

Roy Blunt, John Thune, Steve Daines, Thom Tillis, Kevin Cramer, Chuck Grassley, Tom Cotton, Rand Paul, Roger F. Wicker, Cindy Hyde-Smith.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, I move to proceed to legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 489.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Sherri A. Lydon, of South Carolina, to be United States District Judge for the District of South Carolina.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Sherri A. Lydon, of South Carolina, to be United States District Judge for the District of South Carolina.

Steve Daines, Roy Blunt, John Thune, Richard Burr, John Cornyn, Chuck Grassley, Tom Cotton, Rick Scott, Mike Crapo, Shelley Moore Capito, John Boozman, Roger F. Wicker, Cindy Hyde-Smith, David Perdue, Mike Rounds, John Hoeven, Mitch McConnell.

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum calls for the cloture motions be waived.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority whip.

HONG KONG

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, I would like to comment on the Hong Kong legislation that we passed this week. Tuesday night, the Senate unanimously passed the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act, led by Senators RUBIO and CARDIN, Foreign Relations Chairman RISCH, and Ranking Member MENENDEZ, and a supporting cast of colleagues. This bill is intended to spur Hong Kong officials and pro-Beijing constituencies to protect Hong Kong's autonomy and its

special relationship with the United States and to hold those committing human rights violations in Hong Kong accountable. It builds on the 1992 United States-Hong Kong Policy Act, which asserts that the United States has a "strong interest in the continued vitality, prosperity, and stability of Hong Kong." I am grateful for the leadership of the Senators who worked to advance this bill.

The issue at hand is Hong Kong's right to an independent judicial system and its unique status in a one-country, two-system construct. The bill that spurred the June protests in Hong Kong—a bill pushed by the communist Chinese central government that sought to impose extraditions from Hong Kong to mainland China—would have directly undercut this judicial independence. This bill has been withdrawn, but a number of other grievances have boiled over into protests.

Hong Kong's autonomy is under attack, and China is posturing to "mainlandize" their economy. Recent educational reforms seek to undermine Hong Kong's culture and traditions through compulsory Mandarin classes instead of the Cantonese that most Hongkongers speak. The Chinese Government will say that westerners have the wrong impression of what is going on there, that this is strictly an internal matter. We beg to differ. There are more than 85,000 American citizens in Hong Kong. Moreover, the human rights of the people of Hong Kong are directly tied to U.S. interests in Hong Kong and Hong Kong's economic prosperity.

China has threatened repercussions if the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act is enacted. I imagine China is fearful that attention to human rights abuses in Hong Kong will draw increased attention to other human rights abuses in China, such as the estimated 1.5 million Muslim Uighurs in forced detention in one of China's western provinces.

Papers leaked this week from the government of the Communist Party and General Secretary Xi detail the coercive "reeducation" that goes on in these internment camps. Christians in China also face regular persecution and imprisonment for following their faith and living out their beliefs. The Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act will help shed increased light on Beijing's aggression and on human rights abuses in Hong Kong.

Last night, the House sent this Senate bill to the President's desk with a resounding 417-to-1 vote—a clear statement that Congress stands with Hong Kong.

THANKSGIVING

Madam President, a week from today, we will be celebrating Thanksgiving. Like every Thanksgiving, I will be home in South Dakota celebrating with my family: My wife, my daughters, my sons-in-law, and my four—soon to be five—grandchildren. I will be taking on my traditional job of carving

the turkey and helping with the dishes afterward. I am looking forward to a lot of good pie—apple pie a la mode, pumpkin, with a lot of whipped cream, and my favorite is anything in the creamed-pie family.

I am looking forward to spending time outdoors. My daughters and I traditionally go on a trail run Thanksgiving morning. It is a good way to work up an appetite for all that pie. We all enjoy throwing around a football before or after the meal. South Dakotans are pretty resilient when it comes to being out in the cold. As long as we don't have tons of snow, we like to get outdoors on Thanksgiving.

Like many South Dakotans, I love to squeeze in a little pheasant hunting over Thanksgiving, whenever I can.

Thanksgiving is one of my favorite holidays. I love sitting down with my whole family—and extended family—and getting to spend time in South Dakota outdoors before winter really hits us.

Thanksgiving has a long tradition in this country. Long before the United States was a nation, various Colonies were celebrating days of thanksgiving. Our current celebration of Thanksgiving can be traced to Abraham Lincoln, who issued a proclamation in 1863 inviting a national celebration of Thanksgiving on the last Thursday in November.

In 1941, Congress codified the Thanksgiving holiday and permanently set the date as the fourth Thursday in November. I don't think it is too surprising that the celebration of Thanksgiving is a recurring part of our history. On Thanksgiving in my family, typically, we go around the table and say what we are thankful for. In this country, that is a pretty long list, including the tremendous natural riches of this country, from great rivers to magnificent mountains, to our wide-open access to the sea, and the tremendous freedoms that we enjoy. And in the 21st century, we enjoy freedom of religion, of speech, of the press, and other freedoms, like the freedom from unreasonable searches and seizures, or excessive fines or cruel and unusual punishments. All of these freedoms that we so often take for granted are still unknown to too many people across the world.

The United States is not perfect, and we don't always get it right, but we enjoy tremendous blessings in this country. It is important not to take them for granted. Thanksgiving gives us a chance to pause and reflect on all that we have been given.

I am grateful to God for so many blessings this year. I am thankful for the great blessing of my family—my dad, Harold, a World War II aviator who will turn 100 next month; my brothers and sister; my wife Kimberly, the best thing in my life; my beautiful daughters and my sons-in-law; and our grandchildren, pretty much the most amazing grandchildren ever, in my own unbiased opinion.

I am thankful for the great State of South Dakota, for our fresh air and wide-open spaces, from the prairies of farm country to the rugged terrain of the Black Hills.

South Dakotans are a resilient, kind, and gracious people, and I am thankful every day that I am lucky enough to call South Dakota home.

I am also tremendously grateful for the work I get to do. Getting to represent South Dakotans in the Senate is one of the great privileges of my life. While it has been a contentious year with a divided Congress, I have still had the chance to continue to work on important issues affecting people in my State and around the country, like helping our Nation's farmers and ranchers in this tough agriculture economy.

I am grateful for the privilege of living in this great country, and I am grateful for all the men and women who put their lives on the line every single day to preserve the freedoms we enjoy. Our military men and women represent the very best of America, and I am grateful every day for their service and for their sacrifice.

In that 1863 proclamation of Thanksgiving Day that I mentioned, Abraham Lincoln, in his referring to the blessings America had experienced even in the midst of the horrors of the Civil War, said:

No human counsel hath devised nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things. They are the gracious gifts of the Most High God, who, while dealing with us in anger for our sins, hath nevertheless remembered mercy. It has seemed to me fit and proper that they should be solemnly, reverently and gratefully acknowledged as with one heart and one voice by the whole American People.

God has blessed us with very great gifts in this country, and it is, indeed, fit and proper that we should dedicate a day to reverently and gratefully acknowledge them.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

THANKSGIVING

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, first, let me thank my friend from South Dakota for his wonderful words on Thanksgiving.

I was going to conclude with Thanksgiving, but I will start with it. It is a great holiday. It is a great American holiday. I love it, and my family loves it. I was born on Thanksgiving Day. My new grandson was born on November 24, so he will have birthdays on Thanksgiving as well. This year, for the first time, the SCHUMERS will celebrate with four generations, because my parents, who also served in the Army Air Force in World War II—my dad, 96, and my mom, 91—will be there with their little great-grandson, Noah. We are blessed.

Thanksgiving is family and food. What could be better than that? They are two great parts of the holiday. I

will not carve the turkey like THUNE does because it would get all screwed up, but I can dole out the mashed potatoes—I am good at that—which is probably what they will have me do. It is a great holiday, and we do have a great deal to thank God and the country for.

The wonderful thing about Thanksgiving is, from its origins during the Civil War—one of the worst, most horrible times in America, with so much death and mayhem and division—people were still grateful for America, and we are today. It is an amazing place. My father was an exterminator, and I am a U.S. Senator. What an amazing country this is, and we should never stop trying to make it better. I try to do that every day. I am thankful that I live in a country in which you can try to make it better.

I am thankful for many, many things—family, with our new addition this year. Iris and I are so happy about that. We have great kids and a great daughter-in-law and son-in-law. There is just a lot to be thankful for, and it is nice to take a pause, amidst all the fighting and partisanship here, to be grateful.

IMPEACHMENT

Madam President, now, on some more legislative, Senatorial, governmental subjects, the Ambassador to the European Union, Gordon Sondland, provided some of the most significant testimony yesterday in the House impeachment inquiry to date.

Ambassador Sondland asserted a “quid pro quo,” linking the offer of a White House meeting—an official act—in exchange for Ukrainian officials’ announcing an investigation into Burisma and the 2016 elections. President Trump tried to rebut that quid pro quo by saying he told Sondland on the phone there was no quid pro quo. Donald Trump is not known for telling the truth, particularly when his own self-interest is at stake. So it doesn’t stand up very well compared to Sondland’s words.

Sondland went on to testify to his understanding that President Trump’s suspension of military aid to Ukraine was also conditioned on the announcement of these same investigations. Those investigations, of course, had nothing to do with national security or any other interests of the United States. On the contrary, they were solely in President Trump’s personal, political interests.

Ambassador Sondland also testified that Secretary Pompeo, Secretary Perry, Chief of Staff Mulvaney, and other senior advisers to those individuals were well aware of these activities and the connection between White House policy and requests from the President to have Ukraine announce investigations that would be politically advantageous to President Trump.

Let me repeat: Those individuals I just mentioned—Pompeo, Perry, Mulvaney, and a few of their senior advisers—were identified by Ambassador

Sondland as having information and knowledge of the events that are central to this impeachment inquiry. All of them are currently refusing to testify, are defying subpoenas from the House of Representatives, and, in some cases, are challenging those subpoenas in court.

This morning, I would strongly urge the courts that have jurisdiction over these cases to quickly resolve them. The individuals named in these subpoenas are fact witnesses in the pending House impeachment inquiry. In addition, these officials and others are withholding evidence in the form of documents that are, unquestionably, material to the impeachment inquiry. Ambassador Sondland’s testimony demonstrated even more pointedly why it is so essential that the witnesses who have been summoned must comply and why the courts should promptly enforce House subpoenas in the pending cases.

When I hear the courts say that in 5 weeks or in 6 weeks, they will have court hearings or decisions—I have never practiced in these Washington courts; I have a law degree, but I am not a practicing lawyer—I don’t understand, and I think Americans don’t understand why the courts take so long when there is such an important issue before them. All of the judges have a responsibility to make decisions quickly and soon so that if they agree that these people should be compelled to testify—and I don’t know what the decisions will be—that their testimony would be received in a timely manner.

We have two groups of people at the moment. One group is testifying under oath in the House inquiry that there was a “quid pro quo” and substantial wrongdoing. Another group is denying any wrongdoing but is refusing to comply with subpoenas or to testify under oath. If these individuals feel they have exculpatory evidence to provide or that the testimony provided to the House is incorrect, they should testify under oath. Otherwise, the American people will rightly wonder why they refuse to do so.

Let me just repeat what I said in the last few days: If Donald Trump tweets away at how wrong these witnesses are, let him come before the committee, under oath, and testify to what he tweets. Speaker PELOSI has said she would welcome President Trump’s coming and testifying. President Trump has not been silent on these issues. He has been tweeting away—ridiculing the witnesses and saying what they have said is wrong. Well, if he is right, has nothing to hide, and wants to convince the American people and the House of Representatives, let him come under oath and tell his side of the story. When he doesn’t come under oath—and he can do it tomorrow or in the next few days—the American people will ask: Mr. President, what are you hiding? What are you not telling the truth about?

APPROPRIATIONS

Madam President, on appropriations, later today, the Senate is set to pass a continuing resolution to fund the government through December 20, which will send it to the President's desk. I am optimistic that the passage of the continuing resolution today will be something from which Congress can build—a sign that appropriators from both sides of the aisle will be ready to work together to settle government funding by the end of the calendar year.

With another month's time at our disposal, the appropriations process can now go down one of two paths. On the first path, President Trump stays out of our way and gives Congress the space to work together and find agreement. On the second path, President Trump stomps his feet, makes impossible demands, and prevents his party—the Republicans—from coming to a fair arrangement.

The first path leads to a bipartisan deal on appropriations and guaranteed, long-term funding for both Republican and Democratic priorities. The second path leads, as we all know, to another Trump government shutdown. I hope the passage of the continuing resolution will be the first step down the bipartisan path that will lead to successful agreement by the end of the year.

HONG KONG

Madam President, on Hong Kong, 2 days ago, the Senate passed legislation, by unanimous consent, committing the United States to stand with the brave citizens of Hong Kong, who are now engaged in a fierce struggle to defend their civil and human rights. Last night, the House of Representatives followed suit by a vote of 417 to 1. Only a short time ago, I took part in a bipartisan signing ceremony for the legislation. Now it will head straight to the President's desk. Congress has just sent an unmistakable message to the Chinese Communist Party that the United States stands with the people of Hong Kong.

President Xi, the U.S. Government has spoken. This legislation represents what America really thinks about your policies toward Hong Kong, not what President Trump may whisper in your ear. This legislation shows what Americans think about the Chinese Communist Party's treatment of Hong Kong.

I would say to President Xi and to the Chinese leadership, the Communist Party leadership: You cannot be a great nation when you oppose freedom, deny civil liberties, and brutally suppress your own people from one end of China to the other, as the Chinese Communist Party has done to the people of Hong Kong, to the Uighurs, and to the millions of citizens whose voices have been silenced and whose rights have been trampled on by the Chinese Government.

To the people of China, we stand with you in freedom.

To the students and young people in Hong Kong, we stand with you.

To the Uighurs, who simply want to practice their religion, we stand with you.

I believe that freedom will prevail and that the Chinese system will either change or it will fail. History is not kind to those who peddle in autocracy and suppression.

I thank all of my colleagues. This was one of the rare, fine, bipartisan moments on the floor of the Senate. Our colleagues on both sides of the aisle—the Senators from Florida and Idaho, Messrs. RUBIO and RISCH; the Senators from Maryland and New Jersey, Messrs. CARDIN and MENENDEZ; as well as Senator MERKLEY and Senator CORNYN—all worked hard to put together a very strong bill, and we came together. This has been an important bipartisan moment. It goes to show how Congress is still capable of doing big things.

As we enter the Thanksgiving break, we should think about the other issues we could debate, about the other bipartisan bills on which we could vote, those of lowering the cost of prescription drugs, of securing our elections, of helping our veterans, and more. Passing bipartisan legislation should be the rule, not the exception.

It has been several weeks since we have had a real debate and a vote on any legislation in this Chamber. I hope that in the final weeks of this year, Leader MCCONNELL will begin to listen to the pleas from both sides of the aisle to get the Senate working again.

A happy Thanksgiving to one and all. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arkansas.

RECOGNIZING THE ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

Mr. COTTON. Madam President, I come to the floor with the senior Senator from Arkansas, Mr. BOOZMAN, to celebrate a great anniversary.

Two hundred years ago this week, the very first newspaper in Arkansas was published. It was called the Arkansas Gazette. We know it today as the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette. It is the oldest paper west of the Mississippi, an institution in our State, and a credit to the many outstanding journalists who have made it possible over two centuries.

From its first issue, the Arkansas Gazette was a pioneering newspaper, published by a young man named William Woodruff who crossed the mighty Mississippi into brandnew territory, dragging behind him a wooden printing press and other tools of the trade.

The Gazette was first published out of a log cabin in the territorial capital, Arkansas Post. It reflected the bold aspirations of American settlers moving West to fulfill our manifest destiny on the continent, and it reflected these landlocked settlers' keen awareness that events far beyond our little plot of soil could shape their lives in dramatic ways.

The first story in the very first edition reported on a Navy expedition to

open the Pacific Northwest for American traders. It speculated with excitement about the prosperity that would flow to our Nation as Americans followed Lewis and Clark west across the country. "The plan may appear visionary," the Gazette remarked, "but that which is now speculation will . . . shortly become a fact, and this country will be enriched by the overflows of its benefit."

As the Arkansas Territory grew, Arkansas's newspaper grew with it. Woodruff moved the paper from Arkansas Post to Little Rock in 1821, where it would continue to be published for the next 198 years with few exceptions, such as a devastating fire in the 1850s and military occupation during the Civil War.

Just as Arkansas kept its rough-hewn, pioneer character, so too did Arkansas's newspaper, whose staff were involved in not one but two gun battles, including the last recorded duel in Arkansas history—between, I am compelled to report, the owners of the Gazette and its upstart competitor, the Democrat.

If William Woodruff was the founding father of the Democrat-Gazette, John Netherland Heiskell was its Lincoln, bringing the paper triumphantly into maturity. Heiskell became editor in 1902 and served in that position for an incredible 70 years until his passing in 1972. The one interruption in Heiskell's remarkable tenure came in 1913, when the Governor selected him to serve as a U.S. Senator after the death of a sitting Senator. He only served in this body for 23 days before a successor was elected, and then he hurried back to Little Rock and to the Gazette because the news waits for no man.

Over the next half-century, the Gazette established itself as a world-class newspaper. It was during this period that the Gazette took a bold stand for truth in the finest tradition of journalism by declaring its support for desegregation well ahead of the pack in 1957. The Gazette and its editorial writer, Harry Ashmore, covered the turmoil surrounding Little Rock's integration with decency and firmness, insisting that Arkansas fulfill its obligation to all our citizens on an equal basis, without regard to race. This editorial crusade lost more than a few subscriptions, but it won the Gazette two Pulitzer Prizes "for demonstrating," in the words of the Pulitzer committee, "the highest qualities of civic leadership, journalistic responsibility, and moral courage." And so the Arkansas Gazette entered the modern era as a famous and award-winning publication.

In 1991, after years known as "the newspaper wars," the Gazette's old rival, the Democrat, bought the paper and created what we now know as the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette. Fortunately, I hasten to add, no duels were needed this time around. Now, the Democrat-Gazette is again changing with the times through the capable

leadership of Walter Hussman, his family, and David Bailey, the managing editor. This time, the paper is transforming for the digital era, moving from paper to screen, and it is even giving away free iPads to subscribers to ease the transition. So if you are not already a subscriber, consider supporting our local journalism in Arkansas. It has a bright future ahead.

Today, unfortunately, many venerable newspaper have fallen on hard times. Too many journalists can't be bothered to get the story right. Too many local communities are losing parts of their identity, which is all the more reason to celebrate newspapers like the Democrat-Gazette, which do get the story right and have preserved their distinctive character throughout the years.

Some things may change. The Democrat-Gazette of the future may be heralded by the bright glow of the screen rather than the rustle of the news page. But other, more important things stay the same, such as integrity, impartiality, and credibility. The Democrat-Gazette holds its reporters to the highest standards of accuracy and ethics.

Walter Hussman publishes these high standards that won the Gazette two Pulitzer Prizes every day on page 2 of the newspaper in its statement of core values. That statement reads:

Credibility is the greatest asset of any news medium and impartiality is the greatest source of credibility.

The Democrat-Gazette practices what it preaches, and for that reason, it continues to succeed 200 years on.

There is also its Arkansas focus. As ever, the Democrat-Gazette earnestly pursues stories in Arkansas for the benefit of Arkansans. It is this proud local focus which has made the Democrat-Gazette a beloved institution in Arkansas and which will sustain it in the years ahead. Finally, the pioneer spirit—from the Arkansas Territory to the frontiers of digital journalism, the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette will travel confidently into the future.

Today, I join Senator BOOZMAN in congratulating the Hussman family, the Democrat-Gazette, and all of their many hard-working professionals and journalists.

I yield the floor to my colleague, the senior Senator from Arkansas.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Madam President, it is a pleasure to be with my friend and colleague from Arkansas to talk about a tremendous State institution, something that is truly a true Arkansas institution, and we want to pay tribute to it and the men and women who made it great in the past and will continue to make it great into the future.

Newspapers have played a vital role in our country's history of public discourse, increasing our knowledge and awareness about what takes place all around us. The stories they print keep us informed, while building a sense of community and regional identity. Newspapers drive political debates and set the agenda, helping us make sense of the issues impacting our world.

As one of the oldest continuously published newspapers west of the Mississippi, the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette has been a resource of information that has kept readers connected to community, the State, and our Nation for 200 years.

In 1819, William E. Woodruff published the first edition of the Arkansas Gazette, the Arkansas Territory's first newspaper. There was no shortage of news to print in those days. During its early years, the publication encouraged settlement to the region, shared news of national importance, and promoted statehood.

For generations, this publication has been a primary source of reliable and comprehensive news that has shaped the way Arkansans view the world. It has constantly challenged the status quo and examined the decisions of elected leaders, while pursuing transparency and accountability.

The work the Gazette produced often resulted in positive change in the Natural State. In 1957, the newspaper opposed Governor Orval Faubus's decision to prevent integration of Little Rock Central High School. For its reporting on the struggles of integration, the Gazette earned two Pulitzer Prizes, one for meritorious public service and the other awarded to its executive editor, Harry Ashmore, for editorial writing, marking the first time a newspaper won two Pulitzer Prizes in the same year.

The newspaper and its spirited competitor, the Arkansas Democrat, contended for readers and advertisers for decades. In 1991, the Gazette was sold to the owners of the Arkansas Democrat, who then launched the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, which is the only statewide newspaper Arkansans read today.

The importance of the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette in today's media landscape cannot be overstated. In some cases, it is the sole source of news for many small towns in Arkansas, as local newspapers continue to cease operations, especially those serving rural areas.

Under the leadership of Walter Hussman, Jr., the Democrat-Gazette is navigating the challenging industry landscape and creating opportunities to keep readers informed by keeping costs manageable. Hussman and his team are rethinking how and what news they deliver to readers, as well as how subscribers can and like to consume it.

To cut printing and transportation costs and combat declining advertisement revenue, the paper is now using iPads to maintain subscribers and continue providing this valuable, not-easily-replaced service to the community.

In an interview earlier this year about efforts at the Democrat-Gazette, Hussman noted his view that the print model is not sustainable, but he voiced his commitment to finding a solution that will fill the void because, as he says, society and our democracy will be impeded if we don't have newspapers.

It is a simple truth. Throughout periods of change, Hussman and the newspaper he owns continue to believe in the critical role that news gathering and reporting play in informing the public.

Every day, the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette and the other publications owned by the Hussman family publish a statement of core values that include "objectivity, impartiality, integrity and truth-seeking." This clear, sensible mantra consistently helps guide the work done by the reporters and editors in the paper's newsrooms.

Journalism is a pillar of our democracy. Our Founders understood the importance of a free press and included protections in the First Amendment that safeguard and ensure the ability of reporters and the publications they write for to hold the powerful to account.

Earlier this year, I was proud to support the World Press Freedom Day resolution and recognize the sacrifices journalists around the world make in their effort to report the truth.

We must continue to promote a free and open press in the United States and around the globe. In today's climate, we all share responsibility for acknowledging the value and the necessity of press freedom while at the same time not shrinking away from appropriate scrutiny and fair criticism. The health and well-being of our society and civic life depends on striking the right balance in this regard.

For 200 years, the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette has kept individuals informed about moments and events of significance in Arkansas, our country, and the world. I congratulate the newspaper's leaders and staff for pursuing facts and accountability, as they have created and sustained the publication as a responsible and reliable source of information.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from West Virginia.

BIPARTISAN AMERICAN MINERS ACT

Mr. MANCHIN. Madam President, I want to first say thank you to my colleagues, Senate Majority Leader MITCH MCCONNELL and Senators CAPITO, PORTMAN, JONES, KAINE, DUCKWORTH, BROWN, CASEY, DURBIN, WARNER, SINEMA, VAN HOLLEN, and REED, who have cosponsored this legislation with me, for standing with me to protect coal miners' pensions and healthcare, and specifically Senator CAPITO, who will be joining me here on the floor today.

Yesterday marked the 51st anniversary of the Farmington No. 9 disaster, where 78 coal miners lost their lives in the Consolidation Coal Company's No. 9 mine in Farmington, WV, which is my hometown. I lost my uncle John Gouzd in that mine explosion, I lost my neighbor John Sopuch, and I lost several of my classmates in that tragedy that rocked my hometown. It seems like only yesterday.

I have always said that one life lost while on the job is one too many. It

shouldn't happen. This tragedy shows the risk our coal miners take every day to provide our country with the energy we need, which is why I am here today.

When coal companies go bankrupt, coal miners' benefits are at the bottom of the priority list, which is how we have ended up in this situation today, and that is unacceptable. It should be unacceptable to all of us.

The person who earns the wage should be on the front end of the line when a bankruptcy happens, and whatever happens, they are taken care of first. Time is running out for our coal miners. We need it fixed now—not in a few weeks, not in 2020, but now. Year after year, our coal miners risk their lives to bring America the energy needed to become the world leader that we are today. Our coal miners made a commitment to our country, and now, it is our turn to uphold the commitment we made to them in 1946 by securing their hard-earned pensions in healthcare.

Let me tell you about the coal that we have in our country and has been mined by our hard-working coal miners since the beginning of the 20th century. That coal basically has fueled every war that we have been in, helped us win every war, helped propel us to the industrial might that we are today, built our factories. It has done everything for us, and all we are doing now is trying to make sure that the people that sacrificed all these years are taken care of.

We have 1,000 coal miners who will lose their healthcare coverage on December 31 of this year, a little over a month from now. We also have 12,000 more coal miners who will lose their healthcare in March of next year, and that is only 4 months away. This is an issue that must be dealt with immediately, and time is running out. If you are one of those 1,000 coal miners and one of your family members is depending on their healthcare—probably life-supporting healthcare—and they are thinking they are going to lose it at the end of this month, it is unconscionable for us to walk out of here and not get this piece of legislation down. With it being so bipartisan—having the majority leader from Kentucky representing the coal miners of Kentucky—this is something that needs to be done immediately, and I know that we can.

But if we don't pass this legislation to protect our miners, the UMWA pension fund will be insolvent by this time next year. With the largest privately owned coal company, Murray Energy, filing for bankruptcy 2 weeks ago, the timeline for the UMWA pension fund moved up 2 years. It accelerated a basically exacerbating position that we were in to begin with. Murray Energy, to date, has contributed over 97 percent of the money going into the UMWA pension fund annually because of the size of their company, which is why its bankruptcy has accelerated the situation we are in today with the pension fund insolvency.

Once the UMWA pension fund would become insolvent if we don't do something, this crisis will snowball and impact every other multi-employer pension fund in America. They will all start tumbling, along with the PBGC, which is a federally funded pension guarantee. That is why it is essential that we protect our coal miners' pensions now—not next year or the year after that—which is why my colleagues and I introduced the Bipartisan American Miners Act.

The Bipartisan American Miners Act would amend the current Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977 to transfer funds in excess of the amounts needed to be meet existing obligations under the Abandoned Mine Land fund to the 1974 Pension Plan to prevent its looming insolvency. It also raises the cap on these funds from \$490 million to \$750 million to ensure that there is sufficient funding for those pension funds.

It also guarantees lifetime healthcare for the 13,000 individuals, including the 1,000 scheduled to lose their healthcare on December 31 of this year, by amending the Coal Act to include 2018 and 2019 bankruptcies in the miners' healthcare fix that passed in 2017. The funding for coal miners' pensions is already there. It just needs to be reallocated. These actions will secure the pensions of 92,000 coal miners and their families and protect healthcare benefits for 13,000 miners. That is our goal, and I am proud to be here fighting for these miners today because they surely have fought for me and given me the great country that I live in today.

These miners took home less pay every day from their paycheck with the expectations that they will be able to retire and provide for their families after working for decades for our country. They have paid what they are trying to receive. It is not something they are asking for, a handout. They are not asking for a Government handout or taxpayer handout. They are just wanting the money that they invested and paid into all of these years. It is money they did not take out.

Workers expect the wages they have contributed to be there when they retire, as they were promised. If we pass the Bipartisan American Miners Act as an amendment to the continuing resolution, we will protect coal miners' pensions and healthcare now before it is too late. The Bipartisan American Miners Act is ready to be voted on and has the support from both sides of the aisles. I just read off a list of our sponsors.

The Bipartisan American Miners Act is basically a piece of legislation that needs to be done immediately. If we don't pass it now, 1,000 miners, as I said before, will lose their healthcare on December 31. Healthcare benefits will be terminated, as we talked about, and then by early September 2020, the pension benefits of 82,000 current pensioners and 10,000 future pensioners

could be drastically reduced because of the plan's insolvency.

I want to remind you also that the average pension of a coal miner is less than \$600 a month. Most of these are widows. Their husbands have passed on, and they are living on this as a subsistence basically for their income. It would be tremendously harmful for them not to be able to receive this.

I believe that we can and will pass this legislation before it is too late for these miners as an amendment to the CR. That is all we are asking for. It must be done before and no later than December 20. I am trying to get this on now so that we can move forward.

Can you imagine being one of the 1,000 coal miners, maybe having one of your loved ones—your wife or one of your children—who has a serious illness and needs attention and knowing they are not going to be able to get attention basically to any healthcare after December 31, so put yourself in their shoes.

These are the families that deserve the peace of mind knowing that their pensions are going to be paid and their paycheck—that they did not take the money home—is going to be secure. We can give them peace of mind today. I look forward to passing this legislation with all of my colleagues. It is bipartisan. This is the first time we have had something of this magnitude being done in a bipartisan way. The good Lord knows we need more bipartisan efforts to work for the people.

If we are going to stand for the working men and women that made America, what is our purpose of being here, and who do we stand for? So I am asking all of you, please, with the urgency that is needed, please take up this piece of legislation. Please take up this amendment to the CR, and let's take care of the people that helped make America as great as we are today, the coal miners of the United Mine Workers of America.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

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

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SCOTT of Florida). The Senator from West Virginia.

Mrs. CAPITO. Mr. President, I am really pleased to be here with my fellow West Virginia Senator, Mr. MANCHIN. We have joined each other on this topic before, but he has been a real champion for our miners, and I am really grateful to him and others who have participated, but I think we have got to talk about this every day and make sure that we underscore the urgent need to pass the Bipartisan American Miners Act. I appreciate Senator MANCHIN and certainly appreciate Leader MCCONNELL who has been a

champion for our miners as well—Senator Portland as well—who have made this retirement security a top priority.

Back in 2017, time was running out on the healthcare benefits for 12,000 retired miners. I remember it well, particularly following the Patriot Coal bankruptcy. We came together as a bipartisan group to pass legislation with the House that protected healthcare for those men and women. While we are in a similar situation today, which we knew we were going to be here, the Senate needs to act soon to save the healthcare of 13,000 retired miners and protect the pension benefits of 92,000 people.

Time is of the essence here because roughly 1,000 retirees from Westmoreland and Mission Coal will lose their healthcare at the end of the year if we do not act; 12,000 more could lose their healthcare by next spring, and the pension benefits are at risk in 2020. This is a critical, critical issue for my State and many others.

I am going to take a brief moment to explain how this legislation works, and it is a bit complicated. In 2006, when we passed the last reauthorization of the Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation Program, we had a capped permanent direct appropriation that was created for transfer of payments. That permanent direct appropriation, along with the interest on the AML—the Abandoned Mine Land—trust fund has been used to fund AML payments to certified States and to provide healthcare for our miners. What do we do to certify States? The whole point of the AML is to do reclamation and repair of previously mined lands all throughout our country.

That permanent direct appropriation has been used for the payments for the certified States and also to provide healthcare to our orphaned miners. Well, for those who are not from a coal company, what is an orphaned miner? An orphaned miner is someone who earned a vested right to retiree healthcare benefits through years of hard work but worked for a company that either no longer exists or is no longer financially solvent.

The Bipartisan American Miners Act makes use of the same appropriation that was created in 2006 to cover the healthcare for retirees whose healthcare would be lost due to the bankruptcies in 2018, 2019. The bill would provide resources to guarantee the long-term solvency of the mine workers' pension fund. This is critical. Previous versions of this bill that many of us supported were able to accomplish this goal of protecting those retirement beneficiaries without lifting the cap on the direct appropriation that was set in 2006.

Because Congress has delayed action for so long, our current legislation must lift the cap in order to provide healthcare and pension benefits for our miners. Protecting these benefits is a top priority for me because it impacts so many mining families and commu-

nities in West Virginia. Just last weekend, I talked to three miners directly impacted, just kind of randomly ran into them in different areas of our State.

But I think it is important to understand that this bill does not place other policy items in jeopardy. That is a misconception. Passing this bill does not disturb the principal balance of the AML trust fund. That means we are not jeopardizing funds that are used to clean up abandoned mine sites, and passing this bill will not cut funding for other transfer payments that are authorized by the law.

What the bill will do is protect retirement benefits for tens of thousands of retired miners and their families—benefits that have been worked for, benefits that have been earned through the hard work in our mines; 25,451 West Virginians received benefits from the pension fund during 2018. They were joined by more than 11,000 Pennsylvanians, 8,500 Kentuckians, and thousands more from Illinois, Virginia, Alabama, and Ohio. The pension benefits of all the men and women are at risk if Congress fails to act.

The average benefit—listen to this—the average benefit for our miners is \$590 a month, so these are not lavish benefits, but they are critical to our retirees. One retired miner from Logan, WV, who worked for 36 years in the mines, wrote me and said, “Please keep fighting to save our pension. I receive \$303.34 monthly. We need this badly to help us pay for our food, our medicine and other bills.”

A miner from Richwood, WV, who mined coal for 17 years, wrote, “My monthly check is \$192. It is not a lot of money, but it means a lot to my ability to make ends meet.”

I would add to both of these, these men, these gentlemen, they worked for these pensions. They paid into the pensions. They should receive them. Pension benefits from the mine workers plan went to individuals in all 55 West Virginian counties, so this is truly an issue that impacts my entire State. But in the areas that have the largest number of pensioners, which is Raleigh, Logan, Wyoming, Marion, and Boone Counties, cuts to the pension and healthcare benefits of our retired families would have significant impacts on our entire community.

If these retirees face severe reductions in their pensions, it means less money spent at the local businesses, less money at a local restaurant, and it would cause further economic harm to the areas that cannot afford another blow.

So I ask my colleagues to join me, Senator MANCHIN, Leader McCONNELL, Senator PORTMAN, and many others, by supporting the Bipartisan American Miners Act.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kentucky.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Mr. PAUL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the cloture vote on

the Brouillette nomination occur at 1:30 p.m. today.

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

AMENDMENT NO. 1250

Mr. PAUL. Mr. President, I rise to present an amendment to this bill. My amendment is simple, and it reflects the kind of commonsense budgeting we ought to be doing in Washington. Today I offer the penny plan for infrastructure. This plan cuts one penny, 1 percent of all spending, and puts that money in a fund for infrastructure.

My amendment would put about \$12 billion per year into a fund to fix our roads and bridges. Every agency would still get 99 percent of the spending they got the previous year. Sure, they would need to trim some fat, but they would still be fine. A lot of businesses and organizations will tell you they have to cut much greater than 1 percent a year.

I visited a business recently that in the downturn of 2008–2009 had to cut 30 percent of their expenditures. Business men and women in America are used to having to cut expenditures; government never does.

Whether it is our highways or our bridges or our waterways, our infrastructure in America is falling behind. Everyone knows it, but like so many things, Washington can't figure out how to fix it, how to find the money to fix it.

Politicians on both sides of the aisle talk about trillion-dollar infrastructure plans but offer no way to pay for it. My plan is much more modest, doesn't increase taxes, and doesn't increase our debt. The penny plan for infrastructure pays for it with money we have already allocated.

To be clear, we do have the money. Washington just spends it in inappropriate ways. Washington spends, for example, \$233 million on a single highway in Afghanistan. We have money to pave roads in Afghanistan, but they will not vote to spend the money here to pave roads.

The people in Afghanistan got \$233 million for a road, but they couldn't even maintain it, so we gave them another \$22 million to maintain the road.

We spent \$326 million to pave 2,000 kilometers of dirt roads in Afghanistan. We have enough money to spend over \$300 million to pave dirt roads in Afghanistan, but we can't come up with \$1 billion to help our infrastructure here. They were supposed to pave 2,000 kilometers; it turned out they only paved 159 kilometers. They paved less than 10 percent of what they actually promised to do with the money. What is that equal to—\$2.7 million per mile.

It is outrageous, and it goes on year after year after year. I think it is time we try a new way. Just in Afghanistan, we have spent more than the Marshall Plan did to rebuild Europe after the devastation of World War II, and we are still there, spending good money after bad. So when people come up here and

say that a 1-percent cut would somehow be a disaster, we need to remind them that the money is there. They just have to listen to the people and pull the plug on this kind of crazy spending overseas.

My amendment would move 1 percent of current spending, and it would put that 1 percent of the current spending bill into infrastructure.

Supposedly, Republicans, Democrats, and Independents all agree on infrastructure. Yet we don't allocate more money to it because we are too busy paving roads in Afghanistan. If we did this, it would be about \$12 billion. It is not enough to fix everything in the country. It is a modest sum. This is actually a modest proposal to move over a few billion dollars.

Do you know what it would do? Twelve billion dollars would pave up to 6,200 miles of a new four-lane highway, resurface 20,000 miles of a four-lane highway, and 2,200 miles of a six-lane interstate. It would pay for multiple big-ticket infrastructure projects that are currently stuck without funding. In my State, they have been advocating money for the Brent Spence Bridge across the Ohio River since before I was elected—8 or 9 years of advocating for a bridge for which we can't find the money. We have the money. Quit paving roads in Afghanistan, and let's start building bridges and paving roads here.

This amendment would improve our infrastructure, benefit our communities, eliminate government waste, and help our economy. By cutting 1 percent of the current spending, we will force all of government to do a better job.

There is at least 1 percent waste. There is probably 10 percent waste in government. I am asking to cut 1 percent of waste. Take that money you cut by making government more efficient and put it into infrastructure.

I encourage the Senate to consider this amendment. I think we have very few amendments come forward where people have a chance to vote for infrastructure.

At this point, I move to concur on the House amendment to the Senate amendment—

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Will the Senator suspend?

Mr. PAUL. At this point, I am about ready to do that.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

FURTHER CONTINUING APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2020, AND FURTHER HEALTH EXTENDERS ACT OF 2019

The Presiding Officer laid before the Senate the following message from the House of Representatives:

Resolved, That the House agree to the amendment of the Senate to the bill (H.R. 3055) entitled "An Act making appropriations for the Departments of Commerce and

Justice, Science, and Related Agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2020, and for other purposes," with an amendment to the Senate amendment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kentucky.

MOTION TO CONCUR WITH AMENDMENT NO. 1250

Mr. PAUL. Mr. President, I move to concur in the House amendment to the Senate amendment to H.R. 3055, with a further amendment numbered 1250.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Kentucky [Mr. PAUL] moves to concur in the House amendment to the Senate amendment to H.R. 3055, with an amendment numbered 1250.

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: To reduce the amount appropriated by 1 percent and put the savings towards the Highway Trust Fund and certain Environmental Protection Agency Infrastructure Assistance)

At the appropriate place in division A, add the following:

SEC. ____ . REDUCTION IN RATE FOR OPERATIONS.

The Continuing Appropriations Act, 2020 (division A of Public Law 116-59) is further amended by inserting after section 150, as added by section 101 of this division, the following:

"SEC. 151. REDUCTION IN CONTINUING APPROPRIATIONS TO PROVIDE SAVINGS FOR THE HIGHWAY TRUST FUND AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY INFRASTRUCTURE ASSISTANCE.

"(a) REDUCTION IN CONTINUING APPROPRIATIONS.—

"(1) IN GENERAL.—Except as provided in paragraph (2), the rate for operations provided by section 101 is hereby reduced by 1 percent.

"(2) EXCEPTIONS.—The rate for operations shall not be reduced under paragraph (1) for the following:

"(A) Amounts made available from the Highway Trust Fund established by section 9503(a) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986.

"(B) Amounts for purposes described in section 147.

"(C) For the Environmental Protection Agency, Infrastructure Assistance, amounts made available for the following:

"(i) The Clean Water State Revolving Funds and the Drinking Water State Revolving Funds.

"(ii) The Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act Program Account.

"(iii) The America's Water Infrastructure Act Grant Programs under section 1459A of the Safe Drinking Water Act (42 U.S.C. 300j-19a).

"(b) TRANSFER OF SAVINGS.—

"(1) DETERMINATION OF SAVINGS.—The Secretary of the Treasury shall determine the amount of the reduction in amounts made available under section 101 of this division that is attributable to subsection (a).

"(2) TRANSFER.—The Secretary of the Treasury shall transfer from the General Fund of the Treasury an amount equal to the amount determined under paragraph (1), as follows:

"(A) For the Highway Trust Fund established by section 9503(a) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, 95 percent of such amount.

"(B) For the Clean Water State Revolving Funds and the Drinking Water State Revolving Funds, 3 percent of such amount.

"(C) For the Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act Program Account, 1 percent of such amount.

"(D) For the America's Water Infrastructure Act Grant Programs under section 1459A of the Safe Drinking Water Act (42 U.S.C. 300j-19a), 1 percent of such amount.

"(3) AVAILABILITY.—Amounts transferred under paragraph (2) shall remain available until expended."

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alabama.

MOTION TO TABLE

Mr. SHELBY. Mr. President, I move to table the Paul amendment, but I just want to say a few words.

This continuing resolution before the Senate holds spending at the fiscal 2019 levels. An arbitrary 1-percent across-the-board cut on top of this—although it sounds good—would be extremely harmful to our agencies, particularly our military.

The Senate handily defeated similar amendments just recently, and I hope we will do this today.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I will be brief.

I agree with the distinguished senior Senator from Alabama. The Paul amendment imposes a 1-percent across-the-board cut over last year's funding level to the vast majority of discretionary spending for the duration of the CR.

I hope all Members—Republican and Democratic alike—will oppose it because it would mean arbitrary cuts in defense and other national security programs, cuts to veterans' healthcare, education, childcare, opioid programs, just to name a few. It is a simplistic tool that ignores the complexities of our Federal budget. It is not a way we should govern.

We have the hard work of making hard choices to fund programs each year based on reality. That is what we should do. That is what the American people deserve.

I support increased investment in our Nation's infrastructure. I would be happy to work with Senator PAUL to ensure these programs receive the resources they require.

I hope he might be able to get some support from the Trump administration, which has consistently proposed cutting resources to improve our Nation's infrastructure. I hope he might be able to get that kind of support, but funding it through an across-the-board cut on all other programs, including veterans healthcare, national security, and education programs is irresponsible. It is not the answer.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alabama.

Mr. SHELBY. Mr. President, I move to table the Paul amendment and ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Louisiana (Mr. CASSIDY) and the Senator from Arkansas (Mr. COTTON).