

know if it is going to be wildfires or droughts or hurricanes or tornados. We are not going to deny that help. But it should be budgeted just like everything we do. We should have some sense that we have prepared for it. Preparing for disasters should be part of our budget. There is not a business in this country that does not prepare for disasters. The government should do it too.

I hope we will be on a trajectory to lower the spending, keeping our agreement of August with the Omnibus appropriations bill that is going to be passed by the House this afternoon and will come to the Senate. I hope we will be able to act by tomorrow on that piece of legislation that keeps the agreements we made.

It is a down payment. It is not what all of us wanted, but I think we ought to put in disaster relief. I think we ought to pay for that with another 1.83-percent cut across the board. I think that would be the responsible approach, and then we can start next year on the long term. That would be regulatory reform, Social Security reform—to make it solvent for 75 years, at least—and Medicare reform. Those are the things that will give us a long-term, hopefully, solvent government that will be the model for the world because, is there any question that we need a model in the world right now for fiscal discipline and responsible governing? I hope America can provide it.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

#### KEYSTONE XL PIPELINE

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I rise to make some observations about the Keystone Pipeline. President Obama has said his first priority is jobs. Here is an opportunity for the President to show it, a pipeline provision that, according to some estimates, would create thousands of jobs right away. In fact, those are all the estimates I have seen, that this is a project that is ready to go.

Here is an opportunity for the President to say he is not going to let a few radical environmentalists stand in the way of a project that will create thousands of jobs and make America more secure at the same time. The labor unions support the pipeline, the Chamber of Commerce supports the pipeline, out-of-work Americans support it, and a growing number of Democrats are expressing their support as well.

Here are a few of the comments we heard from Democrats just this very week. Senator KENT CONRAD of North Dakota said:

I personally think the pipeline is absolutely in the national interest. It'll help us

reduce our dependence on foreign energy, at least foreign sources that are hostile to our interests.

Senator CONRAD further said:

I, for one, on this side hope that this could be part of a final package and I hope that this is something we could work through in the coming hours.

Senator McCASKILL:

If States rights are being protected and if this is going to be something maybe, that we can try to jump start the approval process, make it go more quickly.

Representative CLYBURN, one of the leaders of the Democratic conference in the House:

I'm very much for the pipeline. There is no question about that.

Congress should do something, not just assist people who are struggling in a down economy or out of work, but help incentivize job creation for them at the same time. In other words, let's not just pass a bill that helps people on the benefits side; let's also include something that actually helps the private sector create the jobs Americans need for the long term. This is the balanced approach Americans want, one that extends help but also offers hope.

This is just the kind of thing we should be doing around here. Both parties like it, the labor unions like it, why in the world wouldn't we want to put it in the package?

The only reason the White House has given for opposing the pipeline provision is they would rather vote on it alone, which makes absolutely no sense. You are either for the provision or you are not. So I suggest here is a rare opportunity to do something truly positive together on a bipartisan basis at the end of the year. Let's finish this year on a truly cooperative, bipartisan note. Let's strengthen our Nation's energy security, decrease the energy we import from overseas, create American jobs right now, and let's do it all on a bipartisan basis.

As I said, there is bipartisan support for this project. We need to get it done, and we need to get it done now. The House of Representatives has been quite clear that they are not going to support a package that does not include the pipeline. Frankly, I would not be able to support a package that doesn't include the pipeline. I think this is something we could all be proud of at the end of the year, demonstrating to the American people that we can work together not only to help those who are struggling, through a continuation of the payroll tax holiday and an unemployment benefits package, but also create jobs at the same time in the private sector without a penny of the Federal Government's money by moving this pipeline along.

After all, it has undergone years of environmental studies. It is ready to go. The company is ready to hire the people just as soon as we give them the signoff.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered. The Senator from Florida.

Mr. RUBIO. I ask unanimous consent that I be recognized to speak in morning business for up to 15 minutes.

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

#### CONFRONTING THE ISSUES

Mr. RUBIO. Mr. President, I thank those who have listened to our e-mails back in Florida that we just sent out alerting them I will be speaking on the Senate floor, maybe the last time I will speak this year.

I want to take a few minutes to update everyone on what this first year in the Senate has been like. First of all, it has been a tremendous privilege and honor. There is not a day goes by that I do not come to this building early in the morning, when I can get to the gym—I probably should do that more than I do—and see this building lit up in the darkness. It takes my breath away that I actually get to work here in this building on behalf of the people of the State of Florida.

I recognize what an honor and privilege it is to have this position, not just in this unique institution—which is different, perhaps, than any legislative body in all of history—but this Republic that stands out in the history of mankind. As Americans, we should always take a moment to recognize that in America, on this floor, we debate and sometimes solve issues other countries fight wars with each other about. That is a real blessing and a real opportunity to be an example for the world. I am grateful and feel blessed to be a part of it, and I thank the people of Florida for the opportunity to do it.

I want to share two observations as this year comes to an end—and, hopefully, today or tomorrow, sometime this week, we will wrap up our work in this body for 2011—observations I have after my first year. I think I am 3 weeks from having been sworn in for the first time. There are a couple of things that concern me.

First is a real lack of urgency. There are some major issues that confront America. These have to be confronted. We need look no further than Europe to see what our future holds, unfortunately, if some of the issues that now confront us are not confronted. That is not hyperbole, it is not partisanship, it is reality—it is math. This country borrows more money than it needs to or should. This is a country that is now spending more money than it takes in at an alarming pace, and there is no plan in place to prevent that.

That is not a partisan observation; that is not a Republican concern or a Democratic concern; that is the concern of every person who is grounded in