

As our colleagues are aware, this afternoon we will have a cloture vote on the Byrd amendment. I reluctantly filed that cloture vote last week because we are now in the third week of debate on the Interior appropriations bill as well as on homeland security. With all of the work that must be done and with all of the issues we must address, we simply cannot prolong this debate indefinitely.

Seventy-nine Senators a couple of weeks ago voted for an amendment offered by the distinguished Senator from Montana, myself, and others responding to the crisis we now face in drought-stricken parts of the country. The regions of the country which are experiencing drought are growing—the Southeast, the Midwest, and the far West—areas throughout the country that have experienced drought conditions, and in some cases it is unprecedented.

We also have a very serious situation with regard to firefighting, so serious that this administration changed its position from one which said we will not provide any new resources for firefighting—that all firefighting moneys that ought to be dedicated to firefighting this fall be taken from the Forest Service budget. They changed from that position to say, we now recognize how serious this situation is, and we will commit \$850 million and ask the Congress to support it.

You have two very important priorities in dealing with disaster and crisis: One with the Forest Service and firefighting needs. This is urgent. This is extraordinarily important to the ongoing effort to fight fires throughout the country, especially again in the West. And, second, as I noted, the drought.

We have voted for this legislation. We have gone on record on a bipartisan basis in support of this legislation. I know there are those who still would like to work out other compromises relating to other issues, and if that can be done, I certainly will welcome it.

But we simply cannot go on week after week after week without more notable progress, without more of a tangible way with which to address these needs, and, secondly, without a way to recognize that we have a lot of work to do in a very short period of time. We have what amounts to about 15 legislative days left prior to the time we adjourn for the year. I am troubled, to say the least, by the extraordinary list of items that have to be addressed and the very minimal amount of time legislatively we have to address them.

I come to the floor this morning urging colleagues on both sides of the aisle to recognize the need, to recognize the urgency, to recognize the shortness of legislative time available, and to recognize how important it is that we move on to accomplish as much as we possibly can in a very short period of time.

I can only hope we will get a good vote this afternoon—I would like it to

be unanimous—on cloture, so at least on this particular amendment we have the opportunity to move on to other issues, and hopefully to a time for final passage on the Interior appropriations bill.

I will have more to say about homeland security later on in the day, but I must say, this is something that just begs our support, recognizing the prioritization it deserves as we consider the schedule and the need that is so clearly a recognition around the country.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Montana.

Mr. BURNS. Mr. President, the majority leader makes a very good point. I am struck by what we are debating off the floor, which is timber health. At the heart of that is how we deal with judicial appeals, which has brought a new dynamic to that debate on forest health and how we manage our public lands; that is, not a denial of judicial appeals, but also in the area of timber restraining orders.

People can file appeals—we do not want to deny that—but also how we deal with the decision-rendering process, which does cause some concern with folks using timber restraining orders as a tool in the process to get their way. Basically, that is what we have here.

We are on a time line, if we go off this. Those who do not want to see anything move press us into a time line, and then we go on home knowing there is a timeframe on that debate.

Given the time we have and the leader's decision to double-track these two issues in order to facilitate and deal with these issues in a short time line, we have to take a look at that. I know the leader is. I congratulate him for his push on this and to make it a reality. But so far, it hasn't come to be and does not get us to where I think we want to be before we go home in October. We want to move forward as fast as we can.

But also there is lingering debate out there that a lot of folks are concerned about—especially on our forests. I want to bolster the leader's contention that drought relief and disaster relief in farm and ranch country are still with us. Just on Sunday past—here we are in the middle of September with football in the air—it was 92 degrees in Billings, MT. The Yellowstone River is as low as I have ever seen it. Above the Bighorn River where it spills into the Yellowstone, you can walk across that river just about anywhere and not get your knees wet. We still have that concern.

The leader is right. It passed this body overwhelmingly. It should be allowed to move forward with the apparatus in front of us in which to get that relief out to our people who are suffering at this time. I appreciate his leadership on that.

I yield the floor.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2003

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will now resume consideration of H.R. 5093, which the clerk will report by title.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 5093) making appropriations for the Department of the Interior and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2003, and for other purposes.

Pending:

Byrd amendment No. 4472, in the nature of a substitute.

Byrd amendment No. 4480 (to amendment No. 4472), to provide funds to repay accounts from which funds were borrowed for emergency wildfire suppression.

Craig/Domenici amendment No. 4518 (to amendment No. 4480), to reduce hazardous fuels on our national forests.

Dodd amendment No. 4522 (to amendment No. 4472), to prohibit the expenditure of funds to recognize Indian tribes and tribal nations until the date of implementation of certain administrative procedures.

Byrd/Stevens amendment No. 4532 (to amendment No. 4472), to provide for critical emergency supplemental appropriations.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. KYL. Mr. President, I would like to speak directly to the issues raised both by the majority leader and the Senator from Montana; specifically, with respect to how we are going to resolve issues related to the health of our forests.

I know the discussion has greatly focused on fires and the catastrophic results of fires this year. I am going to talk about that to a great extent. But I would like to make a point at the very beginning which I hope we don't lose sight of; that is, fire is merely one component of the problem we have to deal with. What we are really talking about is the health of our forests, both for the protection of people from catastrophic wildfires and also for the ecological benefits that a healthy forest provides. It provides wonderful recreation for our citizens. It provides habitat for all of the flora and fauna we not only like to visit and like to see but to understand that it is very important for ecological balance in our country. It protects endangered species. It provides a home for all of the other fish, insects, birds, mammals, and reptiles we would like to protect, whether they are endangered or not.

In order to have this kind of healthy forest, we have come to a conclusion, I think pretty much unanimously in this country, that we are going to have to manage the forest differently than we have in the past.

What the debate is all about is how the Congress is going to respond to this emergency, not just from the catastrophic wildfires but from the other