to the hospital or dialysis, and yes, that was a legitimate charge. This company was finally identified after charging \$3.6 million for transportation that did not meet Medicare coverage requirements.

You might say: OK, that is one company charged with fraud. You read about that in the paper. The inspector general found that one out of every five suppliers had a questionable billing practice, and that is how it totals up to \$207 million. Clearly, this is a problem that has to be addressed, and if we address this problem, we can save the taxpayer money or we can at least make sure that this money is going to cover the necessary medical treatment for those under Medicare. With 10,000 retirees entering the Medicare program every day, we need to slow down the movement toward insolvency. We need to deal with that here in Congress. We should have been dealing with this issue before. So by putting these proper safeguards in place, over \$207 million in questionable ambulance services could be eliminated and taxpayers' dollars could be saved.

This is a small addition to an ever-growing list of savings to the taxpayer if we can eliminate waste, fraud, and abuse.

I will bring up my chart. As I said before, we used to have a thermometer here to show this, how we were creeping up, and it went so high, it started going to the ceiling. We now have a total of \$117,141,182,855 and change in terms of waste, fraud, and abuse. We will be back next week for the next installment of many more to come.

Mr. President, with that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, last night the National Defense Authorization Act arrived at the White House and on the desk of the President of the United States. President Obama has said he is going to veto it or he has threatened to veto it. I rise on the floor of the Senate today to beg him to rethink his position and caution him before he moves too swiftly to send the message to the rest of the world that America is disengaged. If he vetoes the National Defense Authorization Act, he is convincing and confirming for Vladimir Putin, Kim Jong Un, the Chinese Government, the Ayatollah in Iran, and the rest of the world that America is relegating itself to a spectator on the sidelines of world affairs rather than a beacon of hope for the oppressed, those in search of democracy, and those who are at the feet of dictators.

It is time that we make sure our military is funded and authorized to the levels that are necessary to confront the world's challenges, which are more today than I have ever seen. I have just returned from the Mediterranean, where I was on the USS *Winston Churchill*, the destroyer that is dealing with some of the problems of the migration of people fleeing totalitarian governments in the Middle East. I was at Fort Gordon, GA, where the cyber command is now being set up by the U.S. Army. Cyber terrorism and cyber threats are the biggest threats we face today. I was at Fort Benning, and our Strykers in the brigade are there and in need of upgrades and continuation of improvements. I was at Fort Moody in Valdosta, GA, where the A-10s are housed, but they are going away unless we extend them, and this Defense authorization bill will do that.

While the rest of the world is burning and falling apart, this President is looking the other way and saying: No, I am not going to agree with the overwhelming majority of Congress. Instead, I am going to put America on the sidelines of world affairs.

We cannot afford for that to happen. We are the greatest country on the face of this Earth. We don't find anybody trying to break out of the United States of America; they are all trying to break in. But if we abandon our role of strength, we will never have the peace and the prosperity and the democracy we want to see around the world. Instead, we will be a second-string player in the influence of world affairs.

The National Defense Authorization Act is one thing the Congress—House and Senate alike—has agreed upon overwhelmingly. The vote in the Senate was a veto-proof vote. The vote in the House was a very significant vote. The President should read that to understand that the representatives of

the people are saying to him: We want America to be strong. We don't want our military to be reconstituted. We don't want the dictators of the world taking advantage of vacuums that we have created because we looked the other way and we abandoned ourselves.

We need to think about something and think about it closely. Right now in Greece, for example, half a million people in the last year have gone through there, fleeing Syria, trying to find their way to Europe—half a million. A million and a half will probably go through there next year. The world is trying to flee oppression and dictators wherever they are, and the rest of the free world cannot afford to take care of the rest of the world unless we stop what is happening in the Middle East.

Bashar Al-Assad should be stopped. The Russians should be asked to retrench and come back. We should get back to the table, being the strongest power in the world and being an effective player in the Middle East and being a power that is feared rather than one that is looked at and left wondering. America is abandoning the role it has always held since the end of World War II, and it would be a shame for us to do that.

So, Mr. President, let me ask you to do this: Think real hard before Halloween because that is when the time runs out and you have to either sign the bill or veto it. Think real hard about the America that you took over running as President of the United States 7 years ago. Think about how we got to where we are today. Think about all those who have sacrificed and who have lived and died, in some cases, to keep America free. Are you going to look them in the face or their memory in the face and say to them: I am just not going to reauthorize the National Defense Authorization Act. I would rather play politics with those who have fought and risked their lives for the United States of America.

In closing my remarks, I want to tell my colleagues what we did in the NDAA because I want the people of Georgia and the people of America to understand what the President will be vetoing.

He will be vetoing the improvements in our cyber command as we move our new cyber command of the U.S. Army to Fort Gordon.

He will be saying to Guantanamo Bay: It is OK, we can move the rest of the prisoners from Guantanamo Bay and move them into the United States of America and close Guantanamo Bay—because the NDAA bill prohibits that from happening.

He will be able to say to Stryker Brigade units: You will just have to wait a little bit longer for modernization.

He will have to say to our marines on the ground in Iraq and Afghanistan and in the Middle East: We are going to do away with the A-10s, so you won't have the close air support you have to have in the infantry and in the military to fight the battles of the 21st century.

He will be saying to our veterans who come back home from around the world: No, we are not going to do job training so that you can easily transfer from the military into a meaningful job in the private sector.

He will say to husband and wives of military families: We are taking away your basic housing allowance because there are two of you in the same family getting it and we are cutting it in half. Even though you signed up for a program that guaranteed you would get it, we are cutting it in half and taking it away.

I don't want to be part of a country that says that to the men and women who volunteered to fight for us.

Let's send the right message to the rest of the world. Let's sign the National Defense Authorization Act. Let's not play politics with those who risked their lives. Let's remember we still are America, the greatest country on the face of this Earth. God has blessed us, but with that blessing comes responsibility. It means the President should act, act decisively, act now, and not veto the Defense Authorization Act.

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

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

FISCAL DEADLINES FACING AMERICA

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, to paraphrase Ronald Reagan, "Here we go again."

Treasury Secretary Jack Lew has warned us that the Federal Government will bump up against the statutory debt ceiling on Tuesday, November 3. Shortly after that, on December 11, the fiscal year 2016 continuing resolution will expire, bringing the prospects of yet another government shutdown.

Absent a budget deal to suspend sequestration and lift the spending caps imposed under the Budget Control Act, we face draconian spending cuts that will harm both our economic recovery and our national security. Meanwhile, authority for the Export-Import Bank has expired already, and authority to spend surface transportation funding will expire at the end of this month.

This is no way to run a government. It is time to end this mindless fiscal brinkmanship and negotiate a comprehensive budget deal that resolves all of these issues. The American people demand and deserve no less. But first we must act on the debt ceiling.

With respect to the debt ceiling, Treasury Secretary Lew wrote to House Speaker JOHN BOEHNER on October 15 warning that extraordinary measures to forestall hitting the statu-

tory debt ceiling will be exhausted as soon as November 3. At that point, the Federal Government will have a cash balance of about \$30 billion but will be facing obligations totaling as much as \$60 billion on certain days.

Secretary Lew wrote in his letter:

Operating the United States government with no borrowing authority, with only the cash on hand on a given day, would be profoundly irresponsible. As I wrote previously, we anticipate that a remaining cash balance of less than \$30 billion will be depleted quickly. In fact, we do not foresee any reasonable scenario in which it would last for an extended period of time. The government makes approximately 80 million payments a month, including Social Security and veteran benefits, military salaries, Medicare reimbursements, and many others. In the absence of congressional action, Treasury would be unable to satisfy all of these obligations for the first time in the history of the United States . . .

The creditworthiness of the United States is an essential component of our strength as a nation. Protecting that strength is the sole responsibility of Congress, because only Congress can extend the nation's borrowing authority. Moreover, as you know, increasing the debt limit does not authorize any new spending. It simply allows Treasury to pay for expenditures Congress has approved, in full and on time.

I couldn't agree with Secretary Lew more. Raising the debt ceiling allows us to pay for what has already been appropriated by Congress for spending. This has nothing to do with how much we are going to spend as a nation; it has everything to do with whether we are going to honor our bills. The United States of America has to pay its bills. Just as when American families use a credit card, when a bill is due, it needs to be paid in a timely manner. At no time in our history has our country been unable or unwilling to pay its debts. Raising our debt ceiling has to be done—not so we can spend more, as Secretary Lew pointed out, but to pay the bills we already have. Default is not an option.

Some Republicans, particularly in the House, have suggested that the Federal Government can prioritize its payments to avoid a technical default. Some have dubbed this "pay China first" because, as my colleagues know, much of our public debt is held by the Chinese. It is disturbing that our Republican colleagues are considering such a proposal. It simply won't work. The Federal Government makes 80 million to 100 million payments monthly, including Social Security, veteran benefits, military salaries, and Medicare reimbursements. The Treasury Department doesn't have the manpower, the computer capability, or the guidelines to sort out who gets paid when.

The Bipartisan Policy Center has prepared a comprehensive analysis of what happens if we hit the so-called X-date without lifting the debt ceiling. As the Bipartisan Policy Center notes, "The reality will be chaotic," with the Treasury Department being forced to pick "winners" and "losers." We might have to shut down the entire Justice Department, the Federal courts, the