

have to deal with the reality of people who have addictions, and they need to be able to get help. Part of that is having access to care and having coverage. The elimination of the Affordable Care Act will move us in the wrong direction.

We need to continue to build on legislation we have worked on together—bipartisan—that provides additional resources to our State and local governments to deal with the opioid crisis. Part of that is the expansion of coverage under the Affordable Care Act.

Scrapping the healthcare law will not only leave Medicaid expansion enrollees high and dry; it will also hurt very vulnerable populations that were unable to buy affordable, comprehensive coverage before the Affordable Care Act, including more than 130 million women, children, and other people with preexisting conditions.

Let's remember that prior to the Affordable Care Act, many Americans—millions of Americans—were denied full coverage because of preexisting condition restrictions. The Maryland Health Benefit Exchange estimates that in Maryland, there are approximately 2.5 million non-elderly Marylanders with preexisting conditions, 320,000 of whom are children. They are at risk with this court decision in Texas.

Undoing current law would also eliminate strong patient protection. Insurers would once again be able to impose annual and lifetime limits, discriminate against women, and charge higher out-of-pocket costs. Young adults would no longer be able to stay on their parents' insurance until they turn 26.

We are talking about tens of millions of Americans who are at risk by this court decision. It is absurd to move back and tell these people they are going to lose the protection they now have under our healthcare system.

It is simple. President Trump must take this opportunity to stand up for the American people and defend the law. That is what the President of the United States should be doing. That is why I joined Senator MANCHIN and many of my Democratic colleagues in a letter urging President Trump to direct the Department of Justice to defend the law of the land. Yes, we should defend the law. It is our responsibility to make sure we protect the people of this Nation.

Let's build on the progress we have made together. We know we need to improve our healthcare system. We know the cost of prescription drugs is too high. We can do something about that. We know the individual marketplace needs improvement. We want to make sure there is affordable, quality insurance for everyone in this country.

Yes, we need to build on the progress we have made to make improvement, but what I urge all of us to do—let's maintain the protections we have today. Let's not go back to the time when being a woman was a preexisting

condition and you couldn't get full coverage. Let's not go back to the days when, if you had a heart ailment and you tried to buy an insurance policy, you were not going to get coverage for what you need. You were going to get those exclusions. That is where we were before we passed the Affordable Care Act.

Let's build on the Affordable Care Act. Let's work together as Democrats and Republicans. Let's defend the progress we have made. I hope the President will join us, but let's take that responsibility and build on that and work together, Democrats and Republicans, to build a stronger system for all.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BOOZMAN). The Senator from Montana.

PUBLIC LANDS BILL

Mr. TESTER. Mr. President, I appreciate that and thank the Senator.

Look, we are at the end of the year. Oftentimes in this body, things happen at the end of the year that we are not too proud of, but we have an opportunity to do something we could be very, very proud of, and that is, pass the public lands bill.

This public lands bill would permanently reauthorize the Land and Water Conservation Fund. This is the most effective conservation tool we have in this country right now. Whether it is establishing a park in one of your cities or towns or setting land aside so we can get better access to our public lands, this is a critically important fund that I hope we can get done as part of this lands package that is moving forward and hopefully will move forward before this Congress ends.

LWCF—the Land and Water Conservation Fund—has invested over half a billion dollars in Montana alone.

There is another component of this bill that I am particularly fond of. It is a bill that will protect Yellowstone Park and the headwaters of the Yellowstone River. It is called the Yellowstone Gateway Protection Act. It is a simple bill. It is a bipartisan bill. It is a bill that will help support the hundreds of small businesses in Paradise Valley. And it is called Paradise Valley for a good reason—because it is paradise, and we need to keep it a paradise by preventing large-scale mining in that region.

I am just asking Congress to act. I am asking my fellow Members, my fellow Senators to add some common sense to the negotiations that are moving on here and pass this lands bill because it is critically important for our kids and our grandkids.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia.

FUNDING THE GOVERNMENT

Mr. PERDUE. Mr. President, here we are again at the end of a quarter and

the end of a calendar year—not the end of our fiscal year. But here we are again with late-night sessions and people running around in a very unprofessional manner, in my opinion, talking about how to get our government funded.

Let me put this in perspective. This is the end of December. October, November, and December are the first fiscal quarter of fiscal year 2019. We are already one-fourth through this fiscal year, and we are still talking about the completion of authorizations and appropriations to fund the government for this year—not next year, this year.

In 2018, the Senate and, indeed Congress did something we haven't done in a long time. For the first time in 22 years, we did get 75 percent of the Federal Government discretionary spending funded. By the way, that is only about 25 percent of what we spend as a federal government, but that is a conversation for another day.

On July 31 this year and earlier than that—we started the appropriations process earlier this year and had an opportunity in the Appropriations Committee. The subcommittees and the committee did a fabulous job this year. Democrats and Republicans got together behind closed doors, no cameras, and really argued the points and came to compromises on most of the issues, so that by July 31, we had funded 12.25 percent of this year's Federal budget for discretionary spending.

We decided as a body, with the leadership's approval, to stay here in August of this year. Because of that, we went from 12.5 percent to 75 percent of the discretionary budget being appropriated and approved. Indeed, the appropriators did their job this year and would have gotten 100 percent had we not had the disagreement over border security.

Let's be clear. As we sit here at the end of this quarter, the Senate should have already totally funded the Federal Government's discretionary budget by September 30 of this year. That was 3 months ago. Instead, what we are about to do is have a vote in the next day or two on a continuing resolution for the remaining portion of this year's Federal budget, the 25 percent. This will be the 186th continuing resolution this Congress and other Congresses have used to continue to fund the government in a temporary manner.

I have a major problem with that. First of all, it is an admission that Congress can't do its job. The No. 1 responsibility of Congress is to make sure the government is funded. It is one of the reasons Thirteen Colonies got together in the first place to form this country.

This continuing resolution, as bad as it is, should not be used, but even in its current potential existence, it is so bad for a couple of other reasons.

No. 1, it does not address the border security issue on which the President and the Democrats had prior agreements. Even just a few weeks ago, we