

to fund the government for fiscal year 2016, which begins October 1, 2015.

I congratulate Chairman COCHRAN and his subcommittee chairs for a full and open process. They worked hand in hand with me and my ranking Democratic members. But their bills are based on the postsequester levels of the Republican budget resolution. The bills reported by the committee are too spartan to meet the needs of the American people.

The difference between the Republican budget and the President's budget request is \$74 billion. That is a lot. But even with that increase, the discretionary top line will be equal to what we spent in 2010, 6 years ago.

I would like to talk about one example of the real impact of the Republican sequester level budget—failing our veterans.

Veterans deserve promises made and promises kept. Instead, the Senate fiscal year 2016 Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies bill is at least \$857 million short of what is needed for veteran health care. And the House is even worse, at least \$1.4 billion below what is needed. At those levels, about 70,000 fewer veterans will receive medical care.

Despite record demand for services, our veterans are still waiting to get appointments at hospitals and clinics. In fact, the electronic wait list has grown by almost 10,000 over the past 2 months. Sequester will result in waitlists growing exponentially.

Sequester budgeting for veterans' medical care means almost 150,000 veterans living with hepatitis C will be in limbo, not receiving new, lifesaving drugs.

It is not just care that is short-changed. Sequester budgeting means hospitals and clinics continue to deteriorate. The VA has identified between \$10 billion and \$12 billion of backlogged code violations and deficiencies at hospitals and clinics across the country. In fiscal year 2013, the VA spent \$1.3 billion repairing clinics, but for fiscal year 2016 the Republican bills cut funding in half, even as the backlog grows.

Yesterday, the Republican leader stated that he did not want a government shutdown. Encouragingly, he added, "At some point we'll negotiate the way forward."

Democrats are ready. Since May, we have been asking to negotiate to eliminate sequester with a sequel to Murray-Ryan. The only way we will have shutdown, showdown, and government by self-made crisis is if the Republican majority refuses to send the President bills he can sign and instead sends bills that are too spartan or contain poison pill riders like prohibiting funding for Planned Parenthood or signature initiatives like the Affordable Care Act and climate pollution rules.

Whether it is funding our troops or keeping our promises to veterans, we can't do it without a new budget deal. Freezing Federal spending doesn't meet the growing, complex needs of the Nation.

None of us were elected to make America weaker. Yet sequester makes us weaker and sequester hollows out America.

America deserves better, but we need a new budget deal to do it. Democrats are ready to get serious and get to the table. We need to end sequester for defense with no more gimmicks and end sequester for programs not funded in the defense bill that protect our country and make it great.

DRIVE ACT

Ms. BALDWIN. Mr. President last week the Senate passed a multiyear surface transportation bill, the Developing a Reliable and Innovative Vision for the Economy Act, H.R. 22, referred to as the DRIVE Act. I was pleased to vote for this bipartisan bill. For the first time in 3 years, the Senate has passed a long-term surface transportation bill. Unfortunately, the House adjourned before taking up our bipartisan legislation—forcing the Senate to pass a short-term funding patch, the 34th since 2009.

I am disappointed that we were not able to get the long-term bill to the President's desk. However, I believe the Senate has laid the groundwork to make the most recent short-term extension the last for the next few years. I look forward to working with my colleagues in both houses of Congress to complete a long-term bill before the October 29 deadline, and I expect the DRIVE Act to be the baseline for those efforts.

While the DRIVE Act's most important feature is that it provides certainty to construction firms and state governments to invest in rebuilding our crumbling roads and bridges, it also includes several provisions to improve the way we move goods and people across our nation. In the last few years, I have become very concerned with the way one particular good—Bakken oil—moves through the country. The fiery explosions that accompany Bakken oil train derailments have many in Wisconsin rightfully concerned as we have unwittingly become one of the most traveled oil train routes in the country.

The DRIVE Act includes a rail safety bill that was added thanks to the leadership of Senate Commerce Committee Chairman THUNE, Ranking Member NELSON, and Senators BOOKER and WICKER. I was pleased that the bipartisan bill that passed out of committee included provisions to require a railroad liability study and comprehensive oil spill response plans. These provisions were similar to what is included in the Crude-by-Rail Safety Act, on which I worked closely with Senator CANTWELL to introduce.

While the liability study and oilspill response plans are steps in the right direction, as the bill moved to the Senate floor, I believed we needed to do more to improve rail infrastructure, transparency, and first responder prepared-

ness. That is why I was pleased to work with Environment and Public Works Ranking Member BARBARA BOXER, Commerce, Science, & Transportation Committee Chairman JOHN THUNE and Ranking Member BILL NELSON as well as Majority Leader MITCH MCCONNELL to include two sections in the bill that passed the Senate on July 30. I was able to add these sections to the substitute amendment, No. 2266, that was adopted on July 29, 2015, and the provisions were included in the final version of the bill that passed the Senate.

The first section, section 35416, would require that the Federal Railroad Administration keep on file the most recent bridge inspection report prepared by a private railroad bridge owner and provide that report to appropriate state and local officials upon request. This allows State and local officials who are responsible for public infrastructure integrity and public safety to have access to information they need to keep the public safe. The substance of this section is also contained in amendment 2538.

The second section, section 35431, addresses concerns raised by the first responder community who have had to fight for access to real-time information about hazmat trains entering their jurisdictions. Firefighters want to know in advance when hazmat trains will arrive in order to better prepare and keep their communities safe. The substance of this section is also contained in amendment 2539.

The section modified the bill's original language that only required real-time hazmat train information to go to Department of Homeland Security Fusion Centers. The centers would then provide the information to local first responders only in the event of an accident, when it is less useful. My provision requires fusion centers to provide the real-time information to State and local first responders at least 12 hours prior to a hazmat train arriving in their jurisdiction. The transmission must also include the best estimate of the train's arrival.

I believe these two sections significantly improve transparency and safety in communities along oil train routes. This is also a significant achievement for state and local organizations, who are often powerless to take action against federally regulated railroads—despite being responsible for any problems they cause. In closing, I again would like to thank Senators MCCONNELL, THUNE, NELSON, BOXER, and INHOFE for their leadership on this legislation. And I pledge to work with my colleagues in the House and Senate to pass a long-term surface transportation bill in the next three months.

50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE VOTING RIGHTS ACT OF 1965

Ms. MIKULSKI. Mr. President, today marks the 50th anniversary of one of the most important civil rights bills we have ever come together as a nation to pass: the Voting Rights Act of 1965.