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House of Representatives

The House was not in session today. Its next meeting will be held on Friday, October 24, 2025, at 2 p.m.

Senate

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 23, 2025

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. GRASSLEY).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Eternal Lord God, give our lawmakers this day the wisdom to seek Your guidance and to make time to consider and act on Your precepts. May they not simply embrace the opinions of others, but seek Your truth for their lives. Lord, make them muscular thinkers, not merely reflecting the thoughts of others. Help them to make pleasing You their first priority. We continue our importunity for the ending of this shutdown, particularly pray for our Capitol Police and the many others who are serving without monetary compensation. We pray also for those who are not considered essential workers. Lord, reward them all as only You can. We pray in Your magnificent Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MULLIN). Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The great Senator from Iowa.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

CONTINUING APPROPRIATIONS AND EXTENSIONS ACT, 2026—Motion to Proceed

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, on behalf of the majority leader of the Senate, I move to proceed to Calendar No. 168, H.R. 5371.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the motion.

The senior assistant executive clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to Calendar No. 168, H.R. 5371, making continuing appropriations and extensions for fiscal year 2026, and for other purposes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, first of all, I want to compliment the Chaplain on each one of his prayers this week. He has made very important in his prayers the importance of opening up the government and ending the Schumer shutdown.

I come to the floor today to speak about the Department of Health and Human Services inspectors general routinely issuing recommendations to improve the operation of healthcare

programs and to produce savings for the taxpayers.

Until this year, two very important and top HHS inspectors general recommendations were unaddressed, and they should have been addressed because these are egregious wastes of taxpayers' moneys. No. 1, the report says we should stop duplicative enrollment on two or more State Medicaid Programs of individuals and, second, stopping Medicaid payments for enrollees who have passed away.

The tax bill signed by President Trump July 4 puts an end to this fraud, waste, and abuse in the Medicaid Program. That legislation establishes solutions to stop duplicative enrollments and sending payments out for deceased enrollees and providers. Once implemented, I hope that these recommendations of the inspectors general are satisfied.

Let me give some examples of reasons why these reforms are necessary. In July, the Centers For Medicare and Medicaid Services found 2.8 million Americans were enrolled in two or more Medicaid or Federal marketplace plans.

It is quite obvious that any enrollee only needs one insurance plan for Medicaid—not both—to satisfy their healthcare options.

Is this duplicative enrollment a new discovery? No. Previously, the HHS inspector general has found that nearly all States have paid managed care insurance companies for enrollees who were enrolled in two different State Medicaid Programs.

In another example, in August, a Louisiana Medicaid Program audit

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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found that \$9.6 million were paid out for deceased enrollees in that Medicaid Program.

In other words, showing how stupid it is to pay for healthcare for people who have died. Now, do you happen to think that Louisiana is an isolated incident? It is not an isolated incident. In the past decade, the HHS inspector general has uncovered similar fraudulent payments paid out for deceased enrollees in at least 17 States.

In addition, State Medicaid Programs have been uncovering fraud but, at the same time, failing to return the correct refund to the Federal Government.

Last year, four States were fined by the HHS inspector general for failing to report and return Federal Medicaid overpayments. Using the resources established in the 2025 tax bill, we will put a stop to this and save taxpayers over \$24 billion over 10 years.

While this action might seem like common sense, you have heard me say so often that Washington, DC, is an island surrounded by reality. But now duplicative enrollment payments for deceased enrollees and failing to return Federal money correctly is a stiff to the taxpayers every time it happens.

With these savings, we can protect Medicaid resources for the reason that Medicaid was set up, to help vulnerable Americans like the disabled, like the elderly, like pregnant women, like children, and many more groups of people you can name.

So common sense will now prevail as a result of the changes that the Congress has made in that 2025 tax bill that Congress passed and the President signed on July 4.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, there was a time when Democrats opposed government shutdowns. And not just opposed, Democrats were critical of holding government funding hostage to political demands.

Our Democratic colleague from Michigan said that funding the government is "Congress' most basic responsibility."

The senior Senator from Massachusetts, a leading Democrat, said:

The least we can do—the bare minimum that we can do—would be to pass a "continuing resolution" to keep the doors open and the lights on.

And the Democrat leader, just last year, described the "chaos and pain and needless heartache" that a shutdown brings to American families.

So what has changed? Why are Democrats, in 2025, suddenly comfortable shutting down the government, subjecting Americans to all that chaos, pain, and heartache that the Democrat leader described? Why did Democrats instigate the longest full government shutdown in history?

Well, they would like you to believe it is about healthcare. It is not. Repub-

licans have been perfectly clear that we are willing to have a discussion about healthcare, just not while government funding is being held hostage—and all the Federal employees that come with that.

So if this were really about healthcare, Democrats would be voting in favor of the clean CR as the quickest way to open the government and start the discussions.

But that is not where we are, and that is because what is really driving Democrats isn't healthcare. It is not a desire for negotiations. It is politics and far-left activists who demanded a showdown with President Trump.

The real reason we are now in the longest full government shutdown in history is because Democrats are afraid of backlash from the far left if they stand down. One Democrat Senator was quoted this week saying:

"People are going to get hammered" if they vote for the House-passed bill to reopen the government and keep it funded through Nov. 21.

"People are going to get hammered" if they vote for the clean continuing resolution. That is from a Democrat Senator—hammered by outside groups, hammered by leftwing political activists.

Or take it from one of the organizers of Saturday's No Kings rally, who said:

I'm telling every elected I talk to:—

That is every elected official that I talked to—

millions will be out cheering you on, or they'll be calling for new leadership.

Democrats are keeping the government shut down because they are scared—scared of a primary from the left, scared of losing fundraising dollars, scared that the far left will punish them if they don't appear to be fighting President Trump hard enough.

Unfortunately, Democrats' political games are having real consequences. Airport tower staffing shortages have caused thousands—thousands—of flight delays nationwide. Medicare patients and people in rural areas are dealing with the elimination of telehealth services. Military families have turned to food banks in "unprecedented" numbers.

And things are about to get worse. The nutrition assistance programs that millions of Americans depend on to feed their families are in jeopardy.

And, tomorrow, Federal workers will miss a full paycheck because of the Democrat shutdown. That is right. Tomorrow, Federal workers will miss a full paycheck, thanks to Senate Democrats.

Republicans want to do something about this. We would love to pass the clean, continuing, nonpartisan resolution, which would pay everyone. It passed the House a long time ago. We have voted on it 12 times here now. They continue, with three exceptions, to block-vote against it. Twelve times now, Democrats have blocked just paying our Federal employees.

It is Federal employees all throughout the Federal workforce, which literally is millions of Americans. But it is people right here. People in this Chamber, people in this building had to stay here the night before last, all night—all night—to listen to some Democrats drone on. One Democrat Senator read the same poem four times.

They were here all night, not getting paid. Three hundred thirty-five, exactly, Federal employees, in this building, had to stay here all night, work through the night and into the next day, so they could make some campaign political speech or point, in the middle of the night, that nobody is listening to, obviously—which is why, I guess, you read the same poem four times—four different times—reading from books, while the people sitting here, doing the work, aren't getting paid.

And so, today, we are going to have a vote on Senator RON JOHNSON's bill that would guarantee pay for Federal employees who are working through the shutdown. The 335 people who had to be here, the night before last, to listen to that—they would finally get paid. It is also people like air traffic controllers, TSA agents, park rangers, Federal law enforcement, ICE, Border Patrol—people putting their lives at risk to keep Americans safe.

So we will see what Democrats do. Do they think people that are working ought to get paid?

Well, to date, Democrats have rejected every opportunity they have been given to put the American people ahead of their far-left base.

As I said, they have rejected a clean CR now 12 times—a CR, continuing resolution—that would fund the government until November 21 to give us time to finish the appropriations process, a clean CR, a CR that has no partisan riders, no policy gimmicks that came over from the House, just clean, fund the government straight up. It is sitting right here at the desk of the U.S. Senate.

Five Democrats could help us pass it today. We could send it to the President; he would sign it into law; the government opens up; and all the people here and across our Federal Government would get paid.

Last week, Democrats blocked the bipartisan Defense appropriations bill that would have paid our troops. It came out of the Senate Appropriations Committee by a vote of 26 to 3, very bipartisan on the floor. It should have been. It usually is. It usually gets 80-plus votes on the floor of the Senate, but they blocked it. It would have paid our troops, the Defense appropriations bill.

So today, we are going to have another opportunity to show whether they stand on the side of hard-working Americans or remain beholden to their far-left base. We heard Democrats this week criticize Senator JOHNSON's bill because it would provide pay only to

workers who continue to work through the shutdown. They say they want everybody to get paid.

I have great news for them. The clean continuing resolution sitting at the desk would pay everybody—everybody. We just need five more Democrats to support it. Five more gets us to 60. It takes a supermajority in the Senate. Democrats are the only thing standing in the way of the outcome that they say they want, which is for everybody to get paid.

The clean, nonpartisan continuing resolution sits right there at the desk. President Trump is ready to sign it. The shutdown could be over in a matter of hours if just five Democrats would agree.

But, unfortunately, the shadow of the Democrats' far-left base continues to stand in the way. You don't have to take it from me. As one source familiar with Democrats' thinking told *The Hill* this week, "We would have enough votes to reopen the government if people were not terrified of getting the guillotine."

"We would have enough votes to reopen the government if Democrats were not terrified of getting the guillotine."

We just need five more Democrats to show some courage. This was a statement made yesterday by a Democrat House Member. Sometimes people around here say the quiet part out loud—sometimes it is just subconsciously—and this is what she said. She is a Member of the Democratic leadership in the House of Representatives:

Of course there will be families that are going to suffer . . . but it is one of the few leverage times we have.

Boy, just take that in. Take that in: Of course there will be families that are going to suffer.

But we don't want to give up our leverage. Leverage for what?

Leverage for what? We need five Democrats to show a little courage. Reopen the government, and let's get to work.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, we are staring into the abyss of the healthcare crisis here in America. And what is Donald Trump doing as we stare into the abyss of the healthcare crisis? He is flying off, yet again, to another corner of the world while people's premiums are set to skyrocket here at home. He shut down the government, Trump has, for 23 days, the second longest shutdown ever by refusing to negotiate with Democrats. He is bulldozing the East Wing of the White House to make way for his own ballroom. His own Justice Department is getting ready to cut him a personal check—a personal check—to Donald Trump for \$230 million out of taxpayer money when people are suffering in terms of their healthcare premiums. And then he was

caught trying to push a nominee with proud Nazi and racist views.

And, again, we are in the middle of a healthcare crisis that will decimate tens of millions of Americans. But Donald Trump doesn't seem to want to touch this topic, touch the topic with a 10-foot pole, and has decided to fly off to another country, yet again, without negotiating with Democrats.

Leader JEFFRIES and I asked him to sit down and talk with us. We said we need to talk. He refused. Donald Trump would literally rather fly to another country than meet with Democrats to negotiate on healthcare because he knows the American people are on one side of the issue and his base—his rightwing MAGA base—is on the other. He is afraid to touch the issue so he does his version of JOHNSON'S shutting down the House. He flies away.

It is hard to fathom someone more out of touch and oblivious to our Nation's struggles than the current President.

Let's take the ballroom, for instance. This is the image Donald Trump doesn't want America to see. This is the picture Donald Trump told his people to hide from the American people. Do you know what the picture represents? It is not just the desecration of the White House. It shows that Donald Trump is not focused on fixing healthcare but rather on vanity projects like this one that don't do anything to benefit the American people. They only benefit Trump and his ego.

Donald Trump is telling the American people: No Medicaid for you; the ballroom for me. Americans are appalled at these images. A YouGov poll this week found 50 percent of the Americans oppose this ballroom project, only 33 percent in support.

To Americans, the image of Donald Trump adding a wrecking ball to the White House is a symbol for what he is doing to the whole country. Yes, this is the image Americans are seeing, and they don't like it. They don't like it.

I ask my Republican colleagues: Where are you? Frankly, the East Wing teardown is not the only thing Donald Trump is focused on instead of fixing healthcare. He is also using the Presidency to enrich himself. This week, we learned that Trump is pushing his own DOJ to write him a \$230 million check because his feelings got hurt after being investigated for criminal wrongdoing. While Americans are agonizing over their healthcare, Donald Trump is using the Presidency to reach into the taxpayers' till and put money in his own pocket. Imagine the gall of this President who tells the American people: No healthcare for you, but you pay me an additional \$230 million.

Again, I ask my Republican colleagues: Where are you? And again, I don't expect Republicans to oppose Donald Trump very often, but they should be outraged—outraged—by the way he is pillaging the DOJ to enrich himself.

And, finally, Americans are getting awfully fed up with the Trump administration's incompetence, corruption, and chaos. The data shows it. A few days ago, a Gallup poll showed movement you rarely see among the electorate in a short amount of time. Democrats' party ID is now 7 points higher since the start of the year—7 points higher. It was even with Republicans—"Are you a Democrat or Republican?"—when Trump took office. It is now plus-up 7, Democrats. You rarely see that kind of movement for that kind of number so quickly. It should be an immediate red-light warning to my Republican colleagues.

To quote the pollster Harry Enten, who works for CNN:

I was shocked to see how [Democrats] have gained on Party ID per Gallup. [Democrats] lead by 7 pts vs. a tie at the start of the year. Looks a lot more like the 2018 cycle than 2022.

Indeed, Democrats have gained House seats in all midterms since 1990 when party id looks like what Gallup has.

That is Harry Enten, not me. You don't need to be a political genius to understand why these numbers are moving. People see that Donald Trump is making their lives worse on costs and healthcare and on their financial security.

We spend so much time here in Washington focused on the day-to-day back-and-forth. But people back home don't care about the back-and-forth here in Washington. They care about how much they are paying for groceries. They care about their rising electricity bills. They care about the dramatic increase so many will pay in their healthcare premiums very soon.

What has Donald Trump done while all this is happening, while people are just sitting down at the dinner table on Friday nights and wondering, How the heck am I going to pay the bills? He has enacted the biggest healthcare cuts in American history. He is closing rural hospitals. Americans can see with their own eyes what Trump is doing.

So I say to my Republican colleagues: Beware, this Gallup poll is a warning that Americans are fed up with the high costs that go up each week and the Trump administration's incompetence, corruption, and chaos. It is only going to get worse the more Donald Trump doubles down on this shutdown and on his failed policies.

SHUTDOWN FAIRNESS ACT

Mr. President, on the Johnson bill—that is RON JOHNSON, Senator JOHNSON—right now, on day 23 of the longest total government shutdown in American history, millions of American families are wondering how they will make rent, pay their bills, or put food on the table. What is the Republican response? To hand Donald Trump and his right-hand man Russ Vought, the originator of the evil, awful Project 2025—to hand Russell Vought more power to decide who gets paid and who gets punished.

Let me make one point very clear: The shutdown is on Donald Trump's

back, and the American people know it. They know that Republicans have the Presidency, the House, and the Senate and the shutdown is on them.

So Senator RON JOHNSON and Republicans are feeling the heat and have come up with this proposal. JOHNSON and Republicans know because they are feeling the heat that the American people know exactly who is in charge: Donald Trump and Republicans. When workers are laid off, when they are furloughed, they miss a paycheck, America knows who is to blame. It is on Donald Trump's back.

That is why Donald Trump and his allies are pushing this bill. The bill would not reopen the government, which is the only permanent solution to this crisis. Democrats want to reopen the government as quickly as we can. We want to sit down with THUNE, with JOHNSON, with Trump and negotiate a way to address this horrible healthcare crisis. We also want to make sure that every last Federal worker who has suffered during the Trump shutdown is taken care of.

So that is why Democrats are offering two solutions that actually include all of our Federal employees, not just the ones the President picks and chooses:

Oh, I will lay you off.
I will furlough you.
I won't do you.
I like you.
I don't like you.

That is not the way you govern, but that is how Trump seems to govern.

Our bill is an antidote to that awful way that Trump uses when he picks and chooses winners and losers whom he likes and hates.

The bill—the Republican bill—is a ruse. It is nothing more than another tool for Trump to hurt Federal workers and American families and to keep this shutdown going for as long as he wants.

We will not give Donald Trump a license to play politics with people's livelihoods. That is why we oppose this Johnson bill, because it doesn't end the pain of the shutdown; it extends it.

The only way—the only way—to pay every Federal worker is for Republicans to get serious and sit down with Democrats to avert their healthcare crisis and reopen the government.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican whip.

WAIVING QUORUM CALLS

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to waive the mandatory quorum calls with respect to cloture on the motion to proceed to Calendar No. 191, S. 3012, and the Taibleson nomination.

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

H.R. 5371

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, today is day 23 of the Schumer shutdown of the government, and we just heard the minority leader—right here on the floor—continue to practice the politics of pain, and it is pain felt by the American people.

Remember, Senator SCHUMER is the one who said to the press:

Every day gets better for us.

I don't know who "us" is. It is not the American people, not the people who come to work all across the country and the Wyoming National Guard, the people all around America, the people in the Presiding Officer's State and mine, the people who aren't going to get paid.

Senator SCHUMER said: Can't we do anything about it?

Yes. You could vote to open the government.

Yesterday, they decided, once again, to vote to keep the government shut.

Tomorrow, hundreds of thousands of Federal workers are going to miss their paychecks because CHUCK SCHUMER and the Democrats will not vote to open the government. They won't do it. They haven't done it for 23 days. Democrats have now set the record for the longest full-time government shutdown in American history.

In previous shutdowns, some of the Agencies stayed open—not now. This is the longest shutdown in the history of the entire U.S. Government because, this time, no one is getting paid, not the Capitol Police officers who had to come in during the so-called filibuster by the Senator from Oregon, Senator MERKLEY; none of the people at the desk; none of the people who were working around the Capitol; none of the Democrats' staff or the Republicans' staff who were here as Senator MERKLEY droned on and on and on through the night, reading the same poem four times, to no avail. It was rubbish—all of it.

The Democrats have shut down this government, and they are punishing the American people as a result. They are more concerned about playing politics than they are about protecting working families. It is a big game that they are playing as American families suffer. And they don't seem to care that families are suffering. They are actually bragging about the fact that families are suffering.

This is the Democrat whip in the House of Representatives. What did she say this week? It wasn't just some slip of the tongue. She was in an interview. There is a video of her on television—I saw it early this morning—saying, of course, there are going to be families who are going to suffer. Of course, she says, there is going to be suffering—almost gleefully—because it is one of the few leverage times we have.

That is the Democrat whip of the House of Representatives. The Presiding Officer may have served with her when he served in the House before coming to the Senate. He knows this individual.

This is the politics of pain, practiced by the Democrats, and, apparently, they don't believe that withholding paychecks or stamps or funding to feed women and infants and children is a problem. They think it is leverage. They think it is a big game. Leverage

for what—to give taxpayer-funded healthcare to illegal immigrants? That is one of the demands that we got from CHUCK SCHUMER in the letter of demand to open the government.

Lay it all out there. What do they want? Lots of things, including healthcare—free, paid for by taxpayers—for illegal immigrants. They want \$1.5 trillion in permanent new spending added to the debt because whom are they trying to impress? The radical wing of the Democrat Party, their radical leftwing.

That is what the Democrats are trying to do. That is what CHUCK SCHUMER is trying to do. He doesn't care. He is standing here, talking. He is only talking to one group. It is the radical wing of the party—the people in New York who have nominated Mamdani to be the mayor of that city. The Democrats are willing to cause the American people to suffer because they want to continue to pass liberal policies that Americans don't want and never voted for but that are being demanded by that radical wing of the Democrat Party.

So what have we done as Republicans?

We have proposed a clean, bipartisan continuing resolution to reopen the government and that pays the workers who have been working for weeks without pay so they don't miss their paychecks.

Democrats have rejected it and have continued to reject it not once, not twice—12 times. It is a cycle of obstruction.

Democrats have voted for clean continuing resolutions, as I have heard the Presiding Officer say, a number of times. I have heard him say it on television. The Democrats voted for it 13 different times when Joe Biden was President. Now they oppose it. Why? Because President Trump is in the White House, and they don't even like the White House. They just had a picture of some of the improvements that the President is doing at the White House. They don't like that either. They don't like the fact that he is in the White House. They don't like the fact that he is improving the White House. They don't like the fact that he is going to continue to be in the White House.

Speaking of the President, just days ago, he told the Democrats that he was happy to meet. I agree, and we were there when he said it. He said he was happy to meet once they reopened the government, but since the Democrats continue to refuse to reopen the government, the Senate is going to try to do the next best thing. Today, this body is going to move to begin debate on Senator Johnson's Shutdown Fairness Act. So let's talk about it.

There is not a single good argument that I have heard against passing it immediately because this bill ensures that the men and women who keep our Nation safe receive their pay during this Schumer, Democrat-caused shutdown as they play politics. We have got

to pay the people who are keeping our Nation safe. It pays our troops who are protecting our Nation at home and abroad. It pays the Coast Guard as they continue to patrol our waters. It pays the Border Patrol. They defend our southern border. It pays members of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement as they round up and deport illegal immigrant criminals. It pays the air traffic controllers who guide flights safely to their destinations. It pays the TSA agents who screen the passengers at every airport in America. It pays the Capitol Police officers who have worked for weeks here without pay.

It applies back to the very first day of the Schumer shutdown, and that means employees will get their full pay. It applies to this shutdown, and it applies to future shutdowns. I think that is very important as we cannot allow the Democrats to continue to painfully treat the people and use the American people as what the Democrat whip calls, in the House, "leverage," hurting the American people for leverage. No. So it is not just for this shutdown but for future shutdowns to provide stability and predictability to those who keep us safe.

Would I prefer a clean continuing resolution that fully reopens the government today? Immediately? Absolutely, but Democrats have blocked a clean, bipartisan continuing resolution every single time we have offered them.

It has been reported that Democrats are going to filibuster this bill, today, too. So, when Democrats stand up here today and criticize the bill, remember this: The Democrats have a choice to pay the essential workers who are working right now and are working here without a paycheck or to send them into the weekend with empty bank accounts and bills they cannot pay. If Democrats vote no, it won't be about fairness. It is all going to be about politics. It is a dangerous game of politics they are playing.

Remember what the House Democrat whip told the press. She said: Of course families are going to suffer.

This is a Democrat.

Of course, she says, families are going to suffer, and this is one of the few times—the few leverage times—we have.

That is not about helping the American people. It is about taking advantage and using the American people maliciously, terribly, disgustingly, disgracefully. If the Democrats vote no, it is all going to be about leverage rather than paying the American people.

It is time to reopen the government. It truly is.

BORDER WALL FOOTBALL GAME

Mr. President, on a separate matter, on Saturday, the annual Border Wall football game comes to Laramie, WY.

For the 117th time, the Wyoming Cowboys will play Colorado State University. The winner of the game gets something called the Bronze Boot. This year, the Pokes are going to play in special Cowboy and Coal jerseys, and

uniformed coal miners from all around Wyoming will lead the Cowboys onto the field. This is a fantastic way to celebrate Wyoming's proud history and heritage.

NATIONAL COAL WEEK

Mr. President, in Wyoming, we have world-class coal. Wyoming's Powder River Basin provides nearly half of all the coal produced in America. It is clean coal. It is low-sulfur coal. We have enough coal to power America for at least the next 100 years.

Here in the Senate, Republicans are also celebrating this vital industry.

Senate Republicans introduced a resolution earlier this week to designate this week as National Coal Week.

I want to thank and congratulate Senator CYNTHIA LUMMIS for leading this important effort.

No one knows better than our home State of Wyoming how important coal is to keeping the lights on. Coal is the most affordable, available, reliable source of energy on the planet. National security, of course, starts with energy security. Coal means freedom. That is why coal is such an important part of the Republicans' agenda to unleash American energy. We are cutting redtape. We are opening up 13 million acres of Federal land for mining. Coal production is up more than 6 percent since last year.

The coal renaissance that we are seeing today is part of the broader American energy revival. It was even reported this week that the price of gasoline has fallen to below \$3 for the first time in 4 years. You didn't see this when Joe Biden was in the White House, and they were fighting American energy and making us desperate for energy. Oh, no. We are now heading into an energy-dominant time for America.

Across the country, families are feeling the financial relief that comes from returning to commonsense energy policies. Republicans know you can protect the environment without punishing the economy. Democrats never understood that. And, in Wyoming, we know better than anyone else. America is an energy superpower. Wyoming is America's energy breadbasket. We have the resources; we have the workers; and now we are acting like it.

So, as we mark National Coal Week, I want to thank the great men and women of our coal industry in Wyoming and across the Nation for helping make America energy dominant once again.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SHEEHY). The Democratic whip.

H.R. 5371

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I am sure that those who are following the opening remarks of the Senate today can sense the frustration, bordering on anger, with the current situation, the current status quo. It is shared on both sides of the aisle.

I have had the good fortune of serving in the House of Representatives

and the Senate, representing parts of Illinois and then the entire State, for a big part of my life. I have watched these institutions, the House and the Senate, face frustrating, disappointing, challenging situations. I have found that the rule of thumb is, basically, if reasonable people will sit down to the table and put the items on the table and say, "Let's see if we can find common ground," it usually works. It could work here too. We could reopen this government by the end of the day. I believe it. It is going to be even more difficult because the House of Representatives is not in session. I believe it has now been 3 weeks—maybe even 4 weeks—that they have been out of session. They need to be here, doing their job, helping to work to find a solution to this frustrating situation.

What exactly is behind the shutdown of this Federal Government?

Let me tell you. It is a serious issue that affects virtually every American.

Do you have health insurance?

I do. Most of us do.

Is it expensive? Yes.

Do you still need it? God, yes.

Without it, it would be even worse. With one automobile accident, one broken bone, one serious diagnosis, you could wipe out the savings of most American families. That is the reality. So health insurance is critical. People need it.

Do you know what is going to happen soon? I am sorry to say we are going to see a dramatic increase in health insurance premiums.

There was a debate here several months ago on what the President called his big, beautiful budget. The big, beautiful budget did many things, but in addition to some spending decisions, it made the decision that we were going to give a tax break to the wealthiest people in America, people like Elon Musk. His tax break, if I remember correctly—I don't have it written down here—was \$230,000 a year. I would say that is a lot of money for most Americans. Mr. Musk, though, is so rich—a multibillionaire—he probably wouldn't even notice it.

But the \$230,000 tax break for the wealthiest Americans meant that other programs needed to be cut. One of the programs that President Trump and the Republicans in Congress decided to cut—one was Medicaid.

Medicaid is a pretty universal program that affects millions of Americans and the services that they receive from clinics, from hospitals, even living in nursing homes. Medicaid is an important part.

The Republicans, in order to provide the money for tax cuts for people like Elon Musk, needed to cut \$1 trillion out of Medicaid over the next 10 years.

What does it mean in my State? Well, we worry. Will rural hospitals or inner-city hospitals survive if Medicaid is cut? Will the nursing home people be able to stay in the nursing homes? Those are important and critical questions.

The second part of the decision by the Republicans in the big, beautiful budget to provide a tax break for the wealthy was basically to eliminate the tax subsidy that is available for middle-income families under the Affordable Care Act.

What does that mean? Well, for some people, they are going to see the results in the mail in just a matter of days. The target date in Illinois, which I represent, is October 27. Watch for the mail then because on October 27, you will receive a notice about what is going to happen to your health insurance premiums January 1. They are going to go up an average of 114 percent. So take a look at what you are now paying for health insurance and anticipate that it is going to go up. How much? I am not sure, but it could easily double.

For a lot of families who are struggling to survive, that is going to become a difficult challenge. How are we going to pay this premium? These are the same families who come back from the grocery store every Saturday and Sunday and say: I can't believe what has happened to the price of beef. I can't believe what has happened to the price of produce.

Across the board, people see the cost of living going up. And now an essential service—health insurance premiums—we are going to see this dramatic increase.

It is this increase that is going to affect millions of Americans—over 20 million Americans—that is at the heart of this decision about whether this government is going to reopen.

We have said to the Republicans that we believe the American families need a helping hand and need it now—not something we talk about later but now—so that we can do something to stop these premiums from going up dramatically.

You know what is going to happen. When the premiums go up, some families will say: No problem. Making plenty of money. Hate it, but we can pay it.

Other families are going to say: How in the world are we going to do this? We are going to have to get a health insurance policy which has more copays and deductibles that are paid by us for virtually everything. So we are going to pay through the course of next year for this increase in premiums anyway.

Some will walk away and say: I just can't afford it. Can't make ends meet. Can't pay utility bills. Electric bills are going up and other things that we face, and this health insurance premium too. We are just going to have to drop the insurance and hope for the best.

I am sorry for those people because it not only means that they are facing risks in life without the protection of health insurance—we know statistically that when you don't have health insurance or any basic health insurance, that you forgo treatment and examinations. That is not good, it is not healthy, and it doesn't lead to a good result.

Is that an important issue for your family? I bet it is. It is an important issue for every single family.

That is what is at the heart of this government shutdown—the need for Republicans and Democrats to sit at the table and say: How can we spare American families from this premium increase that they are going to face inevitably—millions are going to face—with bad consequences?

Can we do it? Of course, we can. People of good will can reach a conclusion that they are going to find a way to compromise and see this issue come to an end. We need to do it now—not next week, not the week following, but now. There is too much hardship going on with this government shutdown, and it should not continue.

So my appeal is to the President: Delay your trip overseas.

My appeal to the Republicans in the House: Come back home—I shouldn't say "home"—come back to Washington. Leave your home, come back to Washington, and go to work with us on a bipartisan basis.

Is that what America wants? You bet it is. To address this issue of health insurance premiums—do it on a bipartisan basis, and end this government shutdown. We can do it today.

There is a lot of furniture in this Capitol—I have seen it over the years—and there are a lot of tables. There are many tables big enough for the leaders in Congress and the President to sit down and reach an agreement. That sitdown ought to happen sooner rather than later.

ILLINOIS

Mr. President, on another issue unrelated, last Friday, the Trump administration asked the Supreme Court to green-light the deployment of National Guard troops in my home State of Illinois after the lower courts had temporarily blocked the deployment. In her decision, District Court Judge April Perry said the Trump administration has produced "no credible evidence that there is a danger of rebellion" in Illinois. Rather, Judge Perry found that "the unnecessary deployment of military troops, untrained for local policing, will escalate tensions and undermine the ordinary law enforcement activities of state and local entities."

Three judges on the Seventh Circuit Appeals Court, including one appointed by President Bush and another appointed by President Trump, considered that decision by the lower court and agreed with Judge Perry. They found that "the facts do not justify the President's actions in Illinois. . . . Political opposition is not rebellion." That panel is right.

Last Saturday, I was part of the No Kings demonstration. We estimate there were 100,000 people in Grant Park at the Petrillo band shell. It was non-violent. It was orderly. Oh, they were loud once in a while, but no one was involved in any sort of rebellion. They were exercising their constitutional right to express their opinion about the policies of this government.

I have been honored to represent the great State of Illinois for over 40 years in the Senate and the House. And, yes, like every State, Illinois has its challenges, such as addressing crime. But for the last two decades, the murder rate in Illinois has been lower than murder rates in Republican-led States like Missouri, Louisiana, and Alabama. Violent crime is down dramatically in the city of Chicago.

We should work together to build on this success and reduce the crime rate even more. But the President's actions in sending in National Guard troops even from the State of Texas to Illinois is not about public safety; it is about politics. His unjustified and unlawful attempts to deploy troops to Chicago and other American cities are a threat to our basic democratic institutions.

The Supreme Court should reject the President's petition to use these troops in America. There is no emergency that justifies bypassing the regular appeals process and resolving this issue on the Court's shadow docket without the full public scrutiny this issue deserves.

Just last week, I received a heart-breaking message from one of my constituents, PO2 Jessica Wendlandt—a hard-working provider at Lake County Health Department in Waukegan, IL. In her letter, Officer Wendlandt mentioned that some of her patients have stopped showing up for their appointments because ICE officers are camping out in front of the facility.

Picture it, if you will: People, families, taking their children in for a doctor's appointment—afraid to go, leave their car, and walk the short distance to the clinic because ICE officials, in their combat uniforms and masks, in unmarked vehicles, were lurking outside the clinic.

She said in what she wrote to me:

My patients have not been able to come to their medical appointments out of fear of being taken.

These raids are impacting the ability of medical providers to provide basic family treatment.

Jessica also mentioned that she was treating a mother at the health center when the mother "received several phone calls and messages that ICE [agents] had raided the apartment buildings right behind the facility." The patient was so distraught and in tears that treatment could not be completed that day because she needed to rush home to her other children.

Imagine for a moment the fear that a mother must have felt receiving a call from her kids, scared and screaming that masked men are trying to break into their home. Is this America? Can you imagine the confusion and fear those children must have felt seeing those men at their door, wondering who they were and if they were there to help them or hurt them.

It is not just at health centers in Illinois; ICE is camping out in front of city halls, schools, churches, regularly

outside of Home Depot, where they detained a father who was the sole provider for his two children, including a daughter with stage IV cancer.

Do you remember what led us into this situation? You heard it over and over at President Trump's rallies. Rapists, terrorists, murderers, the criminally insane, sexual predators were coming across our border.

Let me tell you, I will sign up with the President. We don't want those people coming into this country. And if they commit a crime while they are here, they should be gone, period.

Now let's talk about the others, the 11 million who have been in America working jobs, raising families, going to church, paying their taxes. They are the ones they are targeting. Seventy percent of the people who have been stopped by ICE in the State of Illinois—70 percent of them have no criminal record whatsoever. They are not rapists and murderers and terrorists. They are people who overstayed a visa. And they may be American citizens. The ICE officers obviously don't distinguish any difference there.

When will my colleagues on the other side of the aisle decide that the cruelty and fear tactics of this administration must stop? This is America. When will they choose to put an end to the racial profiling which is going on and the detention of even American citizens, including veterans of children?

This is all supposed to be about violent crime? It is not. Enough. If this was actually about reducing crime, President Trump would not be slashing programs that actually help local law enforcement. This cruelty is all for show.

While Americans continue to pay inflated prices at the grocery store and face the prospect of skyrocketing healthcare premiums, this is what the President is focused on: tearing families apart and separating kids from their parents.

Our country is better than this. It is better than this cruelty and lawlessness. Now is the time for us to stand up for the rule of law and our Constitution.

President Trump's claims of "invasions," "rebellions," or "emergencies" to justify calling the military into American cities are shameless attempts to bypass our constitutional checks and balances.

It was the Republican Governor of Oklahoma who said last week that if Governor Pritzker of Illinois tried to send his National Guard troops to Oklahoma, the people of Oklahoma and that Governor, a Republican Governor, would resist it. But that is exactly what is happening in my home State of Illinois. This President, without invitation, is sending National Guard troops in from Texas.

The Supreme Court should stand up to this administration's attempt to cut both Congress and the courts out of decisions squarely given to them by the Constitution.

Political opposition, peaceful protests, and nonviolent civil disobedience are not rebellion; they are the bedrock of our democracy.

Local law enforcement officials have proven they are capable, in Illinois and most places, of handling any unlawful or unruly behavior.

Illinois State Attorney General Kwame Raoul explained to the court:

No protest activity in Illinois has rendered the president unable to execute federal law.

If the Supreme Court enables President Trump to deploy troops to American cities over the objection of State officials before the courts rule on the legality of the actions, I fear it is going to cause lasting harm to America.

I ask my Republican colleagues: Are you really prepared in your home State for the next President after President Trump to send in troops to your State without permission, without the consent of your government? Are you ready for masked soldiers to grab your constituents from their homes?

My constituents elected me to represent them in this fight. I implore you to do right by your constituents and push back against the President's illegal power grab before your State is the next victim.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. President, I would love to introduce the Senate to a couple that I know: husband, wife. Both work for the Federal Government—young couple, expecting their first child. This week, they will miss a paycheck—both of them.

You tell me how many people, in their early days of marriage, both spouses could miss a paycheck while they are preparing for their first child. But that is the reality that is being faced by that couple and, I am sure, a lot of other folks that stepped up to serve their Nation, serving in a Federal Agency, but because of a government shutdown, they are not going to get paid.

I would love to introduce this body to a single mom that just, a couple of weeks ago, got the invitation to go to the FAA Academy and to become an air traffic controller—very difficult to get into that school—but has been accepted, is in the process, has quit her job, has canceled her lease and, as a single mom, is taking the risk to be able to step out in a new, great career. But right in the process of stepping out to do that new, great career, there is a government shutdown, and now she has no idea what is about to happen. She has quit her job already. She has canceled her lease already. She was preparing to move to get to the academy. Now what does she do?

For all the folks out there that say this government shutdown is no big deal—or, as my Democratic colleagues in the House have said, some families are going to have to suffer to give us leverage—here are the families that

are actually suffering to give my Democratic colleagues leverage so they can discuss healthcare.

But let me not just talk about the healthcare they want to discuss. Their focus seems to be on a COVID-era subsidy that they created for the Affordable Care Act to try to make it more affordable—because here is the problem in my State. In my State—in Oklahoma—the Affordable Care Act, the cost for it has increased 200 percent in 6 years, while commercial insurance has increased 29 percent in those same 6 years. So the "Affordable" Care Act is only affordable if there is just one subsidy on top of another, on top of another, on top of another, because the structure of the Affordable Care Act is not affordable. It is only affordable if there is more and more and more tax dollars sent to insurance companies to try to cover more and more and more.

My Democratic colleagues say: We are going to keep the government closed until we even get more money on that, and we don't want to discuss anything.

Well, here is the problem. We have a 200-percent increase for one area, a 29-percent increase in the other, and they say just keep dumping more money into it. We actually know, and my Democratic colleagues have told me privately: We know there is a lot of fraud, that there is money being sent to insurance companies that they are then covering people that actually don't even know they have coverage, just because it is cheap for the insurance company.

Everybody knows that exists in it, but they don't want to discuss that; they just want to add more money into it.

We have people making a quarter million dollars a year that are getting subsidies with these additional subsidies they created several years ago. And we have said: "What in the world" that people making a quarter million dollars a year are getting these subsidies.

We also know, the way that my Democratic colleagues created these subsidies, that it went around the Hyde Amendment, which has been very clear: Federal tax dollars do not go to pay for abortions. But they created this very creative system of tax credits so that they could send money to insurance companies to pay for elective abortions. They are asking every Republican now to jump on board and to be able to vote for that.

Listen, there are big issues with this. My Democratic colleagues say: Well, just fund more healthcare; just take care of it. We know there is fraud. We know there are people making half a million. We know there is abortion funding going. We know all these aspects.

So, no, we are not just going to dump more money into it.

We have said something pretty straightforward: Let's keep the government open, at its current status quo,

and let's keep debating all these issues. But why should next week's SNAP recipients no longer get SNAP benefits because there is a fight over all these healthcare issues on this that we have very strong actual policy issues with? Why are they cutting off SNAP benefits? Why are they telling this young couple with an infant child on the way: No, neither of you are going to get paid. Why is that happening?

So here is what we have done. I have proposed a bill that I put out last session. It was very straightforward. This bill just says we will never have another government shutdown—never. Every time we get to another moment like this, automatic funding kicks in. But here is the kicker: Members of Congress are in session 7 days a week, and we can't do anything but appropriations. We have to do appropriations, and we have to be here 7 days a week, House and Senate, until we actually get this solved.

Now, that seems like a pretty reasonable thing.

My Democratic colleagues have been bemoaning the House is not in session. If you would have voted for my bill last session, we would all be here right now negotiating this out. I had 57 votes on that last session—57. We were three votes short of never ever having a government shutdown again—never.

So I am going to bring it again and to say: Let's end the potential of government shutdowns ever, and let's actually stay here and debate the issues and to be able to work things out like grownups.

In the meantime, until we can get that done and until we can get my Democratic colleagues to agree, my colleague RON JOHNSON has brought forward a very simple proposal: Let's pay the people who are working, like this young couple that I mentioned. They are still working, both of them. Let's pay them while they are working, while we continue to be able to negotiate this out.

If you won't, at least, open the government—as we have the last 13 times when we got to this moment—and just have a continuing resolution, at least, pay the people who are working. This is a baby step and an offer to our Democratic colleagues to say: Let's at least do the minimum on this to not punish those folks.

There are folks, today, that are on the road, working for the Federal Government, that are in critical positions, that they are not being paid and they are actually putting their expenses on their credit card, not knowing if they are going to get the chance to pay that off. It is not right.

So let's take the steps. My recommendation is, long-term, let's never have a shutdown ever again. Let's fix the process. We were three votes short last session. Let's actually fix that permanently. Let's get us back open again. But at a minimum, let's at least, while we are arguing, pay Federal workers that are still at the task.

That should be the easiest threshold to be able to step over.

Me and my colleagues are on the floor today because we want to get a chance to be able to offer this to our Democratic colleagues and say: We are going to reach an olive branch out to you; let's get started on some things.

I yield the floor to my colleagues.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida.

Mrs. MOODY. Mr. President, we are in day 23 of this shutdown—a shutdown that is sowing more uncertainty across our country by the day. It is one that is leaving our Nation vulnerable to adversaries abroad and seeing our servicemembers left wondering if their next paycheck will go through, as they seek not only to protect us but to support their families—a shutdown that my colleagues and I on the Republican side of the aisle voted against over a dozen times.

We are trying to end the shutdown. Yet we are blocked at every point. Along with a few—very few—courageous Democrats, we voted for a bipartisan continuing resolution to fund the government. The opposing Democrats do so while knowing they are voting against paying our troops for our security, against paying law enforcement for safety, and against paying so many other people that are necessary for critical functions. They vote no.

Republicans have voted to eliminate future shutdowns, to pay our servicemembers and other essential Federal workers, and for a full year of funding for our military. And yet, each time, these same colleagues blocked the efforts. They have now resorted to outright obstruction.

I am the newest U.S. Senator from Florida, one of the newest U.S. Senators for our country. I have been here 9 months, and I am disgusted that we have colleagues coming in here, voting against continuing funding, reciting poetry. They are putting poetry over paying our troops.

Since my arrival in Washington, I have watched every single effort by the Democrats to oppose the will of the American people, to undo the outcome of the election, attempting to paralyze not only the administration but our policy goals to get this country back on the right track.

Now, these tactics have evolved into obstructing government itself, to hold the pay of Federal law enforcement and our military hostage—let alone the thousands of other Federal employees who continue to show up and fulfill their duties without pay. Shockingly, even Senators with States that have large Federal workforces have set aside the interests of those families, beholden to some radical agenda.

I implore my colleagues on the other side of the aisle to remember that the effects of this shutdown go well past the boundaries of DC. In my home state of Florida, we are seeing crisis centers which serve veterans, law enforcement officers, first responders,

some of our most vulnerable that encounter hardships, all because colleagues have refused to open the government. In fact, I have committed to donating my salary every day the government is shut down to a crisis center in Florida because they are suffering as this continues to go on.

The choice is simple for my colleagues at this point: Either you stand for this country, for our servicemembers, and for actually governing this Nation, or you stand against that.

And, finally, I want to take a moment to thank every single Federal employee continuing to work without pay: our servicemembers, Federal law enforcement officers, Coast Guard members, air traffic controllers, so many others—including our own staff, including the staff on the Senate floor that show up and stay up all night as the Democrats recite poetry. Thank you for showing up without pay. Thank you for your patriotism, your work ethic, your embrace of duty and commitment to this Nation.

Throughout history, it is the selfless work of patriots that helped build and sustain this incredible country of ours, and I look forward to the day when our colleagues on the other side of the aisle cease with their partisan games and that they put governing for the people back as their No. 1 priority, that they remember it is an incredible responsibility they undertook when they took the oath to become a Senator. I hope they remember that they were trusted to do this in good faith, on behalf of the people, and I hope that they join us in reopening the government and they join us in our bipartisan, clean continuing resolution to reopen the government. That is the only way forward, and it is the sole path available to continue our work on behalf of the American people.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas.

Mr. MARSHALL. Mr. President, good morning. Good morning to all my colleagues here today.

Now, as all the Senators know, as all America knows, my friends across the aisle have kidnapped the Federal Government. In fact, they have now voted a dozen times not to reopen the government. And even surprising to most of us, twice they voted against funding the military during these challenging times. I think it is obvious to all America that this is a political shutdown; that this is show biz to them; that this is an opportunity for their left, lazy media to shout and scream at President Trump and to kowtow to their far-left, Marxist base.

Now, when you kidnap somebody or an entity, you have to have a ransom. Now, the opening ransom from the Democrats was an additional \$1.5 trillion added to our national debt, borrowed from my grandchildren—\$1.5 trillion. It was just this week that the Federal Government passed a \$38 trillion level for our national debt. We are

spending a trillion dollars a year on interest alone. So that was the opening ransom.

And now they seem to be locked in on throwing more money at a very broken ACA, the 24 million people on the ACA.

But it is interesting to me how, when they want to talk about healthcare, they hide behind rural hospitals, that they think, "Oh, we are going to help those," when 97 percent of rural America voted for President Trump. And under President Trump's leadership, in our Big Beautiful Bill we have \$50 billion of a health transformation fund for rural America. But the first thing the Democrats want to do is to take that away.

It has been maybe one of the most hypocritical statements I have ever heard. They want to help rural America, help rural hospitals, but they want to take away this \$50 billion transformation fund.

Instead, they want to put all their eggs in one basket on Medicaid. Look, a hospital loses money every time they see a Medicaid patient. Every time a Medicaid patient walks into the emergency room, that hospital is losing money on that patient as well. Despite that, the Republicans, in our Big Beautiful Bill, increased spending on Medicaid to the tune of \$200 billion a year.

We need to work on getting people off of Medicaid. Let's get them back to work and help them get good health insurance as well.

Now, their latest idea is that they want to throw more money at the ACA. They want to throw more money for the 24 million people on the ACA. Look, Democrats own healthcare, right? The ACA has been the law of the land for 15 years. If any hospital fails today, tomorrow, next week, next year, the year after, if anybody's health premiums are going up—and they are—it is on the backs of Democrats.

The first thing you need to realize is that when you are in a hole, stop digging. When do they think we can stop throwing good money after bad money? Look, I want to fix healthcare. I want to drive down the cost of healthcare.

Now, as my colleague from Oklahoma pointed out, the premiums for the ACA are up 200 percent, is what he mentioned—I think that is a pretty good number—over the last 6 years. But beyond that, the average deductible for the ACA now is \$5,000. Can you imagine you are a family of four—an average salary back in Kansas is \$60,000 a year. And the Democrats think throwing more money at the ACA, which gives you a \$5,000 deductible, is going to solve the problem. Well, of course, it is not.

So we need to address the affordability of the ACA, and we need to address the premiums. Then, beyond that, we need to address the fraud.

Look, this program has grown from a \$50 billion-a-year projection by the famous Congressional Budget Office—

they said it would be \$50 billion. We are spending \$150 billion a year now on the ACA, and we think there is \$25 to \$50 billion of fraud in that.

I think that if you polled Americans and said "Look, there is a Federal program which is paying subsidies for people's premiums, but there is \$50 billion of fraud in that," I think Americans would say "Hey, we sent you to Congress, to the Senate, to fix the darn problem." And we know how to do that. This is a simple fix.

Not one time have you heard a Democrat say: We want to fix what is broken in the ACA. No. All they want to do is throw more money at it. It would be so easy to fix the fraud, and we know how to do it.

How do we address the cost of healthcare? Well, it starts with adding pricetags, right? Can you imagine walking into a restaurant and trying to decide if you want the two all-beef patties, special sauce, lettuce, cheese, onions on a sesame seed bun versus the two quarter-pounders and didn't know the price difference? Of course not. But that is what we are asking Americans to do when they have a procedure done. They have no idea what it is going to cost; they have no idea what outcomes are.

Americans need to realize that you could have a surgery done in one facility for—let's say it is a hip replacement. Maybe one hospital gets \$10,000, but another one, they are reimbursing at \$50,000. I am not making those numbers up. I ran a hospital. Those were the exact numbers just 6 or 7 years ago. By the way, the hospital that was getting reimbursed the lower amount had better outcomes, less infections, and less blood clots.

Look, the Democrats own healthcare right now. These are their policies. When they are ready to do something more than just throw money at one of the most broken systems in the history of America, then we are here to talk to you. But first of all, we need to open the Federal Government.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota.

Mr. HOEVEN. Mr. President, I am pleased to join my colleagues today.

Today marks the 23rd day of the government shutdown—the 23rd day—now the second longest in our Nation's history. Yet, despite the mounting consequences, our colleagues across the aisle continue to block a clean, non-partisan continuing resolution—one that would simply keep the government open and allow us to continue our work on the appropriations process.

To be clear, there are no Republican priorities included in the CR. Let me repeat again: There are no Republican priorities included in the CR. It simply keeps the government funded. It is the same kind of CR that Democrats passed 13 times under President Biden. Yet now they refuse to vote for it.

Let's just take a minute to review. Here are the 13 clean CRs that were

passed during the Biden administration. Thirteen of them. You can count them.

Oh, gee, how did the Democrats vote? I don't know. Let's check.

Well, here is the percentage of Democrats that voted for each of those 13 clean CRs during the Biden administration.

Now, Mr. President, from sitting way back there—I know your eyes are pretty good; former Navy SEAL. They might be diminished a little bit by now, so I am going to help you out here.

On the first one, 100 percent of the Democrats voted for it. On the second one, 100 percent of the Democrats voted for it. On the third one, 100 percent of the—same kind of clean CR we are looking at right now, but it was under Biden. That is the difference. Third one, 100 percent of the Democrats. Fourth one, 100 percent of the Democrats voted for the clean CR. On the fifth one, 100 percent of the Democrats voted for the clean CR. On the sixth one, 100 percent of the Democrats voted for a clean CR—the same kind that none of them will vote for now. Well, I guess we have three, but we have to get enough to get 60 votes.

I lost count. One, two, three, four, five, six. I think I am at seven—100 percent of the Democrats voted for it. The eighth one, 100 percent of the Democrats voted for it.

Now, on the ninth one, I don't know what happened. Maybe one of them was gone. Who knows? But, gee-whiz, we only got 98 percent of the Democrats on that. Ninety-eight percent voted for that one. But the good news is that they were right back on the next one—100 percent. I think that is No. 10, 100 percent. No. 11, 100 percent. It was 100 percent on No. 12. And, gee-whiz, they finished with only 98 percent of Democrats on the 13th one.

You kind of get the point, right? Come on. What in the world is going on here? And then to have the gall to go out there and say oh, well, you know, they are not shutting down the government. It is ridiculous. I don't know how there could be any doubt about it.

For anybody that thinks this shutdown should be stopped right now, they better call their favorite Democrat on the phone and say: Hey, it is time. It is way, way, way past time.

But right now, instead, our colleagues across the aisle have chosen a different path. They have taken our government hostage, demanding more than \$1 trillion in new spending just to keep the lights on—\$1 trillion just to keep the lights on and to pay people—Federal employees, military, everybody else that is working. That is not compromise. That is called coercion. That is not compromise. That is coercion. That is holding our government hostage.

While this political stalemate drags on, American families are paying the price. Vital programs that hard-working families rely on—programs they

have paid into and depend on—have been shuttered or are dangerously close to running out of money.

Several States are now warning that they will be forced to shut down SNAP—the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program—benefits as soon as November 1 if the shutdown continues. That means millions of Americans could lose access to the assistance that helps them put food on the table.

Meanwhile, our economy is losing \$15 billion in GDP each week as long as this shutdown persists.

Many Federal employees, including critical air traffic controllers—our air traffic controllers are working; they are not getting paid. How about our Border Patrol agents? Pretty dangerous job. They are not getting paid. They are working; they are not getting paid.

How about this group? Our troops. Mr. President, you were a Navy SEAL. You were in harm's way. We have people in harm's way, and they are not getting paid because the Democrats want to say that somehow this clean CR shouldn't be voted for and that somehow they are cooperating—they are trying to collaborate when instead they are holding our government hostage.

Rural America—our farmers, ranchers get left behind. Many are out in the field right now, harvesting, working on bringing in their crops, getting ready for next year. Program services they depend on—the USDA—they can't access. That means more uncertainty at a time when they can least afford it.

Look, the list goes on and on—goes on and on and on—but the bottom line is this: We need to get government—we have offered over and over again, as my colleagues said, to work on any and all issues, but you do it once you get the government open.

This has gone on—I would say long enough but actually way too long. I don't know at what point Democrats are going to decide to come back and start doing their job, which is governing, but we are eagerly awaiting it.

For the American people—the American people are the ones that pay the price when the Democrats take our government hostage. And, as I have made very clear here, there is no doubt but that is exactly what they are doing.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Virginia.

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I do want to thank my friend from North Dakota. We see things slightly different, but one thing I think we could probably agree on: Do you know who is getting paid? The House of Representatives, who have been on vacation since the middle of September. And, gosh, wouldn't it be great if they were actually on the floor debating this issue as well, as opposed to getting a taxpayer-paid vacation for over a month?

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 3039

Mr. President, I think one of the things we could all kind of agree on is

that our Nation's public servants are not political pawns.

I say with respect to my friend from Wisconsin, you know, the so-called Shutdown Fairness Act, in my view, is anything but fair. Frankly, this entire year has been anything but fair for all of our Federal employees who show up every single day to serve the American people. Because remember, before Russ Vought even set foot in the Office of Management and Budget, he bragged that he wanted Federal workers—his words, not mine—to increasingly be “viewed as . . . villains” and “put them in trauma.” Think about that. This wasn't some political misstatement or slip of the tongue; it is, frankly, a mission statement.

Unfortunately, that is exactly what we have seen from Mr. Vought, from President Trump, and from those enabling them. In just 9 months, they have forced out or driven into early retirement more than 148,000 Federal employees. That is not efficiency or reform; it is an assault on the very people who work every day for the American people. And God knows we could improve but also make government perform.

Now, let's be clear. It is not this side of the aisle—Democrats who have cherry-picked a few favorite programs to protect. We have been consistent in calling out this administration's totally reckless regard for the vital services the American people rely on to keep them safe and secure and standing up for those folks who deliver those services.

So forgive me when I say I don't think this Shutdown Fairness Act has anything to do with fairness. Once again, Federal employees are being treated not as partners serving the American people but as punching bags for Vought and the President's political agenda.

Right now, the President is trying to RIF another 4,000 Federal employees—not just, I believe, unfairly, but actually illegally, based upon a court's recent decision. Thank goodness the courts have stepped in.

As a matter of fact, many of us were at the OMB headquarters next to the White House just last week, meeting with Federal employees, demanding that Mr. Vought and his team listen not to us—you don't have to listen to us; we are on politically different sides—but listen to the Federal workers and make sure that we get the government reopen, not try to leverage this for some kind of political win.

We are talking about special education programs that support kids with disabilities. We are talking about the CDC, whose experts track outbreaks and try to keep us safe. We are talking about a program called the CDFI Fund at Treasury—a program with broad bipartisan support that helps invest in access to capital in rural communities and in urban communities.

Again, on this one, I have to thank MIKE CRAPO and a whole lot of my Re-

publican colleagues for being willing to push back.

Let's be crystal clear. These actions are not some accident. This is a deliberate choice, a deliberate effort to hold Federal workers hostage in order to jam through an agenda. At the end of the day, it is going drive up healthcare costs for millions of Americans.

Instead of sitting down with us and working to keep premiums affordable, they are using the very Federal workers—I have a ton of them in Virginia—as political pawns. It is wrong, it is cruel, and it is not going to work.

That is why I am proud to join both Ranking Member PETERS, who will be here, I believe, shortly, and my good friend from Maryland Senator VAN HOLLEN on legislation to ensure that not the Trump administration picks and chooses who we ought to go ahead and pay but legislation to ensure that all Federal workers—and, by the way, the contractors who work side by side with them—get paid during this shutdown.

I mean, at the end of the day, this is a moment for every Senator to decide: Are you going to stand with the Federal workers who keep the government running or are you going to stand with those who want to traumatize them and make them all be viewed as villains?

This is an actual chance. In a few minutes, we are going to have to make sure that those workers can feed their families, pay their mortgages, while this Republican shutdown drags on.

There is a lot of language on this floor about who wants to support Federal workers. Well, you are going to shortly have a chance—every Senator will have a chance—to prove whether you are on the side of not selectively paying Federal workers but paying all Federal workers, as we try to bring this shutdown to an end. I urge my colleagues to do the right thing. Let's get it done. And I thank Senator VAN HOLLEN for his leadership on this issue.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maryland.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. President, I want to thank my colleague from Virginia, Senator WARNER, and other colleagues who are joining together to support the proposal that we are putting forward today.

But I think we should all say that the best way to make sure that Federal employees—all Federal employees—get paid and that the American people get the benefit of their services is to reopen the Federal Government and do it now, which is why I and my Democratic colleagues have voted seven times now—seven times now—to reopen the government without giving Donald Trump a blank check and while making sure that we prevent a healthcare crisis in this country when people's healthcare premiums and costs go through the roof, because when Republicans passed their so-called Big Beautiful Bill, they extended the tax

breaks for billionaires and very wealthy people. The one tax cut they did not extend was the one that allows middle-class families to afford health insurance. And so they left in place a ticking timebomb that is going off now.

We would like to defuse that timebomb. Instead of negotiating on that, the President has been AWOL. He has been engaged in discussions overseas regarding the Middle East. He has been on the phone a lot with Vladimir Putin. That is all good, but you would think the President of the United States could carve out just a little time to help reopen the government, to have a negotiation on reopening the Federal Government.

Instead, he is bringing down Republican Members of the House and Senate to the White House and wining and dining them and patting them on the back and saying: Good job for keeping this government shut down and not entering into a negotiation to bring it to a close.

And, of course, with our House colleagues, the Speaker of the House, Speaker JOHNSON, has essentially got the House on a 5-week—I don't know if we are on 6 weeks—paid vacation. I mean, they are AWOL here in the middle of this shutdown.

What is the President focused on? He is asking the Justice Department to pay him \$230 million for legal bills, right directly into his pocket. He is talking about giving his buddy in Argentina a \$20 billion taxpayer bailout, while farmers across the country are getting hit hard because they can't sell their soybeans to China. And he is demolishing the East Wing of the White House, which is a metaphor for what he is doing to the country and people who worked for him to get him elected. He is betraying the very people he said he was going to stand up for when he said he was going to focus on prices and costs, and yet, when it comes to trying to just prevent this huge spike in healthcare costs that people are experiencing, the President doesn't want to talk about it.

So we should not be punishing Federal employees for something they had nothing to do with. They are not responsible. They are innocent bystanders. They all want to get back on the job and provide services to the American people. And I will be putting forth a proposal to say that they should not be punished and they should be paid.

Now, we will hear later today that we are going to be taking up here in the Senate a piece of legislation from Senator JOHNSON, and that proposal would pay Federal employees who are currently working right now. Our proposal doesn't discriminate among Federal employees.

And here is the really dangerous part, I would argue, about Senator JOHNSON's proposal. We have a President, President Trump, who, along with Russ Vought, who is his, you know, guy in the cockpit at OMB—this

is the guy who said publicly that he wanted to inflict "trauma"—that is his word not mine—inflict "trauma" on the Federal workforce.

If you allow them to decide who they are going to keep on the job in the Federal Government and who they are going to pay, you are giving them also a blank check as to who they are going to send home and who they are going to punish by not paying them.

That is what they have been doing. Much of what they have been doing is illegal, in fact, and we have a Federal court in California that has already said that their layoffs of some of the Federal employees at some of the Agencies are illegal.

But if you just let them decide who is going to get paid and who is not, you weaponize that illegality; you weaponize the Federal Government. And, by the way, I think we all know this: If President Trump gets to keep the folks he wants on the job and pay the folks that he wants who are on the job and nobody else, he will have even less incentive to end the government shutdown. He will have the government he wants, not the one that has been supported on a bipartisan basis by the U.S. Congress.

So giving the President a blank check to decide which Federal employees to punish and which ones not to punish is a very dangerous thing at this moment. That is why the proposal I am putting forward—and Senator PETERS will have an even narrower version that he will be putting forward, if our Republican colleagues don't support the one that I am advancing, along with Senator WARNER, Senator KAINE, Senator ALSOBROOKS, and others—these proposals say that Federal employees should not be punished.

Now, we have already made that decision. We have already made that decision as a Congress in the past. During the first Trump shutdown—that was the 35-day Trump shutdown. During that shutdown, Senator Cardin and myself and others, we passed a piece of legislation that was signed by the President that says: At the end of a shutdown, Federal employees get fully paid. They are held harmless.

Why did we decide to do that? Because we collectively made the right decision that Federal employees who have nothing to do with the government shutdown should not be the ones punished for something they were not culpable in. That was the right decision.

What my proposal and our proposal will do is based on that idea that no Federal employees should be punished for something they had nothing to do with. And not only should they get repaid at the end of this, but why would we say to them that you can't have enough pay to make your electric bills or pay your water bills or provide for your family? Why should Federal employees be the ones who are punished for the government shutdown? Why should they be the ones that have to

overdraft their bank accounts and penalized for that? That is not fair.

So the proposals that we are putting forward say that in this government shutdown, Federal employees and, yes, certain Federal contractors who have nothing to do with this political situation that we face, they should not be the ones to bear the burden, and we certainly shouldn't set up a system where the President of the United States gets to decide what Agencies to shut down, what can stay open, who to pay and who not to pay, who to punish, who not to punish. That just gives him a blank check to put in place political cronies and pay them and send home hard-working civil servants who perform important functions. So that is what our proposal will do.

And for any of our colleagues, regardless of the side of the aisle, who agree that Federal employees should not be the ones who are punished for something they have nothing to do with, I hope we will all agree to support this measure.

Now, I don't know if Senator PETERS wants to talk at all on this particular proposal. He is going to be talking on the next proposal.

I know that some of my colleagues are on the way to the floor, as we speak—Senator KAINE and others—and when they arrive, I will return the floor to them to have them say their piece.

But, at this time, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of S. 3039, introduced earlier today; that the bill be considered read a third time and passed; and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Wisconsin.

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, I have come here today on the floor in good faith. I have come here not to argue. I have come here trying to find agreement. And I have listened to the Senator from Virginia, now the Senator from Maryland, and I have to say, I don't know exactly what percentage, but probably 95, 98 percent of what they have said, I agree with.

I do have to point out, and this would be the most—I would say this is a partisan comment. We have voted now 12 times on a measure that would open up the government. It is what the House passed as a clean CR, similar, if not identical, to what happened 13 times during the Biden administration—just a clean CR to open up the government at President Biden's levels, funding levels that Democrats voted for.

By the way, you know, House Republicans could have come to the table with a CR with \$1.5 trillion of spending reductions to match the \$1.5 trillion of spending increase the Democrats wanted, and now there would be areas of compromise.

But the House Republicans basically said here is the deal: Let's not shut

down the government. Let's not make Federal Government workers pay for our dysfunction. So pass a clean CR at President Biden's funding levels.

So, again, that has been voted down 12 times, regrettably. But let me set that aside.

I found out about the Senator from Maryland's proposal last May. I got the language this morning. I have got the bill here. And, you know, first of all, I kind of chuckled because the name of the bill is—I have actually got the true Warren Buffet tax, and we ought to talk about that later on. You might find that interesting. So he has taken my bill, the Shutdown Fairness Act, and now this is his bill, the True Shutdown Fairness Act.

And, again, I haven't done a word comparison, but it is probably like 95 percent of the Shutdown Fairness Act. That is a good thing. That shows there are a lot of areas of agreement.

I come from the private sector. You don't get a whole lot accomplished arguing all the time. It is all about finding areas of agreement. I have got a product; you want to buy it. Now, we will haggle over the price.

I have got a product; you want to buy it. Now, we need to haggle over the price.

Now, the three areas of—the differences in these bills—I think I have got this right. I would ask the Senator from Maryland to confirm that. Your bill is only for this fiscal year. My bill would just end this punishing Federal workers for our dysfunction forever. I mean, I think we should make it permanent.

The Senator from Maryland's bill includes furloughed employees. Now, the fact of the matter is, when all this is said and done, when we finally end this dysfunction, we fund the government through an appropriation, and because of the 2019 Government Fair Treatment Act, they will get paid anyway.

So my bill is obviously targeted to the people we are forcing to work, but I am not necessarily opposed to paying furloughed workers as well. That is something we can talk about.

The last difference is, it limits reduction in force. And I come from the private sector. Nobody likes to terminate employees—nobody.

But in the private sector when a business is facing bankruptcy, sometimes business owners are forced to do that to preserve the other jobs.

The Federal Government is \$38 trillion in debt. I don't think we should limit the President's ability, the Chief Executive's ability, to properly manage the Federal Government and make the tough decisions, sometimes, to reduce the workforce, cut out some government functions.

Again, that is something we can talk about.

So, again, I think, in fairness to the more than 2 million Federal employees that are now being forced to work because—the term is “excepted,” but that means they are essential—they

are protecting our Nation; they are protecting our safety and security; they are writing Social Security checks. We need to see that they get their paycheck so they don't have to work Door Dash, so they don't have to go to food banks, so they are not under that stress.

I am asking in good faith, let's figure out how to get that done.

Now, I mean, I could propose—I will change the name of mine, by the way, if you want to call it “true” because I think it is the True Shutdown Fairness Act.

Today, right now, I would be willing to add furloughed workers because we are going to pay them anyway.

I am just asking: Would you substitute your bill; take my bill, substitute it in? I have actually got my staff to write the language to do this. It is probably not ready for prime time. You really need to get through leg counsel and that kind of stuff. But you would take my bill, add furloughed workers, and say it is a done deal? Is that something you would accept here today?

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. If you are yielding the floor?

Mr. JOHNSON. Yes, yes.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. The short answer is, we do want to pay all Federal employees because none of them should be punished, but we also don't want them to be fired and RIF'd during this period of time. You said, in the private sector, people don't like to fire employees.

I know, Senator, you have read the remarks of Russ Vought, the head of OMB. He wants to visit “trauma” on Federal employees, and he wants to fire a lot of them. He has said so.

Mr. JOHNSON. Again, I—

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. But that is an important piece here, right, because—

Mr. JOHNSON. Again, I am trying to keep this—let's not argue. OK? Let's focus on areas of agreement.

So reduction in force, again, I think we probably have a philosophical disagreement there. I am not associating myself with anybody else's remarks. That is something that I think reasonable people can disagree with, and I think reasonable people can come to an accommodation.

Again, we are talking about making sure that 2.8—I think is about the number, 2.8—million Federal employees aren't worried about getting their next paycheck. That so overwhelms, quite honestly, the smaller differences about the length of the bill or what reduction in force.

Again, I am willing to come a long way in terms of—

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Let me speak.

Mr. JOHNSON. I am willing to come a long way in terms of including furloughed workers. So, again, what I am suggesting is the way to do it—by the way, this could be a wonderful example for this body, working on a piece of legislation that, again, you bring it to the floor. We filed it—it got rule XIV'd, but we are doing it the right way. We are

going to ask for a cloture vote on it, get it on the floor, open it up to amendments—perfect it. See what the body of the Senate wants to do with this piece of legislation that, again, we probably agree on 95 percent of it or higher.

The way to do it is, when I offer my bill and we vote on cloture, vote for cloture. Let's get on the bill. Let's start discussing today. I mean, maybe if we are so successful, we find the differences are so slight, we can pass it by UC later in the day.

But we do need to take this back to our conferences. We do need to go to the leg staff. We do need to perfect this. It will probably take it more time.

Passing it by unanimous consent is not the way to do it. I appreciate the attempt. I appreciate the dialogue.

That is not what I am asking. In all sincerity, for the benefit of those 2.8 million workers—our military, our law enforcement—let's take that burden off them today. Let's give them some hope to know this body is going to finally do something in a nonpartisan—I call it nonpartisan—way that we all agree on. We are going to iron out our differences the way you would generally do it, the way it used to be done: By getting onto a bill, voting for cloture, having the will to work its way, and then hopefully pass it early next week. That would be my suggestion.

I would be willing to do it today. I don't think we could probably handle that. There are things to discuss. That is all I am asking.

Would you like to respond?

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Thank you. Look, it would be great to work this out because there seems to be some agreement that Federal employees should not be the ones to bear the burden of a decision they had nothing to do with.

I see the Republican leader is here with us on the floor.

I think the best way to proceed would be to delay moving forward on the cloture vote on the motion to proceed on your bill and let's sit down and let's talk about whether or not we can find that common ground. We may not be that far apart.

I will just say to the Senator. I will say to the Senator that if you give the President the authority, as your proposal currently does, to decide who to send home and furlough and punish—but it sounds like you are willing to change that—but here is the scenario I am worried about.

If you listen to Russ Vought and the President, they would just fire those people during the shutdown. That is what they are doing. In fact, they are illegally firing people during the shutdown.

Mr. JOHNSON. Like I said, I really didn't want to come and argue.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. OK. Why don't we sit down together.

Mr. JOHNSON. I have to dispute that because even the National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association, which has endorsed my bill, says

that the bill does not single out favored political functions over its favored ones.

You understand, under the Antideficiency Act, opinions from the Office of Legal Counsel, “excepted employees,” it is pretty well standard. There may be some tweaks back and forth, which is what you give latitude to the executive branch.

Again, I am willing to sit down. I am sure the Republican conference is willing to sit down and say: OK. What should we do?

I think Congress has given way too much authority to the executive branch. I don’t mind dialing that back a little bit. But, again, the way to approach that is let’s get on the bill; let’s talk about it; let’s offer amendments—amendments that pass by voice vote—and let’s get it done.

There is a lot of pressure on all of us. We all want to get this done.

But, again, passing by unanimous consent is not the way to get it done. The way to get it done is the way the process should work. I mean, wouldn’t it be wonderful to actually see the process work in the Senate?

You know, again, I realize you don’t like—

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. I would love to see that.

Mr. JOHNSON. Let’s get on the bill. And then let’s sit down in good faith. Let’s hammer out amendments, and let’s get the thing passed next week. Let’s do that. That is all I am asking.

I honestly hate to object to this. I don’t want to. OK? But, again, this is not the way to pass it.

So, again, I will speak to my bill. I know we have got to get to votes and that kind of stuff. But again, truthfully, in as good of faith as I possibly can be, we have to get this done, and the way to do that is vote to get on the bill. Let’s sit down and talk in good faith, and let’s hammer out—it might be pretty minor differences when all is all said and done.

With that, Mr. President—

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Let me just say, Mr. President, just to say to Senator JOHNSON: I am more than happy to sit down with you. I think we should do that maybe later today, get our teams together and see if we can resolve some of these points because if we have the shared view that, No. 1, no Federal employee should be punished for something they had nothing to do with—and then, at least for the period of the shutdown, the President should not be able to fire additional people, which is, I think you well know—and this was partly considered by the Federal court already—the President actually has less authority to do it in a shutdown than when the government is open.

But I don’t want to debate these issues on the floor right now.

Mr. JOHNSON. Sure.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. I am more than happy to sit down with your team and try to resolve this.

Mr. JOHNSON. Let me address that. I think this brinkmanship has got to

end. I have been here 15 years. We should have passed 180 appropriations bills before the end of the fiscal year. We passed six. A lot of people worked in good faith to do that. OK.

It is obviously broken. We have got to start working on appropriations and budget reform. We have to start working on that together. OK?

But my guess is, part of what has happened with the reduction in force is that brinkmanship, trying to get you folks to just agree to what you have done 13 times. Just open up the government, and then we will talk. OK? We are more than open to talk.

But anyway, again, I am literally begging you, please, when we vote on cloture, vote to get on the bill, and then let’s go through the amendment process, and let’s get it done quickly.

Again, there is not that big of difference. We can get this done.

Again, I hate to do this, but with that, I will object and just, again, beg you.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HAGERTY). Objection is heard.

Mr. JOHNSON. Let’s get on the bill.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maryland.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. As I said to the Senator from Wisconsin, I am happy to sit down with him and his team to see if we can put together a proposal based on the principle that no Federal employee should have to bear the burden and the pain of a decision they had nothing to do with as well as many of these Federal contractors who are also involved. So I welcome the chance to sit down with the Senator from Wisconsin.

I also hope that the President of the United States will sit down with Democrats to resolve the overall issue and open the government. That way we wouldn’t even have to go through this exercise right now.

With that, I want to yield the floor to my colleague from Maryland Senator ALSOBROOKS.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maryland.

Ms. ALSOBROOKS. Mr. President, thank you, first of all, to my colleague Senator CHRIS VAN HOLLEN for yielding, and I also want to thank the senior Senator from Maryland for his work on this legislation, the True Shutdown Fairness Act.

Senator VAN HOLLEN is a tremendous partner on this critical issue and an advocate for the thousands of Federal workers in our great State.

Maryland is home for 494,000 Federal workers and Federal contractors and 34,000 uniformed military personnel. Many of these Marylanders have spent their lives serving their fellow Americans, fighting to defend our country, ensuring our food and water are safe, making sure our parents and grandparents get their Social Security checks, and researching cures to cancer.

That they have been characterized by this administration as an enemy wor-

thy of trauma is repugnant. If you live in Maryland, you know a Federal worker. They are your friend. They are your neighbors. They are the people like my grandmother Sarah Daisy.

You see, Sarah Daisy worked as a housekeeper in Washington, DC, but dreamed her entire life of working for the Federal Government. Back then—and many will recall—she had to pass a civil servants exam, which included a typing test, in order to work for the Federal Government, but she couldn’t afford a typewriter and didn’t know how to type. So she taped a white piece of paper on her refrigerator. She drew a keyboard on that piece of paper and stood in front of her refrigerator in her one-bedroom apartment every night and taught herself the key strokes.

Well, Sarah Daisy passed the exam and got herself a job working in the Federal Government. It was her dream.

She worked in the Hoffman Building. She would always tell me about it. I can vividly remember her saying that she was so proud that she walked past this general and that general in the hallway. She was very, very proud. And I am honored to be her legacy and to be fighting for the countless Marylanders, just like Sarah Daisy, who are being so cruelly targeted by this administration.

Now, thanks to Republicans in this body who have chosen to follow this President’s order and shut down the government, many of our Federal workers are working without pay still in service to our country. The rest have been furloughed through no fault of their own.

Our ask today is simple: Pay them for the jobs that they were hired to do.

We are now in day 23 of this Republican shutdown, and let us not mince words. Republicans hold the keys to the kingdom. They have control over the White House. They have majorities in this Chamber and in the House. And what have they done with that power? Has the cost of your groceries gone down? No. Has the cost of housing gone down? No. Has our economy gotten stronger? Absolutely not.

What have they done? Shut down the government. That is it.

This shutdown is on them. We know it; they know it; and the American people know it. It has been 23 days of this administration refusing to come to the table in good faith and negotiate a plan to keep the government open and make sure that healthcare is affordable and accessible for millions of Americans. It has been 23 days of this administration using the shutdown as an excuse to further target Federal workers who are my constituents.

My State is home to 494,000 Federal workers and contractors. All of them are feeling the pain from this President’s refusal to do what he supposedly loves to do best, make a deal.

Right before the shutdown began, the very sinister Office of Management and Budget Director Russell Vought instructed Agencies to use a shutdown as

an opportunity to issue permanent government layoffs. Vought then began circulating a memo that would seem to challenge the legality of furloughed workers receiving backpay.

By the way, Congress passed a bipartisan law ensuring their backpay during the last Trump administration.

Yet this administration continues to disregard the rule of law. Just last week, Vought ominously tweeted: "The RIFs have begun." He then directed Federal Agencies to begin illegally terminating thousands of Federal employees.

This is a man who is outwardly, in a very sinister way, taking pleasure in harming Federal workers.

Hours later, President Trump and Secretary Kennedy fired more than 1,700 more people from the Department of Health and Human Services, including staffers that work to prevent measles outbreaks, before admitting they had sent nearly half of the notices to employees at the CDC in error.

Imagine that, with a family to support, you get a notice that you are fired before getting another email, hours later, telling you that your RIF has been rescinded. The chaos and the cruelty are unconscionable. Thousands of dedicated civil servants have been shown the door by an administration that, in the words the Office of Management and Budget Director Russell Vought, has said that it is his intention—he said he hopes that Federal workers will no longer want to come to work because they will be in so much "trauma." He also said that he hoped they would feel like villains.

So there has been a systemic dismantling of our Federal Government, a witch hunt targeting patriotic people across this country who raised their hand to serve the American people.

All of this chaos is needless. It is a manufactured crisis. So many Marylanders would like to show up to work today and serve the American people, but they have been left behind by this administration. Hundreds of thousands of civil servants have been either furloughed or forced to work without pay, all because this President decided to shut down the government instead of lowering healthcare costs for Americans.

We need to ensure our workers are paid. The truth of the matter is we are now just 9 days away from open enrollment beginning, when Americans will begin to sign up for their healthcare plans for next year, and they are already facing sticker shock.

Even with the State stepping in, a 60-year-old couple living in Salisbury, MD, making \$90,000 a year, will pay \$1,100 more per month—per month—for healthcare. They will have to pay \$1,100 more per month next year. For a family of four in Maryland, making around \$128,000 a year—and for context, that is the combined salary of a firefighter and a teacher—they will be paying \$1,427 per month next year versus \$916 this year.

If the President and our colleagues on the other side of the aisle get their wish and allow the tax credits to expire, nearly 90,000 Marylanders could be priced out of their health insurance all together. So we will keep fighting for healthcare because it is what Americans deserve.

But this chaos is unsustainable, and we must have faith that, soon, this season will be over.

I know, soon, there will be a morning not like the morning we have awakened to today. Today's morning brings about chaos and fear and confusion and division. But I know soon there will be another morning where Americans will wake up across our country and not fear that they will not be able to afford rent, groceries, and healthcare.

Right now, it is our duty as Members of the U.S. Senate to pay our Federal workers. Our government will cease to function if we do not. And the damage, I fear, is irreparable.

Yet, just like Russ Vought, my colleagues today are picking winners and losers, putting forth legislation that made sure only excepted workers are paid, instead of the entirety of the Federal and military workforce that has been held hostage by this Republican shutdown.

We cannot cherry-pick who gets paid during a shutdown based on our perception of the political affiliations of our patriotic civil servants. We must pass legislation that ensures our Federal workers receive the paychecks that they have earned.

Around 750,000 Federal employees have been furloughed this month at no fault of their own. Hundreds of thousands of these employees live in our region—in Maryland, Virginia, and the District. Senator JOHNSON's bill would ignore these dedicated workers, leaving them to continue to go without a paycheck while President Trump refuses to get back to the bargaining table.

They cannot afford to wait for the President to tire of throwing celebratory picnics or tearing down the White House for a gilded ballroom. They cannot afford to wait for Speaker JOHNSON and House Republicans to actually show back up to work.

In case some of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle have forgotten, Federal workers don't just serve Democrats. They serve every American citizen who needs their help. Researching cures for cancer isn't just for people who live in blue States. Making sure that people get their Social Security checks isn't some leftwing conspiracy.

I would assume that everyone in this body agrees that Americans should get paid for their labor. Well, if you believe that, you will support our bill.

It took courage and dedication for my grandmother, Sarah Daisy, to learn a new skill in order to serve her country. Each day, our armed servicemembers and civil servants show courage and dedication to serve and protect our country from harm, to make it a better place. Let's show courage today, work

together, and pay all Federal workers because we all know Federal workers are Republicans, Democrats, and Independents. They are not political pawns. They are patriots.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

Mr. PETERS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have myself and Senator JOHNSON be permitted to complete our remarks prior to the scheduled rollcall vote.

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

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 3043

Mr. PETERS. Mr. President, I rise, today, to request unanimous consent to pass my Military and Federal Employee Protection Act.

I understand my colleague from Wisconsin objected to Senator VAN HOLLEN's proposal. While I support my colleague from Maryland's legislation, I am going to offer an alternative, an alternative that is very, very straightforward.

It seems to me that we all agree in this Chamber that we want to pay our Federal workers. My bill will do just that and nothing else.

The Military and Federal Employee Protection Act provides pay for members of the military, Federal employees, and Federal contractors who have been denied paychecks during the government shutdown.

Let's be honest on why we are all here. The shutdown is not an accident. Republicans, right now, are refusing to negotiate with Democrats on a bipartisan solution to help address the healthcare crisis. As a result of that, Federal workers are paying a price. My bill ensures that no worker is left behind during this difficult period.

Congress has already guaranteed that all employees receive their paycheck when a shutdown ends. In 2019, Congress voted overwhelmingly for a bill to provide all employees backpay once a shutdown ends, and, actually, President Trump signed that bill into law. So the government is already required to pay all of its workers.

What my bill does, very simply, is it just ensures that these workers can actually, now, pay their bills that are coming due this month. Those bills aren't going to be postponed. They need to be paid this month.

While I appreciate my colleague's interest to ensure all workers are paid—I appreciated the comments that Senator JOHNSON made—my legislation will provide pay for all servicemembers, Federal employees, and contractors that have missed paychecks due to the shutdown. But it doesn't do other stuff that his bill does, which gives President Trump an unlimited blank check to pick winners and losers. We are just focused on what I think all of us agree on.

This legislation that I am offering is the absolute simplest path forward to pay our workers. We all say we agree on this. So let's just pass this bill now and get workers their paycheck.

I am going to continue to work to end the shutdown and address the healthcare crisis. But in the meantime, let's protect our servicemembers and our Federal employees, not put other stuff in the bill, just pay them so they can meet their bills as they arise.

I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of S. 3043, introduced earlier today; that the bill be considered read a third time and passed; and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Wisconsin.

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, again, I will condense my remarks because so much of what I want to say I already said to the Senator from Maryland.

I think it is interesting that the Senator from Michigan supports the Senator from Maryland's bill, which is a more comprehensive bill, I think. I only saw this now and hope I get it right. But I think yours is just limited to the time period from the shutdown until the bill is passed, and then we are in the same situation: The shutdown continues.

Hopefully, it won't. You know there is a way of doing it. Just vote for the clean CR.

But, again, I really don't want to object to these bills, but in this case, I understand the way to pass this into law—as I was speaking to the Senator from Maryland today, as he exited the Chamber: Wouldn't this be a wonderful demonstration for the Senate, the Congress, for America of how you pass a piece of legislation? If you take the bill—I realize you don't 100-percent agree with my Shutdown Fairness Act. Fine. I think we are 90-plus percent in agreement on it.

You vote for cloture to get on the bill. Then you work in good faith on the areas of disagreement. Let the Senate work its will through the Member process.

This is a small piece of legislation. It is an incredibly important piece of legislation. It is incredibly important because we all agree that we don't want to make Federal employees pay for the dysfunction of this body.

Let's first demonstrate that this body can actually function the way it is intended to function, which is to write a bill, get it filed, have the leader file cloture on it, and have the body vote to proceed to the bill with 60 votes.

We don't need all of you. We need about seven of you, eight of you. OK? Have eight of you agree to get on the bill. Then we will work in good faith and make sure that we don't make Federal employees pay for our dysfunction.

Again, I do have to object. But, again, I am urging—I am begging—colleagues from the other side of the aisle to vote for cloture, and let's iron out these differences and make the Federal employees whole.

I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Michigan.

Mr. PETERS. Mr. President, I appreciate the comments of my colleague from Wisconsin. We have worked on a lot of bills together. We have come together to find common ground on some, at times, contentious issues.

I agree about the 90 percent comment that Senator JOHNSON mentioned. What I am actually proposing right now is that 90 percent. It is really simple. This is as simple a bill as you can get.

We can show the American people that we come together on a bill that is really straightforward—no gotchas, no language that might trip people up. Pay folks. Make sure they are made whole, if this passes, so they can pay their bills, and we can continue to deal with the other issues of the day.

I think this would be an example of bipartisan, coming together unanimously to say that here is a bill that will pay servicemembers and Federal employees and contractors, make them whole so they can make their bills.

We don't need to have a protracted process. This is a simple issue if we focus on the 90 percent we agree on, and that is what this bill is. It is the 90 percent.

I would hope we can pass it today and put the minds at ease of hundreds of thousands of folks all across the country.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wisconsin.

Mr. JOHNSON. So now we will proceed to the cloture vote on the Shutdown Fairness Act.

In response to this, quickly. It is unrealistic to expect almost any piece of legislation to pass by unanimous consent, a bill that has just been introduced that exact morning. No matter how simple it is, there are going to be people who are going to object. So that is why the process is to file a bill, to file for cloture, and to proceed to get on the bill, to have the amendment process, and to go through the process. It can go very quickly, but doing this by unanimous consent is just unreasonable. So that is unfortunate. Again, the solution here is to vote for cloture to get on the bill, the Shutdown Fairness Act.

Now, I will try and keep my remarks reasonably short. I was allotted 20 minutes, but I know people are already here on the floor to vote, so I am mindful of that, but this is just a quick, little history of my experience since I got here in 2011.

This is our fourth shutdown now, and we are on the 23rd day. We have had 55 continuing resolutions. Again, I didn't vote for all of them, but I voted for many of them. You know, other colleagues on both sides have voted for those. I mean, generally, the fight is over. Let's just have a clean CR; let's not junk it up with policies. That is the loggerhead here. One side refuses to

just do a clean CR. We have had 12 either increases or suspensions of the debt ceiling, and we have just surpassed \$38 trillion in debt.

I realize people work in good faith on the budget process. I am on the Budget Committee and have been on the Appropriations Committee. I see the former chair and ranking member of the Appropriations Committee on the floor here. The sad fact is, since I have been here, we should have passed 180 appropriations bills prior to the end of the fiscal year that we are going to fund, but we have only passed 6. That is a 96.7-percent failure rate. It is clearly broken. The budget and appropriations process is broken.

Rather than spending weeks arguing over how do you get the government back open, I would much rather sit down in a nonpartisan way and go, How can we fix this? Can we go to 2-year appropriations cycles? I mean, what can we do to the budget process? I mean, I would much rather talk about that.

I understand that there is a lot of bipartisan agreement on proposals, but we will never get to that if we are literally mired down. Last year, it took us 6 months to finally fund the government with a continuing resolution. This is beyond ridiculous. So, again, this is a bipartisan problem here. I am not placing blame anywhere. It is just a bipartisan problem.

Unfortunately, we haven't passed any appropriations. I have pointed out before that the Democrats voted 13 times during the Biden administration for a clean CR at Biden's spending levels. Now they are saying, no, they won't.

Of course, their leader, in doing that on January 16, 2024, said:

Passing a clean CR this week is important for two main reasons: First, passing the CR will avert a harmful and unnecessary government shutdown. No reasonable Member of either side, Democrat or Republican, wants a government shutdown.

That was not Leader THUNE saying that. That was then-Leader SCHUMER saying that, and now he has, obviously, completely changed his tune.

I did point this out, and this is important to understand because the other side is saying: Look, why don't you sit down and negotiate and compromise?

The House could have passed a CR with \$1.5 trillion in spending cuts to match the CR proposed by the Democrats of \$1.5 trillion in new spending. OK. There you go. Now you have got something to compromise on. That is not what the House did. The House said: Well, let's do what we did 13 times under the Biden administration. Let's just pass a clean CR at Biden's level and really beg the Democrats to say yes, but they haven't been willing to do that.

Again, I know people are waiting to vote, and I am not going to talk about the issue: you know, the fact that ObamaCare is causing premiums to skyrocket and what they are demanding, in terms of extending the enhanced

subsidies that were supposed to be temporary. They set the expiration date. It is ObamaCare that is causing premiums to be unaffordable, and they want those enhanced premiums to mask the failure of ObamaCare, but I won't get into detail on that.

I will talk about—this is day 23. We are forcing about 2.8 million Federal workers to work—military, law enforcement, people who write Social Security checks, and air traffic controllers who are keeping our skies safe—but we are not paying them. That is absurd. What is even more absurd is they will get paid. Whether they are working or furloughed, they will get paid because of the Government Employee Fair Treatment Act of 2019. Once this ends—I am assuming it will end with an appropriation—they will get paid.

With the Shutdown Fairness Act, all it asks—all it does—is to recognize that reality. It shouldn't cost a dime. The CBO has an alternate universe score on this. There is a zero score. This doesn't cost the Federal Government a dime. It just pays the workers who are being forced to work. Pay them now and not later. It makes incredible common sense.

I will end with a surprising support letter I got from the National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association that pretty well battens down all the arguments against this bill. It doesn't change the government's obligation to pay furloughed employees. They will get paid. It does not single out favored political functions over disfavored ones. Again, President Trump is, by and large, honoring the past opinions of the Office of Legal Counsel's Antideficiency Act.

They say that they don't believe that it is empowering the administration to pick and choose what activities it carries out. It includes to say that the American public relies on the full scope of Federal Agency missions that are funded via appropriations, and political pressures that exist to advance appropriations bills will remain to encourage resolution.

Mr. SCOTT of South Carolina. Vote?
Mr. JOHNSON. No, we are not there yet. I am sorry. I will conclude quickly.

The bottom line is, as I talk to the Senator from Maryland, the way to pass this law—the way to protect Federal workers—isn't with the unanimous consent request of a bill nobody has ever seen; it is to vote for cloture on the Shutdown Fairness Act. Let's work out the differences. We agree on 95 percent of it. Let's work out those differences and vote for cloture. We can get this passed, I think, early next week. With that, I will conclude my remarks on that.

NOMINATION OF REBECCA L. TAIBLESON

Mr. President, I should be speaking for about 5 minutes on the wonderful nomination of Rebecca Taibleson, but I know everybody wants to vote.

She did a wonderful job in Judiciary. She is a highly qualified lawyer. She

will make a wonderful judge for the Seventh Circuit. I urge all of my colleagues to vote for cloture on her nomination.

With that, I yield the floor.

CLOTURE MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Pursuant to rule XXII, the Chair lays before the Senate the pending cloture motion, which the clerk will state.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the motion to proceed to Calendar No. 191, S. 3012, a bill to appropriate funds for pay and allowances of excepted Federal employees for periods of work performed during a lapse in appropriations, and for other purposes.

John Thune, Ted Budd, Katie Boyd Britt, Ron Johnson, Roger Marshall, Tommy Tuberville, Jon Husted, Bernie Moreno, David McCormick, Roger F. Wicker, Rick Scott of Florida, Pete Ricketts, Steve Daines, Joni Ernst, Cindy Hyde-Smith, Shelley Moore Capito, Mike Rounds.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the motion to proceed to S. 3012, a bill to appropriate funds for pay and allowances of excepted Federal employees for periods of work performed during a lapse in appropriations, and for other purposes, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. BARRASSO. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Montana (Mr. SHEEHY).

Further, if present and voting: the Senator from Montana (Mr. SHEEHY) would have voted "yea."

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 54, nays 45, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 585 Leg.]

YEAS—54

| | | |
|-----------|------------|------------|
| Banks | Fischer | Moran |
| Barrasso | Graham | Moreno |
| Blackburn | Grassley | Mullin |
| Boozman | Hagerty | Murkowski |
| Britt | Hawley | Ossoff |
| Budd | Hoeven | Paul |
| Capito | Husted | Ricketts |
| Cassidy | Hyde-Smith | Risch |
| Collins | Johnson | Rounds |
| Cornyn | Justice | Schmitt |
| Cotton | Kennedy | Scott (FL) |
| Cramer | Lankford | Scott (SC) |
| Crapo | Lee | Sullivan |
| Cruz | Lummis | Tillis |
| Curtis | Marshall | Tuberville |
| Daines | McConnell | Warnock |
| Ernst | McCormick | Wicker |
| Fetterman | Moody | Young |

NAYS—45

| | | |
|-----------------|--------------|------------|
| Alsobrooks | Booker | Durbin |
| Baldwin | Cantwell | Gallego |
| Bennet | Coons | Gillibrand |
| Blumenthal | Cortez Masto | Hassan |
| Blunt Rochester | Duckworth | Heinrich |

| | | |
|--------------|---------|------------|
| Hickenlooper | Murphy | Shaheen |
| Hirono | Murray | Slotkin |
| Kaine | Padilla | Smith |
| Kelly | Peters | Thune |
| Kim | Reed | Van Hollen |
| King | Rosen | Warner |
| Klobuchar | Sanders | Warren |
| Luján | Schatz | Welch |
| Markey | Schiff | Whitehouse |
| Merkley | Schumer | Wyden |

NOT VOTING—1

Sheehy

The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 54, and the nays are 45.

Three-fifths of the Senators duly chosen and sworn not having voted in the affirmative, the motion is not agreed to.

The motion was rejected.

The majority leader.

MOTION TO RECONSIDER

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I enter a motion to reconsider.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The motion is entered.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume executive session to consider the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant executive clerk read the nomination of Stephen Chad Meredith, of Kentucky, to be United States District Judge for the Eastern District of Kentucky.

NOMINATION OF STEPHEN CHAD MEREDITH

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I strongly oppose the nomination of Stephen Chad Meredith to serve as a judge on the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Kentucky.

Like several of President Trump's other judicial nominees, Mr. Meredith has a long history of taking extreme positions on women's reproductive rights.

As a Republican political appointee in Kentucky, he sought a functional ban on the most common second-trimester abortion procedure and attempted to shut down what was, at the time, the last remaining abortion clinic in the State.

And he insulted women everywhere when he argued, in court, that doctors should be required to provide certain information to female patients because these women "don't understand" their own medical needs.

In addition to his extreme record on reproductive rights, Mr. Meredith's involvement in pardoning a host of violent offenders—and his total lack of candor on this issue—is disqualifying.

Then-Kentucky Governor Matt Bevin pardoned hundreds of violent offenders during his last days in office. Mr. Meredith served as Governor Bevin's chief deputy general counsel during this time.

There is incontrovertible written evidence that Mr. Meredith worked on at