

home? This is advantageous for our foreign visitors, as well as increasing our security.

The conference report passed by the Senate today thus represents an important step forward in strengthening our security. It will help to strengthen the security of travel to the United States. It does not represent our entire bill.

The Cantwell-Collins bill also has enhanced information sharing between the United States and Europe regarding the identities of suspected terrorists. If our intelligence community can provide more information to European border authorities and they can use it in the screening of the more than 1 million migrants that are arriving in Europe, we simultaneously improve the security of Europe and of the United States.

The continued threat posed to aviation from terrorist groups like Al Qaeda, like ISIS, and so many others demands that we take immediate steps to improve our security, keeping our borders and our aviation industry safe but, most of all, keeping the American people safe. Today's vote on the Customs bill conference report is a significant step in the right direction.

I want to acknowledge the work of the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, which is headed by our colleague Senator RON JOHNSON, as well as the Department of Homeland Security, headed by Secretary Jeh Johnson. Both of them have also worked hard on the preclearance issue.

I hope that our colleagues will join Senator CANTWELL and me as we continue the work we have been doing for the past 5 years on this issue. It is so important. As border State Senators, I think we are particularly sensitive to the fact that we want tourists, we want trade, we want people to come into this country, but we do not want lax border security to allow those who would do us harm to be able to enter this country.

Let me end where I began. Our goal is to keep our enemies out and invite our friends in when it comes to travel. I want to commend Senator CANTWELL for her longstanding leadership on this issue. It has been a pleasure to work with her.

Thank you, Mr. President.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. COATS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

WASTEFUL SPENDING

Mr. COATS. Mr. President, this week the President unveiled his budget for fiscal year 2017, and it landed here in the Senate with a big thud.

This is not the first time that has happened. In fact, when the President's budget has been brought up for a vote by the 100 Members of the Senate, it has never received more than 1 vote. Both Democrats and Republicans have roundly rejected the President's proposals. Why? Overspending and over-taxation, driving us ever deeper into debt—nobody wants to put their name to that. Yet that is the situation we are in. We are in that situation because of the irresponsible policies that have been laid upon the American people and put into law by this President and by those who have supported him.

Despite numerous efforts over the past several years to address this ever-growing threat to our future, all of these efforts—some of them bipartisan, even—have been rejected by the President. They have failed due to the President's unwillingness to work with the Congress and to put us on a path to fiscal solvency.

Now, I have been a part of that effort now for the last 5 years. All of us throw our hands up in frustration as we watch the debt clock click away ever faster, as we watch the debt rising ever greater.

When the President took office, our national debt—the money we had to pay back—was \$10.6 trillion. It is almost impossible to describe what \$1 trillion is. Trust me; it is a lot of money. It was \$10.6 trillion. Today, it is over \$19 trillion—nearly double—just in the term of this President. And what have we done about it? Nothing. Some will say a little bit. We have touched on it a little bit, but it continues to rise.

The Congressional Budget Office, a nonpartisan organization that just does the numbers, has told us that in 10 years the debt will rise to well over \$27 trillion. The shocker is the amount of money that has to be spent in paying interest on the debt. Nobody is giving us this money for free. We have to pay interest on it because people want interest, and they want their principal back. The interest on that, plus the mandatory spending—that is, automatic spending over which we have no control here unless we put reforms in place—will consume 99 percent of all the taxes and revenue that is coming in to pay for these programs. So that means we won't be building any roads; we won't be repairing any roads. That means we won't be providing research capabilities to the National Institutes of Health or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. That means we won't have money for viable programs in the fields of education, commerce, and transportation. Ninety-nine percent is all revenue consumed by just these two items: the mandatory spending—which we have lost control over and refuse to take reform actions to address—and the interest that has to be paid.

Well, this is unsustainable. It will all come down with a crash. That is why the President's budget this year will be

soundly rejected and will only receive one vote, if it gets that.

I am not giving up. I am looking at the major reforms that are necessary, even if we start today, even in an election year. I personally think the public is way ahead of us on this, and they will reward people who stand up and tell them the truth: Folks, we are going broke, and here are the numbers. This isn't political; these are pure numbers that come out of a neutral office. Nevertheless, we will see whether or not those who are running for office will take up the cause.

So I thought: Well, OK, we can't do the big stuff. Can we at least look at waste, fraud, and abuse? Can we not at least encourage my colleagues to take things that have been presented to us—examples of waste, fraud, and abuse by inspectors general, by the Congressional Budget Office, by the Government Accountability Office that looks into all the ways in which we spend money—can't we at least do that? So for the last 33 weeks, starting in the last session and moving into this session, I have been coming to the floor every week to highlight yet another documented example of waste, fraud, and abuse. This is the 33rd time.

Today, this one involves the sum of \$25 billion that has not been properly accounted for by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, which is part of the Department of Health and Human Services. I spoke with the Secretary this morning about it. There are 25 recommendations as to how the Department can address this matter, and she is committed to that. I know she has the right intent, and we will see if it can be accomplished.

In this particular case private sector contractors partner with the CMS, or the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, to provide any number of products and services to beneficiaries—those on Medicaid and Medicare. Federal agencies that administer the contracts are required to track the contracts' progress and costs and then close out these accounts once the contracts are finalized. There comes the rub. The regulations give a grace period of up to 20 months in order to close out a contract—to get everything closed down and so forth on these contracts. There is a handful of extensions where maybe it takes a little bit longer to do that. The timeframe or the grace period is intended to prevent improper payments and reduce the agency's financial risk and then close it out.

The inspector general looked at all this and said: Great idea, good regulation—but it is not happening. In December the Health and Human Services inspector general issued a report of the investigation into these terminated contracts. There are over 6,000 contracts that have been completed, but \$25 billion in funding is overdue—meaning that the accounts haven't been closed, which makes CMS vulnerable to improper payments.

Sadly, 15 percent of the completed contracts remained overdue for more

than 10 years, even though the regulation states they have to be closed out within 20 months. It shows the ineptness of this bureaucracy. It shows the incompetence of this bureaucracy, the inability of this bureaucracy to manage taxpayers' money in an effective way, to perform functions in an effective and efficient way. It is shocking. It is shocking to have the inspector general come along and find that there are thousands of contracts that have been completed for years—some over 10 years—and they are still open. The cost of that is \$25 billion. Even worse, the system that CMS has in place to monitor the contracts hasn't been accessible to the bureau within HHS responsible for closing the contracts. It is just a complicated mess.

Once again, we have situations totaling about \$25 billion that could either be used for more necessary functions, returned to the taxpayer or not taken from the taxpayer in the first place. The bottom line is that these have been identified and action needs to be taken.

This Senator continues to add to an ever-growing amount of waste, fraud, and abuse totaling, since we have started, a grand total approaching \$156 billion.

Having exposed this, the first thing we ought to be doing before we begin talking about raising taxes, before talking about a program staying in place or not staying in place is going after the waste, fraud, and abuse and stopping this outrageous waste of money that is occurring.

The next time we are back in session, I will be back down here with more. They just keep pouring in. We keep finding these documents, finding this and that. It is unbelievable that we have put ourselves in this situation and the ineffectiveness is out of control. It is no wonder the public no longer trusts us. If we can't get to this, how can we ever get to the reforms necessary to stop us from becoming insolvent?

With that, Mr. President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

EVERY CHILD SUCCEEDS ACT

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, last summer, by a vote of 81 to 17, the Senate passed a bill to fix No Child Left Behind. The House of Representatives had already passed their version. We had a conference report. We sent it to the President, and it was in December that President Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Acts to fix No Child Left Behind. The President not

only signed it in a large ceremony attended by parents, teachers, students, Governors, and people from all walks of life, the President said it was a "Christmas miracle." I think he said that for a couple of reasons. One, it was good news. Miracles are usually good news, and this was good news for 50 million children, 3.5 million teachers, and 100,000 public schools. They had waited 8 years for the U.S. Congress to fix the problems with No Child Left Behind. They knew it was difficult to do, and they looked forward to the result that we achieved because we achieved a consensus. There surely was a consensus if this was a law that everybody wanted fixed, but we also had a consensus about how to fix it.

People who don't usually agree in the education world said: We want to keep the tests. We want to keep the 17 federally required, State-designed tests between grades 3 and 12 so we can know how our children are doing, and we want to report that to the parents and the students, but we want to move the responsibility for our children and our schools out of Washington and back to the classroom teachers, back to the local school boards, back to the communities, and back to the Governors.

We heard that from the left, and we heard that from the right. We heard that from the Governors, and we heard that from the teachers unions. Because we all had that consensus, we were able to secure a vote of 81 to 17 here, and, as I often said last year, that is not that easy to do. Everyone is an expert on education. We have all had some education. It is like being in the Louisiana State University football stadium or the University of Tennessee football stadium. The stands are filled with 80,000 or 100,000 people who know exactly what the next play to call is because they have all played a little football and they are usually ready to say what it is. So that is what we had to navigate, but we did. As the President said, it was a Christmas miracle and a gift for the children, the teachers, and the parents who care about our public schools.

The reason I am on the floor today is to put into the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD a letter to the Acting Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education, John B. King, Jr. The letter is from a number of those in the coalition of educators and others who helped to pass the Every Student Succeeds Act.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD the letter I am referring to at the conclusion of my remarks.

This is a letter from people who don't always work together. In fact, in their letter to the Acting Secretary of Education they say: "Mr. KING, although our organizations do not always agree, we are unified in our belief that ESSA is a historic opportunity to make a world-class 21st century education system. We are dedicated to working together at the national level to facilitate partnership among our members

in States and districts to guarantee the success of this new law."

This letter comes from the National Governors Association, the School Superintendents Association, the National Education Association, and the American Federation of Teachers who all signed this letter. So did the National Conference of State Legislators, the National Association of State Boards of Education, the National School Boards Association, the National Association of Elementary School Principals, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, and the National Parent Teacher Association. I have racked my brain, and I can't think of any significant group in the State or local education world that hasn't signed this letter, except the Council of Chief State School Officers. I have no idea why they have not yet signed it because they were enthusiastically in support of our bill as well, so I hope they are also part of our coalition.

But here is the importance of this coalition. The coalition that sent this letter is the same coalition that supported passage of the bill. They know what I know and what Senator MURRAY of Washington State knows—who was the principal Democratic architect of the bill—that bill isn't worth the paper it is printed on unless it is implemented properly.

This bill makes a dramatic shift in policy for elementary and secondary education. The Wall Street Journal called it the largest devolution of power from Washington to the States in a quarter of a century. They are right about that. Both the left and the right had grown tired of a national school board in Washington, in effect, telling teachers and school boards and Governors and legislators what to do about their children and what to do about their schools. Those decisions are best made by those closest to the children. We don't get any wiser by flying from Nashville to Washington each week. In fact, there are a lot of people back in Nashville who think we lose a little bit of our common sense when we come here. So this is important. This is what we usually don't see from Washington—taking large amounts of power and sending it back home where it belongs. That is what all of these organizations say about the new law. Their letter says:

ESSA replaces a top-down accountability and testing regime with an inclusive system based on collaborative State and local innovation. For this vision to become a reality, we must work together to closely honor congressional intent. ESSA is clear: Education decision-making now rests with states and districts, and the federal role is to support and inform those decisions.

Let me read that again:

Education decision-making now rests with states and districts, and the federal role is to support and inform those decisions.

That is what the Governors say. That is what the National Education Association says. That is what the American Federation of Teachers says. That