

could jeopardize our national security and that of our allies, such as the nation of Israel.

Then there is the National Defense Authorization Act, which was passed this last week and which will provide our men and women in uniform the authorities and the resources they need to protect and defend our Nation against rising threats around the world.

And, as I mentioned at the beginning, just yesterday we passed trade promotion authority, which will soon be heading to the President's desk. It provides Texas farmers, ranchers, and small businesses the opportunity to find new markets around the world through pending and future trade agreements.

We also see significant progress in many other bills that the Senate may soon consider, bills that our committee chairs have been tirelessly moving forward. This includes more than 110 bills that have been reported out of committee and legislation such as the PATENT Act, a bill I have been very involved in, which helps startups and small businesses that are too often wasting their time and money fighting costly, frivolous litigation.

It is good to see that the Senate is back working for the American people, and it is my hope that we can, on a bipartisan basis, continue to build on our strong record so far this Congress and to continue to work productively, where we can, to serve those who elected us.

The Senate is starting to build some momentum. With several appropriations bills looming, we need to keep getting things done and to continue providing real solutions to the problems it faces.

Although my friends across the aisle suggested that they will launch a filibuster summer, I would like to stress that would undercut the good progress and the productivity we have demonstrated so far, and it would also frustrate the American people and only harm those whom we are sent here to represent, not the least of which are our troops and veterans.

So let's do away with this irresponsible idea of a filibuster summer, and let's work together to try to do the Nation's business.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Madam President, I wish to say a couple of things before I speak to the issue that brought me to the floor today.

I have been listening to our leader from Texas talk about so many of the advances we have seen in the Senate this session. I think it is important to acknowledge and note that we are making progress. Often we get labeled in the media for being that "do-nothing Congress," that entity which is just engaged in loggerheads and deadlock. But I think the truth is and the facts on the ground are that we are seeing

substantive legislation passed, just as the Senator from Texas has noted.

I was pleased to lead off the Senate with the first bill on the floor in this Congress—the Keystone XL Pipeline. It was good to be back at work in a body that was entertaining amendments from both sides and offered by my colleagues without any direction or dictation from the majority side—an opportunity for the give-and-take that comes with not only good debate but not knowing whether your amendment is going to pass or fail. That is how the legislative process works.

The occupant of the Chair is a former member of a State body, as am I. We know that is how you build legislation, the good, constructive back-and-forth. We saw that with the Keystone XL debate. We moved that through both bodies. The President chose to veto it. I think it is a mistake on his part. I would like to see us resolve that eventually. But I do think it reflects the way that we as a Chamber can work and the way a constructive majority can work. So I applaud the leadership of the majority in getting us to this point and through some very difficult issues. We are going to have some good things coming up, and I look forward to further engaging in debate on those.

FIRES IN ALASKA

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Madam President, I want to mention very quickly what is on the front page of my newspapers in the State of Alaska this week and has been for a couple of weeks now. Our fire season started very early and with an intensity that has really attracted concern not only within the State but outside the State. Currently, we have about 545 fires that have begun within the State, both in the interior, where we traditionally see them, but also down in Southcentral, fires that have taken homes and properties.

In the first part of the fire season, there was a great deal of attention on the community of Willow, an area that hosts the homes of many of our famous and our infamous dog mushers, mushers who mush along the Iditarod Trail and other parts. The articles have been about the dislocation of not only the mushers who have lost their homes but also trying to find places for up to 600 sled dogs for temporary relocation.

So there has been a great deal of concern about the fire status in Alaska. As I mentioned, 545 fires have burned, 427,881 acres as of yesterday evening. That is a significant total. It is a very significant total, but it is pretty small in comparison to where we were in 2004 when we saw almost 5 million acres burn. In 2004, 4.7 million acres burned, and in 2005, we had 2.2 million acres.

We are hopeful that the weather is going to change and that we will get on top of this. But when I was home in Fairbanks in the interior on Saturday, on Saturday alone we saw 6,500 lightning strikes at a time and a place where it is very dry in the interior and

has been for some time. So fire danger is very real.

My point this morning is not to give the weather report but to acknowledge publicly the efforts of the men and women who have been engaged so bravely and so heroically in fighting these wildland fires, fighting these fires all over the State in extreme conditions, in difficult conditions where wind can come in at the last minute and change the direction of the fires and not only threaten the property but the safety of our firefighters.

Right now, we have about 3,300 fire personnel in the State of Alaska. About 2,200 of them are fighting fires on the ground. Over 1,000 of these are men and women from Alaska. Many of them are hotshots and are firefighters from the villages who have a great deal of expertise, but we also rely on many who come from the lower 48 to assist us during this time of our wildfires. We thank them and we pray for their safety and for those who have been left homeless, whose property has been damaged, whose lives have been upended by these very difficult fires. Know that our hearts go out to you, and whatever efforts we are able to provide for assistance, we stand ready to do so. And a very heartfelt thank-you to those who are fighting these fires.

EPA RULE ON WATERS OF THE UNITED STATES

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Madam President, I came to the floor today to speak about an issue—a regulation that has raised a level of concern and controversy in my State of Alaska like no other we have seen in a long time, and this is in regard to the EPA and the Army Corps of Engineers and their release of a final version of a rule that significantly increases the ability of these agencies to regulate more of our land and our water. I am speaking specifically to the rule that expands the definition of "waters of the United States" under the Clean Water Act.

Coming from the State of Nebraska, an agriculture State, I am sure the Presiding Officer has heard concerns from constituents and farmers about the expansion of this definition and what it may mean to our economies.

The EPA claims this rule—and we lovingly refer to it as WOTUS—is a clarification to provide certainty and predictability as to where clean air permits are required. But the view of so many Alaskans—and really the view around the country—is that this rule is far beyond a simple clarification because it substantially increases EPA's regulatory reach. It will subject countless new projects to permitting requirements that will be difficult to satisfy, increasing cost and certainly increasing project delays.

The application of the WOTUS in Alaska is expansive and it is negative. It is something I have described as a showstopper in the past, and none of the changes in the final rule alter that