path to fixing the spending and debt problems our country is facing. As I have said before, there is not much of a difference between a $1.5 trillion deficit and a $1.6 trillion deficit—both will lead us to a debt crisis from which we may not recover.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

## MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent the Senate proceed to a period of morning business with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

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

## RECOGNIZING LAUREL COUNTY, KENTUCKY

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I rise today to give recognition to one of the Commonwealth's most unique and historic areas, Laurel County, KY, which celebrated its 185th birthday on March 5, 2011. Located in Kentucky's eastern coal country, Laurel County was named after the trees that grow along the banks of the Laurel River. A county full of rich history and tradition dating back before the Civil War years, Laurel County first established their government and began business in 1826. Organized through a general assembly, it was the 18th county created in the Commonwealth.

London, the largest town in Laurel County, also celebrated its 185th birthday this year on March 6. Although named after London, England, the town's festive characteristics gave it a name in its own light. In proximity to beautiful landscapes which were explored by the likes of Daniel Boone and Levi Jackson, the two parks that bear their names, the Daniel Boone National Park and the Levi Jackson Wilderness Road State Park, have been hailed as two of the most sought-after vacation spots in the country. Cumberland Falls State Resort Park as well as numerous hiking and bike trails also showcase some of the best scenery the Bluegrass State has to offer. Well-known names such as national best-selling author Silas House, former University of Kentucky star and NBA basketball player Jeff Sheppard, and the infamous Kentucky Fried Chicken founder Colonel Harland David Sanders have all called Laurel County home.

Whether you are sampling a taste of fried chicken at the World Chicken Festival, enjoying a country music show at the Renfro Valley Entertainment Center on a Friday night, or taking in the scenery of the challenging Redbud Ride bike trail, Laurel County has a little something for everyone. Maybe it is a combination of these one-of-a-kind attractions, the pristine beauty of its natural landscape, and its strong sense of southern Kentucky hospitality that makes Laurel County so welcoming and intriguing. Whatever it is, it keeps people coming back for more.

Mr. President, 185 years later, these vacation crossroads still tell a story. Atop the peaks overlooking the Cumberland Gap where the small, yet crucial Battle of Wildcat Mountain was fought in the Civil War to the crystal clear waters of Laurel Lake, I am sure there will be many more stories to tell in the future.

I ask that my colleagues join me in celebrating Laurel County, Kentucky's 185th birthday. This is an exciting time for the people of Laurel County and the Commonwealth, and I send them my congratulations and best wishes for the future.

## SBIR/STTR

Mrs. HUTCHISON. Mr. President, today, I rise to speak to an amendment I believe addresses three underlying issues in S. 493, the Small Business Innovation Research Program, SBIR, and the Small Business Technology Transfer Program, STTR, Reauthorization Act.

First, this amendment reduces the reauthorization of these programs from 8 years down to 3 years. This reauthorization bill, S. 493, makes substantial changes to the SBIR and STTR programs, and it is important for the reauthorization timeline to reflect that. The changes could dramatically improve the program, but in case there are additional changes that need to be to ensure they remain successful and effective, it is in the best interest of the participating agencies and the participants in the programs that there is an opportunity to make adjustments after a few years.

Second, my amendment strikes the mandatory increase agencies must set aside from their budgets to fund both the SBIR and STTR programs. Currently, these programs are funded through the participating agencies setting aside 2.5 percent of their total research budgets for the SBIR program and 0.3 percent for the STTR program. S. 493 would require this set aside be increased to 3.5 percent and 0.6 percent over a period of time for the SBIR and STTR programs, respectively.

In this current budget environment, when all agency budgets are feeling the pinch, increasing this mandatory set aside will mean fewer dollars are available for other research. These programs focus on commercialization of cutting edge innovation, which is critical to our country's global competitiveness. However, this mandatory increase would mean funding cuts to other life saving research. For the National Institutes of Health this 1 percent increase to fund the SBIR program would mean there would be about $300 million less for other NIH research, research focused on finding new cures. For example, NIH spends about $300 million per year on prostate cancer, a little less than that on lymphoma research and spends only half of that on autism research every year.

There is no evidence that agencies must turn away high-quality applicants or underfund them because there is a lack of funding. In fact, agencies that participate in these programs currently have the discretion to spend more on the SBIR or STTR programs if they deem it appropriate. The current set aside is a floor, not a ceiling. This amendment does nothing to change that. However, I believe mandating the increase, especially in this current budget environment, especially for 8 years, could greatly disrupt Federal funding for other critical research.

The third provision of my amendment addresses the reality that bringing an idea to market is a complex process that often requires several rounds of financing. This amendment ensures that all small businesses are given an opportunity to compete for these grants regardless of their financial makeup, as long as they are a small business. Years ago there was an administrative change made to the eligibility criteria for these programs that has severely restricted the ability of quality applicants to compete for funding. That change has unilaterally excluded companies solely due to their financial structure and not due to the size of their company. Small businesses are small businesses because of the number of people they employ, not because they have received their start up money through a venture capitalist, or an angel investor or from winning the lottery. This sentiment was echoed by the Director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy, John Holdren, in a letter sent to Chairman LANDRIEU in 2009. Mr. Holdren stated that ''it is critical for the U.S. economy and global competitiveness that the very best companies are sustained and the most promising small companies are not arbitrarily restricted or excluded because of their capital structure.''

Arbitrary exclusion from these programs has affected small businesses all over the country. Too many times it has become a defining part of the story of too many promising small businesses. One such story is that of ActaCell, Inc. It is a company started with leading research in the lithium ion materials field from the University of Texas in 2007. When ActaCell applied for an SBIR grant through the Department of Defense, it met the new eligibility standards required by the program; both in its size and its financial structure. However, as the application was pending, ActaCell needed to secure additional financing in order to continue its operations and therefore fell