

600 honorable Foreign Service officers are going to be used as political pawns in a crusade to keep Hillary Clinton from being elected President. I hope he will drop his opposition to career diplomats and other important nominations so we can give these good people the promotions they have earned.

As I travel the world through these many years, Madam President, I always go to the embassies, and I always ask them to see as many of the staff there as possible. I tell them there is no finer group of people representing America today than our Foreign Service corps, and I stand by that. It is a shame that I have to come to the floor and talk about this. We should pass these nominations tonight with no further delay.

Would the Chair tell us the schedule of today's business in the Senate.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION AND VETERANS AFFAIRS AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2016

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of H.R. 2029, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 2029) making appropriations for military construction, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2016, and for other purposes.

Pending:

Kirk/Tester amendment No. 2763, in the nature of a substitute.

Kirk amendment No. 2764 (to amendment No. 2763), to clarify the term "congressional defense committees."

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the time until 5:30 p.m. will be equally divided in the usual form.

The Senator from Montana.

Mr. TESTER. Madam President, I will defer my remarks until the chairman of the VA-MILCON appropriations subcommittee comes, and after he speaks, I will.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mr. TESTER. Thank you, Madam President.

It will be some time before Senator KIRK arrives, so I do want to give my remarks for the purpose of other folks who would like to talk about this bill.

I rise today along with Senator KIRK to usher the legislation through this

Chamber, the VA-MILCON appropriations bill, as quickly as possible. I want to thank Senator KIRK for his work on this bill. As I said last week when we began debating the VA-MILCON appropriations bill, this legislation has huge significance. It marks a good-faith effort on behalf of this body to move forward with an appropriations bill that responsibly invests in our national security, our economy, and our country.

I also think that, among all the appropriations bills to move forward, it is right and just that a bill to honor our commitment to our Nation's veterans be the first one to break the gridlock.

I recognize that the VA-MILCON appropriations bill that came out of the committee last spring fell far short of what the VA needs to provide the care our veterans have earned. But now that Congress has passed the budget agreement, we have crafted a substitute amendment that will bring this bill closer to where it has to be to meet the needs of the brave men and women who have served this country. This amendment will provide an additional \$1.9 billion for VA medical services. This amendment fixes a flawed bill.

The bill passed out of the committee in May grossly shortchanged our veterans and undermined the ability of the VA employees to do their jobs, and that is one of the reasons I voted against it. Now, 6 months later, we are about to right the committee's wrong and make investments that we have known all along the VA needs. The money will help allow the VA to address an increased demand for hepatitis C treatments, bolster health care for rural veterans, and will ensure that we can better recruit and retain VA doctors and nurses in every State of the Union. It also provides better care for Vietnam veterans who are reaching retirement age and treats the physical and mental ailments of veterans returning home after 15 years of war in the Middle East. These are investments the VA desperately needs to do its job.

Now, I know the VA has been under a microscope, and it should be. It is responsible for honoring a promise, and when that promise is broken, we need to do more than to say "I am sorry." We need to fix it. This substitute amendment before the Senate will begin to right these wrongs, and you have my word that I and others will be scrutinizing how every dollar is spent because we can't afford to make these investments without knowing they are producing real results for the courageous servicemembers who have earned it.

Colleagues are encouraged to provide amendments in a timely manner because we all would like to pass this bill before Veterans Day. Once we pass the bill, it will prove we are serious about living up to promises that we make to our Nation's veterans. It will empower VA employees to do their jobs and provide veterans with the care they have earned.

It is not just health care. This bill will improve consideration of com-

ensation claims for injuries suffered during their service. It gives the VA the tools to maintain our national cemetery system. It supports the Office of the Inspector General, which we need in order to ensure that the VA is living up to the demands that we have placed upon it.

It adds \$170 million for military construction. These funds will go toward additional projects to enhance our military readiness, particularly for the Air Force and its Reserve elements, and it will set the stage for future appropriations bills that responsibly invest in education, energy, infrastructure, and in our public lands.

I am very happy that we are considering this bill today. Hopefully, we can finish this bill tomorrow, as we should. It will take some cooperation, but I think the Senate is finally ready for some cooperation. I look forward to that.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

WASTEFUL SPENDING

Mr. COATS. Madam President, I am back on the floor once again for my "Waste of the Week." I have been doing this for well over 20 weeks—highlighting waste, fraud, and abuse of taxpayers' money. It is said we cannot afford to cut another dime, that programs are too important.

I question that since the Government Accountability Office, the Office of Management and Budget, and the congressional accounting office have all looked at various Federal programs and said: Why in the world are you doing this in the first place? It is no longer relevant. It is a waste of money. The function has already been taken care of.

Today we are going to highlight yet another situation where this money ought to be going into either higher priority uses—such as Department of Defense or funding soldiers or veterans or something such as that—or not take it from the taxpayer in the first place. And as we document each week, our account keeps growing in terms of money that falls clearly into the category of waste, fraud, and abuse.

Today's situation is a little bit different because the money is not being spent. Then the question is, OK, it is reserved for something, right? It was, but that action has been fulfilled. So why is that money still sitting there and who is using it or if it is not being used, why isn't it redirected and returned to the taxpayer?

Let me talk about this program.

Throughout our Nation's history, the United States has pursued various paths of energy development in order

to power our communities. One of the ways we have pursued energy production is through uranium enrichment and nuclear reactors. Today, that is not a popular way of providing power.

By the way, it is totally environmentally pure. There is no carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide, or any other emission issue here that is harmful to our environment. Yet we have suspended all this for various reasons—mostly the concern about a situation where it gets out of hand, even though today's technology can essentially provide safety for that.

Nevertheless, when Congress passed the Energy Policy Act of 1992, the United States Enrichment Corporation, USEC, was authorized and stood up to provide more privatized uranium enrichment services for the U.S. Government and utilities that operate these nuclear powerplants. And there are several dozen operating in the United States. Previously, this service was provided by the Department of Energy and its predecessor agencies, but now this law appropriated taxpayer dollars to a newly established USEC Fund, which is a revolving fund in the Treasury to carry out the purposes of this new organization, the United States Enrichment Corporation.

The law also appropriated taxpayer dollars to the fund revolving in the Treasury to carry out their purposes. Let me describe this fund in a little more detail.

Four years after the creation of the fund, Congress passed the USEC Privatization Act, which authorized the USEC's sale to the private sector—a pretty good move, I think. There are a lot of things the private sector can do more effectively and efficiently than the Federal Government. This was a privatization effort that was successful. It transitioned from a Federal to a private corporation, and today it operates as a private company, not a Federal company, separate from the Federal Government, under a new name; therefore, it is no longer under the control of the Federal Government.

What has become of the money that was funded? The USEC Fund was authorized to pay for the expenses of the USEC's privatization and for the environmental cleanup expense for "disposition of depleted uranium stored at government-owned enrichment plants operated by the USEC." That was a logical objective. We did not want this depleted uranium stored onsite. We needed to dispose of it. So we took the money in the fund and used that to take care of the uranium that was stored and that needed to be disposed of.

Earlier this year, the Government Accountability Office issued a report that said that the "purposes for which the USEC Fund was authorized after privatization have been fulfilled, and the Government Accountability Office has not identified any other purposes for which the USEC Fund is currently available"—in other words, mission ac-

complished. Mission complete. No other use of the fund has been authorized, and so the money is just sitting there. There is a pot of money sitting in the fund that has no federally authorized use. Whatever you want to call it—a zombie fund, a fund that simply has no purpose—its life is over, yet it lives on.

How much is in this fund? The GAO found that the USEC Fund's remaining balance is expected to be over \$1.6 billion in 2015—not exactly small change.

Predictably, the Department of Energy says: Ah, there is a pot of money. Why don't we use it for something else?

Well, it is not authorized for anything else. It was money contributed from the Treasury to this fund for a specific purpose, and that was to clean up the environment, to dispose of the uranium, and to privatize the program.

The GAO report further stated that "DOE's effort to utilize USEC fund moneys instead of general fund appropriations to support a research and development effort would diminish transparency in budgeting." In other words, the Department of Energy is saying: Oh, we have a slush fund over here. Let's use it for something.

Well, transparency and accountability are important when it comes to spending taxpayer dollars, and every one of us here in the Senate ought to be cognizant and recognize how critical and how important it is to spend hard-earned taxpayer dollars wisely, effectively, and efficiently and not request it from them if it doesn't have that purpose and achieve that purpose.

By the same token, if we have a pot of money—\$1.6 billion—sitting in a fund that has no authorized use, that ought to be returned. That ought to be returned to the taxpayer in one of two ways: one, directed to an absolutely essential need that only the Federal Government can provide, or two, it ought to go back to the taxpayer. It shouldn't be taken from the taxpayer. So since the authorized purposes of the USEC Fund have been fulfilled and Congress has given no new authority or appropriation, the money needs to be rescinded.

I am not the only one supporting this course of action. The GAO recommends that Congress rescind the entirety of the \$1.6 billion, and Congress has attempted to rescind this pot of money before. In fact, the House of Representatives included language in a 2014 appropriations bill to do so. But it is now time to actually return the money. There are attempts being made. If we can successfully achieve this, we can save the taxpayer—by rescinding this \$1.6 billion, if we do that, we will then add up to our ever-growing total of wasted, abused, and fraudulently used money. In this case, this appropriated money—money sitting there waiting to be returned and rescinded—will bring our total to almost \$119 billion of waste, fraud, and abuse.

That ends the narrative this week, and we look forward to next week and

bringing forward yet another waste of the week.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. COATS). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be recognized for such time as I may consume.

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

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, we are having a lot of discussion, and people are lined up now talking about this event that is going to take place in the middle of December. It is going to be the 21st COP. It is a meeting that the United Nations puts on every year. It has been on for 21 years now. They are all saying: This is the time. This is what they say every time—for 21 years—that we are going to adopt something in this country.

Prior to now they had been using legislation to reduce the emissions of CO₂ and the devastation that will be on our economy. There is nothing different now—except everything. As time has gone by, it has not been their friend. We have the alarmists who really believe that the world is coming to an end because of global warming. Some of them actually believe that. For a lot of them, it is the thing to do. You have Tom Steyer with \$75 million trying to resurrect this as an issue. There are some who really do believe it. The problem is, time is not doing them a favor because every time a week or a month goes by, somebody else comes out with some new information.

A recent NASA study that was published in the Journal of Glaciology found that gains in the Antarctic ice sheets are much greater than the estimated losses. This runs counter to the IPCC 2013 report that suggests there was a net loss of ice on the continent.

Let's look for a minute at what the IPCC is. The IPCC is an arm of the United Nations. They have put together these studies of people, and this has been going on now for more than 15 years. The only qualifications you need, I guess, to be one of the scientists is you have to believe in this.

We have testimony from a lot of different members of the scientific community who have said that their position in opposition to the anthropogenic gases causing global warming, causing destruction of the Earth, has caused them not to be a part of this.

There is no better evidence of that than in 2009 when they came out and made it very clear that the science they are dependent on was the IPCC, and it was totally discredited with what they call climategate. We have

talked about this on the floor several times. I thought that would have ended it in 2009, but it didn't. I mentioned that background only because we have the Paris trip coming up, and there will be a lot of people going there to try to fortify their positions.

Since the 1970s, the IPCC climate model historically predicted a significant increase in global temperatures, and we haven't really seen this. The frequent statements held up by the media showing each month that passes is the "hottest month on record" willfully ignore the margin of error contained within these datasets. Simply put, the 15-year hiatus—the hiatus, as it is called—is showing that, yes, we went through a period of time when there was warming. Then all of a sudden, some 15 years ago—16 years ago, it leveled off and it hasn't warmed since that time. This has been a problem for the individuals who believe this.

Let me go back. This is from memory, but I am sure it is right because I have said it so many times. The first time they talked about global cooling was in 1895. In 1895, they came out and said that we are now worried about a new ice age. They coined that term. They said that it is going to be catastrophic. Then about 20 years later—it was in 2018—it changed. All of a sudden, there was global warming. There was a warming. This was the first time the term "global warming" had been used. At that stage, things were warming up from that point until 1945. In 1945, it was rather interesting because that was at the end of World War II, and another cold spell came in.

The interesting thing about this is if you look back historically, the greatest surge in emissions of CO₂ in America happened right after the Second World War in 1945. That precipitated not a warming but another cold spell. In fact, they used the term "ice age." In the 1970s, it started warming.

If you follow this, about every 30 years this changes. God is still up there. We are still going to have a change in climate. What disappointed them, on the other side, is that all the things they have been saying about global warming—it stopped 15 years ago, and it has leveled off.

Despite the clear evidence that the science of global warming is not settled, environmental alarmists are pushing ahead with an economically devastating agenda that is more about ideological outcomes than combating global warming. These efforts will come to a head at the end of this year when the United Nations hosts the 21st Conference on Parties, COP, session in Paris. With this upcoming international spectacle, we should not only be questioning the science, but also the intentions and promises each country is making.

Just last week, China was exposed for underreporting the amount of coal it burns by about 1 billion tons a year for the last 15 years. As the New York Times stated:

Even for a country of China's size, the scale of correction is immense. . . . The increase alone is greater than the whole German economy emits annually from fossil fuels.

They are talking about just the increase of what China has agreed to. They are saying they are reducing some of their emissions. The increase that they admit is going to come will still be far greater than the whole German economy emits annually for fossil fuels.

Then there is India, a country whose climate pledge is based on the premise that developed countries, such as the United States, will pick up these costs to the tune of \$2.5 trillion over the next 15 years—just over \$160 billion a year. India stands to gain from American taxpayer dollars. Keep in mind that each year for the last 21 years, we have had about 192 countries come in, and their job—in order to come in and join the big party—is to say, yes, we are going to do something about reducing CO₂ emissions.

I have a lot of activity in Africa, and there is someone I know very well who lives in a little country called Benin, West Africa. His name is Luke. He was an official in Benin, West Africa.

I went up to him and I said: How come you are at this thing? You know better than to believe in this whole idea of global warming.

He said: Well, look. We have an opportunity to share in something like \$100 billion because we are a minority country. Besides that, this is the biggest party of all every year.

So we have these things that are the motivations for people coming in. Even the United Nations bureaucrats have been very candid about what they hope to achieve through the international climate negotiations, which has nothing to do with saving the environment.

The former French President, Jacques Chirac, when addressing the Kyoto Protocol, described it as the "first component of an authentic global governance."

Margot Wallstrom—I remember this because I was there at the time she said it—former EU minister, stated that international agreements are about the economy and "leveling the playing field for big business worldwide." That has nothing to do with the environment.

Most recently, Christiana Figueres, the U.N.'s top climate official when talking about the Paris climate conference said—she was running this thing for the United Nations—"This is probably the most difficult task we have ever given ourselves, which is to intentionally transform the economic development model, for the first time in human history." She is the person who is supposed to be making the case.

Even the United States' global warming commitment to the international community is questionable. President Obama is committing the United States to cut its emissions by 26 to 28 percent by 2025. This promise is also

just as questionable and hollow as what we are hearing from the countries I mentioned.

The chart itself is self-explanatory. This is the gap that is in there. Not only does the President not have the backing of the Senate and the American people, but outside groups are finding that the President's method to achieve these reductions through climate regulations—primarily the Clean Power Plan—is faulty.

According to a recent analysis by the U.S. Chamber, the President's intended national determination contributions, the INDC—that is what they used to say what commitments are being made—are about 33 percent short of meeting stated targets. On July 8, a former Sierra Club chief climate counsel testified before my committee—I chair the Environment and Public Works Committee—about his own analysis that has found an even greater gap.

Right now, the Clean Power Plan is a regulation that is promoted by the President. Starting in 2002, they tried to pass legislation. After we analyzed this legislation, we discovered that it would have cost the American people somewhere between \$300 and \$400 billion a year.

Whenever I hear a big number like that, what I always do is go back and get the latest figures from my State of Oklahoma as to how much this means to each family that files Federal income tax, and this legislation would cost each family about \$3,000. That is a lot of money for the people in my State of Oklahoma. Yet, by their own admission, it is not going to accomplish anything.

My colleagues might remember Lisa Jackson. Lisa Jackson was chosen by Barack Obama to be the first director of the EPA. I asked her a question right before the Copenhagen party in 2009. I said: Now, you are going to come out with an endangerment finding, and if you have this endangerment finding, who is going to be the scientist?

She said: Well, the IPCC.

I said: Well, assuming that you pass this legislation—they were trying to pass the cap-and-trade legislation that I just described, which would have cost between \$300 and \$400 billion at that time—will that reduce the CO₂ emissions worldwide? Keep in mind, Obama chose her to be the director of the EPA.

She said: No, it wouldn't do that because this isn't where the problem is. The problem is in China, India, and Mexico.

In fact, you can carry it one step further. If you are going to have a reduction in it and then that chases our manufacturing base to other countries where they don't have restrictions, then those countries will be countries like China and India that don't have any controls on emissions, so it will end up costing even more.

I mentioned that the President is going there in spite of where the American people are. This is very interesting because back in 2001 and 2002, major polling showed that the No. 1 concern at that time was global warming. And now that same poll—this is the Gallup poll that came out in March—said it is No. 15, and that is dead last as far as Americans are concerned. The American people have caught on.

The President is setting up the American economy to suffer great pain for no gain. The rising cost of energy will not only restrict access to affordable and reliable energy, but it will also undermine our businesses' ability to compete on a global scale and will ultimately ship jobs overseas to these other countries that will be increasing emissions for the next decade.

The outcome sounds a lot like the United Nations bureaucrats' hope for "leveling the playing field for big business worldwide." It was Margot Wallstrom who made that statement, and I quoted her a minute ago.

It is no wonder the President is working so hard to circumvent Congress's role in committing the United States to an international agreement on climate change. He is playing to the wishes of the international community to include French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius who, when talking about the forthcoming international climate summit, said that an agreement needed to be reached that would allow the President to make a commitment "without going to Congress." That is the whole idea.

It is not just this one; there are other areas as well. Last week we were discussing the big water bill for a long period of time. Historically—always in this country—the control of water has been under State jurisdiction, and if it is under State jurisdiction, the only exception was navigable waters. About 5 years ago, there was an effort by a Senator from Wisconsin and a Representative Oberstar from Minnesota to try to pass legislation that would take the word "navigable" out, and that would have meant that everything would go from the States back to the Federal Government. Not only did we defeat those bills, but both the Senator and House Member were defeated at the next election in 2010.

The American people have caught on, and the summit is going to go forward, and I can assure my colleagues that we will have a big delegation from the United States of America at the summit and will talk about what America is going to do. Again, they are trying to do it through regulation. They tried to do the water rule legislatively, but they couldn't do it. So now the President is trying to do it with a rule. We have gone through this with ozone and other things. We will be faced with this, and clearly the President's agreement is about his legacy more than promoting a policy that is in the best interest of the American people. Amer-

icans need to not only question a science that is not settled, but a policy that is being used to appease internationalists at the cost of America's future prosperity.

We have gone through this now for quite a while—I would say for the last 18 years or so. The problem we are having—and I see a lot of the young people here—is that so many of the young people actually believe this stuff. One of the reasons they believe it is that they are taught it.

This is a terrible confession for me to make. I have 20 kids and grandkids, and one of them—I won't say which one—when she was in sixth or seventh grade came to me and said: Pop—I—the "I" is for INHOPE—why is it that you don't understand global warming?

I said: Honey, show me why you are asking. She showed me the propaganda coming from the EPA and going through our school system. It is incredible.

In spite of that, the facts are there, and it is not going to work any more this time than it did during the 21 last visits.

With that, I will yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

DEFENSE APPROPRIATIONS BILL

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, Veterans Day is approaching on Wednesday, and as the Presiding Officer knows, this is a very important day across the country. It is certainly an important day in my State of Alaska. Alaska has a statistic—I certainly like to talk about it a lot in hearings and on the Senate floor—of having the highest number of veterans per capita than any other State in the United States. It is truly an honor to be serving a State that has so many veterans who have served our country, and we look at Veterans Day as a very important and very somber day.

We are also home to thousands of active duty military members and reservists—in large part because of our strategic location in Alaska.

I was home, like a lot of Members of the Senate, this past weekend, and in Alaska we are already beginning to celebrate Veterans Day in churches, community halls, private homes, and parades. This weekend I had the honor of attending a few of these events. I went to a parade in Anchorage and a wonderful church service yesterday. It is so moving to see and hear from all of our veterans. Again, I had the opportunity to do that this weekend. I met with World War II veterans—the "greatest generation"—Korean War, Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Cold War veterans.

I went to a number of these events and an issue came up—an issue that I think is important for this body to know about since our constituents are asking about it: What the heck is going on in Washington, DC, where Senators are filibustering the funding of our troops? What is going on? It is a good question. It confirms something that I

think a lot of us sometimes forget. We look at the procedural maneuvers here on the Senate floor—filibusters, blocking funding for our troops—and sometimes we think that the American people aren't watching. Well, they are watching, and our troops are watching. Not only are our troops at home watching, but importantly, our troops overseas who are literally risking their lives during this Veterans Day week, protecting our Nation, protecting us, and protecting our security. They are watching and so are their families.

When Members of this body decide to block funding for our troops, known as the Defense appropriations bill, the people know it. They especially know it when it has happened on this floor not once, not twice, but three times. The minority leader on the other side of the aisle has decided to filibuster our troops three times in terms of their funding. What is really amazing about that is that bill came out of the Appropriations Committee with a huge bipartisan majority. The legislation to support our troops is very bipartisan. So, why? I was asked this back home. I truly could not provide a coherent answer for the veterans, for their families or for our troops.

I have heard a number of reasons on the Senate floor as this was being debated. I believe the minority leader said it was a waste of time. I guarantee my colleagues that the vast majority of Americans don't agree with him on that. I heard something about Republican tricks with regard to the budget deal.

I just don't know why we would filibuster the Defense appropriations bill that funds our troops three times, including one time last week. I wish the minority leader would come to the floor and give a simple answer for why he insists on continually filibustering funding for our troops during the week of Veterans Day and, more importantly, when thousands—thousands—of young American men and women are risking their lives right now—right now—defending this Nation overseas.

Some people are starting to fear that Members of this body are not making our troops the highest priority. They are starting to fear that we are not concerned about the welfare of our troops and our Nation's security. Now, I don't believe that is the case. I have the honor of sitting on the Veterans Affairs Committee. I also serve on the Armed Services Committee, and I believe that is a very bipartisan committee, where everybody is focused on our national security and our troops. As a matter of fact, I talked to a reporter last week and told her how on the Armed Services Committee so many Members on both sides of the aisle come together and focus.

We have veterans in this country who still carry scars of their military service who were not supported by the public, who were not supported by the Congress. In particular, many of our veterans who served in Vietnam came

home and were ridiculed. They were not treated well. They were spit on. We can never ever go back to that shameful period of American history—never.

This week we have important work to do on these issues. We have a Military Construction and Veterans Affairs appropriations bill we will be voting on in the next few days. Again, that bill was previously filibustered. I don't know why, but it looks as though we are going to move forward on that. We have a defense authorization bill, which is hugely important for the men and women of our military. It was vetoed by the President. Again, it is not clear why the President vetoed it. We are going to take that up again.

The bottom line is this: enough playing politics with our troops, their families, and our national security. It is time to come together during this week, of all weeks—the week of Veterans Day—to come together in a bipartisan way on these important bills that we are taking up this week to support our troops, to support our veterans, to support our national defense in the finest tradition of this body, in the finest tradition of the U.S. Senate. Filibustering the Defense appropriations bill three times is not in the finest tradition of this body. We need to move beyond that. Doing so this week—the week of Veterans Day—will send an important message to the American people that we know what the highest responsibility of the Congress is. It is to defend this Nation and to take care of the troops and the veterans who have sacrificed and whom we honor this week.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator have Illinois.

Mr. KIRK. Mr. President, I come to the floor to urge support by the Senate for the 2016 MILCON-VA appropriations bill.

Last year this bill's funding for our veterans was \$65 billion and it is now \$71.2 billion. That is a \$6.2 billion increase over last year. The President requested \$70.1 billion for fiscal year 2016. This bill provides \$1.1 billion more than the President's request for this upcoming legislation.

Last week we agreed to debate this bill by an overwhelming vote of 93 to 0. We have record-level funding to fix the disability claims backlog at the VA in this bill. There are new protections for whistleblowers, doctors, and nurses at the VA who are protected when they report patient abuse. This bill protects the protectors of our veterans.

With that, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. ROBERTS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mr. ROBERTS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business for 5 minutes.

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

The Senator from Kansas is recognized for up to 5 minutes.

Mr. ROBERTS. Mr. President, I truly appreciate that from the Presiding Officer.

40TH ANNIVERSARY OF AMERICAN AGRI-WOMEN

Mr. President, today I wish to recognize the American Agri-Women who are celebrating their 40th anniversary this year. The American Agri-Women officially began in November of 1971, with the Kansas Agri-Women one of the earliest State groups. Forty years later, the American Agri-Women have grown to represent tens of thousands of women involved in all aspects of agriculture in all 50 States.

It is rather amazing that membership includes women of all ages from many different professions within the agriculture industry. These talented women are farmers, ranchers, and consumers; they are students, accountants, educators, marketers, managers, researchers, and even elected officials, among many others.

It is impossible to list all of the accomplishments these hard-working women have achieved for the agriculture industry over the last four decades, but perhaps their biggest success has been initiating the national Agriculture in the Classroom Initiative—a program that continues to be widely implemented in schools all over the country to educate children on modern agriculture.

Throughout the year, the Agri-Women have been engaging in their "Drive across America" tour—a road trip across the country to spread the word of the vital role women play in agriculture. Their drive ended last week in Maine, where they hold their annual convention.

During this tour, they also educated consumers on all the challenges that farmers and ranchers face and highlighted the role the United States plays in the global food system.

I have had the opportunity to meet with many of these women and discuss the work of the agriculture committee during their stop in their trip to Washington. They met with many members of the committee and many others interested in agriculture. I hope all of my colleagues will join me in celebrating the last 40 years of American Agri-Women and the hard work of all of the women in our agriculture community, without whom the United States would be unable to provide the highest quality food, fuel, and fiber domestically and around a very troubled and hungry world.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Montana.

Mr. TESTER. Mr. President, the MILCON-VA Subcommittee bill that we will be taking up over the next day or so is critically important not only for our military from a readiness standpoint but also for our veterans. We are approaching Veterans Day this Wednesday.

I hope we are able to put politics aside on this bill and do what is right not only for the military but for the men and women who have served this country in the military. If there are amendments that folks have, I would ask that they bring them to the managers as quickly as possible so we can go to work on them and clear them, if possible, and if not, push them off for another day.

This is really an important piece of legislation. We continually talk about conflicts around the world and we continually send our men and women there, with no argument from them. They do a job we are all very proud of: protecting the freedoms of this country. The second half of that story is making sure we do right by them when they come back home. That is what this bill is about—doing right for our veterans when they come back into civilian society again.

With that, I encourage the Members of this body to break from what we traditionally do; that is, play politics with a lot of things, and do what is right for our men and women who serve, our veterans, and for our military from a readiness standpoint in the bill within the MILCON component.

With that, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

AFFORDABLE CARE ACT

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President, we are in the beginning stages of open enrollment for the Affordable Care Act, which extends through January 31, 2016. I wanted to briefly come to the floor today to make sure the body knows that over the course of the next 2½ months their constituents will have an opportunity to save hundreds if not thousands of dollars by shopping around and finding the most affordable plan available to them but to also make everyone aware that despite the overwhelming success of the Affordable Care Act—the uninsured rate in this country has dropped by 30 percent since its inception only a few years ago—there are still some who have not gone onto the exchanges and found a plan that can bring them into the ranks of those who now have affordable insurance for the first time.

This is an important period for people across this country, but it is also a moment for us to reflect on what has happened over the course of the last 2 years, especially given all of those who were naysayers, all those who predicted the country would fall apart or at the very least the health care economy would fall apart after the passage of the Affordable Care Act. Of course, the exact opposite has happened.

We have seen a dramatic reduction in the number of people who don't have

insurance. We have seen people be able to gain enormous savings on the amount of money they spend on health care.

We have seen the amount of money the Federal Government spends on health care dramatically reduced—a \$1.2 trillion savings over the baseline when the ACA was passed, the amount of money the Federal Government is projecting to save over a 10-year period of time.

We have seen quality get better. Indicators—from hospital readmissions to infection rates—are all going in positive trendlines because, of course, the Affordable Care Act isn't just about getting people access to affordable care, it is also about transforming our payment system away from one that just bases our reimbursement system on the amount of medicine practiced to one that is actually rewarding the quality and outcomes that are gleaned as a part of our health care system.

It is a triple whammy. More people have access to affordable care; we are spending less money than we had planned to spend, by dramatic numbers, from the Federal perspective; and we are getting better quality outcomes.

Lots of us have ideas about how we can improve the Affordable Care Act, and we hope that with the legislative fights behind us and with the judicial fights largely behind us, we can now focus on ways to perfect this law. But there is no question that it is returning enormous benefits to people across this country.

Here is just another quick way to look at it. As shown here, this is the percentage of uninsured by county across the country. Here is 2013. You can see that in almost every county, we have north of 16 percent uninsured. But look how quickly these numbers change. Look how quickly almost every county, at least in the sort of vast swath of territory from the Northwest across to the Northeast, moves down to 2015, where we have majority sections of the country with close to 10 percent uninsured—a 30-percent national reduction in the number of people without insurance. We still have these big gaps where people are in the coverage gap, people who are making so little money that they don't qualify for Medicaid but also can't get into the subsidies, but this is enormous progress all across the country. We can make more progress, and a lot of that comes through consumers being educated during this open enrollment period as to the choices in front of them.

Here are some stunning numbers. Eighty-six percent of current enrollees—people who are on Affordable Care Act plans today—can find a lower premium plan at the same level before tax credits by returning to the marketplace to shop for coverage. If every consumer in the country went back and shopped for the lowest cost premium plan at the same level, the total savings across the country would be

\$4.5 billion. The average consumer—let's say you bought a silver plan last year and you decided to shop for a better deal this year—can save about \$52 a month. That results in a savings of about \$625 a year. So shopping can save you money.

You might be satisfied with your plan—and the satisfaction numbers are pretty remarkable. Seventy-five percent of people who are on the exchange today report being wholly satisfied with their plan, which is, frankly, a higher satisfaction level than for those who are on private insurance outside of the exchanges. But even if you are satisfied, go back and look at the plans that are available to you. You can find a plan that will get you the same coverage for lower costs. Let's make sure people are getting that return on their investment.

The good news is that there is more choice out there than ever before. Every year since the inception of the Affordable Care Act, plans have been added to these State-based and Federal exchanges. The average number of issuers on an exchange was 8 in 2013 and then 9 in 2014 and then 10 in 2015. So choice for the average consumer is increasing. Now, there are certain areas in which choices maybe stayed the same or maybe in some areas choices have been reduced, but on average across the country, you have more choices today than you did before, so there is no excuse not to go back out and try to find a plan that saves you some money.

In Connecticut, we are probably the poster child for effective implementation of the Affordable Care Act. We are a small State. We have a congressional delegation of only five in the House of Representatives. Yet we have had 700,000 Connecticut residents who have obtained health insurance through the Affordable Care Act, either on the exchange or on Medicaid. We have gone from an 8-percent uninsured rate—so we were already on the low end—down to a 3.8-percent uninsured rate. That is a remarkable number over the course of just a few years. We only have so much progress we can make when we have under 4 percent uninsured, but we have a goal of putting 10 to 20,000 people on the Affordable Care Act over the course of this open enrollment period.

Nationally, because we have made so much progress, the goals are going to be modest compared to years past as well, but the point of coming down to the floor today is to say that at this point in the implementation, when we have made such great progress, we want to continue to try to kick down the uninsured rate. But the real benefit in open enrollment is going to come not simply by reducing the number of people without insurance but by making sure that everybody is on the plan that best represents their financial and medical needs. Again, that number—across the country, \$4.5 billion could be saved between now and the end of January—is pretty remarkable.

This Senator has been on the floor a number of times, along with my colleagues, to talk about the simple premise that despite all of those who have been rooting for the Affordable Care Act to fail, it has worked. It has worked from an empirical basis and an anecdotal basis. The statistics don't lie. There are dramatic reductions in the number of people without insurance, dramatic reductions in the pace of health care inflation, and dramatic improvement in the quality of medicine being practiced across the country.

We all have stories of individuals from our State whose lives have been transformed by this act. There are parents who no longer have to worry about their children being locked into a future dictated by their illness, cancer patients who now know they are going to be able to have access to an affordable product and will never be denied access to health care just because of their illness, and taxpayers who see a trajectory of health care spending that is not going to bankrupt this country as fast as it would have had we not put changes inside this act.

So open enrollment is open until January 31, 2016. I encourage all my Republican and Democratic colleagues to get the word out about this. Everyone has constituents who can benefit. Whether or not you support the Affordable Care Act, it is the law of the land and your constituents can benefit from it. We should all be out there talking about the potential for our constituents collectively to save almost \$5 billion if they shop on Affordable Care Act exchanges between now and the end of January.

Thank you.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. TILLIS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

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

The legislative clerk read the nomination of Scott Allen, of Maryland, to be United States Director of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Allen nomination?

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?