

employers with religious objections to things such as coverage for contraception, but in reality this amendment goes much further: it would allow employers to deny coverage for any health service. For example, under the Blunt amendment, if an employer objects morally to vaccinations, then their insurance policy would not have to cover potentially lifesaving vaccinations for the children of that employer's workers or if an employer has religious objections to mental health care, their employees would not have access to basic health care services that we fought to protect. The Blunt amendment will have a harmful effect on all people and would undermine our Nation's effort to ensure that everyone in this country has access to a basic standard of health coverage.

Who opposes the Blunt amendment? It is not just women's groups, as you might expect, but the American Academy of Pediatrics, AIDS United, the American Nurses Association, and the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.

Mr. President, I know your personal background and field of study has included theology and religious training, in that area, and I know this particular debate was brought on because of President Obama's decision when it came to the health care coverage offered by religious colleges, universities, and charities. The President's offer at this point says that no religious-sponsored institution, such as a college, university, hospital, or charity, will be forced to offer health services that violate their basic principles and values, their religious values. The President goes on to say, though, that the employees of that institution would have the right, on their own initiative, to a service not provided to them under the hospital or university policy that they could secure by going directly to the insurance company. It removes the church-sponsored, religious-sponsored institution from making the initial decision that might run counter to their values but gives the freedom to the individual employee to pursue the health care under the law which they consider to be essential, such as family planning. Some say this is unacceptable. I think it strikes the right balance—the balance between respecting the conscience and religious values of certain institutions while still protecting the freedom of individuals.

There has been a lot of talk in this Presidential campaign about religion, and much of it has come from a former Senator from Pennsylvania. I would like to remind him and those who have not followed it closely that there are exactly three provisions in the U.S. Constitution when it comes to religion. One of them says that we have the freedom of religion, religious belief, which gives us the right to believe what we want to believe or to believe nothing. That is guaranteed under the Constitution. Secondly, the government will

not pick a religion. I have heard candidates say we are a Christian nation. No. We are an American nation, which includes many Christians but also others of different religious beliefs, and the Constitution says the government will never pick its religion. The third point that is often overlooked—and I would refer to the Senator from Pennsylvania—it is in the Constitution that there will be no religious test for office. In other words, we could not establish under the law, if anyone cared to, that only Christians or Jewish people could be elected to the Senate or the House. That is strictly unconstitutional.

Those three principles have guided us well, and it is important for us to make sure as we tackle the issues of the day that we apply the principles that have endured. In this circumstance, we have to understand that militant secularization is as intolerant as militant desecularization. We have to try to strike that balance.

I recommend to those who are following my remarks and would like to read more an article that was published in the New York Times on February 24 by Joe Nocera entitled "A Revolutionary Idea." Mr. Nocera is a thoughtful writer, and he traces the history of this. His opening remarks include the following: "Rick Santorum is John Winthrop"—referring, of course, to Mr. Winthrop who joined with the Puritans in trying to assert that our government needed to stand for puritanical values and beliefs. That debate, which even predates the Constitution, is one that molded our country and makes it what it is today. There emerged from that debate over the Puritans and what they would do a feeling that there had to be a separation between church and state, religious belief and secular administration of our government. That is the debate that continues today.

This generation, regardless of the issue of the day, needs to preserve the same basic values that led to this debate in the early Colonies and ultimately to our constitutional principles. As we find countries all over the world bitterly and violently divided over religion, we need to take care in our generation that we protect the basics. The President's decision when it comes to health care through the insurance policies protects those basic values.

I yield the floor and 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. DURBIN. Mr. 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.

RECESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate stands in recess until 2:15 p.m. today.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 12:31 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. WEBB).

Mr. REID. Mr. 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.

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

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

MOVING AHEAD FOR PROGRESS IN THE 21ST CENTURY ACT—Resumed

Mr. REID. Mr. President, would you state the pending business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The pending business is S. 1813, which the clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 1813) to reauthorize Federal-aid highway and highway safety construction programs, and for other purposes.

Pending:

Reid amendment No. 1730, of a perfecting nature.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, at the beginning of this month—in fact, February 7—I moved to proceed to the surface transportation bill that is before us today—an extremely important bill, a bipartisan bill. This effort has been led by two fine Senators—one quite progressive and the other very conservative—Senators BOXER and INHOFE, the chairman and ranking member of the very important Environment and Public Works Committee. This is a vital job-creating measure. The bill would create and maintain up to 2.8 million jobs.

On February 9, 2 days after I moved to this bill, the Senate voted 85 to 11 to invoke cloture on the motion to proceed. The bill has broad bipartisan support. But immediately after the Senate moved to the bill on February 9, Senator BLUNT asked unanimous consent that it be in order to offer his amendment on contraception and women's health. I was stunned. I couldn't believe this. I said, What is going on here? I objected at the time. I didn't see why this surface transportation jobs bill was the appropriate place for an amendment on contraception and women's health.

But the Republican leader and others on the Republican side of the aisle have made it very clear the Senate is not going to be able to move forward on this important surface transportation bill unless we vote on contraception and women's health. My friend the Republican leader said it on national TV