higher unemployment rates than the national average. He introduced and saw to passage legislation creating the Office of Service Member Affairs to protect troops who are often targeted by financial fraud and scams. He saw to the passage of legislation making it easier to void government contracts with businesses found to be funneling taxpayer resources to terrorist groups. He fought for National Guard members and their families to receive their fair housing allowance when deployed overseas.

Although his work in the Senate has come to an end, I am sure SCOTT BROWN's work in public service, in whatever capacity, will not. He is still a young man with a bright future ahead of him. I, for one, am very much looking forward to seeing how he uses his talents next.

From the statehouse to the Senate, from the modeling shoot to the basketball court, Senator SCOTT BROWN has always made his own success. I do not think he knows any other way.

SCOTT, it has been an honor serving with you. You not only made history, you made a difference. You should be proud.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. REED. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for up to 15 minutes in morning business.

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

THE FISCAL CLIFF

Mr. REED. Madam President, I rise today to speak about the real-world consequences of failing to achieve a fair and balanced solution to avert the automatic tax hikes and spending cuts that would otherwise occur at the end of December—the end of this month.

Failing to continue unemployment insurance, allowing taxes to rise on middle-income Americans, and cutting Federal spending too much and too soon during a struggling economic recovery could, as the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office has estimated, cause a new recession.

This is a fate we can and should avoid for people in my State and across the country. Indeed, families in Rhode Island are still getting their economic footing and cannot afford another economic setback. An economic downturn will erase the strides we have made so far to strengthen our economy and exacerbate the widening income inequality, which Americans sense and recognize in an economy that all too often seems stacked against them. Instead, we must work toward a compromise that is fair, helps the middle class, creates jobs, and strengthens and accelerates our economic recovery.

As I see it, widening income inequality and the sense that future generations will not see the same kind of economic security as my generation is one of the most pressing challenges facing our Nation. Over the past several decades, top earners have taken a bigger and bigger chunk of income while wages have stagnated for far too many Americans.

From 2000 to 2007, incomes for 90 percent of workers rose by about 4 percent, while the top one-tenth of 1 percent of Americans saw income gains of 94 percent. The vast majority of Americans have seen wage gains that are barely enough to keep their heads above water, while a very small number of top-income earners have seen an extraordinary growth in income.

In 2010 alone, about 20 percent of all income went to the top 1 percent. We are now back to income inequality levels similar to just before the Great Depression. Such wide disparities are unsustainable, create economic instability and threaten our social fabric.

In the past, when income inequality has reached these kinds of levels, Democrats and Republicans have both recognized its destabilizing impact and worked together to reward success while providing meaningful opportunities and a sense of fairness for all Americans.

I believe there are straightforward ways we can begin to reverse this escalating income inequality—ways which are true to the founding principles of our Nation. After all, we have done it before. From the end of World War II and well into the 1970s, incomes grew rapidly across the United States and economic prosperity was broadly shared. As our economy grew, every level of America shared in that growth.

By making education affordable, fostering innovation and job creation, and providing economic security to retirees through Medicare and Social Security, our country went from a paralyzing Great Depression to an economic superpower. We were able to accomplish such a drastic transformation because we were willing to consider revenue as a way to invest in the future and promise economic security to our seniors.

Focusing spending on policies that work and balancing revenue is at the core of this debate. I have made tough choices in the 1990s that balanced the budget, generated a surplus, and supported robust job creation. In January of 1993, the unemployment rate stood at 7.3 percent, and by January of 2001 that rate had been reduced down to 3.9 percent. That period of record growth also saw a substantial decline in the poverty rate. In 1993, 15.1 percent of Americans were in poverty, but thanks to job growth and an expanding economy based upon a balanced approach to deficit reduction—including revenue and reduction in expenditures—poverty fell to 11.3 percent in 2000.

But the unpaid wars of the Bush administration, excess tax cuts for the wealthy, and a financial crisis brought on by lax regulation under the Bush Presidency erased those hard-fought gains of the 1990s. As a result, we have seen education become more expensive, Federal investments that support economic prosperity for all have been reduced, and economic gains have been concentrated at the top. Meanwhile, in spite of repeated claims, lower tax rates for the wealthiest haven't driven job creation and economic growth. We have had record low income tax rates; yet now we are struggling with one of the worst unemployment crises we have seen since the Great Depression.

I believe the election has shown Americans want us to return to the principles that work for the benefit of everyone, not just a select few. With that in mind, the path forward should be clear.

We should continue tax cuts for income up to one-quarter of a million dollars and reduce the deficit by nearly $1 trillion. We should continue extended unemployment insurance for 2 million people who will lose it otherwise. We should prevent further immediate cuts to Federal investments in things that keep us safe, grow our economy, and enhance the lives of Americans, whether it be infrastructure, workforce training or research and development.

What we should absolutely not do is make changes, hasty changes, to Social Security and Medicare that would undermine the promise of economic security to seniors, not just this generation of seniors but succeeding generations of seniors. Fairness, opportunity, respect for the rules, and a sense of security in retirement, those are the priorities that can't be lost as we debate the budget.

So I am disheartened to hear that Republicans are holding the middle class and the entire economy hostage in order to preserve nearly $1 trillion in additional tax cuts for the top 2 percent of Americans, while at the same time proposing detrimental changes to Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid. I believe this is an untenable position and one I hope my colleagues on the other side will soon abandon.

Moreover, the Republican proposal does not provide immediate, short-term aid to 2 million Americans out of work and looking for employment. These were men and women who were working, and as a consequence of the economic difficulties over the last few years have lost their jobs. Their proposal would not, as the President's plan does, put Americans back to work, not just by continuing benefits in terms of unemployment insurance but by putting Americans back to work improving our roads, bridges, and transportation infrastructure.

Unfortunately, in the past, too many on the other side of the aisle have stymied efforts to accelerate the recovery like blocking jobs legislation that was paid for by asking millionaires to pay Clinton-era rates on income over $1 million. They have endorsed proposals that would transform Medicare into a voucher program and Medicaid into a block grant, which would merely shift health care costs to seniors and States rather than address underlying cost drivers and inefficiencies.

So it is not surprising Speaker BOEHNER has put forth a significantly flawed proposal, in my view, that would jeopardize our economic recovery, undermine the middle class by not providing immediate support for our recovery, and do very little to achieve real deficit reduction.

While the President, in contrast, has put forward a clear and specific plan, the Speaker's proposal is light on details related to deficit reduction. It is, I sense, another sign that the Republican Party is out of touch with the majority of Americans who favor the President's approach. We have had an election in which voters made it clear that if we are going to propose major policy changes, then those proposals must be real and credible. Americans want us to be candid and honest with them as we make these difficult decisions.

We can disagree about policy—we do that all the time—but it is hard to disagree about simple arithmetic. The Speaker, for example, has proposed $800 billion in taxes through ''limiting deductions and lowering rates,'' also known as ''lowering rates and broadening the base.'' But as many nonpartisan analysts have shown, the numbers don't add up. ''Lowering the rates and broadening the base'' just means tax cuts for the wealthy and higher taxes for the middle class because deductions for home ownership, charity, State and local taxes would have to be severely limited for most Americans in order to pay for the top rates and avoid further growing the deficit.

It is not only the math that doesn't add up, but it is also their assumption about job creation and the economy. Historical data shows reductions in top tax rates have had little impact when it comes to creating jobs and boosting growth. But tax cuts do, according to the data, increase income inequality.

In contrast, the President and Democrats have been clear with the American people that we can't afford nearly $1 trillion in additional tax breaks for the top 2 percent—which do little for job creation and exacerbate income inequality. We should let the top two marginal tax rates expire. Democrats have already passed legislation in the Senate to do that. And again, to be clear, letting the top marginal tax rates on income over a quarter of a million dollars expire would still mean all Americans get a tax cut for income below that level.

Moreover, Speaker BOEHNER, in his proposal, again raises the specter of increasing the Medicare eligibility age and reducing Social Security benefits. While raising the Medicare eligibility age from 65 to 67 beginning in 2014 would result in $125 billion in Federal savings, it would basically shift all those costs onto State governments and the private sector.

To help illustrate this cost shift, the Kaiser Family Foundation examined what would happen during the first year the policy would take effect, 2014. In that year, individuals would not qualify for Medicare until age 65 and 2 months. This change would trigger $5.7 billion in Federal savings. However, spending on the part of State governments, employers, beneficiaries and individuals and families slated to purchase health insurance through new health insurance exchanges would double—to the tune of $11.4 billion. Indeed, increasing the Medicare eligibility age is a shell game that will just shift costs and do nothing to bend the proverbial cost curve.

If my colleagues on the other side of the aisle wish to reduce the deficit by $125 billion, there are better ways to do it. We can start by closing egregious loopholes that benefit companies that shift jobs overseas or benefit oil and gas companies.

And there are ways to reform Medicare and Medicaid without shifting costs to beneficiaries and making the goal of a secure retirement harder to achieve. Indeed, the Affordable Care Act makes a downpayment on deficit reduction with a sensible and thoughtful approach to addressing the underlying drivers of health care costs. And we can do more in this regard. We can eliminate overpayments to Medicare Advantage plans. We can allow the Secretary of Health and Human Services to negotiate directly with companies on the cost of prescription drugs in Medicare—or, at the very least, increase rebates in programs such as Medicare and Medicaid.

We should not look to Social Security to solve our fiscal deficit either. Social Security will continue to spend less than it takes in until 2033. And even if we don't do anything to address this very long-term issue, beneficiaries would still receive 75 percent of their expected benefits, according to the law. Moreover, Social Security is not a driver of the deficit. If we make any changes to the program, they must be done, I believe, outside the debate on the deficit and directed at extending the life and solvency of the Social Security trust fund in order to keep our commitment, not only to this generation of seniors, but to succeeding generations of seniors.

Shoring up Social Security can be achieved in several ways, for example, by broadening the taxable wage base. The last time Social Security was reformed in 1983, the cap on taxable income covered 90 percent of earnings. Now the cap only covers 85 percent of income and is steadily decreasing. The first thing we can do is begin to restore the original intent of the program and we can do that by lifting the cap on wages over $250,000.

I hope my colleagues on the other side would hear the same message with respect to some of their proposals regarding Medicaid. Medicaid is already a rather efficient program. Medicaid actually costs less per beneficiary than private insurers to cover similar people with similar health issues. Medicaid spending has grown at a slower rate for beneficiaries than private insurance. Changing the financing structure of Medicaid is just another example to score a political victory at the expense of some of the most vulnerable people in our society.

I hope to work with all my colleagues, on both sides, to strengthen Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security. But now, with only 3 weeks left, it is not the time to make hasty and drastic alterations to the foundation of economic security for seniors and for their families. Because when we talk about seniors, we are also talking about their sons and daughters who would have to step up and fill the gap if we made unwarranted changes to Medicare and to Social Security.

Many of these Republican proposals don't sound particularly serious. The revenue and deficit reduction targets are deceptive and, worst of all, it seems to be more sloganeering, not problem solving. Our goal should be improving the economy and reversing the stark trend of income inequality that has been exacerbated by this great recession and prolonged unemployment.

We should not cut the deficit on the backs of the middle class and seniors. We only have a few weeks before various provisions of the law will begin to cut into our economic growth. The loss of unemployment insurance, for example, will be immediately harrowing for the 2 million on unemployment insurance; middle-income families will be squeezed more and more as their taxes rise and government spending in critical programs is slashed, all because some on the other side are more concerned with protecting tax breaks for the wealthiest.

Economists believe this kind of economic contraction could lead to another recession, where once again low- and middle-income families will feel the brunt of the downturn and have the hardest time making up lost ground during the ensuing recovery.

I hope my Republican colleagues drop their attempts to cut the deficit on the backs of 98 percent of Americans and 97 percent of small businesses in order to provide additional tax cuts to the wealthiest 2 percent of Americans. I hope my Republican colleagues drop their demands to make drastic and hasty changes to Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security. I urge them to pass the Middle Class Tax Cut Act, continue unemployment insurance, and work with us to develop a rational alternative to sequestration. This approach is fair to the middle class, will grow our economy and create jobs, and will help turn around income inequality in our country.

With that, Madam President, 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.

Ms. SNOWE. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. MCCASKILL). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Ms. SNOWE. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to proceed as in morning business and that I be allowed to consume as much time as needed.

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

FAREWELL TO THE SENATE

Ms. SNOWE. Madam President, I rise today with an infinite appreciation for the institution of the U.S. Senate as well as a profound sense of gratitude as I prepare to conclude my 18 years in the Senate and my nearly 40 years in elective office on behalf of the people of Maine.

It has been difficult to envision this day when I would be saying farewell to the Senate, just as it was impossible to imagine I would one day become a U.S. Senator as I was growing up in Maine. But such is the miracle of America, that a young girl of a Greek immigrant and first-generation American, who was orphaned at the age of 9, could in time be elected to serve in the greatest deliberative body the world has ever known and become the third longest serving woman in the history of the U.S. Congress.

So in contemplating how to begin my remarks today, I was reminded of the words of the renowned American poet and son of New England, Ralph Waldo Emerson, who said:

> Cultivate the habit of being grateful for every good thing that comes to you, and to give thanks continuously. And because all things have contributed to your advancement, you should include all things in your gratitude.

That perfectly encapsulates how I am feeling on this day—thankful and blessed. In that light, I first and foremost want to thank the people of Maine for allowing me to be their voice, their vote, and their champion for 16 years in the U.S. House of Representatives and for three terms in the U.S. Senate. One of the definitions of the word ''trust'' is ''a charge or duty imposed in faith or confidence.'' And to have had the trust of Maine people, who have placed their faith and confidence in me, is an honor of indescribable magnitude. Indeed, serving my magnificent State over the past 34 years in the Halls of Congress has been the greatest privilege of my life.

I also want to thank my amazing husband, Jock McKernan, who is with us today and who, as you know, was a former Congressman and former Governor of Maine. In fact, when Jock was Governor while I was serving in the House of Representatives, we used to joke that our idea of quality time together was listening to each other's speeches. But truly, we have shared a passion for public service and quite a unique journey together, with 56 years between us in elective office, and we have never regretted a single moment.

I am also pleased to say he is joined today by our very wonderful, longtime friends, Dan and Sharon Miller from Maine.

On this occasion, I also think of my family, without whom none of this would have been possible. I have often joked that the secret to my electoral success is coming from such a large extended family—some of whom we started on campaigns at birth, I might add. But they have been a source of boundless love and support over the years, through the struggles as well as the celebrations, and I thank them from the bottom of my heart.

It is also impossible to serve for this long and at this level without dedicated and exceptional staff, and during my tenure in the House and Senate, I have had nearly 400 people on my staff who have helped to make all the difference for me, for Maine, and for Washington. Here we have had tremendous support with the invaluable guidance and efforts on the part of my staff through the extraordinary events of more than three decades, and they have represented the very best and brightest the Nation has to offer. They are here today in the back of the Chamber and up in the gallery, and I applaud them time and time again. In fact, we had a wonderful reunion of all of my staff, and I realize it just simply would not have been possible to have been on this legislative journey without them.

The same is true of my staff in Maine, who have not only been my eyes and ears but also my stalwart surrogates in assisting Mainers with their problems and in navigating the Federal bureaucracies. Like me, they have never been inclined to take no for an answer, and in so doing they have touched literally thousands of lives, helping to soften the hardest days and brighten the darkest.

I thank and commend the stellar staff of the Senate, from all of those ensuring the operation of the Senate here on the floor, to the cloakroom staff, the legislative counsel, to all of our pages who are here from all across America, to all those who actually keep the facilities running, and certainly to the officers who are on the front lines of Capitol security, protecting our visitors and all of us. You have my deepest admiration for your immeasurable contributions to the Senate and to our country.

I want to express my gratitude to the minority leader for his gracious remarks about my service. Senator MCCONNELL has worked tirelessly in leading us through extremely challenging moments for the Senate and for the country. His longevity of legislative experience has made him a true asset to this body, for our Republican caucus, and I have the most heartfelt respect and appreciation for his contributions to his home State of Kentucky and to this country.

To my friend and colleague SUSAN COLLINS, I want to thank her for her very kind and extremely generous words on the floor last week. Public service was imbued in Senator COLLINS from her earliest days in Caribou, ME, where, incredibly, both her parents, Don and Pat, were former mayors of the city. I happened to have served with her father Don when he was also in the State legislature. For the past 16 years, Senator COLLINS has provided exemplary representation not only for Maine but for America with her voice of reason, pragmatism, and thoughtfulness, and Maine will truly be in outstanding hands with SUSAN COLLINS as our senior Senator.

I am also indebted to my great friend Senator MIKULSKI, the dean of the women in the Senate and for all women, for the warm and wonderful comments she made yesterday on the floor. I have known BARBARA for more than 30 years, beginning with our mutual service in the House of Representatives. She is truly a dynamo who has always brought to bear an unyielding tenacity that has consistently been reflected in her vigorous advocacy for those she represents.

As I said, in 2011 she became the longest serving woman in the Senate, and there is no one I would rather have surpassing the length of service of Maine's legendary Senator, Margaret Chase Smith, than Senator BARBARA MIKULSKI. What a reflection on her legislative stature that she has now assumed the mantle of longest serving woman in the history of the U.S. Congress.

To our Presiding Officer, I would say that I have enjoyed serving with her as well in this august Chamber and getting to know her. I know she will do well into the future, and I have enjoyed working with her over the years.

I see two of my colleagues here: Senator ISAKSON, who is my neighbor in the Russell Office Building—a gentleman in every way. He has been magnificent to work with. And, of course, my colleague Senator MURKOWSKI from Alaska, who has made some great contributions to the Senate with her consensus-building, her dedication, and her exceptional abilities. I want to thank them because I have certainly enjoyed working with them and getting to know them.

To all of my Senate colleagues, past and present, this Chamber would simply be another room with fancy walls without the lifeblood of passionate service and dedication you bring to this institution and our Nation.

We all have our stories about where we came from, about what shaped our values and aspirations and why we care so much about public service as a vehicle for securing for others the American dream, for all who seek to embrace it. In my instance, my own legislative journey commenced when I was elected to fill my late husband's seat in the Maine House of Representatives. I felt then, as I have throughout my career, that our role as public servants, above all else, is to solve problems. I

have often reflected on my 6 years in the State house and the State senate in Augusta, ME, because that is where I found politics and public life to be positive and constructive endeavors. Once the elections were over, my colleagues and I would put the campaigns and the party labels behind us to enact laws that genuinely improved the lives of Mainers.

I also inherited a legacy of bipartisanship and independence from Senator Margaret Chase Smith, who is best remembered for her remarks made during only her second year of her first term in the U.S. Senate when, with truly uncommon courage and principled independence, she telegraphed the truth about McCarthyism during the Red Scare of the 1950s with her renowned ''Declaration of Conscience'' speech on the Senate floor. In 15 minutes she had done what 94 of her colleagues—male colleagues, I might add—had not dared to do, and in so doing slayed a giant of demagoguery.

So when people ask me why I may be challenging a particular party position or why I don't simply go with the flow, I tell them: Please don't take it personally. I can't help it, I am from Maine. That is what Maine people truly expect from their elected officials—they expect you to do what you believe is right for the right reasons and in the right way. We have seen that reflected time and again, not only with Margaret Chase Smith but in the distinguished service of great Senators who have preceded me from Maine, from Ed Muskie to Bill Cohen and the former majority leader of the Senate, George Mitchell.

Throughout my tenure, I have borne witness to government's incredible potential as an instrument for that common good. I have also experienced its capacity for serial dysfunction. Indeed, as I stated in announcing I would not seek a fourth term in the Senate, it is regrettable that excessive political polarization in Washington today is preventing us from tackling our problems in this period of monumental consequences for our Nation.

But as I prepare to conclude my service in elective office, let me be abundantly clear: I am not leaving the Senate because I have ceased believing in its potential or I no longer love the institution, but precisely because I do. I am simply taking my commitment to the Senate in a different direction.

I intend to work from the outside, to help build support for those in this institution who will be working to reestablish the Senate's roots as a place of refuge from the passions of politics, as a forum where the political fires are tempered, not stoked—as our Founding Fathers intended. Because the Senate in particular is our essential legislative mechanism for distilling the vast diversity of ideologies and opinions in America, so that we might arrive at solutions to the challenges we face.

The fact is, we are a can-do country, infused with an irrepressible can-do spirit. It is in our blood, and in the very fiber of who we are. It is in our hardworking families, and in the limitless entrepreneurship and innovation of our people. And it is profoundly reflected in our heroic men and women in uniform—whose unflagging bravery and professionalism I have been privileged to witness firsthand throughout my tenure in Congress as they answer the call in places like Iraq and Afghanistan, with many having made the ultimate sacrifice so that we may live and that freedom may always ring.

Here in this chamber, I have spoken with many of you who came here to get things done, to solve problems and achieve great things for our Nation. I have heard you lament the inability to accomplish more in today's polarized atmosphere. And as I have traveled throughout Maine and America—even overseas, people ask me, has it always been this way?

I tell them, I am so passionate about changing the tenor in Congress because I have seen that it can be different. It has not always been this way. And it absolutely does not have to be this way.

I have been in the Congress long enough to have experienced firsthand what can be accomplished when individuals from various political backgrounds are determined to solve a problem. For instance, when I first came to the House of Representative in 1979, I joined the bipartisan Congressional Caucus on Women's Issues, which I ultimately cochaired for 10 years with Democratic Congresswoman Pat Schroeder. We certainly did not agree on everything, but with only 17 women in the House and Senate, we simply could not afford to draw political lines in the sand when it came to matters of importance to women.

So when we spoke on these issues, we spoke as women, not as Republicans or Democrats. That is what drove our agendas at the caucus—and, together, we started to make a real difference for women. That was a time in America when child support enforcement was viewed as strictly a woman's problem, a time when pensions were cancelled without a spouse's approval, a time when family and medical leave wasn't the law of the land, and a time when, incredibly, women were systematically excluded from clinical medical trials at the National Institutes of Health—trials that made the difference between life and death.

As Senator MIKULSKI eloquently described yesterday in this chamber, she was waging a battle for equity in women's health research in the Senate while Pat Schroeder, Connie Morella and I were fighting in the House. At a pivotal juncture, Senator MIKULSKI launched a key panel to explore this shocking discriminatory treatment which further galvanized national attention. And in the end, together, we produced watershed policy changes that, to this day, are resulting in lifesaving medical discoveries for America's women.

In the House, we often worked across party lines to craft our Federal budgets, in sharp contrast to today's broken process where we cannot pass a budget in 3 years, even with unprecedented deficits and debt. When President Reagan was elected in 1980, he knew he had to build coalitions to pass budgets that would address the tumultuous economy. And the result was that the moderate northeast Republican group called the Gypsy Moths and the conservative-to-moderate Democratic group called the ''Boll Weevils'' negotiated budgets together, to help reconcile our political and regional differences and in a model for bipartisanship, all of us spent days and weeks fashioning budgets, literally going through function by function.

Arriving at compromise was not easy by any means. It never is. But the point is, we can undertake the difficult work, if we choose to do so.

I was able to make a difference even as a member of the minority throughout my entire tenure in the House, by reaching across the political aisle. And in 1995, when the voters of Maine entrusted me to be their voice and their vote in the U.S. Senate and I was finally serving in the majority, I believed this kind of cooperative disposition would remain an indispensable commodity in meeting the challenges of the times.

That is why I joined the Senate Centrist Coalition shortly after arriving in the Senate, which had been formed by Senators John Chafee and John Breaux during the 1994 health reform debate to bridge the political divide. After Senator Chafee passed away in 1999, Senator Breaux and I thought it was an imperative that we revive the Coalition to help foster bipartisanship following the divisiveness of the Senate impeachment trial. And following the landmark Supreme Court ruling in Bush v. Gore that adjudicated the presidential election, and an evenly split Senate with 50 Republicans and 50 Democrats, Senate leaders Lott and Daschle joined with nearly one-third of the Senate at a meeting of the coalition to explore how to move forward in a bipartisan fashion.

And it is precisely this kind of approach that is crucial, because it is only when we minimize the political barriers that we can maximize the Senate, allowing it to become an unparalleled incubator for results that truly matter to the American people.

It was a cross-aisle alliance that produced the so-called E-Rate program in 1996. This was a landmark law ensuring every library and classroom in America would be wired to the revolutionary resources of the Internet, which one publication has ranked as fourth in a list of innovations and initiatives that have helped shape education technology over the past generation.

My good friend and colleague Senator ROCKEFELLER, with whom I have been privileged to work on so many issues, was doggedly determined to enact this

benchmark initiative. In typical fashion, Jay was not going to take no for an answer—which made us perfect partners and co-authors, as I was equally determined. And by working with Members of both parties who were willing to hear the facts and judge on the merits, we overcame the hurdles and the E-Rate program was born.

During the 2001 tax debates, Senator Blanche Lincoln and I as members of the Finance Committee joined together to increase the amount of the child tax credit and make it refundable, so that low income families who didn't earn enough to pay Federal taxes could still benefit from the credit. Ultimately, our measure was enacted, becoming only the second refundable tax credit ever, and ensuring the child tax credit would assist an additional 13 million more children and lift 500,000 of those children out of poverty.

I also think of how my friend, Senator LANDRIEU who is sitting here in the chamber as well, and I formed the Senate Common Ground Coalition in 2006, to rekindle cross-party relations. And not only have MARY and I made history as the first women to serve simultaneously as chair and ranking on a standing committee, but we have worked together on numerous measures that are assisting America's greatest jobs generators, our small businesses.

In a shining example of what is possible with civility and bipartisan teamwork, Senator Ted Kennedy and I coauthored the landmark Genetic Nondiscrimination Act—to stop insurance companies and employers from denying or dropping coverage based on genetic tests, so individuals would not forgo those potentially life-saving tests. At that juncture, Democrats were in the majority—and traditionally, the chair of a committee takes the lead name on legislation. But Ted approached me and said essentially that, because my work on GINA had made it possible, it should be ''Snowe-Kennedy'' not ''Kennedy-Snowe''—a magnanimous legislative gesture from the legislative lion of the U.S. Senate. And I am proud to say GINA passed in 2008 and has been referred to as ''the first major civil rights act of the 21st century.''

So there are templates for working together effectively in the U.S. Senate on behalf of the American people. But on occasion, it is the very institution of the Senate itself that is preserved when we stake out common ground.

Even in the highly charged atmosphere of the presidential impeachment trial, we made the process work. During a gathering of the Republican Caucus, I advocated that we hold a bipartisan meeting in the Old Senate Chamber, to generate agreement between the parties on the conduct of the trial. The Senate had been about to decide the guidelines of the trial on a purely partisan basis, but by convening both parties, we were able to chart a logical, reasonable and judicious course.

In 2005, I joined the so-called ''Gang of 14,'' comprised of 7 Republicans and 7 Democrats and spearheaded largely by Senators John Warner, JOHN MCCAIN, Robert Byrd, and BEN NELSON. The group was formed to avert an institutional crisis as a result of repeated, systematic filibuster of President Bush's judicial nominees that had been a corrosive force on the Senate. In response, the Republican majority was seeking to break the logjam by exercising the so-called ''nuclear option,'' that would have jettisoned longstanding rules requiring 60 votes to end a filibuster.

That 60 vote threshold had always been a bulwark protecting the rights of the minority, but would have become just a simple majority vote. Yet, just as we were about to cross this political Rubicon, the Gang of 14 forged a pact based on mutual trust, that we would only support a filibuster of judicial nominees under what we labeled ''extraordinary circumstances,'' and we would oppose the ''nuclear option,'' an agreement that embodied the very manifestation of the power of consensus building.

So as this body contemplates changes to its rules in the next Congress, I would urge all of my colleagues who will return next year to follow the Gang of 14 template and exercise a similar level of caution and balance. Because what makes the Senate unique, what situates this institution better than any other to secure the continued greatness of our Nation, is that balance between accommodation of the minority and primacy of the majority. And regardless of who is in the minority, any suppression of the ability to debate and shape legislation is tantamount to silencing millions of voices and ideas—which are critical to developing the best possible solutions.

I have mentioned all of these examples as illustrations of the boundless potential of the Senate—and that our problems are not insurmountable, if we refuse to be intractable. It is not about what is in the best interests of a single political party, but what is in the best interests of our country.

As far back as the fledgling days of our Nation, our Founding Fathers warned of the dangers of undue allegiance to political parties—a potential that Alexander Hamilton and James Madison specifically cited in the Federalist Papers. Now, one study by three political scientists pegs Congress at its highest level of polarization since the end of Reconstruction in 1877. It is true that, in the intervening years, we have had no duels to settle disagreements and no canings on the Senate floor as occurred in the earlier years of the Senate—although there was a physical brawl on the Senate floor in 1902. Yet, the fact we are still more polarized now than at any moment in 140 years speaks volumes.

So instead of focusing on issues as the Senate was uniquely established to do, we've become more like a parliamentary system where we simply vote in political blocks. And we have departed and diverged from the Senate's traditional rules and norms in a manner that is entirely contradictory to the historical purpose of the Senate and the role of the Founding Fathers intended for the Senate to play.

The very name of our institution, the Senate, derives from the Latin root senatus, or council of elders, where the council of elders represented the qualities of experience and wisdom and not just some experience and some wisdom in a deliberative body, but more experience and more wisdom in the highest deliberative body.

For thousands of years, and for the Greeks and our Framers alike, the Senate has stood as an assembly where the lessons of individual experiences were translated by measured wisdom into stable collective judgments. Therefore, understanding through patience, appreciation through tolerance, and consensus through moderation are all required to reach such judgments and to do the work of the people. Indeed, I would argue it is only by recognizing and striving to meet the institutional ideals of the Senate that we can aspire to fill our obligations to those we represent.

We all take an oath to support and defend the Constitution of the United States and to bear true faith and allegiance to the same. I have always believed this oath necessarily included a duty to support and defend the Senate as an institution and the integrity of its deliberative process. That requires the ability to listen before judging, to judge before advocating, and to advocate without polarizing. It also includes a capacity to differ with one's own party, and even to reach agreement and compromise with another party when one's own party is unable to prevail. Such leadership necessarily requires all Members to recognize their individual duty to serve the people best by serving our Chamber with the highest standards of consideration, deliberation, and explanation.

Former Supreme Court Justice Souter once said, and I am paraphrasing: All of the Court's hard cases are divisive because one set of values is truly at odds with another, and the Constitution gives no simple rule of decision. For, in truth, we value liberty as well as order, we value freedom as well as security, and we value fairness as well as equality.

So in the tough cases judges have a hard job of choosing not between those things that are good and those that are evil, but between the many, and often competing, good things that the Constitution allows. Justice Souter could have been talking about the work of the Senate and the often difficult choices we too are required to make. This observation accepts the intrinsic competition that defines these difficult choices but resolves to rely on reason, meaning, and the reputational integrity of the process to make and explain the ultimate decisions.

Indeed, the Justice concluded his remarks by saying he knew of ''no other

way to make good on the aspirations that tell us who we are—and who we mean to be—as the people of the United States.''

We have witnessed the heights the Senate is capable of reaching when it adheres to its founding precepts. Just think about how we came together in the aftermath of the catastrophic events of September 11 to secure our country and to help heal our Nation. Just think about the major debates of the 20th century on such watershed issues as the establishment of Social Security, Medicare, and the Civil Rights Act. None of these profound advancements would have been woven into the fabric of our society today if they had been passed simply on party-line votes rather than the solidly bipartisan basis on which each of them was enacted.

I am not claiming there was some kind of golden age of bipartisanship where everyone all sang from the same legislative hymn book, and I am not advocating bipartisanship as some kind of an end unto itself. That is not the point. What I am saying is we have seen how cooperation in the past has resulted in great achievements, which likely never would have occurred if bipartisanship had not intervened as a means to attaining those most worthy ends.

Our grandest accomplishments in the Congress were also a reflection of the particular compromises and level of urgency required by the times in which they were forged. Recently, New York Times columnist David Brooks summarized this concept well when he wrote that there are policies that are not permanently right and that ''situations matter most. Tax cuts might be right one decade but wrong the next. Tighter regulations might be right one decade, but if sclerosis sets in then deregulation might be in order.''

As we confront the impending confluence of issues known as the fiscal cliff, we are at a moment of major significance that requires the application of the principle that Brooks describes. For the sake of the country, we must demonstrate to the American people that we are, in fact, capable of making the big decisions by putting in place an agreement and a framework to avoid the fiscal cliff before we adjourn this year.

We are surrounded by history perpetually in the Senate as well as throughout the Capitol. How could we not be inspired by it to rise to this occasion? Indeed, if you know history, you understand the very story of America's most formative days was defined by an understanding that effective governance requires the building of consensus, and such consensus is achievable even after the exercise of passionate advocacy, which, in conclusion, brings us back to the creation of a document we all cherish and revere; that is, our United States Constitution.

Madam President, 225 years ago, 55 leaders from divergent geographic and philosophical backgrounds converged on the city of Philadelphia to draft a new structure of government to strengthen our fledgling country. These were no shrinking violets. They had risked their lives and fortunes to establish a new nation under God, indivisible, with liberty, and justice for all.

They were strong-willed and unabashedly opinionated. They disagreed and argued about a great many matters, both petty and consequential. Thomas Jefferson even considered Virginia, and not the United States, as his country. Yet by September of that year, 39 of the original delegates signed the most enduring and ingenious governing document the world has ever known, the Constitution of the United States.

It didn't happen because 55 people who shared identical viewpoints gathered in a room and rubber-stamped their unanimous thinking. It happened because these visionaries determined that the gravity and the enormity of their common goal necessitated the courage to advance decisionmaking through consensus.

I worry that we are losing the art of legislating. When the history of this chapter in the Senate is written, we don't want it to conclude it was here that it became an antiquated practice. So as I depart the Senate that I love, I urge all of my colleagues to follow the Founding Fathers' blueprint in order to return this institution to its highest calling of governing through consensus. For it is only then that the United States can ascend to fulfill the demands of our time, the promise of our Nation, and the rightful expectations of the American people.

Thank you, Madam President. May God bless you, and may God bless the United States of America.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Louisiana.

Ms. LANDRIEU. Madam President, for those of us in the Chamber, and those of us listening, that was one of those beautifully crafted and beautifully deliberated and eloquent statements not only about a Member's service as a Member of the U.S. Senate, but a vision of the world we created and what we can be again. It is so appropriate for the parting words of the Senator, who is truly among the great that has served here.

I have had the great pleasure of working with the Senator from Maine. As she very graciously pointed out, we served together on the Small Business Committee. We were the first of two women to chair a major committee for an entire Congress.

There are Members here—Senator MIKULSKI and others—who served for many years with Senator SNOWE. For the minute that I have before others speak, I just wanted to say that she has served for over 34 years in public office. Her integrity is beyond reproach. She served with intelligence and grace that is widely admired, not just on Capitol Hill and in her home State of Maine, but broadly throughout the United States and the world. Her capacity for hard work and tedious negotiations on important matters is inspiring to us all. She has been a clear and clarion voice for women and girls in Maine, the United States, and around the world, for their legal rights, their economic advancement, and their social advancement.

Above all, as we just heard, she has been a clarion call for common sense and common ground. She was literally involved in every major effort in the last 30 years to find common sense and common ground in a place that is getting harder and harder to find those two qualities every day. So it is with a deep sense of regret that I, for one, am going to have to say goodbye to her as a colleague and a Member of the Senate.

I want her to know that I will continue—and I know many of my colleagues feel this way—to work as closely with her in any capacity of her choice to continue to be a great voice for compassion, compromise, and common sense.

The people of Maine are losing a great Senator. The United States is losing a unique talent that has served this country and this institution so magnificently. We wish her the best, and we say a respectful goodbye.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maryland.

Ms. MIKULSKI. Madam President, yesterday I had the honor of addressing the full Senate to pay a more amplified tribute to the gentlelady from Maine. I will miss her dearly and deeply. We have served both in the House and the Senate together. We have done real good things, including one of our finest bipartisan efforts in the area of women's health in getting women included in the protocols appropriately, the scientific way at NIH when we were excluded. We helped to advance the whole issue of more money for research for breast cancer and other diseases that are generally specific to women.

I will never forget the day when Good Housekeeping called and said that Senator SNOWE and I were going to get an award. I immediately called my family and told my sisters that I had won the Good Housekeeping Award. Well, they thought that was hilarious. I have many awards for speaking, longest serving, but not Good Housekeeping. When I told them I was getting the award with Senator SNOWE, they knew it had integrity, credibility, and was well deserved.

So I just want to, from the bottom of my heart, not only thank the people of Maine, who will express their gratitude for her service. She has a duty-driven approach, an uncommon sense to get the job done in a way that is inclusive and has benefited our entire country whether they be small business or the little people whose voices are never heard.

So we wish her God bless, Godspeed, and we hope to see her speaking out exactly on what she did today, a call toward citizenship and more bipartisanship and less partisanship.

God bless you, Senator SNOWE.

AMERICAN STEEL

Ms. MIKULSKI. Madam President, I wish to take a few minutes to speak about another sad situation in the State of Maryland. Today we got the terrible, sad news that it looks as though Bethlehem Steel, our biggest, largest, most famous steelyard, is going to close, and it is going to close forever.

Throughout the entire 19th and 20th centuries and through to today, Bethlehem Steel hired people, making it one of our largest employers, to build steel for our great iconic projects and to help build America. In its heyday in 1957, 30,000 steelworkers were there. They thought they had lifelong jobs in helping build steel. It was the largest single employer in Baltimore for decades. It made steel for everything from Campbell Soup cans to National beer cans. It built steel for refrigerators, toasters, and thousands of other products. During the war, Bethlehem Steel was part of the arsenal of democracy in which it built Liberty ships.

I am very close to the people at Bethlehem Steel. Members of my own family worked in this steel mill and they worked very hard. People who came into my father's grocery store worked at Bethlehem Steel. They thought they had a job that would last forever because America would need steel. It doesn't look that way, because even though those workers thought America would always want American steel, we looked the other way when foreign imports began to drive down our prices and drive down our steel mills.

We have to begin to rethink what we are doing in this area. America's steel and steelworkers protected the United States and our freedom.

At Sparrows Point they rolled gun barrels, made steel for grenades, shells and landing craft for airplanes and ships. We have to remember whose steel it was that truly built America. But do my colleagues know who the last owner was; not the most recent but the ones before that? The Russians. I am not against Russia, but I am against Russia owning America's tools of production.

What will happen to America if we need more steel to go to war? What about needing steel when we build our infrastructure? When American steelworkers built the great new Golden Gate Bridge with American taxpayers' dollars, the steel came from China. What are we doing to America and what are we doing to our manufacturing?

I think we need a wakeup call. We are busy holding up the entire Congress protecting tax breaks for billionaires. When are we going to start looking out for American jobs? When we are talking about this fiscal cliff, we are not talking about having the jobs component in it. When are we going to start talking about tax breaks so we can have an infrastructure bank, so we can rebuild America using American products? Why is it when we say we want it made in America, some call us protectionists? I welcome the label of ''protectionist.'' I am going to protect American jobs. I don't want them on a slow boat to China or a fast track to Mexico.

I might not ever get my steel mill back and Baltimore might not ever have those jobs back, but we have to get serious in our country. What are our priorities? We have to start rewarding those industries that make products in this country. Right now, our whole code is oriented to protecting people who make money off money. Let me tell my colleagues, we are already getting a big wakeup call in America.

I have fought for more than 25 years to reverse this tide against American manufacturing and for American steel and I am going to keep on fighting. But right now, as we go on debating this fiscal cliff, we have to make sure we protect the safety net. If my colleagues went with me to Dundalk and to Sparrows Point, people would tell us they want their job, and if they can't have their job, could they please have a safety net that protects them in terms of unemployment insurance and health care benefits so they have a bridge to get their family over this very hard time. I worry that during this fiscal cliff debate we are going to lose those benefits, but I will tell my colleagues that I will fight to not go over the fiscal cliff.

In the meantime, I say to the men and women at Bethlehem Steel: Thank you for what you did. You built America. You helped save America. You helped save Western civilization. We are going to try right now to save your safety net benefits. Go to that hall where you can apply for those benefits. They are still there. We still want to make sure you are eligible, but we want not only a safety net to get you over the hard times, we believe the best safety net is jobs in American manufacturing.

I am going to yield the floor, but I will not yield the fight for American jobs.

I note the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

EXECUTIVE SESSION

NOMINATION OF LORNA G. SCHOFIELD TO BE UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK

NOMINATION OF FRANK PAUL GERACI, JR., TO BE UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to consider the following nominations which the clerk will report.

The bill clerk read the nominations of Lorna G. Schofield, of New York, to be United States District Judge for the Southern District of New York, and Frank Paul Geraci, Jr., of New York, to be United States District Judge for the Western District of New York.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there will be 30 minutes of debate, equally divided in the usual form.

The Senator from Vermont.

ON THE CONFIRMATIONS OF LORNA SCHOFIELD TO THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK AND JUDGE FRANK GERACI TO THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK

Mr. LEAHY. Madam President, today, the Senate will finally be allowed to vote on the nominations of Judge Frank Geraci to fill a judicial emergency vacancy on the U.S. District Court for the Western District of New York and Lorna Schofield to fill a vacancy on the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York. Both of these nominees were voted out of the Judiciary Committee virtually unanimously before the August recess and should have been confirmed months ago.

By now, no one should be surprised that it has taken so long to have a simple up-or-down vote on two consensus nominees, even though one would fill a judicial emergency vacancy and the other would fill a vacancy on one of our Nation's busiest courts.

There is an editorial in today's New York Times that explains the slow pace of confirmations, and I ask unanimous consent to have the editorial printed in the RECORD after my statement.

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

(See exhibit 1.)

Mr. LEAHY. The editorial notes:

> A significant reason for the slowdown has been the partisan opposition of Republicans to appeals court and even to trial court nominations, even though almost none of the nominees have backgrounds that raise ideological issues. The Republicans have time and again used the filibuster, the threat of filibuster, holds on nominations and other tactics to confirmations.

This is the new practice that Senate Republicans adopted when President