

changes on it. The American people are held harmless, all the Agencies are held harmless, but Members of Congress, both House and Senate, we stay in session 7 days a week. We have a quorum call at noon every single day. And we can't move to any bill other than appropriations.

In other words, if you don't have your work done, you have got to stay until your work is actually done. And we can't go do something else. We have to stay here to be able to get it done. I guarantee you, if this body was in session 7 days a week for two weeks, by the end of the second week, we would all be staring at each other saying: I want to go see my family. I want to be able to do the other things that are responsibilities that a Senator has. I need to be able to do those things; let's get this thing resolved.

If you remove all of our time, it puts the pressure on us to be able to actually get our work done. If I can say it just as simple as this: My mom, when my brother and I—and I know it may be shocking to some people that my brother and I didn't always get along every day growing up—but when my brother and I would get into a fight, my mom would send both of us into our rooms and say: You guys stay in that room, fight it out, then when you are done, then you can come out to the rest of the house. But go settle it in there, but make sure it is settled before you come out here.

As silly as it sounds, this government shutdown prevention bill I have brought year after year is just as simple as my mom's advice, don't make everybody else have to listen to the fight. Members of Congress should get in the room, fight it out, settle it; and when we are done, we come out and actually vote for it.

But, in the meantime, the rest of the country shouldn't have to suffer because we didn't get our work done on time. That seems pretty straightforward to me. It has had wide bipartisan support, and there have been lots of moments when we have been very close to passing it. There is no trick in it. There is no anything else. It is just, why do we have these crazy government shutdown fight moments that the rest of the world looks at us as Americans and says: Why can't the Americans get their act together?

And the rest of the country looks at us and says: We have to work out all of our details. Why don't you have to work out all of your details?

Those folks are not wrong.

We will, one day, solve this. Apparently, it is not today. Today, there is still a fight over whether we are going to keep the government open for tomorrow.

Federal workers that are already dealing with a lot of tension in their life, quite frankly, they have gotten emails and messages. They are hearing about downsizing in Federal Agencies. They are anxious right now.

And there are a lot of folks in my State, and, quite frankly, around the

country, that say we need to reduce the size of the bureaucracy, which we do. The last time we had a major reduction in the size of the bureaucracy was under Bill Clinton. When Bill Clinton was President, he declared: We are going to reinvent government.

And under Bill Clinton's Presidency, they reduced the Federal workforce by 400,000 people. That was a big reduction in Federal workforce. That is the last time that has occurred, decades ago.

We have grown now to a massive size that we have got to reduce again. Everybody knows it. But if you are a Federal worker or a family member or a next-door neighbor or you go to church together, you know how agonizing this really is. The last thing those Federal workers need is one more thing hanging over their head and a government shutdown at the same time. But it is being debated right now, and my Democratic colleagues are trying to determine if we are going to go into shutdown tonight still.

I would simply say: Let's get our work done. We disagree on many issues. OK? That is what grownups have; we have disagreements. Let's settle our disagreements. Let's keep us operating. Let's take this off the table for good at some point so we don't have this threat hanging over us and some countdown clock on 24-hour news: Here is how many minutes it is until we have a government shutdown. Let's take that off the table, and let's get our work done.

We have a giant deficit—giant—\$2 trillion in overspending this year. We should have budget fights. We should be more efficient. We should allow DOGE and some of those folks to be able to go after some of the wasteful spending.

I don't have a lot of people back in my State that are contacting me and saying: I really want to make sure that we are still spending money for the grants to go to the transgender opera in Colombia that USAID is funding, or the DEI initiatives in Serbia that the USAID is funding. No one is calling me and saying: We need to make sure we keep doing those things.

Everyone looks at it and shakes their head and says: What in the world? I want my tax money to go to education, and I want it to go to roads, and I want it to go to national defense. Don't do that.

So let's find ways to be more efficient. Let's find ways to be able to reduce waste and fraud. But let's also have the fight during office hours so the American people don't have to feel the effects of a government shutdown.

The clock is ticking today. My Democratic colleagues have got to determine if we are going to have this vote today. Let's pass it.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

REMEMBERING ALAN K. SIMPSON

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, before I begin my comments, I wanted to

acknowledge the extraordinary life and the contributions of Senator Alan Simpson from Wyoming. I had an opportunity to hear several of my colleagues speak to the accomplishments of Senator Alan Simpson. And while I did not have an opportunity to serve with him, my father served many years with Al Simpson, and he and my mother Nancy were very close friends with Al and his wife Ann. They traveled together. They joked together.

And I had an opportunity to occasionally meet with Al Simpson. As has been mentioned, his humor was legendary. And as a young woman who was kind of observing, here you have this very important person, this Senator from Wyoming, who was very accomplished in so many years, with a sense of humor and a joke for just about everything—sometimes appropriate, maybe sometimes not quite as appropriate. But he was a genuinely beautiful individual, and you saw how he reacted and interacted with people at all levels.

I can only imagine the depth of appreciation and love that he had from the people in the great State of Wyoming because those of us who had just mere glimpses of an opportunity to see him and to know him found him to just be truly a lovely and a good man.

So I know that my parents would want me to be able to express my condolences to the Simpson family and the great appreciation for the contributions that he made to his State of Wyoming and to our great country.

IDITAROD

Mr. President, I come to the floor this morning with my annual update. As the occupant of the Chair heard, just a couple of weeks ago, we began the "Last Great Race," also known as the Iditarod. This is the sled dog race that typically begins from Willow, AK, and goes northward to Nome, a little less than a thousand miles.

This was the 53rd running of the Iditarod this year, and with great excitement, I am able to announce the winner of this year's Iditarod. At 2:55 a.m., this morning, Jessie Holmes crossed the finish line. He crossed the finish line in a remarkable time of 10 days, 14 hours, 55 minutes, and 41 seconds.

Now, this is not the fastest Iditarod, but it is by far the longest Iditarod. I mentioned that typically you have an Iditarod race of just about 1,000 miles. This was 1,128 miles through extraordinary wilderness, across conditions that were grueling in perhaps different ways: soft snow, howling winds, blasting sand—believe it or not—as they were crossing through river areas. It is a tough race every year, but this year was particularly rough.

They moved the start of the race, this year, from Willow to begin in the community of Fairbanks—my home town is there—but took a northern route through the interior, along the Yukon River, circling all the way down and doing a loop-the-loop down in Grayling, Anvik, and Shageluk.

The conditions coming up into Eagle Island were described as some of the worst. Actually, the terms that were used were not ones that I am going to share on the floor here, but it was a pretty tough trail, hard conditions on everyone.

But then, moving back to Kaltag and coming along here, across Norton Sound, an 8-hour stop here, just out of Nome, in safety, and Jesse Holmes, again, came under the burlled arch at 2:55 a.m., this morning, with 10 dogs in harness.

His lead dogs were Polar and—gosh, who was the other? It was Polar and—I have got to find it here because you got to remember. You have got to acknowledge the names of your dogs because it is the dogs themselves that make sure that you come across safely and with honor.

I can remember Polar, and I can't remember the name of the other dog.

Hercules. Hercules and Polar. I mean isn't that appropriate for your lead dogs that are taking you over 1,100 miles. It is a herculean effort. So it is, indeed, something that we as Alaskans look on with great pride each and every year.

It is a test of endurance of the animals, certainly. It is a test of endurance for the mushers themselves.

Keep in mind, when they set out, on the 3rd of March—that is when they left out of Fairbanks—you are moving. You are moving day and night, although for most of the mushers, they actually prefer to mush at night, when it is cold, because the conditions are actually easier on the dogs so that the dogs don't get overheated.

But it is not like you are checking into a roadhouse or checking into a hotel. When you stop, you are literally getting bales of straw that you have had airdropped to a location. You are putting the straw out as bedding for your dogs. You are tending to your animals. And what I mean by "tending to them"—I mean that is feeding them, that is watering them, that is taking their booties off, that is massaging their feet, that is massaging their muscles, that is working your dogs to get them in shape to run, before you can pause and heat up a pot of stew over your kerosene burner.

Think about what it means to melt snow—enough snow—to water 10 to 14 dogs that have been running miles and miles and miles.

So the effort there is physical endurance—physical endurance, most certainly—but also mental endurance because when you are just head down, running into the wind, taking on conditions that look the same as you have seen for the past 17 miles, because you are running down the width of the wide-open river or going through tussocks and hillocks and a trail that is just so rough and jerky that you have got to stay mentally awake. You have got to be physically on target. But it is hard in every sense of the word.

And so there is an appreciation for the athletes, both human but particularly the dogs themselves. This is not something where you can have a strategy and say: I am going to run for the next 43 miles, and I am going to rest my dogs for 4 hours, and then we are going to move on.

If you are a musher that is a winning musher and a safe musher, you can only go so far as your dogs will tell you. And when the dogs say it is time to take a pause, you know it is time to take a pause.

The third place, the individual who is going to come in third, Paige Drobny here, had a comment just yesterday. She says she has to make sure that she is watching what her dogs say. And when the dogs give her the look that says, "We are not with the CEO right now," she knows and she says, I am listening to them. I have to make sure that they trust me just as I am trusting them. So there is a relationship that is extraordinary when you think about the humans and the canines teaming together.

We have Jessie Holmes, who came in first; Matt Hall has come in second—he is already a known; and Paige Drobny is well on her way in. But every single one of these mushers is a winner. Every single 1 of these 33 teams are winners, and those dogs remind us of that.

People have asked me: What do you get if you win the Iditarod? If this is something that mushers train for day in and day out of each year, there must be some big grand prize. Well, this year, the prize is \$52,000, I believe, the total sum was. In addition to that, Jessie Holmes has won several other acknowledgements as he has entered different checkpoints ahead of the rest of the pack here. His winnings, in addition to the first-place finish, totaled \$4,500 in cash on top of what he is receiving, \$4,500 in gold nuggets, 25 pounds of fresh Bristol Bay salmon, and multiple trophies to commemorate each event. It is not just about the money; it is not just about the accomplishment, but getting some good old Bristol Bay salmon is also not a bad way to be recognized.

A little bit about our first-place winner this year, Jessie Holmes. I was able to share this with my colleague from Alabama. Jessie Holmes hails from Alabama. Alabama is a far piece from Alaska. The temperatures are a little bit different. But Jessie came to Alaska in 2004. He has been there ever since. He fell in love with Alaska. He found running dogs on a remote track line along the Yukon River was a lifestyle he wanted to adopt, and he has embraced it.

Some of you may recognize the name. He was a regular, between 2015 to 2023, on the Alaska reality TV show "Life Below Zero." Maybe some of the people follow "Life Below Zero." A lot of you follow Alaska reality TV shows.

Let me tell you, Jessie Holmes is the real deal. You may see him on reality TV, but he is the real deal. He has

raced in the Iditarod every year since 2018. He placed seventh then as a first-time runner and became the 2018 Iditarod Rookie of the Year. So this guy has just been cruising. He has placed in the top 10 now five times. Again, an extraordinary musher, but a gentleman who has been proving his worth all along for years now, and we are just honored to be able to congratulate him.

This race is one that my colleagues know I get excited about it. This is March Madness, I know, but for us, it is also about the excitement that comes with this amazing race. It is a reminder to us that Alaska is a place that does not yield to those who are unprepared. It rewards those who respect it, who understand its power, and who find strength when faced with some pretty impossible obstacles.

Most people would say it is impossible to run 1,128 miles on a dog sled across these conditions. But the Iditarod is a living tribute to the pioneer spirit and a reminder that hardships are not something to be feared but just faced with courage—just run into the storm.

I want to recognize the values that it upholds: The perseverance in the face of adversity, the partnership that transcends words, and really the unbreakable will to keep it going no matter what the storm is. I wanted to share that with colleagues.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. President, before I conclude my time here on the floor, I just want to acknowledge the place that we are at here today on the 14th of March, a day that we have seen coming, not just on the calendar, but we here in the Congress have known that this is the day that our continuing resolution was going to run out, the clock runs, and we had a choice.

We have a choice we have to make. That choice is: Does the government shut down at 11:59 tonight or do we keep it open? And I think most of us would say a shutdown is never ever a good idea. But you want to be able to have an option that is tenable.

I stood here earlier this week, and I described what a Morton's fork is. It is a phrase that basically refers to a choice between two equally untenable positions. That is exactly where we are. We have two equally untenable positions, in my view. We have a shutdown, which we cannot do, and we have a long-term CR in front of us, meaning a continuing resolution that continues the operations of the government until the 30th of September.

People would say that is good. But it doesn't allow for the good work that those of us that have tried to shepherd the appropriations bills through this process—it doesn't allow for that direction from the Congress. It basically continues fiscal year 2024 levels but without the parameters that the Congress, that we have directed—not just those of us on the Appropriations Committee but along with all of our colleagues.