

will continue to debate tax policy and everything else, but today we are all Americans and we are all Texans. We are standing as one. That is the spirit that built our Nation, and it is the spirit that will rebuild Texas and Louisiana after this disaster.

Let me note that it is also the spirit that has us standing in unity with the people of Puerto Rico, the people of the Caribbean, and the people of Florida who are in harm's way as Irma bears down upon them. Our prayers are that the storm will turn into the Atlantic, dissipate, and turn away from people, but whatever happens, if there is to be yet another major storm hitting America, know that we will stand united in harm's way. We will stand as one, and united we can overcome anything.

With that, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. ERNST). The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

MONTANA WILDFIRES

Mr. TESTER. Madam President, today I rise to talk about a different natural disaster. It is happening in the great State of Montana, and every corner of our State of Montana has felt the impacts of wildfires.

In Montana, we are experiencing a historic drought. As you can see from the map, the red indicates it is very severe, and it gets less from there. But the fact is, there is a large portion of land along our northern tier that is experiencing incredible drought, and Montana is in the middle of it all. Nearly all of our great State is under historic drought conditions.

With dry grass, high winds, and dry lightning storms, it is no wonder that currently in our State we have nearly 30 high-priority fires raging as I speak today. Just last week, we had over 40 new fires spark in Montana. That isn't counting the ones that are currently in existence; there are over 40 new ones.

Over the last month, I went across my State and saw with my own eyes the fires across Montana. All Montanans are dealing with smoke-filled air, often in highly hazardous conditions. You can see here the chart of the smoke. It has been incredibly debilitating, quite frankly.

I have heard stories of ranchers in eastern Montana—in fact, I am talking about the eastern two-thirds of Montana—who took the shoes off their horses for fear that the metal clicking on rocks might spark and light up dry grass.

Hikers in Glacier National Park frantically parked their cars and fled due to evacuation notices.

Families in Whitehall, MT, left their homes with keepsakes and the sprin-

kers on the roof, just in case the fires crept closer to the only homes they have ever known.

Children in Seeley Lake, a little town in western Montana, saw their first day of school canceled due to fire danger. I might add that the smoke was incredible in Seeley Lake and has been for about the last month.

More than 900,000 acres across Montana have already burned. To put that in context, the State of Rhode Island is about 777,000 square miles. More than 900,000 acres in Montana have already burned. One fire alone—the Lodgepole Complex—burned 270,000 acres. That is larger than the city of New York. As I stand here today, more than 600,000 acres continue to burn. There are active fires on 600,000 acres. Firefighters have spent \$220 million to try to get a handle in Montana alone.

Nationwide, we have seen a 70-percent increase in acres burned this year than last year, when the Federal Government spent \$1.9 billion fighting fires. Let me put that in perspective. We have 70 percent more fires burning this year than last year, and last year we spent \$1.9 billion fighting fires. The bill is going to be huge this year.

In Montana, we have tragically lost two brave firefighters—Trenton Johnson and Brent Witham. These two young men selflessly and courageously put their lives on the line protecting our great State.

We have seen pastures burn, fences turn to ashes, and structures crumble before our eyes. In fact, the Glacier National Park's Sperry Chalet, a hotel that was built way back in 1913, was engulfed in flames and destroyed. It hopefully will be rebuilt, but the truth is, you do not rebuild a chalet that was built in 1913. It is gone. The historic Lake McDonald Lodge, a cornerstone of Glacier National Park, stands in the path of the flames.

Montana's forests, our national parks, our agriculture industry—these are all backbones of our economy in Montana. As these fires rage, Montana feels that economic impact. Tourists stay home, ranchers lose grazing land, cattle that survive the fire go hungry, river guides stay off the smoky water, and Montana's economy suffers.

Montana has been fortunate to have many brave men and women working together to fight these fires. Folks have collaborated at all levels of government to try to fight Mother Nature, but we all know that Mother Nature bats last.

Whether it is the floods in Houston or Hurricane Irma, which is threatening Florida, the wildfires across the West, or extreme drought in the Plains, we cannot deny that our climate is changing. Over the past 10 years, we have seen hundred-year storms every few years. We have seen hurricanes repeatedly besiege the gulf and east coast. Historic droughts are becoming common, and water shortages are routine. Unprecedented disasters are becoming the new normal, and it is put-

ting a strain on our government, on our economy, and on our citizens.

Climate change is real, and we can't continue to sit in silence. We have to take proactive steps to keep it at bay. It is costing taxpayers, it is altering our way of life, and our economy is suffering in the process.

Since Hurricane Sandy in 2012, we have spent more than \$100 billion in supplemental disaster relief. Let me say that again. Since Hurricane Sandy back in 2012—not that long ago—we have spent more than \$100 billion in supplemental disaster relief. That is \$100 billion in addition to what Congress has budgeted for disaster relief. That is \$100 billion we could be spending serving our veterans or improving our schools or building bridges and roads or paying down this Nation's debt.

But as our climate changes before our eyes, Congress continues to bury its head in the sand. We are left mortgaging our children's future to pay for disaster relief today. Look at the money we are going to spend on wildfires this year. Look at the funding we are going to be sending to Texas and Louisiana. I will state that I am all for sending help to those folks. I will be making sure the folks in this body understand that we also have to give resources to folks along the northern tier, especially Montana, because fighting fire is expensive and dangerous, and drought has dramatic impacts on our agricultural economy.

I am very thankful that we have folks like this gentleman pictured on the frontlines fighting fires, trying to direct Mother Nature in those fires in a way that they will do the least amount of damage.

We have heard a lot about the good folks and heroic folks down in Houston. We have seen the generosity, the heroism, the fighting spirit of Texans. Well, as I have traveled around Montana, I saw that same kind of heroism. I saw young men and women from across the country spending their summers fighting fires in our forests and across our Plains. I saw communities coming together and opening up their doors and sending aid from across the State. I saw seamless collaboration between Federal, State, Tribal, and county agencies to mitigate the damages across our State.

We are seeing natural disasters across this country. This isn't a contest or comparison of devastation and misery; it is a testament to the American spirit. No matter what Mother Nature throws our way, we are going to need to work together to overcome it. Saving lives and property when disaster strikes is a fundamental pillar of government. It is not a Democratic or Republican issue, it is an American responsibility.

The country's faith in Washington, DC, is at an alltime low, but I am confident that we can work together to ensure the victims of Harvey get the relief they need and that the States that

are burning and impacted by drought, such as Montana, have the resources they need to protect our citizens, our economy, and our way of life.

As Congress works to get resources to the folks devastated by Harvey, I hope we can all take a page out of the American people's book and work together to get resources not only to the folks devastated by Harvey but the folks in Montana and the folks across the West who have been impacted so greatly by drought and wildfires.

I am asking for each and every one of the folks who serve in this body to look at the photos and stand with the people of Montana as they fight for blue skies and fresh air once again. We need the resources. We do not need a delay. We need to send them quickly because lives and property and a thriving outdoor economy are at risk.

In the meantime, I ask for your prayers for all of the folks who have been impacted by disasters, including the folks from the Treasure State, as we endure the drought and these terrible fires.

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

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

RECESS

Mr. FLAKE. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate stand in recess as under the previous order.

There being no objection, the Senate, at 12:18 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Acting President pro tempore.

EXTENSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. DAINES. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that morning business be extended until 3 p.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

ORDER FOR RECESS

Mr. DAINES. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that at 3 p.m. today, the Senate recess until 4:15 p.m. to allow for the all-Senators briefing.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

MONTANA WILDFIRES

Mr. DAINES. Mr. President, I left Montana yesterday morning to come

back to Washington, DC, to do the work of the American people but, as always, my heart remains in Big Sky Country. That is especially true right now as fires burn across our State. In fact, just yesterday, of the top 30 wildfires in the Nation, 28 of those 30 wildfires were in Montana.

Our crisis in Montana isn't water. It is not too much water. It is not hurricanes. It is fire. It is smoke filling the air and filling our lungs. It is communities being evacuated. Montanans standing on the side of the road looking at the fires moving toward their homes. We have seen the loss of homes and many structures. Montanans are looking at the tons of fuel just lying on the forest floor waiting for a spark to ignite. In fact, in this year alone, over 1,600 fires have burned nearly 1 million acres in Montana. That is nearly the size of the entire State of Delaware.

At my invitation, Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue and Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke both came to Montana, just about 2 weeks ago—in fact, 2 weeks ago tomorrow—so they could see firsthand the impact wildfires are having on our great State. We went out and saw the Lolo Peak Fire. The impact is devastating.

We need to be sure Montana gets the resources it needs, first of all, to stop the fires. I am very grateful to the men and women who are risking their lives to fight these fires, going on virtually very little sleep, living in tents, fighting these fires. The firefighters battling on the ground are away from their families, and they are giving everything to protect our lives, our lands, and our property. Tragically, already in Montana, two firefighters have lost their lives—Trenton Johnson, age 19, and Brent Witham, age 29.

Preventing wildfires is impossible, but we can do much more to lessen the severity and impact of these fires. Seven million federally controlled acres in Montana are at high risk for wildfire. Five million acres—five million acres—have been designated for accelerated forest management due to insect infestation. We are talking about dead trees. Yet, since 1990, our State of Montana has lost over 40 percent of its forestry workforce and two-thirds of its mills. The remaining mills that we have are not running around the clock, multiple shifts, which they could do, except for the fact they can't get enough logs. We are literally bringing in logs from out of State and even out of the country to our mills in Montana to keep them going.

Let's talk about Mineral County, MT. Mineral County was founded in 1914. This county in Western Montana is well known for its dense forests and abundant natural resources. The first sawmill came to this area around the turn of the 20th century. Multiple others followed suit. For decades, the timber industry thrived. Montanans worked hard, and they earned good money in the timber industry. In fact, the timber industry produced tax reve-

nues to support their schools, teachers, infrastructure, and allow our counties to prosper, but in the early 1990s things changed. Across the State of Montana, environmental lawsuits became a barrier to timber contracts that were awarded to Montana's small businesses. A community that once thrived on the abundant resources surrounding them now sits with one of the highest unemployment rates in the State.

Today, Mineral County has just a single lumber mill. Folks living there today are watching the very resources that supported their grandparents burn. In fact, in Mineral County alone, over 25,000 acres have been torched this fire season, and the fires continue to burn. The weather outlook for September continues with above normal temperatures and below normal precipitation. This fire season is not over. We are going to be in it for quite some time.

The mismanagement of our Federal forests and radical environmentalists have prevented hard-working Montanans from having jobs, and this just adds more fuel, literally, to these wildfires. Our inability to act and treat these acres further deteriorates the health of our forests and the communities that desperately depend on them.

I can tell my colleagues—and I can speak on behalf of all of Montana—that we are tired of being told that others know better than we do when we watch our forests burn every summer, our mills close, our neighbors lose jobs, and our counties lay off road crews because they don't have the funds anymore to support basic infrastructure, and our communities suffer from the lack of management of our Federal lands.

A safe forest, a vibrant forest is a managed forest. A healthy forest is a managed forest, and timber jobs are good jobs. A properly managed forest is also good for wildlife habitat. We have teamed with the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation. Their headquarters are in Missoula, MT. If you want to see more elk, if you want to see more wildlife, you need to manage the forests. It is good for wildlife habitat and good for water quality. A wildfire is devastating to the watershed because what happens is the wildfires come through, they wipe out the trees and grasses, and then when the spring rains come—when the snow melt comes from the spring—we see tremendous erosion and devastation of fish habitat and the loss of good sources of water for our communities.

Let's talk about the unspeakable amount of carbon emissions that are produced by these wildfires. I can tell my colleagues that we are done listening to radical environmentalists when they tell us otherwise. Too many forest management projects have been held up in frivolous litigation at the expense of the people of Montana. One such project—the Stonewall project—was halted because of the terrible Cottonwood decision, which is the 21st