

and Albania—exceed the agreed-upon ratio of 2 percent of gross domestic product to be spent on defense.

Two decades after the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the U.S. share of NATO defense spending has now risen astoundingly to more than 75 percent. Secretary Gates put all of our efforts under NATO alliance operations together at 75 percent. We are all aware that the United States is facing very hard and real serious fiscal constraints. Hence it is clear that we can no longer continue to pay for the vast majority of NATO operations that are not in the vital security interests of our Nation. It is time for the United States to ask our allies to step up and keep the agreement they made when they became part of NATO, or for the United States to consider reducing our spending level that we now provide to NATO and also move to redeploy a large portion of our military presence in Europe back to the United States.

I have spoken on the floor many times about my concerns for maintaining such a large military presence in Europe and I will continue to fight for spending cuts to a largely unnecessary and expensive U.S. military presence on the European continent. It was decided in the last administration to cut back to two brigade combat teams in Europe, in Germany. We have now had the two be expanded to four. The other two are now in limbo. So there are now four brigade combat teams in Europe. Two were supposed to move back to the United States and the military construction to house at least one of those has been done at a cost of over 400 million taxpayer dollars. So we have the capability to bring home troops, taxpayers have spent \$400 million in pursuit of that, the barracks sit empty, and we still have four brigade combat teams in Europe, in Germany.

Unfortunately, here is the message we are sending to our European allies by that military presence, and by our operations in support of NATO, that American taxpayers are willing and able to shoulder the burden for their defense, and that there are apparently no consequences if the Europeans fail to do their fair share.

We need to change that message. We need to make our Nation's current financial difficulties a priority. Our message should be that NATO has been a valuable alliance for 60 years, and it can be in the future, with a concerted effort by our allies to share the burden. That means truly sharing. The United States should lead when and where our capabilities are essential. We do have vast capabilities. When they are essential we have shown we will always be there. But others can lead where they have the capability to do so, and they need to do it with personnel and with the appropriate level of funding.

The complacency of our allies is increasingly a threat to our national security for we are shouldering more and more of the burden, even where our involvement is not in the vital interests

of the United States. The American taxpayer can no longer afford to write endless checks for NATO operations. It is time for our allies to shoulder their responsibilities and reduce their dependence on U.S. military forces.

We want to maintain our military strength. We have the greatest military in the world. There is no doubt about that. But to keep our military strong, we cannot over-deploy our forces. I have talked to people who have been to Afghanistan six times on rotations—six times. Most of our people who have gone to Afghanistan have gone more than once, and that is following all of the time they have been to Iraq as well. We must keep our military strong by not overburdening them because our allies are not doing their share and supplying the troops they agreed to provide when they became members of NATO. For us to keep the strength we have, or to handle the big operations where we have the unique capabilities, we must be smarter about allocating and sharing the responsibilities. We can continue to lead and take the biggest share, but not 75 percent of the share and continue to remain strong, especially with the financial constraints we have today.

We are in the midst of negotiating how we can lower our deficit so we don't hit that \$14 trillion debt ceiling without a plan for bringing down the deficit so we will never have to lift that debt ceiling again. So it is in everyone's interests for our allies to step up to the plate. They made agreements. It used to be a 3-percent gross domestic product commitment that was required for NATO. Now we are talking 2 percent, and only five countries—only five countries—meet that test. That is not a sustainable alliance. If we allow them to drag down their strongest member, it will not be in the interests of anyone if something big happens that requires an immediate and robust response.

So I appreciate that Secretary Gates, in his final days in office has talked very straight to our NATO allies. I hope they are listening, and I hope they are prepared to act. Yes, they have financial constraints too; we understand that. But it is time the burden be shared. It is time we have a real alliance in which we remain strong so we maintain the strength to respond to the big emergencies when we are called. Being dragged down by smaller contingencies that can be handled by others, whether it is Kosovo or Libya—and, certainly, we also are concerned about the situation in Syria and Yemen—we can let others be in the lead in those areas so that when the big things happen—such as Afghanistan which will continue to require our commitment—those major efforts can be led by the United States with our unique capabilities and our commitment.

Our military remains the best in the world. Our equipment is the best in the world. Our training is the best in the

world. We need to maintain that strength with an alliance that accepts its responsibility for burden sharing. Where we are required to lead and are uniquely capable we will do so but we cannot allow ourselves to be continually placed in the position where these contingencies drag down our capabilities for the future.

So I applaud Secretary Gates for starting this dialogue in earnest. We have talked about it for a long time—for years, actually. We have talked to our NATO allies about stepping up to the plate. Even in good financial times that didn't happen but for a few. I will say that Great Britain has always been there, and we have had other strong alliances, including Australia—not in NATO but certainly a strong ally. Canada is also a strong ally, but it is time for us to reassess our contributions in NATO to preserve our strength so that we are there and prepared for major operations, which is in all of our interests.

Thank you, Madam President. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. WHITEHOUSE). Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### EXTENSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

Mrs. HAGAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the period for morning business be extended until 6 p.m., with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

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

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

#### UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST— S. 782

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I am going to wait until the Senator from Illinois arrives before making a motion, but I wish to explain what I am going to do. I am going to make a motion when he does arrive.

I have an amendment. First of all, being the ranking member of the Environment and Public Works Committee, I have more than just a passive interest in this EDA bill. But one of the things I have been trying to do is get people to understand we have all these