

are coming forward. But I understand the politics in the moment and time, and the only point they are trying to make is that we have to do something material or we are going to be downgraded.

Moody's also says: The government bond rating would very likely be changed to negative at the conclusion of the review unless substantial and credible agreement is achieved on a budget that includes long-term deficit reduction. To retain a stable outlook, such an agreement should include a deficit trajectory that leads to stabilization and then decline in the ratios of Federal Government debt-to-GDP and debt-to-revenue beginning with the next few years.

They said we are at a unique inflection point.

I asked Chairman Bernanke the other day at the Banking Committee—I knew the answer, but I asked him anyway—when was the last time our credit ratings were threatened for downgrade. His answer was, not in the 20th century. And I said to him, well, we are now in the 21st century. The answer was, never. Never in our country's history, that I am aware of, has our credit rating—which is the envy of the world and one of the most important assets that we have as a country and as an economy—been threatened with a downgrade. And now we find ourselves in the position of potentially being downgraded because on the one hand we might not raise the debt ceiling—which I find unimaginable, but it is possible—and on the other hand because our politics look so dysfunctional to everybody who is watching this debate that there is real concern that we can never get to a long-term debt and deficit plan where the math actually pencils. What we know about a plan where the math actually pencils is it is going to require a comprehensive approach that involves discretionary spending cuts, both for military and nonmilitary, that requires entitlement reform and tax reform.

A number of weeks ago, Senator JOHANNIS and I sent out a letter that said just that. We passed it around the Senate offices. There are 32 Democrats who signed it and 32 Republicans who signed it. That is a pretty big number around here, and that is a pretty bipartisan effort around here.

Then I began to despair because it didn't feel as if we were making progress toward the goal many of us wanted to get to, and then today we had this conversation with the Gang of 6, who I think have presented a plan, as the Senator from Texas said, that is not perfect, and everybody is going to have a disagreement about this piece or that piece, but does meet the three-part test by and large that I have come out to the floor and I have said time and time again that we ought to meet for the people of Colorado, which is whom I represent.

What I also know is this: At this remarkable time in the country's his-

tory, if we act in a way that leads to a downgrade of this country's credit rating; if we, the 100 people who are in the Senate at this moment, don't step up to make sure that doesn't happen, no one is ever going to care what pledge was made about this or that or where we drew the line in the sand. The only thing they are going to know about us is we allowed the full faith and credit of the United States to be compromised for all time. No generation of Americans, no matter how dysfunctional their politics was, managed to sacrifice that much of our future.

I believe the only path through this is a bipartisan one, and I believe the only path through this is a comprehensive one. I think that is what the people of Colorado want and what the American people want.

So I think today marked an important turning point in the conversation we are having around here, and I for my own part believe that if we are confident in the people who sent us here, confident enough to do the job they have asked us to do, we can make sure we don't erode the full faith and credit of the United States because undoing that is going to be the work of generations if we don't protect the work of generations that have come before us. And I feel confident that we can and that we will.

Mr. President, I yield the floor, and 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. KIRK. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

COMMENDING THE GANG OF 6

Mr. KIRK. Mr. President, I rise briefly to commend the work of the Gang of 6 and what they have done for our country in what is a complicated proposal with details forthcoming but largely reflecting the actions of the bipartisan deficit commission and what could be between a \$3.5 trillion and \$4.5 trillion reduction in the borrowing needs of the United States.

Specifically, so often we do not thank our colleagues here, but I want to thank especially Senator COBURN, Senator CRAPO, and Senator CHAMBLISS on the Republican side, Senator WARNER, Senator CONRAD, and Senator DURBIN on the Democratic side, because I think they are creating a vital center on what is the most important issue facing the country. I believe the outlines of the plan, as I understand it tonight, will dramatically reassure the American people, our markets, and especially our allies overseas that a free people and their elected representatives can kick their spending habit over time.

At the meeting this morning we had 43 Senators attending, 23 Republicans

and 20 Democrats. In this age of very complicated and tight schedules, that is a mass meeting of the Senate.

I conclude by saying this may be the rise of the policy wonks as opposed to partisans of either side, to actually address the solid details of what is the most difficult financial problem facing the country. I commend the work of these three Republicans and these three Democrats in creating a space now where at least 43 Senators attended the meeting on the most creative and most detailed plan I have yet seen come forward to take on this problem.

We all know under our Constitution that the Senate may be the most difficult place to pass legislation. To see even this initiative coming out of the Senate gives me tremendous optimism that one of the most difficult problems in our country can be handled by some of the most capable policy wonk Members of the Senate.

With that, as we begin a discussion on the Gang of 6 proposal, I want to take a moment to personally thank these six Senators and what they have done in putting together what appears to be an initial outline of, not just a very good proposal but in several key areas as a fiscal conservative, an even better proposal than the bipartisan commission put forward.

I yield the floor and 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. REID. 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 AGREEMENT—H.R. 2055

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that at noon tomorrow, July 20, Senator JOHNSON of South Dakota be recognized to move to table Vitter amendment No. 568; that there be no amendments or points of order in order to the Vitter amendment prior to the vote on the motion to table; and the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

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

SUDAN

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, last night the Senate adopted S. Con. Res. 25, a concurrent resolution welcoming the independence of the Republic of South Sudan, congratulating the people of South Sudan for freely and peacefully expressing their will through an internationally accepted referendum, and calling on the governments and people of Sudan and South Sudan to peacefully resolve outstanding issues including the final status of Abyei. I was happy to see us recognize this important development.

Years ago when violence was raging in Darfur I regularly came to the floor to try to keep the world's attention on the calamities happening in that far corner of the world.

Fortunately, after a number of years and constant international pressure, a sizeable international peacekeeping force was deployed in Darfur, and over time the worst of the violence largely subsided.

Meanwhile a fragile peace treaty—the Comprehensive Peace Agreement or CPA—also started to bring an end to a devastating civil war between North and South Sudan that killed and displaced millions. I give President George W. Bush credit for seeing that important agreement to fruition.

A key CPA provision called for an independence referendum for the southern half of Sudan. This referendum occurred in January and was largely peaceful and without incident.

The South voted overwhelmingly for independence, which the North agreed to respect. And on Saturday, amid widespread celebration and a host of visiting international dignitaries, South Sudan became the world's newest country.

Last year Senator SHERROD BROWN and I visited Sudan. I wanted to see the country—and the new one about to emerge—with my own eyes.

The South faces a daunting task—building a nation that can be responsive to the needs of its 8 million residents, writing a constitution, and creating a functional government.

The people of South Sudan, who have seen so much suffering after years of civil war, deserve this chance at a peaceful and democratic nation—and the international community should help it get started and remain viable and stable.

The people of the North face challenges too, including a fragile economy and a dwindling of the Nile River due to climate change.

And despite the peaceful independence process for the South, many complicated issues related to borders, oil revenues, and immigration still remain to be worked out between both sides.

The Obama administration, including its special envoy Ambassador Princeton Lyman, has been working diligently to help resolve these very thorny issues.

Unfortunately, we have seen a rash of new violence in a number of border areas between North and South Sudan.

With much of the world's attention turned elsewhere, we must not let new violence undermine the hard fought gains that have been achieved in Sudan.

First, in May the Sudanese armed forces invaded the disputed oil-rich Abyei region, displacing as many as 100,000.

Fortunately, both sides met recently in Ethiopia and agreed to withdraw their forces from the region. The U.N. Security Council also voted to send a 4,200-person Ethiopian peacekeeping

force there for 6 months to protect civilians and humanitarian workers.

These are steps in the right direction, and I urge both sides to respect the agreement and work to negotiate a long-term solution to Abyei that will allow its people to live in peace.

More recently there has been a new outbreak of violence—one with disturbing similarities to the violence in Darfur—in an area called Southern Kordofan.

Most people have probably never heard of Southern Kordofan—an area that borders South Sudan and is one of the few major oil-producing regions in the north.

During the North-South civil war, segments of the population supported the south and tensions remain today as a result. Southern Kordofan has a certain degree of autonomy and recently held separate state elections, yet there were allegations of election rigging in favor of North Sudan.

In early June, the North Sudanese government sent troops into the Nuba region in Southern Kordofan to disarm individuals sympathetic to the South—resulting in the displacement of more than 70,000. Humanitarian aid was blocked and U.N. staff harassed and detained.

And there have been allegations of targeted aerial bombing and house to house violence on the Nuba mountain people that are of grave concern.

North Sudan stands to lose sizable revenue from Southern independence and Southern Kordofan is one of the North's major sources of oil revenue. Many have speculated about the timing of the attacks—so close to Southern independence—but I am not going to dwell on motives because what matters most is that the aggression stops.

Two weeks ago both sides signed an African Union-mediated agreement to find a “peaceful resolution of their differences . . . cease hostilities, permit humanitarian access, and allow the return of displaced persons to their homes.”

I hope this agreement is respected. The last thing the people of North or South Sudan need is more human suffering and displacement.

There must be an immediate cessation of hostilities and end to harassment of U.N. staff in Southern Kordofan.

Both sides must follow through with commitments to demilitarize Abyei.

Humanitarian agencies must have safe an unrestricted access to the areas.

And it is long overdue that the various parties in the Darfur conflict reach a long-term political settlement that will allow people to be safe and to return to their homes.

Continued progress on all these fronts is also the best path forward for improving Sudan's relations with the United States and the rest of the global community.

President Obama has called on Sudanese leaders to choose peace, and I strongly echo his sentiments.

EXTENDING THE TERM OF FBI DIRECTOR ROBERT MUELLER

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Mr. President, I rise to speak in strong support of S. 1103, the legislation before the Senate to extend the term of Robert Mueller, the Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

This is an important piece of legislation because without it, Director Mueller's term will end very soon, as he completes his 10 years in office.

That would leave the FBI, the Nation's leading law enforcement agency and the lead intelligence agency for domestic counterterrorism, without a Director as we approach the 10th anniversary of the September 11 terrorist attacks.

This would be unacceptable in my view. Unfortunately, unanimous consent to pass this legislation, S. 1103, is being held up. I urge my colleagues to approve this bill quickly.

Earlier this year, the President conducted a search for a replacement for Director Mueller. He determined that the best choice for the nation, at this critical time, was not to replace him, but rather to seek a legislative extension to Director Mueller's term.

The Judiciary Committee held a hearing with Director Mueller on June 8, 2011, and has considered the text of this legislation, S. 1103. Under a proposed unanimous consent agreement circulated earlier this month, passage of this legislation would be followed by the President's formal nomination of Mr. Mueller for an additional 2 years, and the nomination will be placed directly on the Senate's Executive Calendar.

I do not know of any Senator who does not respect and support Director Mueller. Over the past 10 years that he has been in office, Robert Mueller has provided steady leadership and stability at the FBI. He has worked to transform the Bureau into an agency that can better detect and prevent terrorist attacks against the United States.

Under Mueller's direction, the FBI has played an essential role in more than 20 significant counterterrorism operations, while infiltrating and arresting groups of individuals charged with planning attacks against our country.

The FBI has also built its cyber investigation capability, focused on counterintelligence, investigated public corruption cases, and tracked and disrupted gang activity.

Despite the major setback of the September 11 attacks, the FBI is among our most respected government institutions, and it has changed dramatically to respond to the challenges of our time.

Let me talk about Director Mueller for a moment, who is, personally, a symbol of integrity and dedicated public service. I am very pleased to call him my friend, and thank him for his willingness to continue to serve for another 2 years.