

The most recent census of the lesser prairie chicken indicates that in the last 2 years, the population of that bird has increased by 50 percent. Again, common sense tells us if there is rain and if there is moisture, there is habitat and the birds return. As the rainfall has returned, the habitat is growing, and it is healthy again. Local surveys indicate what we would expect: The bird's population is again increasing.

Therefore, one might think it would be useful to take a second look at the listing. Despite our request of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, they dismissed with little thought that as the species has returned, maybe it should no longer be listed. The opportunity that I and others have to rein in decisions that we believe are poorly made, lack common sense, and are unreasonable occurs in this appropriations process. My guess is that all of my colleagues have certain issues on which they want to direct a Federal agency about how to behave, what rules and regulations are appropriate, where we believe they have exceeded their authority or where they simply lack the common sense or sound science to have made an appropriate decision.

There are some who say you shouldn't legislate on an appropriations bill. An appropriations bill is a legislative effort, and it would be wrong for us not to take the opportunity to direct agencies on behalf of the American people, on behalf of the constituents—in my case of Kansas—who feel very strongly about this issue and have suffered the consequences of the listing of the lesser prairie chicken by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Despite the practical reasons that this listing should be reversed, the agency is not listening, and we ought to take the opportunity to direct their behavior in a legislative way. Whether or not an amendment is approved is decided here in the Senate by a majority vote. I would tell you that in the case of this issue, the amendment was offered in the Appropriations Committee. It is included in the Interior appropriations bill. The House has adopted similar language in their appropriations bill. So for those who say this is inappropriate, this is the legislative process as it should be. This is the Senators and the Members of the House of Representatives speaking on behalf of their constituents in a very constitutional and appropriate way.

It is important for us to utilize our authority as Members of Congress to make decisions that benefit our country as we see best, and we ought to work together to accomplish that. There will be riders—provisions that are offered that are included in an appropriations bill—that I will disagree with, but the appropriations process ought to work. As a member of the Appropriations Committee and as a Member of the Senate, I want to see us get back to the days in which the power of the legislative branch is able to be utilized and we make certain that we

make decisions on how we spend the money.

I appreciate the opportunity to be on the Senate floor today to speak as we move next week toward the appropriations bill and its conclusion. I wish to say that in a bipartisan way, we ought to work together to find opportunities to solve the problems that our constituents and Americans face. The legislative process is a way that we can do that. It is not inappropriate. In fact, it is the constitutional response to an abuse of power in an executive branch. Whether it is a Republican executive branch or a Democratic executive branch, we ought to work together as Members of Congress in utilizing our constitutional authority to make appropriate decisions for the American people.

EXTENSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. MORAN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that morning business be extended until 6 p.m. today, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

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

Mr. MORAN. Madam President, I yield the floor to the Senator from Utah.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

HIGHWAY BILL

Mr. HATCH. Madam President, throughout my time as ranking member and now chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, finding money for surface transportation infrastructure has been a persistent and seemingly intractable problem. Even as we went into this year with a new Republican majority in the Senate, none of us could have imagined that we could find a way to provide 5 years of solvency and stability for the highway trust fund. Yet, with today's announcement of the completed conference report, that is precisely where we are right now.

The conference report for the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act will hopefully be enacted within a few days' time. As the very first member of the conference committee to sign the report, I want to briefly talk about the process by which the legislation came about and how we got to where we are now.

Immediately before the Memorial Day recess, there was an unsuccessful attempt to put together a package to possibly get the highway trust fund through the rest of 2016. The agonizing difficulty we faced at that time in dragging ourselves through another 18 months gave us a desire to think bigger than we had before. This is why I was determined to help find a way out of the cycle of short-term infrastructure bills and why I believed it was necessary for us to think outside of the

proverbial box and look everywhere for potential offsets.

Generally, the Finance Committee is responsible for the financing title of any highway bill that goes through the Senate. Usually, we do our best to work within our committee's jurisdiction to identify offsets. However, because those resources have been quickly drying up, we had to look elsewhere for this package.

After the committee spent weeks examining numerous options and alternatives, I was able to present our distinguished majority leader with a list of offsets that, while not necessarily ideal, would allow us to put together a long-term highway bill without raising taxes or increasing the deficit.

I am very pleased with the work we were able to do there as that list of offsets formed the basis of the funding for the long-term deal we will likely be voting on in short order. As we continued on, by the end of July, the Senate had managed to pass a bipartisan infrastructure bill with 3 years of solvency, funding, and certainty for the highway trust fund. Though we were required to enact another short-term extension before the August recess, momentum had begun to build in both Chambers for a long-term highway bill.

Common practice on highways over the past few years has been to enact short-term extensions and then go and complain about the dysfunction in Congress before moving on to the next order of business. The offset package produced by the Senate showed that we could do things differently and, for the first time in almost two decades, a long-term transportation bill was actually possible.

After the August recess, the House began working off of the Senate bill as a template for their own legislation. After they passed a remarkably similar bill in November, the conference committee came together to produce the legislation announced today.

While I am not one who likes to count chickens before they have been hatched—no pun intended—I am optimistic that the bill will pass with a strong bipartisan vote. Putting these offsets for this long-term bill together has truly been a group effort. As I mentioned, we searched far and wide for offsets that required a number of chairmen and committees to work together. I commend my colleagues for their efforts and their willingness to do so and their willingness to do what it took to make the endeavor successful.

I especially want to thank Senator THUNE and the commerce committee, who assisted these efforts by providing for the transfer of certain motor vehicle safety penalties to the highway trust fund. I also appreciate the work done by the House Financial Services Committee and Congressman RANDY NEUGEBAUER, chairman of the Subcommittee on Financial Institutions and Consumer Credit. He was able to identify a new and important offset for the infrastructure bill, a feat which few

have been capable of. While, as is often the case around here, some are very quick to throw out criticisms of individual offsets and were less willing to offer suggestions for suitable alternatives, Congressman NEUGEBAUER, in response to concerns about an item in the original offset package, came forward to produce a viable and scorable alternative that was able to garner bipartisan support and ultimately broaden the overall support for this long-term deal.

Back in July, when the Senate first proposed a long-term bill, many said we couldn't do it without raising taxes. When we passed our first bill, these same people claimed that it stood no chance of passage in the House. Now, just a few months later, both Chambers are a few days away from considering the conference report built upon the foundation laid by that same Senate bill.

This legislation provides a longer extension than the vaunted SAFETEA-LU extension, which many had long viewed as a model for a multiyear highway bill. In fact, you would need to go back at least to the late 1990s—actually, to the early 1990s—to find a highway reauthorization of comparable duration.

As I said, this major bicameral success was unthinkable a few months ago.

While I do acknowledge that we still face the problem of outlays from the highway trust fund outpacing the dedicated revenues, this bill will give us a much needed 5-year break from the deadlines and cliffs that all too often dictate how we deal with the highway trust fund. It is, quite simply, a great example of what we can do when we work together.

I would like to briefly note that these types of victories for good government have been piling up all year under the current Senate majority.

We do need to start thinking now about more permanent solutions on highways, but once we pass this bill, we will be in a better position than at any time in nearly two decades to do so. That, as they say, is nothing to sneeze at.

Before I conclude, I wish to pay tribute to Chairman INHOFE, Chairman SHUSTER, and BARBARA BOXER and her Democratic counterpart in the House, who led a conference committee that was able to sift through various issues and put together a very complex piece of legislation in a matter of just a few weeks. These two chairmen deserve a lot of credit for their efforts, as do all the Members who took part in the conference.

Today Congress is making headway to implementing the longest highway reauthorization bill in more than 15 years. We have heard time and again that a long-term highway bill would only be possible if we included a big tax increase. Yet we have been able to defy the odds and provide much needed funding for America's bridges, high-

ways, and roads for the next 5 years. This marks a watershed moment for our transportation community, which will now have the security and stability they need to plan, implement, and complete critical infrastructure projects.

Of course, while we have crossed a major hurdle today, our job is not yet over. There is still one more vote to go, and I am confident we will get there.

I look forward to continuing to work with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to complete our work and ensure that a strong multiyear highway bill is signed into law this year. I look forward to working with all of my colleagues for whatever challenges lie ahead.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. GARDNER). The Senator from Oklahoma.

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. President, when you are home and the television is on, the phone starts to ring, your dog is at the back door barking, and the kids need help doing their homework, occasionally you can forget that dinner is on the stove, but if you forget about it too long, your house will catch on fire, and that is going to be a problem. You can get distracted by a lot of things and suddenly miss out on something that is very important.

Our Nation is dealing with a lot of issues right now, such as terrorism, immigration, banking issues, our economy, education, transportation, and I do have a concern that we have forgotten this year we still have \$450 billion in deficit and a total debt of \$19 trillion hanging over our heads.

If we were in any State in America and faced with that, the legislative branch would work, make hard decisions, and then balance their budget. Every single State, at the end of the legislative session, comes to a balanced budget, but we don't. We just overspend, and it has happened consecutively so many times now, our debt has built up to \$19 trillion. I don't have an easy way to articulate \$19 trillion of debt, but let me give you a picture of that. Earlier this year we passed a 10-year budget plan that would get rid of our \$450 billion of deficit and would slowly work down, within 10 years, back to a balance. Good.

Let's do a hypothetical. Let's say we finish out that path, and we have to get back to a balance within 10 years, and then in year 11 we do very well and we have a \$50 billion surplus. It is a good surplus. Here is my question: How many years in a row would we have to have that \$50 billion surplus before we paid off our debt? If you are doing the math in your head, the correct answer is 460 years in a row. If we had a \$50 billion surplus for 460 years in a row, we could pay off our debt. That is not going to happen, is it? We are in a bad spot, and my fear is that we are dis-

tracted and we are not focusing on something that will come back and bite us.

What do we do about that? I ask if we can do the first thing: Can we at least agree that this is a problem and that we should actually work to balance our budget? At least have that as the common ground that we can agree on in this body and say we need to get back to a balanced budget, and then we need to begin to pay this down and start that process—to approach this issue in a way that I think can develop real solutions. We need to find common-ground areas, but first we need to begin with that one simple principle.

Our office has come up with a list which we affectionally call the Federal Fumbles List—100 ways the Federal Government has dropped the ball. We are identifying areas of waste, duplication, and, quite frankly, regulations that are well outside the purview of the Federal Government, many of which slow down the economy and drive up the costs to consumers.

These Federal fumbles are not an exhaustive list. This is not everything; This is just our list. We took some from multiple agencies and entities. As we pulled this list together, we encouraged this. This is our to-do list. We encourage other offices to start their to-do list so at least we can have a common-ground sense of, let's get back to a balance and work together to identify something within our own office to find out ways we can deal with some simple things, such as, how are we wasting taxpayer dollars? What programs are ripe with fraud? What duplication and inefficiency is out there? Where are we overregulating, which in turn raises the costs of goods and services for consumers? And how does the government actually have processes in place that deceive taxpayers and add debt to their families?

When we walked through this, we had a common agreement on our team: We are not just going to identify problems; we are going to actually work together to find a solution. Our issues and conversations have been simple. If I am back home in Oklahoma, I can sit in the coffeehouse with other folks eating breakfast and talk about all the problems, but when I get back in this room, we can't just complain about the issues, we have to fix those issues. That is our job. We spend a tremendous amount of time just complaining about the issues as if fixing it comes from somewhere else.

So we take all 100 of these issues and say: Here is the problem, and here is the solution we have proposed. If people have different ideas and different solutions, bring them, but let's at least agree that these things should be resolved. Some of them are small, some of them are large, but we simply asked the question: How do we fix this?

I have several things to say on that issue. One is that we have to fix our budgeting process and the way we make decisions about it.