having a comprehensive verification regime in place. The ratification of New START will allow us to have that verification system in place, and it is in our national security interest.

We have had plenty of opportunity to understand exactly what is involved in the New START Treaty. For 7 months, the Senate has been considering the ratification. We have had over 20 hearings. I am honored to serve on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. We have had numerous hearings and opportunities, both in closed sessions and open sessions, to understand exactly why this ratification is in the security interest of the United States.

I point out that this is New START. We already had a Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty with Russia that expired at the end of last year. That treaty was ratified by a prior vote of 93 to 6. So we have great interest. We know what is involved, and we have had strong, bipartisan support for the ratification of START. The United States needs transparency to know what Russia is doing and to provide confidence and stability. We need that confidence and stability to contribute to a safer world.

The ratification of New START allows the United States to continue to be in the leadership internationally, not only to deal with arms reduction but also with nonproliferation issues. That is particularly important today as we get international support to prevent Iran from becoming a nuclear weapon state. Russia has helped us in that regard. The ratification of this treaty is a continued movement toward isolating Iran's nuclear ambitions.

As other colleagues have pointed out, military leadership and bipartisan political leadership has supported this ratification.

I urge my colleagues to ratify New START. It is in our national security interest.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Louisiana is recognized.

DREAM ACT

Mr. VITTER. Madam President, I was truly disappointed to learn that Senator REID intends to bring up a new version of the sweeping amnesty proposal, known as the DREAM Act. Disguised as an educational initiative, the DREAM Act will provide a powerful incentive for more illegal immigration by granting amnesty to millions of illegal aliens.

The bill, which is unaffordable for taxpayers in many different ways, is a bad idea and comes at the worst possible time. As of recently, there are now plenty different versions of the DREAM Act on the legislative calendar, with different moving parts and revisions, but at the end of the day, it doesn't matter which one you focus on; they all have the same core, which is amnesty for a significant number of illegal aliens.

Also with that amnesty would come very significant taxpayer-funded benefits for these folks, including instate college tuition. In these difficult economic times, it is an insult to legal, tax-paying citizens that President Obama and his allies in the Senate want to use their hard-earned money to pay for educational benefits for illegal aliens.

The struggling economy has increased the demand for enrollment in public universities, as a growing number of families are unable to afford other education. At a time when many Americans cannot afford to send their own children to college, this bill would clearly allow the government to provide Federal student loans to illegal aliens who will displace legal residents competing for taxpayer subsidies. I am opposed to this proposal because it would unfairly place American citizens in direct competition with illegal aliens for scarce slots in classes at State colleges. The number of those coveted seats is absolutely fixed. So every illegal alien who would be admitted as a result of the DREAM Act would take the place of an American citizen or someone who is legally in our country. It makes no sense to authorize Federal and State subsidies for the education of illegal aliens when our State schools are suffering, as higher education budgets are being slashed, admissions curtailed, tuitions increased.

Enactment of the DREAM Act would be bad policy under any circumstances, but in the current economic climate, it would be a catastrophe for States facing already strained budgets. The DREAM Act will continue amnesty to millions of illegal aliens who entered the United States as minors and meet loosely defined ''educational requirements.'' Specifically, the bill grants immediate legal status to illegal aliens who have merely enrolled in institutions of higher education or received a high school degree or diploma.

The sponsors say several things to try to mitigate this basic fact, but it doesn't.

First of all, they have described the beneficiaries in this legislation as kids, boys and girls. In reality, the DREAM Act allows illegal aliens up to the age of 30 to be eligible to receive amnesty and qualify for Federal student loans.

Second, HARRY REID and the bill's proponents argue that this new version of the DREAM Act has been narrowly tailored. I don't believe the American public would be convinced that dropping the age of eligibility from 35 to 30 transforms the core of this legislation or changes anything at its core.

Third, the new and improved DREAM Act also requires that illegal aliens seeking relief undergo a background check and submit biometric and biographic data. Again, that doesn't change the core of the bill, which is about amnesty for millions of illegal aliens, thereby putting them in a position to compete for important taxpayer-funded benefits with U.S. citizens.

Furthermore, the new version of the DREAM Act expands the waiver authority of the Secretary of Homeland Security, thereby negating any additional requirements for eligibility. The bar for eligibility is already extremely low, but even what little is required can be waived whenever that Secretary decides to do so.

The American people have made it very clear—crystal clear—that they want to see the government fulfill its responsibility to enforce the laws and to take steps to control illegal immigration, not to reward bad behavior with amnesty and taxpayer-funded benefits.

Amnesty and economic incentives only encourage more illegal immigration. This is certainly not the answer to our current, ongoing immigration crisis. It will only worsen our economic crisis. I am really outraged that any elected lawmaker would consider this proposal, particularly now, particularly when our States and fellow citizens are struggling to deal with economic hardship and budget cuts.

The DREAM Act also includes no cap on the number of those who will be eligible to receive this amnesty. The economic ramifications would be profound and are simply unacceptable.

Finally, there is absolutely no pay-for in this legislation, while it is beyond argument that the act will increase costs on the Federal taxpayer.

So, bottom line, this bill is absolutely increasing the Federal deficit and the Federal debt—we don't know by exactly how much. To help answer that question, I am writing the Congressional Budget Office today and asking for an immediate score of the newest version of the DREAM Act. Whatever the number is—and it is important that we get that number—let me underscore that it is beyond debate that there is significant cost to this bill, without any pay-fors. That means the DREAM Act will also increase the Federal deficit and the Federal debt.

As chairman of the Border Security Caucus, I will be fighting this measure every step of the way, doing everything I can to stop what is clearly, at its core, an amnesty proposal. I invite all Members of the Senate, Republicans and Democrats, to listen to the American people who have been speaking about this loud and clear and to heed their call and say no to amnesty and turn to what should be our clear priority, which is enforcing the laws on the books, enforcing the clear laws against illegal immigration.

With that, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Madam President, 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. WHITEHOUSE. Madam President, I see my distinguished friend, the Senator from Wyoming, on the floor, and I would like to make a few remarks about the Social Security COLA.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. There is no time remaining with the majority at this moment.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business for 10 minutes.

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

EMERGENCY SENIOR CITIZENS RELIEF ACT

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. I thank the Chair.

At the end of my remarks, I will propound a unanimous consent request that the minority party is aware is coming.

I travel around my State pretty often, and when I do, I hear a lot in Rhode Island about the sacrifices people have had to make during what are, for our State, still very difficult economic times. We are still over 11 percent unemployment. Many of my constituents have adjusted to this difficult economic climate by cutting back on extras and finding savings in their personal lives wherever they can. But for our seniors—Rhode Island has a very large population of seniors—who live on a limited budget, simply cutting back is a very harsh option for them.

In 2008, Rhode Island seniors on Social Security received an average monthly payment of about $1,130. Madam Present, $1,130 a month is not a lot to live on, particularly in the Northeast. I have heard from seniors who worry about keeping the heat on in their homes because oil prices are so high. I have heard from seniors who have to split pills or skip doses because their prescription costs are so high. And I am hearing this from people who have worked hard all their lives, who paid into the system throughout their careers and who believed they would be able to grow old comfortably. Instead, many of them are really just scraping by on their Social Security benefits, and the benefits often no longer cover their daily living expenses. So for people in this situation, every penny counts.

This past year, for the first time since 1975, Social Security recipients in Rhode Island, in New York, and elsewhere did not receive a cost-of-living adjustment, or COLA, and it appears they will not receive a cost-of-living adjustment in 2011 either. These yearly adjustments are dictated by a specific formula that is tied to inflation. I know that because of the slow economy, inflation has been stagnant over the past 2 years. So the rigid mathematical formula that drives the cost-of-living adjustment does not presently provide for the cost-of-living adjustment seniors need.

This is a misfire in the cost-of-living calculation because it is based on a market basket that includes things seniors don't buy a lot of and it doesn't put adequate weight on heat and oil and energy, prescriptions and medical devices, and things on which seniors do spend a lot of money. It also overlooks people such as Chuck, who is a 67-year-old retiree from North Providence, RI, who wrote to me recently to express his concern that his monthly Social Security income will be frozen at its current level for yet another year. He wrote that regardless of what the COLA formula concludes, his cost of living continues to rise. Chuck says:

> Prices have risen at the supermarkets. Medications have also increased in copayments. Today, I am paying more and getting less for the dollar.

I believe Chuck speaks for many American seniors when he expresses concern about the lack of an increase in Social Security payments. So today I rise in support of the Emergency Senior Citizens Relief Act, introduced by my colleague, Senator SANDERS of Vermont. This bill would help ease the strain on the budgets of our seniors by providing a special one-time payment in 2011 of $250 to all Social Security recipients. In effect, it would be a COLA replacement. Although a $250 COLA replacement may not sound like much money, for those on a limited budget, the extra financial assistance provides a little extra peace of mind amid skyrocketing health care and prescription drug costs. And for seniors in New England, the payment could help keep the heat on through the approaching winter.

This assistance would not be unprecedented. While this was the first year in decades that seniors did not receive a COLA, we have taken steps in recent years to provide special help to seniors and to disabled Americans struggling through this recession. In 2008, I worked very hard with my colleagues to secure a $300 rebate for seniors and SSDI recipients in that year's economic stimulus act. In 2009, we again worked to make sure the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act included a one-time $250 payment to seniors and SSDI recipients. We now have a chance to once again lend that helping hand to our seniors.

Passing this bill would be the right thing to do for seniors, obviously, but it is also a good thing to do for our struggling economy. In Rhode Island, for example, the payments would inject more than $51 million into our economy—money that would quickly be spent on essential items such as food and medicine.

As I said at the beginning, Rhode Island is hurting. Unemployment stands at 11.4 percent, gas is now more than $3 per gallon, and our seniors face yet another year of frozen Social Security payments. By passing this Emergency Senior Citizens Relief Act, we can show our seniors that they are not forgotten and in turn provide a valuable boost to the local grocery stores, pharmacies, and shopping centers that remain such an integral part of our local economy.

I urge my colleagues to join me in standing by our Nation's seniors and to support the Emergency Senior Citizens Relief Act.

In that regard, I ask unanimous consent that the Finance Committee be discharged of S. 3976, which is the Emergency Senior Citizens Relief Act of 2010 that I have been discussing; that the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration; that there be 4 hours of debate with respect to the bill divided and controlled by Senator SANDERS and the Republican leader or his designee, and that no amendments or motions be in order during the pendency of this agreement; that upon use or yielding back of time the bill be read a third time, and the Senate proceed to vote on passage of the bill.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there objection? The Senator from Wyoming.

Mr. BARRASSO. Madam President, reserving the right to object, would the Senator agree to include an amendment that would offset the cost of the bill with unspent Federal funds, the text of which I have at the desk?

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. I am happy to discuss with colleagues on the other side how this can be paid for, but I cannot help but note that colleagues on the other side do not share their concern for the payment and pay-go side of the equation when it comes to the tax cuts for people making many millions of dollars a year whom we are trying to get exempted as we try to get tax relief for the middle class.

It would be hard for me to hold seniors getting a $250 one-time benefit in a year in which the COLA formula has misfired and they are getting no COLA benefit despite their other costs going up, and at the same time be asked to agree to hundreds of thousands of dollars per millionaire, in some cases, in tax relief that is not paid for. I think, if anything, the seniors should be held to a lower standard than multimillionaires for whom the tax benefit would amount to potentially hundreds of thousands of dollars.

I appreciate my colleague's very legitimate concern about the cost this would incur. I submit we are still, at least in my State, in a stage in the recovery where we continue to need to revive the economy. This will be very beneficial to the country in terms of its economic recovery, and it would be unfair to hold seniors to a different standard for this $250 COLA, a harsher standard than we would hold our millionaires to, for hundreds of thousands of dollars in tax relief. So I stand by the request as propounded in the unanimous consent.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there objection?

Mr. BARRASSO. Madam President, reserving the right to object, I note on the front page of USA Today ''Jobless Data could Break '80s RECORD.''