

We also have been very concerned about physical infrastructure. We work very hard in terms of the Metro. Metro is not a Maryland subway; it is not a Virginia subway; it is America's subway. For all who ride that subway, we have been absolutely concerned about their safety. Working with our colleagues across the Potomac, we have been concentrating on Metro safety, and we were able to put the funds in the Federal checkbook to be able to improve that. We also want to be able to get people to the jobs, and that is why we funded the Purple Line.

There is a great opportunity in Maryland, and I hope it comes to other parts of our country, which is modernizing our ports. Whether you are in New Orleans, whether you are in Baltimore, whether you are in Charleston, Long Beach, CA, the ports need to be modernized. It is a great opportunity for jobs—real jobs in construction and real jobs here.

I am happy to say we worked very hard over the years with my colleagues, my beloved friends—Congresswoman Helen Bentley, a wonderful Republican woman. They called us the salt and pepper of the Maryland delegation. We worked to make sure our port was dredged and ready for the future.

There are many other issues that I can show, but I wanted to show that we are making public investments that not only look out for American jobs but our Federal employees working in these key agencies—the National Institutes of Health, the Food and Drug Administration, the National Weather Service. These are civil servants who, while they are located in Maryland, are working on a national mission. I am glad of the role I played to make sure they were capitalized.

I thank my colleagues on the other side of the aisle because they, too, understood why these investments are important.

Much is said about why we need to be America the exceptional, and I believe it is these kinds of programs. Our human infrastructure, our innovation, and our physical infrastructure is what we are doing.

There are many things in this bill. Many will complain about how big it is. But it is not how big the bill is, but it is how effective we are in helping America be able to be what America is—a land of opportunity and a land of growth and a land that knows how to protect its people and protect the world.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

FANNIE MAE AND FREDDIE MAC

Mr. CORKER. Mr. President, as we continue consideration of the omnibus, I rise today to applaud the inclusion of language I coauthored with Senator MARK WARNER that will ensure that the fate of mortgage giants Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac—entities Congress

created—will be determined by Congress, and this language makes crystal clear that this body does not support efforts to return to the failed model of private gains and public losses.

As we wrap up our legislative business of 2015, I am also here to remind my colleagues that there is much work to be done in the new year to finally address the last unfinished business of the 2008 financial crisis. Prior to the crisis, mortgage giants Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac were publicly traded. They benefited from an implicit government guarantee, which meant any upside went to the company. But as we saw at the height of the financial crisis, the downside of that structure fell on the taxpayers and it fell hard.

In September of 2008, because of this flawed model, losses mounted at Fannie and Freddie, causing taxpayers to write a \$188 billion bailout check to keep them afloat. These entities remain in government conservatorship today, backed by the taxpayers and owned by the U.S. Treasury Department.

A 2014 Federal Housing Finance Agency stress test projected that the GSEs could require a \$190 billion taxpayer bailout to keep them afloat during a future crisis—something none of us wants to see happen.

Because housing finance reform remained the last unaddressed piece of the financial crisis left, in 2013 Senator MARK WARNER and I developed legislation that attempted to address the flaws in our housing finance system and protect the taxpayers. This bill has been called the blueprint for how our Nation's housing finance system should look in the future.

After working with a group of bipartisan Members and then-Chairman Tim Johnson and Ranking Member MIKE CRAPO, a reform bill passed the Senate Banking Committee in May of 2014 by a vote of 13 to 9. This bill would protect taxpayers from future economic downturns by replacing Fannie and Freddie with a privately capitalized system. Unfortunately, it did not come to the Senate floor, but that does not change the fact that there continues to be broad, bipartisan, bicameral support to reform these entities.

That broad support at the committee level and throughout Congress came despite pushback from a number of large, self-interested Wall Street hedge funds. Let me explain. As a result of the 2008 bailout, Treasury purchased senior preferred stock in Fannie and Freddie and was given sole discretion to sell or otherwise dispose of those shares. Seeing an opportunity to make huge profits at the expense of taxpayers, a number of big Wall Street hedge funds and other entities rushed in when Fannie and Freddie crashed. They bought shares for pennies on the dollar after the government had taken them into conservatorship and knowing full well the government would have the authority to make decisions relative to their future.

Now the hedge funds appear to be spending big money and going to extreme lengths to stop housing finance reform in order to reap huge financial returns. As they know how to do so well, these wealthy hedge funds made a highly speculative bet that Congress would fail to do its job, structural reform efforts would fail, and Fannie and Freddie would be recapitalized and released out of conservatorship. Under that bet, the taxpayers lose while some of the wealthiest hedge fund managers get even wealthier. That is why the Wall Street hedge funds want to stop efforts to protect taxpayers in the hope that Fannie and Freddie could be recapitalized and released from conservatorship.

Let me be clear. Under that scenario—recapitalizing and releasing Fannie and Freddie in their current form—we would fall back to a system of private gains and public losses, lining the pockets of multimillionaires while leaving taxpayers on the hook for future bailouts. Looking at what is at stake, one can see why these hedge funds are so engaged in stepping on the taxpayers and preventing reform from occurring.

Using a self-analysis from one prominent hedge fund under a recap-and-release scenario, this fund—with an estimated current holding of \$366 million—has a potential net profit of \$8.1 billion and a total sale of \$8.4 billion. To give another example using those same projections, another prominent hedge fund with an estimated current holding of \$501 million has a potential net profit of \$2.3 billion or a sale of over \$2.8 billion.

These hedge funds, and several others, would benefit greatly from a recap-and-release scenario, which is why they are so adamantly opposed to housing finance reform that would put taxpayers' interests above their own. Surely, we will not conflate the clear interests of the hedge fund managers, which are billions of dollars in profits, with the critical need to protect taxpayers from a future bailout by enacting sound housing policy in our country. Returning to the failed model of private gains and public losses would leave taxpayers on the hook for the GSE's \$5 trillion in outstanding liabilities. That is why I believe we must act.

Inclusion of the jump-start provision in this bill is a good first step. This legislation would prohibit the sale of Treasury-owned senior preferred shares in Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac without congressional approval and ensure Congress, and not self-interested hedge funds, has the final say on how our housing finance system should look in the future.

While I believe that recap-and-release is totally inappropriate, I do understand that the hedge funds still have claims to deal with in court, and this legislation does not prejudice those claims.

I believe the blueprint Senator WARNER and I laid out in 2013 is a good

starting point and one that will protect taxpayers, but this legislation in the omnibus bill is silent on the future system. It simply says Congress should have the final say in what happens to these entities—again, entities that Congress created in the first place.

With passage of this provision—in the face of extremely intense opposition—we are telling taxpayers we are putting to bed the idea that returning to the status quo is an option. We will not return to a system where big Fannie and big Freddie control the lion's share of our housing system and taxpayers are exposed for future bailouts, but there is more work to be done.

The question I have is this: Moving forward, who are we going to fight for? Are we going to abdicate our responsibility and shy away due to efforts by large Wall Street hedge funds wanting to get wealthier off of taxpayers by placing taxpayers at greater risk or are we going to fight for the people whom we represent?

As all of us who served in this body during the financial crisis know well, the American people do not want to write another bailout check. Without housing finance reform, that is an all-too-real possibility.

To my colleagues, trust me. I know a number of you have felt pressure from large Wall Street hedge funds and the interest groups they support, but I also know there is not one of you who truly wants to put private investors' interest ahead of the people we represent.

In the new year, it is time for Congress to finally do its job. By finally addressing the last major piece of unfinished business from the financial crisis, we can once and for all end this failed model. Fortunately, a lot of the heavy lifting has already taken place.

As we look forward to 2016, protecting taxpayers by reforming our Nation's housing finance system should be near the top of the to-do list. This legislation takes us a step in the right direction toward that effort by saying the fate of mortgage giants Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac will be determined by Congress.

I remain committed to doing everything I can to make sure we do not return to the same failed model that put taxpayers on the hook for billions of dollars, and instead we can create a dynamic housing finance system that works for Americans rather than against them.

END MODERN SLAVERY INITIATIVE ACT

Mr. CORKER. Mr. President, I also rise to applaud Congress for including important funding in the Omnibus appropriations bill that will help in our efforts to fight human trafficking and slavery around the world through the End Modern Slavery Initiative Act.

I think most Americans would be stunned to know that over 27 million people are enslaved in more than 187

countries, including our own. Over 27 million people are enslaved today. That is more than four times the population of my home State of Tennessee.

Modern slavery comes in many forms and it preys on women and children the most. This brutal, multibillion-dollar industry deprives individuals of their basic human rights. Rather than holding a schoolbook, children in India are stacking bricks. Rather than sitting in a classroom, young girls in the Philippines are sitting in brothels forced into sexual servitude. In Ghana, young boys are forced into a life of slavery on fishing boats, and worldwide men and women hoping only to better the lives of their families are stripped of their passports and trafficked for labor.

I cannot thank the Senator from Texas enough for the incredible efforts he put forth to ensure that we do everything we can in our own country to keep this from happening. He has been heroic.

These are our daughters, sons, mothers and fathers, and that is why it is so important that we take bold action. Those who have been fighting this heinous crime for years all say that to end the practice of modern slavery, we need a reliable baseline data and consistent, effective monitoring and evaluation. They also say that what is most critical in this fight is the need for a focused, sustained effort that can leverage and coordinate private and government funding. That is where the End Modern Slavery Initiative Act comes into play.

This bold, bipartisan initiative has received broad support from over 90 industry experts, nongovernmental organizations, and faith-based groups. This initiative will seek to raise \$1.5 billion—more than 80 percent of which is expected to come through matching funds from private sector and foreign governments—to fight slavery worldwide. This model is designed to leverage limited foreign aid dollars and galvanize tremendous support and investment from the public sector, philanthropic organizations, and the private sector to focus resources responsibly where this crime is most prevalent.

The Omnibus appropriations bill that we will vote on this week brings us one step closer to making this initiative a reality with a \$25 million downpayment. There are many complex problems facing this country that demand our attention but perhaps none whose existence threatens the very concept of what it means to live in a free society. Ending modern slavery and human trafficking will not come easy, but we have a moral obligation to try, and I am proud—really proud—that Congress is taking that step and investing in this critical fight.

With that, I yield the floor and thank the Senator from Texas for allowing me to speak at this time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CASIDY). The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, before the Senator from Tennessee leaves the

floor, I wish to thank him. Among many other issues he has dealt with on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and Banking Committee, he has done great work on this issue. He is absolutely right about the scourge of human trafficking and how we need to do more—not just here at home but internationally—to try to break it up and rescue some of these children. Often the typical profile of a trafficked person in the United States is a young girl 12 to 14 years old. It is a travesty. I thank him for his great work and congratulate him.

OMNIBUS LEGISLATION

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, this week the Omnibus appropriations bill was released, along with the tax relief bill, that extends and makes permanent many important tax credits and lays the foundation for comprehensive tax reform, hopefully sometime soon. Members of this Chamber and the House have been reviewing the text of both pieces of legislation, and I am happy to report that the House of Representatives has now given a resounding bipartisan vote on the tax relief bill, with 318 Members of the House of Representatives voting to support it. The House, we are told, will move on the Omnibus appropriations bill tomorrow morning, and then we will take up both bills tomorrow morning in the Senate.

I want to just remember and recall for anybody listening that the appropriations process did not have to end up this way. As a matter of fact, after having passed the first budget that Congress has had since 2009, that then authorized the Appropriations Committee to begin the process of considering and passing 12 separate appropriations bills. Once they are voted out of committee, we will bring them to the floor, where they are open for amendment and debate in a completely transparent process, where people can understand the details of the legislation.

It didn't turn out that way because our Democratic colleagues filibustered these individual appropriations bills, thereby leaving us with no alternative but to consider this massive Omnibus appropriations bill.

I am tempted to call this omnibus bill an ominous bill, but I am not sure that is pejorative enough. It is not the right way to do business. I am disappointed. I am disappointed in our colleagues across the aisle who forced us to do business this way with them, but I hope next year we can have a regular and open appropriations process, one that will serve the American people far better.

I am by no means happy with the way this year-end funding bill has come together, after having been hijacked, held up, and effectively shut down, but if this sounds familiar, this looks a lot like the strategy they employed when they were in the majority