

amendments. There were also recommendations from more than 75 Senators from both sides of the aisle included in the Transportation-HUD appropriations portion of this bill which were incorporated at the committee level. I thank all of my colleagues for giving us their suggestions, their requests, and their insights. It made for a better bill.

As I mentioned, I am particularly grateful to Senator JACK REED, the ranking member of the Transportation-HUD Subcommittee, for his work.

I also thank the staff for their diligence and commitment throughout this process. As Senator REED mentioned, we worked extremely hard, but our staff worked even harder. So I thank Heideh Shahmoradi, Rajat Mathur, Jason Woolwine, Lydia Collins, Gus Maples, Dabney Hegg, Nathan Robinson, Christina Monroe, Jordan Stone, and Mike Clarke on the subcommittee staff.

I also give special thanks to the floor and cloakroom staffs who worked so hard. Without the help of Laura Dove and her team and the team on the Democratic side, we could not be where we are today. They did a lot of the vetting that needed to be done on various amendments. They helped us in the negotiations and compromises that ultimately were included in this bill.

I would note that our Transportation-HUD portion of this bill recognizes the fiscal reality while making critical investments into our crumbling infrastructure and economic development projects. It meets our responsibility to vulnerable populations. I think most of our colleagues are unaware that 84 percent of HUD's budget goes to subsidized housing. When we fund that, we keep very vulnerable low-income families, disabled individuals, and our low-income seniors from being at risk of homelessness.

We also paid special attention in this bill to vulnerable homeless populations, such as our veterans and our young people. We continued a program the administration wanted to abolish that helps our homeless veterans, to whom we owe so much—\$57 million in new vouchers, so that we can continue the progress we are making in housing our homeless veterans. Since we started this program, the number of homeless veterans has declined by about one-third. This program works, but we can't declare victory until the job is done. That is why both last year and this year we funded the program, even though the President's budget sought to eliminate it.

We have made real investments in helping some of our most vulnerable young people, and those are youth who have been in the Foster Care Program and then age out of that program. In some cases, they are aging out of the program before they have even graduated from high school, and they have nowhere to go. So through family reunification vouchers and other programs, we are beefing up support so

they don't fall through the cracks and become vulnerable to traffickers, to dropping out of school, to couch surfing, or ending up in shelters. In particular, I am very proud of the work we have done in that area.

I am very pleased this bill funds the TIGER Grant Program at \$525 million. This program has been extraordinarily popular and effective. It has funded projects in each and every State—projects that have led to job creation and economic development. When we think about it, at heart, much in this bill is about creating jobs and security for our fellow citizens. If you don't have a place to live, it is very difficult to show up for work every day. If the infrastructure is crumbling, it is very difficult for a business to hire the employees who produce the products and get those products to market. The construction projects this bill will fund creates good-paying jobs. In many ways, I think of this as a jobs bill.

Let me give another example of a very popular program, the Community Development Block Grant Program. If you ask of the mayors and other town and city officials in your State, they will point to that program as one that gives them the flexibility to improve their downtowns, to make investments that bring new employers to the region, to build affordable housing, whatever their needs are, and that is the beauty of that program. It is not dictated from Washington. It gives tremendous flexibility to States and communities to design the kinds of economic development programs that boost growth and create jobs.

In short, our bill strikes the right balance between thoughtful investment and fiscal restraint and thereby sets the stage for future economic growth, something I know the Presiding Officer has been a real leader in speaking out about and reminding us that must be our focus as Members of the Senate.

I am also pleased we were able to bring spending bills to the floor for Members to examine, debate, and vote on in a transparent manner. The worst situation is when we do a series of continuing resolutions temporarily funding the essential functions of government. They create such uncertainty, they lock in priorities from previous years rather than reflecting today's priorities, and they end up costing more money. Agencies are unable to enter into contracts. Businesses, because of the uncertainty, tend to build in a little extra into their bids. It is a terrible way to operate.

Equally bad is the practice of bundling all 12 of the appropriations bills into one gigantic omnibus bill, thousands of pages long, that is rushed through at the end of the fiscal year—or, more often, at the expiration of one of those continuing resolutions that I just deplore. We are not doing that this year. This is the third appropriations bill that the Senate has passed earlier than ever, with great cooperation from both sides of the aisle. The Members of

the Appropriations Committee and its two leaders, Senator COCHRAN and Senator MIKULSKI, deserve great credit for putting us on a strict schedule and keeping the process moving.

In fact, in the full committee today, we approved two more appropriations bills that are ready to come to the Senate floor. That is the way the process used to work. That is the way the process should work, and that is the way the process is working this year. I believe it is a great credit to the Senate, to the leaders of the Appropriations Committee, and to Majority Leader MCCONNELL, who has made it a goal that all 12 bills be reported by the Appropriations Committee and brought to the Senate floor, individually or two or three combined, for full and open debate.

Again, I thank Members on both sides of the aisle. Many of your requests are included in this important legislation. I feel fortunate to have worked with Senator JACK REED on this bill. He is not only a great colleague and a terrific Senator but also a good friend.

#### MORNING BUSINESS

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

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

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

#### INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

Mr. RUBIO. Madam President, there is an ongoing debate in our politics today about the value of leadership around the world in the 21st century. There is a view that seems to be gaining traction and favor—that our international engagement is one-sided, that our allies are free riders, that we contribute too much and get too little in return, and so why should we be involved in the world? These voices exist in both parties, and I would like to answer them today.

I want to start by looking back at the last century, when the world emerged from the death and destruction of the Second World War. The United States could have decided after that war to wall ourselves off—that after the loss of so many of our best and brightest, we had already paid enough for peace.

Instead, our country became the driving force behind international

order. We forged a series of strong alliances, led with moral clarity, and positioned our military strength strategically around the world. In doing so, the American people benefitted immensely as we helped to stave off the threat of another global conflict and oversaw decades of economic growth and the spread of democracy and freedom around the world. Then, like now, our people benefitted tremendously from our status in the world, even though our engagement was disproportional to that of other nations; in fact, we benefitted precisely because our engagement was disproportional to that of other nations.

International engagement has never been a business deal. International engagement is not a transaction in which we give something tangible and receive something tangible in return. America has more to give to the nations we are helping, and that is one of the reasons why we have a responsibility to lead. It is written in the Bible: "From everyone who has been given much, much will be required." But our leadership ends up paying dividends for the entire world, and especially for the American people.

First of all, American workers and families benefit economically. International affairs have a bigger impact on the financial well-being of our people today than ever before. In our global economy, someone on the other side of the planet can now buy a product from an American with the tap of a finger. But when nations or entire regions are torn apart by war and by oppression, they become closed off, and economic growth in our own country is restricted as a result.

If America were to fail to protect the openness of international waters, global shipping would be threatened and prices would rise for consumers on virtually everything. Similarly, if space and cyber space became threatened or restricted, global communications and commerce would suffer as well.

Americans also see real benefits in terms of our safety at home and around the world. Without American leadership, regional order tends to break down, and then instability spreads. This opens up vacuums that are filled up by radicals, and those radicals always—irrespective of what we are doing or what we are not doing—target America, and they do so either to bolster their own prestige or for ideological reasons or often for both. As President Obama has found, leaving the Middle East doesn't mean terrorists stop trying to kill Americans. Our families, our homeland, and our men and women in uniform are less safe when America disengages from the world.

We also benefit geopolitically when we help other nations. Think what Europe would look like if it had not been for America's moral and strategic leadership during the Cold War. Europe still faces many challenges today, mainly because of our neglect of the crisis in Syria, but for centuries prior,

Europe was driven by conflict. European peace was thought to be impossible. Yet that is what NATO and other institutions have helped achieve with American support.

What would Asia look like right now had the United States not helped it to rebuild after the Second World War. Look at the way that American leadership allowed South Korea to go from a poor country—a dictatorship—to a vibrant democracy and one of the largest economies in the world. South Korea is now a net donor to foreign aid and a crucial ally for us in a region that includes an aggressive China and a belligerent North Korea.

Japan has gone from a country devastated by war and not trusted by its neighbors to one of the most peaceful societies in the world. It has also become a net contributor to global security through its military and humanitarian assistance programs.

Then there is the Middle East. Whether we should continue to play a role there is a question that weighs particularly heavily on the minds of many Americans. I understand the doubts and frustrations. We have been involved in the region for decades. Nothing seems to be getting better, and despite our attempts to help, we watch on television as some celebrate our tragedies and burn our flag in the Arab streets.

It is true that we cannot solve all of the region's problems, but we have an interest in what happens there, nonetheless. That interest is served by our involvement, not by our withdrawal. ISIS arose, in the first place, because of the political instability that exists in both Syria and Iraq, and that instability was created in part because President Obama withdrew or withheld American leadership at crucial moments.

Failing to lead costs us more in the long-term than it saves us in the short-term, and we will continue to pay a steep price each time we fail to lead in the future.

There are complex considerations to make regarding our engagement in every region, but I believe a world without sustained American engagement is not a world any of us want to live in. This idea shared by prominent voices in both parties—that America is such a weak nation that we cannot afford to be engaged in the world—is one of the biggest lies ever told to the American people. Just because our government leaders are weak does not mean America is weak.

No American wants to live in a world where Vladimir Putin sets the agenda or ISIS holds us hostage to their demands. Yet this is the world we are heading toward as political leaders continue to embrace America's decline.

Defense spending is currently at roughly 3.3 percent of our budget, compared to 14 percent at the height of the Korean war. Our Army is on track to be at pre-World War II levels. Our Navy is already at pre-World War I levels,

and our Air Force has the smallest and oldest combat force in its history. These are the results of specific policy choices made by politicians right here. It is no accident that the result has been more conflict around the world and less American influence.

I saw firsthand on a recent trip to Iraq how our men and women in uniform around the world are doing their best to keep us safe with limited resources. We put them in an untenable position. They are asked to maintain our global commitments, fight ISIS and other terrorist groups, and deter countries such as Russia, Iran, North Korea, and China. They and our country deserve better.

"Spend less abroad so we can spend more at home" has become a common refrain among leaders in both parties. It is used to excuse cuts to the military and our presence around the world. The truth is that the defense budget is not the primary driver of our debt. It is our entitlement programs. Every time we try to cut a dollar from our military, it seems to cost us several more just to make up for it.

In addition to investing in our strength, we must apply that strength in a way that respects our values and supports our economic interests.

Americans deserve a foreign policy we can be proud of. But for the last 8 years, we have had a Commander in Chief who praises and appeases dictators to promote the illusion of peace. Some in my party have now adopted a similar approach. They may claim to represent different ideas, but both emanate from the same notion—that Americans are too tired, that America is too weak, and that we are too much like the rest of the world to stand up to tyrants, so we should just cut deals with them instead.

This is not only morally wrong, but it is contrary to our interests. Whenever our foreign policy becomes unhinged from its moral purpose, it weakens global stability and it forms cracks in our national resolve. But whenever freedom and human rights spread, partners for our Nation are born. We must restore America's willingness to state boldly what we stand for and why. Just as Reagan never flinched in his criticisms of the Soviet Union, we must not shy away from demanding that China allow true freedom for its 1.3 billion people or boldly stating that Vladimir Putin is a corrupt thug. Nor should we hesitate in calling the source of atrocities in the Middle East by its real name—radical Islam. We should always stand with Israel, and we should not abandon the cause of freedom in our own hemisphere and allow cruel and immoral dictatorships in Cuba and Venezuela to be absolved of their crimes.

The world needs America's moral and military strength just as much as our people and our economy do. No other nation can deter global conflict by its presence alone. No other nation can offer the security and benevolence that

America can. No other Nation can be trusted to defend peace and advance liberty.

America cannot avoid its role as a global leader. But we also know America cannot be tasked with protecting the world on its own. It will take an international order of free nations with free economies to do so. We must work with like-minded allies whenever possible and encourage them to do their part, but no other nation has the ability to organize or lead such a coalition if we fail to do so.

That is why I will continue to make the case for an engaged America, no matter who becomes our next President, no matter how the political winds may blow. Our safety and our prosperity depend on it. The ideal of America depends on it. That was true last century, and it is even more so today.

Madam President, with that, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

#### TRANSPORTATION, HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT, AND MILITARY CONSTRUCTION AND VETERANS AFFAIRS APPROPRIATIONS BILLS

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I am pleased that today the Senate passed two annual spending bills—Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Military Construction and Veterans Affairs—and approved funding to combat the Zika virus.

Senators COLLINS, REED, KIRK, and TESTER worked hard to craft good, bipartisan bills with no ideological, partisan policy riders.

They have reminded us of the way we should do business here in the Senate.

I was proud to support both bills when they were considered by the Appropriations Committee in recent weeks and proud to support them again today.

I am pleased that the bill includes long-overdue funding to fight Zika. The bill does not provide the full amount of funding that our health and infectious disease experts say they need, but it does provide a good down payment of \$1.1 billion.

We must do more, and we must do it now, in order to protect pregnant women nationwide.

This bill builds on the surface transportation bill, the FAST Act, that Congress passed last year that provides funding over 5 years for rail and highway infrastructure.

Illinois rail lines are at the center of our national transportation network.

In 2014, 5 million people boarded or exited trains in Illinois, giving resi-

dents a safe, affordable option when traveling.

The bill supports rail options by providing strong funding for Amtrak, including \$1.42 billion for the national network.

It increases funding for TIGER and Core Capacity Capital Investment Grants, which supports transportation improvement projects across Illinois like the CTA's Red Purple Modernization project to provide more commuter passenger rail options to people in Chicago.

The bill also funds important rail safety programs across the country.

First-time funding for passenger rail grant programs authorized in the FAST Act will address gaps in supporting and growing our nation's passenger rail infrastructure.

Rail line relocation and grade crossing enhancements will reduce accidents and improve passenger safety in Illinois and around the country.

Nearly 1.1 million barrels of crude oil are hauled on our nation's railroads every day. Last year's derailment in Galena, IL, highlights the need to invest in rail safety.

The bill continues funding for Positive Train Control programs and supports the Safe Transport of Energy Products Program.

There is always more work to be done. According to the American Society of Civil Engineers, America scores a D in investment in roads, transit, and aviation and a C-plus in rail.

This bill is a good start. This bill not only invests in our transportation infrastructure, but it also invests in our housing infrastructure.

I want to thank Senators COLLINS and REED again for their efforts to address lead-based paint hazards in our Nation's low-income housing.

Since Flint, we have learned that exposure to lead, be it through our drinking water or paint in our homes, is still a major problem in communities across Illinois and the country.

We have also learned that, when government shortchanges our infrastructure because of opposition to common-sense protections and draconian spending cuts, families suffer the consequences.

In the case of Flint, local and State government was the problem, and now, it, along with Federal Government, have to be part of the solution.

And the provisions in this bill can help us do that. This bill requires HUD to update its standards to the CDC's blood level standard, which is currently four times the CDC level. It improves tenant awareness and education of the lead-based paint hazards. And it provides a modest increase in funding for the identification and remediation of lead-based hazards found in federally assisted housing.

These are all good things, and they will go a long way in addressing the government's abysmal and embarrassing record in dealing with this problem, which has led to far too many

children living in federally subsidized housing suffering from lead poisoning, including one family in Chicago. Lanice Walker's 4-year-old daughter was diagnosed with lead poisoning less than 5 months after her and her family moved into a home subsidized by a Housing Choice Voucher.

But Lanice Walker was not able to move without the risk of losing her voucher because her daughter's blood lead level, which was two times the CDC level, didn't meet the standards under HUD regulations. It wasn't until all nine of her children had elevated blood levels and legal advocates intervened on her behalf before she was granted permission to move.

This is unacceptable, and we must do more to protect children in affordable housing before they become poisoned by lead. We must ensure that lead-based paint hazards are properly identified before a family moves into a unit. We must update all outdated lead regulations using the most recent science and enforce them. And we must adequately fund programs designed to identify and eliminate lead paint hazards.

I hope that our efforts today are just the beginning of our recommitment to addressing our lead epidemic.

The Senate also approved the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs appropriations bill, which provides a \$3.1 billion increase above fiscal year 2016 enacted levels.

This funding will support a wide variety of projects to ensure the military readiness and quality of life on military bases within the United States and around the world.

It provides \$70 million for Arlington National Cemetery to ensure that the final resting place for our servicemembers is well maintained.

The bill ensures that we provide for our Nation's veterans and their families, those who have sacrificed so much over the years and deserve our gratitude.

The Veterans Benefits Administration will receive \$2.8 billion more than last year to help the VA modernize its claims processing as well as help reduce and eliminate backlogs.

Forcing veterans to wait months and sometimes years to get the benefits they deserve is unacceptable.

The bill increases funding for critical programs and emerging needs, including hepatitis C treatment, whistleblower protection, as well as family caregiver support.

For years, I have championed the caregivers program in Congress, so I am pleased that this program is a priority in this bill.

Hundreds of veterans and their caregivers in Illinois and more than 23,000 nationwide participate in this program, with much success.

The bill increases medical and prosthetic research funding by \$44 million compared to fiscal year 2016, at \$675 million. These funds are critical to continuing our national commitment