

access to financing. Whether it is through the community bank or banks on Wall Street or the Farm Credit Union or farm credit system, farmers, ranchers, and those in agriculture need access to financing to get through this difficult time.

That production loan, that operating loan is how they make it from season to season, harvest to harvest, and planting to planting to make sure they have the ability to stay on the farm. Right now we have a system that I am worried about—a financial regulatory system in place that perhaps a farmer walks into a bank one day, a bank they have been doing business with for 100 years, and they have never missed a payment, but all of a sudden, based on some Washington, DC, formulary, they can no longer get the loan they need to keep them into the next year, even though that bank in their hometown on Main Street knows they will be able to make that payment.

What we have created is a system and financial regulations that are going to make it impossible for some of these farmers to work out the crisis that is upon them. I sent a letter 2 weeks ago to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, requesting a review of all regulations potentially inhibiting rural access to finance.

The fourth thing we have to get right is trade opportunity for American agriculture. With corn and wheat prices near 10-year lows, the most obvious solution is to open up more international markets for agriculture to continue to look for new opportunities to export American agricultural products overseas. The price of commodities for a bushel of corn is about the same price today as it was back when I was born in 1974. Opening up trade opportunities, opening new markets will give us the value-added opportunity to help get more for that bushel of corn.

Some of the greatest opportunities lie in Asia—50 percent of global population, 50 percent of GDP in the near future. Those are markets we have to open up in U.S. agriculture. Those are markets that already have access in many cases to U.S. markets, but if we want to sell products there, sometimes we are hit with tariffs. That is not fair. We have to make sure we are reducing the tariffs we face when we go into their markets because they seem to have unfettered access into ours much of the time.

Those are all measures we can address. The four things are long-term farm policies, regulatory relief, access to financing, trade opportunities that work for the American farmers and ranchers.

Those recent fires in northeast Colorado, as well as fires in past years in Colorado and across the West, are another reminder of the need to address wildfire borrowing. Wildfire borrowing is a process where the Department of Agriculture's Forest Service spends money that it has budgeted for the fires. It runs out of money because it

didn't budget enough money to fight the fires, and it turns around and starts cannibalizing other areas of spending that could actually have been used to help reduce the next forest fire. We have to end the practice of fire borrowing, and we have to work with Secretary Perdue as head of the U.S. Forest Service within the Department of Agriculture to end wildfire borrowing and to improve forest and land management to prevent these uncontrollable fires that we have seen.

Supporting those impacted by fires, whether it is in the forest or around the prairie, is something we should all be able to get behind. In Logan and Phillips Counties, neighbors banded together. They worked to recover and rebuild from the devastation shown on these images. It has happened for generations in eastern Colorado and across this country. When there is a crisis, when there is a tragedy, neighbors help their neighbors. You can see it in these pictures. But we can also help our neighbors here in Washington, DC, and across our country's vast farmlands by doing what is right in addressing these challenges. Just as Logan County and Phillips County banded together, we should band together with American agriculture.

It is my hope that Congress can learn from the lessons taught in the aftermath of these difficult situations to come together, support rural communities, support agriculture, and make sure we support our fire response efforts, importantly, to prevent that next catastrophic fire.

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.

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

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

GOVERNMENT FUNDING LEGISLATION

Mrs. CAPITO. Mr. President, earlier today, the Senate voted to pass the Omnibus appropriations bill for 2017.

This bill is a product of bipartisan negotiations and hard work on the part of our Appropriations Committee, of which I am proud to be a member, and the leadership of both of our parties.

I am encouraged by the overwhelming support for this important legislation that reflects our Nation's priorities and funds the government in a responsible way. I am very pleased—and I can't emphasize this enough; very pleased—that the bill includes a bipartisan provision that keeps the promise of lifetime healthcare benefits for 22,000 coal miners and their families, including 8,500 West Virginians—my home State.

Bankruptcies in the coal industry meant that these miners would have lost their critical health insurance coverage at the end of last year. We passed that little, short-term extension for 4

months, and it was set to expire this coming week.

This appropriations bill provides certainty to these coal mining families. Because of this bill, they will keep the healthcare they earned through their years of hard work.

I worked closely with my West Virginia colleague, Senator JOE MANCHIN, as well as our Representatives—Representatives DAVID MCKINLEY, EVAN JENKINS, and ALEX MOONEY—to get this permanent miners' healthcare fix included in the bill.

I also want to particularly thank our majority leader, Senator MITCH MCCONNELL, for his leadership on behalf of the miners in West Virginia and in his home State of Kentucky, and the rest of Appalachia. I would also like to thank my fellow Republican from the State of Ohio, Senator ROB PORTMAN, who was a champion for those miners as well.

But, most importantly, I would like to thank the miners from across coal country who came to Washington to advocate for their healthcare benefits. I met with dozens—probably hundreds, over the course of the years—of West Virginia miners in my office over the last several years.

Last September, miners came by the thousands to the west front of the Capitol and stood for hours in just excruciatingly hot conditions. These miners and their families put a human face on the issue. They are the reason—they are the reason—that we have a successful result today.

Many of these miners have shared their stories with me through letters and emails and personal stories and visits, and I want to share just a few of their thoughts.

Brenda, a coal miner's widow from West Virginia, wrote that continued healthcare coverage presented a life or death situation for her. She wrote:

I have medical problems, which require monthly doctor visits and prescriptions and I will no longer be able to see my doctors—nor afford the prescriptions should our health insurance be taken away.

Alfred, a retired West Virginia coal miner wrote:

We were not given our health benefits as a gift. We worked hard in the mines every day for a long time, and it was backbreaking, year-to-year.

Howard, another retiree, wrote that he worked in the West Virginia coal mines for 41 years to earn this promise of healthcare benefits.

William, also a retired West Virginia miner, wrote that he has had several surgeries, including one on New Year's Day, 2017. The possible expiration of health benefits and the thought of temporary benefit extensions left him worried about whether he would be able to access necessary followup medical care for his surgery.

After learning that permanent healthcare would be included in this bill, Gisele wrote:

Tonight I will rest soundly knowing that we will be able to afford our medicines.

For Brenda, Alfred, William, Howard, Gisele, and thousands of other miners and widows across West Virginia, this bill keeps the promise of lifetime healthcare.

There is more work to be done to protect the pension benefits of our retired miners and to bring jobs back to coal country, to areas that have been hit hard by the previous administration's policies. But the permanent healthcare in this bill is a critical victory for our coal mining families and the communities where they live.

I would also like to quote a young man who sent me an email. I met him at a Chick-fil-A on a Saturday—not a Sunday, of course, on a Saturday. We struck up a little friendship, and the day he learned that this was in the bill, he texted me and said:

Senator, I met you in the Chick-fil-A. Thank you, you have now secured the benefits for my Paw Paw.

I thought it was such a heartfelt message that he sent to me—a new friend of mine who had been struggling along trying to figure out a way to help his grandfather.

There are a number of other important priorities in this bill as well. Mining communities will also be helped by tens of millions of dollars across different agencies to help us retrain our miners who have lost their jobs.

This bill also includes a significant investment in new fossil energy research, including carbon capture and sequestration. These funds will help spur the development of new markets for coal to keep coal mining jobs for years to come.

The appropriations bill also includes funding increases for rural broadband deployment, something I have been very concerned about, as well as continued funding for the Appalachian Regional Commission. Access to broadband is absolutely critical for economic development and improved access to health and education opportunities in our rural communities, and we are sadly underserved. There is much work to be done to bring access to high-speed internet to many communities, but this bill is a positive step.

As chairman of the Financial Services and General Government Appropriations Subcommittee, I am glad that we included increased funding for the Drug-Free Communities Support Program and the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Program, or the HITDA Program. Unfortunately, cascading across this country is the devastating problem of prescription drug abuse, opioid abuse, and heroin addiction. The Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education portion of the bill includes an \$800 million increase to combat opioid addiction. This includes the \$500 million authorized for the 21st Century Cures Act to help States with their response to the crisis. It also includes an increase for medication-assisted treatment programs and for other programs outlined by the CARA bill that we passed last summer.

In addition to these important treatment resources, we have also funded important enforcement and prevention aspects of the problem as well, including \$50 million for the Department of Veterans Affairs for opioid and substance abuse for the treatment of our veterans. This is a real problem for our returning veterans who have addiction issues. There are funds to implement the Jason Simcakoski act that Senator BALDWIN and I introduced.

Unfortunately, West Virginia is the epicenter of the opioid crisis that has struck communities across the country. Passage of this appropriations bill will make a difference—a big difference—for people who are struggling to overcome addiction and to help our States that are financially strapped and our local communities combat this terrible problem.

Another area of significance to a lot of people in my State and across the country is the increase in the funding for the National Institutes of Health. There is a \$400 million increase for Alzheimer's research—something important to me, as I lost both of my parents who suffered from Alzheimer's, this terrible disease. We need to find not just treatments, but we need to find a cure, and I think NIH is where we are going to find it.

There are many other reasons to support this bill. It has additional flood relief for our devastated flood areas. I know the Presiding Officer has major floods in Louisiana, and we had them in West Virginia, and we have had them across the country.

Just to mention a few other things, this bill includes a pay increase for our troops, which is so important. They are on the frontlines.

The bill also works on scientific research for our educational institutions, something important to our universities in West Virginia.

But, most of all, I just want to voice my appreciation for the bipartisan work by the members of the appropriations committees, who worked hard to get this bill where we are. It is a responsible bill. It is a commonsense bill. It sets our priorities. Today, because of the fact that we passed it with support from both parties, I believe it will achieve a positive result for our country.

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

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

NATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER

Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. President, it is a busy day. There is a lot going on in Washington, DC. Quite frankly, at home there is a lot going on in homes, families, and lives. Today is also a unique day for America as well. It is the one day that we as a nation have

something called the National Day of Prayer. It started in 1988. It was an official day on this day, the first Thursday of May. But in the 1950s, Harry Truman started this process of a national day of prayer. So it far precedes that.

Our Nation has a rich and beautiful history in prayer. Members of the House and Senate, as the Presiding Officer knows, open the day every day with a prayer. It has been that way from the very beginning. Even the first Continental Congress on September 7, 1774, opened in prayer.

Tonight, Americans will gather in Statuary Hall in the U.S. Capitol to celebrate the National Day of Prayer. Statuary Hall was once the House of Representatives, where the House gathered. It was also the largest gathering place in Washington, DC, and many churches for years met in Statuary Hall to be able to pray. It was the common meeting place. In fact, for a period of time in the early 1800s, four churches a Sunday used at that time the House of Representatives Chamber—what is now known as Statuary Hall—as their place for worship.

Thomas Jefferson worshipped there. In fact, every President from Thomas Jefferson all the way to Abraham Lincoln attended church on Sundays in Statuary Hall, what was at that time the House of Representatives Chamber.

That is an interesting fact. I have had folks talk about Thomas Jefferson's statement about the wall of separation between church and state. That was actually in a letter Thomas Jefferson wrote to the Danbury Baptist Association, saying they would not allow the State to take over churches—that there would be this wall of separation between church and state. Two days after President Jefferson wrote that statement, he attended church in the House of Representatives Chamber on a Sunday.

Even earlier, at our Constitutional Convention in 1787, Benjamin Franklin stated: "In the beginning of the Contest with Great Britain, when we were sensible of danger, we had daily prayer in this room for Divine protection."

Many U.S. Presidents have signed proclamations for national prayer since 1799, from George Washington all the way to the present.

The National Day of Prayer is a good day for us to be able to reflect as a Nation and to be able to remember well that there are many people of faith in our country that do believe there is a Creator God and that he has made a difference in our own personal lives and he has made a difference in our Nation.

We go back to President Truman's statement. He said in 1952: "The President shall set aside and proclaim a suitable day each year, other than a Sunday, as a National Day of Prayer, on which the people of the United States may turn to God in prayer and meditation in churches, in groups, and as individuals."

As I mentioned, in 1988, President Reagan even affirmed that.