

Mr. SASSE. I urge all of my colleagues to listen to all of the Nebraskans, again, of all backgrounds and across the partisan spectrum, as they have urged us to confirm Mr. Grasiz today.

Thank you.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CRUZ). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that notwithstanding rule XXII that at 4 p.m. on Tuesday, December 12, there be 30 minutes of postcloture time remaining on the Grasiz nomination, equally divided between the leaders or their designees, and that following the use or yielding back of that time, the Senate vote on the confirmation of the Grasiz nomination and that, if confirmed, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table and the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR 5-YEAR
OFFSHORE OIL AND GAS PLAN

Mr. NELSON. Mr. President, there are all kinds of reports swirling around Washington, and we are hearing from those reports that the Trump administration is about to give a huge, early Christmas present to the oil industry. The reports are, the Department of the Interior is preparing to unveil a new 5-year plan for offshore oil and gas drilling—one that would open up the entire Atlantic coast of the United States to drilling. This new 5-year plan, which would go into effect in 2019, would replace the current 5-year plan that was finalized just last year and doesn't expire until 2022.

Why is the Department of the Interior in such a rush to waste taxpayers' money to write a new one? The answer is, the oil industry wants to start drilling in these areas now, and the Trump administration is going to let them do it. While it hasn't been released yet, we are hearing that the administration's new plan will open up the entire Atlantic coast to offshore drilling—from Maine to as far south as Cape Canaveral. Let me show you why that is a problem.

This is the east coast of the United States. This is Maine. This is Florida. This is Cape Canaveral. This is Fort Pierce, FL. Look what happens on the Atlantic coast off the eastern continental United States. These are all military testing areas. Every one of these hatched areas—every one of these blocks—is of a place that has limited access because of military testing.

Take, for example, all of this area off the east coast of Florida. There is a place called the Cape Canaveral Air Force Station. There is a place called the Kennedy Space Center. We are launching commercial and military rockets, and within another year and a half, we will be launching American rockets with American astronauts that will go, just like the space shuttle before them, to and from the International Space Station and will carry crews as well as the cargo they already carry.

When you are launching to the International Space Station or, in 2 years, when we launch the largest rocket ever from the Kennedy Space Center—the forerunner to the Mars Program, taking humans to Mars, or in the case of the new Mars rocket, called the SLS, the Space Launch System—where do you think it will drop its solid rocket boosters? It will drop them precisely out here, which is exactly why you cannot have oil rigs out here.

All of the commercial rockets that come out of Cape Canaveral right now put up a host of communications satellites; that is, a constellation of satellites. How do you think we get our pinpoint GPS here on Earth? Many of those rockets are coming right out of the Cape Canaveral Air Force Station, and, increasingly, there is commercial activity at the Kennedy Space Center, which is collocated with the Cape Canaveral Air Force Station.

What about all of those scientific satellites that are out there that give us precise measurements on what is happening to the climate so when we then track hurricanes, we know precisely and have such great success in predicting the path and the voracity of a hurricane? All of those rockets are coming out of Cape Canaveral. They have first stages, and when the first stages burn up, they have to fall somewhere. You cannot have oil and gas production out here.

It would be the same off of Norfolk, VA. They also have a launching point there for NASA—Wallops Island. Yet, in the Norfolk area, all of the military does its training out in the Atlantic, and you are going to have a whole disruption.

Take, for example, all of the military assets—spy satellites—that go into orbit and are rocketed out of Cape Canaveral. Those first stages, when burned up, have to fall. That is why we have a location like the Cape Canaveral Air Force Station. It launches from west to east in order to get that extra boost of the Earth's rotation and, therefore, needs less fuel to get into orbit.

This is a prime location. You cannot put oil and gas out here. You cannot have oil rigs off of Cape Canaveral, where all of these military, NASA, and commercial rockets are going, as well as governmental payloads that are not military.

We have heard the loud opposition from the Department of Defense, the chambers of commerce, fishermen, and coastal communities all along the Atlantic that have weighed in against the administration's plan to allow drilling off their coasts.

We thought we had put this puppy to bed last year when the Obama administration backed off its plans to have these drilling areas. They backed off because of the opposition. They also backed off when it came to Florida. Why? Florida has more beaches than any other State. We don't have as much coastline. Alaska has the greatest coastline, but the last time I checked, Alaska didn't have a lot of beaches. The one that is blessed with the beautiful beaches is Florida. When it comes to beaches, that means people want to go to the beach, and that means there is a significant tourism-driven economy there. We learned what happened with just the threat of there being oil on the beach. Remember the Deepwater Horizon oil explosion off of Louisiana? Let me show you so you don't get confused with all of these colors.

In essence, all of this yellow over on the other side of Florida, in the Gulf of Mexico, means this area is off-limits. It is in law, and it is a good thing because when the Deepwater Horizon spilled off of Louisiana, the winds shifted, and that oil started drifting to the east. It got as far as Pensacola Beach, and it completely blackened the white, sugary sands. That photograph went all over the world. Pensacola Beach was covered up in oil, and the winds kept carrying it forward. Some of it got into Choctawhatchee Bay and the sands of Destin, and some of the tar balls went as far east as the Panama City Beach. Then the winds shifted and carried it back, and that was the extent of the oil on the beach.

For 1 solid year—a tourist year—the tourists did not come to the west coast of Florida because they had seen the pictures of what had happened to Pensacola Beach, all of the way down the west coast—the Tampa Bay area, Sarasota, the Fort Myers area, Naples, Marco Island. The tourists did not come.

Now let's go back to the Atlantic. When you start to do this, you are now threatening the lifeblood of Florida's economy, its tourism-driven economy. It is not only a threat to the environment, but it is a threat to the multibillion-dollar, tourism-driven economy.

In 2010, we lost an entire season, as the tourists did not come to the west coast of Florida. That is why, when I gave the list of all of those entities, including the U.S. Department of Defense, they don't want it. It is because

of the military areas. I also mentioned the chambers of commerce. They have awakened to the fact that oil on beaches is a killer of our economy. When this plan is announced later today, probably, it will not be unusual to see local governments spring into action, like the Broward County Board of Commissioners, which has already sent letters that oppose drilling off of Florida's coast.

Floridians understand this issue. That is why, in the past, we have had such bipartisan agreement all over Florida—Republicans and Democrats alike—to keep drilling off of our coast, but if Big Oil gets its way, every inch of the Continental Shelf is going to be drilled. We saw what happened less than a decade ago. The scientists would say we are still uncovering, for example, the full extent of that BP oilspill and its damage.

I urge our colleagues to take up the bill that was filed earlier this year by this Senator, Senator MARKEY, and others that would block an attempt by the administration to open up our coast to oil drilling.

The stakes are extremely high for the economy of our States all along the eastern coast. Georgia has a substantial tourism-driven economy. You know South Carolina has Myrtle Beach. What about North Carolina? What about Virginia's tourism-driven economy and especially with all of the military concentration there? You can go right on up the coast. The stakes are exceptionally high. We simply can't risk it.

I yield the floor.

RECESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands in recess until 2:15 p.m.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 12:29 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. PORTMAN).

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

FUNDING THE GOVERNMENT AND THE REPUBLICAN TAX BILL

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, as everybody knows, the Republican Party now controls the U.S. House, the U.S. Senate, and the White House. We also know that unless a budget agreement is reached by December 22, the U.S. Government will shut down, which will cause serious harm to our country, including the men and women in the Armed Forces and our veterans.

I do not know why the Republican Party, which controls all the branches of government, wants to shut down our government. I think that is wrong, and I think a shutdown will be very hurtful to people from coast to coast.

Earlier this year, President Trump tweeted: "Our country needs a good

shutdown." I strongly disagree. I don't think we need a good shutdown; I think we need to reach an agreement on a budget that works for the middle class of our country and not just the wealthiest people.

It is no great secret that we are living in a nation that has almost unprecedented income and wealth inequality, at least since the 1920s. We have the top one-tenth of 1 percent owning almost as much wealth as the bottom 90 percent.

I don't believe that now is the time to give massive tax breaks to the wealthiest people in this country in a horrific tax bill and then at the end of 10 years raise taxes on 83 million middle-class families. I think that makes no sense. I don't think it makes much sense to be passing a tax bill that gives 62 percent of the benefits to the top 1 percent.

Apparently it is not good enough for my Republican colleagues that corporate America today is enjoying record-breaking profits and that the CEOs of large corporations are earning more than 300 times what their employees make. What the tax bill would do is give over \$1 trillion in tax breaks to large, profitable corporations at a time when already one out of five of these major corporations is paying nothing in taxes. That is apparently not good enough—we need to lower taxes for large corporations even more.

Right now as we speak, legislation is being written behind closed doors by the House Freedom Caucus and other Members of the extreme rightwing to provide a massive increase in funding for the Pentagon for the rest of the fiscal year, while only providing temporary and inadequate funding for the needs of the working families of this country, including education, affordable housing, nutrition, environmental protection, and other vital programs.

What we have seen over the last year is a Republican effort to throw 30 million people off of health insurance. What we then see is a Republican effort to give \$1 trillion in tax breaks to the top 1 percent and large corporations and at the end of 10 years raise taxes on middle-class families. Now what we are seeing on the part of the Republican Party is an effort to increase military spending by \$54 billion while ignoring the needs of a struggling middle class. We have to get our priorities right and maybe—just maybe—we have to start listening to what the American people want, not just what wealthy campaign contributors want.

In terms of the Republican so-called healthcare bill, the repeal of the Affordable Care Act, there is massive opposition from the American people. In terms of this tax bill, in case you haven't seen the last few polls, there is massive opposition to a tax bill that gives incredible tax breaks to people who don't need it and raises taxes on the middle class. Maybe—just maybe—we should start paying attention to the needs of working families.

For a start, let us be clear that since the passage of the Budget Control Act of 2011, Democrats and Republicans have agreed to operate with parity, which means if you are going to increase military spending, you increase programs that meet the needs of working families, domestic spending. There was parity in 2011 and parity three times after, and parity must continue. It is not acceptable to be talking about a huge increase in military spending and not funding the needs of a shrinking middle class, which desperately needs help in terms of education, in terms of nutrition, and so many other areas.

Furthermore, the American people are quite clear that they want us to move toward comprehensive immigration reform. They understand that it would be a terrible, terrible, terrible thing to say to the 800,000 young people who have lived, in most cases, their entire lives in the United States of America: We are ending the DACA Program. You are going to lose your legal status. You are not going to be able to go to school. You are not going to be able to hold a job. You are not going to be able to be in the military. We are taking away the legal status that you now have, and you will be subject to deportation. That is not what the American people want. They want to continue the DACA Program, and, in fact, they want comprehensive immigration reform—and now. Now is the time to deal with that.

I am happy to say that on this issue, there are a growing number of Republicans in the House and in the Senate who understand that in America, you are not going to throw 800,000 of our brightest young people, who are serving in the military and holding important jobs, out of this country by withdrawing their legal status.

I have been deeply involved, as have Senator BLUNT and others, in the Community Health Center Program, which is so important for the people of our country. Twenty-seven million Americans today receive their healthcare through community health centers, which provide primary care, provide mental health counseling—so important today—provide dental care, and provide low-cost prescription drugs. While my Republican colleagues have been busy trying to throw 30 million people off of health insurance, while they have been busy trying to give a trillion dollars in tax breaks for the rich and for large corporations, somehow they have not had the time to extend the CHIP program or the Community Health Center Program. How in God's Name can we be talking about tax breaks for billionaires and not extending a health insurance program for the children of our country? If the CHIP program is not reauthorized, 9 million children and working families will lose their health insurance.

Let us get our priorities right. Let us immediately pass legislation extending and funding the CHIP program and the Community Health Center Program.