

get to work. Let's give every single American the opportunity to get the tools they need to achieve their God-given potential.

Thank you.

I yield back.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia.

NATIONAL DEBT

Mr. PERDUE. Mr. President, the national debt is what actually pulled me and you and others, to some degree, into this political process. I have come to this floor many times over the last 4½ years to talk about this. Today, again, it is very timely. It is why I ran for the U.S. Senate. Today, we have—I just checked—\$22.3 trillion, and it is going up \$100,000 a second, as we speak. I have a debt clock in the reception area of my office, in the Russell Senate Office Building, and that thing spins all day long, 24 hours a day.

Even more concerning, we have more than \$130 trillion of future unfunded liabilities coming at us like a freight train over the next 30 years. That is \$1 million for every household for every American.

What we have learned is that we can't cut our way out of it, we can't tax our way out of it, and we can't grow our way out of it alone. Any one of these three will fall short. It has to be a combination. We have to have a balanced approach over the long haul to solve this \$22 trillion of debt problem.

I believe we will not solve this debt crisis unless and until we fix the way Congress funds the Federal Government. The current funding process is designed to fail. It really is. It doesn't work. It hasn't worked. It will never work.

Since the Budget Act of 1974 was put in place, Congress has only funded the Federal Government on time four times. That means that by the end of the fiscal year, Congress has only funded the Federal Government four times by the end of that fiscal year. Let me say that again. It has been four times in 45 years since the 1974 Budget Act was put in place. The last time it was actually done was in 1996, some 23 years ago, under President Clinton.

Congress is supposed to pass 12 appropriations bills to fund the government. Over the last 45 years, we have averaged just 2½ per year. Because of that, Congress has used a little known tool up here called a continuing resolution. In the last 45 years, Congress has used a continuing resolution 186 times. It is a release valve that lets the government continue to operate and on the surface doesn't really sound that onerous. You just keep spending at the same level you did last year. The problem with that is that it is devastating to some Agencies and, particularly, the Department of Defense, with regard to long-term contracts, long-term training, purchases, and maintenance over the end of the fiscal year, and so forth. They are devastating to our military. They create inefficiencies and uncer-

tainty that hurt the bottom line and increase our procurement costs by dramatic amounts. The end result of that is that it lowers our readiness, and it causes the ability to fight to be reduced.

In addition, Congress has shut down the government, over the last 45 years, 21 times because they couldn't get together and agree on how to fund the government that year—21 times.

This funding process, in my opinion, is an unmitigated disaster, based on the actual results that have led to \$22 trillion of debt today, which, in my view, is indeed a crisis. Over the last 4½ years alone, we have looked at practices in States, other countries, and businesses to find best practices. No one else in the world funds their operation the way the U.S. Congress funds our government.

The problem is, we have a three-step process. We do a budget, an authorization, and then an appropriation. There simply are not enough days in the year to get all of those done. It is a 14-week budget process. We have 16 authorizing committees. If you did one a week, that is 16 weeks. And then you have 12 appropriating bills. Even if you did one a week, which is very hard to do, that is not enough time in the calendar year to do that.

Right now, Congress has yet to pass this year a single appropriations bill for the next year. This is not the appropriators' problem. They do their jobs. They proved that last year and the year before that. If given enough time and information, they can get their job done. The problem is that this year we have not even agreed with the House and with the White House on what the top-line spending should be.

As I stand here today, there are 17 working days until 31 July, when Congress leaves for a State work period called the August recess. When we get back, there are only 10 working days until the end of the fiscal year. That means we have 27 working days to reach a budget deal, pass 12 appropriations bills, and bring them to conference and get this government funded.

If we started today, we would need to pass an appropriations bill about every 2 days in order to pass all 12 bills by the end of the fiscal year. We are already behind, and I am afraid we are staring down the barrel of another CR unless we start taking these bills up immediately.

The minority leader and the majority leader in the Senate have been working diligently, along with the appropriations minority leader and chairman of the appropriations committee. They all have been working very well to get to a top-line number with the White House and the House of Representatives. I am told we are very close to a deal today. I hope we are.

Last year, when we paid attention to it, we got to 75 percent funding. But by 31 July, we had only done 12.5 percent of total government funding. Again,

this is just for the discretionary part of our spending, which is only about 25 percent of the total spending that we have in the Federal Government, which includes mandatory expenses.

Last year, 16 of us wrote a letter to Leader McConnell, who agreed, and to his credit, kept us here in August, and we went from 12 percent to 75 percent funding by the end of August, including the Department of Defense and HHS, two of our biggest line items. By staying here in August, we did the people's work and did something that hadn't been done in 22 years.

I hope it doesn't come to that this year. It shouldn't. We have time to do what we need to do. I know the people in charge are doing everything they can to make that happen. That is not what this conversation is about today. I am hopeful that even this week we can get agreement on the topline number, move past the budget cap issue, and get to appropriating these bills so we can avoid any more CRs in our future this year.

The unfortunate reality is we have reached this same predicament almost every year since 1974. Einstein once said that "insanity is doing the same thing over and over again, but expecting different results." That is what this Congress has done continually over the last 45 years, with different Members and different colleagues. We keep doing the same thing.

I am convinced more than ever that we need a politically neutral platform to fund the government on time every year without all of this drama. It can be done. I think both sides want to do it. Both sides have talked about it when they were in the minority and majority at different times, but it is time to move on it.

Today 25 percent of our budget is discretionary. That is all. That is defense, the Veterans' Administration, and all domestic discretionary spending. That is 25 percent. That is what this is all about. This debate and drama is about 25 percent of the Federal Government.

What is the rest of it? We all know that is the mandatory expense side of our budget; 75 percent of what we spend in the Federal Government, over \$3 trillion, is for things like Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, pension and benefits for Federal employees, and the interest on the debt. The interest alone has gone up \$450 billion over the last 2 years with nine Fed fund rate increases, and it is projected that by 2023 we will be spending more on the interest alone on this debt than we do on national defense.

If we borrow about 30 percent of what we spend, that means, by definition, every dime we spend on discretionary spending is borrowed money. What is discretionary again? Our defense. So every time we are spending on defense, it is technically borrowed money.

I believe it is time to fix this, and the way forward is pretty clear. The way I see it, there are three things we have to do to fix this funding process. No. 1,

we have to change the budget process and appropriations process to make it streamlined, as most States do.

Yesterday I introduced a bill called the Fix Funding First Act, which I hope will start a dialogue. It is not the end result, but I am hopeful it will start a dialogue here and that we will be able to work through the details, take individual items one at a time, pass some bills, and start moving toward a solution.

Second, we have to address mandatory spending. We need to save Social Security and Medicare.

Third, we need to adjust the current committee structure so that the same committees on both sides can both authorize and appropriate.

This is a chart of what we have today. This is reality. We have on the left 16 authorizing committees, and on the right we have 12 appropriating committees. You can see for one appropriating committee you may have five or six different authorizing committees that have to provide input, in theory, to the appropriating committee.

When I came to Congress I was asked to head the Subcommittee on State Department Oversight inside Foreign Relations. My responsibility was to provide oversight. Interacting with the person who was the chair of the subcommittee in appropriations—we never talked and there was very little input, but we found out that the State Department at that time had not been authorized in over 13 years. We changed that and got it authorized the very next year. But this is an archaic structure that will never work. It creates all of the confusion that we have right now and the time delays in trying to get this done.

The Fix Funding First Act I introduced yesterday does five simple things.

First, it changes the Federal Government fiscal year to match the calendar year. Why is that important? Well, in the first year of a new Congress we always start 3 months behind; we start in the fourth month.

Second, this bill establishes biennial budgeting. A lot of States do that. It is not the end-all solution, but it is a great place to start and will make things a lot easier here.

Third, this bill makes the budget a law. Simply put, today the budget is a resolution.

Fourth, it creates milestones with consequences to hold us accountable as a body when we don't do our jobs. There are 44 States, including my State of Georgia, that have a balanced budget law, and if they don't pass a budget by the end of their 44- or 45-day session, they don't go home. In most States that is a law. What we are proposing here is essentially the same thing. We have broken the appropriations process into four tranches and set deadlines before Congress's scheduled work break. If we don't make the deadline, we don't go home until we get that part done. It is just that simple.

Last, our proposal requires the Budget Committee to complete a 5-year strategic plan—something we have never done—just as people in the real world do. This gives us a chance to start talking about the long-term debt-to-GDP ratio that my colleague Senator WHITEHOUSE has been talking about for the last several years, and I fully subscribe to what he is trying to do.

That is what the bill that was introduced this week will do, and I think it is the first step to fix the funding process.

Once we complete the first phase, we need to tackle mandatory spending, which is Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and pensions and benefits. Right now, mandatory spending makes up about 75 percent of what Congress spends every year, but costs are expected to explode over the next 20 years.

The next chart shows the projection from the Congressional Budget Office, and these are generally agreed-upon numbers based upon the baby boomers maturing in age. What we have is the green line, total expenses of the Federal Government, going from just above \$4 trillion today to almost \$12 trillion in just 20 years. In 10 years, we are talking about it being over \$8 trillion—almost double what it is today. These are in constant dollars, not inflated dollars. This is our crisis. What is causing that crisis in the green line are total expenses.

The blue line is discretionary expenses, which are what we spend most of our time arguing about here on the floor of the Senate and the House. But look at this. This is the mandatory chart. We go from a moderate one until we see cataclysmic geometric growth. We know that the Social Security trust fund goes to zero in 12 years. The Medicare trust fund goes to zero in 7 years.

We have to save these programs and turn these curves down. There is no way the world is going to allow us to borrow that much money. Until Congress works up the political courage to deal with the mandatory spending issue, we should make all expenditures discretionary, bring them under the budget process when they need to be subsidized, and that is going to happen within a few short years.

I believe the answer is very simple. Even if we pass this bill and the Appropriations Committee still has to write down its own defense authorization, defense bills and so forth, we have to streamline this process. Last year we did, and it almost worked. What we have now is totally dysfunctional.

I hope this proposal that we are putting on the board today will help start the dialogue about how we can fix this funding process.

America always does well in a crisis, but we are not always the first to decide that we are in a crisis. I personally believe we have been in a crisis for the last 15 years. Either we can wake up and face it now or I think we will regret it later.

There are Members on both sides of the aisle who recognize this crisis. I am encouraged by the conversations we are having together. This is not a partisan issue. This is one of those ways that people back home expect us to compromise and work together to solve this.

I am encouraged today. It is time we did this, and this is the time, this year. In the next few weeks, hopefully we will get past this impasse and make it happen this year.

Thank you.

I yield the floor.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the clerk will report the Stilwell nomination.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of David Stilwell, of Hawaii, to be an Assistant Secretary of State (East Asian and Pacific Affairs).

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Stilwell nomination?

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Tennessee (Mr. ALEXANDER).

Further, if present and voting, the Senator from Tennessee (Mr. ALEXANDER) would have voted "yea."

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from New York (Mrs. GILLIBRAND) and the Senator from Minnesota (Ms. KLOBUCHAR) are necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 94, nays 3, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 164 Ex.]

YEAS—94

Baldwin	Ernst	Murkowski
Barrasso	Feinstein	Murphy
Bennet	Fischer	Murray
Blackburn	Gardner	Paul
Blumenthal	Graham	Perdue
Blunt	Grassley	Peters
Booker	Hassan	Portman
Boozman	Hawley	Reed
Braun	Heinrich	Risch
Brown	Hirono	Roberts
Burr	Hoeven	Romney
Cantwell	Hyde-Smith	Rosen
Capito	Inhofe	Rounds
Cardin	Isakson	Rubio
Carper	Johnson	Sasse
Casey	Jones	Schatz
Cassidy	Kaine	Schumer
Collins	Kennedy	Scott (FL)
Coons	King	Scott (SC)
Cornyn	Lankford	Shaheen
Cortez Masto	Leahy	Shelby
Cotton	Lee	Sinema
Cramer	Manchin	Smith
Crapo	Markey	Stabenow
Cruz	McConnell	Sullivan
Daines	McSally	Tester
Duckworth	Menendez	Thune
Durbin	Merkley	Tillis
Enzi	Moran	Toomey