As the 108th Congress comes to a close, it is my sincere hope that the same type of bipartisan spirit can be extended into the 109th Congress. It is vital that Members of this body work together to find common ground on issues that are important to our citizens, our States, our country, and, in some instances, the world.

I, for one, am looking forward to the challenges we face and am confident we can solve the difficult issues for our day and leave a lasting legacy for our children, grandchildren, and future generations.

Mr. President, I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will please call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

THANKING CHAIRMAN STEVENS

Mr. COLEMAN. Mr. President, I got up here about an hour ago to pay homage, to pay tribute to the senior Senator from Missouri, the chairman of the VA/HUD Appropriations Committee, for his help in finding a way to compensate two young men from Minnesota who have suffered great personal tragedy. I must confess to a rookie mistake in not recognizing at the same time a person without whose help, approval, and guidance this never would have happened, and that, of course, is the chairman of the Appropriations Committee, Senator STEVENS from Alaska. I know he was personally involved in this. In fact, he commented to me this is one of the worst, most terrible circumstances, and we need to address it. He has pledged on a longer term basis, even next year, to look at other situations like this so that we do the right thing.

I want to say on the record to my friend, the chairman of the Appropriations Committee, how appreciative I am, how thankful I am, how grateful I am for all he does, for his guidance in putting together a huge package that deals with big things but doesn't forget little things. Sometimes the little things are big things. In this case, this somewhat little thing—little in the scope of a $388 billion bill, but big for two young men who have suffered so much—would not have happened without the help and the direction of the chairman of the Appropriations Committee. I wanted to make that clear on the record my deep appreciation for his big heart, for his guidance and mentorship, his concern, and ultimately his ability to get things done.

I yield the floor and 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. MCCAIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be dispensed with.

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

CONTINUING SAGA OF BOSTON'S BIG DIG

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, I come to the floor to discuss the continuing saga of Boston's big dig, an issue I have been involved in now for many years. As usual, the news is not good.

As most of my colleagues know, the Central Artery/Ted Williams Tunnel Project in Boston, more commonly known as the big dig, apparently has sprung a leak or, more accurately, hundreds of leaks.

The two independent engineers brought in by the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority are still assessing the extent of the problem. But so far, over 400 leaks have been identified that they say could take a decade—and millions of dollars—to fix. And on Wednesday, the Boston Globe reported that documents obtained by the newspaper indicate there are ''thousands of ceiling and wall fissures, water damage to steel supports and fireproofing systems, and overloaded drainage equipment''.

It comes as no surprise that all of the parties involved in this latest scandal are holding each other, but not themselves, accountable. Modern Continental Construction Company, which performed the work where the 8-inch ''blow out'' leak occurred in the northbound section of the I–93 tunnel in September, believes the project's engineer, and joint venture of Bechtel Corporation and Parsons Brinckerhoff, is responsible because of faulty design work. The Turnpike Authority insists that even though a senior agency official was notified of the leak problem in 2001, the contractors and the project engineer are the responsible parties. The Governor believes that Turnpike Authority bears responsibility and has asked for Chairman Amorello's resignation. With all the finger-pointing, I am concerned that the taxpayers could end up footing at least part of the bill for repairs.

I do not intend to allow this to happen. The newly-discovered leaks are just another in a long list of costly failures in the continuing saga of the bid dig.

The Central Artery Tunnel Project was conceived in 1981 and received initial approval in 1985. Construction began in 1991 with a target completion date of December 1998. I repeat, the target completion date of the Central Artery Tunnel Project, known as the big dig, was December 1998. As I calculate, it is now 6 years later. Over the intervening years, the completion date slipped nearly 7 years. The current forecast is for the project to be completed between May and November of 2005.

As delays for the project mounted over the years, the costs of the project spiraled out of control. According to this chart, it was estimated in 1985 that the big dig would cost $2.6 billion. When the project is finally completed next year, the total cost is projected to be $14.6 billion, roughly 5.5 times the original estimate. That does not count the newly discovered leaks and the repairs which, in the view of some, would take 10 years to fix.

We now know that billions of the cost overruns are attributable to mistakes and deliberate misstatements by the project managers. We have had over 20 reports from the Department of Transportation Inspector General which has tracked this very carefully. There have been deliberate misstatements by the project managers, made not only to the people of Massachusetts but also to the Congress of the United States. Several years of low-ball cost estimates finally caught up with the big dig in the year 2000.

In January of that year, the Turnpike Authority submitted its annual financial plan, estimating the cost of the big dig at $10.8 billion.

The following month, on the same day the Federal Railroad Administration accepted the plan as valid, the Turnpike Authority announced the project would cost $12.2 billion, or an estimated additional $1.4 billion.

Bechtel/Parsons Brinckerhoff blamed the increase on unforeseen cost increases and shortening the construction schedule by 2 years. But a series of articles by the Boston Globe concluded that the majority of the $1.4 billion cost overrun was due to design errors by Bechtel/Parsons Brinckerhoff. In one instance, the engineering firms failed to include the FleetCenter, the sports center home to the Boston Bruins and Boston Celtics, in the designs for the project. Months of construction took place before the design flaw was detected. This mistake alone cost taxpayers $991,000.

The Department of Transportation Inspector General and all members of the Commerce Committee are aware of the incredible work the Department of Transportation Inspector General has done, which issued 20 reports on the big dig, and was highly skeptical of the project managers' cost projections, and concluded in May 2000 that the project's managers were ''well aware that costs were increasing significantly'' and ''deliberately withheld'' information about cost increases in the 1998 and 1999 financial plans.

That statement by the Department of Transportation Inspector General bears repeating. It concludes that the project's managers were well aware that costs were increasing significantly and deliberately withheld information—that includes the Congress of the United States—about cost increases in the 1998 and 1999 financial plans.

Last year, the Securities and Exchange Commission determined the Turnpike Authority and its former