

champion for our miners as well—Senator Portland as well—who have made this retirement security a top priority.

Back in 2017, time was running out on the healthcare benefits for 12,000 retired miners. I remember it well, particularly following the Patriot Coal bankruptcy. We came together as a bipartisan group to pass legislation with the House that protected healthcare for those men and women. While we are in a similar situation today, which we knew we were going to be here, the Senate needs to act soon to save the healthcare of 13,000 retired miners and protect the pension benefits of 92,000 people.

Time is of the essence here because roughly 1,000 retirees from Westmoreland and Mission Coal will lose their healthcare at the end of the year if we do not act; 12,000 more could lose their healthcare by next spring, and the pension benefits are at risk in 2020. This is a critical, critical issue for my State and many others.

I am going to take a brief moment to explain how this legislation works, and it is a bit complicated. In 2006, when we passed the last reauthorization of the Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation Program, we had a capped permanent direct appropriation that was created for transfer of payments. That permanent direct appropriation, along with the interest on the AML—the Abandoned Mine Land—trust fund has been used to fund AML payments to certified States and to provide healthcare for our miners. What do we do to certify States? The whole point of the AML is to do reclamation and repair of previously mined lands all throughout our country.

That permanent direct appropriation has been used for the payments for the certified States and also to provide healthcare to our orphaned miners. Well, for those who are not from a coal company, what is an orphaned miner? An orphaned miner is someone who earned a vested right to retiree healthcare benefits through years of hard work but worked for a company that either no longer exists or is no longer financially solvent.

The Bipartisan American Miners Act makes use of the same appropriation that was created in 2006 to cover the healthcare for retirees whose healthcare would be lost due to the bankruptcies in 2018, 2019. The bill would provide resources to guarantee the long-term solvency of the mine workers' pension fund. This is critical. Previous versions of this bill that many of us supported were able to accomplish this goal of protecting those retirement beneficiaries without lifting the cap on the direct appropriation that was set in 2006.

Because Congress has delayed action for so long, our current legislation must lift the cap in order to provide healthcare and pension benefits for our miners. Protecting these benefits is a top priority for me because it impacts so many mining families and commu-

nities in West Virginia. Just last weekend, I talked to three miners directly impacted, just kind of randomly ran into them in different areas of our State.

But I think it is important to understand that this bill does not place other policy items in jeopardy. That is a misconception. Passing this bill does not disturb the principal balance of the AML trust fund. That means we are not jeopardizing funds that are used to clean up abandoned mine sites, and passing this bill will not cut funding for other transfer payments that are authorized by the law.

What the bill will do is protect retirement benefits for tens of thousands of retired miners and their families—benefits that have been worked for, benefits that have been earned through the hard work in our mines; 25,451 West Virginians received benefits from the pension fund during 2018. They were joined by more than 11,000 Pennsylvanians, 8,500 Kentuckians, and thousands more from Illinois, Virginia, Alabama, and Ohio. The pension benefits of all the men and women are at risk if Congress fails to act.

The average benefit—listen to this—the average benefit for our miners is \$590 a month, so these are not lavish benefits, but they are critical to our retirees. One retired miner from Logan, WV, who worked for 36 years in the mines, wrote me and said, “Please keep fighting to save our pension. I receive \$303.34 monthly. We need this badly to help us pay for our food, our medicine and other bills.”

A miner from Richwood, WV, who mined coal for 17 years, wrote, “My monthly check is \$192. It is not a lot of money, but it means a lot to my ability to make ends meet.”

I would add to both of these, these men, these gentlemen, they worked for these pensions. They paid into the pensions. They should receive them. Pension benefits from the mine workers plan went to individuals in all 55 West Virginian counties, so this is truly an issue that impacts my entire State. But in the areas that have the largest number of pensioners, which is Raleigh, Logan, Wyoming, Marion, and Boone Counties, cuts to the pension and healthcare benefits of our retired families would have significant impacts on our entire community.

If these retirees face severe reductions in their pensions, it means less money spent at the local businesses, less money at a local restaurant, and it would cause further economic harm to the areas that cannot afford another blow.

So I ask my colleagues to join me, Senator MANCHIN, Leader McCONNELL, Senator PORTMAN, and many others, by supporting the Bipartisan American Miners Act.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kentucky.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Mr. PAUL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the cloture vote on

the Brouillette nomination occur at 1:30 p.m. today.

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

AMENDMENT NO. 1250

Mr. PAUL. Mr. President, I rise to present an amendment to this bill. My amendment is simple, and it reflects the kind of commonsense budgeting we ought to be doing in Washington. Today I offer the penny plan for infrastructure. This plan cuts one penny, 1 percent of all spending, and puts that money in a fund for infrastructure.

My amendment would put about \$12 billion per year into a fund to fix our roads and bridges. Every agency would still get 99 percent of the spending they got the previous year. Sure, they would need to trim some fat, but they would still be fine. A lot of businesses and organizations will tell you they have to cut much greater than 1 percent a year.

I visited a business recently that in the downturn of 2008–2009 had to cut 30 percent of their expenditures. Business men and women in America are used to having to cut expenditures; government never does.

Whether it is our highways or our bridges or our waterways, our infrastructure in America is falling behind. Everyone knows it, but like so many things, Washington can't figure out how to fix it, how to find the money to fix it.

Politicians on both sides of the aisle talk about trillion-dollar infrastructure plans but offer no way to pay for it. My plan is much more modest, doesn't increase taxes, and doesn't increase our debt. The penny plan for infrastructure pays for it with money we have already allocated.

To be clear, we do have the money. Washington just spends it in inappropriate ways. Washington spends, for example, \$233 million on a single highway in Afghanistan. We have money to pave roads in Afghanistan, but they will not vote to spend the money here to pave roads.

The people in Afghanistan got \$233 million for a road, but they couldn't even maintain it, so we gave them another \$22 million to maintain the road.

We spent \$326 million to pave 2,000 kilometers of dirt roads in Afghanistan. We have enough money to spend over \$300 million to pave dirt roads in Afghanistan, but we can't come up with \$1 billion to help our infrastructure here. They were supposed to pave 2,000 kilometers; it turned out they only paved 159 kilometers. They paved less than 10 percent of what they actually promised to do with the money. What is that equal to—\$2.7 million per mile.

It is outrageous, and it goes on year after year after year. I think it is time we try a new way. Just in Afghanistan, we have spent more than the Marshall Plan did to rebuild Europe after the devastation of World War II, and we are still there, spending good money after bad. So when people come up here and

say that a 1-percent cut would somehow be a disaster, we need to remind them that the money is there. They just have to listen to the people and pull the plug on this kind of crazy spending overseas.

My amendment would move 1 percent of current spending, and it would put that 1 percent of the current spending bill into infrastructure.

Supposedly, Republicans, Democrats, and Independents all agree on infrastructure. Yet we don't allocate more money to it because we are too busy paving roads in Afghanistan. If we did this, it would be about \$12 billion. It is not enough to fix everything in the country. It is a modest sum. This is actually a modest proposal to move over a few billion dollars.

Do you know what it would do? Twelve billion dollars would pave up to 6,200 miles of a new four-lane highway, resurface 20,000 miles of a four-lane highway, and 2,200 miles of a six-lane interstate. It would pay for multiple big-ticket infrastructure projects that are currently stuck without funding. In my State, they have been advocating money for the Brent Spence Bridge across the Ohio River since before I was elected—8 or 9 years of advocating for a bridge for which we can't find the money. We have the money. Quit paving roads in Afghanistan, and let's start building bridges and paving roads here.

This amendment would improve our infrastructure, benefit our communities, eliminate government waste, and help our economy. By cutting 1 percent of the current spending, we will force all of government to do a better job.

There is at least 1 percent waste. There is probably 10 percent waste in government. I am asking to cut 1 percent of waste. Take that money you cut by making government more efficient and put it into infrastructure.

I encourage the Senate to consider this amendment. I think we have very few amendments come forward where people have a chance to vote for infrastructure.

At this point, I move to concur on the House amendment to the Senate amendment—

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Will the Senator suspend?

Mr. PAUL. At this point, I am about ready to do that.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

FURTHER CONTINUING APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2020, AND FURTHER HEALTH EXTENDERS ACT OF 2019

The Presiding Officer laid before the Senate the following message from the House of Representatives:

Resolved, That the House agree to the amendment of the Senate to the bill (H.R. 3055) entitled "An Act making appropriations for the Departments of Commerce and

Justice, Science, and Related Agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2020, and for other purposes," with an amendment to the Senate amendment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kentucky.

MOTION TO CONCUR WITH AMENDMENT NO. 1250

Mr. PAUL. Mr. President, I move to concur in the House amendment to the Senate amendment to H.R. 3055, with a further amendment numbered 1250.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Kentucky [Mr. PAUL] moves to concur in the House amendment to the Senate amendment to H.R. 3055, with an amendment numbered 1250.

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: To reduce the amount appropriated by 1 percent and put the savings towards the Highway Trust Fund and certain Environmental Protection Agency Infrastructure Assistance)

At the appropriate place in division A, add the following:

SEC. ____ . REDUCTION IN RATE FOR OPERATIONS.

The Continuing Appropriations Act, 2020 (division A of Public Law 116-59) is further amended by inserting after section 150, as added by section 101 of this division, the following:

"SEC. 151. REDUCTION IN CONTINUING APPROPRIATIONS TO PROVIDE SAVINGS FOR THE HIGHWAY TRUST FUND AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY INFRASTRUCTURE ASSISTANCE.

"(a) REDUCTION IN CONTINUING APPROPRIATIONS.—

"(1) IN GENERAL.—Except as provided in paragraph (2), the rate for operations provided by section 101 is hereby reduced by 1 percent.

"(2) EXCEPTIONS.—The rate for operations shall not be reduced under paragraph (1) for the following:

"(A) Amounts made available from the Highway Trust Fund established by section 9503(a) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986.

"(B) Amounts for purposes described in section 147.

"(C) For the Environmental Protection Agency, Infrastructure Assistance, amounts made available for the following:

"(i) The Clean Water State Revolving Funds and the Drinking Water State Revolving Funds.

"(ii) The Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act Program Account.

"(iii) The America's Water Infrastructure Act Grant Programs under section 1459A of the Safe Drinking Water Act (42 U.S.C. 300j-19a).

"(b) TRANSFER OF SAVINGS.—

"(1) DETERMINATION OF SAVINGS.—The Secretary of the Treasury shall determine the amount of the reduction in amounts made available under section 101 of this division that is attributable to subsection (a).

"(2) TRANSFER.—The Secretary of the Treasury shall transfer from the General Fund of the Treasury an amount equal to the amount determined under paragraph (1), as follows:

"(A) For the Highway Trust Fund established by section 9503(a) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, 95 percent of such amount.

"(B) For the Clean Water State Revolving Funds and the Drinking Water State Revolving Funds, 3 percent of such amount.

"(C) For the Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act Program Account, 1 percent of such amount.

"(D) For the America's Water Infrastructure Act Grant Programs under section 1459A of the Safe Drinking Water Act (42 U.S.C. 300j-19a), 1 percent of such amount.

"(3) AVAILABILITY.—Amounts transferred under paragraph (2) shall remain available until expended."

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alabama.

MOTION TO TABLE

Mr. SHELBY. Mr. President, I move to table the Paul amendment, but I just want to say a few words.

This continuing resolution before the Senate holds spending at the fiscal 2019 levels. An arbitrary 1-percent across-the-board cut on top of this—although it sounds good—would be extremely harmful to our agencies, particularly our military.

The Senate handily defeated similar amendments just recently, and I hope we will do this today.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I will be brief.

I agree with the distinguished senior Senator from Alabama. The Paul amendment imposes a 1-percent across-the-board cut over last year's funding level to the vast majority of discretionary spending for the duration of the CR.

I hope all Members—Republican and Democratic alike—will oppose it because it would mean arbitrary cuts in defense and other national security programs, cuts to veterans' healthcare, education, childcare, opioid programs, just to name a few. It is a simplistic tool that ignores the complexities of our Federal budget. It is not a way we should govern.

We have the hard work of making hard choices to fund programs each year based on reality. That is what we should do. That is what the American people deserve.

I support increased investment in our Nation's infrastructure. I would be happy to work with Senator PAUL to ensure these programs receive the resources they require.

I hope he might be able to get some support from the Trump administration, which has consistently proposed cutting resources to improve our Nation's infrastructure. I hope he might be able to get that kind of support, but funding it through an across-the-board cut on all other programs, including veterans healthcare, national security, and education programs is irresponsible. It is not the answer.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alabama.

Mr. SHELBY. Mr. President, I move to table the Paul amendment and 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 legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Louisiana (Mr. CASSIDY) and the Senator from Arkansas (Mr. COTTON).