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Senate

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable KIRSTEN E. GILLIBRAND, a Senator from the State of New York.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Eternal God, sustainer of us all, give today to our Senators reverence to realize Your presence, humility to know their own needs, trust to ask You for help, and obedience to accept Your guidance. Remind us all that all great things have their price.

May we remember that there is no purity without vigilance, no friendship without loyalty, no joy without service, and no crown without a cross. Help us to be willing to pay the price that we may enter into our reward.

We pray in Your sacred Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable KIRSTEN E. GILLIBRAND led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

APPOINTMENT OF ACTING PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will please read a communication to the Senate from the President pro tempore (Mr. INOUYE).

The assistant legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, May 16, 2012.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable KIRSTEN E. GILLIBRAND, a Senator from the State of New York, to perform the duties of the Chair.

DANIEL K. INOUYE,
President pro tempore.

Mrs. GILLIBRAND thereupon assumed the chair as Acting President pro tempore.

STOP THE STUDENT LOAN INTEREST RATE HIKE ACT OF 2012—MOTION TO PROCEED

Mr. REID. Madam President, I now move to proceed to Calendar No. 365, S. 2343.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will report the motion.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to calendar No. 365, S. 2343, a bill to amend the Higher Education Act of 1965 to extend the reduced interest rate for Federal Direct Stafford Loans, and for other purposes.

Mr. REID. Madam President, following my remarks and those, if any, of the Republican leader, the Senate will begin debate on several motions to proceed to Republican budget resolutions. Consent was asked last night, I am quite sure, that the first hour be equally divided between the two leaders, with the majority controlling the first half and Republicans the final half. That is already done?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator is correct.

Mr. REID. There will be up to 6 hours of debate on the motions to proceed to the budget resolutions. Senators should expect five rollcall votes around 4 p.m. if all time is used, and it probably will be.

MEASURE PLACED ON CALENDAR

Mr. REID. Madam President, S. 3187 is at the desk and due for a second reading.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will read the bill by title for the second time.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 3187) to amend the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act to revise and extend the user-fee programs for prescription drugs and medical devices, to establish user-fee programs for generic drugs and biosimilars, and for other purposes.

Mr. REID. Madam President, I would object to any further proceedings with respect to this legislation at this time.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Objection having been heard, the bill shall be placed on the calendar.

OBSTRUCTIONISM

Mr. REID. Madam President, it is almost universally acknowledged that Republican obstructionism has reached new heights in the Senate. There are separate articles written about it. There are even now books written about it. Democrats would have to break a filibuster, I guess, to declare the sky blue or the Earth round, and passing the most commonsense and consensus legislation could take weeks or months. So with a mile-long list to do, we can't afford to waste any time. Yet today Republicans will force the Senate to waste a day on a series of political show votes. We will spend hours debating and voting on a handful of nonbinding budget resolutions even though we already have a legally binding budget. If one of the Republicans' budgets passed—which it won't—by law, it is nonbinding. We have a binding budget resolution.

The Senate could spend the day passing tax cuts for small businesses that grow and hire people or even legislation to keep the Food and Drug Administration running. We could be considering the Paycheck Fairness Act, ensuring American women receive equal pay for equal work. We could be debating cybersecurity legislation, and the Pentagon says the No. 1 issue facing this country today is cyber-insecurity. We could be working on a farm bill. Senators STABENOW and ROBERTS have done such an outstanding job saving the country $23 billion and reducing the debt by that much. We should be on that bill. We could be protecting 7 million students from rate hikes on their Federal loans. We could even move a

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.

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series of appropriations bills to implement the budget we have already enacted. Instead, we will debate and vote on a series of stunt budgets.

Republicans aren't interested in getting anything done this year. They have said so from the very beginning. Their leader, my friend from Kentucky, has said the No. 1 issue is to defeat President Obama. So they don't mind wasting a day of the Senate's time on useless political show votes.

Republicans can say over and over that they are only forcing votes on four Republican budgets today because Democrats failed to pass their own budget. That couldn't be further from the truth. In August Congress passed and President Obama signed a budget that reduces the deficit by more than $2 trillion. It is called the Budget Control Act. Twenty-eight Republican Senators, including my friend the minority leader, voted for that last legally binding budget. But since August those Republicans have developed a case of amnesia. Why else would they walk around Washington claiming we don't have a budget? And unlike the hollow Republican budget resolutions the Senate will waste the day debating, the Budget Control Act actually has the force of law. If Republicans were serious about reducing the deficit, they wouldn't be working so hard to undo that August law, which cuts more than $2 trillion from the deficit.

Democrats agree that the across-the-board cuts to domestic spending and defense programs—agreed to in the Budget Control Act—aren't the ideal way to solve our Nation's fiscal problems. But the cuts were designed to be tough so lawmakers were forced to reach a balanced deal. Unfortunately, Republicans refuse to be reasonable. They refuse to raise even a penny of new revenue or ask millionaires to contribute their fair share to help reduce our deficit. And Democrats won't agree to a one-sided solution that lets the superwealthy off the hook while forcing the middle class to bear all the hardship. The American people agree with this.

These four stunt budgets all take that one-sided approach, which protects wealthy special interests at the expense of ordinary Americans, and they clearly illuminate the Republicans' priorities—to shower the wealthy with tax breaks paid for by the middle class. All four of the Republican plans cut investments that help middle-class families get back on their feet in order to increase tax breaks for businesses that ship jobs overseas. All four plans would double the student loan rate. It would put colleges out of reach for many students in order to protect tax loopholes for special interests. All four plans end Medicare as we know it, gutting seniors' health benefits to lavish more tax breaks on millionaires and billionaires.

Yesterday the Senate showed it is possible to advance policies that improve our economy and put Americans back to work as long as Democrats and Republicans work together. On an overwhelmingly bipartisan vote yesterday, we passed the Export-Import Bank reauthorization that will support 300,000 jobs during the next year, and these jobs will help American companies sell their products overseas. But every moment we waste refighting old battles or revisiting Republicans' failed economic policies is time that could be better spent creating jobs. The time for show votes is over. Now it is time for the Senate to get back to work putting Americans back to work.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader is recognized.

THE BUDGET

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, before I was Republican leader, I was probably best known as a lonely warrior against campaign finance reform on the grounds that it violates the first amendment right to free speech. Before that, I was probably best known—at least in some quarters—for an ad that I ran in my first Senate campaign that featured a pack of bloodhounds running around looking for my opponent, who had missed so many votes giving paid speeches around the country that we thought we should call him out on it. Well, I can't help but think back on that ad when it comes to Senate Democrats and the Federal budget. Where in the world is it? Where is the budget?

We have a nearly $16 trillion debt. We are borrowing more than 40 cents of every dollar we spend. Entitlements are going broke. Millions are out of work. And Senate Democrats can't even put a plan on a piece of paper so we can have a vote. What are they doing over there? What are they doing?

Isn't anybody over there embarrassed by the fact that they haven't offered a budget in 3 years? It has been 3 years since the Democrat-led Senate felt it needed to put a budget together so the American people can see what their priorities are and what they plan to do to fix this mess, 3 years in which they have completely abdicated their responsibility as the majority party to show the American people what they stand for, to put their vision in black and white for all the world to see. The fact is they don't have it. They don't have a budget.

As far as I can tell, their only plan is to take shots at our plans and hope nobody notices that they don't have one of their own. They are so unserious, they won't even vote for a budget that was written by a President of their own party. It doesn't get more irresponsible than that.

I think Treasury Secretary Geithner summed it up pretty well when he was asked a few months ago what the administration planned to do to address entitlements—the single biggest driver of the national debt. Here is what the Secretary of the Treasury had to say:

> We're not coming before you today to say we have a definite solution to that long-term problem. What we do know is, we don't like yours.

You have to give the guy points for candor—no plan of his own, but he doesn't like ours. What breathtaking disregard for the problems we face.

So if you are looking for a simple three-word description of the Democratic approach to the problems we face, it is this: Duck and cover. Duck and cover. They don't have a budget of their own. They are going to vote against their own President's budget later today, in all likelihood, and they are going to vote against every budget Republicans put up.

Now, the majority leader has tried to get around all this by suggesting that the Budget Control Act we negotiated last fall should count as a budget since it sets the top-line amount we are going to spend. But he knows as well as I do that is not a budget. A budget is a list of priorities. It reflects your values as a party. It shows the tough choices you are willing to make. It is not just dollar figures, it is a vision. It is the responsibility of any majority party to put one together, to stand and be counted. But since Democrats refuse to do their duty by the Nation, Republicans will attempt to do it for them.

Later today we will vote on five different budget proposals: the President's, Congressman PAUL RYAN's, Senator PAT TOOMEY's, Senator PAUL's, and Senator MIKE LEE's. We will give Democrats a choice and see if they have the courage to get behind any of these proposals—or none of them—and we will learn a lot in the process.

By the end of the day we will know whether there is a budget that Washington Democrats support, and the American people will know without a doubt who is voting for solutions in this town and who isn't. They will know who has a plan to fix the mess we are in and who doesn't. They will know who would rather spend their time criticizing others than doing the hard work of setting priorities and making choices.

Senate Democrats do not want to explain how they will fix the fiscal mess we are in. They do not want to say how they will preserve and strengthen entitlements. What they want to do is complain about others. They are putting their desire for campaign material ahead of their responsibility to govern.

The tragedy is every year they do so, the problems we face only get worse. The debt gets bigger, entitlements get closer to insolvency, and the American people have to go another year wondering when things will ever change.

Some people up here think it is time to do something now and we will know who those people are by their votes.

Madam President, I now ask the Chair execute the order with respect to the five motions to proceed to the budget resolutions provided for under the order.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, leadership time is reserved.

S. CON. RES. 41, H. CON. RES. 112, S. CON. RES. 37, S. CON. RES. 42, S. CON. RES. 44 EN BLOC—MOTIONS TO PROCEED

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to the en bloc consideration of the following concurrent resolutions, which the clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

Motions to proceed to Calendar No. 357, S. Con Res. 41; Calendar No. 354, H. Con. Res. 112; Calendar No. 356, S. Con. Res. 37; Calendar No. 384, S. Con. Res. 42; Calendar No. 395, S. Con. Res. 44.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will be 6 hours of debate equally divided between the two leaders or their designees, with the majority controlling the first 30 minutes and the Republicans controlling the second 30 minutes.

The Senator from North Dakota.

Mr. CONRAD. Madam President, this is a consequential discussion today. It is a question of the future economic policy of the United States. That is what we are talking about here today. I just heard the Republican leader say there is no budget. I don't know how to say this, but sometimes I wonder if colleagues pay attention to what they are voting on here. Last year in August we did not pass a budget resolution; instead, we passed a budget law.

Anybody who has had 10th grade civics knows a law is stronger than any resolution. A resolution is purely a congressional document. It never goes to the President for his signature. A law has to pass both bodies and be signed by the President. Last year, instead of a budget resolution, we did a budget law called the Budget Control Act.

The Budget Control Act set the budget for the next 2 years, for this year and next. More than that, it set 10 years of spending caps, saving $900 billion. In addition, the Budget Control Act gave a special committee the authority to reform the tax system and the entitlement system of the country, and it said: If you come to an agreement, special committee, your action cannot be filibustered. You have to go right to the floor for a vote. And if you do not agree, there will be an additional $1.2 trillion of spending cuts put in place.

The special committee did not agree, so that additional $1.2 trillion of spending cuts is now the law, in addition to the $900 billion of spending cuts. That is a total spending cut package of more than $2 trillion. That is the biggest spending cut package in the history of the United States. For our colleagues to say there are no spending limits in place—really? What is the Budget Control Act, then? It is a law passed overwhelmingly in the Senate. It passed in the House. It was signed by the President of the United States.

Why are they engaged in this diversion? I think I know why. Because the last time our colleagues on the other side were in control, when they had it all, the House, the Senate, the White House—from 2001 to 2006 they had both Houses of Congress, until 2008 they had the White House, so of course nothing could be changed in terms of the policies they put in place until we had a new President. And what happened when they had total control and their policies were in place? Republican policies led the United States to the brink of financial collapse. That is what happened. Do you know what they want to do now? They want to go back to those failed policies and do it all over again.

We cannot let them do that. That would be a disaster for this country. It would be a disaster for the world's economy. I do not know what could be more clear than when their policies were in place they brought this Nation to the brink of financial collapse. I remember those days. I remember being called to a special meeting in this building with the leaders of the House and the Senate and the head of the Treasury Department under President Bush and the Chairman of the Federal Reserve, who told us if they did not take certain actions the next day there would be a financial collapse in the United States within days. I was in the room when the rescue for the major financial institutions in this country was designed and we were told, late on a Saturday night, if we did not reach agreement by the next day the Asian markets would open Sunday night and they would collapse and our markets would open the next Monday and they would collapse.

Barack Obama was not the President; George W. Bush was the President. The Republican economic policies had been put in place in 2001, in 2002, in 2003, and those policies were still in place when we came close to collapse. We do not forget.

Let's go back to what happened with the private sector jobs picture. At the end of the Bush administration we were losing 800,000 jobs a month. Now we are gaining 130,000 in the last month. In the months before that, immediately preceding, we were gaining about 200,000 jobs a month. We have had a gain, now that the economy has started to turn around under this President, of 4 million jobs created in the private sector.

There it is. The red line is the results of the last time the Republicans controlled the policy here—job losses every month. Finally, under this President things have begun to turn around. Instead of losing jobs we are gaining jobs, and the same is true on economic growth. On economic growth the record is very clear. In the last quarter of the Bush administration the economy was shrinking at a rate of almost 9 percent. You can see it there, that long red bar—the economy in the last quarter of the Bush administration shrinking at a rate of almost 9 percent. But that, too, has turned around under this new President and we are now averaging economic growth of about 3 percent—a dramatic improvement.

But our Republican friends are not satisfied. They want to take us back. They want to take us back to those failed policies that had the economy shrinking at a rate of 9 percent, had us losing 800,000 jobs a month. We are not going to support that. We are going to oppose that. One thing the Republican leader got right is we are going to be voting against going back to those failed policies that put this economy in the ditch, that put us on the brink of financial collapse. He is absolutely right. We are going to oppose that.

Our policies have begun to turn things in the right direction. Here are the positive signs for the U.S. economy: 26 consecutive months of private sector job growth; 11 consecutive quarters of real GDP growth; unemployment rate down; manufacturing has expanded for 33 consecutive months; consumer confidence is showing signs of improvement—in fact, the last consumer confidence reading is at a 4-year high; U.S. auto manufacturers that were on the brink of bankruptcy under the Bush administration policies, the Republican policies, are now returning to profitability; and State revenues are showing signs of improvement.

One way we can reality-test is how is our economy doing compared to our major competitors. How are we doing compared to the Europeans? How are we doing compared to Japan? How are we doing compared to the United Kingdom? On every one of those tests the United States comes out on top. Our economy is performing better than the European zone—all the European countries combined. We are doing better than Japan. We are doing better than the United Kingdom. This chart shows the story. Our economic growth is the best, compared to our major competitors.

If there is any doubt that Republican policies had us on the brink of financial collapse, we can look to the study that was done by Alan Blinder, the former Deputy Chairman of the Federal Reserve, and Mark Zandi, who advised the McCain campaign on economic policy. The two of them did an analysis of the Federal actions taken to deal with the fiscal crisis and the financial crisis. Here is what they conclude:

We find that its effects on real GDP, jobs and inflation are huge, and probably averted what could have been called Great Depression 2.0.

When our friends attack the President and say he did not lead—really? He averted a depression. He prevented a financial collapse, because that is exactly where we were headed when the Republicans were in control.

Zandi and Blinder went on to write:

When all is said and done, the financial and fiscal policies will have cost taxpayers a substantial sum, but not nearly as much as most had feared and not nearly as much as if policymakers had not acted at all. If the comprehensive policy responses saved the

economy from another depression, as we estimate, they were well worth their cost.

That is exactly right. But what do our colleagues on the other side want to do? They want to take us to extreme austerity. They want to slam on the brakes, even while this economy is in a fragile recovery. We do not have to wonder what would happen if we adopted the policies they are presenting here on the floor of the Senate today. We do not have to imagine it; we can just look across to Europe because they are pursuing the policies that our colleagues on the other side advocate here today. What is happening? We have kind of an experiment going on because what our Republican friends are pushing for is being done in Europe. What are they experiencing? Here is a column from the former German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, ''Austerity Is Strangling Europe.''

[T]he direction of European economic and financial policy must change, away from pure austerity toward growth. Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Italy and Spain have made substantial progress in stabilizing their finances. But the economic and political situation in these countries shows that austerity alone is not the way to resolve the crisis.

Do we have a problem with debt? Absolutely. Do we need to deal with it? Absolutely. I was part of the Bowles-Simpson commission. I was part of the group of six. I have spent hundreds of hours negotiating with colleagues on both sides to get a result. But the answer is not extreme austerity right now. Almost every economic analyst says if you do that you will slam this country right back into recession. Again, we do not have to look very far to find out if that is true, because Great Britain has tried that approach. What have they experienced? Here is an article from the Wall Street Journal on April 26: ''U.S. Slips Back Into Recession.''

That is exactly the formula that is being presented by our colleagues on the other side of the aisle today. Let's slam on the brakes. We are going to put this thing right back in recession. Hey, they had their chance. They ran the economic policy of this country for 8 years under the Bush administration, and sure enough they had this country on the brink of financial collapse. Now they want to return to those same failed policies. What a mistake that would be.

We have heard the Republican leader say there is no budget; we have no budget. As I indicated in the beginning of my remarks, we do have a budget law that was passed last year. It is called the Budget Control Act. Let me read from the Budget Control Act because maybe my colleagues missed it when they were voting on it. Here is what it says in two places:

The allocations, aggregates, and levels

Referring to spending levels—

set in subsection (b)(1) shall apply in the Senate in the same manner as for a concurrent resolution on the budget for fiscal year 2012.

Is that confusing? It says ''in the same manner as for a concurrent resolution on the budget for fiscal year 2012.''

The identical language is repeated for 2013:

The allocations, aggregates, and levels set in subsection (b)(2) shall apply in the Senate in the same manner as for a concurrent resolution on the budget for fiscal year 2013.

That is about as clear as it can be. I might add, the Budget Control Act, as I indicated earlier, is stronger than any resolution because a resolution is purely a congressional document. It never goes to the President for his signature. So the Budget Control Act that set the budget for 2012 and 2013 has the force of law, unlike a budget resolution that is not signed by the President.

The Budget Control Act also sets spending limits not just for 2 years but for 10 years. It caps spending for 10 years, saving $900 billion. It also provided the full enforcement mechanisms, including a deeming resolution that allowed budget points of order to be enforced for the appropriations bills that come in 2012 and 2013.

The Budget Control Act did something else. It created a supercommittee, a reconciliation-like procedure to address entitlement reform and tax reform backed up by a $1.2 trillion so-called sequester. ''Sequester'' is just a fancy word for more spending cuts.

The Budget Control Act that is the law said if the special committee didn't reform the tax system, didn't reform the entitlement system, that there would be another $1.2 trillion of spending cuts imposed on top of the $900 billion. We all know the special committee didn't reach an agreement, so that additional $1.2 trillion of spending cuts is in place. That is a total of $2 trillion in spending cuts. That is the biggest spending cut package in the history of the United States.

For our friends on the other side to say there are no spending limits in place is just wrong. It is just wrong. We do have a problem. We have a big problem. This chart talks about the spending and revenue of the country over the last 60 years and tells us why we have a problem. The red line shows the spending in the United States over that period. The green line shows the revenues. We can see on the chart there is a big gap between the spending and the revenue, and that is why we have deficits.

Our friends on the other side like to refer to one part of the equation. They just like to talk about spending. But the reality is deficits are created by the gap between the revenue and the spending. We can see on this chart we are at or near a 60-year high on spending. We have come off the 60-year high a little bit, and we are at or near a 60-year low on revenue. We have to work both sides of the equation. Again, we are at or near a 60-year high on the spending, and we are at or near a 60-year low on revenue.

So what is to be done about it? The public says we ought to have a balanced plan: 62 percent say the best way to reduce the Federal budget deficit is a combination of additional revenue and spending cuts. Eight percent say we ought to just increase taxes. Seventeen percent say just cut programs.

I was part of the so-called Bowles-Simpson Commission. There were 18 of us; 11 of the 18 supported the conclusions that called for that kind of approach—additional revenue but also additional spending cuts. That is what the American people say we ought to do, but that is not what our friends on the other side are proposing. They propose additional tax cuts, to dig the hole deeper before we start filling it in.

Then they say: In addition to that, we will have Draconian spending cuts because if we are going to have more tax cuts that primarily go to the wealthiest among us, and we are trying to reduce the deficit, that means we have to have even more spending cuts.

Let me just say that the budgets our Republican friends are going to be offering today have something in common. Every one of them ends Medicare as we know it. Every Republican budget offered today ends Medicare as we know it. One of the Republican budgets being offered today cuts Social Security by 39 percent. That is their answer. If we are going to have more tax cuts for the wealthiest among us—and many of them are not paying their fair share of taxes—and if we are going to give them additional tax cuts, trillions of dollars in some cases in these budgets they are presenting today, then how are we going to make it up? Their answer is end Medicare as we know it, and that is in every one of their budgets.

One of them has gone so far as to say: Let's cut Social Security benefits 39 percent. We will be voting on that later today, and we will see who stands behind that proposal.

Every Republican budget cuts taxes for millionaires by at least $150,000 a year. Are you listening? Every Republican budget being offered today cuts taxes for millionaires by at least $150,000 a year on average.

Every Republican budget being offered today protects offshore tax havens.

What are offshore tax havens? This is a picture of a building down in the Cayman Islands. It is an Ugland House. It is a little five-story building down in the Cayman Islands. That building claims to be the home of 18,857 companies, and they all say they are doing business out of that little building down in the Cayman Islands—18,857 companies.

They are not doing business out of that building. They are doing monkey business out of that building, and the monkey business they are doing is avoiding the taxes they owe in the United States.

Every Republican budget protects those offshore tax havens. The first House Republican budget plan we will be voting on today is totally unbalanced. There is no revenue. In fact, it

is a lot more tax cuts, $1 trillion of additional tax cuts for the wealthiest in our country. They do cut some things other than taxes; they cut health care by almost $3 trillion. They shift Medicare to a voucher system which will end Medicare as we know it. They block-grant for Medicaid, going right after the most vulnerable in our society: children, the disabled, and those who have the least. They cut the safety net for seniors, children, the disabled, which will increase the number of uninsured by more than 30 million. They have large cuts to education, energy, and infrastructure. Cutting education doesn't make a whole lot of sense to me. Talk about eating your seed corn, that is it.

After our House Republican colleagues put out their budget, the Catholic bishops said this in the Washington Post: Bishops say Ryan budget fails moral test.

The House Republican budget authored by Mr. RYAN fails the moral test. It certainly does.

Let's go to the next slide. This plan cuts discretionary spending $1 trillion beyond what the Budget Control Act did. If you look at priorities, it kind of leaps out at you. Health care is cut by almost $3 trillion. It goes from $12.7 trillion to $9.9 trillion.

Then we go to the question of education, where the United States is already lagging. In fact, the United States ranks 25th out of 34 OECD countries in math. We are 25th in math. In science we are 17th out of 34. So we are 25th out of 34 in math, and we are 17th out of 34 in science. The budget from the House Republicans says to cut education by 25 percent; cut it from $77 billion to $58 billion. That is a 25-percent cut in education under the House Republican plan.

We have all seen gasoline prices rising. We are thankful they have been easing back in recent days. But, nonetheless, on May 14 gasoline averaged $3.75 a gallon. What is the Republican answer to rising gasoline prices? Well, let's cut those energy programs that are designed to reduce our dependence on foreign energy. Let's cut them 60 percent. That is what the House Republican plan does. It cuts programs to reduce our dependence on foreign energy from $4.7 billion a year to $2 billion. That is a 60-percent cut in programs to reduce our dependence on foreign energy.

If anybody has driven on the highways of America, we all know we have work to do there. If we look at spending on infrastructure in our country versus our major competitors, we can see China is spending 9 percent of its GDP on infrastructure: roads, bridges, airports, and rail. Europe spends 5 percent, and the United States spends 2.4 percent on infrastructure. We ought to do better than that.

So what is the Republican answer? On transportation funding, they cut it 34 percent. They cut it 34 percent. I think we understand the direction our Republican colleagues want to take this country, and it is full speed in reverse. They want to go back to the failed policies that put this country on the brink of financial collapse the last time they were in charge.

We will hear our colleagues on the Republican side say we can't raise any revenue. We can't raise any revenue, even though revenue is at or near a 60-year low right now. If we look historically at what it has taken to balance the budget, the last five times we balanced the budget, revenue was at 19.5 percent to 20.6 percent of GDP. Under the Republican plan, it never gets above 18.7 percent. So I don't think they are very serious about balancing the budget.

Former Senate Budget Committee Chairman Judd Gregg said this about the need for more revenue:

> [W]e also know revenues are going to have to go up, if you're going to maintain a stable economy and a productive economy, because of the simple fact that you're going to have this huge generation that has to be paid for.

That is the baby boom generation.

Former Senate Budget Committee Chairman Domenici also said we need more revenue. He said:

> A complete deficit reduction plan—one that can gain support from Republicans and Democrats—will need to combine comprehensive spending cuts with structural entitlement reform and new revenues . . . [A]dditional revenues will be needed if we are serious about controlling our debt.

One of the issues that has become more and more clear in recent months is that income disparity is widening in America. This shows, since 1979, what has happened to the top 1 percent in terms of their income and what has happened to the middle quintile and the lowest quintile. Everybody else has been pretty much stagnant since 1979. The top 1 percent has gone up like a rocket. I have nothing to be critical about in terms of people doing well. We want everyone to succeed, not just part of the population.

The hard reality is that since 1995, the effective tax rate for the wealthiest 400 taxpayers in this country has been cut from about 30 percent to 18 percent. That is not fair. The Republican plan is to give them more tax cuts. In fact, the House Republican plan on revenue provides an additional $1 trillion in tax cuts for the wealthiest among us by giving millionaires an average tax cut of more than $150,000 a year. It does not contribute one dime of revenue to deficit reduction.

I want to end where I began. The last time our colleagues on the other side were in charge, when they controlled everything here from 2001 to 2006 and the White House until 2008, their Republican policies led the United States to the brink of financial collapse. The proposals they are making here today are to take us right back to those failed policies. We shouldn't let them do that. That would be a mistake for our country and it would be a mistake for the world.

I thank the Chair and yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Alabama.

Mr. SESSIONS. Madam President, the fundamental question we as a Nation have to ask is: What are we going to do now? What are we going to do for the future? What is our plan for the future? The problem we have in this Senate is that the Democratic majority steadfastly and adamantly refuses to lay out their vision for the future while investing a considerable amount of time and effort in attacking anybody who does. They even voted down their own President's budget, as bad as it is—the most irresponsible budget ever submitted here, in my opinion.

This is an odd situation we are in, and I will say that our country has never been in more danger financially. Erskine Bowles and Alan Simpson—Senator CONRAD served on their committee—came before the Budget Committee, of which I am the ranking member, and told us in a signed statement—that this Nation has never faced a more predictable financial crisis. In other words, the course we are on today is unsustainable. They told us that. They told us it could happen within as little as 2 years, and that was over a year ago that they gave that testimony.

We are in the danger zone financially. I know a lot of people would like to say it is not so, but it is so. Look at this chart. This chart shows the total debt of the eurozone, including the U.K., and the United States. Our debt exceeds that of the eurozone. We have a larger debt than they do. My good friend Senator CONRAD, who is such a fine person, noted that President Bush presided over a period in which our debt increased, and it did increase. The largest debt President Bush ever had was $480 billion in 1 year, which was too large. President Obama has never had a budget that was less than a $1,200 billion deficit, and next year it will be over $1,000 billion again, according to expert testimony. We are on an unsustainable path. So I would note that our $15.5 trillion debt for the United States is greater than the eurozone and the eurozone has a larger population than we do.

Let's look at this chart, which drives that number home again, in case anybody is worried about it. I am. It shows the average debt per person in the countries we have been reading about that are in financial trouble, and it hits them sometimes surprisingly, and we never know quite how it is going to hit. But look at this: The debt in Spain, which we know is in a rocky financial position, is $18,000 per person; Portugal, $19,000; France, $33,000; Greece, $38,000—Greece's debt per person is $38,000, whereas the United States is $44,000. Yes, we have a little larger economy, but this is the danger zone.

A few people were saying we could have a financial problem in 2007 as a result of the bubble in housing. They

warned us that might happen. A lot of people said: Oh, no, not this time; it is different; we have it under control. Yet we had a financial crisis that we haven't recovered from yet. So I would say we do need to take action.

We do not have a budget. If we have a budget, why did President Obama comply with the United States Code and submit a budget this year? If we have a budget, why did the House pass a budget? If we have a budget, why did four different Democratic Congressmen and groups of Congressmen submit budgets in the House? If we have a budget, why did Senator CONRAD seek to have a budget markup in the committee? He basically said: Well, we may not bring it up on the floor, but the law says we should have a budget and I am going to bring one up in committee. The day before the committee met, the Democrats met in conference and told him not to do it.

So we were expecting to have an actual markup of a budget presented by the Democratic leadership and we didn't get it. Why? Senator REID said it would be foolish to have a budget—foolish. What did he mean by that? Why would the Democratic leader, attacking Republicans this morning, say it is foolish for us to produce a budget? Well, he said that because he meant it would be foolish politically. It would be not smart politically because the Democratic leadership in the Senate would have to lay out a vision for the future and the vision they wanted to sell and could agree on was one the American people wouldn't like. It wouldn't be smart. They would reject it. We would add the numbers up and see how much they actually want to increase taxes, how much they are going to increase the debt, how much spending is going to increase. That is not leadership. It is an utter failure of leadership.

In contrast, the Republican House produced a budget that changes the debt course of America. It puts us on a sound financial path. One can agree with it or disagree with it. We will have other budgets offered today from the Republican side that will have substantial support, that will change the debt course we are on, balance the budget in a certain number of years, and put us on a sound financial path. I expect every one of those budgets to be opposed by every Member on the other side of the aisle. Again, it appears they will unanimously vote down President Obama's budget and not offer one of their own, directly contrary to the law.

I know the majority leader this morning said: Well, filibuster is our problem. But we can't filibuster a budget. The Congressional Budget Act is designed to ensure that a budget will be passed. The Congressional Budget Act does not allow a filibuster. Only 51 votes are needed to pass a budget, so why is it being mentioned? Because they prefer to hide under the table and not stand up and be counted and not address the greatest trouble this Nation has, which is our debt.

I see some of my colleagues here today, and I ask unanimous consent to participate in a colloquy with my colleagues for up to 20 minutes.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. SESSIONS. Madam President, I see Senator BLUNT here, who was part of the leadership in the House before he came to the Senate. I know he has a deep understanding of these issues and the place we are in as a Nation today. I also see Senator THUNE from South Dakota, who is an active member of the Budget Committee and part of the leadership here in the Senate.

I am pleased to yield to Senator BLUNT and ask him how he feels this morning as we move forward today to bring up a series of budgets with no plan from the majority party in the Senate.

Mr. BLUNT. Madam President, I am embarrassed that we are not serious about this issue. Senator THUNE and I served in the House together while the Senator from Alabama was leading in these budget fights in the Senate, and we had a budget every year. We didn't always every single year have a budget the House and the Senate could agree on, but the House always had a budget and the Senate always had a budget. We always complied with the 1974 Budget Act that says we have to have a budget. It says we have to have a budget by April 15.

Frankly, we can't do our work without a budget. We can't get spending under control without a budget. We can't appropriate the way we should without a budget because the budget sets forth how much money we are willing to spend on defense and how much money we are willing to spend on military construction and how much money we are willing to spend on energy. If we don't have that, we don't have a starting place.

I have all the respect in the world for our friend from North Dakota, Senator CONRAD, but to be the chairman of the Budget Committee and to have to come to the floor and talk about what is wrong with the other budgets that have been produced when his committee hasn't produced one has to be frustrating for him, no matter how effective he seemed when he was talking about what was wrong with the people who had a plan. It is easy to find out what is wrong with somebody's plan, particularly when one doesn't have any obligation, apparently, on their own part to come up with a plan.

We remember when the White House was asked a few weeks ago, when Senator REID said the Senate will not have a budget and what their position on that was, they said: We don't have a position on that.

The President submitted a budget. Why did the President submit a budget if he doesn't want the Congress to act on a budget? The House voted on his budget this year. It was 414 to 0. Not a single Democrat or Republican in the House voted for the President's budget. Last year we voted on the President's budget, as I assume we will again today. Not a single Democrat or Republican voted for the President's budget last year, and the position of the White House is they don't care. It is an amazing situation to find ourselves in.

Whoever is in charge of the Senate in the future needs to have a commitment to the American people that we are going to have a budget, we are going to have an appropriations process, and we are going to get this spending under control. We have maxed out the credit card; everybody gets that. The Senator from Alabama showed this morning with his chart the figures representing our debt relative to the countries we sort of laugh at, how irresponsible they are—numbers that I think we ought to look at pretty carefully. When our debt per person is greater than the Greek debt per person—I haven't seen the front page of a paper in a while that didn't have something about chaos in Greece on it because they have let their government get bigger than their economy can support. They have let their debt get bigger than the gross domestic product of their country by almost two times, but now we have exceeded our debt by—our debt exceeds our potential to produce goods and services in a year for the first time ever. In fact, in the 3 years we haven't had a budget, the debt of the country has increased almost $5 trillion, as we have spent over $10 trillion in those 3 years without a budget. It is unacceptable. Everybody here knows it is unacceptable. And every American family, frankly, who thinks about it knows it is unacceptable.

The Senator's fight, along with what I am sure has to be Chairman CONRAD's frustration to not have a budget, could not be a more important topic for us to be talking about today or for the American people to be asking the question: Why not? Why are you refusing to do your job? I know nobody in this Chamber knows as much about the budget, in my opinion, as the Senator does. Your frustration of where this does not allow us to go to do the right things is as great as anybody's, maybe greater than anybody's. But I think all of us know we should be doing the right thing here, which is to obey the law, create a budget, and have a budget that gets us to the place we know we need to get to, where our economy, once again, is right-sized to our government or, more importantly, our government is right-sized to our economy.

Mr. SESSIONS. Briefly, before I go to Senator THUNE and get him engaged in this discussion, based on the Senator's experience in the budgetary process, I'm sure he is aware that about 60 percent of Federal spending is mandatory entitlement spending. Does the Senator think we can develop a long-term plan for the future that fails to address that large portion that is growing faster than the other part of the budget?

Mr. BLUNT. No, we cannot. Last year, for the first time ever, all of the money that came in was less than the money that went out automatically to these programs, where, if you meet the definition for the program, you get the money. It is at 60 percent now. It has not been that many years ago that it was at 50 percent. It was not that many years before that it was at 40 percent.

So we have to deal with these issues because they lead us to an inevitable place. Do we want to be Europe today a few years from now? Surely not. Surely the answer is no. We cannot avoid that unless we have a plan.

It is easy to talk about how bad the other plan is. But what we all ought to be doing is coming up with a plan that gets us to where we all know we need to be.

Mr. SESSIONS. I thank the Senator.

I thank Senator THUNE for his leadership and active participation in this debate. I ask the Senator, what is on his mind this morning, as we are heading for votes on four different budgets?

Mr. THUNE. I say to my colleague from Alabama, who is the ranking member on the Budget Committee, I got on the Budget Committee in this session of Congress and have been on it now for 2 years. We have not written a budget either year. So it sort of begs the question about whether the committee has any relevance around here anymore.

But to the point about spending and debt—we get down here and we talk about it. I think it has been interesting. The former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, ADM Mike Mullen—who up until several months ago held that position—would come in front of Congress, in front of congressional committees, and say the greatest threat to America's national security is our national debt. There are a lot of external threats the United States faces. The world continues to be a dangerous place, with al-Qaida and the Iranian nuclear capability and China and North Korea. You can go right down the list. But for the top ranking military official in this country to come before Congress and say the greatest threat to America's national security is our national debt speaks volumes about what our priority ought to be. To think that we here in the Senate now for over 1,100 days have not passed a budget is pretty stunning in light of that reality; and also to say that somehow, because the Budget Control Act last summer passed, we did not need a budget misses the point.

The reason we had the Budget Control Act is because we did not pass a budget. The Budget Control Act is what you get when you do not pass a budget. You end up at the 11th hour having to put something together to deal with the issue of the debt limit, which is what we were dealing with at that time. It did put some caps on spending, but it does not do anything to deal with the long-term structural challenges facing this country, which is what a budget is designed to do.

The President submitted a budget this year, which would suggest he thought we ought to be working on a budget. The chairman of the Budget Committee, as my colleagues have mentioned, even called a Budget Committee markup, where we went there and said: Bring amendments. We went, we brought amendments, and we gave opening statements. We gaveled it out and said we are not going to do it.

So here we are again on the floor of the Senate without a budget, having to vote on other budgets presented by some of our colleagues, the House of Representatives, which passed a budget this year earlier, and the President's budget. To be fair, the President at least submitted a budget. It was a terrible budget if you are looking at the issues of spending and debt. In fact, I think the reason it got voted down 414 to nothing in the House of Representatives is because it added $11 trillion to the debt. It takes our total debt at the end of the 10-year period to $26 trillion and spends $47 trillion over the next 10 years and raises taxes by $2 trillion in a very fragile economy. It was a bad attempt, but at least it was an attempt. It was an attempt that yielded zero votes in the House of Representative, and it will be interesting to see if on the floor of the Senate today there will be any Democrats who will vote for their President's budget proposal.

But the point the Senator from Alabama and the Senator from Missouri make is a good one, and that is simply this: We have a responsibility under the law to spell out what we would do to get this country on a more sustainable fiscal path. That is something that is in the budget laws that the Senator from Alabama pointed out. Yet here we go on, year after year after year now—3 years in a row, over 1,100 days—without the Senate doing its job and passing a budget. That is significant for a lot of reasons, not the least of which is this is the fourth year in a row where we are going to have a trillion dollar deficit. Under this administration, you have the highest deficit, the second highest deficit, the third highest deficit, and the fourth highest deficit in history—4 consecutive years now of trillion dollar deficits.

But we are concerned about the economy. We need the economy to get growing again, to expand, to create jobs. That helps address all these things. What is interesting about it—and I know both my colleagues on the floor are well aware of this—there is a lot of research that has been done with regard to developed countries that start carrying these high debt loads. All the analysis suggests when you get a debt-to-GDP ratio of more than 90 percent, it costs you about a point to a point and a half of economic growth every single year. Well, in our country, a percentage point of economic growth means a million jobs. So our debt to GDP—which is now over 100 percent—means it is draining our economy of economic growth and, therefore, lots of jobs.

The Congressional Budget Office said about the President's budget, if his budget were to be enacted, it could cost us up to 2.2 percent of economic growth over the course of the next 10 years, which would amount to 2.2 million jobs. So we know the President's effort was not serious. He did at least put something out there. But we need a serious discussion in the Senate about a budget that will put us on a pathway not only to get spending and debt under control but to allow the economy to grow and expand and get Americans back to work. That is what is at stake here. That is why we believe we ought to have a budget. That is why we are going to have an exercise today where at least we get a chance to vote on some budgets as advanced by some of our colleagues in the House of Representatives as well as here in the Senate and the President's budget.

The fact is, this is the third year in a row where we have not followed the law and gone through the process of getting a budget here on the floor of the Senate. For our colleagues on the other side to suggest it is not necessary simply because the Budget Control Act was passed last summer not only is inconsistent with the law, but it begs the point about why did the President submit his budget, why did they call a Budget Committee markup in the first place? Clearly, somebody around here thinks we ought to be doing our job. But we are not doing it.

So I would hope, as we debate this issue today, at least we will put in front of the American people the arguments we think need to be made with regard to getting spending and debt under control, addressing the long-term, the mandatory side of the budget my colleague from Missouri, Senator BLUNT, mentioned. That is where we know the money is. That is what nobody wants to deal with. We keep squeezing a little bit more out of the discretionary side of the budget. We have to take that on if we are going to save Social Security and Medicare and reform these entitlement programs. That is what a budget process would do. It does not take 60 votes under the law. It takes 51.

To come down here and say Republicans will filibuster again is completely out of whack with what we know to be the facts around here and the law; that is, that it takes 51 votes to pass a budget and a reconciliation bill that could possibly follow.

I appreciate the leadership of my colleague from Alabama as the ranking member on the Budget Committee. I look forward today, at least, for the chance for us to talk about a budget and what we ought to be doing for the future of this country since we do not have a budget on the floor of the Senate.

Mr. SESSIONS. I could not agree with the Senator more. I would note,

the reason we are here today is because a budget was not produced. The Parliamentarian of the Senate ruled that a budget has not been produced and, therefore, under the rules of the Budget Act, budgets that have been filed can be brought to the floor. That is how we were able to force the votes today.

Senator THUNE, briefly—and I will also ask Senator BLUNT, who is in our leadership—isn't it a fact that what happened with the Budget Control Act is that we had spent so much money, we had reached the spending limit of America—the debt ceiling—and we had to have a last-minute effort to reach an agreement; the Republicans insisted that we had to reduce spending, and we got a reduction in spending from $47 trillion over the next 10 years to $45 trillion? You would have thought that was going to bankrupt America—that we would spend $45 trillion instead of $47 trillion.

That is not a budget. It was a limit on spending, and it was done because Republicans said: We are not going to raise the debt limit until you at least cut some spending. That is all that could be accomplished. We avoided a crisis, but it was a pretty tense time.

Senator BLUNT.

Mr. BLUNT. I would like to stay on this. Saying the Budget Control Act is a budget—as Senator THUNE mentioned, if that was the budget, why did the President submit one? Nobody believes that is a budget. The Parliamentarian said it was not a budget. But what it is—it would be as if your family sitting down to decide what money you are going to have to spend this year said: OK, we have X number of dollars. Let's go out and spend it. That is no budget, particularly when you had to borrow 40 percent of the X number of dollars you said you had. We are borrowing 40 percent of the money we are going to spend. The only number we have that we have agreed to is the maximum amount we will spend, knowing we do not have anywhere near that number, and we have not allocated that in any way.

That is no budget. Everybody knows that. Everybody also knows you cannot get there unless you have a way to get there. Your family says: OK, we have done the budgeting for the year. We decided if we borrow almost as much money as we make, and we spend that somewhere, that is our budget. We have not decided where we are going to spend it, we have not decided how we are going to spend it, and we have not even decided a reasonable way we are going to get it, but we said: Here is the number we are going to spend. Now, family, let's all go out and start spending and we will meet here later this year and see how it worked out. It makes no sense at all, and everybody knows that.

Interestingly, we do not hear much about this. It is surprising to me that every day there is not a story about why for the first time ever for 3 years straight now the Senate has decided it does not have to do the work the law requires it to do, as we dig this hole deeper and deeper and deeper. The longer we wait, the more difficult the solution is going to be. Every single day that passes, it is harder to solve this problem than it would have been the day before. Now we have gone 3 years without a budget and apparently we are going to go through the rest of this process without a budget. By the time we get to the end of this year, we will be approaching that fourth year without a budget. It is not as though this would be a good idea, the law says we have to have one. And we should have one.

Mr. SESSIONS. Senator BLUNT has been in the leadership in the House. He is in the leadership of the Senate. Be frank with us. What is it that would cause the majority party not to want to lead, not to want to lay out a plan for the future, and attack anybody who does lay out a plan? I know it is hard. We all know this is a tough thing. But doesn't the Senator think a party that aspires to lead the Senate should, instead of hiding under the table, stand up and say what they believe we should do over the next decade financially?

Mr. BLUNT. I think the law even requires it. I think the leader on the other side, the majority leader, has been pretty clear about it. It is bad politics to have a budget, bad politics to tell the American people officially what we are for, bad politics for our Members to have to go on record saying what they are for.

The President submitted a budget. There are 54 Members of the President's party here in the Senate. Fifty-one of them could pass this budget. It would be the Senate-passed budget. Then you would go to the House and say: OK, let's look at the House budget and the Senate budget and see if we can agree on a budget.

But they actually have been pretty transparent. You have to give them some credit for not trying to be different than they really are. They said: It would be politically foolish for us to pass a budget because then people would know what every one of the 51 of our Members is for, and they would have to say what they are for.

My guess is that nobody in the majority will say they are for anything today—not for the President's budget, not for any budget we will submit. So you go home and say: I am not for any of that. You can't accuse me of being for a bad plan because I am for no plan.

That is where we are.

Mr. SESSIONS. Well, we need revenue—they use that word but will not explicitly say whom they want to tax except a very few rich. The Buffett tax would produce about $4 billion a year when we have a $1,200 billion deficit.

I would note that Senator MANCHIN, a former Governor of West Virginia, said in today's Politico that he would have been impeached if he failed to produce a budget as West Virginia's Governor. He said: Sure I have a problem with failing to offer a budget. As a former Governor, my responsibility was to put a balanced budget forward.

Well, I see my colleague is here. I think our time is up. There might be a couple of minutes for Senator THUNE.

Mr. THUNE. If the Senator will yield for a minute, I assume in Alabama and Missouri and I know in South Dakota our States pass budgets. It can be done. You can balance your budget. It would be nice if we had a requirement in the Constitution that would demand that the way many of our States do. Certainly, there doesn't seem to be the political will here to do it absent that. But it can be done, and hard decisions have to be made. South Dakota went through it last year, made some hard choices, our Governor, our legislature. Those are the types of hard decisions that are going to have to made here, but it takes a certain amount of political will and a willingness to make hard decisions. As the Senator from Alabama and the Senator from Missouri have both pointed out, there doesn't seem to be the willingness here to make those hard votes.

As has already been pointed out, the leader on the other side has said: What point is there in doing a budget? And the President of the United States and his folks, when they were asked whether the Senate ought to do a budget, said: Well, we don't have an opinion about that, which I think is really ironic coming from the leader of the free world about whether this country ought to have a budget to work with.

But that being said, as our time winds down here, to argue, as our colleagues have, that we don't need one misses the point. The Parliamentarian has ruled that the Budget Control Act was, in fact, not a budget. We need to do a budget here in the Senate. More importantly, the American people expect it and the taxpayers deserve it. That is why we ought to be having a debate on what we are going to vote for today, not what we are going to vote against.

It will be interesting to see if any of our colleagues on the other side vote for any of the budget proposals we put forward today, including the President of the United States; his budget will be voted on along with several other Republican budgets. I have a feeling we will be for some things. I have a feeling, as you said earlier, that they are not going to be for anything.

Mr. SESSIONS. Madam President, is the time up on this side?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The time has expired.

Mr. SESSIONS. I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from North Dakota.

Mr. CONRAD. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the use of calculators be permitted on the Senate floor during consideration of the motions to proceed to budget resolutions.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. CONRAD. Madam President, I wish to go back to the point my colleagues have made. It is fascinating to me. You did not hear them talk for one moment about the substance of their proposals—not a moment. Did you notice that? I wonder why that would be? I think I know. It is because their proposals would take us right back to the failed policies that brought this country to the brink of economic collapse. That is what happened the last time they were in charge. They controlled both bodies from 2001 until 2006, the White House until 2008. So none of those policies they put in place when they controlled both Chambers could be changed. And where were we at the end of 2008? Where were we? We were losing 800,000 jobs a month and the economy was shrinking at a rate of 9 percent. And the proposals they have, the substantive proposals they are making here today, take us right back to those same failed policies.

It is no wonder you did not hear them saying one word about the budget proposals on which we are going to be voting because they are the same failed policies that put this country in the ditch. Instead, what you hear them say is that we on our side have no budget. Fascinating.

Well, let me just put up again what we passed last year in law called the Budget Control Act.

Let me again read from that law. It says:

> The allocations, aggregates, and levels—
>
> Spending levels—
>
> in subsection . . . shall apply in the Senate in the same manner as for a concurrent resolution on the budget for fiscal year 2012.

In the next clause, it makes the exact same statement for 2013, that the Budget Control Act that was passed last year will serve in the same manner as a budget resolution.

Earlier this year, pursuant to that law, I gave the appropriators, which I am required to do under the law, what they could spend, and here it is. I have this chart being blown up.

Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry, $13,397 million; Armed Services, $146,698 million; Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs, $22,167 million; Commerce, Science, and Transportation, $15,016 million; Energy and Natural Resources, $5,276 million. It sounds kind of like a budget does it not? Doesn't that sound kind of like a budget? Well, guess what, it is a budget. It is in the Budget Control Act that we passed last year instead of a budget resolution.

Again, anybody who has taken high school civics knows a budget law is stronger than any budget resolution. Why would that be the case? Because a budget resolution is purely a congressional document. It never goes to the President for his signature. A budget law, by definition, has to be signed by the President. So last year, instead of a budget resolution, we passed a budget law called the Budget Control Act. Pursuant to that law, I gave the appropriators—earlier this year, before the deadline—their allocations, and I was just reading from them. Finance, $1,337 billion; Foreign Relations, $28,640 million; Homeland Security, $102,276 million; the Judiciary Committee, $18,545 million; Rules and Administration, $41 million. It sounds a lot like a budget doesn't it? Because that is exactly what it provided. It provided the spending limit this year and for next year. That is in the Budget Control Act we passed in the Senate last year on a strong bipartisan vote, passed the House of Representatives, and signed into law by the President of the United States.

So when we hear over and over that there is no budget, no spending limits for this year, it is just not so. There are spending limits for this year. There are spending limits for next year. They are included in the Budget Control Act, which is a law. It was passed. It was signed by the President. That Budget Control Act limited spending for the next 10 years—put spending caps in place. Budget resolutions rarely have spending caps for more than 1 year. The Budget Control Act had 10 years of caps, saving $900 billion. That is the law.

I see the Senator from Michigan is on the floor—a very valued member of the Budget Committee. Welcome to this debate. We have been hearing a lot from the other side—interestingly enough, I want to say to the Senator, almost nothing about the substance of their proposals. I assume that is because they want to go back to the same failed policies that put this country in the ditch we are still digging out of. All they want to talk about is not having a budget resolution—not one word that instead of a budget resolution, we passed a budget law, as the Senator well knows, the Budget Control Act.

How much time will the Senator need?

Ms. STABENOW. I will use 7 minutes or so.

Mr. CONRAD. I will allocate the Senator 10 minutes.

Ms. STABENOW. I thank the Senator.

Madam President, first let me thank the chairman of the Budget Committee, who I have to say is going to be sorely missed. In fact, I am not sure we are going to let him go. I think we are going to lock the doors to his office and not let him leave. He has been such an incredible valued Member of the Senate and a leader for our country on these issues.

It is absolutely true that what we are really debating is whether we go back to policies that put us in the huge deficit ditch in which we find ourselves or whether we continue to go forward as a country. We need to keep going forward and going forward even more quickly certainly. But in my State, we are seeing us begin to move forward, with manufacturing coming back and innovation opportunities, and we need to continue to push for that.

But let me stress as well what the chairman has said. We passed the Budget Control Act by 74 votes in the Senate—74 votes, a bipartisan vote—on August 2, 2011. It put in place the spending caps the chairman talked about. It laid out something that, frankly, in my time since being here starting in 2001, has been done differently and, frankly, has a stronger basis for it because instead of just having something passed by the House and the Senate, it was actually signed by the President. It is law. It has the force of law, and it is in a situation where it has even more impact than it would normally.

So, yes, we did not do the normal process. What we did was one better than the normal process, which is the Budget Control Act. It did pass. It did put in place the spending caps and set up, as you know, a deficit reduction commission and a requirement on cuts that will take place in January.

It is also true that what we do not have is a long-term plan. As the chairman has talked about over and over again, we have to come together on a long-term deficit reduction plan. So we agree on that. There are many people who have talked about that, worked on various proposals. The President has lead negotiations. Members in this body have. And certainly the chairman of the committee has continued to lead those efforts. And we need to get that done. But in terms of what we have on a budget resolution that puts in place limits or caps, that has been done.

Now, when we look at what is in front of us and the votes we are going to be having today, it is very simple in terms of values. The question is, Are you on the side of the middle class or on the side of millionaires in this country?

You know, folks in my State, the middle class, feel as though the system has been pretty much rigged against them. All they want is a fair shot. We have families in Michigan struggling to make ends meet, and they are struggling to send their kids to college. Over and over again, they look at what is going on here and scratch their heads. And why in the world would we continue to focus on things that help a privileged few, those who have had the most benefits in the last decade? Why do we continue to see policies like these budgets that, in fact, focus on more tax cuts for millionaires and billionaires and ask middle-class families to sacrifice more and more? They shake their heads and say: What is going on here? You guys just do not get it, what is happening to the majority of families.

And what we are seeing once again is that rather than focusing on jobs and bringing the economy back on track, bringing jobs back to the United States, strengthening our ability to make things and grow things in this country, which has to happen if we are going to have a middle class and have an economy, what we see our colleagues on the other side of the aisle do is wanting to double student loan rates

and eliminate Medicare as we know it in order to give another round of tax cuts to millionaires and billionaires. That makes absolutely no sense.

Instead of spending our time passing jobs bills that we need to pass, by the way, including the farm bill, which affects 16 million people in this country when we talk about rural communities and agriculture and food processing and all of our efforts on food policy across the country, instead of doing that, they want to spend their time focusing on something that will give more tax breaks to millionaires and ask middle-class families one more time—just one more time—to sacrifice.

Folks in my State are saying we have had enough of this. What we ought to be doing is our to-do list—stopping outsourcing and rewarding companies that bring jobs home; helping responsible homeowners refinance and take advantage of today's lower interest rates; cutting taxes for small businesses that are creating jobs and investing in their companies; continuing critical investments in clean energy manufacturing for the future; passing a farm bill for 16 million Americans whose jobs rely on agriculture and our rural economy; and we should focus on helping our veterans coming home from the war find good-paying jobs, thanking them for their service.

We have a lot to do. Instead, we are in the same old failed debate that got us in the hole, that got us to the situation where there was a crisis on Wall Street, that got us to the point where we lost millions and millions of jobs in the past. Are we going to go backward or forward? That is the question.

Right now, what are the differences when we look at the four different Republican plans? They are very similar. Here are three basic things that are the same. They all end Medicare as an insurance plan and increase costs by thousands of dollars for seniors in our country, which puts them back in a plan that is before 1964, where seniors would have to try to find private insurance. Of course, as we get older, we all spend more health care dollars; we need more health care, so costs will be higher. It is tougher for older people to find affordable insurance. That is why we created Medicare in 1965. They want to go back prior to that time.

Second, they allow student loan rates to double. All the plans would double the cost of that. I don't know about anybody else, but in Michigan, where we are transforming the economy and going to advanced manufacturing and new technology, we have folks in their forties and fifties going back to school, and we have young people going to college. They are not asking for more expense. The average student debt in Michigan is about $25,000. They are not asking to add to that anymore. All four of these proposals would do that—double the student loan interest rate.

By the way, these are loans where people are taking out the money, and they are responsible and they are paying it back. But they are asking for help to make sure they can afford to be able to have those loans, so they can dream big dreams and go to college and be successful. I thought that is what our country was all about. When I was growing up in the little town of Clare—my dad was sick when I was in high school—if I hadn't had help with tuition and fees and scholarship and loans, I would not have been able to go to college. The great thing about our country is that a red-headed, freckled-face girl in Clare, who folks didn't know—folks somewhere decided that maybe I ought to have a chance to go to college. Because of that, I have had tremendous opportunities in my life. We have a lot of young men and women working hard every day who deserve the same opportunity. People who lost a job and are going back to get training deserve the same opportunity.

All four of these plans end Medicare as an insurance plan, increase by thousands of dollars costs to seniors, double student loan rates, and all of it is to make sure that we give more tax breaks to millionaires and billionaires. I know at least one or more of these plans adds $150,000, I believe, in average tax cuts. That is more than the average person in Michigan makes in a year—or the average person in America. We are saying to seniors, families, and students that we want you to pay more so we can give another tax cut to the folks who have already gotten the majority of the benefits in the last 10 years economically.

Let me stress one more time before ending, I think this goes to the values represented in these budgets. Do we want to say that retirees and older people in our country have the opportunity to live long lives? Social Security and Medicare are great American success stories. They literally brought a generation out of poverty to live in dignity, like my mom, who is almost 86, to a place where she is healthy and can play with her grandkids because she had the opportunity to be in a system called Medicare, and will be able to live longer. Those are good things, good values, not bad values.

All four of these budgets—the Paul budget would end Medicare in 2014; the Lee budget would end it in 2017; the Ryan budget in 2023; and the Toomey budget in 2023. I cannot imagine that Americans want to go back to that system where seniors cannot count on the ability to have their doctor and get their medicine and have the dignity of a long and healthy life.

Madam President, I urge our colleagues to vote no on every one of these resolutions which go backwards, and support our efforts to keep America going forward and focus on those things that will make our economic recovery even faster.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Alabama.

Mr. SESSIONS. Madam President, we need to lay out a plan for the future of this country. That is what this is all about. My colleague just said vote no on all of them and keep going, don't go back. What I hear being said—and there is no ambiguity about it—is let's keep on the path we are on. This is good enough. Here is the letter: Let's be happy. We are in Washington, and we are having fun, I caught a fish and we had a party, send more money.

Isn't that what it is all about, isn't this what we are hearing from the other side? Send more money. We will take care of things for you. We don't have to cut anything. We are not on an unsustainable path. Actually, we cut spending over the next 10 years from $47 billion to $45 billion. Aren't we great. That is a huge increase over the current level of spending; it increases spending every year under the Budget Control Act—not nearly enough to change the debt course of the country. But that is OK.

By the way, do you know what President Obama's budget does? It wipes out the sequester. Before the ink is even dry on the Budget Control Act, the agreement at the eleventh hour to reduce spending over the next decade by $2 trillion, President Obama submits a budget in February proposing to wipe out the sequester—all $1.1 trillion of it. What kind of commitment do we have to control spending? Send more money; that is the solution. Tax, spend, tax, spend. I wish it weren't so. I wish I could say differently.

Well, let me ask this question: Do my colleagues not feel a responsibility to tell the American people what their financial plan for the future of America is? Do they have no responsibility? Do they feel no sense of obligation, no duty? All they want to do is attack anybody else's plan who is trying to save this Republic from financial disaster—attack them because they might want to reduce spending somewhere, and somebody might not like it because they didn't get quite as much from the government as they got before. Are there no programs that we are prepared to reduce or eliminate that are wasteful and not worthwhile? Is there nothing in this government? Maybe we stop GSA from having hot tubs in Las Vegas; maybe we ought to at least do that. How about the TSA, which has warehouses with millions of dollars of equipment in them that is not even being used? What about the $500 million Solyndra loan and other bogus loans to political cronies? And evidence is coming out that there is more of that. Can't we cut that? Or will they say that is anti-energy?

What they need to do is get off the backs of the energy producers and allow more energy to be produced. It doesn't take taxpayer money to produce more energy and have decent regulations. Do you know what they do? They send checks to Uncle Sam. They pay royalties on offshore and Federal lands. They pay taxes on the money they make. The people who work at the oil companies pay taxes.

That is the way you get money, not by just taxing somebody.

I think the American people fundamentally understand that a tax on the rich is a tax on the private sector, and when you overtax the private sector, you get less of it. It is the private sector that creates the wealth that pays the taxes that allows us to distribute money here and go back to our districts and act as though we are some hero for returning people their money that we took from them, and we want to be some specially credited person because we brought back some bacon to our district. The American people understand this. They are not happy about this.

The Budget Control Act is not close to what we need to do to put our country on a sound path. It is not close. I have to say that the President's budget undoes half of that. When I said the Budget Control Act took spending down from $47 trillion to $45 trillion, President Obama's budget that was submitted a few weeks ago would add $1.6 trillion back, so that would make it go from $45 trillion to $46 trillion in spending over 10 years.

This is the way they propose to operate this government. That is what their plan is. Why won't they lay it out? Because they know the American people will look at it and say: Good grief, that is not what we want for this country. You guys have to get your house in order. We expect you to cut some spending. We know there is waste, fraud, and abuse in the capital. You better get busy.

All we hear from my Democratic colleagues is: Send more money. What is particularly troubling is the suggestion that it is OK, we don't have to make any changes. But we do. We do have to make changes.

Let me show you this chart. The changes will be difficult, but not so bad as to have the country be damaged in any significant way. This is where our spending level is today, $3.6 trillion. This is the next decade under the Budget Control Act, where we cut spending. In that late-night confrontation before the government was to shut down because we reached the spending limit and could not borrow anymore money, an agreement was reached to take $2 trillion out of spending over 10 years. That is what this chart is—after that cut had been put in place. President Obama wants to wipe out half of it. So it would add $8 trillion in new spending. If you cut that to $6 trillion or $5 trillion, we would balance the budget. You would still show an increase; it would just maybe be a $4 trillion or a $5 trillion increase in spending instead of $8 trillion. We could make a big difference there.

The path we are on is unsustainable. The path we are on leaves us in the danger zone. The path we are on has led us to have more debt than Europe and more per capita than any country in Europe, and it is unsustainable. I am worried about this.

I am particularly worried that we don't have a sense in this body that we have to make changes. We are going to have to look at the entitlement programs. I have heard Senator CONRAD say this repeatedly. He served on the debt commission, and they said we have to do that.

Does the President propose any entitlement changes in his budget? No. Are the Democratic Members of the Senate proposing entitlement changes? No. Who is? Congressman RYAN has proposed entitlement changes. He is prepared to defend them as being the kind of changes that will preserve, protect, and sustain Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security.

We cannot allow entitlement spending to continue to increase at rates four and five times the inflation rate. That is an unsustainable spending course. When 60 percent of our budget is increasing at three or four times the inflation rate, we are in big trouble, and we can't tax our way out of that. That is just a fact. Upper income people are going to have to contribute more to Medicare. They just are. We don't have the money. We can't just make it up and act like that is not reality. It is reality.

So I think the budgets we will see from this side will be attacked viciously as wanting to kill these programs. They are not designed to kill these programs. They are designed to put us on a financial path where we can be healthy and prosperous and sustain the benefits we have promised. But a big chunk of Medicare is paid for out of the General Treasury of the United States, and people with big incomes ought to contribute to some of that, and they can do that. We can do that as a nation.

So, Madam President, I think it is rather odd that we have come to the floor and called up—without debate, without opportunity to amend—a series of budgets. Why? Because no budget has been produced in the Budget Committee, and under the rules of the Senate members can bring up a budget. We don't get to have amendments, but we can bring up one. Under the Budget Act, the Budget Committee should have hearings, have a markup, offer amendments, and bring the budget to the floor with a guaranteed 50 hours of debate, unlimited amendments, and then final passage within a certain time. That is the way it works. It guarantees priority to a budget because the people who wrote the Budget Act in 1974 knew how important a budget was. They gave it priority. It can't be filibustered. It can pass with 50 votes, with the Vice President—51 votes otherwise can pass the budget—because we need a budget, and we should be seeking to do that.

To me, it is pretty frustrating to see our current situation. So I guess I will conclude by asking: Does the majority party not feel an obligation to tell the American people where they would like to lead the country; and do they not, in a time of financial crisis, want to lay out a plan they can rally behind and ask the American people to rally behind to save our country?

It is an absolute fact this country has never, ever, ever, been in a financial condition as severe as this one. We have never, ever faced the long-term systemic debt threat we face today. We have never been on a path so unsustainable. Never. Nothing close to it. This is a threat to the future of America, and the party that aspires to lead the Senate should lay out its plan. The President should be engaged. He should be insisting we pass a budget that has some meaning and would change the debt course of the country. Yet what do we have? Nothing but attacks on Members of Congress who lay out plans that would actually do that.

They do not want to bring up a budget. Why? They say it is foolish. It would be foolish for us. Yes, it would be foolish to reveal ourselves. The American people might add up how many taxes we want to increase. They might add everything up and say: Your plan doesn't change the debt course. They may add things up and say: You spend too much. So we don't want to do that. That would be foolish.

I have never seen a situation where, in a time of crisis, this Nation has had a failure of leadership as great as we are seeing today. Now maybe I don't get this. Maybe something is wrong with me. But I think everyone who cares about the Republic should be prepared to stand and vote on proposals to put us on the right path.

We are not on the right path today. We have a threat out there that could put us in a financial crisis overnight. It could happen very quickly. When that occurs, it will be too late to fix it.

We saw the warnings that led to the 2007 financial crisis. That was a deeply damaging event—that crisis. We haven't gotten over it yet, and we could have another one. Wouldn't that be terrible? These numbers don't assume we have a recession. They have no real recession projected in the numbers we will see. We need to avoid a debt crisis, another financial crisis, as Erskine Bowles and Alan Simpson, on the debt commission, told us to avoid. We need to do that, and we are going to have some leadership on both sides of the aisle, I believe.

So, Madam President, I will reserve the remainder of my time, and I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from South Dakota.

Mr. CONRAD. Madam President, Senator MENENDEZ is here to be recognized for 10 minutes, and we can do that at this point.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Madam President, last year the Budget Control Act became the law of the land, and it set discretionary spending limits for security and nonsecurity spending for not just 1 year but for 2 years. It puts us on a

path to reducing the deficit by more than $2 trillion over the next 10 years.

We now hear claims from our friends on the other side of the aisle that we don't have a budget. I guess if one says say it often enough people may believe it. But it seems our Republican colleagues have selective amnesia about the Budget Control Act.

We have a budget. It is called the Budget Control Act, and it has the force of law, which is more than we can say for any of the proposals before us today. So today's debate makes me wonder if we are on a dance floor instead of the Senate floor because we have already taken one step forward and now it is two steps back.

These Republican proposals call for extreme cuts on the backs of seniors, students, and the most vulnerable in our society without asking any contributions from millionaires and corporations. That is not fair, it is not balanced, and it doesn't reflect the priorities of New Jersey's middle-class families.

I strongly believe we must get our Nation's fiscal house in order, and I have always supported a fair and balanced approach to reducing our deficits. But I cannot, in good conscience, support proposals in which working families, seniors, and students must endure billions in cuts while oil companies—making $1 trillion in profits over the next decade—and billionaires are not asked to pay their fair share.

Supporters of the House Republican budget, introduced by Congressman RYAN, justify their radical changes to Medicare and other programs by saying: We simply can't afford it. But in the very same Republican budget in which we can't afford that, we see an average tax cut of over $¼ million to millionaires, and that is on top of the six-figure tax break they are already currently receiving from the Bush tax cuts. At the same time Republicans propose to add thousands of dollars of increased costs on the backs of middle-class seniors, they somehow find the money for another tax cut for millionaires that is worth more than four times the entire average household income of an American family.

People who have worked hard to build personal wealth should be applauded for their success. At the same time, many of them are willing to contribute to help the Nation in this tough economic time, if we ask. We know from experience that asking a fair share from the wealthiest and most successful, as we did during the Clinton era of prosperity, will not break our economy. It just comes down to a matter of fairness.

What we are seeing today is our friends on the other side of the aisle taking yet another run at shifting our Nation's financial burdens onto middle-class families, seniors and students, all while defending special breaks for their special interests. How is that fair? How is that balanced? It is not. And we can't let it stand.

Let's talk about the facts. Republicans are not only seeking to repeal the affordable care act, but they are also dismantling Medicare, Medicaid, and other vital programs. Under the Ryan budget, New Jersey's health care system would be devastated. The Republican plan would cut $39 billion in health benefits from New Jerseyans over the next decade, leaving families unable to find care and doctors unable to provide it. Their plan will throw upwards of 465,000 low-income families and seniors off Medicaid, kick more than 70,000 young adults off their parents' health insurance, and leave more than 3 million New Jerseyans—including 877,000 children—worrying about whether they will hit their lifetime benefit limit and lose coverage as a result.

For seniors, the Republican plan ends Medicare as we know it, leaving retirees to worry about whether the system they paid into their entire working lives will really be there for them when they need it. Their plan would force seniors out of the Medicare they know and instead provide an inadequate voucher they claim will cover the premiums for private insurance. That claim, however, is false, leaving seniors with an increase in out-of-pocket expenses of over $6,000 a year.

It also means immediately higher costs for the more than 126,000 seniors in New Jersey who have saved a combined $95 million on prescription drugs because every one of these Republican budgets will reopen the gap in prescription drug coverage we call the doughnut hole. The Republican budget also means 1 million seniors in New Jersey who have already accessed no-cost preventive health services, such as cancer screenings, would now be forced to pay for those screenings out of pocket. It also means 270,000 seniors and disabled individuals in my home State who rely on Medicaid for services such as long-term care will be kicked out of the system.

The most shocking about all of this is the radical Ryan budget seems to be the least extreme of the Republican budgets. For example, Senator PAUL's proposal calls for Medicare to end abruptly on January 1, 2014, while simultaneously decreasing Social Security benefits and raising the eligibility age to 70. Senator TOOMEY's plan would force seniors off Medicare and only provide a modest voucher to purchase private coverage. It would slash Medicaid by nearly $1 trillion—$180 billion more than even the Ryan budget calls for—and shift a massive and untenable burden on the States while leaving millions of families without coverage.

How is that fair and balanced? It is not, and we should reject these proposals.

Here is another fact about the Ryan House budget. Instead of making college more affordable, more accessible, and more achievable, the Ryan budget will do the exact opposite. It will create additional obstacles for students that could—according to a study by the Education Trust—ultimately take Pell grants away from 1 million students. For those who aren't kicked out of the system entirely, it will freeze the maximum Pell Grant award, despite tuition costs rising far above the rate of inflation. To add insult to injury, the Ryan budget would allow the interest rate on subsidized Stafford loans to double—a debate that is all too familiar to this body.

My Republican colleagues claim to support lower rates, but then they filibustered them, and now they are proposing a budget that would allow the interest rates to double. So for more than 60 percent of students who receive Pell grants while also taking out loans, the Ryan budget is a double whammy. Not only will they lose some or all of their Pell grants, they will be forced to pay double the interest on their loans, which will only increase with a reduction in Pell grants.

Today receiving some form of higher education is almost a prerequisite for a 21st-century career. In fact, young adults with only a high school diploma are almost three times as likely to be unemployed and earn just over half as much as those with a bachelor's degree.

But even as the demand for college graduates in the workforce increases, so have the costs of tuition, making higher education all the more critical, as well as for the Nation to be the global leader competitively. Yet it is more out of reach for millions of students if we follow these plans. How is that fair? How is that balanced? It is not, and it just shows the misguided priorities that are behind these proposals.

Middle-class families can't afford it. Seniors can't afford it. Students can't afford it. That is why we can't afford to let it happen.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from North Dakota.

Mr. CONRAD. Madam President, just to respond to my friend, the ranking member of the committee—and I have a lot of respect for the ranking member. The truth is on the larger issue we are not all that far apart. The larger issue is, as a nation, we are on an unsustainable course. This is as clear as it can be, and we have to deal with it. We have a difference with respect to what we have right now. I believe we do have a budget in place for this year and next year. The place where I would agree with the gentleman is we don't have the longer term plan.

The problem is, Are we really going to get all sides to get off their fixed positions right before a national election? That is a matter of judgment. I don't believe that it is going to happen.

I was part of the Simpson-Bowles Commission. In fact, Senator Gregg and I were the ones who got the Commission appointed, and he and I were 2 of the 11—five Democrats, five Republicans, one Independent—who voted in favor of the long-term plan that Bowles-Simpson put before the American people that would have reduced

the debt from what it would otherwise be by more than $4 trillion. Depending on what baseline you use, even more than that. That is the minimum we need to do.

I actually tried to convince the Commission to do $5.6 trillion. That was my proposal to the Commission, a $5.6 trillion package of deficit reduction and debt reduction. Why did I pick that? We could balance the budget in 10 years if we did.

But I do want to go back to this question about whether we have a budget right now, for this year. I say, with respect, I believe it is very clear we do. The Budget Control Act—not a budget resolution but a law—said very clearly the allocations, aggregates, and levels of spending shall apply in the Senate in the same manner as for a concurrent resolution on the budget for fiscal year 2012. That identical language follows for 2013.

So pursuant to the Budget Control Act, in April I provided to the appropriators and the authorizers these budget allocations for appropriations: For security discretionary budget authority for 2013, $546 billion; for nonsecurity discretionary budget authority, $501 billion. That is a total, onbudget, of $1,040,000,000,954; mandatory spending, $815 billion, $671 billion, for a total of $1,862,671,000,000.

Then to the authorizing committees, I went through some of these numbers previously. The Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry, $13,397 million; on entitlements for that same committee, $124,580 million; on Armed Services, $146,698 million; on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs, $22,167 million.

Again, I could go through every committee, but there it is. The appropriations spending limits have been provided to the appropriators. The authorizing committees have been given their designations. So for this year and next, it is clear we have spending limits put in place. What we don't have is the longer term plan. That is where I would agree with the gentleman. The question is, Is there any prospect of the two sides coming together, getting off their fixed positions right now? I doubt that very much.

Madam President, Senator PAUL is here and he has this time.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Kentucky.

Mr. PAUL. Madam President, we are currently borrowing $50,000 a second. We borrow $4 billion a day, and we are borrowing over $1 trillion every year.

The situation has gotten out of control, and I think the situation of our deficit and our country threatens our country. In fact, I think it is the No. 1 threat to our national security, and our security as a nation is this overwhelming burden of debt.

Many economists have said this burden of debt is actually causing us to lose 1 million jobs a year. It crowds out private investment because we have to take care of financing this enormous debt.

Amidst all of this, we have rules in place. There is a Budget Act that we have had in place since the 1970s that requires that this body put forward a budget. The problem is we have no budget and have had no budget for 3 years.

Now, one would say: How can this be when we have a law that says the majority party has to have a budget, and yet we have no budget? They are in defiance of the law. Then if you were to come to us and say you want money spent on X item, we can't even do anything about it because there are no appropriations bills. If we don't have a budget, we don't have appropriations bills, and we can't alter up or down the appropriations bills because we don't have a budget to go by.

In fact, every bit of spending we do here is in defiance of our own rules because we are supposed to compare the spending bills to the budget, and we have no budget.

Many of us have been promoting something new—this would be a balanced budget amendment to the Constitution—because we don't seem to be doing a very good job balancing the budget. When you have less money coming in, you spend less money. Every American family has to do this. Why can't Washington simply spend what comes in? It shouldn't be that complicated. But they aren't obeying their own rules, so I think we need stronger rules. That would be an amendment to the Constitution that says we must balance the budget.

We had a vote on it. Forty-seven of us on our side of the aisle voted for it, and no one on the other side voted for it. Our balanced budget amendment to the Constitution would require that the budget balance within 5 years. In that vein, our office has put together a budget that does balance in 5 years, and it actually, over a 10-year period, would reduce the deficit by $2 trillion. Ours is the only budget that will balance in 5 years and begin paying down the debt over 10 years.

Right now, Congress has an approval rating of 11 percent. Maybe that has something to do with the fact that we aren't doing our job. We aren't passing a budget, much less a balanced budget amendment. If people vote for our budget, we would balance in 5 years and begin paying down the debt. I think the stock market would be ecstatic to hear this.

How do you do this? In order to balance the budget, we have to tackle entitlement reform. Currently, Social Security is $6.2 trillion short of money. The taxes people pay into Social Security are less than what we pay out. Social Security is essentially insolvent.

You ask: Well, how come my check keeps coming?

Your check will always keep coming. As the bankruptcy grows deeper and deeper, your checks will come—they won't buy anything. You are already seeing this at the pump. Gasoline prices have doubled. Is it because gas is more precious? No. It is because the value of the dollar is shrinking. The value of the dollar is shrinking because we print all this new money to pay for this massive debt. It is unsustainable, and one way or another it is going to come to a head.

Will it come to a head through the destruction of our currency paying for this debt? I don't know, but we certainly need a budget. Ours will be a budget that balances in 5 years. People say: Why don't you compromise with the other side?

We will, but they have to have a budget. If ours balances in 5 years and the other side will promote one that balances in 10, compromise would be 7½. But if the other side doesn't have a budget or if the other side has a budget—the President put forward a budget, and we will vote on that too. His never balances. So we have infinity for their side, and we have 5 years on our side. How do we get halfway from infinity to 5 years?

If we are going to compromise, they have to come to the table. We have to engage in a debate. Entitlements are 65 percent of the budget. They call it mandatory spending, and nobody wants to do anything about it. Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid is 65 percent of the budget. If we don't tackle entitlement reform, we can't fix it. We have a proposal on the table.

Social Security reform, we fix Social Security. The way we fix it is we gradually let the age of eligibility rise to 70 over about 20 years, and we means-test the benefits—not on the current people but on the next wave. My generation will have to wait longer. Why? Is it because we want to change things? No. It is because we are living longer. We all have a longer life expectancy, and then we had smaller families. This isn't anybody's fault. It is not the Democrats' fault and it is not the Republicans' fault. We just had a bunch of large families born after World War II. They are all retiring, and each subsequent generation had less children. It is a demographic fact. Combine that with the fact that we are living longer, and we have to make changes.

But we have a proposal on the table. We will fix Social Security. How do we compromise if the other side will not come up with a proposal?

Social Security is $6 trillion in the hole. Medicare is $35 to $40 trillion in the hole. We have a solution. We will give every senior citizen in the country the same health care plan I have. The same health care plan that every Senator and Congressman has, we are willing to give it to them. Do you know whose idea this was? Senator JOHN KERRY from Massachusetts, a Democrat. We have taken his idea and put it forward, but we can't get anybody on that side to talk to us. They have given up. It is an election year. They are not going to do anything this year. They didn't do anything last year.

So we haven't done anything to fix entitlements. We have done nothing to

fix Social Security, nothing to fix Medicare. How do you compromise with a side that has no proposition, that won't put anything forward? But we have a 5-year plan that balances in 5 years, and we fix Social Security. We save Social Security in perpetuity—which, I laughingly say, is a long time.

We also fix Medicare. We save Medicare. Medicare is facing a $35 to $40 trillion deficit, and we are willing to save it. But the other side has to come to the table, and nobody is showing up to debate these issues. No one is proposing any budget on the other side. No one is proposing any entitlement reform.

In our budget we save Social Security, we save Medicare, and we go one step further. We have tax reform that would help the country and would make it fair.

Some on the other side say, well, let's get rid of all those loopholes for special interests. We do it. We do a flat tax: 17 percent for all businesses, 17 percent for all personal. You get to deduct your kids and your house, and that is it. No other deductions. No other special interest exemptions. No other special credits for any special business or special enterprise. A flat 17 percent for everybody. We would see a boom in this country like we have never seen if we would do it.

What would compromise be? Maybe the other side wants 25 percent, and I want 17 percent, and we go in the middle and we do 22 percent. That would be compromise. But how do we compromise with the other side when there is no budget? There is no entitlement reform proposed from the other side. There is no tax reform proposed from the other side. How do we compromise if there is no other side?

If the other side has decided not to show up this year—if this year is going to be a waste of time and everybody is going to just run for office, maybe we shouldn't be paid this year. Maybe you shouldn't pay your Congressman, maybe you shouldn't pay your Senator this year if we are not going to have proposals from both sides.

This means we should be talking about entitlement reform, talking about tax reform, talking about budgets, and there would be give-and-take.

The only way to get give-and-take in our country is people need to show up for the debate. We need to do our job. Why is there not a committee in Washington, not any committee—why is there not any committee meeting every day on how to fix Social Security? Nobody is talking about it. Why is there no committee discussing Medicare reform meeting every day, Republicans and Democrats, talking, figuring out a way out of this? There is no such committee.

Why is there not a committee on tax reform, discussing how we could make our Tax Code simpler and make it easier for people to figure out and make the rates lower so we could spur the economy? Every time we have lowered tax rates, unemployment is cut in half. When we had an upper rate of 90 percent and Kennedy lowered it to 70 percent, unemployment was cut in half. When Reagan lowered the top rate from 70 percent to 50 percent, unemployment was cut in half. When Reagan lowered it again from 50 to 28, unemployment was cut in half.

But we as a country have to decide that we do not want to punish rich people, that we do not want to go out and punish corporations. We work for these people. We want them to do better. The oil and gas industry employs 9.2 million people and pays $86 million a day in taxes. We want them to do better. Let's not punish them with more taxes and regulations. Let's make their taxes lower and their regulatory burden lower so they can drill for more oil in our country and employ more people in our country. These are the decisions we have to make as we go forward.

We have a budget that can balance in 5 years. It is what our country needs. I think people would react, and the marketplace in particular would react in a tremendous fashion if we would move forward and vote for a budget.

The Republicans will have four or five budgets presented. Some of them balance in 5, some of them balance in 8, some of them balance in 28. But we are at least trying. We are showing up and we are presenting budgets that would balance at some finite period of time. I tell people if it is never going to balance, it should not even be presented. If it is not going to balance in your lifetime—if you say it is going to balance in somebody else's lifetime when somebody else is going to be here in Congress—you have abdicated your responsibility. We can do better than this. The American people expect us to do better than this. The American people expect us to show up and do our job.

We will today vote on these budgets. What I ask of the American people is: Look and see how your Representatives vote. Look and see how your Senators vote. Look and see whether your Senators believe in balancing the budget or if they think it doesn't matter; we will just print up more money.

But realize if their answer is to print up more money, if their answer is deficits do not matter, if that is their answer, I want you to get mad and I want you to get angry and I want you to get even. Every time you go to the gas pump and pay $4 for gas I want you to know why gas prices are rising. Not because gas is more precious but because your dollar is less valuable, and that is because of the massive debt we run and the irresponsibility up here that nobody is willing to tackle it.

There are some on our side willing to make the tough decisions. Is it easy to stand here and say to the people in Kentucky and the people in America that the only way to save Social Security is letting the age of eligibility rise? Do you think that is popular? Do you think I am saying that to pander and try to get votes? I am saying that is because it is the only thing that is going to save Social Security, the only thing that will save our country, is we have to make difficult decisions. I think that is what needs to happen.

People need to say: Are you willing to make the tough decisions? Are you willing to stand up and say this is how we would fix Social Security; this is how we would save the system; this is how we would correct this deficit that is dragging us all down?

One side is willing to do that. I am willing to do that and I hope my fellow Senators will today consider voting to balance the budget.

I yield my time.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from North Dakota.

Mr. CONRAD. Madam President, we are waiting for a number of Senators who have sought time. They will be coming to the floor and we will hear from them momentarily.

Let me say Senator PAUL is sincere. One place I agree with him is that the country has to face up to our deficit and debt situation. As I indicated earlier, I was part of the Simpson-Bowles commission. We agreed to, and voted on, significant reforms, spending cuts, but we also used some additional revenue to have a balanced plan.

I believe that has to be the test for any of the proposals that are made here. As I see the proposals coming from our Republican colleague, they flunk that test because they are not balanced. There is nothing on the revenue side. In fact, in all of their plans, there are deep additional tax cuts aimed at the wealthiest among us. None of the Republican plans have less than a $150,000 tax cut, on average, for people with earnings of over $1 million a year.

Senator PAUL's plan is truly radical. He didn't mention a lot of the elements, but his plan includes massive tax cuts for the wealthiest among us. He scraps the entire tax system and goes to a 17-percent flat tax. That is a massive tax cut for those of us who have higher income—massive tax cut. I can tell you it would be a massive tax cut for my family.

He also cuts discretionary spending, education, and energy, by huge amounts. I will go into that in a bit. He cuts health care by almost $4 trillion.

He replaces the current progressive system with a 17-percent flat tax. He eliminates the estate tax—eliminates it. He eliminates taxes on capital gains and dividends—eliminates them. My goodness, think about what that would mean. People such as Warren Buffett would pay almost nothing in taxes. The richest people among us would pay almost nothing in taxes, because he eliminates taxes on capital gains and dividends.

But he is not so generous when it comes to lower income people. He raises taxes on lower income people by ending the earned-income tax credit and the child tax credit. He eliminates it.

Perhaps most stunning, his answer to saving Social Security is to cut the benefits 39 percent. The plan does not include a dime of revenue for Social Security. That is what Senator PAUL has before this body. Really? Is that what we should do? Massive tax cuts for the wealthiest among us and make up for it by cutting Social Security benefits 39 percent. That is the Paul plan. He increases the retirement age three times faster than the Fiscal Commission plan and he shifts to something he calls ''progressive indexing'' for those earning above $33,000, which cuts their benefits even deeper over time.

I respect his desire to do something about deficits and debt, but the answer is not massive tax cuts. Eliminate the estate tax? Eliminate capital gains taxation? No taxes—wow. Warren Buffett should send him a thank-you letter. And cut Social Security 39 percent?

I can go into the other details. He cuts energy dramatically. He cuts education. What is his education cut? I think we have it there. We will go into the specifics of the massive cuts so we can have more tax cuts for the wealthiest among us, trillions of dollars, and then cut Social Security 39 percent. That is breathtaking. We will see how many colleagues are going to stand up and support that in a vote later today.

Senator DURBIN is here. I thank him very much for his involvement. He has not only served on the Simpson-Bowles commission but also served on the group of six and has spent literally hundreds of hours trying to find a way on a bipartisan basis working together to come up with a plan that is balanced and fair, to get us back on the track and save trillions of dollars on the debt. I applaud him for it. He has shown enormous courage and also extraordinary energy trying to get our country back on track.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I thank Senator CONRAD. Let me say the retirement of Senator CONRAD from North Dakota is a great loss to the Senate and to the Nation. We have only six or seven months left to do something significant. It will be easier to do it when KENT CONRAD is working with us. I hope we can achieve it.

I also want to say for those who have come to the floor over and over to say it is time for a budget resolution, it bears repeating that we passed the Budget Control Act, which is a law. A resolution is just that, a resolution passed by the House and Senate, recommending our spending levels. A budget law passed by Congress, signed by the President, has the force of law and it in fact is going to determine our spending levels for the next year. The people who come to the floor and say isn't it about time we had a budget resolution so we knew what we were going to spend next year—we do. We passed it on a bipartisan basis. In fact, the Republican Senate leader voted for it, so it was not as though it wasn't a bipartisan effort, it was all the way, and the President signed it and it guides our spending.

Let me speak for a moment about those ''thrilling days of yesteryear,'' as they used to say on the old radio serial, going back to 2001, if you can stick with me for a minute. That was the last time the United States of America had a balanced budget. Who was President at the time? It was President Clinton, who left that budget for President Bush. That represented, I think, two or three successive years of balanced budgets.

I said to my staff: Take a look at the last time our budget was in balance, take a look at today, and compare spending and revenue between those two periods of time. I think the Senator from North Dakota told me once something like 19.6 percent of GDP in that year of balance was being spent, 19.6 percent was being raised in revenue, and there was the balance.

Now we have drifted to the point where I think spending is around 24 percent, is that close? And the actual revenue is down to 14 percent. The 10-percent delta equals the deficit.

But in specifics, what has happened in that period of time? Thanks to Senator INOUYE, chairman of the Appropriations Committee, here is a chart which tells the story. The blue line, of course, this bar, represents the spending and revenue in fiscal year 2001, the last time we had a balanced budget, and the red bar represents fiscal year 2012. I asked them to compare it and here is what we found. The security in there represents, of course, military spending, primarily military spending. In the period of time we were last in balance until today we have seen roughly a 60-percent increase in military spending—understandable, two wars, all the buildup that has been part of it—OK? A 60-percent increase.

Now let's take a look at nondefense spending. That would be everything from medical research, building highways or helping to build highways, education, basic health care. What has happened in real dollars since we were last in balance in that nonsecurity discretionary spending? Flat. Zero increase. But if you listen to the debate over the last 2 years here, you would think it was all the increase—all the increase we have seen in our deficit is attributable to these nonsecurity programs. Those are the ones we have been cutting away at. I think they represent 12 percent of the budget. We keep cutting away all these nondefense programs but they have not added to our deficit since we last were in balance.

Now look at mandatory programs. Mandatory programs, obviously Medicare and programs such as that, have seen an increase of about 30 percent because yesterday 10,000 Americans reached the age of 65, today 10,00 more, and tomorrow 10,000 more, and for the next 18 years 10,000 a day. Boomers have arrived. After paying into Social Security and Medicare for a lifetime they walk up to the window and say now it is my turn. It is understandable.

The demographics are growing for those who are covered by these mandatory programs, and the costs have been growing right along with them—a 30-percent increase.

Take a look at revenues, compared with when we were last in balance. Revenues have gone down 13 percent. Senator CONRAD and I were on the Bowles-Simpson commission and 18 of us sat there for a year-plus and listened to all this testimony about everything. Here is where we came down. He and I both voted for it. We believe the premise of the Simpson-Bowles commission is the right premise—everything must be on the table. Everything.

What do you mean by everything? Spending cuts must be on the table, both on the defense side and the nondefense side. In addition, we have to put the entitlement programs on the table. My friends, we cannot ignore this conversation. We are 11 or 12 years away from Medicare going bankrupt. We have to have a serious conversation about this, and we have to look seriously at the question of revenue.

We cannot ignore the fact that we have seen a decline in the revenue coming into the Federal Government since we last had a budget imbalance. We have to put all that on the table. I added another part that fits right into the revenue conversation, the Tax Code. This is not Holy Writ. The Tax Code is a compilation of laws passed over a long period of time that takes about $1.2 trillion out of the Treasury every year for deductions and credits and exclusions and special treatment.

They asked us at one of these meetings about the Tax Code: What do you think is the most expensive provision in the Tax Code that takes the most money out of the Treasury? I said, mortgage interest for sure. Wrong. The most expensive is the employers' exclusion of health insurance premiums. So imagine when we get into the debate about tax reform and the first item up is the biggest item up, employers' exclusion of health insurance premiums. Imagine that conversation. If we say your employer can no longer take the full deduction, what does it mean to you as an employee in terms of your out-of-pocket expense, in terms of your health insurance coverage? So I am not going to suggest tax reform is an easy exercise. It is hard, but it has to be part of the conversation.

Here is where we come down: We are having an exercise today, which is not worthless, it is important. It is an exercise in discussing the budget. What Senator CONRAD has spelled out are different visions of things. What we find coming from the other side of the aisle is primarily talk about more tax cuts—particularly for the higher income people—in the belief that that is how you

spark an economy and get it to go. I disagree with that premise. I think the way to move this forward is for working families and middle-income families to have more spending power. I don't believe we can give more money to the richest people in America and expect the economy to take off.

Also we find that many of the entitlement programs, which have now become critical safety net programs, are victims of the budget resolutions that come to the floor. I cannot imagine what life would be like for 40 million Americans on Social Security with a 39-percent cut—as Senator PAUL suggested—in Social Security benefits. Too many of these people are living on their Social Security checks and barely getting by. A 39-percent cut is cruel and unrealistic. I don't think it is going anywhere. And the notion from others that we can keep cutting taxes from the highest income categories, let me say, we will never balance the budget doing it. Never. If we don't balance the budget, we could jeopardize our economic recovery.

We have a cliff we are going to face on December 31. It is a big deal. I cannot remember a time when I have been in the House or Senate when so many things are going to happen in one day. But on December 31, all of the Bush tax cuts expire on the highest income levels as well as the lower and middle-income levels. For example, I think the 10-percent tax rate goes away, and the child tax credit is cut in half. All of these things mean more taxes for every American paying into income tax.

Secondly, we are going to see the end of the payroll tax cut—the 2-percent cut we have had for 2 years that the President put in place.

I could go through the litany. The bottom line is this: We need to start that honest conversation about the deficit now, and we need to put something on the table ready to be discussed. The group of eight—there are four Democrats and four Republicans—has been meeting for a long time. We are trying to put together a bill, something that could actually become law. I don't think it is the last word, but it may be the first word in the debate. If we cannot get anything done before the election, let's hope that the day after the election we can put this on the table and say: Here is our starting point. Let's solve the problem on a bipartisan basis, put everything on the table, and do it in a thoughtful, balanced way.

I think that is what the American people are looking for. They really are. They are beyond the charades of: Oh, this won't touch me, let's hit somebody else. I think everybody realizes we are in the soup together. If we come out of this together, think about where we will be as other Nations around the world are struggling to survive economically. I could go through the list in Europe, but we know it well. We don't want to put ourselves even close to that position.

The debt ceiling expires December 31, or soon thereafter. If we do not renew the debt ceiling, America will have defaulted on its debt for the first time in history. That is totally irresponsible. It is an invitation for the downgrading of our credit rating and the upgrading of the interest rates we pay and the upgrading of the deficit we owe. I hope the statements made by the House Speaker in the last couple of days don't reflect the position of his party when it comes to the debt ceiling. That would be a totally irresponsible act in terms of our economy.

I will join Senator CONRAD today in voting against the budget resolution that has come to the floor. But I will say this: I am glad we are having this conversation. We need to have more of them, and we need to have a bipartisan effort with both parties to make sure we deal with the current spending in a responsible way. And equally important, we need to find a way to get past the December 31 cliff in a way that will build the economy and not take away from it.

I yield the floor.

Mr. CONRAD. I thank the Senator for his leadership and the extraordinary effort he has made to get us back on track. I thank him for supporting Simpson-Bowles and the group of six that is now the group of eight. Senator DURBIN has spent hundreds of hours in good-faith negotiations to bring both sides together so we actually get a result and not the political charade that so often goes on around here, but serious solutions to serious problems.

Senator WYDEN is a very valuable member of the Budget Committee and is here on the floor. No Senator has proposed more serious solutions to America's problems than Senator WYDEN, and he has done it without the benefit of having a committee staff that he controls. He does it based on his own hard work and the work of his office staff. He has proposed major tax reform, major health care reform, and he has done it in a bipartisan way. In many ways, I think he has set an example for everybody in this Chamber.

How much time does the Senator need?

Mr. WYDEN. Approximately 12 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. FRANKEN). The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, without turning this into a bouquet-tossing contest, I want Senator CONRAD to know how much I appreciate his leadership. I also want to make sure people understand the record. If the Congress had passed the bipartisan proposal the Senator put together on the budget with Senator Judd Gregg, the Conrad-Gregg proposal—a Democrat joined with a Republican—in 2010 we could have forced an actual effort to put together a comprehensive tax reform and spending agreement. As we know—and I don't need to go over the history—some of the sponsors of the proposal were not even willing to go along. But I think it is important that the country understand we have to do this in a bipartisan way. If Senator CONRAD and Senator Judd Gregg had prevailed in 2010, we could have forced actual spending reductions and tax reform in a bipartisan effort. I sure wish we had proceeded with it. And as one who supported it, I still think that would have been preferable.

For 7 years before being elected to the Congress, I had the honor of serving senior citizens. I ran the Senior Citizens Legal Aid Office, I served as the public advocate on our State's nursing home board, and I taught gerontology at several of our universities.

What I enjoyed most was the personal contact I had with senior citizens as a voluntary board member of our senior nutrition program. It is known as Loaves and Fishes, and through it I could bring meals to seniors at their homes on a number of occasions as part of the Meals on Wheels Program. Meals on Wheels is one part of government that truly understands the connection between the heart and the head. It touches the heart because I saw when we bring a nutritious meal to seniors, we can spend time visiting with them at home. Often they will tell us that we are the only visitor they will have during that day. It causes us to use our head and a sharp pencil. We can see without Meals on Wheels, as sure as the night follows the day, some of those seniors are not going to be able to stay in the community. They will end up needing institutional services, and those services are more costly. And, of course, seniors will often be less happy with those kinds of institutional programs.

I bring up Meals on Wheels today because several of the proposals that are offered by colleagues on the other side of the aisle are not going to be bipartisan because they substantially cut the part of the budget that funds Meals on Wheels. Through our research we specifically found that in several instances it will be between 17 and 59 percent in just the upcoming year.

Putting Meals on Wheels at risk like that defies common sense. I have already indicated from a compassion standpoint alone it warrants support. But even if Meals on Wheels doesn't grab your heart the way it does for me, it certainly ought to get the attention of your head because it is the kind of program that lets seniors have more of what they want, which is to be at home at less price to the taxpayers. It defies common sense to not be bipartisan in terms of approaching something like Meals on Wheels.

I think what is common sense is what Chairman CONRAD and other colleagues have touched on, and that is tackling the big issues in a bipartisan way. Certainly when it comes to Medicare, that is what is needed. I would only say, having worked in this area, we ought to start with the fact that we are looking at—I am not the first to describe this—a demographic tsunami. For the next 20 years we are going to

have 10,000 seniors turning 65 every single day—10,000 seniors turning 65 every single day.

Fortunately, we have made a commitment in this country to those senior citizens, and it is called the Medicare guarantee. That is the commitment we have made to older people. It is a commitment to good quality, affordable health care. And if absolutely nothing is done, it is a commitment at risk. If nothing is done, the Medicare guarantee is in peril. My own sense is that if nothing is done, Medicare—as Senator CONRAD pointed out, it is already facing cuts with sequestration—will face a steady diet of benefit cuts and cost shifting until we do not recognize the Medicare guarantee as it stands today. That is unacceptable to me. It ought to be unacceptable to every Member of the Senate.

As Chairman CONRAD has noted, Medicare reform is going to have to be bipartisan. The reason I believe that is that if it is not, much like we saw with health care reform, if it is done on a partisan vote, as soon as the ink is dry on the signature of the passed bill, the other side will move to undo it or repeal it or radically alter it. I say the Medicare guarantee is too important for that, and that is why I, with other colleagues on both sides of the aisle and the help of the chairman, have been working to get bipartisan Medicare reform ready and teed up for enactment at the first possible opportunity. It is outlined on my Web site, Bipartisan Options for Reform. I am interested in working with every colleague here in the Senate to pursue it.

Here is what it is going to take: First and foremost, it will protect the most vulnerable seniors, what are called the dual eligibles, which are seniors who are eligible for both Medicare and Medicaid. The protections for those dual eligibles must be ironclad.

Unfortunately, a number of the offerings we are going to see from colleagues on the other side do not ensure ironclad protections for these vulnerable seniors—the dual eligibles—and by block-granting Medicaid, they put at risk the most vulnerable seniors, the seniors who need nursing home care that is paid for by Medicaid, and since Medicaid is a Federal-State program, by block-granting it, we put at risk the most vulnerable seniors. That is certainly not in line with what people will see on my Web site that outlines bipartisan approaches on which Democrats and Republicans can come together for Medicare reform.

The second part of Medicare reform is to ensure that we protect traditional Medicare. Traditional Medicare mandates that the government pay doctors and other providers for services, as well as providing private sector choices that have to offer coverage that is at least as good as traditional Medicare. By doing that, we force traditional Medicare and the private choices to hold each other accountable. It is going to be pretty hard to protect traditional Medicare and its purchasing power with some of what we are going to see later this afternoon that actually proposes to end traditional Medicare within the space of 2 years.

Third, Medicare reform—and we went into this in a very good hearing that was held in Chairman CONRAD's Budget Committee—is going to require comprehensive consumer protection. I have been involved in this since the days when I would go visit senior citizens and they would bring out a shoe box full of health insurance policies that weren't worth the paper on which they were written. It was a Medigap scandal that we finally fixed in 1990. I have seen how these rip-off artists try to exploit our seniors. So at Chairman CONRAD's hearing we talked about comprehensive consumer protections and specifically ensuring that any Medicare reform would have to have a strong risk-adjustment program so that if, for example, any network of health care providers or an insurer took mostly healthy people, their contribution from the government would be far less than the contribution that would be afforded for a program that took a greater number of older people with health challenges.

So I bring this up only by way of saying I am committed to bipartisan Medicare reform. I think Medicare is really sacred ground. It can only be preserved and protected by ensuring that we take the steps I have just outlined—three or four of them this afternoon—which ensure that we put seniors and their well-being before ideology and politics. This afternoon we are going to hear several alternatives offered by colleagues from the other side of the aisle that, in my view, don't do that, don't meet that test. In effect, we are going to be dealing with ideology rather than the kinds of principles I have outlined here today that I think can win support from colleagues on both sides of the aisle and that people can see on my own Web site have attracted the support of influential Republican voices.

So we have a test to meet. It is a test that builds on a bipartisan approach to a program that is sacred—I ask unanimous consent for 1 additional minute.

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

Mr. WYDEN. —and that is built around a Medicare guarantee that must be protected and preserved. A number of the proposals we will get from the other side this afternoon don't meet that test.

I want colleagues to know that I am committed to working with them to produce what America wants in this Congress; that is, bipartisan Medicare reform that ensures that this very special program prospers in the days ahead. We are up to it. We are up to it if we build on the bipartisan example Senator CONRAD started years ago with Senator Gregg.

With that, I yield the floor.

Mr. CONRAD. I thank the Senator. I thank him for the extraordinary work he has done on the Budget Committee. I thank him for the extraordinary work he has done as an individual Senator to propose bipartisan tax reform, bipartisan Medicare reform, and the kinds of thoughtful solutions we so desperately need.

I see Senator LAUTENBERG is here. We are glad to have the Senator. How much time would the Senator like?

Mr. LAUTENBERG. Mr. President, I ask for recognition from the Presiding Officer to move ahead with my statement.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota.

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I wish to inform the Senator from New Jersey that Senator ALEXANDER is scheduled to be here at 12:30 or thereabouts, so if the Senator could consume about that amount of time, we can make this all work.

Mr. LAUTENBERG. We will give the Senator a good greeting.

Mr. CONRAD. I thank the Senator.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. LAUTENBERG. Mr. President, one thing we know is that a budget isn't just a collection of numbers, it is an expression of principles and priorities and direction.

While I have the floor, I will take a moment to say to our friend and colleague from North Dakota that he has been one of the strongest chiefs of the Budget Committee. I sat on the Budget Committee for a long time. I think it is fair to say, Republican or Democrat, the Senator from North Dakota deserves the thanks and respect from everybody here for the detail and for the arduous task he took on to make sure our budgets were clear. No matter how often the challenges came, Senator CONRAD would stand and give the background and give the details that got him to a point of view, and we are grateful, and we will certainly miss his presence here.

The budgets the Republicans have put forward today confirm their true priorities.

I had a good business career before coming to the Senate, and I remember that during the Second World War we raised taxes on high incomes and on excess profits because the country needed the revenues. We needed to make investments.

Again, the budgets the Republicans have put forward today confirm their true priorities. What are they? They really are pushing, working hard to make sure people who make millions can get tax breaks. It is a little hard to understand, with the shortages we have and needing to invest in more programs, that they are worried about those who make more than $1 million a year. I have had a good business career, and I want to make sure our country is strong, and I want to make sure my contribution is included among those who should be paying.

What Republicans do not seem to care about in their budgeting is seniors, children, and middle-class Americans. At a time when our economy is

fighting against strong headwinds and too many Americans are out of work, the Republicans are offering the same old prescriptions: tax cuts for the rich and austerity for everyone else.

Now, I have seen this country of ours through adversity many times, and I have seen it come out stronger on the other side. But our recoveries have never been spurred by starving the middle class while giving tax breaks to the wealthy. Prosperity has never trickled down from the wealthy few. Prosperity has always grown up from a broad middle class. We can't build a building starting with a chimney, and we can't build a society's strength by starting from the top. It has to have a foundation at the bottom that is strong and has the ability to support the needs of our total society.

But a strong middle class depends on a first-rate educational system—and forgive the personal annotation here for a moment more. When I got out of the Army—I was a high school graduate. I enlisted when I was 18, and I was lucky. I was able to get an education paid for by the government. I was one of 8 million soldiers—service people—who got our education paid for virtually because of the fact that we had served in the military. As a result, half of those who were in uniform—8 million out of 16 million—got a college education.

I can tell my colleagues that it enabled me, working with two colleagues, to start a company that the three of us founded, a company that took years and years to build. Slowly and energetically it began to develop. Today that company produces the labor statistics every month for the worldwide knowledge of what is happening with working people, what their wages are, what employment is like. The name of the company is ADP. We have 50,000 employees now. We were three poor boys with nothing going for us except the willingness to work hard, and that is the value. What did we get? It was determined that was the greatest generation. Why? Because an education was given to so many who could learn but didn't have the ability to get to college.

What we need is a society with affordable and accessible health care and a tax system where everyone pays their fair share.

The Republican budgets include vicious cuts to the middle class. Just look at what they do to education. They slash funding for education by $19 billion. They want to do that now when we desperately need the skills and the knowledge that education brings and the opportunity for invention and creation. They want to take away $19 billion. That is not going to help us get out of the hole we are in.

The Ryan budget coming from the House of Representatives would cut education, as I pointed out, by $19 billion. They don't want us to see the specific programs they cut, but let's look at the devastating consequences if their cuts were distributed evenly.

I don't know whether Head Start is a familiar operation in our country, but it is one of the most valuable. I believe there are about a million children who participate in the program. Look at the face of this child, looking through a narrow prism. There are 200,000 of these children who will be told: Stay home. There is no room for you. We can't afford to pay for you.

I recently went to a Head Start school in New Jersey and I met the children. I am such a professional grandfather that all little kids look beautiful to me. I met the children. What they were learning was that learning is fun. Words mean something. Pictures mean something. They were prepared, when they got to kindergarten or first grade, to say that learning is good.

I met a child there. The children lined up to greet me. This is a school that is bilingual.

I said: What is your name?

The little boy standing in front of me said: My name is Julio.

So I put my hand out to shake his hand, and he pushed it aside and instead he wrapped his arms around my legs and gave me a hug. All the little kids who followed thought he was the leader, so they all gave me hugs. It was one of the best days I have had, to see what happens when we treat these little kids to an opportunity to learn. Imagine slashing funding for a program that will help children learn how to learn.

These cuts are shortsighted. They are cruel. Ten million college students could see their Pell grants cut by more than $1,000 in 2014—very painful.

With less support and rising costs for higher education, young people would be forced to take on more debt in order to attend college because we see college tuition is going up rapidly across the country.

The Republican budgets address student debt too. They would let the interest rate on the new student loans double, increase by twice. It is an outrage. Why are Republicans putting obstacles in front of young people seeking an education? I never would have been able to attend, as I said, Columbia University without that government help for me and the services that ADP provides. It enabled me to cofound one of America's most successful companies. The investment this country made when we came home from World War II helped to create the momentum and direction of this country with decades of prosperity.

But instead of offering a helping hand to this generation of students, the Republican proposals close the door in their faces. Government investments in science, technology, and medical research are cut by more than $100 billion over the next 10 years. Medical research funding alone could take a hit of nearly $6 billion by 2014.

What does that do? It delays research on new treatments for diseases such as cancer, childhood asthma, and juvenile diabetes. Imagine telling a parent of a sick child that we could not help find the money to help him get back with his friends out in the play yard or the schoolroom or going to school on a regular basis. Is that where America wants to be? Right now we are finding across the country that there is a greater likelihood that autism will enter into a family's difficulties with a child being born with autism. How can we say no when we see, in my State alone, that 1 in 29 male babies has autism? That is a plague. That is a terrible statistic.

Then we want to talk about cutting back on health research? In their budgets, instead of helping seniors retire with dignity, Republicans have proposed to end Medicare as we know it, giving seniors a voucher instead of guaranteed care. If that voucher cannot cover the cost of needed medical services, Republicans say: Hey, too bad; you are on your own. We have heard comments from them saying: Well, so what if you are poor. It does not matter.

I look at this chart that says: ''Ends Medicare As We Know It To Provide Tax Cuts For The Wealthy.'' They want to say that to people who need the care, who are fortunate enough now under present conditions to be able to have long-term care with a disease that is terminal.

The Republican plan would also cut Medicaid. Medicaid is a program for those less able to provide for themselves because of low income or no income. The Republican plans also want to cut that by more than $800 billion over 10 years. Medicaid provides vital resources such as pregnancy services for expectant mothers and nursing home care for seniors.

We created Medicare and Medicaid because it was decided in this country as a society that we have to be there for seniors and the poor when they get sick. But now the Republicans are proposing to break that promise. They seem to do it without shame.

Republicans are not even exempting the hungry from their cuts. They would eliminate food stamps for up to 10 million Americans over the next decade.

In their obsession with austerity, they cut through far more than the fat in the budget. They cut into the bone.

Many on the other side—and I do not say all; a lot of people on the other side are good people concerned about their constituents, concerned about what happens—but many on that side say balancing the budget is the mission, the only mission. And in order to do it, they want to make sure that includes a high priority for tax breaks for the millionaires.

We could reduce our deficit if we required the wealthiest among us to pay at least the same tax rate as middle-class Americans on all of their income. But, instead, a Republican budget would give millionaires an average tax cut of almost $400,000 a year. Their

plan shreds the safety net for seniors and the poor while padding the mattress for the rich.

I ask my colleagues, please get your priorities straight. America needs your help across the board. Your families, your neighbors, your State, all need your help. Millionaires do not need more tax cuts, and they certainly should not get them at the expense of seniors, children, and the middle class.

With that, I yield the floor.

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I thank the Senator.

Senator ALEXANDER is next. I wonder if we could enter into a quick time agreement to get the next Senators slotted. That might help us manage the floor, I would say to my colleague, Senator SESSIONS.

Mr. SESSIONS. Right. I believe Senator TOOMEY is here and would be prepared to go next after Senator ALEXANDER.

Mr. CONRAD. We have Senator REED slotted in between.

I wonder if we could propose—I say to Senator ALEXANDER, how much time would you like?

Mr. ALEXANDER. Well, Mr. President, what I wish to request is—Senator COONS and I were hoping to introduce a piece of legislation on another matter and talk about it. I think, given the focus on the budget here, I am going to suggest to Senator COONS, who will be coming here at 12:45, that we just mention our bill. If he could have time to do that, and then we would stay focused on the budget, and we will talk about the other matter tomorrow.

So what I wish to do, if I may suggest, is ask that I have 5 minutes to speak on the budget and maybe 5 minutes to speak on the other matter, for Senator COONS to be recognized for 5 minutes, and that would take all of the time I would ask for.

Mr. CONRAD. The problem is, we are oversubscribed by that. It is difficult to—we have not been yielding for things that are not budget related, I would say to the Senator. So I wonder if it would be agreeable if the Senator would take 5 minutes on the budget, we come back to Senator REED, if he could take 5 minutes on the budget, and then we go to Senator TOOMEY for 15 minutes on the budget because he has a substantive budget alternative that deserves additional time.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I think that is a reasonable request. I wonder if I might ask on behalf of Senator COONS that if he should come to the floor during that period, he be recognized for 1 minute to simply stand up and say he was planning to do this, but we will defer the introduction of our bill until tomorrow out of respect for the budget discussion.

Mr. CONRAD. I appreciate that very much.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that Senator ALEXANDER be recognized for 5 minutes on the budget, Senator REED of Rhode Island for 5 minutes on the budget, then Senator TOOMEY for 15 minutes on the budget, and if Senator COONS comes after that point he be recognized for a minute on a separate matter, and then we come back to Senator WHITEHOUSE for 8 minutes. If we could lock those in I think that would help all Members.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, am I now recognized for 5 minutes?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Thank you, Mr. President. Please let me know when 30 seconds is remaining.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Chair will do so.

FOREIGN STUDENT LEGISLATION

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, Senator COONS will come to the floor in a few minutes. He and I have been working together on legislation that many Senators on both sides of the aisle support.

Very simply, it pins a green card on the lapel of any foreign student who is involved in science, engineering, technology graduate programs who gets a degree and who wants to stay in the United States and work. What we would like for them to do, instead of going home to create the next Google in India or China or some other country, is to stay here and create it here.

The legislation has broad support. It is a recommendation of the American Competes Act which I worked on and many others did in 2005 and 2007. We will come to the floor and talk about that tomorrow. But I wanted to salute Senator COONS for his leadership on this issue and recognize it.

Now I will turn to the budget with my remaining time.

Former Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan recently said the worst mistake President Obama made was not embracing his own fiscal commission's recommendations to reduce our debt by $4 trillion over the next 10 years.

Today, our national debt is more than $15.6 trillion, which is nearly $1.9 trillion higher than it was when the fiscal commission released its recommendations and $6.4 trillion higher than when President Obama was sworn in. In January 2013, the first thing the next President will have to do is to ask the Congress to increase the debt ceiling. The fundamental problem is that Washington does not know how to balance its checkbook.

The President has proposed a budget that raises taxes by $1.9 trillion over the next 10 years and still spends more than it takes in every year, instead of endorsing the fiscal commission's recommendations—or any other plan to address our Nation's fiscal crisis. According to the Congressional Budget Office, under the President's budget, interest on our debt will triple over the next 10 years, and by 2022 we will be spending more in interest than we spend on national defense.

This is an irresponsible proposal, and instead of playing politics we should be working together on a plan to address the debt, which is the most urgent problem facing our country and, according to former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen, the biggest threat to our national security.

The Simpson-Bowles fiscal commission plan, the Domenici-Rivlin plan, and the Gang of Six proposal all offer bipartisan blueprints for how to address it. Each of these proposals would reform the Tax Code and restructure entitlement spending—the main source of our dangerous Federal debt—so that seniors can count on Medicare and Social Security and taxpayers can afford them.

Mandatory entitlement spending, which is 58 percent of the Federal budget, is growing at nearly 3 times inflation and bankrupting our country. Discretionary spending, which funds our national defense, our highways, our national parks, and National Laboratories, is only 36 percent of the Federal budget and is growing at the rate of inflation. Focusing our budget cutting on discretionary spending is just a way for Congress—to use the President's words—to kick the can down the road. The real work is reducing the growth of mandatory spending.

Although the Senate is not debating its own budget resolution, going 1,113 days without passing a budget, we are debating several proposals. I do not agree with every one of these, but I do support the House-passed budget because it is a serious proposal to cut out-of-control spending and help solve our fiscal crisis.

I will also support the proposal offered by Senator TOOMEY. Even though it cuts nondefense discretionary spending to 2006 levels, which I believe is too low, it reforms mandatory entitlement spending, it closes tax loopholes, it lowers tax rates, and it would save Medicare for future generations.

Senator TOOMEY and I have also discussed the possibility of allowing States to have the option of choosing per capita caps on their average Medicaid expenditures per beneficiary as an alternative to traditional block grants, and I am encouraged by these discussions.

Last August, I supported the Budget Control Act because it was an opportunity to take an important step in the right direction.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator has 30 seconds remaining.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Thank you, Mr. President.

The House-passed budget and the budget proposed by Senator TOOMEY are opportunities to take the next step after the Budget Control Act. I look forward to working with them to adopt a responsible budget that grows the economy and reduces our debt.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

STUDENT LOAN INTEREST

Mr. REED. In 46 days, the interest rate on subsidized student loans will be doubled. Zeroing in on these budgets that are before us, all of them seem to support the essence of the Ryan budget, which is to allow this to happen. In fact, the Ryan budget in the House not only allowed a doubling of student interest rates, it also recommended eliminating the in-school interest subsidies for student loans, putting middle-class families at a particularly severe disadvantage.

We have 46 days to stop this increase on the interest charges to middle-income students. We have to act. We have seen denial, delay, and disruption. We have not seen the cooperation we need to help students and families throughout this country.

The budget before us not only allows this interest rate to double, but it will also, through its tax policies, favor the wealthiest and not those who are struggling in the middle simply to get ahead or simply to stay where they are. One of the other interesting aspects of the proposal is that as we look at this student rate interest doubling, my colleagues on the other side have said: We will fix it. We are for fixing it. But, again, ask yourself: If they are for it, why are they voting for several budgets today that would, in fact, support the doubling? It seems to be an incongruity I cannot understand.

In addition to that, they said: Well, if we are going to go ahead and stop this doubling of the rate, let's do it by paying for it with the prevention fund, which is a program in health care that I think, over time, is not only going to help families all across this country, but it is going to begin to do what we have all said we have to do, bend that cost curve for health care.

Instead of a debate about how to pay for this in a responsible way—and we are certainly open to proposals if they have them, other than this prevention fund, which I think is a nonstarter—they have suggested that our proposal, which is to close an egregious loophole in the Tax Code, is somehow a tax increase or somehow does not do the job. But Politifact, which is an objective body that looks at these various charges, has evaluated one claim that, in fact, our offset is a tax increase. Here is what they say:

> Actually, the bill changed tax rules only for S-corporations, and only on professionals like lawyers and accountants who could be taking advantage of the tax code to avoid paying payroll taxes. The Democrats took the additional step of saying the rule change would only apply to individuals who reported more than $200,000 in income.
>
> The bill's intent was to close a loophole on people who are avoiding payroll taxes, taxes that they are supposed to pay anyway.

The Republican criticism ''gives the impression that all kinds of mom-and-pop operations might be subject to new, additional taxes, when actually the bill is aimed squarely at high-income professionals who are taking advantage of a loophole.

The claim was rated by this organization as false. We are closing a loophole that benefits the wealthy and some of the most powerful interests in this country in order to allow middle-income families to send their children to school. I cannot think of anything more sensible or anything more fair.

I will just return to the final point about these budgets. As I read them, they, by and large, echo the Ryan budget, which allows for a doubling of the interest rate on students and does other things that will harm middle-income and middle-class people all to benefit the wealthiest through additional tax cuts. That is not good fiscal policy, not good educational policy. It is not good policy for the growth of this country, to invest in education, and it is not fair. I would hope that we would reject them.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Delaware.

Mr. COONS. Mr. President, I rise to join my colleague, Senator ALEXANDER, in briefly making reference to a bill which we introduced today and which we will speak about in more detail on the Senate floor tomorrow.

At the moment, the Senate is engaged in an important and purposeful debate on the budget. I support Chairman CONRAD and his leadership of our Budget Committee. We will cast a series of other important and difficult votes on budget matters later today. But I take 1 minute to say that at a time when there is not enough bipartisanship, I am grateful to Senator ALEXANDER for his leadership and for working with me on an issue that will, I hope, move forward—the debate on how we make the promise and the opportunity of America open to more real job creators.

The record shows that a significant number of the most innovative and fastest growing companies in America were founded by immigrants. Immigrants have long contributed significantly to our culture, to our strength, and to our competitiveness. I think this particular bill, which opens a new class of visa for students from outside the United States who would pursue master's or doctoral programs in STEM, is an important step forward.

There are many other issues in immigration we need to resolve. There are many other elements we need to reform. But I am grateful for the chance to work with Senator ALEXANDER on this bill and will address it further tomorrow.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. UDALL of New Mexico). The Senator from Pennsylvania.

Mr. TOOMEY. Mr. President, I rise to speak on the budget resolution I have introduced and on which we will have a vote later today, at least on a motion to proceed. I want to start with underscoring the magnitude of the challenge we face. We have a full-blown crisis that awaits. It could arrive at any moment virtually if we do not change the course we are on.

The deficit we have in 2012, $1.3 trillion, is the fourth consecutive year with a deficit of over $1 trillion. We are now routinely running deficits that are 7, 8, 9 percent of GDP. Of course, every year we run a deficit, the excessive spending over the tax revenue has to be funded by more borrowing. So we have the mounting debt that is now at stunning levels. For much of the post-war era, after the big repayment of debt after World War II, the national debt fluctuated somewhere around 40 percent of our total economic output.

Today our actual debt held by the public is 73 percent of our total economic output, and that is just the publicly held debt. That does not include the liabilities within the government, which, if you add that, is up to 100 percent of our total economic output. This has never ended well for a country that last chose to run up massive deficits and massive debt. I would argue that we are seeing exactly how this typically plays out. We are seeing it across the Atlantic in Europe where countries are a little further down this road than we are today, having run big structural deficits for longer than we have, and having accumulated more debt as a percentage of GDP than we have thus far.

We see what has happened, especially in countries such as Greece where it is particularly acute, and other countries, especially on the periphery of Europe, that arguably are not terribly far behind. This is completely unsustainable, and I think what we are witnessing today on the Senate floor is that there is one party in this Chamber that is addressing the problem. There is one party that is proposing very specific solutions.

It is perfectly reasonable to have objections and disagreements with any number of elements in my budget resolution or Senator PAUL's or Senator LEE's or the Ryan budget. But what I do not understand is how the majority party, the party that is actually in control of this Chamber, can think that it is OK not to have an alternative, not to offer a vision, not to offer a solution to the biggest problem we face as a nation and one that is imminent; one that if left unaddressed certainly will result in a crisis. It is just a question of when.

So I think this is an unacceptable abdication of responsibility. But that is where we are. I would argue that what got us into this problem is too much spending. Look at the numbers. They speak volumes. Since 2000, Federal spending has more than doubled. We took spending, which was as recently as 2007 only a little over 19 percent of our total economic output, and grew that to 24 percent of our economic output. That is a tremendous surge, not just in the absolute dollars in spending but in the relative size of spending relative to our economy.

President Obama's budget is not a serious attempt to deal with this. It was

put on the floor of the House of Representatives and got precisely zero votes. It failed 414 to 0, meaning not a single Democrat wanted to vote for the President's proposal. I can understand why. The President's proposal is to increase spending, increase taxes, and increase debt.

The President's proposal claims to level off debt as a percentage of GDP for a brief time but then starts to grow again. The reason the President absolutely refuses to offer a budget resolution that solves this problem is because he refuses to deal with the real underlying driver of this, which we all know are the big entitlement programs.

The current structure of these programs is unsustainable. If anyone doubts it, look at what CBO has shown us and has told us. By 2021, 9 years from now, if we take three categories of Federal spending: the Social Security Program, interest on our debt, and health care entitlements, those three things combined will consume almost 90 percent of all of the revenue we can realistically hope to collect, if the last several decades are any indication of what we are going to collect.

How could it possibly be that we would continue down this path where those three categories are going to consume virtually the entire budget? I would also observe it is a simple matter of arithmetic that no significant Federal Government program can grow faster than the economy for very long because everything has to be paid for by the economy. In fact, it has to be paid for by some fraction of the economy. If we have a big program that is consistently growing much faster than the economy, well, it will consume everything. Then these programs will collapse, and then what are we going to do?

Rather than waiting for that day to come, some of us are proposing specific solutions for this problem. Medicare is growing much faster than the economy. Medicaid is growing, arguably, at least two times as fast as the economy. Other mandatory health care programs, if President Obama gets his way, will grow even faster.

This is all completely unsustainable, and we are going to fix this problem. The question is whether we fix it while we have this window of time, when we are still able to borrow the massive sums that we are borrowing, or will we wait until we have a full blown crisis, the bond market shuts us down, and then we have sudden Draconian and very disruptive and painful decisions to make.

I would rather do this while we have this moment, change the course we are on, and establish a sustainable fiscal path. So I have submitted a budget for the second consecutive year that puts us on a path to balance. My budget balances within the 10-year historical window of the budget resolutions. It actually balances in the eighth year and runs a very modest budget surplus in the ninth year.

I do that in part by reducing the total level of spending relative to GDP as compared to the alternative budgets, specifically the President's alternative or CBO's. I cannot compare it to the Senate's Democratic alternative budget because that does not exist. We have no idea what the Senate Democratic proposal is, but I have one.

So I will elaborate on that a little bit. My proposal is that we get spending down to about 18.3 percent of GDP. That is about the same level revenue has been historically, which thereby brings our budget into balance. Some of my colleagues have suggested there are Draconian spending cuts that will get us there. Well, let me be very specific about what spending cuts are necessary to achieve this.

In 2013, spending in my budget is 2.9 percent below what it is in 2012, which means the Federal Government will spend—under my budget, it would spend 97.1 percent of everything it spent the previous year. People can decide whether that constitutes Draconian cuts.

Now, here is the amazing thing. After that, on average, over the 10-year window, my budget calls for Federal spending to increase—in fact, to increase at about a rate of 3 percent per year nominally. See, this is my point. This is a solvable problem. All we need to do is cut out some of the excess, restructure certain programs, and allow the government spending to grow. It just cannot grow quite as rapidly as it is currently projected to do.

If we get that under control, we can put ourselves on a sustainable path.

Another part of this is to have policies that maximize economic growth. I mean that is an important goal in and of itself, but it is also a path to restoring balance because stronger growth generates more revenue for the Treasury.

Well, my budget would do that without raising taxes. What I would do is have progrowth tax reform. That is comparable in spirit and in the right direction. It goes to all of the bipartisan commissions that have looked at this, whether it is Simpson-Bowles or Rivlin-Domenici or any of the others. I know there is broad bipartisan consensus on the principle that we would have stronger economic growth if we simplified the code, broaden the base on which we apply taxes, and then apply those taxes but at lower marginal rates. That is what my budget calls for. It should not be all that controversial to move in this direction of tax simplification, lowering marginal rates, and offsetting the lost revenue by reducing the value of deductions and loopholes and writeoffs. That is what my budget asks for.

There are a couple of areas that I think are important where there is bipartisan support for elements within my budget. One is, the President of the United States suggested in his budget that very wealthy senior citizens contribute a little bit more for the Medicare benefits that they obtain. Some means testing already occurs within Medicare. But I happen to agree with the President that it is reasonable, especially under these circumstances, to ask the wealthiest members of our society to pay a little more for the benefits they are getting from the government.

So my budget adopts the President's proposal of expanding means testing, expanding the contribution we would ask from the wealthiest Americans for their Medicare benefits.

I also include in my budget long-term reform for Medicare that makes it more viable. This has been much maligned despite the fact that one of our Democratic colleagues, Senator WYDEN, supports this approach as well.

I wish to emphasize that this is a different plan than what it was last year. Last year there was a criticism that any premium support model that establishes the amount of money given to seniors to purchase health care at a fixed dollar amount was a flawed approach because what if health care costs rose more rapidly than that amount could afford to pay for? That is a valid concern.

There is a different dynamic, a different mechanism in the House-passed budget, and in my budget, and I think it is part of the reason a Democratic Senator has embraced this, and Alice Rivlin, a former senior member of the Clinton administration, supports this. You set the premium based on the second lowest bid for the health care services we want to provide, thereby ensuring that a senior citizen would have enough money to purchase that plan. Not only that but we go further and include the traditional fee-for-service Medicare system to which seniors are currently accustomed—we include that as one of the plans that could bid. So it is absolutely the case that any senior citizen who wanted to stay with the traditional fee-for-service Medicare Program could do so under the reform plan.

I happen to believe that in an innovative marketplace, there will be more attractive options. I happen to know that under this system, a lot of seniors—my parents included—have to wait forever to see a doctor, and part of the problem is the dysfunctional system we have now. It is already costing us access and quality in health care.

I think this reform will make Medicare a better program for the people who need it. Yes, we will ask the wealthy to pay a little more for it. That is reasonable. Those seniors who want to stay in traditional Medicare can do that too. In the process, you can put this on a sustainable path. It has some bipartisan support. Mr. President, we don't really know the extent of that because our Democratic colleagues refuse to put a budget or mark up a budget in committee, present one on the floor.

I will close with this request, which is to vote for the motion to proceed.

Let's get on to my budget and have a debate about this, and let's see where people are. I don't know how we are ever going to reach the compromise we need to reach to put us on a sustainable path if one party is consistently putting out a whole range of ideas and the other party refuses. How do you negotiate with somebody who doesn't have a position? How do you have that discussion?

I don't know how many of my Democratic colleagues agree with the President of the United States and my own thought that we ought to ask wealthy seniors to pay a little more for Medicare benefits. If we get on the bill, we could have a debate and have amendments. I think this is too big and too important an issue not to address. The way to address it is to vote yes on the motion to proceed to get on a budget resolution, and then let's have that discussion and let the American people see it. Let's take their ideas and all of the ideas we have and see if we can make some progress.

There is an unambiguous fact that I want to underscore. There is one party showing up at this debate—the three Republican Senators who are proposing budget resolutions, comprehensive documents that address the entitlement reform we need, the discretionary spending limit we need, and the tax reform that will help grow this economy and generate the revenue we need. We have done that. As I say, it is perfectly fair and legitimate to criticize any aspect of any of that, but I think there is an obligation especially of the majority to offer its view, its alternative.

I urge my colleagues to vote in favor of this motion to proceed and allow us to get on with addressing the single most pressing problem facing our country, which is restoring a fiscally viable path that allows us to have strong economic growth.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota.

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I think we allocated 8 minutes to Senator WHITEHOUSE.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator is correct.

Mr. CONRAD. That was part of a unanimous consent agreement so that we could manage the time on the floor better. We have, I say to the Senator, 60 minutes left on our side. I think they have 100 minutes left on their side. We have seven Senators left.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Eight minutes just about works, from the math.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. I thank the chairman, Senator CONRAD, for his leadership on this important issue.

I would note for the record that with the conclusion of Senator TOOMEY's remarks, following Senator REED, I think for the first time in the history of the Senate we had back-to-back presentations by two separate Senators who were graduates of LaSalle Academy in Providence, RI—noteworthy, perhaps, in Rhode Island.

I did note in his remarks his references to the magnitude of this challenge, to the full-blown crisis he perceives, to the completely unsustainable nature of our outward debt, that this is too big and too important not to address, and that this is the single most pressing problem our country faces—all of which might lead one to conclude that this would be the most important thing they would pursue. Yet we know it is less important to them to address our debt problem than it is to protect oil and gas subsidies for Big Oil at a time when their profits are unprecedented; it is less important than protecting tax loopholes that allow high-income individuals to incorporate themselves and avoid paying FICA taxes; it is less important to them than protecting special tax rates that allow people making $100 million a year to pay a lower tax rate than a family making $100,000 a year. So it seems that when you actually look at practice—what their priorities are—this isn't quite the priority they claim it is.

I agree there are other priorities we face as a country. This July, unless we move quickly, student loan interest rates will double, which will hurt our economy, our growth, and it will hit families across this country. We brought forward a plan to keep those rates down, but our colleagues filibustered it. Our Nation's highway program will expire next month, jeopardizing millions of jobs. We voted overwhelmingly on a bipartisan basis to reauthorize the highway bill and move forward on it, only to have our bipartisan highway bill stalled by House Republicans. Republicans may talk about jobs, but they are busily stalling the most important jobs bill we have. That stalling and delay will cost jobs because of the summer building season in so many of our States.

One thing that has not been urgent has been to pass a budget. Why is that? Well, it is because we already have one. This whole exercise today rests on a false premise. The false premise is that we have no budget. Last summer Congress passed and the President signed into law the bipartisan Budget Control Act, which sets binding discretionary spending levels for a decade and establishes budget levels for the current fiscal year and next, which our appropriations committees are now working under—Republicans and Democrats together. But you would not know this when listening to Senate Republicans. Instead of focusing on real issues, where real jobs are at stake, they are wasting a day of floor time on extremist tea party budgets. They also plan to force a vote on what they describe as the ''Obama budget.''

I plan to vote against all of the motions to proceed for the simple reason that we already have a budget in place that we voted on and agreed to for next year. Today's votes are nothing more than a Republican attempt to promote a radical and unwelcome agenda of slashing middle-class programs while protecting and enlarging tax giveaways for the ultrarich.

Let's make no mistake about what this would do to middle-class families. The House Republican budget would start by cutting taxes for big corporations and the ultrarich, adding $4.6 trillion to our national debt. To pay for these extra tax cuts, the Republicans would decimate programs on which regular American families at some point in their lives come to rely. They start by ending Medicare as we know it. Beginning for workers who retire in 2023, the House Republican budget would make it a voucher system, which, according to the nonpartisan CBO, will add an estimated $6,000 in annual out-of-pocket costs for each retiree by 2050. In Rhode Island, the average annual Social Security benefit is about $13,600. It is hard to imagine how future seniors living on a fixed Social Security income will be able to maintain health care coverage with that kind of extra cost dropped on them individually. At the same time that they would slash Medicare, the House Republican budget gives those making over $1 million per year an average tax cut of over $150,000.

If you are getting older or you are a working family and you are going to need Medicare one day, you will get an end to Medicare as we know it. If you are making over $1 million, you get an average tax cut of over $150,000. Those are not real priorities for the people I represent in Rhode Island.

It doesn't stop there. They repeal the affordable care act, which would reopen the doughnut hole. The affordable care act has helped nearly 15,000 Rhode Islanders save an average of $554 each last year just by closing the doughnut hole partway, and soon it will be all the way. That made a difference to people such as Olive in Woonsocket, whose husband fell into the doughnut hole last July. Thanks to the new law, they saved $2,400. Under the House Republican budget, they would be stuck paying that $2,400 as an out-of-pocket cost to the big drug companies.

The radical House budget would slash funding for Pell grants, and it would increase interest on student loans. We have all heard people say here that they don't want to encourage the increase in student loan rates we are facing. But while they say that, they, of course, are filibustering our effort to do that. In their budget, they build in the increase in the interest rate. So they speak from two notions.

The House budget requires only $1 trillion in additional and unspecified cuts, and that will be Draconian. Senator PAUL's budget, which we may take up today, would also slash middle-class programs, including Social Security. He includes an eventual 39 percent cut to Social Security benefits and would end Medicare for all seniors in 2014. If you want to put an end to Medicare in 2014, the Paul budget looks like a really great opportunity for you. But that is not what I think anybody really

wants in this country. I think almost every American wants to see Medicare strengthened and supported.

We should move on from this unnecessary budget messaging exercise and resume our work to keep student loan rates down and support good-paying highway jobs—bills that are being delayed that we need action on now. When we turn to a real debate about deficit reduction, I hope my colleagues will unshackle themselves from the tea party and put forward a budget that doesn't put Big Oil subsidies ahead in priority of taking care of our real budget problems. They have to get over putting the priorities first of protecting Big Oil subsidies.

With that, I yield the floor.

Mr. CONRAD. I thank the Senator from Rhode Island. I thank him for his contributions on the Budget Committee. I don't think there has been any stronger voice for fundamental health care reform along the lines of dealing with the system we currently have that, by most accounts, is costing us hundreds of billions of dollars and not adding to the quality of health care. Nobody has been a stronger voice on the Budget Committee or off of it on that subject. I appreciate the Senator's leadership.

We have Senator WICKER next. Does the Senator have an estimate as to how much time he may consume?

Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, I have been told I have 10 minutes allocated, and I shall use probably less than that allocation.

Mr. CONRAD. Very well. Senator WICKER.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Mississippi.

Mr. WICKER. I thank the Chair for recognizing me and I appreciate the time.

I want to agree with my friend from Rhode Island to this extent: He said this debate is based on a false premise. And I agree with him in this respect. This is not a reality debate about a budget resolution. These are show votes. These are messaging votes we have today.

One can argue all he or she wants that we have a budget in place that we voted on last year, but there is no getting around 2 U.S.C. 631, which is the budget law of the United States of America, passed back in 1974. That budget law requires Congress each year to pass a budget resolution. As a matter of fact, it says on or before April 15 of each year, Congress completes action on a concurrent resolution on the budget.

The last time this Senate did that was in 2009. We missed the April 15 deadline in 2010, the leadership of this body missed that deadline in 2011, and they missed it again this year. It has been that long since this body, under the leadership of my friends across the aisle, have complied with the explicit terms of the Federal statute and brought a budget to full consideration on the floor.

What we will have today is debate on five concepts. I am happy to vote for some of them, and will certainly vote against others, but make no mistake about it, this is not the process called for by the Federal statute and it doesn't comply with the law and doesn't serve the purposes of advancing public policy in the United States of America. We are long overdue for a real budget debate that puts something in place.

As I mentioned a moment ago, we have passed the 3-year mark now—1,100 days—since Senate Democrats fulfilled one of their basic obligations, as I mentioned, laid out in Federal statute. A recent column in the Washington Times pointed out that the iPad had not yet even been introduced when the last budget was passed on the floor of this Senate. But since that time, in 3 years, Federal spending has topped a staggering $10 trillion.

Every day our country's debt grows closer to $16 trillion. This is money my generation will not be able to pay. We have our pages here on the floor. Even their generation will not be able to pay off this $16 trillion in debt. It will be left to their children and grandchildren. Annual deficits continue to soar, adding to that debt—over $1 trillion each year during President Obama's time in office—even though the President promised in 2009 he would cut the deficit in half during his first term, a promise that certainly has not been fulfilled. Instead, his latest budget relies more on spending, new taxes, and accounting gimmicks, and it leaves insolvent entitlement programs without meaningful reform.

I noticed the previous speaker stated he would not be voting for President Obama's budget proposal. I think it is because it is such a false and weak proposal. I expect the Obama budget today would get the same response it got on the floor of the Senate during these messaging votes last year when it failed to get a single vote. As I understand it, it failed to get a single vote in the House of Representatives. Not one Republican or Democrat in the House of Representatives earlier this year was willing to step forward and embrace the Obama budget proposal, and it got a big fat zero when it was put to a messaging vote in the House of Representatives. So we are watching a disastrous trajectory and we need to change it now.

Families, businesses, and organizations in my home State of Mississippi, and in every State across the country, know the importance of having a sensible budget and living within that budget; likewise, taxpayers deserve to see a blueprint of where their money is going and how much will be spent. Washington must be held accountable.

We heard talk on the other side of the aisle about priorities that our Democratic friends wish to see enacted. The Democratic majority in the Budget Committee needs to bring those priorities forward. They need to wrap them up in a budget resolution and bring them to the floor. That is the one thing we are not seeing today—a proposal by the Democratic majority.

It only takes 51 votes to pass a budget. There is no two-thirds rule on a budget resolution. There is no filibuster on a budget resolution. My Democratic colleagues, many of whom are dear friends of mine, have 53 Members in this caucus. They have the votes. We know a budget is required every year. Yet with a 53-vote majority, and with only 51 votes required, they do not bring a budget to the floor for us to consider so we can know what their budget priorities are.

There are plenty of excuses from across the aisle for not complying with the clear mandate, but there is no excuse. It is inexcusable that the majority party in this Chamber refuses to fulfill this statutory responsibility when the warning signs of fiscal calamity are at our doorstep.

You know, it is no wonder our popularity rating as a Congress is down around 10 or 11 percent when this Federal statute explicitly requires us to do this by April of each year and we do not do it. It is no wonder we are held in such low regard by the public. Inaction ultimately bequeaths a burden of debt to our children and grandchildren.

We certainly cannot blame the inaction on an absence of ideas. As has been stated by my friend from Rhode Island, we have five proposals before us today. President Obama's will probably get zero votes. The House Republican blueprint will be considered, and budgets from Senators LEE, PAUL, and TOOMEY. Yet the Senate Democrats, regrettably, stay on the sidelines. They have the votes, but we do not have their proposal on the floor—one they are willing to put forward and tell the American people they own.

My friend the budget chairman has suggested the upcoming election stands in the way. In April he said:

> This is the wrong time to vote in committee. This is the wrong time to vote on the floor. I don't think we will be prepared to vote before the election.

I want to make it clear, I have the highest affection and regard for the chairman of the Budget Committee, but I do believe what he is saying, in other words, is that we have a job to do, we have a law to comply with, but we are not going to bring it up at this time because of political concerns. I think political concerns are keeping our friends on the other side from saying where they stand on the budget issues. I think political concerns are keeping them from making the hard choices.

I can imagine the American taxpayer would like to know when will be the right time for the Senate to begin complying with Federal law and the right time for a budget that takes fiscal responsibility seriously. They know kicking the can down the road will not make the debt problem go away.

I noticed recently our Commander in Chief told a Russian leader that after

the election he would have more flexibility on a national security issue—the issue of national military defense. He said, I need to have some time, because after the election I will have more flexibility. Please pass that along to Vladimir. I suppose my friends on the other side of the aisle believe they will have more flexibility on spending issues and budget issues and taxation issues after the election.

The truth is Republicans and Democrats have differences on a number of issues, but that should not deter a concentrated effort to lower the deficit and curb runaway spending. I hope this week we can focus on constructive dialogue. I would have hoped we would have an honest process and do what is right and necessary to put this country's fiscal house back in order.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Delaware.

Mr. CARPER. I thank the Chair.

Mr. CONRAD. If I may, if the Senator could do his presentation in about 8 minutes, we have six speakers left and we have 50 minutes.

Mr. CARPER. I will be happy to do so.

Mr. CONRAD. I thank the Senator.

Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, in listening to the presentation of my friend from Mississippi, I am reminded of the words of Harry Truman when he said something to the effect: The only thing new in the world is the history we forgot or never learned.

I want to go back in history. I want to go back about 15 years. We had gone from 1968 to 1997 and never balanced a budget. All those years—almost 30 years. Then President Clinton said to Erskine Bowles, his Chief of Staff, figure out a way to maybe negotiate a balanced budget deal with Republicans in the House and in the Senate and see what kind of deal you can get. So Erskine went out and negotiated and came up with a deal. It was the deficit reduction deal that lead to not one but three balanced budgets by the end of that decade. Interestingly enough, half of the debt reduction was on the spending side and half the debt reduction was on the revenue side.

Now fast forward to 2001, a new President, a change in administration, and as far as the eye could see not just balanced budgets but plenty of black ink—surpluses as far as the eye could see. Eight years later, we had another change in administration, and a new President was handed over a $1 trillion deficit, the worst recession since the Great Depression, and we are still trying to dig our way out of that. When we tried to pass legislation here to create a deficit commission a couple of years ago and failed—we were short of votes, and our Republican friends who had cosponsored that measure, as I recall, ended up not voting for it—this President used his own executive powers to say we are going to have a deficit commission and he asked Erskine Bowles to head it up, along with Alan Simpson, a former Senator and deficit hawk from Wyoming.

There were 18 good people, including some from this Chamber, who went to work on a real deficit reduction plan—Democrats and Republicans—and 11 out of the 18 ended up voting for this kind of plan. It was not a 50–50 deal on deficit reduction, but $3 on the spending side for every $1 on the revenue side, with $4 trillion to $5 trillion in deficit reduction over a 10-year period of time.

As my friend mentioned, we are seeing a lot of different ideas. We have a bunch here on the floor. The administration submitted their budget as well, and, frankly, none of them come close to being as good as Bowles-Simpson. Alice Rivlin has done good work. Pete Domenici, our former colleague here in the Senate from New Mexico, has done a good one. But in the end, they all come back to pretty much the same place. Bowles-Simpson says we are going to raise $1 in revenue for every $3 on the spending side.

The grand compromise was Democrats agreeing to entitlement programs reform—not to get rid of them but make sure they are going to be around for our children and grandchildren. And on the revenue side, we actually raise revenues by reducing the rates on the individual side and the corporate side, and we eliminated by half the so-called ''tax expenditures'' in the Tax Code—tax credits, tax reductions, tax loopholes, tax breaks. We got rid of about half of them.

So the Bowles-Simpson deficit commission plan enjoys the support of almost half the Senate—almost half the Senate. Pretty much an equal number of Democrats and Republicans. We have a budget in place right now. We have a budget in place for 2012. We have a budget that is going to be effective for 2013. Right now, we are seeing a deficit reduction of $600 billion in defense spending implemented over a 10-year period of time. Right now, we are seeing a deficit reduction of $600 billion in domestic discretionary spending implemented over a 10-year period of time. And if we don't come up with an agreement, such as Bowles-Simpson, we will see $600 billion more of deficit reduction on the defense side, another $600 billion on the nondefense side, and some entitlement program changes as well.

A much better plan than doing that—even though that adds up to about $2 trillion worth of deficit reduction for this year and the coming fiscal year—is the kind of comprehensive balanced plan we have been given by the deficit commission. My hope is, at the end of the day, when we have the opportunity to debate here—later this year, when the elections are behind us—people will actually turn around and say, let's try to figure out the right thing to do, and then do it. This is the right thing to do. In the meantime, let's not waste the next 6, 7, or 8 months.

I would suggest to my colleagues to join the bipartisan efforts of people such as TOM COBURN and myself and others, Senator CONRAD and Senator GRASSLEY and others, and to join us in going to work on a to-do list provided to us by GAO, the Government Accountability Office. That to-do list is just full of ways to avoid wasting money, and it includes ways to save money by reducing improper payments. We are down from $119 billion last year to $115 billion this year, finally heading in the right direction, reducing fraud in Medicare and Medicaid.

Some very good stuff is being done there to help reduce the fraud losses. We have all this surplus property, a lot of which we don't need. The idea is to get rid of that, and we are beginning to do that. We have too many bad information technology projects and too many information processing centers. We are getting rid of a bunch of those we don't need. There is actually some good work that is beginning to be done. We can do more, and we ought to do more.

Lastly, I would suggest we ought to consider making the President's rescission powers real. Senator MCCAIN and I and about 40, almost 45, Democrats and Republicans have proposed that we make the President's rescission powers real. The President could sign an appropriations bill under current law, send us proposals to rescind or reduce spending within that appropriations bill that he has just signed into law, and we don't even have to vote on the rescission. We don't even have to take it up or look at it. For the most part, we don't. What JOHN MCCAIN and I and almost half the Senate, Democratic and Republican, have said is, when a President signs an appropriations bill into law and sends it to us, he can send us a rescission message as well that we have to vote on, we actually have to vote on it. And it doesn't affect taxes. It is not a deal that affects entitlement programs but on appropriations, and we would try this for 4 years.

With a simple majority, we literally vote on the President's proposal. If it doesn't get a simple majority in the Senate—51 votes—or a simple majority in the House—218 votes—then it goes away. But at least we have to take responsibility to be held accountable to vote on it. The President would perhaps have some extra responsibility and the opportunity to make meaningful reductions.

Mr. President, how am I doing on time?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator has 30 seconds.

Mr. CARPER. I want to close and say to my friend, Senator CONRAD, I know the Senator, as much as I, favors Bowles-Simpson, and I want to thank the Senator for the work he is doing in bringing attention to it again and saying this is still the best plan in the room. I think it is still the best plan out there.

So the idea is when we get to the day or the week after the election, we will be ready to move and to take it up and,

hopefully, to embrace and endorse large parts of it.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota.

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I thank the Senator, and I thank him for his leadership on these issues. Nobody has been more serious about getting deficits and debt under control than the Senator from Delaware, Mr. CARPER.

Mr. President, how much time would Senator GRASSLEY like to use?

Mr. GRASSLEY. Ten minutes or a little less.

Mr. CONRAD. Perhaps we can ask for a unanimous consent request to lock in these next Senators so people know who is waiting.

Mr. GRASSLEY. I am not prepared to speak for our side.

Mr. CONRAD. We can do it. We have been doing this and I think it works out well.

So I ask unanimous consent that Senator GRASSLEY be recognized for 10 minutes, followed by Senator CARDIN for 8, followed by Senator CRAPO for 10 minutes.

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

The Senator from Iowa is recognized.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, adopting a budget for the country is one of the most basic responsibilities and fundamental functions of the Congress.

The Budget Act of 1974 requires Congress to adopt a budget by April 15 each year. It is a requirement that this Senate majority has ignored time and again. In fact, the Senate hasn't adopted a budget since April 29, 2009.

More than 3 years have passed since the Senate last adopted a budget. During that time, more than $4 trillion has been added to our Nation's debt. In President Obama's Presidency, we have added $5 trillion to the national debt.

So we are in the midst of the fourth consecutive year of $1 trillion deficits. All the while, the Senate Democratic majority has failed to propose a budget blueprint that would lay out their priorities for deficit reduction, economic growth, and a path to balance. It is no wonder, then, our Nation is driving toward a fiscal cliff of deficits and debt. There is no one in the Democratic leadership willing to take hold of the wheel of this vehicle.

In February, President Obama released his budget. The President's 2013 budget would expand the scope of government by spending more money, increasing taxes on job creators, and continue on the path of enormous deficit and record debt.

While President Obama claims his budget will create an America built to last, the only thing his budget builds, it seems to me, is higher deficits and debt—a bigger and more intrusive government and economic decline for future generations.

During the past 60 years spending has averaged about 21 percent of GDP. Over the 10-year window of President Obama's budget, spending never gets below 22 percent. In dollar terms, spending goes up from the present $3.8 trillion to $5.8 trillion in the year 2022. So it is very clear President Obama is built to spend.

President Obama's budget is also harmful to our fragile economy because it would impose a $1.9 trillion tax increase. Maybe the President's purpose in imposing this huge tax increase is an effort to reduce the Nation's debt. Unfortunately, that is not what he has planned in his budget. He wants to spend every dollar.

His budget runs deficits totaling $6.4 trillion over the next 10 years. Debt held by the public increases from 74.2 percent of our economy today to 76.33 percent in 2022. Of course, we need to remember that the historical average since World War II has been about 43 percent of the economy.

If people believe President Obama is putting us on a path to fiscal sustainability, I would suggest that they look at the annual deficits over the next 10 years. They never drop below $575 billion, and they actually go up at the end of his budget, rising to $704 billion in 2022. President Obama's budget puts America on the course of deficits and debt as far as the eye can see into the future.

The President also took a pass on proposing any real changes to our entitlement programs, which are a real driver of future deficits and debt. Again, he is absent from the discussion. He has no solution. He has chosen not to lead. But where is the leadership from the Senate majority? Where is their budget? Why have they not proposed a budget in more than 3 years?

The budget chairman has said repeatedly that we already have a budget in place for this year and even for next year. The chairman and majority leader believe the Budget Control Act was a budget resolution. The Budget Control Act is not a budget. President Obama clearly agreed when he proposed his budget. House Republicans and Democrats alike agreed when they voted on seven budget resolutions offered by both Republicans and Democrats. The Democratic leadership in the Senate stands alone in their belief that the Budget Control Act was a budget resolution. Is it because they have no ideas on how to balance the budget, contain out-of-control spending, grow the economy, or create jobs?

If the Democratic majority can't muster the will to present their own budget, why don't they offer President Obama's budget?

I am sure we will hear the argument that the resolution our side is offering is not a fair depiction of President Obama's budget. That is the rhetoric we will likely hear so that they can vote against it. The fact is they are going to vote against it for one reason, just like a year ago; that is, because it is President Obama's budget. They don't want to be on record voting for any budget. That will be the most remarkable outcome of today's exercise.

We are going to vote on five different budget proposals. Three are being offered by Senate Republicans, one is Budget Chairman RYAN's budget, and the final resolution is President Obama's budget. Not only have Senate Democrats failed to even propose a budget, they will likely vote in lockstep against each of the five budget proposals.

We are likely to see Senate Democrats come to the floor one by one and cast roughly 265 votes against the consideration of any budget. Is that leadership? Is that conviction? They are in the majority. When it comes to proposing and supporting a budget, they are the party of no and the party of obstruction. Democrats are the party filibustering consideration of budget blueprints. My friend, the budget chairman, was quoted recently as saying:

> This is the wrong time to vote in committee. This is the wrong time to vote on the floor. I don't think we will be prepared to vote before the election.

How many more trillions do we need to add to the national debt before it is time to vote on a budget resolution? If now is not the time to lead, propose bold solutions and take action, when is?

The American people are going to pay a heavy price for the unwillingness and inability of the Senate majority to lead and to offer solutions. Once again, the Senate majority and its leadership and President Obama are content to be absent from the discussion. Three years without this sort of debate is proof of that. There are no solutions; there is no leadership. There is only failure and punting until after the next election.

We have a moral obligation to offer serious solutions for today—most importantly for future generations.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maryland.

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, the budget document is a very important document.

It speaks to the priorities of our Nation, and it gives instructions to our committees to report out legislation consistent with that of the budget resolution. It gives instructions to the Appropriations Committee to pass appropriations bills and to other committees as it may affect revenues or mandatory spending.

We have that budget document for the fiscal year that begins October 1 of this year. That was included in the Budget Control Act which passed this body by 74 votes. It has the force and effect of law.

So our appropriations committees know the numbers for the appropriations bills for the year that begins October 1, and the other committees know what the requirements will be. The question is whether we should have a longer term commitment on dealing with our budget problems.

We do need a bipartisan, credible program that involves not only the Democrats and Republicans in the Senate,

but also the Democrats and Republicans in the House, and the President of the United States. We need to avoid sequestration, and we need the predictability for our economy and for those who act upon our actions to know what the rules will be. We need to have a responsible plan to deal with the long-term deficit that is balanced and fair, that involves more revenue and spending cuts, that allows our recovery to continue, and is bipartisan.

I compliment Senator CONRAD for his leadership in giving us an opportunity to move in that direction. I think Senator CONRAD showed tremendous leadership on behalf of the Democratic members of the Budget Committee to forgo bringing forward a partisan budget and instead said: Let's take a look at a long-term budget that can get bipartisan support, that has been tested, that has been out there, and that is called Bowles-Simpson.

We are talking about the broad outline. A budget document gives broad instructions to the committee. It is the so-called macro numbers. I think the chairman has provided us the leadership on that issue. But do not get confused, we have a budget for the fiscal year that begins October 1. We have it earlier than we have ever had it, and it has the force and effect of law.

Each of the four Republican plans that we will be voting on moves us in the wrong direction to accomplishing those goals. They use almost all of the spending cuts that are included in these budgets for additional tax cuts. It benefits primarily those who do not need an additional tax cut. The House Republican budget would provide $1 trillion in tax cuts for the wealthiest among us, giving millionaires an average tax cut of $150,000. At the same time, that budget would ask our college students to pay more by allowing interest rates on their loans to increase, and they would ask our seniors to pay more by paying more for their Medicare benefits.

They have it backward. Those who have sacrificed the most during these economic times under Republican budgets would be asked to pay more. Those who have benefited the most during that period of time would get additional tax cuts. That is not what we should be doing. It would hurt our economic recovery.

It is irresponsible to make the types of cuts that are in the Republican budget that deal with American innovation. Take a look what it would do for basic research in this country, which I hope we all agree is necessary for America to continue to lead the world in innovation. In my own State of Maryland I look at the jobs we created in the biotech field, through cybersecurity. Basic research is critically important to advance those job opportunities and economic opportunities for America. It would reduce our commitments to building our infrastructure—our transit systems, our roads, our energy grids. If we are going to be competitive, we need to rebuild America to meet the global challenges.

It would reduce our commitments in education. An educated workforce is America's future. Investing in our children is what we should be doing. The quality of K–12 would suffer, even pre-K—what they do with Head Start—and I already mentioned the cost of student loans in postsecondary education would go up. For our seniors, they would be thrown into a voucher program in Medicare at the mercy of private insurance companies and asked to pay more when they are already overburdened by the costs of their health care.

Under the Toomey budget, they would block-grant Medicaid, throwing that burden onto our States. Our children and families would suffer.

Under the Paul budget, Social Security benefits would be reduced on average by 39 percent. Social Security is a vital lifeline for the people of this country. Turning it into a program that becomes a political football is not what we need for this country. For our students, the cost of a college education would be increased.

We need to put forward a credible plan to reduce the deficit. We need to do this—and we have done it before. When Bill Clinton was President of the United States and I was serving in the House of Representatives, we passed a plan that balanced our Federal budget and actually created a surplus. How did we do it? We did it through a balanced approach. We did it through cutting spending and raising the revenues so we paid our bills. What were the results? Our economy took off, creating millions of jobs. That is what we need to do again.

How do we get this done? Let's get working together. Let's have Democrats and Republicans work together in order to come up with a balanced approach that has spending cuts and those who can afford to pay more should be paying more because it is not fair to future generations for us to spend money today and ask our children and grandchildren to pay for it tomorrow.

Let us protect the programs that are important for economic growth, for the dignity of our seniors, and for the welfare of our children. It starts with rejecting the extreme partisan budgets that our Republican colleagues are offering on the floor. I urge my colleagues to reject those budget resolutions.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Idaho is recognized.

Mr. CRAPO. Mr. President, I appreciate the efforts by our Republican leader, MITCH MCCONNELL, and by the ranking member of our Senate Budget Committee, JEFF SESSIONS, to give the Senate a chance today to do its job. It has been more than 3 years since the Senate has passed a budget, almost 1,100 days, $4 trillion in increased debt since we last had a budget. Yet it seems as if the current majority are the only ones who do not think passing a budget is part of our job.

I have to stop here for a moment and commend the chairman of the Senate Budget Committee, Senator CONRAD. I know he has fought mightily to get a budget to this floor. But the politics he faces have not allowed him to do so. As of today, for 1,100 days we have not been able to see a budget proposal reach the Senate floor from our committee.

I have worked with Senator CONRAD long and hard and will continue to do so, trying to get a broad, bipartisan solution brought forward. But today we need to take action on the Senate floor. Everyone else has a budget. The President has offered a budget. The House Republicans have offered a budget. The House Democrats have offered a budget. The Senate Republicans have introduced several budgets, which we will vote on here today.

Every American family and every American business has to develop a budget. Previous Congresses, including those that enacted the Congressional Budget Act last year, clearly saw the importance of Congress enacting a budget every year. In fact, it was that congressional budget act that we were able to get in place last year that put into effect the mechanism we are employing today which says if the majority party leadership fails to bring a budget forward by the statutory deadline, then any Senator has the right to call for consideration of any budget on the Senate Calendar.

Let's look at the budgets we will be voting on today. First we have the President's budget. At a time when our national debt is more than $15.6 trillion, well more than 100 percent of our gross domestic product, the President's budget seemingly makes no acknowledgment of the dramatic and predictable fiscal crisis we face. Instead of embracing the comprehensive work of his own fiscal commission, the Bowles-Simpson commission on which I served, or any of the other key bipartisan proposals that are available such as the Ryan-Wyden proposal or the Domenici-Rivlin plan or even coming up with a true reform plan of his own, the President's budget regrettably remains within the old discredited framework of trying to tax and spend our way into prosperity.

The President's budget would raise taxes by $2 trillion. This is in addition to the $1.2 trillion of tax increases in the health care law which are just beginning to take effect and will continue to roll out over the next few years. Perhaps even more remarkable, the President's budget actually increases spending by $1.2 trillion more than current law. So another $1.2 trillion in new spending, another $2 to $3 trillion in new taxes, no structural entitlement reform, and no discretionary spending reform.

Even though it is widely acknowledged that the current paths of our entitlement programs are unsustainable

and even though they are on track to soon become insolvent, the President's budget has no comprehensive reforms to our entitlement programs—none. The modest amount of health care savings he does propose would not even be enough to offset the extension of the doc fix or the other increases in the health care spending he proposes.

This is a dangerous approach, and it should be noted that this budget failed by a vote of 0 to 414 in the House. Yet we have no other pending proposal from the other side to consider.

Today the Senate will also have an opportunity to reject the President's approach to the Federal budget, and I expect it will do so, just as it did last time. Because the Democratic majority here in the Senate has failed to produce their own budget, we will also have the opportunity to vote on some important budget proposals offered by the House Budget Committee chairman and by our own colleagues here in the Senate, Senators TOOMEY, PAUL, and LEE. Each of these proposals would include true comprehensive reforms to our entitlement programs to prevent the impending insolvency and to protect the programs for current and future generations, and would put us on a sustained pathway to balancing our Federal budget.

These budgets also call for comprehensive tax reform which takes us out of the old paradigm of Congress debating whether to raise or cut taxes and, instead, these proposals would each in their own way dramatically streamline the Tax Code, reduce the tax rates, and unleash significant economic growth in our economy. A byproduct of this robust economic growth would be an increase in revenues to help us deal with our pending debt crisis.

I again commend the chairman, Senator CONRAD, for his effort to bring forward a comprehensive plan, a solution—one that originated with Bowles-Simpson on which he and I sat and one which has then been worked on by the so-called Gang of Six for a significant amount of time now to improve and bring forward, and one which the chairman is prepared to move when the opportunity is available. I have encouraged him to do it now. I believe we ought to have it on the floor today for this debate. But whenever the time becomes available, it is a proposal such as this that we need to be dealing with. We need to develop the bipartisan support that is necessary to pass it.

What is it? First of all, as we worked on the Bowles-Simpson commission, we made some basic decisions. We concluded that spending was the major problem—that is where the major part of the solution should be—but that revenue was also critical to the solution and that growing our economy was an important part of anything Congress should do. We first discussed putting together a strong approach to entitlement reform, structural entitlement reform. We put strong spending caps in place and we made clear that our spending patterns in the Federal budget would be brought under control. In addition, recognizing the importance and need for strong growth, we concluded that our Tax Code must be reformed and not on the traditional battleground of whether to raise taxes on one group or lowering taxes on another but in a complete paradigm shift to focus on the reforming of both our corporate and individual tax codes.

If you went about trying to create a Tax Code that was more unfair, more complex, more expensive to comply with, and more anticompetitive to our own American business interests, you would be hard pressed to do it different or worse than we have done with our own Tax Code. We concluded that we ought to reform that code to develop a strong, dynamic tax code for America to go forward with. That is why we proposed broadening the base, reducing the rates, and reforming the way we tax in America by simplifying our Tax Code and making America a strong, powerful, and robust economy as it historically has been.

Then we put together what is critical for any plan to succeed, and that is an enforcement mechanism. Congress has a perfect record of violating its own budgets. Congress has a record of ignoring the budgets, simply getting 60 votes to waive the Budget Act whenever Congress wants to spend in excess of a budget. Literally in every budget for the last two decades or more, Congress has done so; Republican or Democratic, the Congresses have done so. What we put together in our negotiations was an enforcement plan that would keep Congress within the walls of the budget we adopt. It would have a series of points of order to protect against the declaration of emergencies unjustifiably and would then force even emergency spending, that usually is conducted outside the budget, to be done in the face of a sequestration backed up by 67-vote points of order on the floor of the Senate. This kind of strong enforcement is also critical to what we must do to protect our Nation.

We need a comprehensive plan, we need to have entitlement reform, we have to have discretionary spending reform, and we need to have budget enforcement that is solid. We need to strengthen our revenue stream and enforce our Tax Code by lowering taxes. That gives American businesses the opportunity to compete aggressively across the globe.

If we do so, we will see a strong revenue component to our reform measures, and we will see strong growth coming out of the fact that we put together effective spending controls. But we have to get there. We have to do it.

I appreciate the opportunity to work with Senator CONRAD as we try to put this kind of broad, comprehensive reform package together and build bipartisan support for it. But I am very discouraged still that we cannot get a budget proposal onto the floor of the Senate that we can work on.

I also appreciate the leadership of Senator MCCONNELL and Senator SESSIONS, who have given the Senate the opportunity today to debate this issue and have votes, at least, on meaningful proposals that move us down the path I have discussed, and put us onto a pathway for economic prosperity and growth for all.

America is at a terrible crisis point. Our national debt is now exceeding over 100 percent of our GDP and threatens our economy. We must take action. We cannot let another year go by without adopting a budget on the floor of the Senate.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CARDIN). The Senator from North Dakota.

Mr. CONRAD. I would say to Senator BOXER the situation we find ourselves in is we only have 34 minutes left on our side. I will yield 7 minutes to Senator BOXER.

Senator MURRAY is here now.

Mrs. BOXER. I will wait.

Mr. CONRAD. We have a situation in which our time is rapidly fleeting. They have much more time left on their side than we do on ours.

Could the Senator do her presentation in 7 minutes?

Mrs. MURRAY. I will attempt to do my best.

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that Senator MURRAY be allowed to speak for 7 minutes followed by Senator BOXER for 7 minutes.

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

The Senator from Washington is recognized.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I wish to thank Senator CONRAD for his leadership on this issue. At the end of last week, the Republicans in the House of Representatives passed legislation that continues their mad dash away from the bipartisan Budget Control Act and reflects the upside-down priorities that are guiding their party and stands absolutely no chance of passage in the Senate.

I think it would be very helpful at this point to remind my colleagues of the recent history that has brought us to this point.

In August of last year Democrats and Republicans came together, and we agreed to the Budget Control Act to cut spending and put in place a process for additional deficit reduction. The purpose of that bipartisan agreement was to move toward serious deficit reduction and to give some consistency to the Federal budget so the American people would not be threatened with a government shutdown every few months. That bipartisan deal sets the levels for next year's discretionary spending, which allows Congress to do its jobs and work to allocate Federal resources toward investments in jobs, infrastructure, innovation, maintaining our commitment to our servicemembers and their families, and protecting and supporting the middle-class families and so much more.

That was the agreement we came to. Speaker BOEHNER shook on it, Minority Leader MCCONNELL shook on it, Majority Leader REID signed it, joined many of my colleagues in voting for it, and then President Obama signed it into law. It became the law of the land. I would add it is binding and replaces and carries more weight than a budget resolution. It makes the budget resolutions we are debating today nothing more than political theater.

Senate Democrats fully intend to honor our word and stick to the bipartisan budget levels for next year, and Senate Republicans in our Appropriations Committee, including the minority leader, recently voted to stick to those levels as well. I was disappointed that less than 9 months after we shook hands on that deal House Republicans turned right around and broke it. They put appeasing their extreme base ahead of the word they gave to us and the American people. They demonstrated clearly that a deal with them isn't worth the paper it is printed on.

Despite House Republicans reneging on the deal, the Budget Control Act is the law. It is signed, and we have so many challenges ahead of us as a nation we cannot afford to relitigate bipartisan deals every time members of the extreme end of the Republican Party make some noise in a meeting. House Republicans are not only trying to relitigate that Budget Control Act, they want to pretend it never happened.

As part of that deal, in addition to the $1 trillion in discretionary spending cuts, a joint select committee on deficit reduction was formed to reduce the deficit by at least an additional $1.2 trillion. In fact, if they couldn't come to an agreement, the bipartisan Budget Control Act put in place automatic spending cuts, or sequestration, which spread evenly across defense and non-defense spending.

We all knew at the time the sequestration was not the ideal way to reduce spending, but we wanted to have that in place so that painful cuts were prominent and would help both sides to come to a bipartisan compromise.

I was called on by the majority leader to cochair that committee with Republican Representative JEB HENSARLING, and I am proud of that committee's hard work. I was extremely disappointed in the end that committee was not able to come up with a bipartisan deal.

I want to be clear—because this is very relevant today—we weren't able to get a deal because Republicans refused to even consider tax increases on the wealthiest Americans. The talks fell apart around that issue and that issue alone.

I came to the table with many of my colleagues with proposals for serious compromises on spending and a willingness to move forward with smart changes to strengthen entitlements. We knew many of these compromises would be painful, but we were willing to put them forward to get to a bipartisan deal and a balanced deal. But as much as we offered, we couldn't get our Republican colleagues to give an inch when it came to taxes on the wealthiest Americans and the biggest corporations even though the rich are paying the lowest tax rates today in generations. They were fundamentally opposed to any plan that would call on the wealthy to pay a penny more in taxes.

In poll after poll Americans overwhelmingly say they want to see a balanced approach to tackling the deficit and debt that puts everything on the table, including revenue. Every single bipartisan group that has come together to tackle this—from Simpson-Bowles, Domenici-Rivlin, Gang of 6—has included a balanced approach that reduces spending and raises revenues. That is the only real and fair way to tackle this challenge, and it simply doesn't make any sense to solve this problem with cuts alone.

So as we watch House Republicans rolling back the automatic cut they don't like and acting as though the bipartisan Budget Control Act never happened, I say to them today what I said to the Republicans in the joint select committee: We will not allow the debt and deficit to be reduced on the backs of our middle-class and most vulnerable Americans without calling on the wealthiest to contribute as well. It is not fair, it is not what the American people want, and it is not going to happen. We are facing these automatic cuts because Republicans continue to protect the rich above all else. Unless that changes before the end of the year, our country is going to have to face the consequences of intransigence.

Republicans in the House of Representatives are not only acting as though the BCA never happened, they are highlighting the moral and intellectual bankruptcy of a party that allows itself only to think in terms of cutting, shrinking, eliminating, and never in terms of investing and growing and fairness. The legislation they passed would roll back sequestration for next year by simply taking funding from programs middle-class families and the most vulnerable Americans count on and shifting it to defense. They want all of the deficit reduction from the Budget Control Act without any bipartisan compromise or shared sacrifice.

Since they refuse to consider raising taxes on the wealthy, the only way they can increase spending on defense is by absolutely devastating critical government investments in our families and in our future.

According to a report from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, the House legislation would not only roll back sequestration on the defense side, it would increase overall defense spending by over $8 billion.

And while they may say they are rolling back the automatic cuts on non-defense spending too, this report shows House Republicans are slashing these programs almost three-quarters of the way to what would be cut under sequestration.

Since they need to find a way to pay to undo the automatic cuts they don't like, their bill cuts even deeper into programs millions of families across America count on.

According to that same CBPP report, the Republican legislation would cut food assistance to the most vulnerable families, Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program, and block grants for States to run programs to help families and workers get back on their feet.

So House Republicans are actually increasing defense spending, protecting the wealthiest Americans and biggest corporations, and throwing the entire burden on the backs of middle class families and the most vulnerable Americans.

That's not just bad policy, it is simply wrong.

If Democrats were willing to accept a wildly imbalanced deficit reduction plan to avoid the automatic cuts, we would have done that in the Joint Select Committee. But we didn't then, and we won't now.

Any bipartisan deficit reduction plan, whether the goal is to reduce the deficit in a better way than the sequesters or to put our country on sound fiscal footing over the long term, has to be balanced. It has to be fair. And it has to work for middle class families across America. That means responsibly cutting spending. It means making sure entitlement programs that seniors and the most vulnerable families depend on are strengthened and secured for the next generation. It means examining where we can save money on the defense side. And it means raising revenue from the wealthiest Americans and biggest corporations who are paying close to the lowest levels in generations.

Because budgets aren't just numbers on a page. They aren't just about charts and formulas and trajectories. Those are important but budgets are also about real people, with real lives. They are about investments in our families, our communities, and our economy. They are about the kind of country we want to be now and in the our future. And above all, budgets are about the choices and priorities of a nation.

Democrats are willing to make compromises. We are willing to have those tough conversations and come to the difficult agreements we know are necessary. We are willing to put everything on the table.

And I truly hope Republicans decide they are ready to do the same and end their commitment to protecting the rich from paying a penny more in taxes. Because while so many families continue to struggle, I think it's more than fair to ask the richest Americans to pay their fair share.

While we scour programs that so many middle class families rely on for

fat to trim, I think it makes sense to scour the tax code in just the same way and eliminate the egregious loopholes that the wealthiest Americans and biggest corporations take advantage of.

And while oil and gas companies are making record profits, I think it just makes sense to end the handouts they get every year from U.S. taxpayers.

So Democrats stand ready to work with Republicans on this. But what House Republicans did last week has moved us in the wrong direction, and makes it even harder to get to the bipartisan deficit reduction deal they say they want.

So I urge them to end this partisanship.

Stop allowing a small and extreme minority of members to dictate policy for an entire chamber of Congress. Stop protecting the wealthiest Americans from sharing in the sacrifices so many Americans are making every day, and to truly work with us to get this done for the American people.

As soon as that happens, Democrats stand ready to get to a balanced and bipartisan deal.

The choices we make as a body in the coming months will affect every single American. As we have said from the start, we will put everything on the table, but that word is ''everything.'' We cannot come to a solution in America unless everybody contributes and there is shared sacrifice. That is the principle we have been fighting for, it is the one we will continue to fight for, and that is what the American people want. I am proud to stand with my party to continue to fight for that.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from California is recognized.

Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, I rise to say that it is stunning to see the Republican Party running away from a bill they supported and a deal they cut. The deficit reduction deal was led by Senator CONRAD. The Budget Control Act is the law of the land. Instead they are offering up a series of budgets that I believe will destroy this country.

Why do I say that? Because they destroy the middle class and they give to the millionaires and the billionaires. That is a recipe for a third world nation, the haves and the have-nots. I hope the American people wake up and pay attention because a budget is a statement of who we are as a people.

I was proud to serve on the Budget Committee. I wish I was still on there, but I had other options for my State. I decided to leave the Budget Committee and go on the Commerce Committee. That is one tough committee, and we are going to miss Senator CONRAD. His leadership is exemplary, and he has explained why the replacement budgets the Republicans have offered are unworkable. Some of them don't even make any sense.

This is serious business because one of them did pass the House. Not only did it pass the House, but then they passed another law, and we call it reconciliation, which is dangerous in what they did. They stood with all of their heart, with all of their soul, with all of their power and their fervor to fight for the 1 percent. They are fighting for the millionaires, the multimillionaires, the billionaires, and the trillionaires; that is who they are fighting for. They are giving them back an average of $150,000 a year. Over the 10-year period that average millionaire can write a big kiss to the Republicans if this ever becomes law because they would get back $1.5 million over the 10-year period.

How do they pay for this largess? How do they pay for this warm, fuzzy hug to the people who have everything? They cut the heart out of the middle class. I will give some examples. They would allow student loan rates to double so students would have to pay not a 3-percentage point interest rate on their student loans but over 6 percent.

They will cut the heart and soul out of America's infrastructure. Did you ever look at the construction industry lately? Well, there are 1.4 million unemployed construction workers. We need to make sure they are building the roads, highways, and the 70,000 bridges that are deficient. Half of our roads don't meet the standards. We need to rebuild America, as the President said—not Afghanistan, not Pakistan. Thank you very much. Iraq? The blood of our people is on the ground over there. It is time to spend that money here as our President has said.

They continue all that war spending, they add to that war spending, and they expect everybody else to stand back and quietly accept a doubling of their student loan rate and a cut in the transportation program.

They end Medicare, period. They are going to turn it into a voucher system, and our elderly are going to have to negotiate to try and find a way to pay for health insurance, and it will cost them thousands of dollars more.

One of these budgets actually cuts Social Security by 39 percent. Imagine a Social Security recipient living on $18,000 getting a cut of almost 40 percent.

So this is what they are doing, I say to my colleagues. They eliminate the Department of Education. They eliminate the ability for many people to pay for their energy assistance in the winters. They walk away from alternative energy, which is going to free us from foreign oil and make us safer. That is what they do, and they do it all in the name of tax breaks for the people in America who—I am very proud of them. They made it. In my State, a lot of those folks who have made it have written to me and said: Senator, we want everybody to have the chance we had.

The only passion of Republicans is for those who have. They practice Robin Hood in reverse. In one of the budgets, they even—I think it is the Ryan budget—tax the poorest people. They tax the poorest people. They raise taxes on the poorest people, and they cut taxes on the richest people. Robin Hood in reverse. Isn't that sweet? Isn't that kind? Not. So they bring America to its knees. They walk away from the Budget Control Act. Do we know why they don't like it? Because it forces spending cuts across the board. I don't like that, but we are serious about deficit reduction.

In my closing remarks I will say this: In the last 40 years, one party balanced the budget. In the last 40 years, one party created a surplus. That happens to be the Democratic Party and a Democratic President named Bill Clinton. How did we do it? We met each other halfway. We said that when we are faced with a crisis, we have to put everything on the table and everybody makes a little bit of a sacrifice. It is no big deal. We ask the people who have the most to do a little more, and we find ways to cut spending. That is what we did in the Clinton years. Do we know what happened? We created I think 23 million new jobs. We created 23 million new jobs. We balanced the budget, we created a surplus, and now we have to listen to the demagogues over there lecture us about how to balance the budget. Wrong. We know how to do it. They don't know how to do it. All they know how to do is stand up and attack our President when our President inherited this terrible deficit from George W. Bush, who took a surplus—Bush did—and turned it into deficits as far as the eye can see. And we were losing—I ask unanimous consent for 30 additional seconds.

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

Mrs. BOXER. We were losing how many jobs a month? We were losing 800,000 jobs a month when our President took over. The country was falling apart.

He saved the auto industry—it is back on top—when others said: Let them go bankrupt. He started the job creation. It is not good enough, but I will tell my colleagues one thing: If we are going to make it better, we better start working together.

Let's live by the Budget Control Act that is the law of the land, and let's use that time to find a long-term solution, as we did in the Clinton years.

Thank you very much. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alabama.

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, I wish to make a reference to the Budget Control Act. One of my colleagues said we are running away from the Budget Control Act. I would suggest that is not accurate. In truth, the Budget Control Act was a cap on spending, and the Republicans have proposed that we spend less than that, as any economist would tell us we need to do because it wasn't sufficient.

The difficulty arises, however, when we consider what President Obama proposed with regard to the Budget Control Act. It is amazing. In August President Obama signed the Budget

Control Act as an agreement to raise the debt ceiling by $2.1 trillion in exchange for reducing spending by $2.1 trillion. He signed that, it went into effect, and it is the current law today. But when he proposed his budget in January of this year that we will vote on later today—and I expect it will not get a single vote, and it should not—President Obama's budget wiped out half of those savings. So $1 trillion of those savings were wiped out, and he replaced it with almost—he added more spending in addition—Mr. President, I am having a little trouble thinking here.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate will be in order. The Senate will suspend for a moment.

The Senator from Alabama.

Mr. SESSIONS. So I think the dramatic event that has gone unappreciated is that the President's budget eviscerates the Budget Control Act and puts us back on full speed tax and spend.

I see my colleague Senator ENZI is here, a senior member of the Budget Committee who has been involved in so many important issues. He is an accountant, a small businessman, and he understands the real world and the value of a dollar. I yield to Senator ENZI.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, I thank the ranking member of the committee for all of his work on this issue and the suggestions he has as to the importance of what we are doing today.

I rise today to discuss our Nation's budget situation and the budget proposals we will vote on later today. While I am pleased that my colleagues have put forth a number of good ideas, this debate is long overdue.

The Congressional Budget Act sets a statutory deadline of April 1 for the Senate Budget Committee to report a budget resolution and a deadline of April 15 for completion of a congressional budget. Despite these statutory deadlines, it has been more than 3 years since the Senate passed a budget, and the majority party once again refuses to debate this important topic through the normal budget process. We did not mark up a budget in the Senate Budget Committee, and we have not been given the opportunity to offer amendments to any of the budgets that are before us on the Senate floor. That is disappointing.

With a national debt approaching $16 trillion, and it is hard for me to even say $16 trillion—I saw a kid with a t-shirt that said, ''Please don't tell him what comes after $1 trillion.'' With $16 trillion in debt, we cannot afford to continue operating without a budget that is a blueprint to put the country on a sustainable path in both the short term as well as the long term, and we better be looking at that long term as well.

We cannot continue to simply spend money we don't have without a plan to get our spending under control. We are so bad on spending that we are taking 10 years' worth of revenue to pay for 2 years' worth of projects, and those are projects that will continue after that. I don't know what we do after the 2 years. How far out can we borrow money that may not even come in because it might not even be budgeted? A budget is supposed to do just that—it is supposed to put spending under control. But instead, for the third year in a row, it looks as if the Senate majority will refuse to pass a plan to help fix the fiscal crisis we face.

In the 3 years since the Senate majority passed a budget, our country has spent approximately $10.4 trillion. We have accumulated around $4.5 trillion in gross debt, which translates to an additional $15,000 for every man, woman, and child—$15,000 for every man, woman, and child—which brings it up to about $49,000 total for every man, woman, and child. Since we last adopted a budget, we have spent more than $626 billion on net interest payments to service the debt alone. These are unsustainable levels of spending. Yet the majority continues to ignore the problem and refuses to take these numbers seriously and consider, much less pass, a budget.

The majority argues that we have a budget in place because of the passage of the Budget Control Act, which also governed our spending in fiscal year 2011. But if that truly governed what we are doing, why did the President even submit a budget to us? If that was the budget, he shouldn't have gone to all the effort to put his own budget together. But he felt he needed to put a budget together.

In fiscal year 2011, the government brought in slightly more than $2.3 trillion in revenue. At the same time we collected $2.3 trillion, we spent $3.6 trillion. In other words, we overspent by $1.3 trillion. That is more than 50 percent of the revenue we were expecting. We are on pace for another $1 trillion deficit this year. The Budget Control Act may include some spending limits, but with record trillion-dollar deficits, the Budget Control Act cannot replace an actual budget that puts in place long-term spending cuts and helps get our country back on the path to balance. Again, if that Budget Control Act really took care of everything, the President would not have needed to submit a budget. He did.

I applaud the President for appointing a deficit commission. We tried to pass that as a bill. It came close, but it didn't make it. He saw there was a need, and he appointed a commission. The commission was cochaired by Erskine Bowles and Senator Alan Simpson. They painted a pretty bleak picture for our country. More than a year and a half has gone by since they painted that bleak picture, and it has gotten worse, not better. I really expected at the State of the Union that year that the President would have painted the same bleak picture he had been handed by the deficit commission. It was scary. It is now scarier. But he didn't. Instead, he gave us another stimulus budget. I think if he had painted the bleak picture in the State of the Union that was handed to him by the deficit commission, if he had painted that same picture and not placed a solution out there but painted the picture so America would understand where we are with the debt and the deficit—if he had done that, he could have come out with a budget that was parallel to what Simpson-Bowles had, and I think we would have had a solution over a year ago.

We have a nearly $16 trillion debt that keeps growing. It is unaffordable, and we need to make a change. What will happen if we don't act and if we don't cut spending? We won't be able to afford the military we need. People will have drastically reduced Social Security checks. Roads won't be fixed. All of our money will go toward paying interest on the debt.

People shouldn't doubt that this is real. There were riots in the streets in Greece when their government was forced to deal with the realities of debt. In the United States, we owe $49,000 for every man, woman, and child. In Greece, they only owe $39,000 and had to make drastic cuts, and they had riots in the streets. Now they have stepped back with the recent elections and are trying to turn away from the reality of their debt. Does that sound familiar?

I have news for my colleagues. Our debt per person, as I mentioned, is more than Greece's debt per person. It is more than Italy's debt per person. In fact, the United States owes more than all of the Euro countries and the United Kingdom put together.

My Republican colleagues and I have put forth a series of budgets that would help to improve the fiscal situation. I drafted legislation that would reduce spending by 1 percent per year until we reach balance. By reducing spending by 1 percent, we can achieve balance by fiscal year 2017. That is a 1-percent reduction per year to 2017, and most of the people I have talked to—and I have talked to a lot of people in Wyoming and some other places around the country—have said 1 percent is not bad. One percent is definitely not bad if we compare it to the possibility of a 19-percent cut when we step off the cliff.

The House of Representatives passed a budget last year that cut spending by $5.8 trillion. This year the House passed a second budget that would reduce the deficit by $4.4 trillion, in comparison to the President's budget over the next decade, which does nothing to improve the short- or long-term economic outlook of the country. In fact, President Obama's budget would make things worse.

Senator TOOMEY has put together a detailed budget plan that would balance the budget within 8 years. It would enact corporate tax reform, and it would adopt important changes to

the entitlement programs that are the drivers of the Nation's unsustainable debt.

Senator PAUL has put forth a budget that would balance within 5 years. Of course, it eliminates four departments and reduces spending by $8 trillion over the next 10 years. It seems radical, but we are facing a cliff, and he is willing to put a budget out there.

Senator LEE has also introduced a budget that balances our budget by fiscal year 2017 by cutting spending by $7.1 trillion over the next 10 years, and it, too, reforms Medicare and Social Security.

Why do we have to reform Medicare? Well, in the health care reform bill we took $½ trillion out of Medicare. It was already going broke but, don't worry, we put in a special panel that will tell where cuts can come from each and every year, and if we don't suggest different cuts, those go into effect without a vote of the U.S. Senate. The only places they can cut are doctors, hospitals, nursing homes, home health care, and other providers. If you do not have a doctor, I do not think you have much medical care.

There are going to have to be reforms in Medicare. We have already forced that. For Social Security, there are not as many people working now as will soon be on Social Security, and that creates problems. I do not agree with everything that is included in these budgets I have mentioned, but I want to commend my Republican colleagues for making tough choices and putting forth solutions.

While they have been doing that, President Obama and the Senate majority have ignored the problem and refused to acknowledge the need to cut spending. They have demonized Republicans and suggested it is our intention to harm seniors, poor people, and children. One advertisement showed a picture of House Budget Chairman RYAN pushing an elderly woman off a cliff. That kind of rhetoric does not help anything, that rhetoric is over the top, while their solutions have been nonexistent.

Last year, President Obama's budget was such an empty proposal that it failed by a vote of 0 to 97 in the Senate. In the House this year, his latest budget failed by a vote of 0 to 414. I suspect it may face the same fate when it is considered later today—the same one they voted on. Not a single Member of either party was willing to support the President's budget proposal. How is that for leadership?

In some of the countries that have a parliamentary form of government, they have heard about these votes and are terribly shocked because in their country it would call for a special election and a new Prime Minister.

We will be voting on five budgets later today—four from Republican Members and President Obama's budget. Absent from the discussion is a budget produced by the Senate majority that is shirking their responsibility to govern.

We are in too serious a situation to continue ignoring the budget problems we face. At a time when the national debt breaks down to more than $49,000 for every person in Wyoming and across this country, we cannot afford to continue business as usual. We cannot continue punting the tough decisions simply because the tough decisions might impact our reelection campaigns. The decisions that are painful today will be even more painful in the future.

We talk about pay-fors here when people want to do a new program or continue an old program with additional expenses, but we better start including the debt. Our debt is greater than the value of everything we produce in this country in a year. That is the gross national product. The debt is greater than the gross national product. There are a lot of stories about what happens when your debt gets greater than the gross national product, and none of them is good.

I have heard from a lot of people in Wyoming about the national debt and the lack of a budget for more than 3 years. While they have differing viewpoints on the best solution, they have one common message: Do something. Do something, and do it as soon as possible. I am concerned that, after votes, we will end up in the same place we started—without a budget and without a fiscal plan to get our Nation's debt and deficit in check. I do not know about you, but it is keeping me up nights.

Some of my colleagues have offered plans to make that happen. Those who control the Senate appear content to sit on the sidelines and criticize. While that happens, we continue to add trillions of dollars to our national debt. I would encourage my colleagues on the other side of the aisle to think about what that means to future generations and join us in finding a plan to fix our fiscal woes.

I know that is what they are thinking about because I have been in meetings off of the Hill where they have talked about this same thing. But we have to solve it; we cannot just talk about it. We cannot give it lip service when we are off of the floor and excuse it when we are on the floor.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alabama.

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, before Senator ENZI leaves the floor, he made reference to the fact that in the European parliamentary system, when a Prime Minister proposes a budget that fails, that would be cause for collapse of the government and a new election.

He also correctly recalled how the deficit commission that was appointed by President Obama came back with a number of recommendations that would have gone far farther than the President's budget in dealing with our debt course.

But I would ask the Senator about that moment he mentioned, after the debt commission reported, when the President came before the joint session of Congress to give the State of the Union. Was the Senator surprised and disappointed that the President virtually ignored the debt commission and did not take the opportunity to explain to the whole audience of the American people that we are on an unsustainable course that could lead to financial catastrophe?

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, I was both surprised and disappointed. I thought he had a unique opportunity, and it had been handed to him on a platter that he designed. He appointed these people, and they put a lot of hours into it, including the Senator from North Dakota, who is here on the floor, and came up with a plan. It was not a pleasant plan by anybody's imagination. It was an important plan by everybody's—well, evidently not everybody or we would have adopted it by now. But it had some critical things in there that should be taken care of, that should be considered in a budget, and should have leadership coming from the White House. That is where leadership on budgets happens.

I remember being in the Wyoming legislature. We have a requirement that you have to balance the budget each and every year, and we do that. If you find out there is going to be a deficit before the legislature meets—and they only meet for 20 days in the budget year—if you know about it before that time, then the legislature has to make those cuts. One of the things I noted was when we made the cuts, the people in the administration picked out something that was painful and made that cut so the constituents out there would say: Oh, that really hurt. Those stupid legislators picked the wrong things. Well, it was not the legislators who picked the wrong things. It was the people in charge of each of those trying to make sure the legislature felt pain.

If that deficit is noted outside of the time of the few days that the legislature meets, then the Governor has to make the cuts. Virtually everybody in the administration worked for the Governor. So when he made the cuts, they took the priorities and they chopped off the lowest priorities, so it was not noticeable around the State, and it works out well. That is leadership. That is tough leadership because the Governor does not like to have to be the one who is held up for all the scrutiny of what is spent.

That is what the President has to do. That is the President's job, to get this budget back in balance. There are some examples around the world where, when they put the budget on a path to balancing, the economy comes up.

Mr. SESSIONS. Yes.

Mr. ENZI. That gives people a little bit of confidence of what can happen. Right now, there is not a lot of confidence around this country, so the economy is dropping. But a good budget, that follows a plan, that gets us in

fiscal stability, would make a huge difference for this country and stimulate business.

Mr. SESSIONS. I could not agree more. I do believe the debt course we are on, which is unsustainable—every expert and the witnesses who come before the Budget Committee on which Senator ENZI and I serve have told us it is unsustainable, and if we get off of it and tighten our belts and do things such as Governor Bentley in Alabama is doing, Governor Christie has had to do, Governor Brown is now facing in California—they let that State go so far out of control, it is going to be difficult to bring it back—but they have to make tough choices. If we do that, I believe we will get some positive impact on the economy from the confidence that restores.

I say to Senator CONRAD, I see Senator LIEBERMAN is here. I would be willing to yield if you are ready to use some time now.

Mr. CONRAD. Could I say to my colleague, we have 17 minutes left on this side. We have four Senators left to speak. The Senator has, I think, probably 54, 53 minutes left—something like that.

So I say to Senator LIEBERMAN, if you could take about 4 minutes, if that would work for you.

Mr. LIEBERMAN. I was hoping for 4¼ minutes. OK. I will do my best.

Mr. CONRAD. Sold.

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, I will yield 4 minutes to the Senator from our side.

Mr. LIEBERMAN. I thank the Senator.

Mr. SESSIONS. He will have a flat 8 minutes.

Mr. LIEBERMAN. That is very generous of my friend.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. LIEBERMAN. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from North Dakota and the Senator from Alabama.

I have been listening to some of the statements that are being made. They are quite sincere. They are quite interesting. But I am afraid, in the end, they are not going to signify very much except good intentions.

We have ourselves in a position here where we all know the country has a terrible problem. We are spending a lot more than we are bringing in. The simplest way to explain it is, the last time I looked—I think I am still close on this—revenues of the Federal Government are about 15 or 16 percent of gross domestic product and the spending of the Federal Government is about 25 percent of gross domestic product. There you have a yawning, enormous deficit, which adds up now to a long-term debt of over $15 trillion.

We cannot go on like this and be a great country. We cannot go on like this and have any hope of economic recovery. I happen to agree—I should say in gratitude for the extra time Senator SESSIONS has given me—I happen to agree with the last thing he said. I think—and I am not alone; I think some people on both sides feel this—the best thing we can do for our economy and economic growth is to adopt a bipartisan long-term program that will reduce and hopefully eliminate our debt. Why? Because it will restore confidence in the American economy.

We all know that jobs do not come from government. They should not come from government or in government. Jobs that people want, need, come from the private sector. The last time I looked, the private sector—American business—was sitting on somewhere between $2 trillion and $3 trillion of liquid assets that they are not spending. Why aren't they spending it? They have very little confidence in the future—not just confidence about how the economy is going to be, but what we are going to do, what the government is going to do.

I think if we adopted a long-term bipartisan debt reduction program that gave them some sense of security about what taxes and spending policies were going to do for some years ahead, they would start to invest that $2 trillion to $3 trillion again, and that would create hundreds of thousands of jobs that people desperately need, who are trying so hard to get back to work.

Look, basically we know what we have to do to make this happen. To state it bluntly, it has to be a combination of tax reform and entitlement reform. We have to raise revenues so they get back up to 18, 19, 20 percent and we have to bring spending down—most of the spending increases are coming from entitlements—to about 18 or 19 percent of GDP so we can be in balance. It is not very mysterious how we are going to do this. But the political will is not there now to make those tough decisions.

Today is a classic moment. We have these budget resolutions that are before us as a matter of privilege. They are privileged matters. I have wanted to vote to proceed to some of them just to get on the subject matter, hoping that maybe the door would be opened for direction to various committees to come back with long-term solutions, as I have talked about.

We all know the Bowles-Simpson model is the one we are going to eventually get to. The question is, how close do we get to the fiscal cliff—or has our country gone over the cliff, falling down—and, finally, we rush in here and in a panic rescue it with something like Simpson-Bowles?

The closest Senate proposal that would do what we need to do is the one my friend from North Dakota has tabled in the Budget Committee. I wish we could vote on it. I do not know how many votes we would get, but I wish we could at least start the process.

I know everybody says we are going to come back after the election and there is going to be a burst of courage, I guess because the election is over, and we are going to do the Simpson-Bowles tax reform and entitlement reform. What I am sort of hearing in the wind around here is, do not count on it. I hope so. Senator CONRAD and I, it is going to be our last couple of months on this particular stage. There is nothing I know he would like more to be part of, and I can tell you nothing I would like more to be part of, than doing a bipartisan, long-term debt reduction program.

But I am fearful that it is asking an awful lot of the system in a short period of time, and the tendency will be to protect us from falling off the cliff by extending everything that is going to expire at the end of the year: stopping the sequestering, stopping the end of the Bush tax cuts. I hope I am wrong. I know there are some bipartisan groups that I have been part of that are working to get ready for that point.

That is important work, because it cannot spring out of nowhere. But our country's future is at stake, the future of the greatest economy in the history of the world, because of our irresponsibility is the only thing I can say, and we have been part of it. I take blame for part of it. We are not doing what the country needs us to do.

I am going to vote against the motions to proceed, because each of them, the proposals before us do not achieve anything near what we need to do in terms of a balance—entitlement reform, tax reform.

I do want to say one other thing which I hope we can get to soon. To say the obvious, but sometimes it is important to say it, the existing budget process has broken down. It does not work. It is not related to the reality of the economic or political times we are in. So the budget process does not work. Let me cite a couple of statistics. Not since early in 2009 has the Congress managed to actually pass a real annual budget resolution. I know the Budget Control Act does some of the things a budget resolution would do, but not all of them, and it does not do what the Budget Reform Act of 1974 called on us to do.

Listen to this. Only four times in the last 35 years—four times in 35 years—have the appropriations bills been completed prior to the beginning of a new fiscal year. What business or what other government entity could operate like that?

The last time Congress successfully passed all of the appropriations bills prior to the beginning of a new fiscal year was 1996. We know it because we have been here. Over and over again, Congress slides from one temporary short-term appropriations bill to the next, months into the fiscal year, until we finally throw it into one big hodgepodge, which is not responsible government, and a lot gets hidden in it.

I want to raise the question—I know my friends on the Budget Committee have thought about it. I sense my time is up. I wonder whether we need a commission to take a look in a short period

of time, 6 months, at the budget process we are following now and make recommendations for a new process that will work. Maybe it is a lack of political will and an inability to take on these tough issues now, but maybe it is the process, and maybe that is something sooner than later we can work together on.

I thank Senators CONRAD and SESSIONS for allowing me to speak as long as I was able to.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alabama.

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, I would share something that was in last week's Wall Street Journal, because it deals with an issue that is important and not to be dismissed, and that is should we begin to make reductions in spending today. I think Mr. Barro provides some real valuable insight to that.

With regard to Senator LIEBERMAN, I do think that the budget process can work. It should be able to work. But it will not work if we do not try to make it work. Under certain circumstances, it is hard to get a bipartisan budget if you do not have everybody together. So maybe it is worth examining whether we can make improvements there.

But Mr. Barro deals with this question. He writes:

The weak economic recovery in the U.S. and the even weaker performance in much of Europe have renewed calls for ending budget austerity and returning to larger fiscal deficits. Curiously, this plea for more fiscal expansion fails to offer any proof that Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development countries that chose more budget stimulus have performed better than those that opted for more austerity.

He continues. These are the developed countries in the world, OECD countries.

He goes on:

Two interesting European cases are Germany and Sweden, each of which moved toward rough budget balance between 2009 and 2011—

That is after the financial crisis—

while sustaining comparatively strong growth—the average growth rate per year for real GDP for 2010 and 2011 was 3.6% growth for Germany and 4.9% for Sweden. If austerity is so terrible, how come these two countries have done so well?

The OECD countries most clearly in or near renewed recession—Greece, Portugal, Italy, Spain and perhaps Ireland and the Netherlands—are among those with relatively large fiscal deficits.

The deficits for these six countries for 2010 and 2011 were 7.9 percent of GDP. Germany and Sweden did not raise taxes but cut spending. He goes on to say:

Every time heightened fiscal deficits fail to produce desirable outcomes, the policy advice is to choose still larger deficits—

Borrow, tax, and spend. He goes on to say:

If, as I believe to be true, fiscal deficits have only a short-run expansionary impact on growth and then become negative, the results from following this policy are persistently low economic growth and an exploding ratio of debt to GDP.

Japan, he goes on to note, ''once a comparatively low public-debt nation, apparently bought into the Keynesian message many years ago.'' That is the ''spend'' message. ''The consequences for today is a ratio of government debt to GDP around 210 percent, the largest in the world.''

I ask unanimous consent to have that article printed in the RECORD because I think it helps give us some guidance that at some point bringing spending under control and tightening our deficit clearly would achieve more financial benefit than continuing to borrow and spend or create new taxes that depress the economy.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the Wall Street Journal, May 9, 2012]

STIMULUS SPENDING KEEPS FAILING—IF AUSTERITY IS SO TERRIBLE, HOW COME GERMANY AND SWEDEN HAVE DONE SO WELL?

(By Robert J. Barro)

The weak economic recovery in the U.S. and the even weaker performance in much of Europe have renewed calls for ending budget austerity and returning to larger fiscal deficits. Curiously, this plea for more fiscal expansion fails to offer any proof that Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries that chose more budget stimulus have performed better than those that opted for more austerity. Similarly, in the American context, no evidence is offered that past U.S. budget deficits (averaging 9% of GDP between 2009 and 2011) helped to promote the economic recovery.

Two interesting European cases are Germany and Sweden, each of which moved toward rough budget balance between 2009 and 2011 while sustaining comparatively strong growth—the average growth rate per year of real GDP for 2010 and 2011 was 3.6% for Germany and 4.9% for Sweden. If austerity is so terrible, how come these two countries have done so well?

The OECD countries most clearly in or near renewed recession—Greece, Portugal, Italy, Spain and perhaps Ireland and the Netherlands—are among those with relatively large fiscal deficits. The median of fiscal deficits for these six countries for 2010 and 2011 was 7.9% of GDP. Of course, part of this pattern reflects a positive effect of weak economic growth on deficits, rather than the reverse. But there is nothing in the overall OECD data since 2009 that supports the Keynesian view that fiscal expansion has promoted economic growth.

For the U.S., my view is that the large fiscal deficits had a moderately positive effect on GDP growth in 2009, but this effect faded quickly and most likely became negative for 2011 and 2012. Yet many Keynesian economists look at the weak U.S. recovery and conclude that the problem was that the government lacked sufficient commitment to fiscal expansion; it should have been even larger and pursued over an extended period.

This new point is dangerously unstable. Every time heightened fiscal deficits fail to produce desirable outcomes, the policy advice is to choose still larger deficits. If, as I believe to be true, fiscal deficits have only a short-run expansionary impact on growth and then become negative, the results from following this policy advice are persistently low economic growth and an exploding ratio of public debt to GDP.

The last conclusion is not just academic, because it fits with the behavior of Japan over the past two decades. Once a comparatively low public-debt nation, Japan apparently bought the Keynesian message many years ago. The consequence for today is a ratio of government debt to GDP around 210%—the largest in the world.

This vast fiscal expansion didn't avoid two decades of sluggish GDP growth, which averaged less than 1% per year from 1991 to 2011. No doubt, a committed Keynesian would say that Japanese growth would have been even lower without the extraordinary fiscal stimulus—but a little evidence would be nice.

Despite the lack of evidence, it is remarkable how much allegiance the Keynesian approach receives from policy makers and economists. I think it's because the Keynesian model addresses important macroeconomic policy issues and is pedagogically beautiful, no doubt reflecting the genius of Keynes. The basic model—government steps in to spend when others won't—can be presented readily to one's mother, who is then likely to buy the conclusions.

Keynes worshipers' faith in this model has actually been strengthened by the Great Recession and the associated financial crisis. Yet the empirical support for all this is astonishingly thin. The Keynesian model asks one to turn economic common sense on its head in many ways. For instance, more saving is bad because of the resultant drop in consumer demand, and higher productivity is bad because the increased supply of goods tends to lower the price level, thereby raising the real value of debt. Meanwhile, transfer payments that subsidize unemployment are supposed to lower unemployment, and more government spending is good even if it goes to wasteful projects.

Looking forward, there is a lot to say on economic grounds for strengthening fiscal austerity in OECD countries. From a political perspective, however, the movement toward austerity may be difficult to sustain in some countries, notably in France and Greece where leftists and other anti-austerity groups just won elections.

Consequently, there is likely to be increasing diversity across countries in fiscal policies, and this divergence will likely make it increasingly hard to sustain the euro as a common currency. On the plus side, the differing policies will provide better data to analyze the economic consequences of austerity.

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, I would share a few thoughts in general about where we are. Our colleagues on the Democratic side have said they want more taxes. They have not told us what taxes, how much, and where they would be. But they have told us that. Senator CONRAD has said that.

He has also been open and bold about the need to cut spending. So he wants more tax increases than I would like and he wants substantial spending cuts, but that is his view. He stated it publicly. But I will have to say, that is not the position of the Democratic majority in the Senate because they have refused to put it on paper.

Senator CONRAD was going to have a Budget Committee mark up. We were going to mark up a budget. He was going to lay out a plan. I guess it would be somewhat ''Simpson-Bowlesish.'' But it was not offered because the leadership and I suppose the members of the Democratic Conference agreed that they do not want to be on record. They would rather do like last year. And what happened last year?

They voted against the Toomey budget; they voted against the Ryan budget; they voted against the Rand Paul budget; and voted against the President's budget.

They wiped their hands. They did not vote for anything to cause any pain to anybody. And presumably they thought that was better than actually being engaged in leading and telling the American people what they planned to do to change the debt course we are on. That is the deal.

Well, I would say a couple of things. If I were talking to a group of American citizens today, I would say this: Do not send one more dime to Washington, DC until they show you a budget, how they are going to spend it. I mean, why should they? We get in trouble; we overspend; we place the Nation at risk. And all we want to say is: Send more money. You cannot cut, we are going to throw people into the streets, and push older people off the cliff in a wheelchair.

No, I do not think so. I think the American people need to hold this Congress, this government, to account. They need to say, we are not sending you any more money until you get your house in order. And we are not paying for hot tubs in Las Vegas. We are not throwing away $500 million on a Solyndra loan project that never had a chance to succeed and was benefiting cronies of the White House. We are not going to pay for the TSA to have warehouses filled with millions of dollars in equipment not being used.

You do not have your act together. We want you to get your act together. We want to see some management. We want to see some leadership. Who is the top manager in America? It is not the chairman of the Budget Committee, or the ranking member of the Budget Committee, it is the Chief Executive. The President heads the executive branch. Every Cabinet member, subcabinet member, sub-sub-sub cabinet member works for the President.

We had a situation where it has become clear that for over a year, people illegally in the country earning money are filing income tax returns and gaining as much as $4 billion a year in child tax credit money, a direct payment from the United States for children who do not even live in the country.

The Inspector General for the U.S. Treasury Department said this should have been ended, and the IRS is not ending it. Congress ought to pass a law about it. The House has done so. This Senate has not acted. Those are the kinds of things that are happening. I would think the President of the United States, as soon as he learned that, would say: Stop it today. If you care about the money of the American people, if you care about the fact that we are now spending about $3.6 trillion dollars a year, taking in $2.3 trillion a year, so a deficit of $1.3 trillion.

Oh, they say that President Bush increased the deficit. And he did. But the highest deficit he ever had was about $450-some-odd billion. The last 3 years under President Obama, the deficits have averaged over $1.3 trillion a year. Next year, beginning September 30, the next fiscal year, it is projected to be over $1 trillion again.

This is an unsustainable course. We are looking here for some reality and leadership. I think it is a stunning, amazing development when we have the President of the United States at a time of financial systemic crisis and danger who has the opportunity to lead, who does not lead, who has an opportunity to tell the American people why we need to change the course we are on, the fact that it is going to take some belt tightening and some pain and some sacrifice—not so much, but some.

We are going to have to do it. And if we do it, the country will be on a good path. We can save this country. We can avoid a debt crisis that could happen to us, because indeed our debt per person in America is higher than that of Greece, higher than that of any other country in Europe. We are in a dangerous area. We need to get off of it. I am amazed the President has not led.

I think it is a development of the most stunning nature that he would, as the law requires, submit the budget he submitted. It is irresponsible. It did not get a single vote in the Senate last year. It went down 97 to 0. It was voted down 414 to 0 in the House this year. I suspect in an hour or so it will go down again on the floor of the Senate by unanimous vote. That speaks a lot. That says a lot, indicates the sad state of affairs which we are in.

It is deeply disappointing.

I see Senator LEE from Utah here, who is a new Member of the Senate. If Senator CONRAD doesn't have an objection, I will yield to him and note that Senator LEE campaigned throughout his State. He talked to thousands of people. He was elected in this last cycle. He felt the mood of the people of his State and America, their concern about the debt course we are on. He has worked extremely hard and has laid out a proposal that he would like to explain and ask us to support.

I thank the Senator for his leadership and his commitment and his hard work since he has been in the Senate.

Mr. CONRAD. Might I inquire of Senator LEE, how much time would the Senator require?

Mr. LEE. Ten or twelve minutes.

Mr. CONRAD. Can we have an agreement for 15 minutes? Is that reasonable?

Mr. LEE. Yes.

Mr. CONRAD. And if the Senator completes his statement before then, he can yield back—either way.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

Mr. LEE. Mr. President, the true greatness of our Nation lies in the power and promise of the American dream. Unfortunately, for many individuals and families, this dream has become a national nightmare. Without the clear priorities and accountability of a budget, we continue to careen toward the economic cliff, with our massive debt and trillion-dollar deficits threatening the prosperity of Americans from every walk of life. To put it simply, we must change course.

Restoring the American dream will require more than clever bumper sticker slogans. While optimism is an important part of the American dream, hope simply is not a strategy for the kind of course correction our country desperately needs.

Doing nothing is no longer an option, although this President and this Congress have attempted, by not having a budget, to convince the American people that doing nothing is somehow the only option. Ignoring our broken entitlement programs, maintaining our complex Tax Code, and pretending we don't have a spending problem ensures that our economy will never truly recover and that the American dream will not be restored.

The good news for Americans is that many of us do have solutions to confront and correct the country's most pressing challenges. In today's debate and discussion, the Nation has seen that changing course and balancing our budget doesn't have to take 30 years, nor does it have to require the kinds of drastic cuts that could devastate America's most vulnerable citizens.

As we conclude this debate, I remind my colleagues of the old adage that ''you can make excuses or you can make progress, but you cannot make both.'' Given the gravity of our current situation, we should also recognize that our present path is unsustainable. A course correction is coming; the question we will be held accountable for answering is whether that correction comes by choice or as a consequence of making excuses and doing nothing.

The Saving the American Dream Plan, which I have proposed, puts us on a sustainable and affordable path toward economic growth. It reforms our Tax Code to make paying taxes a simple, transparent, and equitable process that regular people can perform on their own. It empowers families to save by making savings tax free, which in turn lowers their tax burden in a way that helps them and our economy. It establishes a single tax rate. It eliminates the payroll tax, helping all Americans—especially those at the lowest income level—and it abolishes the death tax permanently. Under this plan, Americans will no longer be forced to navigate the complex web of countless loopholes—for people who don't need them—contained within a tax code that is longer than the works of Shakespeare.

In addition to placing an enormous burden and imposing immense uncertainty on our people, such a tax system hides the true size and cost of government. This plan is simple, and it provides certainty for individuals and for businesses.

Opponents of reform will play petty politics and prey on false fears about the government's ability to help the helpless. They claim that any course correction in entitlement or social service spending will damage the social safety net. The truth is that doing nothing will absolutely and completely destroy the safety net. If we do not change course, the collapse of safety net services for our most vulnerable Americans is certain, and it is certain to hurt most those who have the least.

This plan saves Social Security by transitioning to a real insurance plan that provides income security for seniors and prevents sudden poverty as a result of unforeseen events. The affluent elderly, such as Warren Buffett, will see a decrease in benefits. This plan will allow people like Mr. Buffett to help in a way that is actually good for our economy and job creators.

The Saving the American Dream Plan also ends the government takeover of health care and puts dollars and decisions back into the hands of families and individuals and their doctors. Just like school choice allows parents to make sure their kids don't get stuck in a failing school system, this plan ensures families don't get stuck in a failing health care system.

Finally, this plan acknowledges that we have a spending problem and works to reduce the size of government, eliminate waste, lower the future burden on taxpayers, encourage productive economic activity, and enhance individual liberty and choice. It reins in spending by a total of $9.6 trillion over 10 years when compared to President Obama's budget and by $7.1 trillion as against the CBO baseline.

Supporters of the status quo will have every excuse as to why this budget or that budget won't work, but now is the time to stop making excuses and start making progress. Today we will vote on five budget proposals, but this is only the beginning of the discussion. I can say confidently that Republicans have done a tremendous amount of work to craft proposals to begin to change our course and move our country in the right direction, in a sustainable direction.

The President's budget reflects the status quo: Do nothing, keep our complex Tax Code and broken entitlement programs, and ignore spending. As for Senate Democrats, for 3 straight years they have refused to participate in this discussion except to criticize ideas they don't like. Leadership is what leadership does. For the past 1,113 days, our country has suffered from a lack of leadership.

I ask my colleagues, if you cannot vote for these budget plans today, will you at least do the right thing for the country and put aside election-year politics, show true leadership, and work with us to explore and implement real solutions? We cannot stand by the status quo. We cannot decide by default to do nothing. The American people expect more, and they deserve better.

We need every American to join us in finding the solutions that will enable us as a nation to change course. The Saving the American Dream Plan is about empowering individuals to define their own dream and ensuring they have every opportunity to make that dream reality.

This is the greatest civilization the world has ever known—not because government made it great but because Americans continually reject the status quo, choose to change course when needed, and demand economic freedom, while ensuring individual liberty and the right to pursue happiness.

This budget preserves the clear priorities and accountability we must have to jump-start the economy, create real jobs, strengthen the safety net, and restore the American dream.

I thank the Chair.

Mr. FRANKEN. Mr. President, I would like to echo what so many of my colleagues have already explained: that voting on a budget today would serve no purpose. We keep hearing from our friends on the other side of the aisle: ''We haven't passed a budget in a thousand days.'' While this is technically true, this is a technicality without a difference, and ignores one essential detail: we passed something else which, for all intents and purposes, accomplishes exactly the same thing as a budget the Budget Control Act of 2011.

First let's look at what a budget resolution actually is. According to the Congressional Research Service, a budget resolution:

> sets forth aggregate levels of spending, revenue, and public debt. It is not intended to establish details of spending or revenue policy and does not provide levels of spending for specific agencies or programs. Instead, its purpose is to create enforceable parameters within which Congress can consider legislation dealing with spending and revenue.

A budget resolution is a document intended to guide Congress, and never goes to the President for his signature. The Budget Control Act actually went much further than a budget resolution—it actually set spending caps for the next 10 years and put them into law—a law signed by the President. The spending caps alone produce $900 billion of cuts. In addition, the Budget Control Act created the Super Committee and, because the committee failed to produce a deficit reduction plan, the Act calls for automatic cuts—through a so-called ''sequestration''—of an additional $1.2 trillion.

So Congress has passed over $2 trillion in spending cuts—the biggest package of spending cuts in American history. Yet some of my colleagues are now calling on Congress to also pass a budget resolution, despite the fact that the Budget Control Act has the force of law, and has spending caps, whereas a budget resolution has none of that and in fact, the Budget Control Act states clearly that it ''shall apply in the same manner as for a concurrent resolution on the budget.

In addition, the Budget Control Act is something that we all agreed to. This legislation passed the Senate and the Republican-controlled House with wide margins. And this was not a deal that we passed years ago that we have somehow forgotten about—we passed the Budget Control Act less than 10 months ago. These budget resolutions diverge greatly from the deal that we all agreed on. We passed that legislation to avoid a debt default, to give us some certainty. But here we are 10 months later, rehashing much of the same debate.

Going through the motions of considering a budget resolution would not be a productive use of our time. Procedural rules require that we spend up to 50 hours on a budget resolution. And on top of that, they force us into a ''vote-a-rama'' on all amendments that are offered. So that means that we would lose a week or 2 on an exercise that is moot because we already have budget caps. That is time we would not have to focus on things that will provide needed help to my Minnesota constituents: creating jobs, helping small businesses, keeping interest rates low on student loans, and passing a long-term highway bill.

But instead, the minority is insisting that we spend precious time debating whether or not we should pass a budget resolution. And so here we are with five pending budget resolutions, and it is hard to tell which among them is the most detrimental to our country, because they are all very dangerous.

Senator PAUL's proposal eliminates the U.S. Departments of Education, Energy, Commerce, and Housing and Urban Development and turns important safety net programs like child nutrition and Medicaid into block grants, resulting in their funding being slashed.

Most of the proposals fundamentally change Medicare from a program that guarantees health care to seniors to one that gives seniors some money—but not enough money—to buy health insurance in the private market. This breaks the promise we have made to Americans—that if they work hard and pay into the system, their health care will be covered when they retire.

Yet these massive cuts to programs which benefit millions of Americans seem designed to bankroll new tax cuts that benefit only the wealthiest few. The Urban Institute and Brookings Institution's joint Tax Policy Center estimates that Senator TOOMEY's proposal gives people making more than a million dollars a year an average tax cut of $92,000. And that plan looks reasonable compared to Senator PAUL's, which not only cuts the top tax rates in half for wealthy Americans but increases taxes on working families.

And all the while, these plans would sacrifice programs that assist children, seniors, and the poor in favor of those tax giveaways to the wealthy. That is how these plans can be summarized. If there were a reason to vote on these proposals, which I do not think there is, then they would all deserve our full-throated opposition.

But, as we have pointed out repeatedly, passing a budget resolution is simply not needed after we have already passed spending caps in the Budget Control Act. That would be about as productive as asking for someone to draft up blueprints after they already had built your house.

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, our Nation faces enormous and worrisome fiscal challenges. There is no question we must reduce our budget deficit in the medium-term and prepare for a longer-term future in which an aging population stresses Medicare and Social Security funds. And we face, at the beginning of January, the prospect of automatic, unprioritized, and unwise budget cuts that would do tremendous harm to just about every program in the government, from domestic programs to our military, and would in the process threaten our economic recovery.

The way to address those enormous challenges is by coming together to address the sources of our budget deficit. The solutions must include prudent, prioritized spending cuts. They will undoubtedly include reforms to entitlement programs to ensure their long-term viability. And, as just about any objective observer has repeatedly pointed out, the solutions must include restoration of revenues lost to the Treasury through unjustified tax cuts for the wealthiest and unjustified tax loopholes.

Democrats have repeatedly demonstrated a willingness to address these areas—even in painful ways that have a real impact on programs about which we feel strongly. President Obama has repeatedly reached out to Republicans in trying to craft a bipartisan agreement that deals with spending, entitlements and revenues. Senator CONRAD and many others on this side of the aisle have said they will work with our Republican colleagues to deal comprehensively with the deficit.

Rather than seeking compromise, Republicans seem determined to draw uncompromising lines in the sand. Today we will vote on extreme budget proposals that would sacrifice vital programs like education, transportation and research in order to protect tax breaks for millionaires and billionaires.

The Republican proposals before us today demonstrate that our efforts to deal constructively with the deficit have so far fallen on deaf ears. Rather than offer prudent, thoughtful spending cuts, these proposals would gut programs that Americans have repeatedly told us to preserve. Rather than recognize the obvious fiscal reality that revenue must be part of the equation, these proposals demonstrate a continued, ideologically motivated refusal to even consider what must obviously be part of any serious attempt to address the deficit. Rather than reform entitlement programs so we can maintain our commitment to seniors, these proposals would upend that commitment.

Perhaps the clearest statement of all of Republican intentions is the budget passed in the House, one of the proposals we will vote on today. This budget eliminates the decades-long guarantee of health care for our seniors, replacing Medicare with a voucher program that would cause skyrocketing out-of-pocket costs for seniors.

There is more. The Ryan budget proposes to cut billions and billions from domestic programs, but gives us no specifics as to how those cuts would be accomplished. It proposes almost no specific spending cuts, though it promises massive savings. We can see just how devastating these cuts would be if we assume, in the absence of specific proposals, that they would be distributed evenly across the budget. If that were the case, we would lose more than $100 billion in funding over the next decade for science, including the search for new cures and other new technologies. We would have space for 2 million fewer Head Start students to get a jump on their education. More than 9 million college students would lose $1,000 in Pell grant funding to afford college.

This budget would slash spending to educate our children and to train our workers. It would cut funding to support new sources of energy and to protect our national parks and historic sites, and for environmental protection and other natural resource programs. It would slash funding to pave our roads and bridges and meet other transportation needs.

And the Ryan plan does not address what budget experts of all ideological stripes tell us we must address: the need for additional revenues. Rather than restore revenue, this budget is premised on the notion that high-income earners haven't gotten enough in tax cuts—and so it slashes the top tax bracket.

If you are not willing to address revenues, you are not serious about addressing the deficit. The Ryan budget and the other Republican proposals before us fail that test. I hope we can dispense with these proposals and get to the challenging work of dealing with the deficit.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota.

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, Senator HARKIN is here, and Senator HARKIN needs about 4 minutes; is that right?

Mr. HARKIN. Yes.

Mr. CONRAD. How much time do we have?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Thirteen minutes 20 seconds.

Mr. CONRAD. On the other side?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Twenty-four minutes 46 seconds.

Mr. CONRAD. This might be a useful time to get another consent. If we can have Senator HARKIN for 4 minutes, how much time does Senator JOHNSON need?

Mr. JOHNSON of Wisconsin. Not more than 10 minutes.

Mr. CONRAD. OK. I ask unanimous consent that Senator HARKIN speak for 4 minutes and Senator JOHNSON for 10 minutes.

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

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, I wish to address these budget proposals in one context. First of all, we have to dismiss the so-called Sessions budget that is supposedly the Obama budget—it is not. That is not even serious. Beyond that, we have four Republican budgets. Here is the one thing people have to keep in mind, especially now: Each one of those budgets will double the interest rate on student loans beginning on July 1 of this year—every single one of them.

We were here in the last couple of weeks trying to bring up a bill to prevent those interest rates from going up, to keep it at 3.4 percent rather than going to 6.8 percent. The Republicans filibustered that. We could not even bring it up for discussion, debate, and amending. But the Republicans kept saying, oh, they want to keep the interest rate at 3.4 percent. Well, quite frankly, I don't see how they can say that and then vote for each one of these budgets because each one that will be voted on in about an hour and a half, if it passes, will double the interest rate on student loans on July 1. At the same time, they continue to filibuster our bill to even bring it on the floor. My friends on the other side of the aisle are telling students across the country they don't want to see the interest rate double, but their budget has it.

Our former colleague and now the Vice President of the United States JOE BIDEN, when he was a Senator, said something I think very savvy one time: Don't tell me what you value; show me your budget, and I will tell you what you value.

Mr. President, my friends on the other side may say in public that they want to prevent the student loan rate hike, but their actual budget tells a very different story. Likewise, their ongoing filibuster of our Stop the Student Loan Interest Rate Hike Act tells a different story. Again, they have blocked us from proceeding to the bill. If we had proceeded, we could have had a serious discussion about how we pay for it. They could have offered amendments that we could have voted on. Instead, they chose to obstruct the entire process, and yet repeatedly on this floor Republicans, one after the other, came up and said they want to stop the increase in interest rates from going from 3.4 percent to 6.8 percent. Don't tell me what you value; show me your budget. I will give them credit for this: They have shown us their budget, and in it is a doubling of the interest rate on student loans beginning July 1.

I want to be clear that anybody who votes for any one of these budgets is voting to double the student loan interest rate on July 1 regardless of what may be said, regardless of crocodile

tears that may be shed on interest rates and what is happening. The budgets we are voting on today tell the true story: Republicans are willing—not only willing, but they are going to, if they vote for these budgets, double the interest rates on student loans beginning on July 1. There is just no getting around that, and that is a shame.

We have to stop that interest rate hike on July 1. That is why it is important to vote down these proposed budgets this afternoon.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wisconsin is recognized.

Mr. JOHNSON of Wisconsin. I ask unanimous consent to speak for no more than 10 minutes.

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

Mr. JOHNSON of Wisconsin. Mr. President, before I start talking a bit about the budget of my friend Senator LEE, I want to respond to the comments of the Senator from Iowa in terms of interest rates.

Instead of talking about student rates, let me talk a little about America's average borrowing cost. Certainly, what I have done is delved into the budget and taken a look at the history, and from 1970 to 1999—over that 30-year period—the average borrowing cost in the United States was 5.3 percent. By the way, that was when America was a far more creditworthy nation, when our debt-to-GDP ratio ranged from about 40 percent to 67 percent. Now our debt-to-GDP ratio is over 100 percent.

Over the last 3 years our average borrowing cost has been kept artificially low, at 1.5 percent. So my concern is by not seriously addressing the problem, by not actually passing a real budget that starts reining in the growth in government, we are going to go from that 1.5 percent and revert back to that average mean borrowing cost of 5.3 percent. If we do, that 3.8-percent differential would add $600 billion to $700 billion per year to America's interest expense, and that would crowd out 60 to 70 percent of all discretionary spending. That is the interest rate that I am concerned about.

That is the day of reckoning I am concerned about, when global investors look at the United States and say: You know what. We are not going to loan you any more money. Or what is more likely to occur, they will say: We will loan you money but at a far higher rate.

Having made that statement, I would like to talk a little about the budget of my friend, Senator LEE, and the things I like about it. One of the things I like to do is take a look at history. I know a lot of us say we don't have a tax problem, and we don't. It is not that we tax the American public too little, it is that we spend too much. And this is some pretty graphic proof.

This reflects our 10-year spending levels. From 1992 to 2000, the Federal Government spent a total of $16 trillion over that 10-year period. Over the last 10 years, from 2002 to 2011, the Federal Government spent $28 trillion.

Now, the debate moving forward is—according to the just released Obama budget—the President would like to spend $47 trillion over the next 10 years. The House budget would spend $40 trillion. I guess what I like about Senator LEE's budget is that he would come in and spend about $37 trillion and put us on a more aggressive path toward fiscal sanity. While we hear about Draconian cuts all the time, one doesn't have to be a math major to realize that moving to $37 trillion, $40 trillion, or $47 trillion is not a cut from $28 trillion. All we are trying to do is reduce the rate of growth.

The other thing I like about Senator LEE's budget can be illustrated in terms of this chart, which shows the total Federal debt. I started this chart in 1987, the tail end of Ronald Reagan's administration, when our total Federal debt was $2.3 trillion. I want to point out that it took us 200 years to incur $2.3 trillion. Of course, last year, in the debt ceiling agreement, this Congress gave the President the authority to increase our debt ceiling by $2.1 trillion. We will go through that in less than 2 years. That is a problem.

Of course, if we take a look at President Obama's budget, we can see how quickly our national debt has increased. But according to President Obama's budget, in the year 2022 our total Federal debt would be $25.9 trillion, up $10 trillion from what it is today. Senator LEE's budget would result in a total debt of about $19.1 trillion. Even more importantly, he stabilizes and then reduces a very important metric, our overall debt-to-GDP ratio. That is what investors take a look at in terms of our creditworthiness.

The other thing I like about Senator LEE's budget is by 2022 it will reduce Federal spending to 17.8 percent of the size of our economy. If you are like me and you think the root cause of our economic problem is the size, the scope, and all the rules and regulations, all of government's intrusion into our lives and the resulting cost of government, this is the key metric: How large is the Federal Government in relationship to the size of our economy?

Currently, the Federal Government takes 24 cents of every dollar that is generated by our economy. If we add in State and local governments, total government in the United States consumes 39.2 percent. Put another way, 39 cents of every dollar filters through some level of government.

I don't know about anyone else, but I don't find government particularly effective or efficient. To put that in perspective, for example, the cost of government for Norway last year—one of the European-style socialist nations—was 40 percent. For Greece, it was 47 percent. Anybody hear of Greece recently? That economic model is collapsing.

This is why Senator LEE's proposal is important. If we take a look at spending and revenue generation over the last 50 years, we can see spending from 1959 through 2008 averaged 20.2 percent. Over the last 3 years we have increased that to 24 percent. Revenue generation has been 18.1 percent over that same time period.

By the way, as much as our friends on the other side of the aisle want to punish success and increase the top marginal tax rates, the problem with that is it simply doesn't work. During my lifeline, the top marginal tax rates have been 90 percent, 70 percent to 50 percent to 28 percent, 35 percent, 39.6 percent, and now back to 35 percent. In all that time period the average tax receipts—the maximum amount the Federal Government could extract from our economy—has averaged very tightly around that mean of 18.1 percent.

If we ever have any chance of living within our means, we better get Federal spending down to about that level. That is what Senator LEE's budget does.

So, again, I thank my friend Senator LEE, as well as Senator TOOMEY, and Senator PAUL for putting forward serious proposals. I thank all Republicans in Congress who are actually voting for something because, Mr. President, Republicans are proving we are willing to be held accountable to the American people by putting a plan on the table and showing the American people what we would do to try to get our fiscal house in order.

With that, Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I will not take more than a few minutes, as I have explained to the senior Senator from North Dakota. I appreciate his courtesy, and I ask unanimous consent that my statement be made as in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Withought objection, it is so ordered.

(The remarks of Mr. LEAHY are printed in today's RECORD under ''Morning Business.'')

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New York.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, before he leaves, I want to say that the Senator from Vermont has done an incredible job on the Violence Against Women Act. He has put together a bipartisan coalition, and I would like to second his words that the House pass our bill. It is a careful compromise, and it is a delicately crafted compromise.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Will the Senator suspend? How much time does the Senator from North Dakota yield to the Senator from New York?

Mr. CONRAD. How much time do I have remaining?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. There is 4 minutes remaining.

Mr. CONRAD. I give the Senator 3 minutes.

Mr. SCHUMER. I thank my colleague for the time.

Again, I want to compliment the Senator from Vermont and agree with him and hope we can move the bill forward.

But, Mr. President, I am here to talk about the budget. All afternoon I have heard my colleagues on the other side of the aisle repeat over and over that we haven't passed a budget. As my friend from North Dakota knows, that is clearly not the case.

Last August, President Obama signed a budget for this year that reduces the deficit by $2 trillion. It is called the Budget Control Act. It was passed 74 to 26, bipartisan, with many Republicans voting for it on August 2, 2011.

Despite what we hear on the floor today, after the Budget Control Act passed, several Senate Republicans, including Senators GRASSLEY, ALEXANDER, and COLLINS, admitted it constitutes a budget. So watching this debate on the Senate floor is a sort of through-the-looking-glass experience. We are watching our colleagues call for something they acknowledge already happened and they supported. This is nothing more than petty politics. We should be focused on jobs and the economy. Instead we are forced to spend hours debating something that already happened. It doesn't make sense.

But let's put that aside for a moment and look at the extreme plans we are voting on today. The only real differences between the four Republican budgets—the only real difference between the four Republican budgets—is how quickly they race to end Medicare as we know it. The Republican budgets all cut taxes on the wealthiest Americans and leave the middle class to foot the bill. They all allow student loan rates to double. They all provide tax breaks for millionaires and billionaires. And they all put the middle class last instead of first.

When I first examined the Ryan budget passed by the House GOP this year, I thought it was the height of irresponsibility. But now that we have seen three other Republican budgets, we know they make the Ryan budget almost seem reasonable by comparison, and that is no small feat.

I have nothing against the wealthy. I am glad they make money. That is the America way. God bless them. Many are living the American dream. But in order to keep that dream alive and get our country on firmer fiscal footing, I think we need a little shared sacrifice. The bottom line is any budget that jeopardizes the middle class while filling the pockets of the wealthy with greater tax breaks is ultimately untenable and will never pass the Senate. While we are certainly open to compromise, Democrats will not tolerate an assault on the middle class. It isn't fair and it isn't right.

We hope the coming debate will yield a sound serious agreement. But if it doesn't, Democrats are happy to take this contrast of priorities into November because we know we have the high ground.

I thank the Chair, and I yield my remaining time back to my friend and colleague from North Dakota.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alabama.

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, the Budget Control Act is not a budget, it is just a containment of spending. A clever attempt was made to make it look like a budget, but it is not a budget. If it was a budget, why did the President submit a budget this year? Why did the House pass a budget? Why were four budgets produced in the House by Democratic House Members?

In today's Politico, an article quotes Senator LIEBERMAN, who just spoke and who caucuses with the Democrats.

> I don't think [Democrats] will offer their own budget and I'm disappointed in that.

Senator MANCHIN of West Virginia, a Democrat, said he would have been ''impeached'' if he had failed to produce a budget as West Virginia's Governor, though he conceded there are differences with the State budget process.

> Sure I have a problem with [failing to offer a budget]. As a former governor, my responsibility was to put a budget forward and balance it, so anyone who comes from the executive mindset has a problem with that. I don't care if you're Democrat or Republican.

''A problem with that'' means a problem with not having a budget.

Senator MARK PRYOR, a Democrat from Arkansas:

> The budget process is just not working around here. We've had three years with President Obama where we're not able to get a budget resolution passed.

That 3 years includes this one.

So we don't have a budget, we have a spending cap. And our Democratic colleagues—bless their hearts—have been whining that the House proposed a budget that came below the Senate's Budget Control Act caps in some areas, so they say that was breaking the budget.

I would just advise them that when they vote on the President's budget—and I assume they will all vote against it; they did last year—the President's budget wipes out half the savings in the Budget Control Act.

The President signed the Budget Control Act last August to raise the debt ceiling. We agreed to cut spending $2.1 trillion—not nearly enough, but we cut that and it was a decent step forward in the right direction, and the President proposes a budget this year that takes half of it out. Give me a break. There is no sense of wanting to have a budget, to adhere to one, and to contain spending. What do they want? More taxes.

The President said, ''The Buffett rule will help stabilize the debt.'' That is what the President said; that is, tax increases on the rich would help stabilize the debt. Well, the Buffett tax would raise about $4 billion a year. This year the deficit will be $1,200 billion, not $4 billion. That is not going to fix it. It will be $1,200 billion, and the Buffett rule would raise about $4 billion a year. What kind of responsible leadership is that, for the President of the United States to be traveling this country at a time when we have never faced a more significant financial threat to America—we never, ever have been on a debt course as dangerous as the one we are on today. It is systemic. It is deep. We have to make serious changes, and he goes around saying the Buffett rule is going to stabilize the debt? He also said his budget last year would lead us to balance when the lowest single deficit year in 10 would be a deficit of $748 billion.

So I don't know what kind of leadership we are getting. It is not good leadership. It is worse than no leadership because when a budget is prepared with great effort by Congressman PAUL RYAN in the House, and his budget will actually change the debt course of America and minimize the pain we all have to suffer and create some growth and prosperity, the President invites him over to a conference, sits him down there, and then attacks it, and he has been attacking the budget ever since. Why is this? Why will not our colleagues support any budget?

I fully expect my Democratic colleagues to vote against all of these budgets and not vote for one. Think about that. They will vote against four, not vote for one. Well, because you don't have the fingerprints on anything that results in cutting spending, nobody that benefits from spending is going to be mad with you. Everybody who wants more money and doesn't want to have a dime reduced in the take they get from the taxpayers' trough and the debt we borrow—they don't have any reduction in that, and then they can't be mad at me. But that is not a responsible course.

This is not a little matter. This is what Admiral Mullen, the former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said just 2 years ago:

> The biggest threat we have to our national security is our debt.

In an important statement by 10 former Chairs of the Council of Economic Advisers, who served in Republican and Democratic administrations, they wrote in March of 2011:

> At some point, bond markets are likely to turn on the United States, leading to a crisis that could dwarf 2008.

Bond markets will turn. That is what they have done on Greece.

The Simpson-Bowles Commission's Erskine Bowles and Alan Simpson, in testimony to our committee, said:

> This nation has never faced a more predictable financial crisis.

The same thing as the Council of Economic Advisors said: You are on a debt path that is unsustainable.

Chairman Bernanke, Chairman of the Federal Reserve—always cautious about what he says—talking about the Congressional Budget Office's projections of surging debt year after year, says:

The CBO projections, by design, ignore the adverse effects that such high debt and deficits would likely have on our economy. But if government debt and deficits were actually to grow at the pace envisioned by this scenario, the economic and financial effects would be severe.

And I recall at one point he said in his testimony: You see these debts being projected out there year after year, surging at this high level? You are never going to get there.

What he meant was that we would have a financial crisis before that happened.

I would say to my colleagues, this is a time of challenge for the Senate and the Congress of the United States. Will we rise to the challenge and actually do something? We can talk about it. We can have secret meetings and secret meetings and secret meetings. That is not fixing it. We can have these last-minute decisions, like last summer when the government was about to virtually shut down because the debt limit had been reached, and reach some secret agreement that is brought up on the floor for a vote and is not very well written. Or we can do what the law requires. In the United States Code, the Congressional Budget Act of 1974. It requires that we pass a budget. We can't guarantee exactly how it will all come out, but we ought to attempt to comply with the law, at least. We haven't attempted to do that.

I am worried about our future. I am worried about where we are heading. And I do think the American people have a right to be upset with us. They are not happy with us. They should not be happy with us. When their Congress has allowed this country to reach a state where we are taking in $2.3 trillion and spending $3.6 trillion, when 35, 40 percent of what we spend is borrowed money, the American people have a right to be unhappy about that. They absolutely do. We are not protecting their interests, their children's interests, their future, or the economy.

And it is stunning to me that the leader of the free world, the President of the United States, the Chief Executive, isn't pounding away at the Congress to bring spending under control and to reduce the debt we have. Instead, he seems to never want to talk about it. He only talks about investments—more investments.

In fact, that budget he produced this year, what did it do to the spending levels we agreed to last August? Before the budget control agreement of last August, the U.S. Government was on path to spend $47 trillion over 10 years. What it effectively did was it reduced that spending to $45 trillion—still substantially more each year than we are spending now. There is growth every year under that proposal—too much growth, too much debt. But it was a step. So this year when he proposed his budget, he proposed spending another $1.4 or $1.5 trillion, new, on top of that. After he signed the agreement that we would cap spending at $45 trillion, this would take spending up to $46.6 trillion again, almost $47 trillion, where we were before the agreement was reached. Now, that is not responsible leadership. And he had a big tax increase. Tax and spend—that is what that budget is. And the American people shouldn't be happy with us.

It was noted also that Senator HARKIN said, well, this isn't the President's budget, that Senator SESSIONS offered some joke, or something to that matter. But it is the President's budget. It has the numbers in it that the President had. They directly reflect the President's request. If any Senator wants to come forward and show any number we put in there that is different from the President's numbers when he laid out his budget, then I would like to see it. Maybe we could correct it. But I don't think there is an error. I think we scrupulously followed the President's budget proposal request, and when people vote on it, they can know they are voting exactly on what he proposed. I don't think anybody will dispute the numbers we have in the budget.

Also, I note that some of our Democratic colleagues are not happy about having no budget produced by the Democratic side. They feel bad about it, and I understand that. But I would have thought we would have had some Members come down and complain about it, to say that they didn't think the Democratic leadership, the Democratic conference should have blocked Senator CONRAD and the Budget Committee from having a budget, that they should be handling this differently. But we haven't had that, so I guess everybody is basically happy on the Democratic side not to have to cast any tough votes.

Mr. President, how much time is remaining on this side?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator has 4 minutes.

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, as we come to a conclusion of this debate, Senator HARKIN said something that was pretty insightful. He said: Show me your budget, and I will show you what you value.

Refuse to show me your budget, I will say, and I can say you are refusing to show what is important to you.

One of the things that has been brought up is the war costs. The war on terror in Iraq and Afghanistan has been expensive, no doubt about it. Last year the total for both wars over 10 years reached $1.3 trillion—10 years—both wars. That was the deficit last year alone, $1.3 trillion. This year the war costs are declining. The year we are in, we are spending $118 billion on the war. Our deficit will be $1,200 billion. So eliminating all war costs would be less than 10 percent of the amount of our deficit.

I say that so we understand what has happened. Over 50 percent of our spending is in mandatory entitlement programs—Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, food stamps, retirement benefits. Those are huge and they are increasing at two, three times the rate of inflation. That is what puts us on an unsustainable course.

The President's budget goes against everything the experts said, against the debt commission he appointed, and refuses to confront these surging entitlement costs. That is a disappointment because we have nothing from the other side on how they would deal with them.

But the Members on this side have offered budgets, and Congressman RYAN offered a budget. They do begin to deal with this painful but difficult situation concerning the entitlement programs. I note the Budget Control Act they have been calling a budget had nothing to do with over 50 percent of the budget. It did not deal with those expenditures, it did not deal with the entitlements. That is another reason it is not a budget. It is a cap on discretionary spending. That is all that was. It was a step in the right direction but not a budget plan that would help us have a prosperous future.

This is an important day. I think it will cause the American people and all of us in Congress to confront the reality of a danger we face from debt. No matter how we vote this day, this next hour—even if we vote in what I think is the wrong way—hopefully this whole process would have caused all of us to confront the reality of the danger to the American Republic, the growing debt.

I would say from my experience it will be tough to deal with it, but I absolutely believe we can. It is not outside of the possibility and ability of this country to reverse our course. The kind of cuts we will need to have will not be such that will damage in any significant way the strength and health of America.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The time of the Senator has expired.

Mr. SESSIONS. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota.

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I would ask Senator SESSIONS, if I might, for 2 additional minutes because of the time Senator LEAHY consumed?

Mr. SESSIONS. I appreciate that and will agree to those 2 additional minutes.

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

Mr. CONRAD. I thank the Senator for his courtesy.

Mr. President, the place we agree is we have a long-term problem for this country that we must address. I attempted to lay before the Budget Committee, and did lay before the Budget Committee, the Bowles-Simpson plan. It is the one plan that has had bipartisan support. I hope before the year is over that we can go back to it because I think it holds the greatest potential.

A key difference Senator SESSIONS and I have is whether we have a budget for this year and next. I believe it is clear we do. The Budget Control Act that passed last year says that the allocations and spending levels set ''shall

apply in the Senate in the same manner as for a concurrent resolution on the budget.'' That is for both 2012 and 2013.

I believe our Republican friends want to focus on that because they do not want to focus on the specifics of their budget plans. Recall, the last time they were in charge, when they controlled everything—the House and the Senate and the White House—the Republican policies led us to the brink of financial collapse. The proposals they are advancing today are a return to those failed policies. Remember what happened when they were in charge. We were losing 800,000 jobs a month and the economy was shrinking at a rate of almost 9 percent a year. That is why they do not want to focus on the substance of their plans.

Let's focus on the substance for a moment. Every Republican budget ends Medicare as we know it. One Republican budget cuts Social Security benefits by 39 percent. Every Republican budget cuts taxes for millionaires by at least $150,000 a year. And every Republican budget protects offshore tax havens.

I have shown on the floor many times a picture of this little building in the Cayman Islands that claims to be the home of 18,857 companies. It is not their home. They are not doing business out of this little five-story business in the Cayman Islands. They are doing monkey business. The monkey business they are doing is avoiding the taxes they owe. Every Republican budget protects this scam. That should not be allowed to continue.

I hope my colleagues reject these proposals. I hope we will vote no, and then get onto the serious business of a bipartisan plan to get America back on track, the Simpson-Bowles plan that I presented to the Budget Committee.

I yield the floor. I believe all time has expired?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator is correct.

The question is on the motion to proceed to S. Con. Res. 41.

Mr. SESSIONS. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, we have 1 minute on each side?

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

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, the President's budget is now before us. Last year it failed in this body 97 to 0. It failed in the House, the budget that he offered this year, 414 to 0. I expect it will receive no votes today. That is a stunning development for the President of the United States in his fourth year in office, to produce a budget for the future of our country at a time of fiscal danger, great financial and economic danger to our country, to not receive a single vote.

Maybe somebody will vote for it. Let me tell you why we should not. It does not change the debt course. It violates the budget agreement the President signed and Congress passed last year, by increasing spending over that level by $1.5 trillion. It throws off another $1.8 trillion in tax increases, essentially using tax increases to offset new spending programs, not to pay down the debt. It is the most irresponsible budget submitted. I urge my colleagues to vote no.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The time of the Senator has expired. The Senator from North Dakota.

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, this is the budget. This is what Senator SESSIONS has presented as being the President's budget. Do you see a difference? This is what Senator SESSIONS describes as the President's budget. This is the President's budget. I think it is readily apparent, there is a big difference between the President's budget, which I hold in my hands, and what Senator SESSIONS has presented as being the President's budget. This is not the President's budget, so of course we are not going to support it. It is not what the President proposed.

I yield back our time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The yeas and nays have been ordered.

The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. KYL. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Illinois (Mr. KIRK).

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. KLOBUCHAR). Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 0, nays 99, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 97 Leg.]

NAYS—99

Akaka	Franken	Mikulski
Alexander	Gillibrand	Moran
Ayotte	Graham	Murkowski
Barrasso	Grassley	Murray
Baucus	Hagan	Nelson (NE)
Begich	Harkin	Nelson (FL)
Bennet	Hatch	Paul
Bingaman	Heller	Portman
Blumenthal	Hoeven	Pryor
Blunt	Hutchison	Reed
Boozman	Inhofe	Reid
Boxer	Inouye	Risch
Brown (MA)	Isakson	Roberts
Brown (OH)	Johanns	Rockefeller
Burr	Johnson (SD)	Rubio
Cantwell	Johnson (WI)	Sanders
Cardin	Kerry	Schumer
Carper	Klobuchar	Sessions
Casey	Kohl	Shaheen
Chambliss	Kyl	Shelby
Coats	Landrieu	Snowe
Coburn	Lautenberg	Stabenow
Cochran	Leahy	Tester
Collins	Lee	Thune
Conrad	Levin	Toomey
Coons	Lieberman	Udall (CO)
Corker	Lugar	Udall (NM)
Cornyn	Manchin	Vitter
Crapo	McCain	Warner
DeMint	McCaskill	Webb
Durbin	McConnell	Whitehouse
Enzi	Menendez	Wicker
Feinstein	Merkley	Wyden

NOT VOTING—1

Kirk

The motion was rejected.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. There will now be 2 minutes of debate equally divided prior to a vote on the motion to proceed to H. Con. Res. 112.

The Senator from Alabama.

Mr. SESSIONS. Madam President, at a time when our Nation has never, ever faced a deeper, more dangerous systemic debt threat than we face today, the Republican House, under the leadership of Congressman PAUL RYAN, has produced a budget that would change the debt course of America, create economic growth, put us on a path to financial stability, and do the things that a responsible budget should do. The President's budget utterly failed in that regard and has gotten no support. This budget will do the job.

People can disagree with this or that portion of it. I think this budget is a historic step in the right direction for this great Republic, and I urge my colleagues to support it.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota.

Mr. CONRAD. Madam President, this budget plan, the House Republican plan, ends Medicare as we know it. All the while, it provides $1 trillion of additional tax cuts to the wealthiest among us. It gives millionaires, on average, an additional tax cut of $150,000 a year. In addition, it cuts health care by $3 trillion and increases the number of uninsured in our country by 30 million people.

I urge my colleagues to reject this budget proposal.

Mr. HARKIN. Would the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. CONRAD. Yes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. HARKIN. Does this budget permit the interest rates on student loans to double on July 1?

Mr. CONRAD. It does.

Mr. HARKIN. I thank the Senator.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

Mr. SESSIONS. Madam President, I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. KYL. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Illinois (Mr. KIRK).

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 41, nays 58, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 98 Leg.]

YEAS—41

Alexander	Corker	Inhofe
Ayotte	Cornyn	Isakson
Barrasso	Crapo	Johanns
Blunt	DeMint	Johnson (WI)
Boozman	Enzi	Kyl
Burr	Graham	Lee
Chambliss	Grassley	Lugar
Coats	Hatch	McCain
Coburn	Hoeven	McConnell
Cochran	Hutchison	Moran

Murkowski	Rubio	Toomey
Portman	Sessions	Vitter
Risch	Shelby	Wicker
Roberts	Thune	

NAYS—58

Akaka	Hagan	Nelson (FL)
Baucus	Harkin	Paul
Begich	Heller	Pryor
Bennet	Inouye	Reed
Bingaman	Johnson (SD)	Reid
Blumenthal	Kerry	Rockefeller
Boxer	Klobuchar	Sanders
Brown (MA)	Kohl	Schumer
Brown (OH)	Landrieu	Shaheen
Cantwell	Lautenberg	Snowe
Cardin	Leahy	Stabenow
Carper	Levin	Tester
Casey	Lieberman	Udall (CO)
Collins	Manchin	Udall (NM)
Conrad	McCaskill	Warner
Coons	Menendez	Webb
Durbin	Merkley	Whitehouse
Feinstein	Mikulski	Wyden
Franken	Murray	
Gillibrand	Nelson (NE)	

NOT VOTING—1

Kirk

The motion was rejected.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. There will now be 2 minutes of debate equally divided prior to a vote on the motion to proceed to S. Con. Res. 37.

The Senator from Pennsylvania is recognized.

Mr. TOOMEY. Madam President, the vote we are about to cast is on a motion to proceed to the budget I have introduced, one of the important features of which is within the customary 10-year budget window this budget would balance. It does not happen overnight. It takes 8 years to get there. But it does, in fact, balance, and it does it by essentially containing the rate of growth in spending. Only in the first year is there a spending cut, and that is less than 3 percent. Every year thereafter spending grows in this budget, but it grows a little more slowly than the alternative. It grows at a sustainable pace so that with normal economic growth we will reach a balance within 8 years and a modest surplus thereafter.

It does call for some of these structural entitlement reforms we need. Specifically, it would call for adopting the bipartisan Medicare reform plan that I would remind everyone permits senior citizens to continue to choose the traditional fee-for-service Medicare they have now—if that is their choice—but it does make other options we think would be more cost effective available as well.

It also adopts the President's recommendation by asking the wealthiest Americans to pay a little more for the Medicare benefits they enjoy. It asks for tax reform that we all know we need to generate economic growth, and it puts our budget on a sustainable path.

I urge Members to vote in favor of this motion.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota.

Mr. CONRAD. Madam President, this is another unbalanced plan. There is very little in the way of revenue to reduce deficits and debt but deep spending cuts in priorities such as education and energy. In fact, this proposal cuts discretionary spending $1 trillion below the Budget Control Act, which cut $900 billion. In addition, this cuts $3 trillion in health care by ending Medicare as we know it and by block-granting Medicaid, holding hostage those who are the most vulnerable among us, children and the disabled.

I urge my colleagues to resist this proposal.

Mr. HARKIN. Madam President, will my colleague yield for a question?

Mr. CONRAD. I am happy to yield.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. HARKIN. Does the Toomey budget we are about to vote on increase student loan interest rates on July 1 from 3.4 percent to 6.8 percent?

Mr. CONRAD. It does permit that.

Mr. HARKIN. Well, I hope every Senator who votes on this knows, if they are voting for this budget, they are voting to double student loan interest rates on July 1.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

Mr. CONRAD. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. KYL. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Illinois (Mr. KIRK).

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 42, nays 57, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 99 Leg.]

YEAS—42

Alexander	Enzi	McConnell
Ayotte	Graham	Moran
Barrasso	Grassley	Murkowski
Blunt	Hatch	Paul
Boozman	Hoeven	Portman
Burr	Hutchison	Risch
Chambliss	Inhofe	Roberts
Coats	Isakson	Rubio
Coburn	Johanns	Sessions
Cochran	Johnson (WI)	Shelby
Corker	Kyl	Thune
Cornyn	Lee	Toomey
Crapo	Lugar	Vitter
DeMint	McCain	Wicker

NAYS—57

Akaka	Gillibrand	Murray
Baucus	Hagan	Nelson (NE)
Begich	Harkin	Nelson (FL)
Bennet	Heller	Pryor
Bingaman	Inouye	Reed
Blumenthal	Johnson (SD)	Reid
Boxer	Kerry	Rockefeller
Brown (MA)	Klobuchar	Sanders
Brown (OH)	Kohl	Schumer
Cantwell	Landrieu	Shaheen
Cardin	Lautenberg	Snowe
Carper	Leahy	Stabenow
Casey	Levin	Tester
Collins	Lieberman	Udall (CO)
Conrad	Manchin	Udall (NM)
Coons	McCaskill	Warner
Durbin	Menendez	Webb
Feinstein	Merkley	Whitehouse
Franken	Mikulski	Wyden

NOT VOTING—1

Kirk

The PRESIDING OFFICER. There will now be 2 minutes of debate equally divided prior to a vote on the motion to proceed to S. Con. Res. 42 introduced by the Senator from Kentucky, Mr. PAUL.

The Senator from Kentucky.

Mr. PAUL. Madam President, like the previous three Republican budgets, this budget is silent on student interest rates. Anyone who asserts otherwise for good political theatre should know that it is untrue. This budget has nothing to do with student interest rates. I think we should have a debate on a little higher plane.

We are borrowing $50,000 a second. We are borrowing $4 billion a day, over $1 trillion a year. While America burns through a century of wealth, the President fiddles. The President's friends fuss and they produce no budget.

This budget balances in 5 years. It saves Social Security. It saves Medicare. It reforms and simplifies the Tax Code. I urge my colleagues to act now and vote for a budget that balances. Do something to save America from this looming debt crisis.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota is recognized.

Mr. CONRAD. Madam President, this plan has massive tax cuts for the wealthiest among us. This plan cuts discretionary spending $2 trillion below the Budget Control Act that cut $900 billion. This plan ends Medicare in 2 years. This plan repeals health care reform. Thirty million more people would be uninsured.

Perhaps most stunningly, this plan cuts Social Security benefits 39 percent. One can say it balances, but it balances at an extraordinary cost. And the cost is borne by those least able to bear the cost. I urge my colleagues to reject this plan.

Mr. HARKIN. Would the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. CONRAD. I would be happy to.

Mr. HARKIN. Madam President, I ask the same question of the distinguished chairman: Would this budget have the interest rates double on student loans on July 1 from 3.4 percent to 6.8 percent?

Mr. CONRAD. Well, it is hard to see how it would not. Let me say, in education, it cuts education 59 percent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

Mr. CONRAD. Madam President, I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There is a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. KYL. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Illinois (Mr. KIRK).

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. WHITEHOUSE). Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 16, nays 83, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 100 Leg.]

YEAS—16

Barrasso	Johnson (WI)	Sessions
Coburn	Lee	Shelby
Crapo	McConnell	Thune
DeMint	Moran	Vitter
Enzi	Paul	
Hatch	Risch	

NAYS—83

Akaka	Franken	Merkley
Alexander	Gillibrand	Mikulski
Ayotte	Graham	Murkowski
Baucus	Grassley	Murray
Begich	Hagan	Nelson (NE)
Bennet	Harkin	Nelson (FL)
Bingaman	Heller	Portman
Blumenthal	Hoeven	Pryor
Blunt	Hutchison	Reed
Boozman	Inhofe	Reid
Boxer	Inouye	Roberts
Brown (MA)	Isakson	Rockefeller
Brown (OH)	Johanns	Rubio
Burr	Johnson (SD)	Sanders
Cantwell	Kerry	Schumer
Cardin	Klobuchar	Shaheen
Carper	Kohl	Snowe
Casey	Kyl	Stabenow
Chambliss	Landrieu	Tester
Coats	Lautenberg	Toomey
Cochran	Leahy	Udall (CO)
Collins	Levin	Udall (NM)
Conrad	Lieberman	Warner
Coons	Lugar	Webb
Corker	Manchin	Whitehouse
Cornyn	McCain	Wicker
Durbin	McCaskill	Wyden
Feinstein	Menendez	

NOT VOTING—1

Kirk

The motion was rejected.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, if I can have everyone's attention, we have one more vote this evening. The Republican leader and I have worked out something tentatively—I think we will be able to put it in writing in just a few minutes—where we will have two votes tomorrow at noon on the two Fed nominees.

I think most people know I moved last night to the FDA bill. I hope we won't have to file cloture on that and that we can just move to it and start the amendment process. That is what the people want, that is what we want, and that is what we are willing to do, so I hope we can do that. It is a wide-ranging bill, extremely important for the country, with relevant amendments. There are a lot of them to do, so I hope we can have an agreement to that effect.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there will now be 2 minutes of debate equally divided before the vote on the motion to proceed to S. Con. Res. 44 introduced by the Senator from Utah, Mr. LEE.

The Senator from Utah.

Mr. LEE. Mr. President, I remind my colleagues of the old adage that you can make excuses or you can make progress but you cannot make both.

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, the Senator deserves to be heard.

Mr. LEE. I remind my colleagues of the old adage that you can make excuses or you can make progress but you cannot make both—at least not simultaneously.

Our current course is unsustainable. Maintaining the status quo will inevitably impair our ability to fund everything from defense to entitlements. So sticking to this course isn't the solution. It can't be the solution. And if followed as a solution, it will have an impact that will prove devastating to America's most vulnerable populations. It is for exactly that reason I have proposed this budget—a budget that balances within 5 years, a budget that simplifies the Tax Code, a budget that puts health care decisions back into the hands of individual families, individuals themselves, and their doctors, where those decisions properly belong.

We don't have much time. We have to get this done. I urge my colleagues to support this budget.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota.

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, this budget proposal has the most serious mistakes I have seen in 26 years of dealing with budgets in this Chamber. This budget starts with an $8 trillion mistake on the size of the deficit.

I have put up the calculation. This budget has Federal revenues of $27.5 trillion, budget outlays of $37.2 trillion, for a difference of $9.750 trillion. But it claims deficits of $1.750 trillion. That is an $8 trillion mistake.

No. 2, it has a $5.7 trillion mistake with respect to budget authority. If we add up the individual budget function totals, they are $5.7 trillion less than the aggregate budget authority totals in what is being offered by the Senator.

No. 3, this requires some committees to cut more spending than they have available to them in their resources. For example, the HELP Committee is instructed to save $2.7 trillion, and they only have $510 billion available to them to cut.

This budget is shot full of basic fundamental mistakes. It should not even be considered as a budget on the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator's time has expired.

The question is on agreeing to the motion.

Mr. LEE. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. KYL. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Illinois (Mr. KIRK).

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 17, nays 82, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 101 Leg.]

YEAS—17

Barrasso	Grassley	Paul
Coats	Hatch	Risch
Coburn	Inhofe	Sessions
Crapo	Johnson (WI)	Thune
DeMint	Lee	Vitter
Enzi	Moran	

NAYS—82

Akaka	Gillibrand	Murkowski
Alexander	Graham	Murray
Ayotte	Hagan	Nelson (NE)
Baucus	Harkin	Nelson (FL)
Begich	Heller	Portman
Bennet	Hoeven	Pryor
Bingaman	Hutchison	Reed
Blumenthal	Inouye	Reid
Blunt	Isakson	Roberts
Boozman	Johanns	Rockefeller
Boxer	Johnson (SD)	Rubio
Brown (MA)	Kerry	Sanders
Brown (OH)	Klobuchar	Schumer
Burr	Kohl	Shaheen
Cantwell	Kyl	Shelby
Cardin	Landrieu	Snowe
Carper	Lautenberg	Stabenow
Casey	Leahy	Tester
Chambliss	Levin	Toomey
Cochran	Lieberman	Udall (CO)
Collins	Lugar	Udall (NM)
Conrad	Manchin	Warner
Coons	McCain	Webb
Corker	McCaskill	Whitehouse
Cornyn	McConnell	Wicker
Durbin	Menendez	Wyden
Feinstein	Merkley	
Franken	Mikulski	

NOT VOTING—1

Kirk

The motion was rejected.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the motion to reconsider is considered made and laid upon the table.

STOP THE STUDENT LOAN INTEREST RATE HIKE ACT OF 2012—MOTION TO PROCEED—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

(The remarks of Senators GRASSLEY and LANDRIEU pertaining to the submission of S. Res. 462 are printed in today's RECORD under ''Submitted Resolutions.'')

Ms. LANDRIEU.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BENNET). The Senator from Kansas.

Mr. MORAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to address the Senate as in morning business.

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

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

Mr. MORAN. Mr. President, today we considered five separate budget proposals for the Federal Government. At first glance, that would appear to be the fiscally responsible thing to do. The families and small business owners I talk to back home in Kansas do that every year. They operate with a budget, and we know the Federal Government needs to do so as well. However, this Chamber has not passed a budget in 1,113 days. That is more than 3 years.

In my first speech on the Senate floor as a new Member of the Senate a little more than a year ago, I indicated to my Senate colleagues that my greatest concern for our country is our Nation's out-of-control spending. I am here today because I still have that concern. We spend too much money, and we no longer can delay the difficult decisions necessary to correct that problem.

Our national debt stands at more than $15 trillion. This enormous

amount of debt is slowing our economic recovery and threatening the prosperity of our future generations, who will have to pay for our fiscal irresponsibility.

Writing and passing a budget is one of the most basic responsibilities of Congress. It is required by law. The budget sets forth priorities and guidelines for the fiscal year and begins the process of determining how much money should be spent and which programs should be cut back, eliminated, or even further supported. Without a budget, the annual appropriations process—and I am a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, and I want the appropriations process to work, but in many ways that appropriations process continues to be on hold. This is not the way to run our country. To put our country back on its path to fiscal responsibility, we must set the budget. We set budget limits, and then we have to stick to them.

Any serious conversation about the budget and Federal spending must include a candid assessment of our Nation's entitlement programs. Those programs include Social Security and Medicare. Mandatory spending makes up 56 percent of the Federal budget—if we had one. This percentage will only increase in years ahead as more Americans retire and fewer workers are there to replace them. Without addressing our long-term commitments, our attempts to significantly change our country's fiscal outlook will be limited.

As I said, I am a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, where our appropriations process deals with about 30 percent of spending on an annual basis. We have done a reasonable job—I hate to be overly complimentary to Congress—at holding the line on discretionary spending, that 30 percent we deal with every year. It has been pretty flatlined over the last several years, but you cannot solve our country's fiscal problems by only dealing with the 30 percent that we include in the appropriations process. We have to deal with the remaining portions of our budget.

The challenge of not only the appropriations process to determine how much money we spend every year but the broader issues of so-called entitlement spending cannot be ignored any longer. Of the five budgets we considered earlier today, four of them—all but President Obama's budget—contained serious proposals to these entitlements. I can critique every one of the four budgets that move in the right direction of balancing the budget. There are things I would do differently, but I commend my colleagues for offering serious solutions to serious problems.

It has bothered me greatly that when Members of the House or Members of the Senate offer a serious budget, they are immediately attacked from a political point of view as if we can continue to ignore the problems we face and simply make sound bites out of proposals that Members of the Senate and the House care very seriously about.

We have to work together to put forward commonsense solutions that will preserve these programs for future generations. This is not about ending those entitlement programs. In fact, the reports that recently came from nonpartisan sources tell us that both Medicare and Social Security will face significant shortfalls in the near future. Therefore, this is about taking care of those programs to see that they are available for those who need them in the future. I want to be able to tell every young person—when they ask, will I be able to get Social Security when I retire, I want that answer to be yes. If we don't deal with the issues, the answer cannot honestly be yes.

In Congress, we have a solemn obligation to be good stewards of taxpayer dollars. Our spending debate is oftentimes seen as something that is philosophical or academic or more likely just a partisan argument, but the truth is that out-of-control borrowing and spending has a very real consequence on the daily lives of every American and certainly on the economy in which we live and operate. It is about whether Americans can find a job, make payments on their homes and automobiles, and whether their children will have a bright future and the opportunity to pursue what we all call the American dream.

When we continue to fail to balance the budget, when we don't put ourselves on the path toward a balanced budget, it means increasing inflation, with higher interest rates and an uncertain economy, which results in fewer business investments and fewer jobs.

The greatest opportunity we have to improve the lives of Americans is to erect an environment where employers feel comfortable in investing in the future and create jobs so people can go back to work. When they go back to work, they can put food on their family's table, they can save for their children's education, they can save for their own retirement, and most importantly, every person in America will once again be able to pursue the American dream.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION ACT

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I would like to address a slightly different topic, which is the continuing conference on the highway bill. We passed a very good highway bill in the Senate. We passed it on time for the March 31 deadline when the highway trust fund was going to expire. We passed it in bipartisan fashion, with 75 Senators supporting it. We passed it after it came unanimously out of the Environment and Public Works Committee with the support of the chairman, Senator BOXER, and the ranking member, Senator INHOFE. We passed it after a very open and transparent floor process in which around 40 amendments were agreed to either by vote or agreement, and it has the support of everybody from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce to labor, from the pavers to the environmentalists. So it is a good piece of legislation. It was done right.

The problem is that it is running up against a time deadline. As my director of transportation tells me, if we delay this too long, he has to start dropping projects off of this summer's highway work period because the time is slipping away as we dawdle here in Congress on this bill.

It is not just the Rhode Island Department of Transportation saying this. Standard & Poor's Global Credit Portal has a report, ''Increasingly Unpredictable Federal Funding Could Stall U.S. Transportation Infrastructure Projects.''

It says within the report:

> As the construction season begins in the northern half of the country, this continuing uncertainty in funding could force states to delay projects rather than risk funding changes or political gridlock come July.

So we need to get this done, and I have heard at this point that the House Republican conferees intend to hold the conference on this bill through late June, and if we do that, that will cost jobs in America, that will cost jobs in Rhode Island, that will cost jobs around the country because our transportation directors are going to have to take work scheduled for the summer and postpone it, and that is a very unfortunate turn of events. It has nothing to do with the merits.

Unfortunately, the House was not able to pass a highway bill of any kind, which is unfortunate because it is not the most complicated task. It is something we have been doing for decades around here. They couldn't get that done, and so what they have done now is gone to conference on the Senate bill without a bill of their own, and this appears to be causing delay. So I am here to urge that we all encourage the House Members of the highway conference committee to expedite their work as much as they can. Apparently there is a 2-week period that the House is taking off, and if it is delayed by 2 weeks so that Members can go home, I don't think that is a profitable use of our time.

There is a great deal of loose talk around here about jobs. We have even had bills that didn't relate to jobs called jobs bills because of gimmickry in the title. But this is a real jobs bill. This is 3.9 million jobs for the country, and it is 9,000 jobs for Rhode Island, as calculated in years of work—job years. We are just wasting that if we don't get this done on time.

So if people really want to do something about jobs, they can get the highway bill moved along rapidly so that the work can be done in this summer work session.

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 called the roll.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Pennsylvania.

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

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

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I rise tonight to speak about the war in Afghanistan. I have spoken on the Senate floor many times over the last number of years about the war. I have done so because I believe the American people and our servicemembers in the field deserve a policy worthy of their efforts and their sacrifice and a thorough examination of the issues at hand. I have done so also because when it comes to matters of war, the Senate has an important responsibility to ask tough questions of any administration.

I believe we are entering a critical phase in our engagement in Afghanistan which will have implications for our eventual drawdown of troops in the year 2014.

Earlier this month the President spoke to us from Kabul on the new Strategic Partnership Agreement known by the acronym SPA. Of course, this is an agreement with Afghanistan. He described a transition plan which focuses on protecting and promoting shared Democratic values, advancing long-term security, reinforcing regional security and cooperation, social and economic development, and strengthening Afghan institutions and governance.

I agree with the general approach laid out in the Strategic Partnership Agreement, but I have several outstanding questions and concerns regarding U.S. engagement in Afghanistan. I wish to describe some of these concerns and lay out specific steps the administration should take with respect to the war to ensure that U.S. security interests and the tangible security, political, and economic gains in Afghanistan are, in fact, protected.

I have participated in more than 20 hearings on Afghanistan and Pakistan with the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. I have personally chaired four hearings on aspects of our engagements in the region. I have visited Afghanistan and Pakistan three times, most recently in August 2011, with the Presiding Officer, Senator BENNET, along with Senator BLUMENTHAL and Senator WHITEHOUSE. When we were there, we met with, as I have done on other visits, U.S. military and civilian leaders, as well as senior government officials in both countries.

Through this engagement, I have sought to examine U.S. goals and progress in this war within three broad areas: first, the formation of representative political institutions; second, the overall security environment; and third, the development of key sectors in Afghan society, including education, health, the economy, and the well-being of women and girls. In examining these factors, it is clear to me that a responsible drawdown of U.S. and international forces in Afghanistan must be concurrent with not only progress on security and an increase in well-trained Afghan national security forces but with a strong commitment to a transparent political process in Afghanistan.

We should work to ensure that there will not be a crumbling of institutions similar to that seen prior to Afghanistan's civil war in the 1990s. In fact, without representative political institutions, I am concerned that the training of the Afghan national security forces could, in fact, be counterproductive and that we would end up developing a force that answers to a dysfunctional political system.

Politics and governing institutions matter a great deal, and there are tangible steps the United States can take to support Afghanistan's political development in the short term. Let me be clear. We should be under no illusions that Afghanistan's political system will, nor necessarily should, reflect our Western model developed over centuries. But there are universal principles that should apply in Afghanistan, including the inclusion of all key political groups and transparency in elections and governance. In fact, the adoption of these universal principles is perhaps the only antidote to continued decades of conflict.

First, the 2014 transition to Afghan leadership will require the active participation of the constellation of ethnic groups in Afghanistan. They will need to have some confidence in the political process or Afghanistan could very easily again descend into civil conflict, similar to that seen in the aftermath of the Soviet withdrawal in the 1990s. The opposition represented in what was formerly known as the Northern Alliance will likely be among the most skeptical. The United States can play an important role in bringing the interested parties together for dialog to identify areas of concern and a path forward looking toward 2014 and beyond.

Second, Presidential elections are scheduled to take place in 2014. According to the Constitution, President Hamid Karzai is limited to two terms and should step down. President Karzai has seen his country through a very difficult and historic time. Afghanistan's elections—the foundational act in a democratic system—have historically not met international standards and have established the basis for an unresponsive government, unresponsive government officials, and, unfortunately, widespread corruption. A peaceful transition of power in Afghanistan is not only good for the country and good for its democratic institution, it is vital to our own transition out of Afghanistan.

Third, Afghanistan's Independent Electoral Commission needs to become a truly independent body. Currently, the President selects the commissioners, creating the suspicion that the body is biased. In accordance with international standards, the commissioners should be selected by a body that reflects the broad consensus of the Afghan people, not just the President. A statutory check on executive authority is needed to ensure the impartiality of the body in the years to come and enhance public confidence in the electoral system overall.

Fourth, President Karzai has issued a Presidential decree which allows him to nominate the 5 national and 133 provincial commissioners of the Electoral Complaints Commission. This body also needs to be independent from the executive branch to remove any perception of bias. During the last election, there was a lack of transparency in the handling of these electoral complaints. Afghan authorities need to take steps now to ensure that the national and provincial commissioners are fair and transparent in their work. As it stands now, the political opposition does not trust the Electoral Complaints Commission to equitably deal with inevitable disputes that emerge from the process.

Throughout this process, the United States should emphasize the importance of international standards in the conduct of elections and stand ready to support a process that is based on those universally accepted principles. We know at the Bonn conference in 2011 Afghanistan pledged—pledged—to strengthen and improve its electoral process. We must hold them to that commitment. The United States should condition its aid in support of the administration of the 2014 election based on these reforms. Let's send a very clear message: We will not be a party to funding the administration of an election similar to those conducted in the years 2009 and 2010. The administration must begin to act now. Electoral reforms take time to adopt and implement. The clock is ticking.

While political challenges abound in Afghanistan, the Parliament has emerged as an important check on the executive and over the past several years has begun to exercise more of a voice in governance. We have seen several examples in recent years where the Parliament has weighed in on important issues. Moreover, 27 percent of the Afghan Parliamentarians are women—a stunning statistic compared to where we were 10 years ago. The Parliament's upward trajectory is a promising pillar of the democratization process, but more can be done. The United States can play an important role in exposing Afghan Parliamentarians to legislative experiences from other and different developing democracies and the opportunity to meet their counterparts in other Parliaments.

During our trip to Afghanistan last August, I and Senators WHITEHOUSE, BENNET, and BLUMENTHAL had the fortunate opportunity to travel to five of

the ISAF regional commands. We saw firsthand the progress made by our airmen, soldiers, marines, and sailors on the ground. Due to their efforts, the enemy has lost territory and influence. According to the Pentagon, the number of attacks by militants dropped in 2011 for the first time in 5 years.

There has been undeniable progress in pushing back the Taliban, but these military gains are delicate and will be short-lived without an Afghan force that can assume more responsibility for security. I discussed these issues with LTG William Caldwell, the former commander of the NATO effort to train the Afghan forces. Lieutenant General Caldwell has been ably replaced by LTG Daniel Bolger. We have seen significant progress in the training and deployment of the Afghan Special Forces Units which, according to the Pentagon, have made ''impressive strides towards becoming an independent and effective force.'' We have also seen growing independence of the Afghan regular units. As of the end of March, 13 ANA kandaks have been designated as able to operate independently with advisers. In September of 2011, there was only one kandak with that designation. We have gone from 1 unit to 13 in a rather short period of time, so we know there is progress.

But despite this progress, however, challenges in training the Afghan National Security Forces, in fact, remain.

First, the Afghan security forces still do not have an elite Pashtun officer corps and only 6.6 percent of the enlisted recruits are southern Pashtuns. This is a significant shortfall that must be addressed if the security forces are going to develop the cohesion necessary to ably represent the ethnic makeup of the country and address ongoing security challenges in the south.

Second, NATO currently requires 2,774 trainers to conduct its training mission but faces a shortfall of 440 positions. While this capability has improved, the training shortfall remains stubbornly high and has an adverse impact on NATO's ability to adequately train the Afghans in a timely manner. Our NATO partners can and should do more to help address this deficit.

Finally, I have concerns about the long-term pricetag associated with the Afghan National Security Forces. While investing in these forces will be a fraction—a small fraction—of the $100 billion to $120 billion a year currently spent in Afghanistan by our government, we must work to ensure that the force is right-sized to the security challenges in the country and that there are strict accountability measures in place to ensure that the Afghan National Security Forces abide by all U.S. standards in terms of human rights and the Geneva Conventions.

While we have made progress on the battlefield, the Taliban and terrorist groups like the Haqqani network remain capable of spectacular attacks across the country and, as we know, in Kabul, the capital. Thirty-four percent of the attacks by militants took place in Regional Command East, an area where the Haqqani network is most active. I believe that the Afghan National Security Forces will be capable by 2014 of providing security in much of the country, but we need to maintain a capability to attack and disrupt terrorist groups in the country that seek to project force outside of Afghanistan's borders and do harm to U.S. interests.

Central to the political effort is the ongoing effort to reconcile with the Taliban. I have a high degree of skepticism that this can work, at least in the short term. The Taliban has shown little interest in compromise, and recent events show that this group is willing to target civilians and to conduct devastating terror attacks against the Afghan people. Ultimately, there does need to be a political end to this conflict, as there is in all wars. But how we get there is important, and the administration must set clear guidelines. In the meantime, I support maintaining pressure on the Taliban until it accepts the Afghan Constitution and agrees to peacefully participate in the political process.

During our visit to Afghanistan last August, we also had the honor to meet with several of Pennsylvania's servicemembers. Since 2001, Pennsylvania has lost 80—80—servicemembers, and 589 have been wounded. These courageous individuals gave what President Lincoln called the ''last full measure of devotion'' to their country. We owe them a debt of gratitude, and we owe a debt of gratitude, as well, to their families and to veterans returning from the field. I, like a lot of our colleagues, have visited with our wounded warriors and their families at Bethesda, Walter Reed, and other places, and we keep them in our thoughts and prayers every day. The courage and commitment of these young Americans is hard to describe in a speech and it is hard to illustrate, but it does demonstrate the best of who we are as a country, and we see that every day.

We know in the area of development as well, there are enormous challenges across a lot of sectors in Afghanistan that will likely extend for years. Prior to the civil war, Afghanistan was one of the poorest countries in the world. After decades of war, Afghanistan's minimal infrastructure was destroyed. The challenges today to significant progress are indeed substantial. Government corruption obstructs any serious effort at rule of law and any basic respect for contracts, which is a fundamental element of business growth. The precarious security environment also serves to deter any international investment. Poppy growth, fueled by the heroin trade, remains rampant. Women continue to be subjected to unspeakable violence and discrimination across the country.

Amid these daunting challenges, the United States should prioritize a few key areas for developmental progress, so as to mitigate the challenges leading to 2014.

The foundational basis for development in any society is the educational system. We know that in 2002 only 900,000 students were enrolled in school. Just 9 years later, 2011, more than 8 million children were enrolled in school, 35 percent of whom were girls. This will have a long-term, long-lasting effect on Afghan society, and the United States should be proud of this element of our engagement and should seek to protect those gains. I and other Senators, when we saw this, were pleased to see that the partnership agreement prioritized the access to, and the enhanced quality of, education.

We have also seen significant strides in the field of health care. In 2002, only 9 percent of Afghans had access to basic health services. Today that number has grown to 64 percent of the population. More children live to see their fifth birthday than ever before in Afghanistan. Health care too was emphasized in the agreement that the President talked about recently, and it focused on basic health services and specialized care for women and children.

These are real achievements, but they are very fragile.

Also fragile are the overall gains made for women and girls in Afghanistan. I was privileged, as I know Senator BENNET, Senator WHITEHOUSE, and Senator BLUMENTHAL were privileged, to meet with a group of Afghan women leaders during our August 2011 trip. We were all tremendously inspired by their determination to continue to fight for women's rights in the face of blatant oppression and violence.

In 2010, I cochaired a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing on the plight of women in Afghanistan. We must preserve the progress that women and girls have achieved in the past 10 years. Empowered women have an immensely positive impact on their communities, investing resources in education, health care, and other basic needs. They also dissuade young men from turning to militancy. In 2011, Secretary Clinton told a group of Afghan women—and I am quoting—''We will not abandon you, we will stand with you always.'' We as a nation have an obligation to stand by that commitment to the women and girls of Afghanistan. It is not only the right thing to do, it is in our national security interest to do this as well.

I agreed, like many did, with the findings of a 2011 report by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, which made three main recommendations with respect to U.S. assistance to Afghanistan. First, it called for a multiyear civil assistance strategy for the country. Second, the report called for a ''Reevaluation of the performance of stabilization programs in conflict zones.'' Third, it called for a focus on sustainability. The report argued that all U.S. assistance projects should meet three basic criteria: They should be ''necessary, achievable, and sustainable.'' This simple concept is critically

important. A great deal of funding and resources has been expended in Afghanistan, much of it on important and necessary programs. But with the withdrawal of international troops and a commensurate decrease of funds going into the country, there is a distinct possibility that Afghanistan could experience an economic depression which could have dramatic security implications. There is time now to address this problem by conducting a careful review of all U.S. assistance to the country. Those programs that are not sustainable should be phased out. While this may have painful short-term consequences, it will be better for the long-term viability of the Afghan economy.

The United States and the international community should consistently reemphasize that while there will be a transition in 2014, this does not mean the wholesale withdrawal and disengagement from Afghanistan. The Strategic Partnership Agreement has helped send this message. The United States will still have significant security concerns in the country and should maintain a strong counterterrorism capability. Work will still remain in providing support and assistance to the Afghan National Security Forces. The international community can also continue to play a key role in helping Afghan society to develop.

All of this falls squarely within our national security interests, and all parties in Afghanistan and in the region should hear this message.

Finally, I will end with a few comments about Pakistan. I continue to believe that Pakistan is too important to U.S. interests for us to sever ties or significantly diminish the relationship. We know we have had trouble in our relationship, but we know a couple of other things as well. Pakistan has lots of nuclear weapons. It is a hotbed of Islamic extremism. It also provides the best logistics routes for our supplies headed into and out of Afghanistan, and Pakistan will play an essential role in ensuring the transition to a peaceful Afghanistan.

Despite the seemingly insurmountable challenges and at times divergent strategic interests, we must continue to find a way forward and work together where our interests do overlap. Pakistan has made significant sacrifices in countering extremism within its borders, mostly against forces that represent a direct threat to the state itself. It has yet to go after the Haqqani network in a serious way. It continues to provide a haven for the Quetta Shura Taliban, which is the headquarters of those seeking to destabilize the Afghan State.

Pakistan has not taken adequate measures to confront the proliferation and trade in illicit bombmaking materials which have killed thousands of its own citizens and hundreds and hundreds of our U.S. troops across the border in Afghanistan. Taking all of this into account, there is a significant element of Pakistani society that we cannot consider allies. This is why I strongly support the conditionality built into U.S. assistance to Pakistan, which requires that the Pakistani authorities make significant progress in countering terrorism and attacking IED networks. If they do not take steps to address these issues, this assistance will be significantly cut, and it should be.

For more than 2 years I have worked to address this critical problem of improvised explosive devices, which are responsible for the majority of deaths and injuries among our servicemembers in Afghanistan. The primary explosive ingredient in IEDs used in southern Afghanistan is calcium ammonium nitrate, CAN. It is also used as a fertilizer and is produced in factories in Pakistan. I have been adamant that the Pakistani Government must significantly increase its commitment to regulating the bomb components and preventing them from being smuggled across the border into Afghanistan.

In June 2010 I introduced S. Res. 570, which called for an increased effort by Pakistan to effectively monitor and regulate the manufacture, sale, transport, and use of ammonium nitrate fertilizer in order to prevent its entrance into Afghanistan. The resolution passed the Senate unanimously on June 28, 2010.

During our recent visit to Pakistan, I discussed this issue with several senior government officials, as did Senator BENNET, Senator WHITEHOUSE, and Senator BLUMENTHAL. The Pakistani leaders expressed an interest in countering the proliferation of bomb components and presented to us an action plan for interdicting these materials. However, the proof of their commitment has yet to be seen through the implementation of this plan.

In December of 2011, I introduced an amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act that would require the Secretary of Defense to certify that Pakistan is demonstrating a continuing commitment to and making significant efforts toward the implementation of a strategy to counter IEDs. This provision, unfortunately, was removed during the conference committee. The final version of the bill requires the Secretary of Defense to produce a report on Pakistan's efforts to counter IEDs.

I continue to believe combating the threat posed by IEDs is one area where our interests do in fact overlap with Pakistan. At this time of frayed relations, IEDs continue to kill Pakistanis, Afghans, and, of course, Americans on the battlefield. By working together against this common threat, we can begin to rebuild confidence in the relationship and make progress toward more vexing strategic issues that affect our countries.

In September of 2010, I gave a speech on Afghanistan and Pakistan at the Army War College in Carlisle, PA. Former Secretary of War Elihu Root believed that the Army War College was established in 1903, ''not to promote war, but to preserve peace by intelligent and adequate preparation to repel aggression.''

That is what Secretary Root said all those years ago. As we look forward to 2014 and a long-term relationship with the people of Afghanistan, all of our support for representative political institutions, improving the security environment, and Afghan social and economic development are intelligent and adequate preparation to repel aggression.

The next year and a half will be very consequential. If the United States works to strengthen representative institutions, bolsters the Afghan security forces, and maintains sustainable development assistance, all will pay dividends for our peace and security for years to come.

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

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

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN REAUTHORIZATION ACT of 2012

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, last month, the Senate came together and passed the Leahy-Crapo Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2012. Our legislation takes some much needed steps to help the most vulnerable victims of domestic and sexual violence, and it was passed with significant bipartisan support. The Leahy-Crapo Violence Against Women Act was an example of what we accomplish when we put politics aside and work to find real solutions to real problems facing real Americans.

Few laws have had a greater impact on the lives of women in this country than the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). By shining a light on the insidious crimes of domestic and sexual violence, this law(s initial passage nearly 20 years ago sent a powerful message that violence against women would no longer be tolerated. The days of dismissing these crimes with a joke or a shrug were over. The resources, training and law enforcement tools provided by VAWA transformed the criminal justice and community-based response to abuse. It gave support and protection to the victims who for generations had been blamed, humiliated and ignored.

With each reauthorization of this landmark law, Congress has repeatedly shown its bipartisan commitment to ending domestic and sexual violence by building on the protections in the initial legislation and expanding the reach of VAWA to meet the remaining unmet needs of victims.

The bill that I introduced with Senator CRAPO, and which passed the Senate with an overwhelming bipartisan majority just last month, is based on the successful tradition of preserving and enhancing protections. It is based on months of work with survivors, advocates, and law enforcement officers from all across the country and from across the political spectrum. We purposely avoided proposals that were extreme or divisive and selected only those proposals that law enforcement and survivors and the professionals who work with crime victims every day told us were essential. That is why the provisions in the Senate bill have such widespread support. More than 1,000 Federal, state, and local organizations have endorsed it, including service providers, law enforcement, religious organizations and many, many more.

The inclusive, open process of drafting this legislation is also why the Senate bill always had strong bipartisan support. It was a bipartisan effort from the beginning with eight Republican Senators cosponsoring the bill and seven more joining Democratic and Independent Senators in voting to pass the bill. We were able to move able to move to the bill without a filibuster, to consider amendments, which were rejected, and to pass the bill with almost 70 votes. We adopted a bill of which the Senate can be proud, because it serves the interests of the American people while improving support and protection for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault.

I am alarmed the other body—the House—has chosen a different path. Instead of building on the broad bipartisan support for the Senate-passed Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act, Republican members of the House Judiciary Committee last week took up a bill, H.R.4970, that they crafted in back rooms without the input of those who dedicate their lives to helping victims. This afternoon the House Republican leadership brought that same bill to the floor, with only minor modifications that do little to respond to the urgent concerns of victims, and is forcing an up or down vote while blocking any attempts to modify the legislation in response to the concerns raised by victims and service providers around the country. Their legislation not only fails to include the critical improvements in the Senate bill that would increase protections for Native-American women, gay and lesbian victims, battered immigrant women, and victims on college campuses or victims in subsidized housing, it actually rolls back existing protections leaving many victims more vulnerable to sexual and domestic abuse. Among the most troubling provisions are those that drastically undercut important, long-standing protections that are vital to the safety and protection of battered immigrant victims.

As a result of this misguided effort, the House bill is strongly opposed by many of the leading organizations that know these issues best, including the National Network to End Domestic Violence, the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, the National Alliance to End Sexual Violence, the American Bar Association, the YWCA, the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and many, many more.

The thousands of local advocates and service providers around the country that make up the National Network to End Domestic Violence warned in a letter to the House Judiciary Committee that H.R. 4970 would (weaken, rather than enhance, protections for victims of domestic violence.(Sue Else, the President of that organization, lamented:

> This is an unprecedented departure from this effective law(s original intent. Thousands of victim advocates across the country recommended substantial improvements for the latest reauthorization, and the U.S. Senate accepted those recommendations in a bipartisan way. It is alarming that the House Judiciary Committee has not done the same.

The American Bar Association has stated:

> Unlike the recently passed Senate bill (S. 1925), which reflects discussions with more than 2,000 advocates and experts across the country, H.R. 4970 represents a retreat from the fight against domestic and sexual violence. It fails to add critical improvements to address the needs of underserved populations, like victims who are members of faith communities and those who are denied services because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, and strips critical protections from existing law.

The YWCA, the largest provider of services for battered women in the country, calls the House bill a ''dangerous bill that puts the lives of millions of women across the nation at risk.'' These organizations represent those on the front lines against domestic and sexual violence. They are motivated by their desire to see all victims get the help they need.

Likewise, a number of faith-based organizations, such as the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, the National Association of Evangelicals, and nearly 20 other religious institutions have joined a letter stating that they are ''deeply troubled'' by the ''many provisions [in the House bill] that actually would roll back protections in current law for battered non-citizens, making them more vulnerable and, in some cases, endangering their lives.''

House Republicans are headed down the wrong path. In fact, when the Senate rejected their alternative to our bipartisan bill last month by a strong bipartisan vote of only 37 in favor and 62 opposed, I had hoped that would end the partisanship and the gamesmanship and we would be able to move forward together to reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act. I was encouraged to see the lead sponsor of the Republican alternative, the distinguished senior Senator from Texas, do just that and join with us to support the bipartisan Senate bill upon final passage. I commended Senator HUTCHISON for doing so. Likewise, we were buoyed by the support on final passage by the Senior Senator from Arizona, the Senators from Tennessee, Senator COATES of Indiana, Senator HOEVEN of North Dakota, Senator PORTMAN of Ohio and Senator VITTER of Louisiana.

Despite all this, House Republicans seem determined to destroy this bipartisan effort. As evidenced by the vote they are forcing today, they are intent on proceeding with their bill to roll back victim protections and insistent that it be done without the opportunity to consider the better, Senate-passed bill or, for that matter, any other amendments to their ill-conceived effort to undercut the Violence Against Women Act.

The House Republican bill not only fails to protect more victims, but actually weakens existing protections. I fear that it puts more lives at risk.

In its Statement of Administration Policy, the Obama administration correctly opposes the House bill, H.R. 4970, as a measure that ''would undermine the core principles of the Violence Against Women Act.'' It notes the House Republican bill ''retreats'' from the progress represented by the protections included in the bipartisan Senate-passed bill and ''weakens'' critical protections for victims. The House provisions ''senselessly remove existing legal protections, undermine VAWA's core purpose of protecting victims of sexual assault and domestic violence, frustrate important law enforcement objectives, and jeopardize victims by placing them directly in harm's way.'' It concludes with a threatened veto recommendation since the House measure ''rolls back existing law and removes long-standing protections for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault.'' Never before, in either Republican or Democratic administrations, Republican- or Democrat-controlled Houses or Senates, has the Violence Against Women Act been used to increase the dangers to women and so consciously disregard the unmet needs of our most vulnerable victims. Never before.

Last week the White House Advisor on Violence Against Women noted that the House Republican bill ''adds burdensome, counter-productive requirements that compromise the ability of service providers to reach victims, fails to adequately protect Tribal victims, lacks important protection and services for LGBT victims, weakens resources for victims living in subsidized housing, and eliminates important improvements to address dating violence and sexual assault on college campuses.'' She is right.

The closed process by which the House Republican leadership insisted

its ill-conceived bill be rubberstamped breaks House Republican promises to allow amendments and proceed by an open amendment process. The House Republican bill's roll back of protections breaks the promise of the Violence Against Women Act to protect victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. Never before has the Violence Against Women Act been used to increase the dangers to women and so consciously disregarded the unmet needs of our most vulnerable victims.

A recent New York Times editorial entitled ''Backwards on Domestic Violence'' had it right: ''House members on both sides of the aisle who are serious about combating domestic violence must work to defeat this atrocious bill.'' That sentiment was reinforced by a recent Los Angeles Times editorial which stated: ''Republicans in the House should drop their attempts to undermine the Violence Against Women Act and instead move swiftly to reauthorize and strengthen the existing program, as the Senate has already done.''

Today The Washington Post reports on another study by Human Rights Watch documenting sexual violence and harassment of female farmworkers. Congress should not be turning its backs to these battered and abused women. We should be moving forward promptly to adopt the provisions of the Senate-passed bill to protect the most vulnerable among us, women who are doubly victimized by abusers and by the fear that they have no recourse.

I thank Senators MURRAY, MENENDEZ and SHAHEEN for their strong statements in support of the Senate-passed Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act yesterday. I am disheartened by the decision of the House Republican leadership to try to push through their destructive bill over the clear objections of those very victims it is supposed to serve. I urge the supporters of the bipartisan Senate bill to continue our efforts to see that this carefully crafted legislation that meets the needs of so many people is finally passed into law.

I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD the Statement of Administrative Policy, the editorials from the New York Times and the Los Angeles Times, and the letters to which I have referred.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

STATEMENT OF ADMINISTRATION POLICY

H.R. 4970—VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN REAUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2012

(Rep. Adams, R–FL, and 40 cosponsors, May 15, 2012)

The Administration strongly opposes H.R. 4970, a bill that would undermine the core principles of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). VAWA is a landmark piece of legislation that first passed the Congress in 1994 and has twice been reauthorized with overwhelming bipartisan support, each time with important improvements to strengthen VAWA. The Act transformed the Nation's response to violence against women and brought critically needed resources to States and local communities to address these crimes.

H.R. 4970 retreats from this forward progress by failing to include several critical provisions that are part of the Senate-passed VAWA reauthorization bill. For instance, H.R. 4970 fails to provide for concurrent special domestic violence criminal jurisdiction by tribal authorities over non-Indians, and omits clarification of tribal courts' full civil jurisdiction regarding certain protection orders over non-Indians. Given that three out of five Native American women experience domestic violence in their lifetime, these omissions in H.R. 4970 are unacceptable. The bill also fails to include language that would prohibit discrimination against LGBT victims in VAWA grant programs. No sexual assault or domestic violence victim should be beaten, hurt, or killed because they could not access needed support, assistance, and protection. In addition, H.R. 4970 does not include important improvements to the Clery Act found in the Senate-passed bill that would address the high rates of dating violence and sexual assault experienced by young people in college and other higher education institutions. The bill also weakens critical new provisions in the Senate-passed bill that would improve safety for victims living in subsidized housing.

H.R. 4970 also takes direct aim at immigrant victims of domestic violence and sexual assault by removing critical protections currently in law. H.R. 4970 allows abusers to be notified when a victim files a VAWA self-petition for relief, and it eliminates the path to citizenship for U visa holders—victims of serious crimes such as torture, rape, and domestic violence—who are cooperating with law enforcement in the investigation or prosecution of these crimes. These proposals senselessly remove existing legal protections, undermine VAWA's core purpose of protecting victims of sexual assault and domestic violence, frustrate important law enforcement objectives, and jeopardize victims by placing them directly in harm's way.

The Administration urges the House to find common ground with the bipartisan Senate-passed bill and consider and pass legislation that will protect all victims. H.R. 4970 rolls back existing law and removes long-standing protections for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault—crimes that predominately affect women. If the President is presented with H.R. 4970, his senior advisors would recommend that he veto the bill.

NATIONAL NETWORK TO END DOMESTIC VIOLENCE,
Washington, DC, May 7, 2012.

Hon. LAMAR SMITH,
House Judiciary Committee, House of Representatives, Washington, DC.

Hon. JOHN CONYERS,
Ranking Member, House of Representatives, Washington, DC.

DEAR CHAIRMAN SMITH AND RANKING MEMBER CONYERS: The National Network to End Domestic Violence, which represents all of our nation's state and territorial domestic violence and dual domestic violence-sexual assault coalitions, their 2,000 member programs and the millions of victims they serve every year, opposes HR 4970, a bill introduced by Representatives Sandy Adams (R–FL) and Eric Cantor (R–VA) to reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA).

VAWA was initially passed in 1994 and subsequently reauthorized in 2000 and 2005 to meet the needs of victims. HR 4970 fails to meet, and in fact, weakens, rather than enhances, protections for victims of domestic violence. The network of survivors and advocates who work on a daily basis with courts, law enforcement, prosecutors, shelters, academic and medical institutions need VAWA's tools—its laws and programs—to help keep victims safe. All of us are alarmed that HR 4970 takes the wrong direction and will be dangerous for victims.

We are particularly concerned with provisions that erode critical safety measures for immigrant victims seeking safety and justice, fail to fix a jurisdictional issue for victims on tribal lands who are beaten by non-tribal perpetrators with near impunity, and turn a blind eye to lesbian, gay and other marginalized communities. If enacted, this bill would jeopardize victims' lives and embolden perpetrators of violence. HR 4970 also wrongly grows bureaucracy through the costly and excessive auditing of small non-profits. Resources would be better spent training and supporting those important organizations that provide these lifesaving services and advocacy. And finally, the emergency housing transfer section in this bill, which is intended to help victims flee violent, dangerous perpetrators without becoming homeless, is weakened by allowing the adoption of transfer policies to be ''voluntary'' by owners, managers and public housing agencies.

The U.S. House of Representatives has the opportunity to develop and pass a bipartisan VAWA that meets the needs of victims. HR 4970 is not such a bill. We look forward to working with the House Judiciary Committee and all Members of Congress to develop a bill that is reflective of the needs of all victims. Please contact Paulette Sullivan Moore, NNEDV's Vice President of Policy, at psmoore@nnedv.org with any questions.

Sincerely,

SUE ELSE,
President.

MAY 7, 2012.

Hon. LAMAR SMITH,
Chairman, Committee on the Judiciary, House of Representatives, Washington, DC.

Hon. JOHN CONYERS,
Ranking Member, Committee on the Judiciary, House of Representatives, Washington, DC.

DEAR CHAIRMAN SMITH AND RANKING MEMBER CONYERS: On behalf of the undersigned faith leaders and faith-based organizations concerned about victims of domestic violence, human trafficking, sexual assault, and other forms of violence, we write to express our concerns about Title VIII of H.R. 4970, legislation to reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), which we understand the House Committee on the Judiciary plans to mark up tomorrow.

Faith communities are on the front lines, identifying victims, providing refuge, referring victims and their families for services, and offering hope and healing. In times of crisis, victims often turn to faith communities and leaders for support and moral guidance because they see places of worship as a sanctuary from the horrors they have experienced. Through our ministry with victims, we have learned that abusers often exploit a victim's immigration status, leaving individuals extremely vulnerable and afraid to report the abuse to law enforcement, assist in the prosecution of crimes, and seek services.

Congress created VAWA in 1994, and it has voted twice since then to reauthorize the law, each time with broad bipartisan support. However, we are deeply troubled by Title VIII of H.R. 4970, as introduced. Title VIII contains many provisions that actually would roll back protections in current law for battered non-citizens, making them more vulnerable and, in some cases, endangering their lives. We urge you to strike these provisions from the bill before the measure is brought before the full House of Representatives for a vote.

VAWA is an effective tool in combatting the devastating crimes of domestic violence and providing lifesaving programs and services. We urge Congress to preserve and improve protections for vulnerable immigrant victims.

Sincerely,

Noel Castellanos, CEO, Christian Community Development Association; Rev. John L. McCullough, Executive Director and CEO, Church World Service; Wendy Tarr, Director, Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice; Alex Baumgarten, Director of Government Relations, The Episcopal Church; Luis Cortes, President, Esperanza; Alexia Salvatierra, Director of Justice Ministries, Southwest California Synod Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; Patrick Carolan, Executive Director, Franciscan Action Network; Gideon Aronoff, President and CEO, Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society; Orlando Crespo, National Director, La Fe Multi-Ethnic Ministries, Intervarsity Christian Fellowship/USA; Janet Mock, CSJ, Executive Director, Leadership Conference of Women Religious.

Linda Hartke, President and CEO, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service; Rachelle Lyndaker Schlabach, Director, Mennonite Central Committee, U.S. Washington Office; Salam Al-Marayati, President, Muslim Public Affairs Council; Leith Anderson, President, National Association of Evangelicals; Rev. Samuel Rodriguez, President, National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference; Rev. Gabriel Salguero, President, National Latino Evangelical Coalition; Jim Wallis, President and CEO, Sojourners; Johnny Young, Executive Director, Migration and Refugee Services, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops; Lynne Hybels, Willow Creek Community Church; Deborah Fikes, Executive Advisor, World Evangelical Alliance; Stephan Bauman, President and CEO, World Relief.

AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION,
Washington, DC, May 7, 2012.

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY,
U.S. House of Representatives,
Washington, DC.

DEAR REPRESENTATIVE: On behalf of the American Bar Association, with nearly 400,000 members, I write to express our opposition to H.R. 4970, the Violence Against Women Act reauthorization bill introduced by Rep. Sandy Adams (R-FL), which is scheduled to be considered by the House Judiciary Committee on May 8, 2012. We urge members of the committee to oppose the bill.

VAWA has been the single most effective federal effort to respond to the epidemic of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking in this country. The act has ensured that legal and social services are available to survivors, and that law enforcement, prosecutors, judges, attorneys and advocates are well-trained and equipped with cutting-edge resources to effectively address these crimes in their own communities.

Reauthorization of VAWA is critical, providing Congress with the opportunity to amend the act in order to combat domestic and sexual violence more effectively. For example, in 2000, Congress created the Legal Assistance to Victims grant program. It also created the U visa for immigrants who are victims of serious crimes and who have cooperated with authorities in the prosecution of the perpetrator, and it authorized funding for increased protection of older individuals and individuals with disabilities. And in 2005, it became unlawful to deny an individual housing assistance simply because the individual is a victim of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault or stalking. Congress also created a new grant program to improve court responses to these crimes.

H.R. 4970 does not continue this tradition of improvement. Unlike the recently passed Senate bill (S. 1925), which reflects discussions with more than 2,000 advocates and experts across the country, H.R. 4970 represents a retreat from the fight against domestic and sexual violence. It fails to add critical improvements to address the needs of underserved populations, like victims who are members of faith communities and those who are denied services because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, and strips critical protections from existing law.

The provisions of H.R. 4970 that significantly undermine protections available to vulnerable immigrant victims of violence are of particular concern. Before enactment of VAWA, abusive U.S. Citizens and Legal Permanent Residents (LPRs) were able to use the immigration laws as a mechanism to further abuse and control their immigrant spouses and children. Perpetrators of domestic violence routinely would thwart, or threaten to thwart, the visa petitioning process. In creating a special application process for battered spouses and children of U.S. Citizens and LPRs, lawmakers recognized that many victims of domestic abuse were unwittingly victimized by the immigration system as well.

The current VAWA green card application process involves a ''self-petition,'' so that the abuser is not involved at all in the process and prohibits the government from releasing information about the existence of a VAWA immigration case to the abuser or others. H.R. 4970 removes those critical protections. A forced choice between deportation or safety from an abusive spouse or trafficker is the precise evil that the original self-petitioning provisions of the VAWA were intended to eliminate. H.R. 4970 creates obstacles for immigrant victims seeking to report crimes and increases the danger to victims by eliminating important confidentiality provisions.

Because it fails to improve upon our nation's response to domestic violence and sexual assault by ensuring that all populations are protected and in fact rolls back critical protections in existing law, the ABA urges you to oppose H.R. 4970. VAWA is a critical tool in the arsenal to address domestic and sexual violence, and it must be improved during this reauthorization process to address the needs of all victims and hold more offenders accountable.

Sincerely,

THOMAS M. SUSMAN,
Director, Governmental Affairs Office.

MAY 7, 2012.

DEAR REPRESENTATIVE: As the largest provider of battered women's services in the United States, with over 1300 locations in 47 states, the YWCA is deeply invested in the safety and health of all women. The YWCA serves over half a million women each year through its anti-violence programs, providing much needed access for victims of violence to 24-hour crisis hotlines, emergency shelter, counseling services, legal assistance, child care, economic empowerment programs and transitional housing. The YWCA strongly opposes any legislation that puts victims' lives at risk, and as such, opposes H.R. 4970 to reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) introduced by Rep. Sandy Adams (R-FL).

For nearly 18 years, VAWA has provided a national, streamlined response to address domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence and stalking. H.R. 4970 cuts back on critical provisions outlined in S. 1925, passed last month, that protect some of the most vulnerable women in our communities, and as a result, is a dangerous bill that puts the lives of millions of women across the nation at risk.

Under H.R. 4970, immigrant women will be required to conduct interviews for U-visa petitions in person, which does not take into consideration the unfortunate reality of many victims of violence where their movement is strictly limited or closely monitored by their abusers. In addition, H.R. 4970 would eliminate key confidentially measures by allowing USCIS officers to notify and interview the abusers. Not only will this keep immigrant victims from reporting abuse, but it will put their lives at risk if they do proceed to apply for a U-visa. Studies indicate that the two most heightened periods of danger for victims of abuse are when they are pregnant and when they decide to leave an abusive situation—disregarding the importance of confidentiality and informing the abuser of the victims' intent to leave will undoubtedly lead to greater danger for the very people that this bill purports to assist.

H.R. 4970 disregards the epidemic rates of violence in Indian Country by allowing batterers to avoid prosecution on Tribal lands. By doing so, the bill fails to hold perpetrators of violence accountable for their actions and sends a clear message to Native victims of violence to remain silent and endure abuse. Without explicitly addressing the issue of accountability, Native victims will continue to remain fearful of reporting crimes of abuse. H.R. 4970 also strips all support for LGBT victims of abuse, claiming that they are not the 'right' victims. The YWCA supports all women and victims of abuse regardless of sexual orientation, immigration status, or race, and does not stand for isolating entire subsets of the community that face unique barriers to accessing services. By excluding the LGBT community in the bill, H.R. 4970 it prevents providers from serving ALL women, and no one should be denied help based on their sexual orientation.

H.R. 4970 fails to provide inclusive provisions that address the unique needs of underserved communities, which would in turn endanger the lives of millions of women across the nation. The YWCA supports legislation that is trauma informed, victim centered, and evidence based, and is opposed to any provisions that force victims to negotiate their safety when seeking assistance from abusive situations.

In short, we urge you to oppose H.R. 4970.

Please contact Desiree Hoffman, Director of Advocacy and Policy at dhoffman@ywca.org or Qudsia Jafree, Field and Policy Coordinator at qjafree@ywca.org should you have questions.

Sincerely,

DESIREE HOFFMAN,
YWCA USA, Director of Advocacy and Policy.

[From the New York Times]

BACKWARD ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

In an all-too-rare show of bipartisanship, 15 Senate Republicans joined with the Democratic majority last month to reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act, the landmark 1994 law that is key to efforts against domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking.

Unfortunately, the lopsided 68-to-31 Senate vote halted G.O.P. opponents only temporarily. The House Judiciary Committee last week approved its version of the reauthorization bill, which not only omits improvements the Senate bill made to the law but also removes existing protections for immigrant women, putting them at greater risk of domestic and sexual abuse.

The Senate's measure ensures that victims are not denied services because they are gay or transgender. It also strives to ensure that domestic violence crimes committed by non-Indian men in tribal communities are prosecuted. The Senate bill also would modestly

expand the availability of special U-visas for undocumented immigrants who are victims of domestic violence. That move was supported by law enforcement to encourage victims to come forward and testify against their abusers.

The regressive House alternative removes these and other improvements, including new protections for students on college campuses. The House measure would eliminate a confidentiality requirement in current law that protects the identity of immigrant women who file domestic violence complaints against a spouse who is a citizen or legal resident and allows the women to apply for legal status on their own.

House Republicans claim there is a big fraud problem in this area, but there is no hard evidence of that. And their plan to end the centralized handling of these issues by a Vermont-based office would undermine the government's ability to detect untruthful stories.

House members on both sides of the aisle who are serious about combating domestic violence must work to defeat this atrocious bill. If that fails, the Senate will need to insist on fixing it during the reconciliation process.

[From latimes.com, May 15, 2012]

PARTISANSHIP AND THE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ACT

The House needs to reauthorize the law, without limits, as it has in the past, so Republicans can demonstrate that helping battered women is more important than political games.

The political climate in Congress is so noxious these days that even a law that originally passed with overwhelming bipartisan support because it provided much-needed help to abused women is now a partisan issue. That's shameful. Republicans in the House should drop their attempts to undermine the Violence Against Women Act and instead move swiftly to reauthorize and strengthen the existing program, as the Senate has already done.

First enacted in 1994, the law has been renewed twice without a fight. Last week, however, some of the same GOP lawmakers who once endorsed the law retreated, voting in committee to strip out provisions designed to protect immigrants. Under VAWA as it has long existed, if an immigrant married to a U.S. citizen or a green-card holder—and therefore eligible to stay in the country permanently—can show evidence of abuse, he or she may file independently without having to rely on the abusive spouse. VAWA's gender-neutral protections apply to legal and illegal immigrants and allow the victim to file confidentially.

Confidentiality is crucial. As the Republican-led House Judiciary Committee noted in its 2005 report to reauthorize VAWA and expand protections, without such guarantees, an abuser could try to derail a spouse's green-card application or push to have him or her deported. A battered woman whose application depends on her abusive husband certainly might think twice about filing if she knew her abuser would be notified that she was seeking help without him.

Eliminating the confidentiality provision is one of several changes House Republicans would like to make to weaken the law. They argue that the changes are necessary to combat fraud, in which immigrants falsely claim to have been abused in order to obtain visas. But where are the data and studies that fraud is a problem? Immigrant victims who petition for visas under VAWA are already required to supply ample evidence of abuse, such as police reports or medical records. And applications undergo intense scrutiny. In fiscal 2011, immigration officials denied nearly a third of those petitions.

The House reauthorization bill also seeks to undercut a provision that allows undocumented immigrants who assist in prosecutions of serious crime for U visas, and ultimately obtain green cards. The proposed changes would allow victims to obtain temporary visas only. Surely, even those lawmakers who embrace anti-immigrant legislation can appreciate that U visas help protect American citizens too, by encouraging witnesses to step forward without fear of deportation. That's why the program enjoys the backing of many law enforcement groups.

The House will vote on Wednesday. It should reauthorize VAWA without limits, as it has in the past, and demonstrate that helping battered women, those who are immigrants, isn't a partisan issue.

THE FARM BILL

Mr. BENNET. Mr. President, I rise to highlight for my colleagues how Congress now has a critical opportunity to support the competitiveness and prosperity of American agriculture. We need to move the farm bill forward. It is fitting that this week marks the 150th anniversary of the founding of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Federal Department solely dedicated to meeting the needs of America's farmers, ranchers, and rural communities.

Agriculture is at the heart of Colorado's history and cultural fabric. It also continues to be one of our most significant economic drivers. At a time when many sectors are struggling to find growth, Colorado farmers and ranchers are more productive than ever, finding innovative ways to harness growing consumer demand for agricultural products both at home and in overseas markets.

As evidence of this success, agriculture is the one sector of the U.S. economy that boasts a trade surplus. During the first 2 months of 2012, Colorado exports of agricultural products grew by 25 percent over the same period in 2011, led by an 80-percent increase in dairy exports. This good news comes on the heels of several consecutive years of double-digit increases in Colorado agriculture exports.

The USDA is part of this success story. Colorado farmers and ranchers work closely with local USDA employees to support the productivity of their operations and to maintain the health of their land and water resources. It is a vital partnership. And with expiration looming on many programs important to Colorado agriculture, I can think of no better way to commemorate the USDA's 150th anniversary than by reauthorizing the farm bill.

Over the last several months, the Senate and House committees on agriculture have come together to craft a bipartisan farm bill that not only provides America's farmers, ranchers, and rural communities with the tools they need to keep growing but also makes a significant contribution toward important national deficit reduction goals. The farm bill passed by the Senate Agriculture Committee makes very significant progress in simplification, accountability, and taxpayer savings.

Using feedback I received from over 20 listening sessions statewide, I worked to secure Colorado's top farm bill priorities. In particular, I am encouraged by the farm bill's revamped conservation title. It maintains vital authorities for land and water protection while also consolidating over 20 existing conservation programs to provide producers and landowners with much needed flexibility.

I also strongly support efforts by the Senate Agriculture Committee to strengthen the Federal crop insurance program. Time and time again, Colorado farmers have told me that affordable crop insurance is the single most important risk management tool the USDA can provide to producers for addressing today's economic and ecological challenges.

According to Colorado State University, agriculture contributes $40 billion toward the State economy annually. Of course, the benefits of a strong farm economy extend far beyond the farm. It means stronger energy, transportation, and retail sectors. It also allows us to provide food assistance to the most vulnerable populations at home and in countries suffering from famine due to drought and conflict.

In short, reauthorizing the farm bill is one the most important things this Congress can do to provide farmers and ranchers with the certainty they need to plan for the future. It will help to keep rural America growing and thriving, and it will help to invigorate an economy just now getting back on its feet. Acting on this legislation during USDA's 150th year would make the accomplishment even better.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

TRIBUTE TO FATHER RICHARD J. KELLEY

• Ms. AYOTTE. Mr. President, today I wish to recognize and honor my friend, Father Richard J. Kelley, a Catholic priest who has devoted decades of service in parishes across New Hampshire. It is my privilege to congratulate him as he celebrates his 40th anniversary of ordination to priesthood.

Father Kelley was born in Boston, MA, on May 10, 1943. He was raised in Needham and West Roxbury and graduated from Catholic Memorial High School in 1961. His seminary studies took place at the Holy Apostles Seminary in Cromwell, CT, and Catholic University in Washington, DC.

In addition to his commitment to the Catholic Church, Father Kelley has always reached out to help those in need. Before his ordination to priesthood, he spent time performing inner-city social work in Kansas City, MO. Shortly thereafter, Father Kelley was ordained to priesthood on May 20, 1972, at the St. Joseph Cathedral in Manchester, NH.

Since offering his first Mass at St. Joseph Church in his hometown of Needham, Father Kelley has spent many years serving parish churches in cities and towns across New Hampshire. As an associate pastor, he led Seacoast parishioners at Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal Parish in Hampton and St. Michael Parish in Exeter. He also served at St. Joseph Cathedral in Manchester.

On October 7, 1985, Father Kelley was appointed to his first pastorate at St. Catherine Parish in Charlestown, followed by over a decade of service at St. Patrick Parish in Jaffrey. So many New Hampshire parishes have been blessed to have Father Kelley's guidance, and his message of faith and devotion has touched many lives.

Since 2000, Father Kelley has served as the Pastor of St. Christopher Parish in my hometown of Nashua. In addition to his role as leader of the parish, Father Kelley is also a familiar face to the students at St. Christopher's Catholic School, where his patience, kindness, and humility serve as an inspiring example.

The impact of Father Kelley's 40 years of service can perhaps best be witnessed every Christmas. He receives hundreds of holiday cards from parishioners and friends he has met throughout his lifetime. He hangs up each one to decorate the walls and doors of his office, completely covering each surface and eventually spilling into the hallways. This seasonal collage reflects the many valued friendships he has cultivated throughout his career.

Father Kelley's impact continues to reach far beyond the parish walls. In addition to his responsibilities at St. Christopher's, he has assisted other community members through his service as the Nashua Police Department chaplain, as a former board member of Harbor Homes, and through his continued support of Catholic Memorial High School.

I am honored to recognize Father Richard Kelley as his many friends help him mark his 40th anniversary of ordination to priesthood. His loyalty and dedication to the Catholic Church and to his parishioners is unwavering—St. Christopher's is blessed and fortunate to have his guidance. I am grateful for Father Kelley's leadership and his many years of service to the Catholic Church in communities across New Hampshire.●

REMEMBERING JUDGE ROBERT E. COYLE

● Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, I ask my colleagues to join me in honoring the memory of Judge Robert E. Coyle, a talented jurist, a respected member of the community, and a kind and gentle man. Judge Coyle passed away on May 7 in Fresno at age 82.

A Fresno native, Robert Coyle received his B.A. from Fresno State College in 1953 and his J.D. from the University of California, Hastings College of the Law in 1956. After law school, he began his legal career as a deputy district attorney in Fresno County before working as an associate at Hansen, McCormick, Barstow and Sheppard from 1958 to 1961 and as partner at McCormick, Barstow, Sheppard, Coyle and Wayte from 1961 to 1982.

Judge Coyle was nominated to the Eastern District bench by President Reagan, confirmed by the Senate on March 31, 1982, and served as chief judge of the district from 1990 to 1996, when he took senior status and continued to take cases until 2006.

Judge Coyle played an instrumental role in the construction of new Federal courthouses in Sacramento and Fresno. For 13 years, he led the effort to build the Fresno courthouse, often seen shuttling from his chambers to the construction site with his hard hat in hand. His passion for this project once prompted him to ride in a suspended platform to some 300 feet above the ground to get a glimpse of the view that is now enjoyed by the building's occupants and visitors. After taking in the views of his beloved hometown and the breathtaking Sierra and beautiful Coastal Range, Judge Coyle compared his experience to ''riding on a cloud.''

I am proud to have introduced legislation that led to the naming of the Federal courthouse in downtown Fresno as the Robert E. Coyle United States Courthouse. The nine-story building stands as a reminder to the community and people of California of the dedicated work of Judge Robert E. Coyle.

Judge Coyle was always admired for his sharp intellect, collegiality, and gentlemanly ways. A giving person, he lent his time and talents to a number of community causes, including service on the board of trustees of the United Way Advocate. In his leisure time, he enjoyed spending time at the family cabin above Bass Lake.

I extend my deepest sympathies to his wife of 59 years, Faye; his son and daughter-in-law, Robert and Kim; and his daughter and son-in-law, Barbara and Michael Vellone; and his grandchildren, Hunter, Sydney, Morgan, and Matthew.

Judge Coyle will be greatly missed.●

TRIBUTE TO DR. THEODORA KALIKOW

● Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, on April 23, 2012, Dr. Theodora J. Kalikow gave her last lecture as president of the University of Maine Farmington and received a standing ovation from an overflow audience at the campus's largest auditorium. In that same spirit, I rise today to express my gratitude to a great leader and good friend for 18 years of outstanding service to the people of Maine.

There are many ways to describe what Theo as she is known to colleagues, students, and friends has meant to our State. One is to note that in 1998, her fourth year as president, the University of Maine Farmington was named to U.S. News and World Report's best college list for the first time. This year, UMF celebrated 15 consecutive years of receiving that hard-earned and well-deserved recognition.

Another way is to consider the deep affection alumni and people throughout Maine have for this remarkable institution. As just one example, in 2007 UMF opened its new Education Center that integrates technology with teaching and learning. This major expansion was made possible only through the generosity of countless individuals, businesses, and organizations. Over the years, this kind of overwhelming support has enabled this small school of just 2,000 students to keep pace with the top colleges and universities in the country.

Responding to the needs of an ever-changing society is one of the richest traditions a college can have. The traditions Dr. Kalikow has upheld began a century and a half ago when the people of rural Franklin County joined together to establish Maine's first public institution of higher education. When the first class of 31 students matriculated at the new Farmington Normal School in 1864, they did so in a setting that was described by a University of Maine historian as ''rough, crude, and plenty humble.''

Under Dr. Kalikow's leadership, UMF has upheld another noble tradition that of contributing to the entire region by adding to its cultural life, teaching in local classrooms, coaching youth athletics, and helping youngsters learn everything from swimming to foreign languages. From the Health and Fitness Center to the Mantor Library, the doors of UMF are open to the community.

In her last lecture, Dr. Kalikow drew a strong connection between the America we know today as a place of unsurpassed equality, freedom, and opportunity and the ''rough, crude, and plenty humble'' foundation of public higher education laid in Farmington, ME, and other frontier communities across the Nation so many generations ago. These ordinary citizens knew that education was a necessary condition of creating a successful society, she said, and we today are the beneficiaries of their investment.

Mr. President, Dr. Theo Kalikow has increased that investment through an ongoing commitment to teaching and learning. On behalf of the people of Maine, I thank Dr. Kalikow for her contributions to our State and wish her all the best in the years to come.●

CONGRATULATING ANGELA FOREMASTER

● Mr. HELLER. Mr. President, today I wish to congratulate a student from my home State for being recognized as one of Nevada's top youth volunteers of 2012. Angela Foremaster, a senior at Legacy High School in Las Vegas, was

honored with the Prudential Spirit of Community Award for her advocacy on behalf of foster children and homeless teens in the Greater Las Vegas area. I am proud to recognize Ms. Foremaster for this accomplishment as she serves as a role model for students across the nation striving to make a difference in the lives of America's youth.

Having five adopted siblings, Ms. Foremaster understands the importance of supporting organizations that find adoptive families for children who wait in foster care. She has dedicated more than 1,000 hours to foster organizations around Nevada to assist their efforts to provide a supportive community for children. One winter, as she helped a group prepare for the holiday season, Ms. Foremaster noticed that they weren't providing children with stockings for Christmas. This experience encouraged her to hang flyers, asking for donations and small gifts to help her fill stockings for adoptive children and displaced teens. Ms. Foremaster was thrilled to receive generous donations that enabled her to fill 250 stockings to help bring the holiday spirit to kids in needs.

I am so appreciative that Ms. Foremaster is raising awareness of the needs of our country's struggling youth. In this tough economic period, America's children deserve our attention more than ever. Since coming to Congress, I have supported legislation that assists individuals who have fallen on hard times, recognizing the importance of temporary safety nets. It is of paramount importance in this distressed economy that we keep the needs of our most vulnerable at the forefront while focusing on solutions to our nation's long-term economic problems.

I ask my colleagues to join me today in congratulating a young Nevadan for her incredible determination to assist our nation's youth. The citizens of Las Vegas are fortunate to have such a generous volunteer who selflessly gives back to her community and exemplifies the very best America's youth has to offer.●

COLONEL BRIAN DUBIE

● Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I would like to take a moment to pay tribute to Col. Brian Dubie, a fifth-generation Vermonter who is retiring on June 2 after a long and distinguished career in the Vermont Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve. Brian served as Vermont's 78th Lieutenant Governor and has devoted his life to serving his State and his country.

Upon graduating high school in Essex Junction, Brian enrolled in the U.S. Air Force Academy. Even though the flight he took to Colorado was his first time on an airplane, Brian already knew that he loved aviation. Growing up, his father an officer in the Vermont Guard would bring the family to watch the planes take off and land from Burlington. Those excursions made vivid and lasting impressions on young Brian.

When he returned home to attend the University of Vermont, Brian joined the Vermont Air National Guard and flew F–4s and then F–16s, eventually rising to the rank of lieutenant colonel. In 1998, he joined the U.S. Air Force Reserve where he now holds the rank of colonel and serves as an emergency preparedness liaison officer.

Brian's service has touched thousands of Americans outside of Vermont. Following the September 11 attacks, Brian procured and coordinated the distribution of badly needed cell phones and radios for emergency responders at Ground Zero. For his actions he was awarded a Meritorious Service Medal. When Hurricane Katrina hit the gulf coast in 2005, Brian mobilized and ensured that civilian responders had the support they needed. For his achievements at the Hurricane Operations Center, he earned another Meritorious Service Medal and the Air Force Commendation Medal.

Admirable as they are, Brian's achievements are not surprising considering his roots in a family who values service and duty to country. His mother Janice worked as an operating room nurse at what was then the Medical Center Hospital of Vermont. His father Clem was a colonel in the Vermont Guard where he served full-time as a personnel officer. His brother Michael is the adjutant general of Vermont.

Brian is also a tireless promoter of the Vermont business community. He was the motivational force behind the Vermont Aerospace and Aviation Association. He also served as the unofficial Vermont ''ambassador'' to Quebec a position he took on with such fervor that some Quebec officials called him Mr. Ambassador.

I am proud of all that Brian has accomplished for Vermont and our country. While he may be retiring from the Air Force, I know that his service to both State and Nation is far from over. I wish him, his wife Penny, and his family all the best.●

RECOGNIZING UPRIGHT FRAMEWORKS

● Ms. SNOWE. Mr. President, in February, the New York Times ran a heartbreaking story about Robert and Wilma Hartford, two elderly Peru, ME residents unable to pay for basic heating during the State's bitter cold winter, and a heating oil dealer's personal struggle to assist them. As a result, the outpouring of support for this couple was astonishing, as neighbors, generous New York Times readers across the country, and local small businesses sought to help. One such business, Upright Frameworks in Wilton, ME, was happy to lend a hand. This small firm's assistance to the Hartfords during their time of need illustrates the generosity of Mainers, consistently rising to the occasion to help a neighbor, while demonstrating enormous potential for curbing our exorbitant energy costs. Today I wish to recognize Upright Frameworks for their compassion and tireless efforts to improve energy efficient building techniques.

Owner and founder Josh Wojcik began Upright Frameworks in 2008, after moving back home to Maine following a 9-year term in environmental policy in New York. As a trained environmentalist and graduate from the Structural Insulated Panel, SIP, School in West Virginia, Josh is dedicated to ensuring that buildings take full advantage of energy efficiency. Josh developed the idea for Upright Frameworks while assisting his father, Tom Wojcik, a long-time Mainer Builder, on construction projects throughout the State. As individuals continually inquired about energy efficiency and going ''green,'' Josh saw an opportunity to utilize his skills in Maine.

Despite the challenging construction market, today Upright Frameworks employs 12 individuals. As a new innovative construction solution, this small firm specializes in installing structural insulated panels which have been on the forefront of energy efficiency. For existing structures, the company performs energy audits and weatherization retrofits to ensure that buildings have the most cost-effective energy systems in places.

When Josh learned of the Hartfords' struggle, he was determined to help. With an existing home such as the Hartfords, the first step was to evaluate the project and determine the most cost-effective method to reduce energy costs. For Josh, reducing the heat loss in the attic was paramount to addressing energy efficiency. In collaboration with several other local Maine businesses and donations from across the country, Josh was able to effectively make a difference by reducing air leakage in the Hartfords' home by an astonishing 63 percent. This drastic reduction will allow the couple to substantially reduce their home heating costs for years to come.

While energy costs are still a major issue facing my State, I applaud Upright Frameworks' ability to achieve real results with their creative use of energy efficiency to alleviate the burdens of home-heating costs. This company's selfless commitment to helping fellow Mainers in need truly warms my heart. I am proud to extend my praise to Josh Wojcik and everyone at Upright Frameworks for their dedication and offer my best wishes for their continued success in building a new energy future and improving the daily lives of Mainers.●

REPORT RELATIVE TO THE ISSUANCE OF AN EXECUTIVE ORDER WITH RESPECT TO BLOCKING THE PROPERTY OF PERSONS THREATENING THE PEACE, SECURITY, OR STABILITY OF YEMEN—PM 48

The PRESIDING OFFICER laid before the Senate the following message from the President of the United States, together with an accompanying report; which was referred to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs:

To the Congress of the United States:

Pursuant to the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (50 U.S.C. 1701 *et seq.*) (IEEPA), I hereby report that I have issued an Executive Order (the ''order'') declaring a national emergency with respect to the unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States posed by the actions and policies of certain members of the Government of Yemen and others to threaten Yemen's peace, security, and stability.

The order does not target the entire country of Yemen or its government, but rather targets those who threaten the peace, security, or stability of Yemen, including by obstructing the implementation of the agreement of November 23, 2011, between the Government of Yemen and those in opposition to it, which provides for a peaceful transition of power that meets the legitimate demands and aspirations of the Yemeni people for change, or by obstructing the political process in Yemen. The order provides criteria for the blocking of property and interests in property of persons determined by the Secretary of the Treasury, in consultation with the Secretary of State, to: have engaged in acts that directly or indirectly threaten the peace, security, or stability of Yemen, such as acts that obstruct the implementation of the agreement of November 23, 2011, between the Government of Yemen and those in opposition to it, which provides for a peaceful transition of power in Yemen, or that obstruct the political process in Yemen; be a political or military leader of an entity that has engaged in the acts described above; have materially assisted, sponsored, or provided financial, material, or technological support for, or goods or services to or in support of, the acts described above or any person whose property and interests in property are blocked pursuant to the order; or be owned or controlled by, or to have acted or purported to act for or on behalf of, directly or indirectly, any person whose property and interests in property are blocked pursuant to the order.

The designation criteria will be applied in accordance with applicable Federal law including, where appropriate, the First Amendment to the United States Constitution.

I have delegated to the Secretary of the Treasury, in consultation with the Secretary of State, the authority to take such actions, including the promulgation of rules and regulations, and to employ all powers granted to the President by IEEPA as may be necessary to carry out the purposes of the order. All agencies of the United States Government are directed to take all appropriate measures within their authority to carry out the provisions of the order.

I am enclosing a copy of the Executive Order I have issued.

BARACK OBAMA,
THE WHITE HOUSE, *May 16, 2012*.

MESSAGES FROM THE HOUSE

At 9:33 a.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Mrs. Cole, one of its reading clerks, announced that the House has passed the following bill, in which it requests the concurrence of the Senate:

H.R. 4045. An act to modify the Department of Defense Program Guidance relating to the award of Post-Deployment/Mobilization Respite Absence administrative absence days to members of the reserve components to exempt any member whose qualified mobilization commenced before October 1, 2011, and continued on or after that date, from the changes to the program guidance that took effect on that date.

At 2:04 p.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Mrs. Cole, one of its reading clerks, announced that the House has passed the following bills, in which it requests the concurrence of the Senate:

H.R. 205. An act to amend the Act titled ''An Act to authorize the leasing of restricted Indian lands for public, religious, educational, recreational, residential, business, and other purposes requiring the grant of long-term leases'', approved August 9, 1955, to provide for Indian tribes to enter into certain leases without prior express approval from the Secretary of the Interior, and for other purposes.

H.R. 365. An act to encourage, enhance, and integrate Blue Alert plans throughout the United States in order to disseminate information when a law enforcement officer is seriously injured or killed in the line of duty.

H.R. 1864. An act to limit the authority of States to tax certain income of employees for employment duties performed in other States.

H.R. 3534. An act to amend title 31, United States Code, to revise requirements related to assets pledged by a surety, and for other purposes.

H.R. 3874. An act to provide for the conveyance of certain cemeteries that are located on National Forest System land in Black Hills National Forest, South Dakota.

H.R. 4240. An act to reauthorize the North Korean Human Rights Act of 2004, and for other purposes.

The message also announced that pursuant to section 201(b) of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (22 U.S.C. 6431 note), as amended, and the order of the House of January 5, 2011, the Speaker appoints the following member on the part of the House of Representatives to the Commission on International Religious Freedom for a term ending May 14, 2014: Mr. Elliot Abrams of Virginia.

MEASURES REFERRED

The following bills were read the first and the second times by unanimous consent, and referred as indicated:

H.R. 205. An act to amend the Act titled ''An Act to authorize the leasing of restricted Indian lands for public, religious, educational, recreational, residential, business, and other purposes requiring the grant of long-term leases'', approved August 9, 1955, to provide for Indian tribes to enter into certain leases without prior express approval from the Secretary of the Interior, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Indian Affairs.

H.R. 1864. An act to limit the authority of States to tax certain income of employees for employment duties performed in other States; to the Committee on Finance.

H.R. 3534. An act to amend title 31, United States Code, to revise requirements related to assets pledged by a surety, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs.

H.R. 3874. An act to provide for the conveyance of eight cemeteries that are located on National Forest System land in Black Hills National Forest, South Dakota; to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

H.R. 4240. An act to reauthorize the North Korean Human Rights Act of 2004, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Foreign Relations.

MEASURES DISCHARGED

The following bill was discharged from the Committee on Energy and Natural resources, and referred as indicated:

H.R. 2947. An act to provide for the release of the reversionary interest held by the United States in certain land conveyed by the United States in 1950 for the establishment of an airport in Cook County, Minnesota; to the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry.

MEASURES PLACED ON THE CALENDAR

The following bill was read the second time, and placed on the calendar:

S. 3187. A bill to amend the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act to revise and extend the user-fee programs for prescription drugs and medical devices, to establish user-fee programs for generic drugs and biosimilars, and for other purposes.

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

The following reports of committees were submitted:

By Mr. LIEBERMAN, from the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, without amendment:

H.R. 2415. A bill to designate the facility of the United States Postal Service located at 11 Dock Street in Pittston, Pennsylvania, as the ''Trooper Joshua D. Miller Post Office Building''.

H.R. 3220. A bill to designate the facility of the United States Postal Service located at 170 Evergreen Square SW. in Pine City, Minnesota, as the ''Master Sergeant Daniel L. Fedder Post Office''.

H.R. 3413. A bill to designate the facility of the United States Postal Service located at 1449 West Avenue in Bronx, New York, as the ''Private Isaac T. Cortes Post Office''.

EXECUTIVE REPORT OF COMMITTEE

The following executive report of a nomination was submitted:

By Mr. LIEBERMAN for the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs.

*Joseph G. Jordan, of Massachusetts, to be Administrator for Federal Procurement Policy.

*Nomination was reported with recommendation that it be confirmed subject to the nominee's commitment to respond to requests to appear and testify before any duly constituted committee of the Senate.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS AND JOINT RESOLUTIONS

The following bills and joint resolutions were introduced, read the first and second times by unanimous consent, and referred as indicated:

By Mrs. GILLIBRAND:

S. 3188. A bill to increase the authorized number of Weapons of Mass Destruction Civil Support Teams; to the Committee on Armed Services.

By Mr. PORTMAN:

S. 3189. A bill to amend the Controlled Substances Act to place synthetic drugs in Schedule I; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

By Mr. PORTMAN:

S. 3190. A bill to amend the Controlled Substances Act to place synthetic drugs in Schedule I; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

By Mr. BROWN of Ohio (for himself and Mr. ALEXANDER):

S. 3191. A bill to improve provisions of title 23, United States Code relating to the use of HOV facilities; to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

By Mr. ALEXANDER (for himself, Mr. COONS, Mr. LUGAR, and Mr. ISAKSON):

S. 3192. A bill to amend the Immigration and Nationality Act by establishing an F-4 nonimmigrant visa for aliens pursuing an advanced degree in mathematics, engineering, technology, or the physical sciences in the United States, to authorize such aliens to become permanent residents if they obtain employment in the United States related to their field of study, and for other purposes; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

By Mrs. FEINSTEIN (for herself, Mr. AKAKA, and Mrs. BOXER):

S. 3193. A bill to make technical corrections to the legal description of certain land to be held in trust for the Barona Band of Mission Indians, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Indian Affairs.

By Mrs. HAGAN:

S. 3194. A bill to require the establishment of a small business common application and web portal for purposes of Federal small business assistance programs, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship.

By Mr. INHOFE:

S. 3195. A bill to suspend temporarily the duty on certain fishing reels; to the Committee on Finance.

SUBMISSION OF CONCURRENT AND SENATE RESOLUTIONS

The following concurrent resolutions and Senate resolutions were read, and referred (or acted upon), as indicated:

By Ms. LANDRIEU (for herself and Mr. GRASSLEY):

S. Res. 462. A resolution recognizing National Foster Care Month as an opportunity to raise awareness about the challenges faced by children in the foster care system, acknowledging the dedication of foster care parents, advocates, and workers, and encouraging Congress to implement policy to improve the lives of children in the foster care system; to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

By Mr. UDALL of Colorado (for himself, Mr. BINGAMAN, Ms. MURKOWSKI, and Mr. PORTMAN):

S. Res. 463. A resolution designating May 19, 2012, as ''National Kids to Parks Day''; considered and agreed to.

By Mr. JOHNSON of South Dakota (for himself and Mr. THUNE):

S. Res. 464. A resolution commemorating the 70th anniversary of Ellsworth Air Force Base; considered and agreed to.

By Mr. UDALL of Colorado (for himself and Mr. BENNET):

S. Res. 465. A resolution recognizing that the Governor of the State of Colorado has proclaimed 2012 as the ''Year of Water''; considered and agreed to.

ADDITIONAL COSPONSORS

S. 577

At the request of Mr. VITTER, the name of the Senator from Alabama (Mr. SESSIONS) was added as a cosponsor of S. 577, a bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to clarify eligibility for the child tax credit.

S. 960

At the request of Mr. KERRY, the name of the Senator from New York (Mrs. GILLIBRAND) was added as a cosponsor of S. 960, a bill to provide for a study on issues relating to access to intravenous immune globulin (IVG) for Medicare beneficiaries in all care settings and a demonstration project to examine the benefits of providing coverage and payment for items and services necessary to administer IVG in the home.

S. 1299

At the request of Mr. MORAN, the name of the Senator from Montana (Mr. BAUCUS) was added as a cosponsor of S. 1299, a bill to require the Secretary of the Treasury to mint coins in commemoration of the centennial of the establishment of Lions Clubs International.

S. 1335

At the request of Mr. INHOFE, the name of the Senator from Arizona (Mr. KYL) was added as a cosponsor of S. 1335, a bill to amend title 49, United States Code, to provide rights for pilots, and for other purposes.

S. 1929

At the request of Mr. BLUMENTHAL, the names of the Senator from Nevada (Mr. REID), the Senator from Oregon (Mr. MERKLEY), the Senator from Arkansas (Mr. BOOZMAN), the Senator from Florida (Mr. NELSON), the Senator from Oregon (Mr. WYDEN), the Senator from Hawaii (Mr. INOUYE) and the Senator from Georgia (Mr. ISAKSON) were added as cosponsors of S. 1929, a bill to require the Secretary of the Treasury to mint coins in commemoration of Mark Twain.

S. 2134

At the request of Mr. BLUMENTHAL, the name of the Senator from Vermont (Mr. LEAHY) was added as a cosponsor of S. 2134, a bill to amend title 10, United States Code, to provide for certain requirements relating to the retirement, adoption, care, and recognition of military working dogs, and for other purposes.

S. 2165

At the request of Mrs. BOXER, the names of the Senator from Maryland (Mr. CARDIN) and the Senator from Utah (Mr. HATCH) were added as cosponsors of S. 2165, a bill to enhance strategic cooperation between the United States and Israel, and for other purposes.

S. 2189

At the request of Mr. HARKIN, the name of the Senator from Wisconsin (Mr. KOHL) was added as a cosponsor of S. 2189, a bill to amend the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 and other laws to clarify appropriate standards for Federal antidiscrimination and antiretaliation claims, and for other purposes.

S. 2234

At the request of Mr. BLUMENTHAL, the name of the Senator from Montana (Mr. TESTER) was added as a cosponsor of S. 2234, a bill to prevent human trafficking in government contracting.

S. 2241

At the request of Mrs. MURRAY, the name of the Senator from Rhode Island (Mr. REED) was added as a cosponsor of S. 2241, a bill to ensure that veterans have the information and protections they require to make informed decisions regarding use of Post-9/11 Educational Assistance, and for other purposes.

S. 2245

At the request of Mr. BARRASSO, the names of the Senator from South Carolina (Mr. DEMINT) and the Senator from Alabama (Mr. SHELBY) were added as cosponsors of S. 2245, a bill to preserve existing rights and responsibilities with respect to waters of the United States.

S. 2250

At the request of Ms. STABENOW, the names of the Senator from Maryland (Mr. CARDIN), the Senator from Hawaii (Mr. INOUYE), the Senator from Connecticut (Mr. LIEBERMAN) and the Senator from California (Mrs. BOXER) were added as cosponsors of S. 2250, a bill to prevent homeowners from being forced to pay taxes on forgiven mortgage loan debt.

S. 2296

At the request of Mrs. HAGAN, the name of the Senator from Connecticut (Mr. BLUMENTHAL) was added as a cosponsor of S. 2296, a bill to amend the Higher Education Opportunity Act to restrict institutions of higher education from using revenues derived from Federal educational assistance funds for advertising, marketing, or recruiting purposes.

S. 2371

At the request of Mr. RUBIO, the name of the Senator from Wyoming (Mr. ENZI) was added as a cosponsor of S. 2371, a bill to amend the National Labor Relations Act to permit employers to pay higher wages to their employees.

S. 2374

At the request of Mr. BINGAMAN, the name of the Senator from Pennsylvania (Mr. TOOMEY) was added as a cosponsor of S. 2374, a bill to amend the Helium Act to ensure the expedient and responsible draw-down of the Federal Helium Reserve in a manner that protects the interests of private industry, the scientific, medical, and industrial communities, commercial users, and Federal agencies, and for other purposes.

S. 2554

At the request of Mr. LEAHY, the name of the Senator from California (Mrs. FEINSTEIN) was added as a cosponsor of S. 2554, a bill to amend title I of the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968 to extend the authorization of the Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant Program through fiscal year 2017.

S. 3180

At the request of Mrs. GILLIBRAND, the names of the Senator from Alaska (Ms. MURKOWSKI) and the Senator from Alaska (Mr. BEGICH) were added as cosponsors of S. 3180, a bill to require the Department of Defense to develop a plan to track and respond to incidents of hazing in the Armed Forces.

S. RES. 399

At the request of Mr. MENENDEZ, the name of the Senator from Nevada (Mr. HELLER) was added as a cosponsor of S. Res. 399, a resolution calling upon the President to ensure that the foreign policy of the United States reflects appropriate understanding and sensitivity concerning issues related to human rights, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing, and genocide documented in the United States record relating to the Armenian Genocide, and for other purposes.

S. RES. 402

At the request of Mr. COONS, the name of the Senator from Wisconsin (Mr. JOHNSON) was added as a cosponsor of S. Res. 402, a resolution condemning Joseph Kony and the Lord's Resistance Army for committing crimes against humanity and mass atrocities, and supporting ongoing efforts by the United States Government and governments in central Africa to remove Joseph Kony and Lord's Resistance Army commanders from the battlefield.

S. RES. 429

At the request of Mr. WICKER, the name of the Senator from Florida (Mr. RUBIO) was added as a cosponsor of S. Res. 429, a resolution supporting the goals and ideals of World Malaria Day.

S. RES. 434

At the request of Mr. WARNER, the names of the Senator from Montana (Mr. TESTER) and the Senator from Connecticut (Mr. BLUMENTHAL) were added as cosponsors of S. Res. 434, a resolution supporting the goal of preventing and effectively treating Alzheimer's disease by the year 2025, as articulated in the draft National Plan to Address Alzheimer's Disease from the Department of Health and Human Services.

S. RES. 446

At the request of Mr. RUBIO, the name of the Senator from Missouri (Mrs. MCCASKILL) was added as a cosponsor of S. Res. 446, a resolution expressing the sense of the Senate that the United Nations and other intergovernmental organizations should not be allowed to exercise control over the Internet.

STATEMENTS ON INTRODUCED BILLS AND JOINT RESOLUTIONS

By Mrs. FEINSTEIN (for herself, Mr. AKAKA, and Mrs. BOXER):

S. 3193. A bill to make technical corrections to the legal description of certain land to be held in trust for the Barona Band of Mission Indians, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Indian Affairs.

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Mr. President, I rise today to introduce legislation that will correct an error in the Native American Technical Corrections Act of 2004.

The intent of section 121 of the 2004 law was to put a parcel on the northern edge of the Barona reservation, in San Diego County, into trust for the tribe. Unfortunately the bill identified a parcel on the southern edge of the reservation and put that in trust.

The mistake is compounded by the fact that the land north of the reservation is owned by a non-Indian property owner. The landowner now cannot sell or modify his property without permission from the tribe and the Department of the Interior.

The Barona Band of Mission Indians Land Transfer Clarification Act corrects this mistake.

The bill removes the private property on the northern side of the reservation from trust status; and the bill places the correct parcel in trust for the Barona tribe on the southern edge of the reservation.

The Barona Land Transfer Clarification Act closely follows an agreement brokered by Congressman DUNCAN HUNTER and his staff. Congressman HUNTER, and former Congressman Duncan Hunter, Sr. before him, brought the Band, the County of San Diego and the neighboring homeowners to the negotiating table.

The agreement they reached, embodied in this legislation, is a product of compromise. The end product is something that everyone agrees is better than the status quo. That is how compromise works.

The Tribe supports the legislation. The Homeowners and the County have reviewed and approved the language.

For the County and Homeowners, the findings section is the most important part of the bill.

This section addresses the ongoing water dispute between the tribe and its neighbors.

The fourth finding is particularly important if—the tribe uses the land to bring additional water into the area, the effort is only authorized if it also addresses the water needs of the neighboring off-reservation property.

Homeowners in the area have noticed diminished groundwater supplies in recent years, and they have looked to the tribe to help resolve the issue. In this arid part of the State, this is a significant concession on the part of the Tribe, and it is the cornerstone of the entire agreement.

I am hopeful that we can quickly pass this legislation and undo this unfortunate mistake. By enacting the Barona Land Transfer Clarification Act, all parties will gain some certainty that their issue will be resolved.

Finally, I am proud that my colleague from California Senator BOXER, and Senate Indian Affairs Committee Chairman DANIEL AKAKA have joined me as original cosponsors.

Once this legislation is sent over to the House, I know that Congressman HUNTER and the San Diego Delegation stand ready to join our fight to resolve this issue.

This strong, bi-partisan, bi-cameral support gives me confidence that this simple, straightforward piece of legislation is one that the Senate can pass very quickly.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the text of the bill be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the text of the bill was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

S. 3193

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the ''Barona Band of Mission Indians Land Transfer Clarification Act of 2012''.

SEC. 2. FINDINGS; PURPOSES.

(a) FINDINGS.—Congress finds that—

(1) the legal description of land previously taken into trust by the United States for the benefit of the Barona Band of Mission Indians may be interpreted to refer to private, nontribal land;

(2) there is a continued, unresolved disagreement between the Barona Band of Mission Indians and certain off-reservation property owners relating to the causes of diminishing native groundwater;

(3) Congress expresses no opinion, nor should an opinion of Congress be inferred, relating to the disagreement described in paragraph (2); and

(4) it is the intent of Congress that, if the land described in section 121(b) of the Native American Technical Corrections Act of 2004 (118 Stat. 544) (as amended by section 3) is used to bring water to the Barona Indian Reservation, the effort is authorized only if the effort also addresses water availability for neighboring off-reservation land located along Old Barona Road that is occupied as of the date of enactment of this Act by providing guaranteed access to that water supply at a mutually agreeable site on the

southwest boundary of the Barona Indian Reservation.

(b) PURPOSES.—The purposes of this Act are—

(1) to clarify the legal description of the land placed into trust for the Barona Band of Mission Indians in 2004; and

(2) to remove all doubt relating to the specific parcels of land that Congress has placed into trust for the Barona Band of Mission Indians.

SEC. 3. LAND TRANSFER.

Section 121 of the Native American Technical Corrections Act of 2004 (Public Law 108–204; 118 Stat. 544) is amended—

(1) by striking subsection (b) and inserting the following:

''(b) DESCRIPTION OF LAND.—The land referred to in subsection (a) is land comprising approximately 86.87 acres in San Diego County, California, and described more particularly as follows: T. 14 S., R. 1 E. San Bernardino Meridian; Section 21, SW¼ SW¼, excepting the north 475 ft.; W½ SE¼ SW¼, excepting the north 475 ft.; E½ SE¼ SW¼, excepting the north 350 ft.; Together with that portion W½ SE¼, lying southwesterly of the following line: Beginning at the intersection of the southerly line of said SE¼ Section 21 with the westerly boundary of Rancho Canada De San Vicente Y Mesa Del Padre Barona as shown on United States Government Resurvey approved January 21, 1939; thence northwesterly along said boundary to an intersection with the westerly line of said SE¼; containing 68.75 acres more or less; Section 28, NW¼ NW¼, excepting the east 750 ft.; containing 17.02 acres more or less.''; and

(2) by adding at the end the following:

''(d) CLARIFICATIONS.—

''(1) EFFECT ON SECTION.—The provisions of subsection (c) shall apply to the land described in subsection (b), as in effect on the day after the date of enactment of the Barona Band of Mission Indians Land Transfer Clarification Act of 2012.

''(2) EFFECT ON PRIVATE LAND.—The parcel of private, non-Indian land referenced in subsection (a) and described in subsection (b), as in effect on the day before the date of enactment of the Barona Band of Mission Indians Land Transfer Clarification Act of 2012, but excluded from the revised description of the land in subsection (b) was not intended to be—

''(A) held in trust by the United States for the benefit of the Band; or

''(B) considered to be a part of the reservation of the Band.''.

SUBMITTED RESOLUTIONS

SENATE RESOLUTION 462—RECOGNIZING NATIONAL FOSTER CARE MONTH AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO RAISE AWARENESS ABOUT THE CHALLENGES FACED BY CHILDREN IN THE FOSTER CARE SYSTEM, ACKNOWLEDGING THE DEDICATION OF FOSTER CARE PARENTS, ADVOCATES, AND WORKERS, AND ENCOURAGING CONGRESS TO IMPLEMENT POLICY TO IMPROVE THE LIVES OF CHILDREN IN THE FOSTER CARE SYSTEM

Ms. LANDRIEU (for herself and Mr. GRASSLEY) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions:

S. RES. 462

Whereas National Foster Care Month was established more than 20 years ago to bring foster care issues to the forefront, highlight the importance of permanency for every child, and recognize the essential role that foster parents, social workers, and advocates have in the lives of children in foster care throughout the United States;

Whereas all children deserve a safe, loving, and permanent home;

Whereas the primary goal of the foster care system is to ensure the safety and well-being of children while working to provide a safe, loving, and permanent home for each child;

Whereas there are approximately 408,000 children living in foster care;

Whereas there were approximately 254,000 youth that entered the foster care system in 2010, while over 107,000 youth were eligible and awaiting adoption at the end of 2010;

Whereas children in foster care experience an average of 3 different placements, which often leads to disruption of routines and the need to change schools and move away from siblings, extended families, and familiar surroundings;

Whereas youth in foster care are much more likely to face educational instability with 65 percent of former foster children experiencing at least 7 school changes while in care;

Whereas children of color are more likely to stay in the foster care system for longer periods of time and are less likely to be reunited with their biological families;

Whereas foster parents are the front-line caregivers for children who cannot safely remain with their biological parents and provide physical care, emotional support, education advocacy, and are the largest single source of families providing permanent homes for children leaving foster care to adoption;

Whereas children in foster care who are placed with relatives, compared to children placed with nonrelatives, have more stability, including fewer changes in placements, have more positive perceptions of their placements, are more likely to be placed with their siblings, and demonstrate fewer behavioral problems;

Whereas an increased emphasis on prevention and reunification services is necessary to reduce the number of children that are forced to remain in the foster care system;

Whereas more than 27,900 youth ''age out'' of foster care without a legal permanent connection to an adult or family;

Whereas children who age out of foster care may lack the security or support of a biological or adoptive family and frequently struggle to secure affordable housing, obtain health insurance, pursue higher education, and acquire adequate employment;

Whereas foster care is intended to be a temporary placement, but children remain in the foster care system for an average of 2 years;

Whereas volunteers, guardians, mentors, and workers in the child-protective-services community play a vital role in improving the safety of the most valuable youth and work hard to increase permanency through reunification, adoption, and guardianship;

Whereas due to heavy caseloads and limited resources, the average tenure for a worker in child protection services is just 3 years;

Whereas on average, 8.5 percent of the positions in child protective services remain vacant;

Whereas States, localities, and communities should be encouraged to invest resources in preventative and reunification services and postpermanency programs to ensure that more children in foster care are provided with safe, loving, and permanent placements;

Whereas Federal legislation over the past 3 decades, including the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 (Public Law 96–272), the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (Public Law 105–89), the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (Public Law 110–351), and the Child and Family Services Improvement and Innovation Act (Public Law 112–34) provided new investments and services to improve the outcomes of children in the foster care system;

Whereas May is an appropriate month to designate as National Foster Care Month to provide an opportunity to acknowledge the child-welfare workforce, foster parents, advocacy community, and mentors for their dedication, accomplishments, and positive impact they have on the lives of children; and

Whereas much remains to be done to ensure that all children have a safe, loving, nurturing, and permanent family, regardless of age or special needs: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Senate—

(1) recognizes National Foster Care Month as an opportunity to raise awareness about the challenges faced by children in the foster care system, acknowledging the dedication of foster care parents, advocates, and workers, and encouraging Congress to implement policy to improve the lives of children in the foster care system;

(2) encourages Congress to implement policy to improve the lives of children in the foster care system;

(3) supports the designation of May as National Foster Care Month;

(4) acknowledges the special needs of children in the foster care system;

(5) recognizes foster youth throughout the United States for their ongoing tenacity, courage, and resilience while facing life challenges,

(6) acknowledges the exceptional alumni of the foster care system who serve as advocates and role models for youth who remain in care;

(7) honors the commitment and dedication of the individuals who work tirelessly to provide assistance and services to children in the foster care system; and

(8) reaffirms the need to continue working to improve the outcomes of all children in the foster care system through parts B and E of title IV of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 601 et seq.) and other programs designed to—

(A) support vulnerable families;

(B) invest in prevention and reunification services;

(C) promote adoption and guardianship in cases where reunification is not in the best interests of the child;

(D) adequately serve those children brought into the foster care system; and

(E) facilitate the successful transition into adulthood for children that ''age out'' of the foster care system.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, as cofounders and cochairs of the Senate Caucus on Foster Youth, Senator LANDRIEU and I offer a resolution to recognize May as National Foster Care Month.

The resolution is an opportunity to raise awareness about the challenges faced by children in the foster care system. It is also a time to acknowledge the dedication of foster care parents, advocates, and workers who are changing the lives of children every day.

National Foster Care Month was established more than 20 years ago to bring foster care issues to the forefront. Today we continue to see almost a half million children who are unable to remain at home because of abuse or neglect or because of other family issues.

During this separation, foster youth face loneliness, instability, and grief. Unfortunately, children in foster care experience an average of three different placements which often lead to disruption of routines. Some are required to change schools and move away from siblings, extended families, and familiar surroundings. They face educational instability and, as a result, score lower on all academic measures than peers.

Foster youth have to overcome misperceptions and stigmas and deal with emotional pain and trauma that comes from such separation. It becomes a reality for many children every day. In 2010, about 254,000 children entered into care. While many are reunified with their families or adopted into new ones, more than 107,000 children were awaiting adoption at the end of 2010.

The Senate Caucus on Foster Youth is providing a voice for these foster young people. Senator LANDRIEU and I founded this caucus in 2009 to raise awareness of issues challenging foster youth, including educational stability, substance abuse, sexual exploitation, and the overprescription of psychotropic drugs.

We hear from youth about policies that affect their quality of life. Among other activities, the caucus sponsors a speakers series to bring the best ideas from the field to us policymakers in Washington, DC.

Today I invite my colleagues to join us on this caucus, to get involved and to make a difference. Senator LANDRIEU and I created the foster care caucus in the Senate to focus on all youth in the system, but we have particular focus on older children who may lack the security or support of a biological or adoptive family. These kids tend to age out of the foster care system, then struggle in creating a stable life that many of us often take for granted. More than 27,900 youth age out of foster care without a legal, permanent connection to an adult or family. We must focus on how to reduce this number from year to year. We have made great strides over the years, and we have done so in a bipartisan manner.

In 2006, the Senate Finance Committee held the first hearings on child welfare in more than a decade. The hearings led to passage of the Child and Family Services Improvement Act, which improved programs designed to help troubled families, provided grants for States and community organizations to combat methamphetamine addiction and other substance abuse, and increased case worker visits for children in foster care. It also supported grants to strengthen and improve collaboration between courts and child welfare agencies.

In 2008 I introduced the bill that became the Fostering Connection to Success and Increasing Adoption Act. This bipartisan bill made it easier for children to stay in their own communities and be adopted by their own relatives, including grandparents, aunts, and uncles. It provided incentives for States to move children from foster care to permanent adoptive homes, and it made all children with special needs eligible for Federal adoption assistance.

The law also broke new ground by establishing opportunities to help kids who age out of the foster care system at age 18 by giving States the option to extend their care in helping them pursue educational and vocational training.

Last year, to try to prevent children from having to enter the foster care system in the first place, I worked to reauthorize grants that support families who struggle with substance abuse and improve the safety, permanency, and well-being of children who are not in their homes or are likely to be removed from their homes because of substance abuse by parents.

Children in the foster care system yearn for permanency, and these grants help keep families together when possible so the children are not subject to the many difficulties they face in the foster care system.

But Congress, as you know, must be vigilant. We must always keep our eyes on the prize; that is, a safe, loving and permanent home for every child. We must always stress prevention as well as reunification and the reunification services because these two key components are necessary to reduce the number of children who are forced to remain in foster care.

Finally, let me take a moment to pay tribute to many volunteers, guardians, mentors, and workers in the child protective service community. Every person in this field plays a vital role in improving the safety of our most vulnerable youth, and our country is better off for that. They are dedicated and important to thousands of children and can be very positive influences for families across the country.

This month of May is the time to pay tribute to the community. It is time to remember these young people. More important, it is time to encourage others to get involved and, hence, make a difference. It is my hope that this awareness will extend beyond me, and people will recognize the need to step up and to fight for these vulnerable youth on a daily basis. I encourage Members to cosponsor our resolution, and I especially appreciate the cooperation and working relationship I have had with Senator LANDRIEU on this subject of adoption, foster care, and, in particular, for aging-out young people.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Louisiana.

Ms. LANDRIEU. Mr. President, I appreciate the eloquent statement our colleague from Iowa has put into the RECORD and his passionate advocacy on behalf of this special group of children in America. From his position as senior member on the Finance Committee, both serving as chair and as ranking member, his support has been essential to their well-being. In a committee that has a lot of important issues, from tax reform to international trade, the Senator from Iowa, Mr. GRASSLEY, never fails to keep the needs of foster care children and their families and the support community on the front of that agenda. I could not have a better partner, and I am very grateful for his partnership on this issue and his friendship.

I also want to recognize some of our colleagues from the House: Representative KAREN BASS, Representative TOM MARINO, Representative MICHELE BACHMAN, and Representative JIM MCDERMOTT, who worked very closely with Senator GRASSLEY and myself. As you can see, this is across party lines, across geographic lines, and across different political philosophies.

We want to say one thing very loud and clear to the country: Foster children are not criminals. They are not delinquents. They are children who are in desperate need of love and care and support. Our foster care system in many ways works beautifully and in some ways needs, of course, to be fixed, repaired, and strengthened. But overall the foster care system should, at all times, be temporary. It is a temporary place for children to go to be protected and healed and nurtured until they can be returned to their birth family or to their extended family with sibling groups intact or until they can be processed to a kinship adoption, which Senator GRASSLEY has been a tremendous advocate for, or to a domestic adoption.

I cannot add anything to the very excellent and comprehensive statement the Senator made. I would like to add just a few points. Because of the work many of us have done—and we do not hear good news around here that often, so I want to share that in the last 20 years, because of the work that our group has done, and others in the Congress, we have doubled the amount of children being adopted out of the foster care system. That is a tremendous victory because of the legislation that has been passed, the focus across party lines.

In 1990 we only adopted 14,000 children out of foster care. In the last year of record, 2010, we adopted 53,000. It is a tripling of adoptions out of foster care.

I do not have the numbers in front of me for reunifications, but Senator GRASSLEY and I know that number has increased as well. We are making progress in the bills we are proposing and passing, the appropriations that we are investing. It has not been a lot more money over the last few years. It

has just been a real strategic focus which I would like to believe our caucus and the adoption caucus as well, the foster care caucus, has helped to produce.

We have had more adoptions out of foster care. We have had more reunifications out of foster care. We have shortened the time that children are in foster care. But we have, and in this month of May still have, many challenges. That is why Senator GRASSLEY and I urge our colleagues to join us in this resolution, S. Res. 462. Be a cosponsor. Step up and say by your cosponsorship that you care about this issue, that you want to help us continue to make progress.

I want to remember our former colleague, John Chafee, who, when he was in the Senate, was an extraordinary advocate for foster care children. We named the John Chafee Foster Care Independence Program in his honor. As Senator GRASSLEY said, we are making progress with helping our children who age out when we failed to reunite them with their birth family, we failed to find them an adoptive home. They are aging out, but we are trying to give them more help and support. That is still a challenge.

Some of our Members are working on foster children and school choice. If children are brought into the foster care system and they are separated from their families, it is quite traumatic. Of course it is for their own good. Sometimes their families are being abusive. Sometimes their families are being grossly negligent. Unfortunately, in this day and age sometimes their families are deported and they are in the home alone. We want to make sure the children get to stay at least in the school of their choice. It is one thing to be pulled from your family; it is another thing to have to lose your family 1 day and your school the next day and all of your teachers, all of your friends.

There is legislation pending that would give foster children the opportunity to stay in the school they are in when they enter care, if that is their choice. That would be a great reform.

We also want to continue to promote kinship adoption, reaching out to the extended family, trying to keep children placed in their extended families who are willing and responsible to raise them—but not placing children with kin if the kin or the relatives are not responsible and not willing; that is not a solution.

Finally, we want to promote quality foster families. This is a problem that is easily solvable. It seems like it is a lot, this number, 450-some-odd thousand children. But it represents only one-half of 1 percent of all children in America. This is not a big number. It sounds like it when we say 450,000, but the percentage, one-half of 1 percent—we calculated it 1 day on just the back of a napkin. If one family for every four churches in America would say yes to taking in a foster child or to adopt a child out of foster care, there would be no more orphans in our country.

Again, if one family out of every four churches stepped up for the children available for adoption, we would have no more orphans in America. Then we could focus on recruiting quality foster families who can help these children to find their way—to find their way back to their biological families with their sibling groups intact or find their way to a new family who will love them and nurture them and protect them and support them forever.

That is what families do. We do not support our children until they are 18 and let them go on their merry way. We are with them until the last breath. That is what parents do. We are with our children forever. Every child in this world deserves a forever family.

Senator GRASSLEY and I have come together. We work to strengthen our foster care system. We know it is broken in places. We know it can be fixed. We work on fixing it every day.

I thank our colleagues who have joined us in just recognizing Foster Care Month. As Senator GRASSLEY said in his conclusion, and I will say in mine, we want to thank everyone who helps on this every month of the year, not just May. We want to thank the teachers who reach out especially to the foster children they know are in their classrooms. We want to thank the judges who process their cases quickly.

I particularly want to thank the CASA workers. I am a big believer in CASA, Court Appointed Special Advocates. I think it is a great organization for all the volunteers who worked to help make our foster care system in America better.

Again, this is S. Res. 462.

I would like to thank our counterparts in the House.

It has been a real joy and pleasure to work with Senator GRASSLEY these many years on helping to promote the very best practices in the country on reforming our foster care system in America and trying to help who we can around the world.

SENATE RESOLUTION 463—DESIGNATING MAY 19, 2012, AS ''NATIONAL KIDS TO PARKS DAY''

Mr. UDALL of Colorado (for himself, Mr. BINGAMAN, Ms. MURKOWSKI, and Mr. PORTMAN) submitted the following resolution; which was considered and agreed to:

S. RES. 463

Whereas the second annual National Kids to Parks Day will be celebrated on May 19, 2012;

Whereas the goal of National Kids to Parks Day is to empower young people and encourage families to get outdoors and visit the parks of the United States;

Whereas, on National Kids to Parks Day, individuals from rural and urban areas of the United States can be reintroduced to the splendid National Parks and State and neighborhood parks that are located in their communities;

Whereas communities across the United States offer a variety of natural resources and public land, often with free access, to individuals seeking outdoor recreation;

Whereas the people of the United States should encourage young people to lead a more active lifestyle, as too many young people in the United States are overweight or obese;

Whereas National Kids to Parks Day is an opportunity for families to take a break from their busy lives and come together for a day of wholesome fun; and

Whereas National Kids to Parks Day aims to broaden the appreciation of young people for nature and the outdoors: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Senate—

(1) designates May 19, 2012, as ''National Kids to Parks Day'';

(2) recognizes the importance of outdoor recreation and the preservation of open spaces to the health of the young people of the United States; and

(3) calls on the people of the United States to observe the day with appropriate programs, ceremonies, and activities.

SENATE RESOLUTION 464—COMMEMORATING THE 70TH ANNIVERSARY OF ELLSWORTH AIR FORCE BASE

Mr. JOHNSON of South Dakota (for himself and Mr. THUNE) submitted the following resolution; which was considered and agreed to:

S. RES. 464

Whereas on January 2, 1942, the War Department established Rapid City Army Air Base in South Dakota as a training location for B–17 Flying Fortress crews;

Whereas thousands of pilots, navigators, radio operators, and gunners were trained at Rapid City Army Air Base and went on to support the allied efforts in World War II;

Whereas on June 13, 1953, President Dwight D. Eisenhower visited the base and dedicated it in memory of Brigadier General Richard E. Ellsworth;

Whereas during the Cold War, Ellsworth Air Force Base maintained 2 legs of the strategic triad, strategic bombardment, and intercontinental ballistic missiles, earning the title ''The Showplace of Strategic Air Command'';

Whereas 2012 marks the 25th year of the B–1B Lancer mission at Ellsworth Air Force Base;

Whereas in 1999, B–1Bs from Ellsworth Air Force Base flew over 100 combat missions in support of NATO forces in Operation Allied Force in Kosovo;

Whereas Ellsworth Air Force Base has played a crucial role in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation New Dawn, and Operation Enduring Freedom, deploying over 10,000 personnel and flying over 6,000 combat sorties in those operations;

Whereas the first ever B–1B global strike mission launched from the United States came from Ellsworth Air Force Base on March 30, 2011, striking targets in Libya before refueling, rearming, and hitting additional targets in Libya on the return;

Whereas, for 70 years, Ellsworth Air Force Base has served as an integral part of the defense strategy of the United States and served as the proud home to thousands of bomber pilots, navigators, radio operators, gunners, missile launch control facility personnel, and aircraft and missile maintenance personnel;

Whereas, the personnel from Ellsworth Air Force Base have a history of compiling some

of the highest marks in competitive readiness and maintenance exercises and competitions;

Whereas, for the past 65 years, Ellsworth Air Force Base has—

(1) been home to the 28th Bomb Wing and some of the most impressive aircraft in the United States, including the B–17 Flying Fortress, the B–29 Superfortress, the RB–36 Peacemaker, the B–52 Stratofortress, the KC–135 Stratotanker, KC–97 Stratofreighter and the B–1B Lancer; and

(2) for parts of 4 decades, served as an important cog in the missile defense system of the United States, featuring the Titan and Minuteman missile systems;

Whereas Ellsworth Air Force Base continues to evolve and is preparing to welcome the MQ–9 Reaper mission later in 2012; and

Whereas, Ellsworth Air Force Base and the communities of Rapid City and Box Elder, South Dakota have and will continue to enjoy a long standing, mutually beneficial relationship: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Senate—

(1) recognizes the contributions of Ellsworth Air Force Base to the security of the United States;

(2) commemorates 70 years of excellence and service by Ellsworth Air Force Base to the United States; and

(3) encourages the people of the United States to recognize and honor the dedicated and exemplary service of the airmen and their families, past and present, stationed at Ellsworth Air Force Base.

SENATE RESOLUTION 465—RECOGNIZING THAT THE GOVERNOR OF THE STATE OF COLORADO HAS PROCLAIMED 2012 AS THE ''YEAR OF WATER''

Mr. UDALL of Colorado (for himself and Mr. BENNET) submitted the following resolution; which was considered and agreed to:

S. RES. 465

Whereas water is a precious and limited natural resource;

Whereas a clean and sustainable water supply is essential to the high quality of life enjoyed by Coloradans;

Whereas a clean and sustainable water supply is essential to the success of all aspects of the economy of the State of Colorado, including the agricultural, municipal, industrial, and recreational economies;

Whereas as a headwaters State, the health of the water in the State of Colorado has a direct impact on neighboring States;

Whereas the population of the State of Colorado is predicted to double by 2050;

Whereas educating the public about limited water resources will be critical in meeting the increasing demands placed on water in the future;

Whereas 2012 marks the—

(1) 100th anniversary of the construction of the Rio Grande Reservoir;

(2) 90th anniversary of the Colorado River Compact of 1922;

(3) 75th anniversary of the creation of the Colorado Water Conservation Board;

(4) 75th anniversary of the creation of the Colorado River Water Conservation District;

(5) 75th anniversary of the creation of the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District and the Colorado-Big Thompson Project;

(6) 50th anniversary of the Fryingpan-Arkansas Project, administered by the Southeastern Colorado Water Conservancy District;

(7) 10th anniversary of the Colorado Foundation for Water Education; and

(8) 10th anniversary of the Lower Arkansas Valley Water Conservancy District; and

Whereas the Governor of the State of Colorado has proclaimed 2012 as the ''Year of Water'' in the State of Colorado: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Senate recognizes that the Governor of the State of Colorado has proclaimed 2012 as the ''Year of Water'' in the State of Colorado.

AUTHORITY FOR COMMITTEES TO MEET

COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on May 16, 2012, at 2:30 p.m. in room SR–253 of the Russell Senate Office Building.

The Committee will hold a hearing entitled, ''Oversight of the Federal Communications Commission.''

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

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Foreign Relations be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on May 16, 2012, at 2:30 p.m.

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

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR, AND PENSIONS

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions be authorized to meet, during the session of the Senate, to conduct a hearing entitled ''Identifying Opportunities for Health Care Delivery System Reform: Lessons from the Front Line'' on May 16, 2012, at 10 a.m. in room SD–430 of the Dirksen Senate Office Building.

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

COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on May 16, 2012, at 10 a.m.

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

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on the Judiciary be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate, on May 16, 2012, at 10 a.m., in room SD–226 of the Dirksen Senate Office Building, to conduct a hearing entitled ''Oversight of the Office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.''

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

SUBCOMMITTEE ON CHILDREN'S HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Subcommittee on Children's Health and Environmental Responsibility of the Committee on Environment and Public Works be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on May 16, 2012, at 10 a.m. in room SD–406 of the Dirksen Senate Office Building to conduct a hearing entitled, ''Growing Long-Term Value: Corporate Environmental Responsibility and Innovation.''

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

PRIVILEGES OF THE FLOOR

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that Chantel Boyens, a detailee to the Budget Committee, be given floor privileges for the pendency of the debate on the budget resolutions and S. 2516, the Food and Drug Administration Safety and Innovation Act.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that Laura Sands and Katrine Lazar of my staff be granted floor privileges for the duration of today's proceedings.

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

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREEMENT—EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that at 10:30 a.m. on Thursday, May 17, 2012, the Senate proceed to executive session to consider Calendar Nos. 646 and 647; that there be 90 minutes for debate equally divided in the usual form to run concurrently on both nominations en bloc; that upon the use or yielding back of time, the Senate proceed to vote without intervening action or debate on the nominations in the order listed; that the nominations be subject to a 60-vote threshold; the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate; that no further motions be in order to the nominations; that any statements related to the nominations be printed in the RECORD; that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action and the Senate then resume legislative session; further, that the cloture votes with respect to these nominations be vitiated.

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

RESOLUTIONS SUBMITTED TODAY

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration en bloc of the following resolutions which were submitted earlier today: S. Res. 463, S. Res. 464, and S. Res. 465.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered. The Senate will proceed to consider the resolutions en bloc.

S. RES. 463

Mr. UDALL of Colorado. Mr. President, I rise today in support of a pretty common sense goal—getting more kids outside and engaged in the great outdoors.

In America today, I am sad to say that one in three children are overweight or obese. Kids between the ages of 8 and 18 spend an average of 7 and a half hours a day using some sort of entertainment media such as TVs, computers, video games, cell phones and movies. I believe this is a major reason why only ⅓ of all children get the recommended level of physical activity every day, contributing to high obesity rates.

The grave effects of childhood obesity on our children's quality of life are troubling, and the impacts on our economy distressing. But the effect on our national security is equally alarming. With current obesity rates, I have serious concerns that our military will have difficulty finding soldiers physically qualified to serve in the near future.

A healthier Nation is a stronger Nation, and encouraging greater physical activity in America's youth by getting more kids outdoors will help stop this disturbing trend.

That is why I am proud to submit a bipartisan resolution today which recognizes May 19, 2012, as the second annual National Kids to Parks Day. I led this effort last year, and was extremely pleased to see the many thousands of families that made it out to a national, State, or local park to enjoy the great outdoors.

So far, over 70,000 people across the country have signed the pledge to get outside on National Kids to Parks Day.

Enjoying the outdoors has been a lifelong passion for me. Growing up in the American southwest, my parents would take our family on frequent trips to the nearby parks and helped inspire me to become a mountain guide with Outward Bound. At Outward Bound I developed a strong love not just for being outdoors, but for sharing the outdoors with others.

In Congress, I have similarly tried to ensure that open spaces in both urban and rural areas are preserved so that families in Colorado and across America have ample opportunity to get out and take advantage of our greatest natural resources, our parks, and open spaces.

Preserving open spaces is critical to our ability to enjoy the outdoors, which is essential not just to public health but to our economy as well. In Colorado, a big part of our economy is dependent on having open spaces—from skiing to whitewater rafting, hiking, and mountain biking—protecting land for outdoor recreation keeps us and our economy healthy.

In this same spirit, on Saturday families all across the Nation will get outside to celebrate National Kids to Parks Day and America's commitment to getting kids outdoors.

Getting kids outdoors won't completely solve our childhood obesity problem, but it may help them get excited about being active and healthy outdoors. It may help inspire the next generation of American stewards to enjoy and protect our Nation's special places.

I would like to thank Senator BINGAMAN, Senator MURKOWSKI and Senator PORTMAN for joining me in submitting this resolution.

I would like to close by asking my colleagues to support my National Kids to Parks Day resolution.

S. RES. 464

Mr. JOHNSON of South Dakota. Mr. President, today I wish to mark the 70th anniversary of Ellsworth Air Force Base. For the past seven decades, my home State of South Dakota has had the distinct honor of being home to Ellsworth Air Force Base. This weekend, I will gather in Rapid City with Air Force Chief of Staff General Norton Schwartz, 28th Bomb Wing Commander Colonel Mark Weatherington, Governor Dennis Daugaard, Senator JOHN THUNE, Congresswoman KRISTI NOEM, past and present Airmen, and proud South Dakotans to celebrate this anniversary.

A lot has changed since the Rapid City Army Air Base opened in 1942. At the time, the base served as a training location for B–17 Flying Fortress crews and thousands of pilots, navigators, radio operators, and gunners trained there during World War II. Over the years, the base has adapted and grown to support new missions but a reminder of its early days remains in the PRIDE hangar. This historic building was completed in 1949 to house the RB–36 Peacemakers and later was home to the 44th Strategic Missile Wing and the 77th Bomb Squadron.

The 28th Bomb Wing at Ellsworth Air Force Base has been home to such impressive aircraft as the B–17 Flying Fortress, B–29 Superfortress, the RB–36 Peacemaker, the B–52 Stratofortress, and, for the past 25 years, the B–1B Lancer. All these planes have graced the skies of western South Dakota, offering South Dakotans a visual and audial reminder of the power of the United States Air Force. Ellsworth has played an important role in every major conflict since World War II, including flying over 6,000 combat sorties in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation New Dawn, and Operation Enduring Freedom. On March 20, 2011, history was made as the first ever B–1B combat sorties launched directly from the United States to strike targets overseas were launched at Ellsworth and hit targets in Libya. Ellsworth continues to evolve and as we reflect on the past, we also look to a bright future for the base, including the arrival later this year of the MQ–9 Reaper mission.

Ellsworth Air Force Base is the largest employer in western South Dakota and has had a significant economic impact on our State. The impact of the base on our State goes beyond the economic, however; the base and its personnel are a part of the fabric of our state. Rapid City, Box Elder, and communities throughout the Black Hills have enjoyed a friendly and mutually beneficial relationship with the base. This is something that, unfortunately, cannot be said at every military installation. This symbiotic relationship has displayed itself in numerous ways, such as in 1972 when base personnel assisted in the recovery and relief efforts when historic flooding struck Rapid City. When snowstorms crippled the region in 1949 and 1950, Ellsworth personnel airlifted food and hay bales to stranded ranchers and livestock. Today, personnel from Ellsworth contribute to many charitable efforts in the community, such as helping with the United Way's annual Day of Caring and the Children's Miracle Network.

As I reflect on this anniversary, I'm reminded of all of the dedicated Airmen, past and present, that have served at Ellsworth Air Force Base. The Air Force is only as strong as its members, and Ellsworth has seen many talented, patriotic individuals over the past 70 years. Many former Wing Commanders have gone on to serve in top positions in the Air Force, including as commanders of U.S. Transportation Command, Air Education and Training Command, and Air Force Global Strike Command.

Mr. President, for the past 70 years Ellsworth Air Force Base has made significant contributions to the State of South Dakota and the security of the United States. I commend Ellsworth Air Force Base on this occasion and know that the base, and the brave men and women who serve there, will continue to make invaluable contributions for decades to come.

S. RES. 465

Mr. UDALL of Colorado. Mr. President, today I am submitting a resolution concerning water in the State of Colorado. This resolution recognizes the importance of water to the State of Colorado and the contributions of many of the organizations that have innovated and cooperated over the past century to develop, protect and conserve this scarce resource. I want to thank my colleague from Colorado Senator BENNET for cosponsoring the resolution.

In the arid West, water is our most precious natural resource. It is woven into our history as a source of life, a source of recreation and even economic growth. But as a limited resource, it is also a source of conflict. As the old saying in the West goes, whiskey is for drinking and water is for fighting.

However, I rise today to highlight not our disagreements but our cooperation. Generations of Coloradans have joined together and worked hard to solve Colorado's water challenges, because a resource as valuable as water must ultimately unite us.

The year 2012 is a particularly significant year for water in Colorado, as it marks numerous anniversaries that have had an enormous impact on how water is managed in my state.

It is the 100th anniversary of the construction of the Rio Grande Reservoir, 90th anniversary of the Colorado River Compact of 1922, 75th anniversary of

the creation of the Colorado Water Conservation Board, 75th anniversary of the creation of the Colorado River Water Conservation District, 75th anniversary of the creation of the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District and the Colorado-Big Thompson Project, 50th anniversary of the Fryingpan-Arkansas Project, 10th anniversary of the Colorado Foundation for Water Education and 10th anniversary of the Lower Arkansas Valley Water Conservancy District.

In fact, Colorado Governor John Hickenlooper has designated 2012 as the Year of Water in Colorado.

I am proud of efforts underway in the state to raise awareness about the importance of water. For example, a statewide celebration named Colorado Water 2012 will help to engage and educate Coloradans about past achievements and highlight the challenges we face in the future management of water. Colorado Water 2012 will continue throughout the year, and I look forward to participating in the education and engagement of our citizens.

I hope that this resolution can in some small way add to the appreciation of water issues in the United States Senate and to efforts underway in Colorado.

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent the resolutions be agreed to, the preambles be agreed to, the motions to reconsider be laid upon the table en bloc, with no intervening action or debate, and any statements related to the resolutions be printed in the RECORD at the appropriate place as if read.

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

The resolutions were agreed to.

The preambles were agreed to.

The resolutions, with their preambles, read as follows:

S. RES. 463

(Designating May 19, 2012, as ''National Kids to Parks Day'')

Whereas the second annual National Kids to Parks Day will be celebrated on May 19, 2012;

Whereas the goal of National Kids to Parks Day is to empower young people and encourage families to get outdoors and visit the parks of the United States;

Whereas, on National Kids to Parks Day, individuals from rural and urban areas of the United States can be reintroduced to the splendid National Parks and State and neighborhood parks that are located in their communities;

Whereas communities across the United States offer a variety of natural resources and public land, often with free access, to individuals seeking outdoor recreation;

Whereas the people of the United States should encourage young people to lead a more active lifestyle, as too many young people in the United States are overweight or obese;

Whereas National Kids to Parks Day is an opportunity for families to take a break from their busy lives and come together for a day of wholesome fun; and

Whereas National Kids to Parks Day aims to broaden the appreciation of young people for nature and the outdoors: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Senate—

(1) designates May 19, 2012, as ''National Kids to Parks Day'';

(2) recognizes the importance of outdoor recreation and the preservation of open spaces to the health of the young people of the United States; and

(3) calls on the people of the United States to observe the day with appropriate programs, ceremonies, and activities.

S. RES. 464

(Commemorating the 70th anniversary of Ellsworth Air Force Base)

Whereas on January 2, 1942, the War Department established Rapid City Army Air Base in South Dakota as a training location for B–17 Flying Fortress crews;

Whereas thousands of pilots, navigators, radio operators, and gunners were trained at Rapid City Army Air Base and went on to support the allied efforts in World War II;

Whereas on June 13, 1953, President Dwight D. Eisenhower visited the base and dedicated it in memory of Brigadier General Richard E. Ellsworth;

Whereas during the Cold War, Ellsworth Air Force Base maintained 2 legs of the strategic triad, strategic bombardment, and intercontinental ballistic missiles, earning the title ''The Showplace of Strategic Air Command'';

Whereas 2012 marks the 25th year of the B–1B Lancer mission at Ellsworth Air Force Base;

Whereas in 1999, B–1Bs from Ellsworth Air Force Base flew over 100 combat missions in support of NATO forces in Operation Allied Force in Kosovo;

Whereas Ellsworth Air Force Base has played a crucial role in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation New Dawn, and Operation Enduring Freedom, deploying over 10,000 personnel and flying over 6,000 combat sorties in those operations;

Whereas the first ever B–1B global strike mission launched from the United States came from Ellsworth Air Force Base on March 30, 2011, striking targets in Libya before refueling, rearming, and hitting additional targets in Libya on the return;

Whereas, for 70 years, Ellsworth Air Force Base has served as an integral part of the defense strategy of the United States and served as the proud home to thousands of bomber pilots, navigators, radio operators, gunners, missile launch control facility personnel, and aircraft and missile maintenance personnel;

Whereas, the personnel from Ellsworth Air Force Base have a history of compiling some of the highest marks in competitive readiness and maintenance exercises and competitions;

Whereas, for the past 65 years, Ellsworth Air Force Base has—

(1) been home to the 28th Bomb Wing and some of the most impressive aircraft in the United States, including the B–17 Flying Fortress, the B–29 Superfortress, the RB–36 Peacemaker, the B–52 Stratofortress, the KC–135 Stratotanker, KC–97 Stratofreighter and the B–1B Lancer; and

(2) for parts of 4 decades, served as an important cog in the missile defense system of the United States, featuring the Titan and Minuteman missile systems;

Whereas Ellsworth Air Force Base continues to evolve and is preparing to welcome the MQ–9 Reaper mission later in 2012; and

Whereas, Ellsworth Air Force Base and the communities of Rapid City and Box Elder, South Dakota have and will continue to enjoy a long standing, mutually beneficial relationship: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Senate—

(1) recognizes the contributions of Ellsworth Air Force Base to the security of the United States;

(2) commemorates 70 years of excellence and service by Ellsworth Air Force Base to the United States; and

(3) encourages the people of the United States to recognize and honor the dedicated and exemplary service of the airmen and their families, past and present, stationed at Ellsworth Air Force Base.

S. RES. 465

(Recognizing that the Governor of the State of Colorado has proclaimed 2012 as the ''Year of Water'')

Whereas water is a precious and limited natural resource;

Whereas a clean and sustainable water supply is essential to the high quality of life enjoyed by Coloradans;

Whereas a clean and sustainable water supply is essential to the success of all aspects of the economy of the State of Colorado, including the agricultural, municipal, industrial, and recreational economies;

Whereas as a headwaters State, the health of the water in the State of Colorado has a direct impact on neighboring States;

Whereas the population of the State of Colorado is predicted to double by 2050;

Whereas educating the public about limited water resources will be critical in meeting the increasing demands placed on water in the future;

Whereas 2012 marks the—

(1) 100th anniversary of the construction of the Rio Grande Reservoir;

(2) 90th anniversary of the Colorado River Compact of 1922;

(3) 75th anniversary of the creation of the Colorado Water Conservation Board;

(4) 75th anniversary of the creation of the Colorado River Water Conservation District;

(5) 75th anniversary of the creation of the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District and the Colorado-Big Thompson Project;

(6) 50th anniversary of the Fryingpan-Arkansas Project, administered by the Southeastern Colorado Water Conservancy District;

(7) 10th anniversary of the Colorado Foundation for Water Education; and

(8) 10th anniversary of the Lower Arkansas Valley Water Conservancy District; and

Whereas the Governor of the State of Colorado has proclaimed 2012 as the ''Year of Water'' in the State of Colorado: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Senate recognizes that the Governor of the State of Colorado has proclaimed 2012 as the ''Year of Water'' in the State of Colorado.

DISCHARGE AND REFERRAL—H.R. 2947

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that H.R. 2947 be discharged from the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources and be referred to the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry.

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

ORDERS FOR THURSDAY, MAY 17, 2012

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that when the Senate completes its business today, it adjourn until 9:30 a.m. on Thursday, May 17; that following the prayer and the

pledge, the Journal of proceedings be approved to date, the morning hour be deemed to have expired, the time for the two leaders be reserved for their use later in the day, and that the majority leader be recognized.

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

PROGRAM

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, it is the majority leader's intention to begin consideration of the motion to proceed to Calendar No. 400, S. 3187, the FDA user fee bill, and equally divide the time until 10:30 a.m., with the Republicans controlling the first half and the majority controlling the second half.

At 10:30 a.m., the Senate will proceed to executive session to consider the Stein and Powell nominations, both nominees to the Federal Reserve Board of Governors. At noon, there will be two votes on confirmation of the nominations.

ADJOURNMENT UNTIL 9:30 A.M. TOMORROW

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, if there is no further business to come before the Senate, I ask unanimous consent that it adjourn under the previous order.

There being no objection, the Senate, at 6:56 p.m., adjourned until Thursday, May 17, 2012, at 9:30 a.m.