

Maybe they want to see the President's tax returns in order to evaluate their proposal to see the President's tax returns. That sounds like a lot of circular logic to me.

Democrats have also made a big deal out of the fact that under section 6103, the Secretary of the Treasury "shall" turn over relevant tax records to the chairman of the Ways and Means Committee if he requests it. That is exactly right, as long as the committee has a legitimate legislative purpose in asking for them, as opposed to this perceived political reason for why they want to do it.

For decades, the courts have been clear that congressional requests for information, like those tax returns or anything else we are trying to do, must have a legitimate legislative purpose. That is where the Democrats come up very, very short.

See, they don't have a purpose. All they have are a lot of excuses. Let me tell you something. Introducing legislation that would essentially require the President to release his tax returns and then using that to somehow justify requesting the President's tax returns is one of the worst excuses I have ever heard of.

You would think, considering the amount of time and practice they have had trying to rationalize all of this and make it sound so very good, they would be able to come up with something a little bit better than that. Apparently not, and that really speaks volumes, doesn't it?

The fact is, the reasons the Democrats have offered for wanting President Trump's tax returns back in 2016 and 2017 don't pass muster any better than the ones they are trying to peddle right now. That is because they are not requesting the tax returns in order to investigate a problem in need of oversight at all. All they really care about is finding a pretext to bring this President down.

As a Member of Congress who knows firsthand the importance of good oversight, that is what concerns me the most about this whole campaign that is going on in the other body.

I happen to know a thing or two about oversight. Over my career, I have conducted oversight of the last seven Presidential administrations—Democrat and Republican. I have called out both parties for doing things they shouldn't be doing. In that spirit, I have always said that every single Member of Congress is dutybound to conduct oversight of the Federal Government. In fact, I remind every new Member that I run into in this body—and the Presiding Officer has heard me tell him this—that if you want to get a bill passed, you have to have 51 votes to get it passed, but if you want to do oversight, you have to have one vote—your own decision to do that oversight.

The responsibility to conduct oversight is and ought to be regarded by each and every one of us as sacrosanct. The power to conduct oversight flows directly from the Constitution.

As Members of Congress, we owe it to the people we represent to preserve and protect its use as a tool for carrying out our legitimate constitutional responsibilities. I don't believe for a minute that when the Framers created article I—the power of Congress to legislate—what they had in mind was Members using these powers to collect personal information on their political opponents in an effort to destroy those political opponents.

In all my years of conducting oversight, I have never started with an end result and then worked backward in search of a reason for making it happen. That is not how oversight is done.

Oversight is about advocating for transparency, and with transparency comes accountability in order to fix problems and to improve government. It is not about searching for ways to sow division and tear down your political opponents. What Democrats are doing now looks a lot more like the latter than the former. If that is what they are up to, it is not oversight at all.

When you strip away all of their pretexts and when you strip out their circular logic, all you have are Democrats who want to go after the President in any way they can. They dislike him with a passion, and they want his tax returns to destroy him. That is all this whole process is about, and it is Nixonian to the core.

I yield.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, I ask that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

H.R. 268

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, earlier this week, the Senate debated a disaster relief funding bill that would have provided \$13½ billion in assistance to States and territories that have been touched by recent hurricanes, wildfires, and other natural disasters. I share my colleagues' commitment to provide necessary assistance to get affected Americans back on their feet.

As chairman of the Budget Committee, I believe we should always consider the budgetary effects of any legislation pending before this body. Supplemental appropriations bills highlight a real challenge in controlling Federal spending. How should we budget for inevitable natural disasters and emergencies?

Answering this question is important because the Federal Government continues to spend more money than it takes in and will soon confront annual deficits exceeding \$1 trillion a year. These surging deficits add to our rising

debt, which stands today at \$22 trillion, or more than \$65,000 per person. That is regardless of age—the baby who was born this morning owes \$65,000. By 2029, if nothing is done, the national debt will grow to more than \$33 trillion, or more than \$94,000 per person.

Adding urgency to this situation is the surge in autopilot spending, which now represents more than two-thirds of what the Federal Government spends each year. Two-thirds of what we spend is not actually voted on; it happens automatically.

As our population ages, rising healthcare and interest costs will compound our fiscal problems. In 10 years, nearly 80 cents of every dollar the government spends will be on mandatory programs and interest on the debt. We need to do everything we can to improve our fiscal situation, and that includes improving the way we provide disaster relief.

Some of my colleagues may not realize that since the passage of the Budget Control Act in 2011, Congress has spent \$250 billion outside of the discretionary caps responding to natural disasters and other emergencies.

This spending has received special designations under the law that exempt it from discretionary spending limits, but such spending still has the very real effect of further increasing the Federal budget deficit—and the Federal debt. One designation that is often used is the "emergency" designation, which implies it is for something Congress did not anticipate. But as we all know, natural disasters happen on an annual basis, and in recent years we have had multiple natural disasters in a fiscal year.

I want to applaud my friend from Utah, Senator ROMNEY, for offering an amendment that recognizes the challenge of budgeting for disasters and emergencies. Disaster relief funding must be built into our base budgets, which is why I have incorporated these costs in recent budget resolutions, including the one that passed through our Budget Committee last week.

While there is no silver bullet to this problem, I am willing and eager to work with any of my colleagues who believe there is a better way to anticipate these costs.

The Senate Budget Committee recently held a hearing that partially touched on ideas to better budget for disaster funding. One option is to offset emergency spending increases with spending reductions in other areas. Another option could require a dedicated fund for emergencies, similar to how some States budget for these events. I have also considered whether a new actuarially sound insurance program could appropriately assess the risk for such disasters while maintaining affordable premiums. Budgeting for emergencies and disasters is not a precise science, but I believe Congress can do a lot better than just calling an emergency and adding to the debt.

While we work to more honestly budget for these annual costs, there are

other ways we can lower the costs of natural disasters. The Federal Emergency Management Agency has found that every \$1 spent mitigating against natural disasters saves an average of \$6. Last year, Congress passed the Disaster Recovery Reform Act, which I was proud to support. This bill included programs that encouraged mitigation activities. Congress should be open to any idea that could help our country better plan for annual costs of these natural disasters. This would allow us to respond to natural disasters more efficiently, while also reducing the burden on American taxpayers.

With our country more than \$22 trillion in debt and quickly approaching \$1 trillion annual deficits, we must do everything in our power to put our country on a more fiscally sustainable path. Better budgeting for natural disasters will not fix all of our financial problems, but it is a good place to start.

Before I conclude, I want to touch on another area of concern, and that is the growing prevalence of directed scorekeeping. That is a way of saying: We are not going to count that, even though we are going to spend it, and we can spend it more than once.

Congressional budget statutes have established scoring rules that are intended to provide standardized accounting to ensure that lawmakers have the best possible information upon which to base fiscal decisions. In recent years, however, we have seen more and more attempts to undermine that process and instead direct the scoring outcomes.

Last week, the Senate Budget Committee, which I chair, approved a fiscal year 2020 budget resolution that aims to crack down on this process by allowing a surgical point of order to be raised against any such provision. What that means is that the offending provision can be stricken from the underlying measure unless 60 Senators vote to retain it.

Unfortunately, the disaster bill which was brought to the floor this week included a provision that would essentially direct the appropriations from the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund, up to a limit, to be scored as costing zero dollars. The effect of this change would allow Congress to spend an additional \$2 billion above the statutory spending caps each year, while obscuring the real budgetary impacts from the American people. I filed an amendment that would solve that.

It is long past time for an honest conversation about the fiscal challenges facing our country. In the Budget Committee, we tried to advance that conversation with the budget that was approved last week. Unfortunately, the directed scorekeeping provision in the disaster bill considered earlier this week would set that effort back. I hope that when Congress returns to consideration of disaster legislation, it abandons that multiple-spending effort.

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.

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

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

NATO

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, I come to the floor today following our colleague Senator TILLIS to join him in talking about the importance of NATO and expressing our deep appreciation for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Senator TILLIS and I are the cochairs of the newly established Senate NATO Observer Group, which builds on the effort that was started back in the 1990s, by Tom Daschle and Trent Lott, to address the expansion of NATO, following the fall of the Berlin Wall. Our task is not just to shepherd through the Senate any changes in NATO that require Senate approval, but it is also to remind all of us and to remind the American public just how important NATO is.

Over the last seven decades, the NATO alliance has stood by its members in the darkest hours, including in Afghanistan, after the United States was attacked on September 11.

As Secretary General Stoltenberg reminded us yesterday, the only time article 5, the mutual aid clause of the NATO charter, has been invoked was after September 11, after the United States was attacked by terrorists.

Our Transatlantic bond has been critical to the United States and NATO, and, in particular, it has sustained a period of unprecedented global security and stability. While people may not recognize it, every day the United States sees the benefit of NATO. Whether we need to use NATO bases to evacuate American troops from conflict or to ensure that American goods and people travel safely across the Atlantic Ocean, NATO plays a critical role.

As NATO marks its 70th anniversary—today, in fact—the fact is that the alliance makes us stronger around the world and safer at home. So it is no wonder that Americans are very supportive of this organization. Any implication that Americans don't like or understand NATO is just simply wrong.

This week the Pew Research Center unveiled research to show that nearly 8 in 10 Americans, or 77 percent of Americans, including large majorities in both the Democratic Party and the Republican Party, agree that being a member of NATO is good for the United States.

We have also seen that the Chicago Council on Global Affairs has recorded a steady increase in NATO favorability across generations of Americans. Even the millennials, the generation born between 1981 and 1996, which are now

the largest voting bloc in the United States, value our alliances, and 72 percent back the United States' contribution to NATO.

Boosted by these numbers, Congress has been more active than at any time in my memory in expressing its support for NATO. In 2017 and 2018, Congress took more votes in support of the United States' enduring commitment to article 5 and NATO than at any time since the fall of the Soviet Union. That is why Senators TILLIS and I reestablished the Senate NATO Observer Group last year. Since then, we have enjoyed a diverse and active membership across the Republican and Democratic Parties, as well as the enduring support of the Senate's leadership—both Senator McCONNELL, the majority leader, and Senator SCHUMER, the Democratic leader.

Further, Congress continues to put its word into action by allocating significant levels of funding to help Europe deter threats that emanate from NATO's eastern and southern borders, already having provided \$6.5 billion in the last year alone for the European Deterrence Initiative.

I have no doubt that as the Senate prepares to provide its advice and consent to NATO's 30th member, North Macedonia, Members of Congress will, once again, rally to NATO's side and push forward on initiatives to further strengthen NATO.

I should just call out the Republic of North Macedonia, as well as the country of Greece, for reaching an agreement around the name change for North Macedonia that both countries have agreed to and that the Parliaments of both countries have supported.

So as China and Russia struggle to maintain allies and resort to coercion and force to keep countries in their sphere, NATO has proven to be an enduring American advantage in an uncertain world.

Our NATO allies continue to magnify the strength of our military, and they stand ready to protect us and protect our shared interests and values worldwide. For this reason, I thank our allies for what they have done for the United States and for the people of Europe who are part of our partner nations.

While we may have our differences, we will always remain stronger with allies. As the Secretary General said yesterday, "it is good to have friends."

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

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