

is either not inspected, nor safe, or sent back.

We had a hearing in the Finance Committee. We were told about port shopping, that products coming in commodities, coming into our country come to one of our ports, get inspected, get rejected, and then they start shopping around for a port that does not have an inspector. And, yes, we have ports without inspectors.

So not only are we accepting substandard food, but we are minimizing our ability to produce our own with the control and the oversight that ensures us that what we produce domestically is safe.

This piece of legislation is about national security, just as foreign policy is in many other regions of the world. Why is it we think that when we go to these trade negotiations, usually the last thing that is negotiated is agricultural products? It is because those countries understand. Those countries have been hungry. They have been subjected to foods that are unsafe or grown in a manner they don't appreciate. But they also know they can control making sure that there is enough there, if they can control and keep out our products. Many of the commodities I grow do find themselves on the international scene as commodities left out of trade agreements. That is because they are critical. They are a staple in the global community for sustenance of life.

Whether a country provides subsidies at levels much higher than those included in this bill or protects their farmers by a prohibitive tariff structure, every country in some form or fashion ensures a domestic food supply. If we continue in the direction we are going, where we are seeing for the first time in the history of our country the possibility of a trade deficit in agricultural products, what is that going to mean to us as a nation? It is going to mean we are then going to be more dependent on other countries for food that is critical for children and families all across this land.

In the United States, the farm bill is the policy that ensures safe food and fiber. We have worked hard in the Agriculture Committee to come up with a bill that was both bipartisan and biregional, agreed upon by everybody. Everybody got something positive out of a bill that was respectful to the diversity of this country, to the diversity of how we grow our crops. Lord, it was interesting for me to talk with my colleagues from way up on the Canadian border who had snow in August. We had 12 straight days of over 100-degree weather in Arkansas. We are a diverse nation and we are blessed to be that way. It is all the more reason we have the responsibility in this body to be respectful of that diversity and what it is that each of us has to bring to the table from our States. The Agriculture Committee did that.

It also respected the needs of those who are less fortunate in the nutrition

title. It respected the idea that Americans want to ensure conservation and good stewardship of the land. We did that. We looked at the need for renewable energy, and we have made a huge investment, both in the farm bill in authorizing policy and also in the Finance Committee package that accompanies it, making sure that incentives are there for communities and for ag producers and all of those in rural America that not only can we continue the research but get into production of renewable fuels and, most importantly, that we can get them to the consumer. It doesn't matter how much we produce; if we are not using it, it is not benefitting the environment and not lessening our dependence on foreign oil. In the long term, it is not going to benefit growers who are looking for that secondary market.

We should all recognize and appreciate the bounty this bill provides and what it does for the hard-working men and women in farm families across this country who support each and every one of us every day in what it is they do for us for that security. I urge my colleagues to get serious about passing this bill and providing the certainty our farm families deserve, knowing that Government stands with them. Today, this time right now in our State of Arkansas, it is time to plant the winter wheat crop. Without knowing what the policy is going to be for next year or the year after that or the year after that, it is pretty hard to go to that banker and ask for that tremendous loan for that investment one has to make in producing that safe and abundant, affordable food supply, without knowing where one's Government stands.

I appeal to my colleagues and ask them to join us on the floor to talk about how important this bill is and, more importantly, to come together and figure out a way we can make this happen before we go home to celebrate Thanksgiving and the incredible bounty this country provides. Let us make sure those who provide for us have an understanding of where their Government stands on their behalf.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mr. CORNYN. I yield myself 10 minutes of our allotted 30 minutes.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator is recognized.

APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, amid the news we have received this last month on a variety of fronts—some

good, some bad—is some very positive news from our economy. October marked the 50th straight month of positive job creation in the United States, a new record since the Government began keeping such records in 1939. Unfortunately, Congress has set a record of its own last week, when it finally sent the first of 12 appropriations bills that should have been finished before October 1, when the new fiscal year began, to the President for his signature. Not since 1987, 20 years ago, has Congress taken this long to send a single appropriations bill to the President this late in the fiscal year. I ask this question: What family, what small business, who in the United States could run their fiscal house this way, other than the Congress? Only the Congress has the power to basically suspend the powers of disbelief and pass something called a continuing resolution so that spending remains on auto pilot at last year's levels, rather than meet the needs of this current year by passing appropriations bills. Instead of working hard together, as I genuinely believe most Members of this body want, we see instead a calculated game being played out.

I want to focus specifically on our Veterans and Military Construction bill which should have been passed as a stone-alone bill and should have been signed by the President before Veterans Day this last Monday but was not. Rather than working to see that the funding for our veterans and for quality-of-life funding for military families, which is absolutely essential for a volunteer military force such as ours, we see this bill has consciously been held behind, even though it passed some 2 months ago, presumably to serve as a vehicle for a large spending bill that will be offered in December.

This veterans funding bill is perhaps the most telling and troubling sign of the games this process has degenerated into. It strikes me—and I believe I am not alone—that there is a serious discrepancy between what Congress says to our veterans and what Congress does for our veterans. Knowing how important veterans funding is to the President and to the country as a whole and to the Members of this body, some of my colleagues have decided instead to use this bill as a vehicle to expand Washington spending and, unfortunately, engage in partisan games. Rather than funding the veterans bill by itself with important funding and benefit enhancements that will serve America's veterans and military families, the majority leader has decided, initially at least, to try to merge this bill with another bill he knew the President was going to veto. As a matter of fact, he did yesterday, the Labor-HHS bill, because it would cost American taxpayers \$11 billion more than the President asked for and included a number of, shall we call them, "interesting earmarks" or special projects designated by Members of the Senate.

Fortunately, we were able, through a point of order urged by my senior Senator, Mrs. HUTCHISON, under Senate rules, to separate the Veterans and Military Construction bill from an overloaded Labor, Health and Human Services bill.

I ask my colleagues to consider what the American people are supposed to think when they see examples such as this. The labor bill the President vetoed included a special interest earmark for a San Francisco museum called the Exploratorium. I have never heard of the Exploratorium before, but let me explain a little about this particular earmark that was included in the vetoed bill. This is to fund, at taxpayer expense, a museum that has more than 500,000 visitors each year and an annual budget of almost \$30 million. Yet the American taxpayer has been asked unknowingly to spend money on Exploratorium—payments of more than \$11 per visitor over the last 6 years. What is perplexing to me is why the majority would knit together funding for this Exploratorium, for example, along with about 2,000 other earmarks or special interest appropriations, with money for veterans health care. Why should veterans be required to shoulder the burden not only for this earmark, which I think we could fairly debate the appropriateness of, but over \$1 billion set aside for earmarks in a completely unrelated matter and unrelated bill? This is exactly what the majority leader tried to do last week, along with our colleagues on the other side of the aisle.

At the end of the day, we were able to stop this strategy and prevent our veterans from becoming yet another political football in the appropriations process. Unfortunately, we still haven't seemed to learn the lessons from this unfortunate gamesmanship, because we still have not yet passed the Veterans and Military Construction appropriations bill, even though it has been sitting there, waiting to go to the President for about the last 2 months. Just as we were able to free our veterans from this pork-laden trap, the majority leader indicated that the veterans bill would not actually ever get independent funding. On November 7, he said:

Some Republicans are seeking to separate the two bills, to force a vote just on the VA bill and vote just on the Labor-Health and Human Services bill. If we do that, here is what happens. This bill will go back to the House with only the Labor-Health and Human Services bill. That is all the President will get. He will not get the veterans bill.

In other words, the majority leader on November 7 said that if we were successful in splitting these two bills apart, the President would get the porkbarrel spending bill that pluses up spending for these 2,000 earmarked special projects and is \$11 billion over the President's requested amount, and the majority leader would make sure that the Veterans and Military Construction appropriations bill didn't go to the

President. I don't know how this kind of action can be characterized other than a shameful way to treat our veterans and to deal with the quality-of-life issues included in the military construction portion of this appropriations bill.

It is past time to fund the Federal Government at appropriate levels and to give our veterans and troops currently in harm's way the funding they need, as well as those who have proudly worn the uniform of the U.S. military whom we honored just this last Veterans Day, last Monday. It is long past time we put aside the gamesmanship that, unfortunately, seems to characterize so much of what happens here in Washington when it comes to politics.

I think we ought to try to figure some way to work together to reverse the lowest approval rating in recent time which the American public currently has with regard to the U.S. Senate, to help put a stop to these games and liberate our Nation's finances from the grip of partisan politics, I would suggest, and to make sure we do not end up in a game of chicken where the American people are told if we do not pass a bloated Omnibus appropriations bill there will be a shutdown of the Government.

I believe we ought to go ahead and pass, by way of insurance, the Government Shutdown Prevention Act. This legislation will guarantee that the Government continues to work for the American people until Congress passes responsible appropriations bills. We need to do this sooner rather than later. It does not look as if we are going to get it done this week before we break for the Thanksgiving recess, but we sure ought to get it done when we come back on December 3.

Passing the Government Shutdown Prevention Act will make sure the American people need not be frightened into thinking the Federal Government will not continue to operate and fund essential programs while we continue to debate what the appropriate level of appropriations bills should be.

Mr. President, I yield myself 2 more minutes, to be followed by the Senator from New Hampshire.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. WHITEHOUSE). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, my colleagues from the majority want to spend \$23 billion above what the President has requested in his budget for discretionary spending. Now, that is \$23 billion in discretionary spending over and above entitlement spending, which has been operating again on autopilot at the growth rate of about 8 percent per year. They have claimed \$23 billion is not all that much money. But I would suggest that only in Washington is \$23 billion to be considered pocket change. The American people are smarter than that. They know somebody has to pay for that money. It does not magically appear. What it means is the Federal Government is

going to reach into their pockets and extract it from their hard-earned wages in order to fund these vast expansions of Government programs.

We need to make sure that we are better stewards of the taxpayers' dollars and that we regain the lost confidence the American people had in this institution. We need to take care of problems, for example, such as the growing alternative minimum tax, which threatens to grow from 6 million taxpayers this year to 23 million taxpayers next year—a typical so-called tax-the-rich program, which, just as they always do, tends to grow to creep into the middle class. We need to make sure the middle class does not suffer a huge tax increase by dealing with the alternative minimum tax.

Again, instead of being in lockdown, as we are on the farm bill because the majority leader will not allow any amendments to be offered except for ones he cherry-picks, we ought to be solving these problems, pass a Veterans and Military Construction bill, get it to the President, and not have a game of chicken with \$23 billion in excess spending, which we know the President is going to veto. Instead we should engage in a meaningful dialog to try to come up with a negotiated amount. We should eliminate this middle-class tax increase which is going to grow from affecting 6 million people to 23 million people unless we do something about it before the end of the year.

Mr. President, I know the distinguished Senator from New Hampshire is here with us and ready to take the floor, so I yield to him.

I ask that the Senator from South Carolina, who I know is coming down after the Senator from New Hampshire, be reserved 8 minutes of the time we have remaining.

Mr. President, could I ask how much time we have remaining on this side?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Seventeen minutes is remaining.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that it be split evenly between the Senator from New Hampshire and the Senator from South Carolina.

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

The Senator from New Hampshire.

Mr. GREGG. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Texas.

First, Mr. President, I join the Senator from Texas in asking that the majority leader and the Democratic membership free the Veterans bill and the Military Construction bill, which is ready to be sent to the President, stop holding it hostage for the purpose of holding it up with special interest projects which have nothing to do with the military or with veterans, and instead send that bill down to the President so he can sign it so our veterans can know they are getting the support they need after their great service to our Nation.