

has a unique section that allows us to identify those types of highways that are no longer needed and that are dividing and isolating communities so we can get those highways removed.

I am proud that this legislation builds on the Transportation Alternative Program that I helped author on the reauthorization bill with my partner Senator WICKER. I thank him for his help. It allows for much more local discretion on how transportation funds are spent. It allows local communities to have a source of Federal support to deal with local safety issues, for developing trails for pedestrian and bike paths so that the quality of life and safety of the local community are taken into consideration on the use of Federal highway funds.

It provides flexibility to local government. In the first year, we provide \$1.2 billion for transportation alternative programs with a steady growth in the ensuing 4 years.

I also want to acknowledge the section in the bill that deals with freight traffic. It is a growing field. We expect it to continue to grow. There are funds that are provided in here to deal with the realities of moving freight through our highway surface transportation system.

In that regard, I was pleased that this past week we were able to announce an INFRA grant for Maryland of \$125 million for the Howard Street Tunnel. This is a tunnel that is 120 years old and runs through Baltimore. The replacement of this tunnel will allow for double stacking of rail freight, which is what you need to do today if you are going to have efficiency and be economically competitive. This grant will help us replace that tunnel and help create more jobs in Baltimore, in Maryland, and in our entire region of the country and will provide for more efficiencies on truck traffic.

I say that because, today, because of the inefficiencies of rail, we have trucks that are stacked up in the Port of Baltimore, which is inefficient for the truck operators and, again, adds to the climate problems of excessive use of fuels.

There is a section in here that deals with safety, as we should. In 2017, 37,000 people died in our transportation areas. We need to improve that. There are some important provisions in this legislation that deal with safety issues.

The bill also deals with reauthorizing the Appalachian Regional Commission. I particularly thank Senator CAPITO for her leadership on this issue. Reauthorization is important for the entire region, including the western part of the State of Maryland.

This is the first step—and I hope a successful step—for the completion of the reauthorization of surface transportation by this Congress before the end of this year. I hope we can get it moving. I hope we can get it enacted, certainly, in time, so there is no lapse in Federal partnerships dealing with transportation.

I know we have other committees that need to act on a comprehensive transportation bill. Many of us serve on those other committees. If we follow the example of the Environment and Public Works Committee—21 to 0—if we listen to each other, if we do that, we can succeed in passing a strong reauthorization of surface transportation that will help modernize America's transportation needs, which will be good for our economy, good for our environment, and good for the quality of life of all Americans.

I urge my colleagues to follow that example, and let's get this work done.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic whip.

ELECTION SECURITY

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, as those who are following on C-SPAN have probably noted, we are not overwhelmed with business on the floor of the U.S. Senate, nor have we been during the course of this year.

We have considered several bills—you could count them on one hand—including the Defense authorization bill, and, of course, the momentous, historic legislation 2 weeks ago, the tax treaty with Luxembourg, which had been pending before the U.S. Senate for 9 years. It finally made it to the floor of the Senate. That was the highlight of the week, as we have watched the U.S. Senate ignore some of the most important issues of our time.

Let me tell you one that strikes at the heart of our democracy, which we should be focused on today and until it is resolved. Last week, former FBI Director and Special Counsel Bob Mueller testified before the House Judiciary Committee about his report on Russian interference in the 2016 election. The hearing clarified several important things. For example, President Trump loves to claim that the Mueller report completely exonerated him. Trump's tweets, one after another, talk about how he was exonerated by that report. Director Mueller made clear that is "not what the report said."

When asked by the House Judiciary chairman "Did you actually totally exonerate the President?" Director Mueller answered "no."

President Trump likes to say the Mueller investigation was a witch hunt. He has said that about 1,000 times. But the investigation actually led to 37 indictments and over \$42 million in assets forfeited to the government. If this were a witch hunt, it certainly found a lot of wealthy witches.

Some Republican members of the House Judiciary Committee tried to attack Director Mueller's credibility, but Mueller has a lifetime record of being a straight shooter, by-the-book investigator, and prosecutor. He did this country a service when he took on the role of special counsel.

One thing Director Mueller tried to remind the American people of is the reason the investigation was necessary. He said:

Over the course of my career, I have seen a number of challenges to our democracy. The Russian government's effort to interfere in our election is among the most serious.

Mueller went on to say: "This deserves the attention of every American."

One of the most important takeaways from the Mueller report is that Russia did successfully attack our democracy in 2016. Page 1 of the Mueller report says: "The Russian Government interfered in the 2016 presidential election in sweeping and systematic fashion."

The report detailed numerous examples, including an "intelligence-gathering mission" that employees of the Internet Research Agency, known as the IRA, took in June of 2014.

The IRA was the Russian troll farm that waged information warfare against the 2016 election by using stolen identities, fake social media accounts, and fake campaign events.

The Mueller report and the earlier indictment of several IRA employees noted that two of the Russians arrived in the United States for a 3-week trip "for the purpose of collecting intelligence to inform the [IRA's] operations."

The report also detailed the Russians' attack on my own home State board of elections. In July 2016, the Illinois State board of elections discovered that it was the target of a malicious, month-long cyber attack that enabled the intruder to access confidential voter information and view the registration data of approximately 76,000 voters in my State of Illinois.

These efforts to influence the election and attack campaign organizations and State and local election administrators and vendors continue to this day. What are we going to do about it?

What has been the response so far of the U.S. Senate, the body sworn to uphold the Constitution and to protect against enemies, foreign and domestic? Nothing. We are too busy with the trade treaty with Luxembourg to deal with Russian interference in our elections. In the face of Russia's threat to our elections, this Senate has been quiet as a graveyard.

Let's start in 2016. Top officials from the administration's national security and intelligence community came and warned congressional leadership of Russia's ongoing attack on our elections, rightly asking for a bipartisan statement to tell Russian dictator Putin to stop. What was Senate Majority Leader McCONNELL's response to this obvious request to protect our Nation? He said: No thanks. I am not going to do it.

History will no doubt look back in infamy at that decision.

What about the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, a historically recognized body with key jurisdiction over Russian attacks on the United States? That committee did not even conduct an investigation into Russia's actions in the last Congress.

Republicans were silent when Trump repeatedly accepted Russian dictator Vladimir Putin's brazen denials over American intelligence experts and all of the evidence to the contrary.

They were silent again after the Mueller report's devastating findings of Russian interference. And they were silent when President Trump subsequently said he would gladly accept election help from a foreign power again.

Now look at the current Congress. Several bipartisan bills have been introduced to respond to this Russian threat, including the Election Security Act. This is a critical, comprehensive bill that would provide States with much needed resources and establish a robust Federal effort to protect our democracy.

Unfortunately, Republican Senate Leader McCONNELL is blocking all efforts to bring this important legislation to the floor for a debate and vote. This legislation could thwart Russian interference in the 2020 election. Senator McCONNELL refuses to bring it to the floor.

I end with the questions I have asked before here on the floor: How can the party of Ronald Reagan continue to sit by while this President pursues policies aligned with the former KGB agent, Vladimir Putin? Why didn't the first bills in this new Senate under Republican control deal with this threat to the election process in our democracy? Why isn't the Senate Foreign Relations Committee holding urgent hearings on these stunning dalliances between an American President and a Russian dictator? Why isn't the Senate Foreign Relations Committee moving bipartisan legislation that would protect U.S. membership in NATO?

Quite frankly, we barely do anything in this legislative graveyard of the Senate under Republican control. You would think we would at least focus, on a bipartisan basis, on making certain that the outcome of the next election is not influenced by a foreign power, whether it is Russia or some other malicious force in the world today.

But because it bruises the President's ego and it may invoke a nasty tweet, the Republican-controlled Senate prefers to do nothing. It is time for the Republican majority to stop protecting President Trump at all costs.

There reaches a point when the Senate Republican leadership needs to put the country before fear of the President's tweets.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kentucky.

BIPARTISAN BUDGET ACT OF 2019

Mr. PAUL. Mr. President, can you hear it? Can you hear the somber notes, the feet shuffling, and the solemn tones? Can you hear it? It is a dirge, a funeral march, and it is the death of a movement—a once proud movement with hundreds of thousands of people gathered on the National Mall. It is the death and it is the last

gasp of a movement in America that was concerned with our national debt.

Today is the final nail in the coffin. The tea party is no more. The budget deal today allows unlimited borrowing for nearly 2 years—unlimited, no limits—and the government will borrow what they wish without limit for 2 years. It abolishes all spending caps. Adoption of this deal marks the death of the tea party movement in America. Fiscal conservatives—those who remain—should be in mourning for Congress. Both parties have deserted you.

The national debt now stands at \$22 trillion. This year, we will add over \$1.2 trillion. We are approaching record deficits, and neither party cares. Both parties have deserted, have absolutely and utterly deserted America and have shown no care and no understanding and no sympathy for the burden of debt they are leaving the taxpayers, the young, the next generation, and the future of our country.

The very underpinnings of our country are being eroded and threatened by this debt. The interest on this debt will be over \$400 billion next year—precisely, \$455 billion. Interest will surpass all welfare spending in the next 2 years. Interest on the debt will surpass defense spending by 2025.

Social Security is \$7 trillion in debt. Medicare is over \$30 trillion in debt. Yet a parade of candidates on national television last night said they want to double and triple the government's expenditures where the government is already trillions of dollars short. Whose fault is this? Both parties.

The media completely doesn't get it. The media says: Oh, there is not enough compromise in Washington. That is exactly the opposite of the truth. There is too much compromise in Washington. There is always an agreement to spend more money. There is always an agreement to spend money we don't have. There is always an agreement to borrow your kids' and your grandkids' money and to put this country further at risk.

Admiral Mullen put it this way. He said the most significant threat to our national security is our debt. Yet all around me on my side of the aisle are those who clamor and say: Our military is hollowed out and can't complete its mission. Well, perhaps the mission is too big for the budget. Maybe it is not a problem of having enough money; maybe it is a problem of making our mission to be everything to everyone around the world, to have spent \$50 billion a year building roads and bridges in Afghanistan for the last 20 years and to continue that forever.

When the President put forward a proposal, a thought that we might try to end and to declare victory in Afghanistan, this body—both parties rose up as one, and the vast majority said it would be precipitous to leave Afghanistan after 19 years.

This is the problem. It isn't acrimony. It isn't both parties fighting each other. It is both parties agreeing

to increase the debt. They increase the debt for different reasons, but the only way they get theirs—"give me mine, give me mine" is what both sides say. The right wants for the military. Yet we spend more on the military than the next 10 countries combined. We spend more on the military—the United States spends more than all of NATO combined. All of the NATO countries combined spend less than we do on the military.

People say we are hollowed out and we can't complete our mission. Well, maybe the mission is too big. It isn't that the budget is too small; it is that the mission is too big. Maybe we don't need to have troops in 50 of 55 African countries. Maybe we need to rethink our mission. Maybe the mission of the military should be to defend our country, not to intervene in every civil war around the world.

Admiral Mullen said the most significant threat to our national security is our debt. Yet we are piling on more debt, saying we need more military. Maybe we need to discuss the mission of our military. We are piling on more debt, some in the name of national security. Yet I think it weakens us with every moment.

The vote today will be on a 2-year debt ceiling with no limits. The details do matter. Raising the debt ceiling with no limits would be like telling your kid: OK, you can have a credit card, but there will be no limits on what you spend. Just spend it on whatever you want, in whatever amount, and in 2 years, I will just pay the bill for you.

Nobody would do that with their family money, and no country should act that way. We can't keep going on like this.

Where are all the fiscal conservatives? What happened to the tea party movement, which was bipartisan and was concerned citizens rising up and saying: I don't want something from government. What I want is a government that is responsible, a government that spends what comes in, a government that doesn't keep borrowing and borrowing and borrowing and putting us further at risk.

What happened to that movement? That movement elected some of these people. You heard these people. Don't you remember, when President Obama was President, the Republicans all clamoring and saying "trillion-dollar deficits" for multiple years. Every year, they would say: President Obama wants to spend and borrow and spend and borrow. I heard it in my State. I heard it from the very people who today will vote for this monstrosity.

Some of them will actually vote for my amendment to give themselves cover. They will say: Oh, yeah, I was for the Paul amendment. But then they are also going to vote for the deal that will bankrupt our country. What happened to these people? They all thought debt was bad when it was President Obama's debt, but they are