

have to deal with the reality of people who have addictions, and they need to be able to get help. Part of that is having access to care and having coverage. The elimination of the Affordable Care Act will move us in the wrong direction.

We need to continue to build on legislation we have worked on together—bipartisan—that provides additional resources to our State and local governments to deal with the opioid crisis. Part of that is the expansion of coverage under the Affordable Care Act.

Scrapping the healthcare law will not only leave Medicaid expansion enrollees high and dry; it will also hurt very vulnerable populations that were unable to buy affordable, comprehensive coverage before the Affordable Care Act, including more than 130 million women, children, and other people with preexisting conditions.

Let's remember that prior to the Affordable Care Act, many Americans—millions of Americans—were denied full coverage because of preexisting condition restrictions. The Maryland Health Benefit Exchange estimates that in Maryland, there are approximately 2.5 million non-elderly Marylanders with preexisting conditions, 320,000 of whom are children. They are at risk with this court decision in Texas.

Undoing current law would also eliminate strong patient protection. Insurers would once again be able to impose annual and lifetime limits, discriminate against women, and charge higher out-of-pocket costs. Young adults would no longer be able to stay on their parents' insurance until they turn 26.

We are talking about tens of millions of Americans who are at risk by this court decision. It is absurd to move back and tell these people they are going to lose the protection they now have under our healthcare system.

It is simple. President Trump must take this opportunity to stand up for the American people and defend the law. That is what the President of the United States should be doing. That is why I joined Senator MANCHIN and many of my Democratic colleagues in a letter urging President Trump to direct the Department of Justice to defend the law of the land. Yes, we should defend the law. It is our responsibility to make sure we protect the people of this Nation.

Let's build on the progress we have made together. We know we need to improve our healthcare system. We know the cost of prescription drugs is too high. We can do something about that. We know the individual marketplace needs improvement. We want to make sure there is affordable, quality insurance for everyone in this country.

Yes, we need to build on the progress we have made to make improvement, but what I urge all of us to do—let's maintain the protections we have today. Let's not go back to the time when being a woman was a preexisting

condition and you couldn't get full coverage. Let's not go back to the days when, if you had a heart ailment and you tried to buy an insurance policy, you were not going to get coverage for what you need. You were going to get those exclusions. That is where we were before we passed the Affordable Care Act.

Let's build on the Affordable Care Act. Let's work together as Democrats and Republicans. Let's defend the progress we have made. I hope the President will join us, but let's take that responsibility and build on that and work together, Democrats and Republicans, to build a stronger system for all.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BOOZMAN). The Senator from Montana.

PUBLIC LANDS BILL

Mr. TESTER. Mr. President, I appreciate that and thank the Senator.

Look, we are at the end of the year. Oftentimes in this body, things happen at the end of the year that we are not too proud of, but we have an opportunity to do something we could be very, very proud of, and that is, pass the public lands bill.

This public lands bill would permanently reauthorize the Land and Water Conservation Fund. This is the most effective conservation tool we have in this country right now. Whether it is establishing a park in one of your cities or towns or setting land aside so we can get better access to our public lands, this is a critically important fund that I hope we can get done as part of this lands package that is moving forward and hopefully will move forward before this Congress ends.

LWCF—the Land and Water Conservation Fund—has invested over half a billion dollars in Montana alone.

There is another component of this bill that I am particularly fond of. It is a bill that will protect Yellowstone Park and the headwaters of the Yellowstone River. It is called the Yellowstone Gateway Protection Act. It is a simple bill. It is a bipartisan bill. It is a bill that will help support the hundreds of small businesses in Paradise Valley. And it is called Paradise Valley for a good reason—because it is paradise, and we need to keep it a paradise by preventing large-scale mining in that region.

I am just asking Congress to act. I am asking my fellow Members, my fellow Senators to add some common sense to the negotiations that are moving on here and pass this lands bill because it is critically important for our kids and our grandkids.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia.

FUNDING THE GOVERNMENT

Mr. PERDUE. Mr. President, here we are again at the end of a quarter and

the end of a calendar year—not the end of our fiscal year. But here we are again with late-night sessions and people running around in a very unprofessional manner, in my opinion, talking about how to get our government funded.

Let me put this in perspective. This is the end of December. October, November, and December are the first fiscal quarter of fiscal year 2019. We are already one-fourth through this fiscal year, and we are still talking about the completion of authorizations and appropriations to fund the government for this year—not next year, this year.

In 2018, the Senate and, indeed Congress did something we haven't done in a long time. For the first time in 22 years, we did get 75 percent of the Federal Government discretionary spending funded. By the way, that is only about 25 percent of what we spend as a federal government, but that is a conversation for another day.

On July 31 this year and earlier than that—we started the appropriations process earlier this year and had an opportunity in the Appropriations Committee. The subcommittees and the committee did a fabulous job this year. Democrats and Republicans got together behind closed doors, no cameras, and really argued the points and came to compromises on most of the issues, so that by July 31, we had funded 12.25 percent of this year's Federal budget for discretionary spending.

We decided as a body, with the leadership's approval, to stay here in August of this year. Because of that, we went from 12.5 percent to 75 percent of the discretionary budget being appropriated and approved. Indeed, the appropriators did their job this year and would have gotten 100 percent had we not had the disagreement over border security.

Let's be clear. As we sit here at the end of this quarter, the Senate should have already totally funded the Federal Government's discretionary budget by September 30 of this year. That was 3 months ago. Instead, what we are about to do is have a vote in the next day or two on a continuing resolution for the remaining portion of this year's Federal budget, the 25 percent. This will be the 186th continuing resolution this Congress and other Congresses have used to continue to fund the government in a temporary manner.

I have a major problem with that. First of all, it is an admission that Congress can't do its job. The No. 1 responsibility of Congress is to make sure the government is funded. It is one of the reasons Thirteen Colonies got together in the first place to form this country.

This continuing resolution, as bad as it is, should not be used, but even in its current potential existence, it is so bad for a couple of other reasons.

No. 1, it does not address the border security issue on which the President and the Democrats had prior agreements. Even just a few weeks ago, we

had agreements on some numbers for border security that are not being honored right now. It is like you negotiate to a point, and then one side says: Well, we are going to back up on that. Well, we will agree to this. And then they back up again.

The American people are not fooled. This is not an immigration issue any longer. It is clearly a national security issue. The President is right: Over 85 percent of the illegal drugs come into this country illegally across that border. Almost 100 percent of the fentanyl that comes into this country comes across that southern border of the United States illegally.

There is a second reason this is such an insidious thing to do right now with this continuing resolution. It is incredibly disappointing that this continuing resolution does nothing to address disaster relief funding for the people of Florida, Georgia, the Carolinas, Alabama, and California who have been devastated by historic wildfires and hurricanes.

The reason this is so critical right now is that this hits agriculture in these States in a way that is so insidious. The reason is that it hit at exactly the harvest time, when crops are being harvested or are potentially going to be harvested. It devastated entire regions of that portion of the United States.

In December and January, what farmers are typically doing is they have taken the money from the crops, paid back the planting loan from this year to the banks, and now in January will start negotiations for loans for next year for the planting season. What this continuing resolution does is kicks the can down the road until a theoretic date—somebody picked February 8 as an arbitrary date. This devastates farmers and smalltown bankers who are trying to fund next year's crop because they have no way of paying this year's.

I am absolutely convinced that President Trump wants to help these farmers and the people in California who have been devastated by these fires. He has said so repeatedly. In October, on a trip to Georgia and Florida, he saw the devastation from the hurricane and the tornadoes that came with it and all the damage that came from that event, and this is what the President said:

The farmers really got hurt, especially in Georgia. . . . But we're going to get it taken care of.

There is no question that the President of the United States wants to make good on that promise. The problem is, he is dealing with another party that is not being genuine in their effort to find a solution to this funding issue right now.

Democrats in the House want to clearly push this out into the new year for an obvious reason, and that is what we are pushed to tonight, tomorrow, and the next night. I fully believe the Senate should be back here the day after Christmas, frankly, to debate this, to get to a resolution, to some compromise, to get the benefits that

we have identified are necessary to protect this strategic industry of ours called agriculture.

I remember that during my career, we would work half a day on Christmas Eve. I remember that. It hasn't been that long ago. We might take Christmas Day off, and then the next day, most people in America are back to work if they are not taking vacation. But here in the Senate, right now, we won't be back until sometime in January, and we have given ourselves until February 8 to resolve this issue. That is unacceptable. I believe it is unacceptable to the President. It is certainly unacceptable to a person who comes from the real world as an outsider to this process.

Here is another derivative negative to kicking this can down the road: It not only affects the funding we are talking about this year; it also talks about the planning and budgeting for fiscal year 2020, which starts October 1, 2019. From January 8 until July 31, there are 19 weeks or 57 workdays—only 57, the way the Senate operates today. What that means is that the Senate and the House have to appropriate 12 appropriations bills—I believe before July 31—in order to fund the government before September 30 next year. Here is why: The August break is a work break, and people in the Senate and the House go home and work in their States during the month in August.

If that happens this year, then when we come back in September, we will have 12 working days in September. There is no way we are going to have any appropriations bills and the conferences necessary to get that done in September.

It is very clear that this continuing resolution is improper, it should not be done, and it puts the people who have been devastated at risk. And I think that right now, we need to be very serious about one thing, and that is, going forward, we need to find a way to create a politically neutral platform to fund this government on time every year without all this drama.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

SYRIA

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President, I come to the floor today to speak briefly about the President's announcement today that he is going to be withdrawing 2,000 American troops from Syria.

Let me be clear. I thought this was a bad idea from the start, primarily because our troop presence in Syria is not authorized by Congress. We have had that debate in many forums here, but I believe this Congress has never authorized the U.S. military to engage in hostilities against ISIS. I think it is an extrapolation of the 2001 AUMF. It simply belies common sense. So we should never endorse military activity

overseas, no matter what we think about the merits, if it is not authorized by this body.

But we have also seen over and over again that our relatively meager military presence in the Middle East has never been enough to change the political realities on the ground. The training mission was a disaster. The weapons we gave to the rebels ended up in the hands of the people we were fighting. Ultimately, we never had enough firepower there to be able to meaningfully change the balance of power.

But I will concede that the way the President went about making this decision makes our country an even bigger laughing stock than it already is in the region, and, frankly, that is pretty hard, because everybody is asking questions right now about why we pretended we were going to protect our Kurdish partners in the region if, on the eve of the Turkish offensive against the Kurds, we decide to pull out.

It makes absolutely no sense to pretend for literally months and months that we are going to be the bulwark to protect the Kurds against the Turks and then right on the precipice of the Turkish offensive, we leave. Why would anybody believe us in the future if we give them our word?

Again, I am speaking as someone who didn't support the intervention in the first place, but once you have made that commitment, why not follow through?

Second, why pull the rug out from under our diplomats in the region? It is very clear that neither Jim Jeffrey nor Brett McGurk knew anything about this. In fact, they were just making plans and suggestions weeks ago to increase our military involvement in the region, and now they are having to explain why 2,000 troops are leaving.

If you are going to make a decision like this, make sure the people who are working for you know about it.

Third, why announce this pullout without answering any questions about it or without announcing an alternative strategy? Total darkness from the President and his national security team. An announcement—a statement made on Twitter and no rollout of a plan for how the United States is going to continue to try to keep the peace.

So I agree with many of the criticisms that my Republican friends who have come down to the floor have complained about. This was done in a ham-handed manner that makes us weaker in the world. But forgive me if I have a few questions about why my Republican friends chose to speak up only now with questions about the President's Syria policy.

Where was this outrage when the President of the United States froze millions of dollars in humanitarian funding that could have saved lives on the ground in Syria? If they care so deeply about the future of Syria, why