

can deliver a historic victory for the American people, and I will continue working to get this bill on President Trump's desk.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PERDUE). The Senator from Iowa.

WASTEFUL SPENDING

Ms. ERNST. Mr. President, with spring approaching, the days are getting longer and temperatures are warming up. Many are hitting the gym, trying to get that summer bod before heading to the beach, including some turtles. That is right, your tax dollars actually paid for a study that put turtles on treadmills.

So here we have our turtles on a treadmill. To no one's surprise, it turns out that turtles are really, really slow. OK. That is what our tax dollars went to. In fact, this wasteful study found that turtles moved at nearly the same pace as dead turtles on a treadmill. Aren't you glad that Washington bureaucrats used your hard-earned dollars to conduct this study? Good grief, folks.

How many of your tax dollars went to this study, exactly? Well, folks, your guess is actually as good as mine because there is no legal obligation for most Federal agencies to publicly disclose the price of government projects, even though the American taxpayers are paying for them. Folks, this is your money—your money. Shouldn't you have a right to know how it is being spent?

It has been said before, and I surely believe it: Government functions best when it operates in the open. This is the basis of Sunshine Week, which begins this Sunday. Sunshine Week is celebrated every year in March to remind us of just how important it is to have government transparency, especially when it comes to how our tax dollars are being spent.

Transparency really is fundamental to the principles upon which our Nation was founded. The people have power to affect the decisions made by those of us who are elected leaders, and, in turn, Congress has the authority to hold accountable the millions of unelected Washington bureaucrats who ultimately write the rules and regulations that impact nearly every aspect of our lives and decide how our taxpayer dollars are spent.

This year, I have a couple of bright ideas to shine some light on how Washington is spending your money. Let's talk about those darn government boondoggles—those Federal projects that are billions of dollars over budget and years behind schedule. Frankly, we know nothing about them because the government agencies aren't required to report this information to you.

Well, I have a bill to help shed some light on these costly monstrosities. My Billion Dollar Boondoggle Act would require an annual report listing every single taxpayer-funded project that is

\$1 billion or more over budget or 5 years or more behind schedule. This will make it impossible for Washington bureaucrats to continue throwing our tax dollars into bottomless money pits without being noticed.

Unfortunately, it is not just the billions wasted on boondoggles being kept secret. It is the cost of the Federal projects. So I have proposed a bill that requires every project supported with Federal funds to include a pricetag with the amount that is paid by taxpayers. That way, when your money is being spent to put turtles on a treadmill—the ones I mentioned to you earlier—you, the taxpayer, can decide if the price is right.

Of course, the waste doesn't stop there. Did you know that Federal agencies spend over \$1.4 billion every year on advertising and public relations? This includes—you will love this—more than a quarter of a million dollars for costumed mascots like Sammy Soil and Milkshake the cow—a quarter of a million dollars. There was nearly \$10,000 to produce a zombie apocalypse survival guide. Yes, folks, I am not joking. And there was \$30,000 for a martian New Year's Eve party and hundreds of thousands of dollars on tote bags, stress balls, fidget spinners, and other trinkets.

Well, folks, thankfully, the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee is voting today on my bill, which forces agencies to disclose exactly how much they are spending on all of these government gimmicks. Folks, it is time we bag the swag and end this unnecessary taxpayer-funded propaganda.

With our national debt now exceeding \$23 trillion, there is literally no better time than Sunshine Week to start shedding more light on how Washington is managing or maybe, in this case, mismanaging your money. The only reason to keep taxpayers in the dark is that these spending decisions can't withstand the scrutiny. And, folks, that is exactly why sunlight is the best disinfectant.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. President, there are a lot of things going on right now in DC and a lot of moving targets. A lot of Americans are looking closely at what is happening with the COVID-19 virus. We are tracking what is happening overseas in Afghanistan and multiple other issues on the stock market, as well as what is happening with oil and gas right now.

We are spending a little bit of time, in the middle of all those things, to also say that we can't lose track of structural issues in government, to see if we can work on those issues that are, right now, in front of us, but we also have to look at long-term issues, to look at basic government transparency and basic accountability for government.

So I want to highlight—several of my colleagues are here, as well, high-

lighting some of the things that are actually on the floor or have moved recently or we think we can move on those. One of those things is the GREAT Act. This is a bipartisan bill that deals with basic transparency for grants.

If you go back 20 years ago, the Federal Government gave away very few grants. Now, \$600 billion a year is just for grants. My colleague, JONI ERNST from Iowa, just highlighted some of those wasteful grants that are out there that, as we go through them, we say we can try to get those one at a time or we can try to get a system in place where all grants have to go through a centralized data system where we can actually all look at the data and compare it across the government to basically look for areas of inefficiency. That is what the GREAT Act does. It creates standard data elements so that we can look at how the money is being spent—America's money—so we can actually evaluate it. That has overwhelmingly already passed. We are grateful to get that done this year.

Another one we were able to get done this year that has passed the Senate but has not yet passed the House is providing accountability through transparency. Now, this may seem super simple, but let me just begin with the most basic principle. No small business owner in America gets up every day and reads the Federal Register. It just doesn't happen anywhere.

If you are running a small business, you are running your small business. You are not getting up every day and reading the Federal Register to see the latest regulation. Even if you did, with the pages and pages and pages of regulations there, you can't make sense of it. This basic providing of accountability through transparency asks a simple question: Can we force the agencies, when they actually do a new regulation, to condense it down to 100 words or less in plain English so that you can actually figure out what this regulation is trying to do, so when you see a regulation come out, you can actually understand it without having to hire an attorney to go interpret it for you?

That has overwhelmingly already passed the Senate, and we are waiting for that to pass the House, as well—basic simplification of some of the government entities, in trying to be able to help out.

We passed by a majority—and it has already been signed into law—the one dealing with representative payee fraud. Now, again, this was a simple piece that was just needed in government. We discovered that if someone is a trustee for a Federal retiree for their retirement account and, as a trustee, they stole the money out of that person's account, we couldn't actually enforce the law on them. We could in several other areas, if it was Social Security or if it was disability, but we couldn't on Federal retirees.

So we were able to get a bipartisan agreement to pass this to take care of

that. It was a very simple bill, but it is the way we need to react when we see a problem—to actually go to solve that problem rather than take forever to do it.

Speaking of “forever” to be able to solve it, what I think is the most basic government transparency piece we can put out there to force real dialogue on budget issues is a simple bill we have on shutdown prevention. If we can end government shutdowns, we can actually have more debate on budget issues here in this room, where it should occur, and take the pressure off of Federal workers and Federal families facing a shutdown and furloughs.

MAGGIE HASSAN and I have a very simple bill. The bill simply says: If we get to the end of the fiscal year and if we don’t have all the issues resolved on our budget, we continue debating those things here. We remain in session 7 days a week until it is actually resolved. But in the meantime, Federal workers and their families are unaffected because the budget automatically continues at last year’s budget level until we get things resolved here. But in the meantime, we can’t go home until we actually solve that problem.

It is a straightforward solution to say: We are not going to have government shutdowns. We are not going to have chaos across the whole country. We have had 21 government shutdowns in 40 years. We have to stop that chaos.

So it stops that chaos, and it puts the pressure where the pressure needs to be—on us. When we finish our work, then we can move to the next thing. But if the budget work is not done, the most basic elements of those appropriations bills, if they are not finished, we remain in session 7 days a week until they are finished.

We need to find ways to be more efficient as a government. Government shutdowns waste money by the billions. ROB PORTMAN and his team did a remarkable study to look and see how much money was wasted in the last shutdown, and it was in the billions of dollars, and not even every agency turned in all their information to ROB PORTMAN and his team.

We can’t keep losing money that way. We can’t keep that chaos going for all the Federal workers and their families. We should have arguments about the budget. We have big ones that need to be resolved, but we should keep it here.

So, this week, as we pause for just a moment on all the other big issues that are pressing on us right now, I am grateful that we are also pausing for a moment to say: What are the big issues that we should look long term on, and how do we solve some of those issues for the future, as well, to make government more efficient and try to make government more transparent?

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, I am here to join my colleagues in speaking

on the floor in advance of government Sunshine Week, but before I do that, let me commend my colleague from Oklahoma for his comments about the need for more transparency in government and particularly our grantmaking process.

We have made some progress on that—most recently, the DATA Act. His predecessor in Congress, Tom Coburn, worked on this issue, and we came up with legislation when I was on the other side of Pennsylvania Avenue at the Office of Management and Budget to put all grants and contracts online, which was a start. But the DATA Act takes that to the next level to make sure there is uniformity in government.

We still have difficulty with some agencies getting information out there, but he is absolutely right. It would make a difference because if people know how the money is being spent, it is much more likely to be spent wisely, all the way down to the ZIP Code in terms of where grants are going and what kind of Federal taxpayer dollars are being spent in our communities and whether it is being spent well.

Government shutdowns, of course—I couldn’t agree more with my colleague—have not worked to help make our government more efficient. In fact, we always spend more after the fact.

Think about it. People were furloughed, and, then, when they went back to work, they got backpay. Well, it would have been much better had they been there to provide the services to the taxpayers.

You also just have a lot of dislocation that is unfair and people who have to go to work who are essential employees. Think of our TSA employees—for those of you who travel in airports—not getting paid. A lot of them had car payments or house payments they couldn’t make during the last government shutdown. It is just unfair. So we have to get at that.

We have legislation that actually two-thirds of the Members of this side of the aisle have supported. Yet we have not been able to make that bipartisan. So I appreciate the fact that my colleague from Oklahoma has a bipartisan approach to that. We have tried for four or five Congresses now to pass legislation that simply says that at the end of the fiscal year, if you haven’t completed all the bills, then the government continues to operate, but 1 percent of spending is cut every 120 days, and every 90 days thereafter to give the Appropriations Committees here the incentive to get to work and to get the budget bills done. That, I think, would work.

It used to be a bipartisan approach. It is not now. So I am interested in looking at other options, including what the Senator from Oklahoma was talking about in terms of providing more pressure on us here to get our work done because these shutdowns clearly haven’t worked to help make the government more efficient. They have just had the opposite impact.

GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, today there is a discussion about transparency. I am going to talk about one that is maybe going to surprise some people, but it is about the lack of transparency and about \$150 billion a year that is taxpayer money that is put into research and development. It is money that we, as taxpayers, pay to places like the National Institutes of Health. The National Institutes of Health does great research. So the Federal dollars go in there to try to develop cures—as an example, for diseases, but also for other healthcare research. There is the National Science Foundation, which does a lot of research on technology and research, and the Department of Energy, which does a lot of the basic research on science in our country. So I am going to focus on that funding today and a specific problem we have right now. It is about ensuring the government remains accountable to taxpayers. It is about ensuring that hard-working American taxpayers know where their money is going, and it is about a specific issue of that money going to research that is then taken by other countries, particularly by China, and the need for us to address that issue, in part, through transparency and, in part, through actually some new criminal statutes to be able to ensure that there is accountability.

Last fall, the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations did a study. It was about a yearlong study. We looked at this issue of China’s talent recruitment programs and, more broadly, other countries, but, specifically, what China has been doing to find researchers over here in the United States whom they think are doing interesting work and recruiting those people to be able to provide that research and sometimes to have the person actually go to China to provide that research.

The issue we focused on in our report was this theft of intellectual property at research institutions and at our colleges and universities. It was a shocking report. We issued it late last year. It showed, as you probably know now from some of the press accounts that have arisen since then, that, in fact, China was recruiting individuals who were giving up their research that was taxpayer funded.

China has made no secret of its goal to surpass the United States to be the world leader in scientific research, but that doesn’t mean they should use our research institutions here in America, paid for by us, to accomplish that goal. These talent recruitment programs—most notably, the Thousand Talents Program—recruits researchers at American universities and American research institutions to do the same research, usually at shadow labs in China, in order to just transfer taxpayer-funded research back to China.

This is an issue that has been going on for two decades, we found out, and