

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington is recognized.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, under the unanimous consent, the Senator from Idaho is next, but he is not on the Senate floor. I ask unanimous consent that I may proceed next in line.

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

APPROPRIATIONS

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I rise this afternoon as we go into the last hours of this session, before we are apparently going to adjourn for an entire 5 or 6 weeks, until after the election, to join with my leader on the Appropriations Committee, Senator BYRD, who spoke earlier today, and explain how the Republicans' failure to act on the annual funding bills is going to hurt all of our communities.

As Senators, we have a job to do in passing the annual spending bills that fund essentially all of our Government. It is one of the most basic responsibilities we have. On the Appropriations Committee, under the leadership of Chairman COCHRAN and Ranking Member BYRD, we have done our job. But on the Senate floor, the Senate Republican leadership has blocked our progress.

American families are going to pay the price. When I go home and talk to constituents in my State of Washington, they tell me they want our country to be strong again. The way that we can be strong again is to invest at home. That is what I have been fighting to do on the Appropriations Committee. But now the Republican leadership is refusing to allow us to move forward on the investments that we have agreed on in a bipartisan way in the Appropriations Committee. In fact, they are not even allowing us to debate making those investments. That is how wrong I see the priorities by this leadership.

Some people may suggest that if we pass this continuing resolution, everything is going to be fine. I hear the claims that there is no real difference between passing the bills we have worked so hard to put together and just putting our Government on autopilot for a couple of months. Nobody should believe that. It is simply not true.

There is a real cost to failing to act on the appropriations bills. This country is going to pay a price in airline safety. We are not going to be able to rapidly hire the air traffic controllers or safety inspectors we need. We are going to pay a price in highway safety because we are not going to be able to rapidly reverse the high increase in traffic fatalities. We are going to pay a price in the fight against terrorism. We are not going to be able to fund the Treasury Department's efforts to stop

terrorist financing. We are going to pay a price in educating our kids, improving our communities, and training our workforce.

Almost everywhere you look, we are going to pay a price if the Republican leadership succeeds in blocking action on the annual appropriations bills.

I want to share some specific examples. First, I will say a word about why this is happening. It is not because of partisan gridlock or because we have not had enough time to act. All of our bills have been ready to go since August. It is because this Republican leadership does not want to have a public debate about America's priorities just weeks before an election. I suspect it is because they realize their priorities are out of step with the American people.

There may be another reason to stall these bills. It hides the true cost of their wrong priorities. When we bring these bills up on the floor, we have a chance—all of us in America—to see what is funded and what is not. We have a chance to offer amendments and debate about priorities that deserve more support. By blocking that debate, the Republican leadership is hiding the true cost of their policies. Just as they have used supplemental spending bills to hide the true cost of the war, they are failing to act on the annual spending bills to hide the cost of their misplaced priorities. They prefer to mask from the voters the tough funding choices their policies will require.

They prefer to deny almost three-quarters of this Senate the opportunity to have any input on the appropriations bills by sending these bills directly from the committee to a conference. They prefer to set up an end-of-the-year train wreck that will require a massive Omnibus appropriations bill that will shortchange America's needs with a minimum amount of debate.

I personally thank Senator BYRD for taking the time this morning to call this issue to the attention of the entire Senate, as well as to the entire Nation. I thank our committee chairman, Senator COCHRAN, for his very capable leadership of our committee. I only wish Senator COCHRAN was in power to control the floor schedule and not just the committee schedule.

Last year, Senator COCHRAN surprised many of us and earned the respect of all of us in doing what seemed impossible: he succeeded in sending 11 appropriations bills to the White House for signature. He showed us how it should be done.

This year, when it came to the management of our committee, Senator COCHRAN actually improved on last year's record. Last year, the Appropriations Committee reported all but one appropriations bill to the Senate floor before the August recess. This year, Chairman COCHRAN saw to it that

each and every one of our appropriations bills was reported to the Senate floor before the August recess. That involved a lot of very hard work and some very long markups. No one worked harder than Chairman COCHRAN himself.

Unfortunately, this year, the Senate Republican leadership didn't share Chairman COCHRAN's commitment. That is a change from last year. Last year, the Senate Republican leadership saw to it that all 12 appropriations bills were considered on the floor prior to adjournment. Today, we are just a few hours away from the beginning of a very long fall recess, and yet the Senate Republican leadership has seen fit to call up only 2 of our 12 appropriations bills that the committee reported back in June and July. That record is shameful.

The full Senate has only debated two funding bills this year—Defense and Homeland Security. They are certainly really important, but they are just 2 of the 12 bills that we are charged with passing.

The others are critically important as well. Those bills ensure that the care of our veterans returning home from Iraq is met. They ensure that we educate our children, that we meet the housing needs of the people we represent, and that we deal with the health care of all of our families, particularly our seniors. Those bills support our efforts to fight crime and drug abuse, provide disaster assistance to struggling family farmers, and invest in our roads, our bridges, and our rail system.

It seems, as far as the Republican leadership is concerned, that those issues this year can rot on the vine. According to their plan, these functions of Government will be subjected to a continuing resolution that guarantees them only the lowest possible funding level.

I have had the privilege of serving on the Appropriations Committee for every one of my 14 years in the Senate, and I am certainly aware that Congress does not have a great track record when it comes to finishing all the appropriations work before the beginning of a fiscal year. But in my 14 years, I cannot remember a time when the Senate has made so little progress in executing its most basic responsibilities. The new fiscal year starts this coming Saturday, tomorrow. I had my staff go back and check the record, and I can tell my colleagues that in the last 14 years, we have never begun a new fiscal year having passed as few as two of the appropriations bills out of the Senate. This year, we have a deplorable record.

Looking forward, we are now hearing rumors that the other 10 appropriations bills are never going to come to the Senate floor for debate. We are hearing rumors they are going to be sent straight to a conference with the

House of Representatives to put together some kind of massive omnibus appropriations bill. I hope that is not the case. That approach, frankly, is an insult to the 72 Members of this Senate who do not serve on the Appropriations Committee. As a member of that committee, I had the opportunity to review each of those bills the committee reported. I had an opportunity to offer amendments in committee and full committee markups, but 72 of my Senate colleagues never had that opportunity.

Those 72 Senators were elected by the people of their State to oversee and influence decisions regarding the way their tax dollars are spent. By denying these 72 Senators the opportunity to debate these important bills, the Senate Republican leadership is denying those Senators' constituents the right to be heard. That is not the way this Senate ought to be doing its business.

Our country will pay a high price if we fail to act on these appropriations bills.

Some people are claiming it doesn't matter when we get around to actually finalizing the appropriations process. Mr. President, as the ranking member on the Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, Treasury, the Judiciary, and HUD, I want to tell my colleagues that it does matter. I will give a couple of examples.

Last month, we experienced a tragic plane crash in Lexington, KY. The NTSB has not yet reported to us on the actual cause of that crash, but it was revealed that the air traffic control tower at Lexington had only one controller on duty—one controller on duty—contrary to the FAA's own policy. When this incident occurred, it was discovered that several other towers were also operating with only one air traffic controller.

Everyone involved in aviation policy knows the FAA needs to hire more controllers. They have to fill the vacancies, and they have to replace a growing number of retirees. There is money in the FAA budget to hire more controllers. We put the money in the House and Senate appropriations bills to hire those controllers. But until the FAA Administrator gets a final budget, she won't know how many controllers she can hire or how quickly she can hire them. This is a basic issue of safety and people's lives. But it is the safety issue that the Senate Republican leadership is now happy to have wait on the back burner for a few more months.

A similar situation existed in the hiring of more air traffic safety inspectors. We desperately need more safety inspectors to ensure that our financially strapped airlines are operating safely. An increasing amount of airline maintenance for U.S.-flagged airlines is now being conducted overseas. We need inspectors to visit those foreign

repair stations to make sure all of the appropriate procedures are being followed.

Just this week, the National Academy of Sciences reported that the FAA needs to modernize its system for determining how many inspectors they need and whom to hire. But the FAA cannot address any of those deficiencies until it gets its final budget for the year. This is just another safety issue that the Senate Republican leadership is now happy to have wait on the back burner for a few more months.

The Republican leadership's failure to act could also hurt our efforts to fight terrorism. The Treasury Department has a critical role in combating terrorist financing. They are on the job morning, noon, and night trying to interrupt the cashflow between the terrorists and those who fund them.

Ever since 9/11, the Treasury Department has been seeking increased resources from our subcommittee to fight terrorist funding. Our subcommittee has provided every dollar the Treasury Department has requested, including the funding for increased personnel and infrastructure for fiscal year 2007.

The Treasury Department is now being told that the increased funding they had asked for will have to wait a few more months. Why? Because the Senate Republican leadership doesn't want us to debate the Transportation-Treasury bill before the election.

One of the issues being discussed in the closing days of this session is the security of our courts and our judges. An effort is being made to provide authorization for additional court security in the Department of Defense authorization bill. The brutal murder of a father and mother of a Federal judge in Chicago showed us the urgent need for better security.

The Transportation-Treasury appropriations bill, as passed by the House and Senate committees, included sizable increases for that court security. We are not talking about an authorization; we are talking about cold, hard cash that will go out to better protect our judges. But you know what. That money can't go out until our appropriations bill is signed into law, and that can't happen if the Senate Republican leadership slows this appropriations process to a crawl.

Finally, I want to talk about the critical need for improved safety on our highways. One month ago, our Nation received a wake-up call from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

For many years, our country was making steady progress in reducing the overall fatality rate. But last month, the fatality rate on our highways started to move back up. Deaths from motor vehicle crashes jumped up 1.4 percent over the level in 2004. We had 43,443 deaths on America's highways in

2005. That is the highest number since 1990.

We also have begun to see a number of road fatalities involving large trucks head back up. We made progress between 1998 and 2002, but since that time, the number of large truck fatalities is moving in the wrong direction.

More and more people are dying on our highways, and Congress is working to respond. There are increased levels of funding, consistent with the SAFETEA-LU authorization law—both for highway safety and motor carrier safety in both the House and Senate appropriations bills. But those additional resources that save lives on our highways have to wait. Why? Because the Senate Republican leadership didn't want to debate this Transportation appropriations bill before this election.

These decisions by the Senate Republican leadership to stall the appropriations process can and are having very real consequences.

I want to state today my deep disappointment that the Senate Republican leadership has done such an abysmal job in fulfilling its most basic responsibility to fund our Government.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator's time has expired.

Mrs. MURRAY. I ask for 1 additional minute.

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

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, it doesn't have to be this way. Rather than spending the month of July and September debating bills for political reasons, we could have been debating these appropriations bills that are critically needed for the Nation's safety and security. We could have been fighting for the people we represent. We could have been meeting their basic needs, protecting their livelihoods, and ensuring their safety. But our leadership said no, and now our families are paying a price.

I think the Senate deserves better, but more importantly, the people we represent deserve better.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Idaho.

EXTENSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. CRAIG. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the period for the transaction of morning business be extended until 3:30 p.m. today, with time equally divided in the usual form, and the order of speakers remain in place.

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

AGJOBS

Mr. CRAIG. Mr. President, I will be brief because I have already spoken on