

And while Congress will be paid for failing to do its job, many essential government employees who have continued to work through this shutdown will likely miss their next paycheck.

The President is ensuring our troops get paid this week, a move that is being protested by some Democrats.

Now, my daughter serves on Active Duty. She is a young Army officer, and she had to sit down and counsel her troops last week on where they could go to get loans so they could make their obligated payments.

So, thank you, President Trump, for taking care of my daughter and her soldiers.

Meanwhile, 750,000 nonessential government employees—who haven't worked at all in these past weeks—will be paid for doing nothing. It costs \$400 million every workday to provide back-pay to those that are furloughed during Schumer's shutdown. As of today, the pricetag to pay nonessential bureaucrats not to work is \$4.8 billion—\$4.8 billion.

Taxpayers should all be asking: Why is Washington spending money on anyone or anything that is nonessential?

President Trump is permanently eliminating many of these nonessential positions as part of a reduction in force, or RIF.

So here are some of my suggestions for getting rid of the riffraff with a RIF.

First up, eliminate the positions of Federal employees and contractors who weren't even working before the government shutdown. While millions of Americans have two or more jobs to make ends meet, these Federal employees aren't working at all. There are dozens of National Laboratory employees with nothing to do who spend the workday catnapping or playing cards and games.

To pass time, one of them started journaling. One of his entries reads:

Did nothing all day today over 10 hours in here.

The following day he wrote:

I do hope to play another good game of chess.

They are not the only ones with nothing to do. A Department of Energy contractor actually filed a complaint that he was getting paid for work he wasn't doing. So good on him—at least he is honest. For years, he and his co-workers have been spending their time looking for things to do, watching Netflix and taking naps. He says he is "begging for work," adding, "I can't believe I am getting paid to do nothing."

If Federal employees can't even justify their own salary, how can anyone else?

I have also uncovered bureaucrats who are holding several different government jobs simultaneously but aren't doing any of them. For example, a full-time HUD employee was being paid for two other full-time—got this, folks? She was being paid for two other full-time government contractor jobs.

That is three full-time jobs in total. She frequently billed taxpayers for working more than 24 hours in a single day.

Gosh, if I could find more than 24 hours in a day, that would be pretty extraordinary.

But this woman was paid \$225,000 for hours she never worked in nearly 3 years. Three full-time jobs, people—not working any of them.

This isn't an isolated case, either.

I have introduced my Double Dippers Act to crosscheck paychecks and payrolls to identify and stop bureaucrats from double billing taxpayers for work they are not even doing.

OK, don't laugh. This is true here.

There are plenty of other non-essential jobs that can be nominated immediately, beginning with the multitude of gimmicky government mascots. I am not talking about Smokey the Bear—OK?—not talking about Smokey the Bear, but rather other costume characters you probably have never even heard of, like the National Parks Service's Lupe the Ringtail, who is so frightening that Lupe makes children cry. Owlie Skywarn—I am sure you have all heard of Owlie Skywarn, with the National Weather Service.

Another Parks Service mascot is Riley the Roadrunner; Puddles the Blue Goose, with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; and everybody's favorite, Franklin the Fair Market Fox, from HUD.

I say, let's "fur-lough" these furballs forever.

Tax dollars should never be spent paying for any of these do-nothing jobs, especially when there are severe staffing shortages for critical jobs, like air traffic controllers and VA healthcare providers. The folks who are working these important jobs are too often overworked, understaffed, and underappreciated. So these folks can go.

I commend all of those essential workers who are doing the jobs that we need done on a daily basis. They continue to answer the call of duty during the Schumer shutdown without knowing when they may receive their next paycheck. Thank you for putting your country first. And on behalf of my fellow Iowans, I would also like to extend to them a very hardy thank-you.

To those who have been collecting paychecks without even working, even before the shutdown began, all I can really say is thanks for nothing.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Delaware.

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2026

Mr. COONS. Mr. President, I rise today to address the moment that we are in here in the U.S. Senate. We are about to proceed to a vote on a motion that the majority leader has laid on the floor.

I am the senior Democrat on the subcommittee of Appropriations that writes the bill that funds our national

defense. I have worked well and closely with Senator MCCONNELL in this undertaking this year. I am about to vote no on proceeding to take up the House Defense bill, which may surprise some of my colleagues from both parties or my constituents or folks who are wondering: What the heck is going on here? So I wanted to take a few minutes and speak to this moment, my vote, and hopefully our path forward.

Americans care deeply about security—about the security that comes from knowing that you and your family won't suddenly be bankrupted by unexpected healthcare costs, the loss of health insurance, and the security that comes from knowing that millions of highly skilled, trained, and dedicated American men and women are on the line around the world, shoulder to shoulder with our allies, defending America's security and that of the world, and we need a path towards addressing both.

The Federal Government is currently shut down. It is shut down because we can't come to an agreement here in the Senate, with the President, and with the House to deal with the expiring Affordable Care Act tax credits that make it affordable.

Letters are about to go out in my home State of Delaware that will tell folks who get their health insurance through the Affordable Care Act that their rates are going to go up dramatically—in many cases, more than 100 percent—because of expiring tax credits.

Well, what has that got to do with national defense? Bluntly, the process here in this Senate, the process with our President, and the process of spending or not spending appropriated funds has destroyed a lot of the trust that is essential for the Senate as a body to work, for the Congress to legislate, and for our Federal Government to reopen.

In the last Congress, I was the chair of the subcommittee that wrote the appropriations bill. Roughly, \$32 billion went to USAID—an Agency that no longer exists. Some of you may remember DOGE—an Elon Musk-led effort to get into and tear up and, in the case of USAID, to tear apart our longstanding, decades-old, U.S. foreign assistance program. It did a lot more damage than just that.

In many ways, the actions that began in January and picked up speed in the spring caused alarm and concern by many of us in the Senate that we have an OMB Director and an administration willing to violate bipartisan agreements from the last Congress, commitments to spend money, and contracts and agreements with partners and allies around the world and across many different areas.

In fact, just yesterday, a Federal district court judge in California ruled that the reductions in force—the layoffs, the RIFs—announced by the administration during this current shutdown were illegal because they were targeted and partisan.

So many things have happened this year that it is tough to keep track, but the combination of them has led to a reduction in trust between our two caucuses—trust that is essential to having an understanding and an agreement to move forward.

Let me be clear about this year's appropriations process. It was positive from when we started in March-April to when we concluded on the committee in July and voted out eight strong, bipartisan bills. The Senate appropriations process for at least eight of the bills—the biggest bills—was constructive and bipartisan. In fact, the bill that I worked on closely with Senator McCONNELL was voted out of the committee by 26 to 3. So, too, were other key bills that deal with housing, that deal with education, and that deal with healthcare. They came out of the committee 26 to 3 and are ready for action on the floor of the Senate. Yet we are not proceeding to them today.

There are four bills remaining in committee that are unaddressed, and the committee should focus on them, take them up, and work them through. There are three bills that have already passed the Senate and are all but done being conferenced with the House.

What I have heard from my Republican colleagues is that Leader THUNE is trying to move ahead with a process that would put the Defense bill, the Health and Education bill, the Housing and Transportation bill, which we call Labor-HHS, and T-HUD—very compelling names, I know—he wants to put together a package of many of these bills. Well, if that is the intention, we need communication between our leaders and our caucuses.

We have had a positive and productive process in Senate appropriations this year, but the leader's motion to go to the House Defense bill was not expected, was not discussed, and was not clear to my caucus as to what happens next. So it is with some real regret that I will vote no today but will continue to talk with my colleagues about how do we move forward.

I want to take a moment and just speak to the Defense bill that we have worked so hard on and that came out of the committee with such strong bipartisan support. It would provide a better quality of life to the men and women of the American military and their families. It would invest, in total, \$852 billion in our national defense—expanding shipyards, expanding munition production, creating stockpiles of critical weapons that we know we need for the future, investing in cutting-edge technologies—and would reject some of the Trump budget cuts in aid to Ukraine, to Taiwan, and to our Baltic allies, who are making positive progress in key areas.

Our work together on this bill has generally been a positive experience between Senators and our staffs. Our challenge was the Department, and it was the Secretary and his budgeteers, who often appeared at hearings and

meetings without their homework done, without the details ready, without a budget ready to go.

Some of you may have forgotten this, but a principal focus of the administration and the majority here during this same time was the so-called Big Beautiful Bill and trying to put \$160 billion onto the Defense Department not through regular order and not through the usual budget processes but through this one-time infusion of cash.

Senator McCONNELL and I historically haven't agreed on much, but we certainly have agreed on this in hearings and in speeches: If we are trying to invest in the future of our Armed Forces, whether it be new planes, new ships, new systems, or new technology, doing it with 1-year money is unwise and unsound.

We need to get back to regular order. We need to get back to a reliable and predictable appropriations process. In order to do that, we need bipartisan agreement that rejects severe cuts; that restores funding for programs like the NIH and the CDC, which is done in the bipartisan Labor-H bill; and that rejects cuts to WIC and rural housing, which is done in the Ag bill. We need to move these bills forward.

The way we move these bills forward is by linking arms and making it clear: We reject rescissions. We want to appropriate beyond just defense. We want a broader package and to have clarity from our President, the House, and the Senate about how we address the imminent health security crisis that confronts millions of Americans and, for today and tomorrow, keeps our government shut down.

Americans care about security. We care about security for our families from healthcare costs, and we care about security for our Nation from the threats that are greater than at any time in my adult life.

Let's find a path toward working together to address them.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I came in at the tail end of the comments from my colleague and my friend from Delaware. He has underscored some points that I think are important to remind us here in the Senate but also people who are watching as we are in day 16 of the government shutdown.

There is no great secret as to how we get the government fully functioning again. It is going to come about through cooperation. It is going to come about through good-faith efforts by good folks who are intentioned to address the matters in front of us.

We deal with politics. This is a political world. But I can tell you that so many of the people who I am talking to don't really care about the politics of our situation. They don't care if the Democrats are winning or the Republicans are winning. They feel like, as Americans, they are the ones who are

being caught in this backwash. They don't understand why their flight was delayed or canceled this morning. They don't understand why the individual that they are trying to get through to at an Agency is not picking up the phone or they get a message saying that this office is going to be closed until the government is reopened. What they care about is that we figure it out—that we figure it out. That requires communication. It requires talking with one another.

That is why I appreciate much of what my colleague has shared today, because as we are positioning as two sides that are seemingly dug in on this 16th day of a shutdown, real people are wondering: Is their government going to be there for them?

#### ALASKA FLOODS

Mr. President, I didn't come to the floor this afternoon with a focus, necessarily, on the shutdown. I came to speak about a situation in my State that has literally—literally—closed off, shut down, collapsed whole communities.

We had a storm—actually, a series of storms—hit the west coast of Alaska, just over the weekend. In this smaller inset here, you have got the State of Alaska, but this square panel is where the extent of the damage is.

This was a thousand-mile storm going from the north up in Kotzebue all the way down into the Bristol Bay region, with the bulk of the damage on these small Native communities that are focused on the coast and up, going into the Kuskokwim River. It has been a disaster of major proportions.

As we speak, we have communities that are being evacuated. And we understand, when we talk about evacuation with them, what I mean. But people in these villages—in the villages of Kipnuk and Kwigillingok—are being told that everyone from your village is being evacuated. And it doesn't mean that you go to a town that is a few miles down the road to get to safety. It means that you are airlifted 500 miles to Anchorage or possibly closer, to Bethel.

Before I detail some of that, I think it is important to recognize that what we had happening over the weekend, while this massive storm—a storm that was bringing winds in excess of 100 miles an hour, flood surges that were pummeling the coast with inundation levels like we have never seen before—we heard, saw, and read the stories of people who were trapped in their homes at night when the home was literally lifted off of its foundation and carried away in the current with families inside.

One detail was of a father and four children, who woke his children up to say: We all need to go to one corner of the house in case the house tips—but to hear the fear, really the terror, of being trapped into your own home as it is moving out into the ocean current.

The U.S. Coast Guard and the Alaska National Guard were on deck, as they