

unanimous consent or in a managers' package. I am confident because of this bipartisan cooperation, because of the extraordinarily hard work of our staffs, that we could finish this appropriations bill today.

Would that not be progress for the Senate, to be able to complete action on a bill that has vital funding for homeless veterans, for homeless youth, for disabled and low-income elderly who depend on the subsidized housing programs that are funded in this bill? This bill has important infrastructure spending. All of us are aware of the deteriorating infrastructure, the crumbling roads and structurally deficient bridges that we have in this country, the need for improvements in rail safety, in our transit system.

There are so many issues that are important to the American people. This bill funds the Community Development Block Grant Program, possibly one of the most popular programs with State and local officials for spurring economic development and job creation in their communities, but, alas, we have encountered a roadblock. As we have seen this morning, even amendments that have been cleared on both sides of the aisle are not being allowed to proceed. I think that is so unfortunate because with cooperation I am confident we could have finished work on this bill and moved to final passage today. Regrettably, that is not going to occur unless there is a change of heart.

I do want to say I recognize there are other very important issues for us to deal with. The House today is taking up a bill that would deal with the screening process for refugees who come into this country. All of us recognize that our first obligation is the security of the American people. That is not what the bill before us is dealing with, but there is action on the House side. A bill is expected to pass today with widespread bipartisan support and will be sent over for our consideration. So I think it is unfortunate that we apparently cannot complete action on the appropriations bill that is before us.

However, I do want to assure my colleagues that we are going to continue to work on this bill. We are going to continue to review the amendments that have been filed. We are going to work with the sponsors. We are going to work with the floor managers. We are going to continue to make progress behind the scenes in the event that we find a way around this roadblock.

In the meantime, I do want to express my appreciation to my ranking member, Senator REED, for his close cooperation on this bill. He and I introduced the substitute amendment jointly when we began work on this bill. A special thanks to our staffs who have been working night and day to clear amendments that are ready go but unfortunately cannot be considered.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. REED. Madam President, this whole process has been moved forward

by the leadership of Chairman COLLINS. She and her staff have done an extraordinary job of taking the additional resources made available by the budget agreement and constructively focusing them towards addressing important policies in transportation and housing in the United States.

As Chairman COLLINS discussed, we have about nine amendments—bipartisan amendments—that have been agreed to that focus on housing and transportation issues exclusively. These amendments also display the give-and-take and back-and-forth that is necessary, the compromise that is necessary. One example is the amendment that Senator CORNYN, along with Senator HARRY REID, proposed that dealt with small airports throughout the United States.

Those are the types of issues that should be the focal point of our deliberations on the Transportation, Housing and Urban Development appropriations bill, and that is what we have tried to do. Frankly, under Senator COLLINS' leadership, we were moving forward, but we have run into a bit of an impasse. We are going to continue to work because it is critical to the country that we rebuild our infrastructure and make sure that we have adequate, affordable housing, which is key to so many things—to having a job, to holding a job, to children being in a school for the whole year and not moving from school to school. All of these are tied directly to our efforts here today.

I again compliment the chairman for her extraordinary efforts. The staffs have done a superb job. We will continue to work. Our objective is to get a bill done and move forward in the process. Unfortunately, we have hit this bump, but we are still going down the road.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Indiana.

WASTEFUL SPENDING

Mr. COATS. Madam President, the Presiding Officer has been in the chair before when I have done my waste of the week. This is my 27th "Waste of the Week" this year, where I come to the floor of the Senate and take a documented waste, fraud, or abuse within the Federal Government, expose that abuse, and inform taxpayers that their hard-earned money is being wasted by this Federal Government. We are taking those items that have been documented by government accounting agencies, by agencies that have been charged with the responsibility of looking into how we spend the taxpayers' money and alerting us to problems of fraud, waste, and abuse.

So No. 27 waste of the week is up this week, and this week it involves the issue of paid leave. This is an executive policy which applies to departments and agencies across the Federal Government.

Specifically, what I wish to do today is highlight the \$31 million in payments to Federal employees who have received paid leave for over a 1-year period of time. For Federal employees, paid administrative leave is typically a paid, excused absence that is separate from vacation time. It includes things such as jury duty or time to allow a person to transition home after an overseas deployment or post. Some agencies also use paid leave when making personnel evaluations. This could include things such as investigations into alleged misconduct, security threats, and similar situations where the employee should be restricted from the worksite while the investigation occurs. Many of these are legitimate. Many of these fall into this category. But being given paid leave for over a year?

First, it raises the question, What is going on here? This is way beyond the norm.

Secondly, shouldn't we have some documentation as to why this takes place? Currently, Federal agencies across the Federal Government have the authority to set their own policies regarding administrative leave, and this leads to a variety of different policies from agency to agency. Why are there discrepancies among agencies in both length of time and the frequency of the granted paid leave?

What is particularly troubling to me is that an audit by the Government Accountability Office, the GAO, found that 263 employees have received paid administrative leave for over a 1-year period of time—more than 1 year. Most of us expect, yes, OK, 2 days off or a week off because I have been selected for jury duty. I have a citizen's and a resident's obligation to do that. Paid leave is justified on that basis. For someone returning from a post overseas, to get resettled, paid leave is justified. There are some other justifications. But over a year? Paid leave for over a year and \$31 million paid out to people who haven't worked for over a year? Something needs to be looked into regarding how and why that takes place.

Last month, the Washington Post told a story about how this issue has persisted within the Department of Homeland Security even after the report was issued. The Post article states that "close to 100 DHS [Department of Homeland Security] employees still are being paid not to work for more than a year."

So I think the question we need to ask ourselves in response to this report is why? Why did the Federal Government spend \$31 million to pay 263 employees not to work for more than a year? And what is the justification for the 1-year paid leaves? Unfortunately, the Government Accountability Office was unable to disclose the specific details as to why these 263 individuals were on paid leave for over a year. However, there are public reports that give examples of employees who have

continued to receive paychecks for over a year.

The Washington Post again reported the case of a former high-level Environmental Protection Agency employee who pretended he was a member of the Central Intelligence Agency for years. This employee collected paid leave under the pretense he was conducting top-secret work for the CIA when, in fact, he was home exercising and pursuing a personal research project. He effectively, according to the Post, stole \$900,000 from taxpayers for work he never did. That included his salary and bonus. He was actually paid bonuses. The man was paid a bonus payment for not working—defrauding the Agency he worked for. The good news is that they caught him. The bad news is that it took 2½ years to figure out something was going on.

An article in the Washington Times details a 4-year case where an employee at EPA was fired for “sending a ‘hostile email’ and making inappropriate statements that ‘caused anxiety and disruption in the workplace.’” That employee was ultimately removed from the EPA a second time but only after he received 1,496 hours of backpay.

And on and on it goes. I could stand here for a long time talking about examples of paid leave to personnel totaling \$31 million for payments of paid leave for over a 1-year period of time. It is not just the EPA. I am not picking on one agency. Every agency in government has these policies. GAO estimates that there are some bad track records for these agencies. For instance, the Department of the Treasury has 25 employees on paid leave for over a year and the Department of Veterans Affairs has over 46. And even more disturbing is the fact that the GAO investigation found that Federal agencies don't have sufficient documentation for the paid leave, if they had any documentation at all. How can you put someone on paid leave, how can you make payments for over a year and have no documentation as to why you are making the payments?

Coming to the floor with these waste of the week, fraud-and-abuse situations, it is hard to comprehend how these things go on. The ingenuity of those who are committing fraud and those who oversee agencies that are paying this out is stunning.

I want to make it clear that I am not against paid leave. There are many valid cases. But taxpayers deserve to know why Federal agencies are paying their employees not to work for over a year without sufficient documentation for taking such action. In fact, this ought to go for all paid leave, whether it is for 1 day, 1 month, or 1 year.

Particularly, though, what ought to be ringing an alarm bell is someone who is on the record as receiving paid leave for several months or over a year—and I am only documenting that which was documented for over 1 year. Who knows how much this would total

if we looked into every agency's policies and found out that they weren't documented and that they couldn't prove that the paid leave was legitimized.

I need to give credit where credit is due. The Office of Personnel Management has finally recognized that this is a costly issue and has moved to take steps to address this misuse of taxpayer dollars. This summer, the agency announced guidance on what does and doesn't constitute paid administrative leave. I urge OPM to follow up now and ensure that all Federal agencies are implementing these recommendations. But why did it take us so long? Why do we have to have an investigative report? Where is the management? Where is the management in these agencies that oversees this and does not allow this to happen? Why do we have to wait for the Government Accountability Office to come in and audit these agencies and find this unbelievable amount of waste, fraud, and abuse that takes place?

So taxpayers are on the hook for another \$31 million of waste. We add that to our ever-growing total of waste, fraud, and abuse, now reaching well over—almost \$119 billion. And we have Members down here talking about a program that needs funding because it is an essential program, but we don't have the money to do it. Others come down and say we can't cut a penny more from any of the programs we have—and that is another issue—and yet we continue to waste this kind of money.

Next week it will be item No. 28 as we go forward exposing waste, fraud, and abuse in the Federal Government, taking hard-working taxpayers' dollars at a time when the economy is not doing all that well. This is something which continues to be a noose around the Federal Government's neck and which needs to be addressed.

Madam President, with that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, I was seeking the floor, but it is my understanding that Senator McCONNELL, our leader, is on his way to the floor. I will wait until he speaks. I don't think we have to ask for a quorum call because I think he will be here in just a minute.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

TRANSPORTATION, HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2016

CLOTURE MOTIONS WITHDRAWN

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the two pending cloture motions with respect to H.R. 2577 be withdrawn.

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

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION EXTENSION ACT OF 2015, PART II

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of H.R. 3996, which was received from the House.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 3996) to provide an extension of Federal-aid highway, highway safety, motor carrier safety, transit, and other programs funded out of the Highway Trust Fund, and for other purposes.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, I know of no further debate on the bill.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there further debate?

If not, the question is on third reading of the bill.

The bill was ordered to a third reading and was read the third time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The bill having been read the third time, the question is, Shall the bill pass?

The bill (H.R. 3996) was passed.

Mr. McCONNELL. I ask unanimous consent that the motion to reconsider be made and laid upon the table.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

TERRORIST ATTACKS IN THE UNITED STATES

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, because of what happened in Paris last week, a lot of speeches are going to be given on the floor of the Senate about terrorism. But it is too bad that we only seem to talk about the dangers of terrorism when bad things happen in the United States or happen in Paris or someplace else that brings the issue to our attention. I think what we all need to remember is that it is a constant danger that may not appear to us daily, but somewhere out there are people thinking about killing us for what we believe.

So I rise today, again, expressing my sympathies to the people of Paris and those affected by Friday's terrible attacks by radical Islamic terrorists there. On behalf of the people of Iowa, I continue to stand with the people of France.

Unfortunately, the attacks last Friday should not have been a surprise. Radical Islamic terrorists have been waging war against the United States and our allies for years. When thinking about the last three decades of the last century, you think about the terrorism at the Munich Olympics or an American being murdered on a TWA plane. Then we had a Jewish person in a wheelchair thrown overboard in the Mediterranean. There was the attempt to bring down the Twin Towers in 1993