

starting point and one that will protect taxpayers, but this legislation in the omnibus bill is silent on the future system. It simply says Congress should have the final say in what happens to these entities—again, entities that Congress created in the first place.

With passage of this provision—in the face of extremely intense opposition—we are telling taxpayers we are putting to bed the idea that returning to the status quo is an option. We will not return to a system where big Fannie and big Freddie control the lion's share of our housing system and taxpayers are exposed for future bailouts, but there is more work to be done.

The question I have is this: Moving forward, who are we going to fight for? Are we going to abdicate our responsibility and shy away due to efforts by large Wall Street hedge funds wanting to get wealthier off of taxpayers by placing taxpayers at greater risk or are we going to fight for the people whom we represent?

As all of us who served in this body during the financial crisis know well, the American people do not want to write another bailout check. Without housing finance reform, that is an all-too-real possibility.

To my colleagues, trust me. I know a number of you have felt pressure from large Wall Street hedge funds and the interest groups they support, but I also know there is not one of you who truly wants to put private investors' interest ahead of the people we represent.

In the new year, it is time for Congress to finally do its job. By finally addressing the last major piece of unfinished business from the financial crisis, we can once and for all end this failed model. Fortunately, a lot of the heavy lifting has already taken place.

As we look forward to 2016, protecting taxpayers by reforming our Nation's housing finance system should be near the top of the to-do list. This legislation takes us a step in the right direction toward that effort by saying the fate of mortgage giants Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac will be determined by Congress.

I remain committed to doing everything I can to make sure we do not return to the same failed model that put taxpayers on the hook for billions of dollars, and instead we can create a dynamic housing finance system that works for Americans rather than against them.

END MODERN SLAVERY INITIATIVE ACT

Mr. CORKER. Mr. President, I also rise to applaud Congress for including important funding in the Omnibus appropriations bill that will help in our efforts to fight human trafficking and slavery around the world through the End Modern Slavery Initiative Act.

I think most Americans would be stunned to know that over 27 million people are enslaved in more than 187

countries, including our own. Over 27 million people are enslaved today. That is more than four times the population of my home State of Tennessee.

Modern slavery comes in many forms and it preys on women and children the most. This brutal, multibillion-dollar industry deprives individuals of their basic human rights. Rather than holding a schoolbook, children in India are stacking bricks. Rather than sitting in a classroom, young girls in the Philippines are sitting in brothels forced into sexual servitude. In Ghana, young boys are forced into a life of slavery on fishing boats, and worldwide men and women hoping only to better the lives of their families are stripped of their passports and trafficked for labor.

I cannot thank the Senator from Texas enough for the incredible efforts he put forth to ensure that we do everything we can in our own country to keep this from happening. He has been heroic.

These are our daughters, sons, mothers and fathers, and that is why it is so important that we take bold action. Those who have been fighting this heinous crime for years all say that to end the practice of modern slavery, we need a reliable baseline data and consistent, effective monitoring and evaluation. They also say that what is most critical in this fight is the need for a focused, sustained effort that can leverage and coordinate private and government funding. That is where the End Modern Slavery Initiative Act comes into play.

This bold, bipartisan initiative has received broad support from over 90 industry experts, nongovernmental organizations, and faith-based groups. This initiative will seek to raise \$1.5 billion—more than 80 percent of which is expected to come through matching funds from private sector and foreign governments—to fight slavery worldwide. This model is designed to leverage limited foreign aid dollars and galvanize tremendous support and investment from the public sector, philanthropic organizations, and the private sector to focus resources responsibly where this crime is most prevalent.

The Omnibus appropriations bill that we will vote on this week brings us one step closer to making this initiative a reality with a \$25 million downpayment. There are many complex problems facing this country that demand our attention but perhaps none whose existence threatens the very concept of what it means to live in a free society. Ending modern slavery and human trafficking will not come easy, but we have a moral obligation to try, and I am proud—really proud—that Congress is taking that step and investing in this critical fight.

With that, I yield the floor and thank the Senator from Texas for allowing me to speak at this time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CASIDY). The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, before the Senator from Tennessee leaves the

floor, I wish to thank him. Among many other issues he has dealt with on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and Banking Committee, he has done great work on this issue. He is absolutely right about the scourge of human trafficking and how we need to do more—not just here at home but internationally—to try to break it up and rescue some of these children. Often the typical profile of a trafficked person in the United States is a young girl 12 to 14 years old. It is a travesty. I thank him for his great work and congratulate him.

OMNIBUS LEGISLATION

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, this week the Omnibus appropriations bill was released, along with the tax relief bill, that extends and makes permanent many important tax credits and lays the foundation for comprehensive tax reform, hopefully sometime soon. Members of this Chamber and the House have been reviewing the text of both pieces of legislation, and I am happy to report that the House of Representatives has now given a resounding bipartisan vote on the tax relief bill, with 318 Members of the House of Representatives voting to support it. The House, we are told, will move on the Omnibus appropriations bill tomorrow morning, and then we will take up both bills tomorrow morning in the Senate.

I want to just remember and recall for anybody listening that the appropriations process did not have to end up this way. As a matter of fact, after having passed the first budget that Congress has had since 2009, that then authorized the Appropriations Committee to begin the process of considering and passing 12 separate appropriations bills. Once they are voted out of committee, we will bring them to the floor, where they are open for amendment and debate in a completely transparent process, where people can understand the details of the legislation.

It didn't turn out that way because our Democratic colleagues filibustered these individual appropriations bills, thereby leaving us with no alternative but to consider this massive Omnibus appropriations bill.

I am tempted to call this omnibus bill an ominous bill, but I am not sure that is pejorative enough. It is not the right way to do business. I am disappointed. I am disappointed in our colleagues across the aisle who forced us to do business this way with them, but I hope next year we can have a regular and open appropriations process, one that will serve the American people far better.

I am by no means happy with the way this year-end funding bill has come together, after having been hijacked, held up, and effectively shut down, but if this sounds familiar, this looks a lot like the strategy they employed when they were in the majority

preceding the election of just a year ago. Do you know what happened? Well, it didn't work very well because they ended up losing their majority.

Needless to say, the American people actually want us to do our jobs, to look out for their interests, and to make sure we pass legislation that is thoroughly considered, transparent, and then we could be held accountable for the votes we have made. Unfortunately, this omnibus appropriation process undercuts those principles, and as I said a moment ago, it is not a good way—it is a terrible way—to have to do business.

But I am happy and proud of the fact that in virtually every other area we have undertaken—following the budget, the multiyear highway bill, the trade promotion authority legislation, the Defense authorization bill that was led by our colleague from Arizona, the chairman of the Armed Services Committee, the Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act that passed 99 to 0—as I was talking about with the Senator from Tennessee, it is clear we know how to work together on a bipartisan basis, disagreeing on some issues but finding common ground where we can, and the American people end up being the winner.

Dysfunction and shutdowns do not work. That is not why most of us came here. Most of us came here to try to make this institution and the country and conditions for our constituents a little bit better, one step at a time.

In this Omnibus appropriations bill there is an issue I want to highlight, and that is a clear win for progrowth and one that will foster, not hinder, job creation, and that is lifting the decades' old ban on exporting crude oil produced here in America. This month actually marks 40 years since the United States implemented a ban on the export of crude oil, a policy that was put into place as a precaution to protect the United States from disruption in the global oil supply. But as we all know, the world looks a lot different than it did back then. The shale revolution has helped the geopolitical energy landscape turn in favor of the United States, and we have an abundance of oil and natural gas available, not only for our use here domestically but to export to our friends and allies around the world. By doing away with this antiquated policy and allowing our domestic production to reach global markets, we can kick start the U.S. economy and provide a real opportunity for job creation in the country.

Lifting the ban would not just be beneficial to people working in the domestic energy sector because the domestic energy production involves many different sectors—construction, shipping, technology. By allowing more export of our crude, we have the potential to create thousands of more jobs deep into the supply chain in a variety of sectors and across a multitude of States. In fact, one study estimated that for every new production job in

the oil field it translates into three additional jobs in the supply chain and another six in the broader economy. So we are talking about a major opportunity for job creation throughout our country.

Doing away with this outdated protectionist policy also gives the United States an opportunity to promote stronger relationships with our allies and partners around the world. Today many of our allies in Europe, including some of our NATO allies, rely on countries such as Iran and Russia for their energy needs. Our allies' dependence on our adversaries for basic needs such as heating, electricity, and fuel creates a real vulnerability that exists for the United States, as their ally and partner. By lifting the ban, the United States can help offer our friends a chance to diversify their energy supplies and enhance their energy security and avoid giving people such as Vladimir Putin the opportunity to use oil and gas and energy as a weapon.

Lifting the crude oil export ban will strengthen our economy. It will actually save Americans on their gasoline prices at the pump by increasing supply, and it will help our friends and allies around the world. So it is a big win for the American people, whether or not you work directly in the industry.

Finally, I would say—and I know the Senator from Arizona is waiting to speak, so I will be brief—that I am happy to see that the omnibus also includes several bipartisan priority items that will benefit my constituents in Texas. For example, for years I have worked alongside of Congressman FILEMON VELA, a Democrat from South Texas, to put pressure on Mexico to fulfill its commitment to deliver water to South Texas as outlined and required in a 1944 treaty. Now this is incredibly important for a wide swath of folks whose access to water is not always assured. This bill includes language that reinforces that commitment and includes a measure that requires the State Department to assess the impact of Mexico's water debt on Texas and the rest of the United States.

This bill also renews an innovative port of entry partnership program modeled after the Cross-Border Trade Enhancement Act. This, too, is bipartisan legislation in this case, which I have introduced along with Congressman HENRY CUELLAR, another South Texas Democrat, earlier this year. Specifically, it provides new opportunities for border communities and businesses to improve staffing levels and upgrade infrastructure at our international border crossings to help move people and goods across our border more safely and efficiently. Obviously, with 6 million jobs in the United States dependent on cross-border commercial traffic and trade between the United States and Mexico, this is really important.

This omnibus legislation also includes a provision to fully repeal the country-of-origin labeling regulations

known as COOL. This has been a real problem for our livestock producers in Texas and in the United States. By repealing these costly food labeling mandates, the United States will avoid a trade war with Canada and Mexico, two of our largest export and trading partners, and will help Texas farmers, ranchers, and manufacturers back home in my State and across the country.

In terms of national priorities, the omnibus bill increases resources for our military, thanks to the leadership of people such as the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee. This bill will increase resources for our Active-Duty military to make sure that those deployed around the world, as well as those serving stateside, have what they need to get the jobs done that they volunteered to do.

This legislation also blocks overreach by the Environmental Protection Agency by providing no new or expanded funding for its programs—the lowest level of funding since 2008.

Finally, this bill prioritizes our veterans and helps ensure they are better able to receive the care and benefits they deserve in a timely manner.

This legislation also includes the Protecting Americans from Tax Hikes Act, which includes the permanent extension of State and local sales tax deductions, something that amounts to more than \$1 billion in annual tax relief for Texans. This will ensure that Texans are on a level playing field with those who deduct their State income tax, because we don't have an income tax and never will. That is something that I can say that Texas will never have. As I said, it never will.

This also rolls back several of President Obama's ObamaCare taxes and can provide relief to folks all over the country being crushed by the President's failed, unpopular health care law.

So while no legislation is perfect, and indeed this process is the antithesis of perfect—it is the wrong way to do business—this is the hand we have been dealt by the filibusters of the appropriations bills by our Democratic colleagues. So we are doing the best we can with the hand that we have been dealt. In the end, nothing passes Congress and gets signed into law by the President without some level of bipartisan cooperation in both Chambers of Congress and working together with the executive branch. This legislation does include several significant wins for the American people.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, I come to the floor today to discuss the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2016. I am obviously pleased we are not going to pass another continuing resolution, which I believe is irresponsible, but at the same time the process by which we are now considering this legislation is just as irresponsible.

As my colleague from Texas just pointed out, we are here where we are because my colleague and leader on the other side of the aisle refused to allow the appropriations bills that had been passed through committee one by one to be considered and voted on and amended in the fashion that the American people expect us to behave, and, frankly, the Constitution demands. So here we are after months and months of gridlock with the Democrat leader not allowing us to bring up these bills one by one.

We are now faced with a \$1.1 trillion bill that, in the view of many, is must-pass with literally hours to review and debate and no amendments—no amendments. So we are faced with a parliamentary situation of \$1.1 trillion we are considering without an amendment—without a single Member on either side of the aisle being able to propose an amendment to make it better. My friends, this is a recipe for corruption. It is a recipe for corruption.

A few people—a very few people—not all 100 Members of the Senate or 435 Members of the House but a handful of people behind closed doors work, and then 48 hours or so, or whatever it is, before the vote, it is presented to us as “take it or leave it,” with the choice being this: Well, you can sign on to it; you will probably have to hold your nose, but we have no choice.

Well, my friends, I believe we do have a choice. I believe we do have a choice. I believe we should behave in the manner in which our constituents expect us to behave: Take up a bill, have an amendment, have a debate, have a discussion, and do what we are supposed to do. And if the Democratic leader wants to block us, then let him take the responsibility for doing so. Now we are faced with a \$1 trillion spending bill that includes numerous policy provisions that have never been debated and discussed, pork barrel spending that would never stand the light of day—never, ever—and I will be talking about some of them.

I will give you some examples of the pork that has been snuck into this bill. Let me give you a few examples here that I think might interest our constituents. This is in this bill, in law: \$3.6 million for 30 vineyards, breweries, and distilleries to build tasting rooms, conduct whiskey production feasibility studies, and other alcohol marketing gimmicks. Yeah, the one thing we really want to do is give money to help alcohol marketing. There is \$100,000 in funding to sell goat whey sodas and soft-serve frozen goat yogurt, \$247,677 to develop pecan snacks, and \$49,750 to introduce Americans to flavored beef bratwurst and beef chili. If there is anything I think the American people need to be educated and introduced to, it is bratwurst and chili. There is \$49,990 for spinning raw alpaca fiber into a very fine yarn, \$42,000 to produce cheese from buffalo milk, \$250,000 to produce and market lamb jerky, \$26,270 to determine the feasibility of pro-

ducing blue cornmeal from Navajo corn, and \$200,000 to make apple pies. Now this list goes on and on.

My favorite, my friends, of many of them is a thing called the catfish inspection office—the catfish inspection office. Most of us enjoy catfish and we appreciate the benefits to our nutrition and of course the sizeable industry around catfishing. What we have again this year is a Department of Agriculture catfish inspection office. Now there is the Department of Agriculture catfish inspection office, but the FDA also has a similar catfish inspection office, and the GAO, the Government Accountability Office, has issued more than six reports calling the U.S. Department of Agriculture catfish Inspection Office “wasteful and duplicative.” As a result of this protectionist program, an estimated \$15 million of your tax dollars per year will be spent on enabling government bureaucrats to impose barriers on foreign catfish importers, which will in turn increase the price of catfish for American consumers, restaurants, and seafood producers. So, my friends, in this bill \$15 million every year of your tax dollars will be spent for a catfish inspection office. That is the kind of thing that happens when you get to this date at the end of the year with a mammoth bill worth \$1 trillion. It is too ripe. It is too ripe for the picking by the pork barrellers who we have in the Senate and the House.

I will quickly give a couple more examples: \$1.7 million for the Senate kitchen exhaust systems upgrades; \$65 million for Pacific coast salmon restoration for States. On the face of it, you would think that money for Pacific coast salmon restoration would perhaps be a beneficial expenditure of your tax dollars. Guess what. The State of Nevada is included in this \$65 million salmon restoration. A cursory glance at a map of the United States might indicate that the State of Nevada is not exactly an ideal place for salmon restoration, but they are going to get some of these millions of dollars, and I am sure it has nothing to do with the makeup of the U.S. Senate from Nevada.

There is \$15 million for an “incentive program” that directs the Department of Defense to overpay on contracts by an additional 5 percent if the contractor is a Native Hawaiian-owned company. So if you have a contract with a Native Hawaiian-owned company, the Department of Defense will add approximately 5 percent of taxpayers’ dollars.

There is language that makes it easier for the Department of Defense to enter into no-bid contracts. If there is anything in my years I have seen that lends itself to outrageous spending, of course it is no-bid contracts. The Department of Defense may eliminate competition and use a no-bid contract for a “product of original thinking and was submitted in confidence by one source.” That is interesting.

Well, anyway, there are many more of those.

I am proud of what this Congress has done this year. There are many good things that have been done. There has been the Defense authorization bill. For the first time, there has been a budget. For the first time, we have reformed education. For the first time, we have done so many things. We have finally sent a bill to the President’s desk repealing and replacing ObamaCare, but to end the bill with this is really an embarrassment.

So here we are looking at \$1 trillion, and I particularly want to talk a little bit about national defense. I could not be more proud of the bipartisanship—both Democratic and Republican—that has been involved in the Senate Armed Services Committee and the bipartisanship with our friends on the other side of the Capitol.

We have come up with legislation that has been described as the biggest reform bill for defense in 30 years—I am proud of it—and we have a lot further to go. We had hours and hours of hearings, hours and hours of markups. We had over 130 amendments to the Defense authorization bill considered on the floor of the Senate.

We did things we have never done before. For example, we are completely reforming the retirement system for the military. It used to be that you had to stay 20 years before you could receive any financial benefit. Now, after 2 years and 1 month, you can get into a matching-funds agreement with the Federal Government. So now, instead of 85 percent of those who joined the military never receiving a financial benefit, 85 percent of those who join will receive it.

So I am very proud, and I am very proud of the work I did with my colleague from Rhode Island, Senator REED, as well as our friends on the other side of the aisle.

Then at the last minute, these earmarks, these pork barrel projects, these egregious, wasteful projects are airdropped into what I believe is a 2,000-page—whatever it is, it is huge, and we saw it for the first time at about 10 p.m. or 12 a.m. last night, and they want us to vote on it tomorrow. That is crazy.

What the appropriators did, they included over 150 different programs and initiatives where the appropriations exceeded what they were authorized, totaling \$9.4 billion. By passing the Defense authorization, we set an expectation on how to allocate funds. This was obviously completely broken.

As an example, the appropriators included \$160 million for humvees even though the Army requested zero dollars for humvees. We had hearings on this. We had hearings on the issue of what the Army needed, and it was abundantly clear that the Army did not need any more humvees. Somehow the appropriators decided that there would be \$160 million for humvees; \$7 million for a machine gun—five times

the current size of the program. Again, our Army and Department of Defense said they didn't need it.

But this is the worst one of all, my friends, and it will not surprise anyone that it is manufactured in Alabama. There is \$225 million for the addition of a joint high-speed vessel, which is, of course, manufactured in Alabama. This will be the 12th ship of this class. The Navy's requirement was 10–10 vessels. Remember, this is \$225 million for this vessel. The Navy said stop at 10. We stopped at 10. Last year the appropriators added one for \$225 million; this year, another \$225 million. By my calculation, that is \$450 million for two joint high-speed vessels that the military—the Navy and the Department of Defense—said they don't need or want. What could we have done for the men and women in the military with that \$450 million we just wasted on two ships the Navy and the military said they didn't need? It is unacceptable.

The bill includes over \$2 billion in funding—I am not making this up—it includes almost \$1.2 billion on top of the \$1 billion for medical research within the Defense Department. My friends, I want to emphasize that I am all in for medical research. I think medical research is vital to the future of all Americans. But what in the world does most of this have to do with Defense appropriations? Nothing. Nothing. It is the Willie Sutton syndrome at its best. Mr. Sutton was once asked why he robbed banks, and he said, “Because that's where the money is.” My friends, the Department of Defense is where the money is, so we have seen this gradual creeping up of funding out of defense funds for programs—which I will read a few of—that have nothing to do with defense.

I will say again that I am for funding medical research. I think it is vital, and I think it is important. But someone is going to have to explain to me how tuberculosis, autism, lung cancer, gulf war illness—actually, that is one of them—spinal cord injury, ovarian cancer—those research funds should come out of the Labor, Health and Human Services appropriations bill, not out of defense at a time of sequestration, when we have planes that can't fly and guns that won't shoot and ships that can't sail.

So what have we done? Let me show you what they have done this year. You can see the gradual increase. Beginning in 1992, there was about \$20 million, I guess, something like that. Then in 1994 it went up and then up. Then something happened and it went down. Then you can see the gradual, almost steady increase of funding for medical research as the funding for defense has remained constant or even in some cases reduced.

So what have we done this year, my dear friends? Here it is: \$2.2 billion of your tax dollars is now earmarked for medical research—all of them worthy causes. Almost none of them have anything to do with guns, ships, planes,

barracks, or medical research that is directly connected to our military. To add to that, the Army received an additional \$16 million to conduct research on Parkinson's disease, and the list goes on and on.

So what do we have here. By the way, the bill also includes nine “Buy American” provisions, which will inevitably add to weapons systems and other contracting costs. The “Buy American” provisions are a handout to labor unions and are a ploy to protect defense companies in a particular State.

I won't waste time and go too much longer except to say that today we see an interesting political environment in America. We see on the Republican side—my side—we see the leading candidates, people who are basically seeking the nomination of the Republican Party because they are running against Washington; that they don't want business as usual; that they are frustrated by the fact that, in their view, the Congress doesn't work for them.

The approval rating of Congress is consistently somewhere in the teens, and Americans are frustrated and they are angry. Many of them support an individual who says: We will make America great again; it will be huge. It is language that is not very specific, but it inspires them to see change take place.

Although I disagree with that and I think we have a record this year that we can be proud of in many respects—whether it be education reform or whether it be finally sending a bill to the President's desk to repeal ObamaCare or fixing education, as I mentioned, or better ways of defending the Nation with many reforms of how the Pentagon does business—there are many things I am very proud of. I think we can return to our constituents and tell them that for the first time this year, Congress has done some things that will be helpful to the everyday man and woman who has not received really much benefit over the last 8 years since the economic collapse.

But then we send them this Christmas turkey. We send them a bill laden with millions and millions of dollars in wasteful and unnecessary spending. We send them a bill that purchases for \$225 million a ship that nobody wants or needs. That, my friends, gives substance and reason behind the frustration many of our constituents feel.

It is probably over for this year. I think it is probably going to be a situation where there are sufficient votes to pass this “omnibus bill” worth \$1.1 trillion of taxpayers' money without a single amendment, not a single one. Then we will go home, enjoy Christmas, and then come back in January hopefully refreshed. But I hope that in January we will make a commitment to the American people that we will stop doing business this way, that we will stop waiting until the last days and having these extensions that last 2 days or 3 days before the threat of a

government shutdown—which no American I have ever met enjoys—and learn that the American people expect better of us than this process.

I am not proud of this. In fact, I am a bit ashamed because, particularly on defense, there are so many critical needs of the men and women who are serving in our military. Their carriers are going on 10-month cruises. Some of our men and women who are serving are on their fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh tour to Afghanistan. Even now many are going back to Iraq, and they will be going back, my friends. They will be going back. They will also be in Syria because, I predict to you now, there will be another attack on the United States of America because this President cannot lead. We are paying the price for a feckless foreign policy that is a disgrace and will be judged by historians as one of the low points in American history as far as national security is concerned.

So instead of providing for those critical needs—and I guarantee I can come up with billions of dollars of critical needs. By the way, I can also come up with reforms that will save billions of dollars in our legislation.

We are proud of that. For example, we require a reduction of 7.5 percent per year for 4 years in the size of the staff in the military. That will save over \$3 billion over time. I am proud of that. So we come to the American people with a defense bill that is lean and efficient. We have a long way to go, but we are proud of it. Then we look at things like this. It is not acceptable.

I hope I don't have to stand up here again next year. I hope we can finally sit down and work for the American people, and that means taking up the appropriations bills one by one by one and giving them the same attention the Defense bill got. The Defense bill got 2 weeks, 133 amendments, debate on every issue conceivable concerning national defense. We need to do that with each of the 12 appropriations bills. That way we can give the American people a product that is the most efficient, that is the least wasteful, and something we can be proud of.

I urge my colleagues to understand that this legislation on the Defense appropriations part of it does not help America defend itself in these difficult times. In fact, because of the waste, because of the pork-barrel spending in this, because of the earmarks in it, we have actually harmed the ability of our Nation to defend itself and the welfare of the men and women who are serving. That is something we cannot be proud of.

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

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

Mr. HATCH. I ask unanimous consent that I be permitted to complete my remarks.

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

FINANCE COMMITTEE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, as we count down the remaining days on the 2015 legislative calendar, there is still quite a bit of work to do and a few more big-ticket items to put to bed. Still, even with so much still on our plates, I believe it is appropriate to take a look back at the year we are now finishing up and reflect on what we have been able to accomplish.

Now, 2015 has been a big year in the Senate. After many years of unproductive division and stagnation, the Senate finally has returned to work. While some of my friends on the other side of the aisle have tried to downplay the productivity we have enjoyed under the current Senate leadership—and the Washington Post Fact Checker awarded them some Pinocchios for their efforts—no one can seriously argue that things haven't changed around here.

Under the current Senate majority, the committees have been allowed to function and work. Under the current Senate majority, we have had fuller and fairer debates on the Senate floor. Probably most important of all, under the current Senate majority, the Senate has actually been doing the people's business. Instead of being bogged down with divisive, political show votes, we have tackled tough challenges—including numerous challenges that have plagued this body for many years—and we have delivered results, usually with a strong bipartisan majority, which I find to be very heartening.

I am pleased to say this new trend toward efficiency and bipartisan success has been evident in the Senate Finance Committee, which I have been privileged to chair since the 1st of January this year. I would like to take some time to pay tribute to my colleagues on the Finance Committee and the successes we have enjoyed this year. I will start with the basics, just some top-line numbers.

In 2015, the Finance Committee held 30 full committee hearings to discuss various legislative efforts, conduct oversight of the administration, and to question executive branch nominees. There were also two subcommittee hearings. We convened 10 separate markups to consider and report legislation and nominations.

Let's dig a little deeper with the numbers. In terms of legislation, the Finance Committee moved at a historic pace in 2015, considering and reporting 37 individual bills. Those are more bills than the committee reported in the past four Congresses combined and more than any single Congress in the last 35 years. I just have to reiterate that I am not comparing 2015 to any single previous year. I am com-

paring it to the entirety of past Congresses. We have moved more legislation in just 1 year than the Finance Committee has in any entire Congress in the past three and one-half decades.

Even more striking is the fact that every one of the 37 bills we reported this year enjoyed overwhelming bipartisan support in the committee. So far, 9 of those 37 reported bills have been signed or incorporated into law, and several more are likely to get there before the end of this week. In addition, three other bills that came through the Finance Committee were discharged and subsequently signed into law.

However, while these raw numbers may be impressive, they only tell part of the story. If we take the time to delve into the specifics of our efforts on the Finance Committee, we will see that we have actually enjoyed significant successes in each of our major areas of jurisdiction, including tax, trade, health care, Social Security, and oversight. I have often spoken about many of our individual achievements on the Senate floor, but I think they deserve another mention today.

Trade. I will start by talking about our efforts with regard to international trade policy. We began 2015 with a desire to advance a bold and ambitious trade agenda that would update our trade laws for the 21st century global economy and set the stage for American leadership in the international marketplace. By any measurable standard, our efforts have been a smashing success. The centerpiece of our trade agenda was the legislation to renew trade promotion authority, or TPA. Prior to this year, it had been nearly three decades since a TPA bill was fully considered and reported out of the Senate Finance Committee. Our TPA bill received a strong bipartisan vote in the committee and another one on the floor. Actually, to be precise, we had to pass it twice in the Senate, with similar results on both occasions.

This legislation put in place strong negotiating objectives to ensure our negotiated trade agreements reflect the collective will of Congress. It also empowered our negotiators to reach the best deals possible by providing a path to getting fair up-or-down votes for future trade agreements, giving our trading partners the assurances they need to put their best offers on the table. I don't want to go into too much detail today about any specific trade agreements that may or may not make their way to Congress in the future. I just want to point out that the Finance Committee's TPA bill—now a law—will ensure that we have all the information we need to make an informed decision on any agreement that Congress has the ultimate say over whether any agreement enters into force.

In addition to TPA, the Finance Committee developed legislation to renew some of our most vital trade preference programs, including preferences for Haiti and countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Generalized

System of Preferences, or GSP, Program. These programs are key tools in our arsenal for assisting developing nations and providing important benefits for job creators and consumers here at home. The preference bill was signed into law after getting a near-unanimous vote in both the House and the Senate.

We also crafted the Trade Facilitation and Trade Enforcement Act, a bill which will, among other things, authorize the Customs and Border Protection agency and update our processes and standards for enforcement at our borders, most notably with regard to the protection of intellectual property rights, an issue that has long been of particular interest to me.

This legislation also had a lot of support in the Senate and in the House. The conference committee, which I chaired, charged with reconciling the differences between the House- and Senate-passed versions of the bill, filed its report just this last week. My hope is that we will consider and pass this conference report as soon as possible.

International trade is a key element of a healthy U.S. economy. We have made great strides toward promoting trade and improving global trade standards already this year—and hopefully we will be able to make a few more in the very near future.

Entitlement reform. The Finance Committee has also enjoyed significant success when it comes to entitlement reform, which I think has surprised many people around here. For years—decades even—we were told that bipartisan entitlement reform was impossible. The political stakes, according to the naysayers, were far too high. The parties and stakeholders, they said, were too entrenched.

Yet, in 2015, we have successfully enacted significant reforms to our two most “untouchable” entitlement reform programs: Medicaid and Social Security.

In April, Congress passed, and the President signed, legislation originally drafted and reported out of the Finance Committee in late 2014 to repeal and replace the Medicare sustainable growth rate—SGR—formula. Although it has been a little while since the bill passed, I think we all remember the periodic scramble to find short-term offsets to patch the SGR and kick the can even further down the road. It was, quite frankly, an embarrassment we forced ourselves to endure year after year and a prime example of government ineptitude and our apparent inability to do anything in Congress to fix it.

That all changed this year with the passage of the committee's legislation, which not only reformed Medicare in terms of the SGR but also featured cost-saving measures within the underlying program. These included a limitation on so-called Medigap first-dollar coverage, more robust means testing for Medicare Parts B and D, and program integrity provisions that have