

are burning and impacted by drought, such as Montana, have the resources they need to protect our citizens, our economy, and our way of life.

As Congress works to get resources to the folks devastated by Harvey, I hope we can all take a page out of the American people's book and work together to get resources not only to the folks devastated by Harvey but the folks in Montana and the folks across the West who have been impacted so greatly by drought and wildfires.

I am asking for each and every one of the folks who serve in this body to look at the photos and stand with the people of Montana as they fight for blue skies and fresh air once again. We need the resources. We do not need a delay. We need to send them quickly because lives and property and a thriving outdoor economy are at risk.

In the meantime, I ask for your prayers for all of the folks who have been impacted by disasters, including the folks from the Treasure State, as we endure the drought and these terrible fires.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

RECESS

Mr. FLAKE. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate stand in recess as under the previous order.

There being no objection, the Senate, at 12:18 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Acting President pro tempore.

EXTENSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. DAINES. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that morning business be extended until 3 p.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

ORDER FOR RECESS

Mr. DAINES. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that at 3 p.m. today, the Senate recess until 4:15 p.m. to allow for the all-Senators briefing.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

MONTANA WILDFIRES

Mr. DAINES. Mr. President, I left Montana yesterday morning to come

back to Washington, DC, to do the work of the American people but, as always, my heart remains in Big Sky Country. That is especially true right now as fires burn across our State. In fact, just yesterday, of the top 30 wildfires in the Nation, 28 of those 30 wildfires were in Montana.

Our crisis in Montana isn't water. It is not too much water. It is not hurricanes. It is fire. It is smoke filling the air and filling our lungs. It is communities being evacuated, Montanans standing on the side of the road looking at the fires moving toward their homes. We have seen the loss of homes and many structures. Montanans are looking at the tons of fuel just lying on the forest floor waiting for a spark to ignite. In fact, in this year alone, over 1,600 fires have burned nearly 1 million acres in Montana. That is nearly the size of the entire State of Delaware.

At my invitation, Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue and Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke both came to Montana, just about 2 weeks ago—in fact, 2 weeks ago tomorrow—so they could see firsthand the impact wildfires are having on our great State. We went out and saw the Lolo Peak Fire. The impact is devastating.

We need to be sure Montana gets the resources it needs, first of all, to stop the fires. I am very grateful to the men and women who are risking their lives to fight these fires, going on virtually very little sleep, living in tents, fighting these fires. The firefighters battling on the ground are away from their families, and they are giving everything to protect our lives, our lands, and our property. Tragically, already in Montana, two firefighters have lost their lives—Trenton Johnson, age 19, and Brent Witham, age 29.

Preventing wildfires is impossible, but we can do much more to lessen the severity and impact of these fires. Seven million federally controlled acres in Montana are at high risk for wildfire. Five million acres—five million acres—have been designated for accelerated forest management due to insect infestation. We are talking about dead trees. Yet, since 1990, our State of Montana has lost over 40 percent of its forestry workforce and two-thirds of its mills. The remaining mills that we have are not running around the clock, multiple shifts, which they could do, except for the fact they can't get enough logs. We are literally bringing in logs from out of State and even out of the country to our mills in Montana to keep them going.

Let's talk about Mineral County, MT. Mineral County was founded in 1914. This county in Western Montana is well known for its dense forests and abundant natural resources. The first sawmill came to this area around the turn of the 20th century. Multiple others followed suit. For decades, the timber industry thrived. Montanans worked hard, and they earned good money in the timber industry. In fact, the timber industry produced tax reve-

nues to support their schools, teachers, infrastructure, and allow our counties to prosper, but in the early 1990s things changed. Across the State of Montana, environmental lawsuits became a barrier to timber contracts that were awarded to Montana's small businesses. A community that once thrived on the abundant resources surrounding them now sits with one of the highest unemployment rates in the State.

Today, Mineral County has just a single lumber mill. Folks living there today are watching the very resources that supported their grandparents burn. In fact, in Mineral County alone, over 25,000 acres have been torched this fire season, and the fires continue to burn. The weather outlook for September continues with above normal temperatures and below normal precipitation. This fire season is not over. We are going to be in it for quite some time.

The mismanagement of our Federal forests and radical environmentalists have prevented hard-working Montanans from having jobs, and this just adds more fuel, literally, to these wildfires. Our inability to act and treat these acres further deteriorates the health of our forests and the communities that desperately depend on them.

I can tell my colleagues—and I can speak on behalf of all of Montana—that we are tired of being told that others know better than we do when we watch our forests burn every summer, our mills close, our neighbors lose jobs, and our counties lay off road crews because they don't have the funds anymore to support basic infrastructure, and our communities suffer from the lack of management of our Federal lands.

A safe forest, a vibrant forest is a managed forest. A healthy forest is a managed forest, and timber jobs are good jobs. A properly managed forest is also good for wildlife habitat. We have teamed with the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation. Their headquarters are in Missoula, MT. If you want to see more elk, if you want to see more wildlife, you need to manage the forests. It is good for wildlife habitat and good for water quality. A wildfire is devastating to the watershed because what happens is the wildfires come through, they wipe out the trees and grasses, and then when the spring rains come—when the snow melt comes from the spring—we see tremendous erosion and devastation of fish habitat and the loss of good sources of water for our communities.

Let's talk about the unspeakable amount of carbon emissions that are produced by these wildfires. I can tell my colleagues that we are done listening to radical environmentalists when they tell us otherwise. Too many forest management projects have been held up in frivolous litigation at the expense of the people of Montana. One such project—the Stonewall project—was halted because of the terrible Cottonwood decision, which is the 21st

century poster child for radical environmental activism. Two fires blazed on the very lands that were set to be managed had it not been for these radical environmentalists. This is wrong.

We need litigation relief. We need to reform the process that our land managers go through to get these projects done. The National Environmental Policy Act—NEPA—was established to provide guidance for land managers to analyze all project alternatives and allow for public comment. This process has become so bogged down with additional steps and litigation that projects now at times take years to get through it. Others never even make it.

When it takes this long to analyze whether to even start a project, the forests continue to get more and more overstocked, more and more littered with fuels. A forest is a renewable resource, but if we do not manage the forests, they become unhealthy. They become prone to wildfire. Something needs to be done to streamline the process while allowing more collaboration between stakeholders. We can't wait any longer.

We need our colleagues to come to the table because we need comprehensive forest management reform. How many more thousands of acres in Montana and all over the West must burn before we act? Tying the hands of the State, tying the hands of the local communities, tying the hands of the people of Montana who best know how to manage these lands has not served us well. We need to change course.

I will work with anyone of any party and at all levels of our government to ensure that forests are managed in a way that reduces the severity of wildfires because Montanans deserve it, and because, quite frankly, it makes sense. Montanans are tired of seeing and breathing the smoke. The firefighters risking their lives out there deserve it as well.

Here is the bottom line. Either we are going to manage the forests or the forests are going to manage us. It is time to put the loggers of Montana back to work. I urge my colleagues to join me in this effort.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Wyoming.

WILDFIRES, HURRICANES HARVEY AND IRMA, AND HEALTHCARE REFORM

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, over the last several weeks I have spent a lot of time traveling around my home State of Wyoming, and the Presiding Officer may have in his home State of Arkansas as well. We all do. We talk to a lot of people and hear from a lot of people as we travel around to the rodeos, the fairs, and the parades.

One of the things I have been hearing more and more about because I am seeing it daily in Wyoming—I know both Senator DAINES and Senator TESTER, both Senators from Montana have talked about it—has been the incred-

ible forest fires that have been raging in the West. There are more than 1 million acres of land burning in the West. Smoke is spreading all around the West, certainly in Wyoming—fire as well as smoke—impacting people, impacting land, impacting the soil, air, water, and impacting life, as well as property.

The damage that is happening is dramatic, and in many ways it is similar to the kinds of comprehensive damage and destruction we are seeing with the big storms hitting, like Hurricanes Harvey and Irma, which is on its way to Florida. These are incredible storms, and the people of Wyoming want to express and share their sympathy for the people who have lost family members, who have lost property, and those who are still in danger. We also know in Wyoming that people are wanting to volunteer, wanting to go to help by collecting food, supplies, clothing, taking up collections, as well, in churches, schools, and communities because that is the American spirit.

Today I come to the floor to express my admiration for the resilience of the people of the West, as well as the resilience of the people of Texas, Louisiana, and all Americans who are today dealing with the disasters they are facing in their homes.

The other things I heard a lot about—and this will not surprise us—are the concerns still out there regarding the Obama healthcare law. A lot of people in the media seem to think the discussion about that healthcare law is over. I can tell you, for the people of Wyoming, they are still very concerned about what we are seeing in terms of the collapse of the healthcare system, fewer choices, and higher prices. For them, the conversation is not over, and they want to make sure it is not over in Congress either. ObamaCare is still failing, and the American people are certainly still suffering, so we need to do something about it. We need to act.

There was an article by the Associated Press in the paper on Monday that summed up the situation. The headline was “Millions who buy health insurance brace for sharp increases.”

The article goes on to say: “Millions of people who buy individual health insurance policies and get no financial help from the Affordable Care Act are bracing for another year of double-digit premium increases, and their frustration is boiling over.”

The article says that these are mostly middle-class folks—hard-working people who may be self-employed or work for small businesses that can't afford to offer insurance. It goes on to say that these millions of Americans “pay full freight and bear the brunt of market problems such as high costs and diminished competition.”

That is the exact situation people are facing in Wyoming, and I assume in the Acting President pro tempore's home State of Arkansas as well.

The ObamaCare exchange in my State has only one company selling in-

surance. It wasn't supposed to happen that way. Democrats in Congress who supported the healthcare law said that it was going to create more competition and would bring down the prices and costs for families. In September of 2009, President Obama said that “without competition, the price of insurance goes up and quality goes down.”

So what is the situation now? All summer long we have heard about insurers who are giving up, pulling back, and dropping out. Millions of Americans will have fewer choices when it comes to their health insurance plans and opportunities in 2018.

On August 24, the largest hospital system in New York State announced that it was going to stop selling an ObamaCare insurance plan it had launched just 4 years ago. This is the home State of the Democratic leader in the Senate, someone who has come to the floor supporting the healthcare law.

The company is blaming the flaws in the Obamacare law and the fact that we haven't been able to do the reforms we need to do. Things I proposed and things that make sense to me—the Democratic leader will not allow us to address the many, many flaws of ObamaCare. Meanwhile, the people of his home State of New York are losing another option to get the coverage ObamaCare requires by law for them to have.

They are not alone. People living in 47 percent of all counties will have only one option for coverage next year, so millions of Americans are stuck in an insurance monopoly under ObamaCare.

Monday was the deadline for insurance companies to say what they will need to charge next year. People across the country continue to be very worried about how much more expensive their health insurance will be.

The lack of competition is one reason for the skyrocketing prices, but other big reasons for the increase in prices are actually the tax increases that were put in place when ObamaCare was passed. The healthcare law included \$1 trillion in new taxes.

One of the biggest ones hitting hard-working families is a tax on every health insurance plan that gets sold. It is called the health insurance tax. There was a new study last month that found this tax is going to raise prices by about \$500 per family next year.

The tax alone is raising the cost \$500 per family next year. That is just to pay for one of the taxes. Republicans want to get rid of the tax. That was part of our repeal-and-replace plan.

Every Democrat voted no—voted no—to removing the taxes, so premiums are continuing to soar because the healthcare law is unsustainable, and the taxes are unbearable for hard-working families. We have to do something to help people and to reverse the damage caused by ObamaCare.

I voted for the repeal legislation in July, and I am going to continue to work to replace ObamaCare. But until