

The problem is that, from the very beginning, many people, including those who put their name on that document, and our laws at the time did not reflect that founding principle, and our story can largely be summarized as the 244-year journey to more fully live up to the promises made at our founding.

For our first 89 years as a nation, human beings were owned as slaves. And beyond just the horrors of slavery, they were the subject of torture, of rape, of seeing their children sold away—away from them—never to see them again.

When that horrible institution finally came to an end, it was followed by another hundred years of separate and unequal, where Black Americans were told where they could live, where they could work, where they could go to school, and more. They were told where they could eat, where they could sit or not, where they were allowed to stay overnight. They were even told what side of the road they would be allowed to walk on in many parts of this country. They were denied the right to vote, either directly or through intimidation and threats.

It was a time when, in many parts of this country, any Black man was one false accusation away from losing his life at the hands of a lynch mob.

This is a shameful truth, an undeniable part of our history, a stain on our legacy as a nation. But it is not the whole story. From the very beginning, it was clear that the promise of our founding and our failure to live up to it—these two things could not ultimately coexist. From the very beginning, within a year and even before the founding of our Nation, there were already Americans working to end slavery. Sometimes they paid for it with their lives.

Ultimately, it became the single most divisive issue in the country, to the point that it was resolved only through a bloody civil war. For the next hundred years, during the era of separate and unequal, it was also Americans who worked to end segregation and Jim Crow laws, Americans of every walk of life: little children who would brave angry mobs to desegregate a school, the protesters and those in the streets who faced down “Bull” Connor’s dogs and beatings, little girls who died when their church was bombed.

Ours is not simply the story of a people who, for 189 years, failed to live up to the promise of America. Ours is also the story of the Americans who ultimately succeeded in making us a nation that was closer to who we were supposed to be.

That is why, at least for me, when they play the “National Anthem” and the flag that I face and put my hand over my heart to honor—that flag—that is not the flag of slave owners; that is the flag of the abolitionists. That is the flag of Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass, who were American heroes. The flag that I pledge allegiance to is not the flag of a segrega-

tionist. It is the flag of the Freedom Riders, the people who made the march from Selma to Montgomery. That is the flag of Rosa Parks and Dr. King.

Our history does not simply belong to the villains. It belongs, even more so, to the heroes who, frankly, made us more American in each successive generation.

I have heard in some corners people suggest that our founding documents themselves are documents embedded in racism because I imagine many of the people who signed it, indeed, were or did not live up to the words they signed their names on. But that would be forgetting the fundamental fact that every single great movement in American history—every movement for equality in the history of this Nation—has not been a rejection of our founding documents, has not been a rejection of our founding principles, has not been a call to overthrow the Constitution or the Declaration of Independence. Every one of these movements—great movements in the history of this country towards equality—has been an appeal to those principles, a demand that we live up to those principles.

Dr. King said the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence—an appeal to our founding documents, which he called a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir.

As we talk now about what is taught to our children in our schools and in our lives, I think our children deserve to know the truth about their country—all the truth. We must teach our children about the times in which our Nation fell short. We must teach them about the people responsible for our falling short. We must point to the times even now when we fall short. That is the only way you learn the lessons of history and the only way to avoid repeating them. But we must also teach them that it was Americans who dedicated and even lost their lives to end these evils.

While we are at it, we should teach them, too, about the greatness of our country. Teach them about the young Americans who died far from home for the freedom and the liberty of others, who lost their lives at Iwo Jima and Guadalcanal and Normandy and the Ardennes and Chosin and Fallujah, on San Juan Hill and in Manila Bay. Teach them also about how, when disaster strikes anywhere on this planet, it is their country that responds first and with the most—Fukushima, Japan, and West Berlin; after an earthquake hit Haiti; after floods impacted Pakistan—how it is Americans and their charities and their government that have literally saved the lives of millions of people on the African continent from starvation, from the ravages of HIV-AIDS. Teach them how, on a summer night in 1969, the entire world stopped and watched with amazement as man first stepped foot on the Moon and there planted the flag of their country.

Our children deserve to know the truth about their country, that in the history of mankind, there has never been a great power that has used its means to help more people and more places than anywhere in human history—no other great power in human history has done what the people of this Nation have done, both individually through the monies we give to charities and through their government. This is also true about America.

Our children deserve to know that they are citizens not of a perfect country but of the single greatest Nation in the history of all of mankind. They deserve to know that they are the heirs to a 244-year journey to achieve in one land a nation where all people are viewed as equal under the law, whose rights come from their Creator. They deserve to know that their country is a special one—one worth defending, one worth protecting, and one worth passing on to the generations that will follow them.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

WILDFIRES

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, because of raging fires in my home State of Oregon, many communities in my home State have been reduced to ashes. A number of others are experiencing what is known as the ice box effect, where, in effect, smoke blocks out the Sun, and it gets quite cool. Virtually all of Oregon is now choking on smoke—that is whether you are inside or outside at this point. Countless thousands of Oregonians are under evacuation orders. Many are quite literally fleeing for their lives and abandoning their homes as the flames approach.

When I was home this weekend, I initially thought that a number of my communities had been hit by a wrecking ball. That really understates the situation because usually when you get hit by a wrecking ball, there is a little bit left that is not just ashes. Now thousands of people in my State have lost their homes. They have lost their businesses. They have lost lifelong memories.

I brought a flag to a family who lost in one of the fires the service flag of a loved one that they had cherished, and it just struck me that it is those kinds of memories, and losing them, that are as painful in many instances as losing houses and businesses.

The death toll has been rising. Others are still missing and unaccounted for.

Amid all the panic and loss, one of the aspects that left me, as I came back to Washington, with a bit of hope is that we lost so much, but we didn’t lose our spirit. We didn’t lose what we call the Oregon Way—neighbor helping neighbor, volunteers helping evacuees get food and water and shelter. Everybody steps up when a crisis arrives; nobody cares a whit about anybody’s politics.

I have come to the floor today with a specific purpose, and that is to ask the

Senate to match the same standard I saw of volunteers, neighbors, and Oregonians helping Oregonians this weekend, to show the same kind of can-do spirit.

The Presiding Officer of the Senate is new to this body. He has a State with a lot of rural terrain. I am going to be asking him and every Member of the Senate, all 100 of us, to say: Let's make today the day when the Senate chose to finally get serious about fire that has harmed so many these last few weeks. Let's make this the day when the Senate chose to take a dilapidated and out-of-date fire policy and replace it with a modern strategy for the real, on-the-ground conditions that have caused fires to magnify the pain that is being felt by millions today.

The reason I am making this request of the Senate—that the Senate replace the way forest policy has been made in the past—is that those past processes—and, as my colleague already knows since he has been here now, the Senate moves often with glacially slow Senate processes, and those processes are now being totally overwhelmed by the massive infernos that are blanketing our communities and blanketing the West with smoke that is literally up to our eyeballs. The Presiding Officer in the Senate is a tall fellow. I am 6 feet 4 inches. That is what I felt this weekend. I and everybody else had smoke up to our eyeballs.

The process the Senate has for dealing with these new kinds of forest calamities—and there is no other way to describe it—those old procedures lack the urgency, lack the speed, lack, frankly, the resolute discipline for the incredibly big job that needs to be done and done quickly.

So today I want to begin by offering three policies that I believe could be supported by every Senator, Democrats and Republicans. The first is that Congress should pass a 21st Century Civilian Conservation Corps Act. I have actually seen press in Missouri calling for this kind of approach, where young people are involved, securing jobs where they pay a living wage, and they can go in and shore up these communities threatened by fire.

I want to emphasize that, having served on the Energy Committee now for several years, having authored the two major bills in the forestry area—the bill with Senator CRAPO—so we no longer waste so much money not budgeting for fire, brought about the end of fire borrowing so the big fires get taken care of in the disaster fund—don't shortchange prevention—and then secure rural schools, which I think is also a policy that benefits people all over the country in rural forested areas.

I will just offer the first. All over America, there are millions of acres of overstocked timber stands. They are hazardous fuels. It is urgent that we go in there, and we can use these hard-working young people to clean out those overstocked stands and reduce

the risk of fire. Fire is inevitable. I know of no bill—none—that can abolish fire. The question is, Can we take concrete steps to reduce the suffering and the damage of these big fires?

(Ms. ERNST assumed the Chair.)

I just gave one example of what the 21st Century Civilian Conservation Corps could do. In my home State, there are more than 2 million acres backlogged in terms of these hazardous fuels that need to be reduced. You could have the 21st Century Civilian Conservation Corps—thousands of young people—going into every State and taking action to reduce these risks. There are a lot of other things that could be done by the 21st Century Civilian Conservation Corps.

I learned this weekend that we are going to need to deploy new cell phone connectivity because a lot of people have lost those connections. In fact, one of the challenges in trying to determine how many people we have lost is that we believe when the fires first hit, a lot of people went to a friend's house and then the friend is not able to communicate because they lost cell phone connectivity.

This is about having young people work on communications, having them clean out hazardous fuels, and having them work on stabilizing soils to prevent massive flooding, because, make no mistake about it, all over the West—in Oregon, Washington, and California—we are going to need those soil stabilization projects to prevent massive flooding this spring. As sure as the night follows the day, it will be a problem.

Using the 21st Century Civilian Conservation Corps, we can deploy folks into the forest and into our wildland-urban areas, where there is a connection—an interface—because we have a lot of fires in those areas, and the Civilian Conservation Corps can reduce hazardous fuels, prevent catastrophic fires, and they can do it on a grand scale.

An ideal part of it and one of the reasons I think this will appeal to Democrats and Republicans is there doesn't have to be a fight over carrying out our nation's environmental laws. As I mentioned, in Oregon alone, there was already a backlog of more than 2 million acres that need to be treated. Without those treatments, a lightning strike or a carelessly dropped match can start yet another inferno. Just picture that. After everything that we had over the last few days, you have all of these hazardous fuels built up and you have a lightning strike or a carelessly dropped match and, all of a sudden, you have ripped through thousands of other acres in the blink of an eye.

Oregon's forests and the forests of the West badly need this care and investment. It would really be an updated version of one of the most popular programs the government has ever pursued, that came out of the New Deal, and it would be a huge economic boost to rural communities—I see the

Presiding Officer from the State of Iowa—rural communities that feel like government has left them behind.

That is my first proposal—the first of three—that I believe can help us come together as a Senate to reduce the devastating toll of these fires that are not your grandfather's fires. They are bigger and they are hotter and they are more powerful. We can do it together.

The second area that I want to see the Senate focus on is addressing that the fires mean a lot more than spending all your money on just putting big fires out. Forest science has shown that wildfires are a part of the natural life cycle of certain parts of the Nation. If all you do is focus on putting out fires all the time, you disrupt the cycle and that can lead to bigger fires down the road.

But America no longer gets just manageable natural fires. Instead, we get these huge infernos like the ones we have in Oregon, fires that are hot enough to melt a car and sterilize the soil. I ask the Presiding Officer to imagine how hot it has to be to melt a car.

There is a need for another tool to help reduce the devastating effect of these great fires. It is supported by scientists who have been looking at the various tools for dealing with these horrors—Democrats, Republicans—and it basically involves a prescribed fire that can be done safely in the off-seasons, say, in the winter months.

During those months, there is less risk of spread. You can limit the smoke. Civilian Conservation Corps workers working with the scientists at the U.S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the Oregon Department of Forestry, collaboratives, and our counties can carefully target these prescribed fires during the off-season and help prevent catastrophic fires in the summer and the fall by using the concept to clean out the dead and dying undergrowth.

Here is the essence of my second proposition. If you use prescribed fire to burn a little when it is safe in the off-season, you can save a whole lot later on by preventing catastrophe during those hotter months of summer and fall.

I have a bill that I have been developing with the Energy and Natural Resources Committee. I would say to my colleagues that this approach, like the 21st Century Civilian Conservation Corps, will be ready for cosponsors later this week. I am going to be going to all of my colleagues to ask for support for this second commonsense approach to catastrophe avoidance.

The third proposal brings it all together. Congress must finally kick its aversion to making long-term budget investments in treatment and fire prevention. Managing our forests requires an investment that we essentially look to beyond the next 36 hours. Managing our forests for wildfire resilience needs

to be approached as a longer term proposition, one that can make our communities safer while generating jobs—timber for mills, improving recreation opportunities. And yet this has been an investment the Senate has been unwilling to spend.

Clearly, not enough has been done to deal with fire prevention. The fact that the Congress has constantly been shorting fire prevention is contributing to what is being seen in Oregon and throughout the West right now. Shorting fire prevention is the wrong way to go, and this item, No. 3, is literally a matter of life and death.

Somehow, this Senate can produce hundreds of billions of dollars for tax breaks for special interests. There are outrageous, indefensible subsidies for fossil fuels that compound the climate crisis.

Senator CRAPO and I—my colleague who sits just a few feet away, the Republican of Idaho—worked for years in a bipartisan way to end what is called “fire borrowing.” This is actually the first year when our bill has gone into effect. It got to the point where we needed over 300 citizens’ groups to pass this bill because so often the big fires were fought with prevention money—money borrowed from the prevention accounts, and then the fire just got worst.

Senator CRAPO and I said that is foolish, even by Washington, DC, standards. We were able to get a special fund created where the big fires would be fought from the disaster fund. But still, even with the beginning that Senator CRAPO and I have made on a bipartisan basis, the budget for fire preparedness and prevention is still so woefully short. More has to be done to limit the damage from staggeringly powerful forest fires, and one of the best ways to do it is to start building up that prevention fund that Senator CRAPO and I started here in the U.S. Senate.

We laid the foundation, but it is clearly not enough. I checked, actually, a couple of days ago. There are \$3 billion now in the fund for fire suppression. We are sure going to need that because we have scores of fires still burning in Oregon, but we are going to need to build up preventive funds. And still, prevention as of today, September of 2020, is woefully underfunded.

The Forest Service has the technical tools it needs to improve forest health and to reduce the risk of fire, but, as I mentioned, there is a 2 million-acre backlog just in Oregon. Multiply that all over the West or all over the country where there are forests that are under the jurisdiction of the Federal Government and it is pretty clear that America has to decide it is urgent business to build up the budget for fire prevention.

By allowing the fire prevention backlog I have described to build, Congress is just racking up more debt—dangerous debt—and the devastation and the smoke in Oregon and across the West today is the debt coming due.

For those of us in the West who fear it is going to be impossible to pay the enormous bill that we have been handed through a combination of lousy forestry science and a disinterest in real policies that reduce climate change, we know the job is going to be hard, but we can and must do it by coming together like I saw Oregonians do just this last weekend.

Before I wrap up, I want to mention that there sure have been some misguided priorities on all sides of the political spectrum. On one side, some of the timber industry skipped past active management to pursue the golden calf of eliminating environmental laws. On the other side, misguided nonmanagement priorities beat back every attempt to manage our forests based on science. Now add to that the ridiculous new lies and delusions you are seeing online about the causes of these fires, and you have a recipe for distraction as to how the Senate must move forward.

Just today, while visiting California, the President was asked about climate change and fires. He said: No problem. The President said, “It’ll start getting cooler,” and then he blamed “explosive trees.” Sending that kind of nonsense across the land is cold comfort to the families who are mourning the loved ones they have lost in the fires or the thousands of Oregonians who barely made it out before their homes and businesses went up in flames.

The Senate has an obligation to act because around this country—and it is not just in my State but across the West—big-hearted neighbors, animal lovers, county employees, city administrators, local U-Haul businesses, teachers, nurses, and retirees—all of them—are stepping up and pitching in. They are bringing food and clothes and towels, and they are helping with mental health services.

Before I wrap up, I particularly want to thank the incredible firefighters who are working on hardly any sleep, and I thank the first responders, the police and others who are doing so much. One issue they are helping with is cell phones and service. My staff and others in the delegation have been working with these folks.

I see my friend from Virginia, who knows a lot about what it takes to maintain communications networks, and that is what we are working on this afternoon.

One problem that has come up is networks and equipment burn. There is a major strain on the resources for the people on the frontlines who are fighting the inferno—for example, with the repeaters that can amplify a signal and keep our firefighters connected. I am hearing that this country doesn’t have enough repeaters in stock to begin to address such a crisis that the West is experiencing. It is another example of what happens when, year after year, you ignore the urgent need for serious fire prevention.

Before I left Oregon, I told some friends that I was going to come back

and try to bring the Senate together around fire prevention.

One said: Well, you are going to be Mr. Fire Prevention.

I said: No, that is not how it works. I would like to make this the Senate that is known for fire prevention and the Senate that said, between there and here, there are 100 U.S. Senators, and we have differences of opinion. Lord knows that this is the case. But I offered concrete proposals, 21st Century Conservation Corps-prescribed changes in the budget that Democrats and Republicans can come together on. The reason I say that is that we have already done it. That is how Senator CRAPO and I ended fire borrowing.

I close with this: What I saw this weekend was heartbreaking—thousands of families mourning unthinkable loss, trying to figure out how to move forward when their homes and their possessions had been reduced to ash. Yet, when you talk to them, they will tell you that they also know that the problem is not going to get better all by itself—I know there are Senators who want to debate this—and that is because the climate crisis is here, right now, today.

It is no longer a far-off hypothetical danger for Senators to debate in comfortably air-conditioned buildings. The American West—my State—is on fire. Whole neighborhoods and whole communities are being reduced to ashes. Our air quality has had the dubious recognition over the last couple of days of being some of the worst in the world. The climate crisis is happening now to us and to our kids. America and the Senate ignore it at our peril.

I brought today three concrete proposals that I think make a serious contribution to reducing the pain and suffering that have been seen across Oregon and across the West over the last couple of days. I want this to be the day the Senate gets serious about fire prevention as part of a comprehensive effort to fight the climate crisis.

The ideas I have outlined—the three major proposals—ought to become law soon, and they ought to have bipartisan support. They are policies that will protect our communities and the families who live in them and that will protect jobs, protect homes, and protect businesses. They sure are a lot cheaper because they will prevent fires rather than force a bigger pricetag when we need to rebuild communities out of the ashes.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Virginia.

Mr. WARNER. Madam President, I have come to the floor to talk about a different subject, but I want to commend my good friend, the Senator from Oregon, for his comments. We all watched with horror this weekend the images from his State and from those in Washington and California that were literally like something out of Dante’s “Inferno.”

I have enormous respect for the Senator from Oregon, and he can count on

me to be behind him on these proposals. I know they will be reasonable, and I know they will be straightforward. Boy oh boy. If, when we see those images, we are not able to step up with a commonsense, bipartisan, and quick response, then shame on all of us. I commend the Senator for his leadership, and I look forward to working with him.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Madam President, as if that isn't enough—and with the challenges we face with having close to 200,000 of our fellow citizens dead from coronavirus and there still being no national plan on PPE or testing or, my fear, that we could see a repeat of the mistakes that were made on testing and PPE happen on vaccinations if we are not careful—what I actually came to talk about and to remind my colleagues about is something that the Senator from Oregon will also be very, very involved in. I express my grave concern that we are only 16 days away from a potential lapse in government funding.

It is encouraging that Secretary Mnuchin and Speaker PELOSI seem to have reached at least an agreement in principle on this must-pass stopgap funding, but I have been around here long enough to know that when negotiations between and within two Chambers on supposedly must-pass coronavirus relief legislation breaks down and stalls—and when that breakdown lasts for months—that we cannot let the funding of our government get mired in the same complacency and lack of urgency.

I hope and pray that the devastating impact of the 2018-2019 government shutdown is still in the front minds of all of my colleagues here in the Senate. I acknowledge it has been a long year, so here is a little recap for those who need it.

The government shutdown over the holiday of 2018 and into the beginning of the new year of 2019 was the longest shutdown of the Federal Government in history—not of this Congress's and not under this administration but in our country's history.

For 35 days, the Federal Government did not hold up its end of the bargain with taxpayers or the public servants who have dedicated their lives to delivering services to them. The economic impact and human toll were devastating. More than 380,000 Federal workers were furloughed, and another 450,000 were forced to work without pay. While Federal employees eventually received backpay, furloughed workers who happened to be contractors still have not been made whole. To put that in context, contractors, including those who had served the Federal Government as custodians, cafeteria workers, and security guards, had to figure out how to pay rent and buy medicine and put food on the table after two entire paychecks just evaporated.

The economic effects were not just personal either. The Congressional

Budget Office estimates that the 2018-2019 government shutdown cost taxpayers—cost all of us—about \$3 billion. It actually registered as a decrease in 2019's gross domestic product of about two-tenths of a percent. Those will be losses that we will never recover.

As bad as that all sounds, that was only a partial government shutdown. There were 9 out of 15 Departments and several Agencies that were closed.

What we are facing in a couple of weeks would affect the entire Federal Government. To state the obvious, that was when we were not in a global pandemic and an economic recession. Virginians and people across the country continue relying on services from the Federal Government to help keep their families and businesses afloat.

I am sure the administration will take steps to ensure people continue to receive their most essential things, like SNAP benefits to keep their families fed and PPP loans to keep their businesses afloat. Shutting down the entire Federal Government will inevitably lead to disruptions and bare-bone contingency matters.

The American people need and, frankly, deserve better. With food insecurity, housing instability, and job loss all on the rise, now is the time for the Federal Government to do more to help everyday people—not by turning the lights out. Shutting down the government just as we are expecting a surge in COVID-19 cases post-Labor Day and as the flu season is starting and as we are needing to work double time to secure the November election and as the Postal Service needs relief and, as Senator WYDEN just indicated, as the entire west coast is burning—boy oh boy. Calling it a self-inflicted injury doesn't even cut it. If we were to shut down, it would be more like kicking ourselves. Failing to reach an agreement on funding the government would be absolutely disastrous.

I can only hope that there will be bipartisan agreement on this point and that we will be able to put aside any of the unrelated policy differences to fulfill one of our most basic obligations as lawmakers—that of funding the government and keeping our commitments to both our constituents and the Federal workforce that works so tirelessly to serve them.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

BROADBAND

Mrs. CAPITO. Madam President, I rise to address broadband connectivity and broadband access in rural States like the Presiding Officer's State and my State of West Virginia.

Our Nation has experienced a very tough couple of months because of the

coronavirus pandemic. With the new normal consisting of teleworking, virtual learning, and telehealth appointments, there is no question that this has forced us to recognize and to reckon with the digital divide in this country. The ability to have affordable and reliable service is more valuable than ever.

However, in 2020, my State remains one of the least connected States in the country. Over the last few months, I have heard from many constituents—hundreds of my constituents—who are having difficulties properly and efficiently working from home, helping their kids with their homework because they lack robust internet access.

You know, I think about those children who either don't have connectivity or don't have an adult in the home who can really help them do their digital learning. We have to get our kids back in school, but in the meantime we have to have this connectivity.

Some examples of this are Randy from Parkersburg, whom I spoke to recently during a tele-townhall meeting that I held with constituents. Randy expressed his frustration with not being able to access the internet, making it difficult for his kids to complete their homework. He was driving to a hot spot.

Laura from Wheeling expressed her concern that her children will fall behind in school without access to their homework online.

And Mandy from Elkins, who is a professor, needs internet because of required online learning at Davis & Elkins.

These are just examples of the few of the concerns that I have heard from my constituents, but, unfortunately, there are many, many more just like those. I am sure you are hearing them as well in the great State of Iowa.

The reality is that broadband build-out in rural areas of West Virginia and across our country are extremely expensive and take more time to complete because, in our case, we have those beautiful West Virginia mountains. I have always said that if we can communicate with somebody on the Moon, we can surely find a way to deliver broadband to individuals, families, and businesses all across this Nation.

Fortunately, the FCC Chairman, Ajit Pai, understands this and has been working with the other Commissioners at the FCC to structure the future of rural broadband deployment. The FCC's upcoming Rural Digital Opportunity Fund—which I am going to call it RDOF, which is how we address it—is the largest Federal investment aimed at closing the digital divide.

RDOF will award \$20.4 billion over the next 10 years for broadband service in rural America, with a special emphasis at the beginning on those who are totally unserved and then moving to those who have some service, but it is inadequate.