

is a model for the country and for the world. He has succeeded because he knew all along that our fortunes depend on our work together—as one people, as one community, as one Boston.

On behalf of a grateful people, Tom Menino, we thank you for your hard work, for your service, and most of all for your dedication to making Boston a better place.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

TRIBUTE TO LAURA HERZOG

Mr. CORKER. Mr. President, I rise today to speak about an outstanding member of our staff, a friend, and a very special person who will soon leave the Senate—after almost 11 years of service—with her family to go to Nashville to begin the next exciting phase of their lives.

I first met Laura Lefler when she was a staffer working in Senator LAMAR ALEXANDER's front office answering the phones and greeting visitors. I was in Washington to try to decide, like the Presiding Officer, whether running for the U.S. Senate was something I should consider. Seeing her smiling face and listening to her Tennessee accent certainly made me feel at home.

Later, after I decided to run, we became involved in one of the most difficult races in the country in 2006. I was the only new Republican to make it through. Toward the end, with the race nationalized and dealing with all kinds of issues, a whole crew of folks descended upon our office to help us get across the top. One of those was young Laura Lefler, who helped us in our communications office. I think she was surprised by the fierceness of a campaign such as this. She took it all very personally—a sign of someone you want to be at your side.

Then came the transition. Laura was the first person to open our office, and she helped us interview people and find our way through the daunting task of opening a new Senate office. When it came down to deciding who would lead our communications office, we had gotten down to people who had been here and done it for a long time and Ms. Laura Lefler. She always said I was concerned about whether she should really be the person, and, in fairness, now that she is leaving, I will say I was. She was young. She had never done this before. Certainly I had never done this before. And I wondered whether we needed someone who was more seasoned and had different expe-

riences. Without question, hiring Laura to lead our communications office is one of the best decisions I have ever made in my life. I cannot imagine the last 7 years without Laura in our office, and I know the rest of our staff feels the same way.

Laura has been instrumental to our office in every way. No doubt, she has done an outstanding job as a communications director. I think every person in our office, those in other offices, and the media people throughout the Capitol and throughout Tennessee would all speak to the fact that she has been a professional, she has been endearing and a responsible communications director.

She has also been instrumental in other ways, such as always ensuring that I have never forgotten where I came from. She has that knack when we are making a decision over a tough vote to slip in toward the end and sit down privately and express her own feelings—something I value greatly.

As time went on, I realized something was different about other Senate offices. Most Senate offices center around the U.S. Senator. Our office has never been that way; it has always revolved around Laura.

It began with this guy named John Herzog, whom she later married. Was he going to end up having the kind of job that would allow him to know he could support a family? And then when he did, was he going to ask her to marry him? This went on for months and months.

Then there was the wedding after he asked. I do not think I have ever seen so many photographs of dresses and flower arrangements, nor have others in our office.

Then came the decision about their home purchase. Where would it be? What would it look like? How far of a drive would it be? You know the drill.

Then came young Jack. His hair was so perfect when he was born, he instantly was dubbed “the Weatherman.” Then, of course, which daycare would he attend? Would it be close enough? Would she continue to be a communications director and a good mom? As we all knew would be the case, she has been exceptional at both.

Then more of the same in Tennessee. I remember a townhall meeting in Loudon, TN, where over 1,000 people showed up at the gymnasium—a place where Laura Lefler had been the val- edictorian. I remember walking in with such excitement that so many people would be there at this townhall meeting to hear me discuss the big issues facing our Nation, but, not surprisingly, the first thing that was said when I walked in the door was, “Where’s Laura?”

Now, as we all knew would happen at some point, it is time for them to move on to the next phase in their lives. While we have all been a part of her

life and lived the ups and downs, she has been a part of all of ours. We will miss her greatly. She knows full well that I would gladly continue to be second fiddle in our office if she would stay. But we all know it is time for her and John, with their wonderful son Jack and possibly others to come, to go back to Tennessee, time to go back and be a part of other people's lives the way they have been a part of ours.

She has made life better for all of us over the last 7 years. Her big smile and ability to take ribbing—and also dish it out—have made each day so much more enjoyable. She is a consummate professional, always seeking perfection but with the ability to make it fun along the way. We will miss her, but we are so happy for her, for John, and for Jack. We are happy for her mother, who lives just across the line in Kentucky, and her dad, who lives right up the road in Loudon. We know Nashville will be a much better place with the Herzogs there. We look forward to visiting them often, and we all hope they will continue to involve us all in their wonderful life, their story, and the evolution of the Herzog family in Tennessee.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maryland.

Ms. MIKULSKI. Mr. President, I rise to speak in morning business for approximately 10 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator is recognized.

BIPARTISAN BUDGET AGREEMENT

Ms. MIKULSKI. Mr. President, I come to the floor today to urge my colleagues to support the bipartisan budget agreement.

I congratulate our colleagues, especially Budget Committee chairwoman MURRAY for her outstanding leadership in forging this bipartisan agreement with her House counterpart, Mr. RYAN. They reached this agreement in a way that is indeed a compromise—not everyone's desired outcome but a fair and necessary one. I urge my colleagues to support it. I think it is fantastic that they actually got a budget done. This is the first time in several years we are actually going to vote on a bipartisan budget conference agreement, and I think it bodes well for future activity where we return to the due order of passing legislation, one in each House, having a conference committee to hammer out the disagreements, and then it coming back to us for final agreement.

What I like about this agreement is it creates certainty by avoiding sequester for 2 years, giving the top-line funding to us on the Appropriations Committee for 2014 and 2015. Many people do not realize that we on the Appropriations Committee who actually put money in the Federal checkbook to be

spent have a cap put on our spending by the Budget Committee. That is called the 302(a) or the top line. We have not been able to do our Appropriations Committee work because we have not had a top line. This enables us to have one for 2014. We are under a mandate to bring it back to the Senate and to the House by January 14. We will meet that deadline. It is going to be tough. It is going to be stringent. But we are going to get the job done. It also gives us certainty for 2015 so we can return to a regular order of actually knowing where we stand with our cap, holding our hearings, and bringing bills to the committee.

The other facet I like about this bipartisan budget agreement is it prevents harm. It protects seniors and families. It preserves the social safety net, such as Medicare and Social Security.

Finally, the agreement ends gridlock. The American people are tired of shutdown, slowdown, slam-down politics. This agreement ends the lurching from crisis to crisis and shows we can compromise and we can govern.

First of all, and foremost, this budget agreement creates certainty for America's businesses and families. By avoiding sequester for 2 years, it prevents further across-the-board cuts—not that we do not need strategic cuts, and we will come up with them in the Appropriations Committee—but across-the-board cuts where we do not know if a program works or if a program is dysfunctional. This way, we can actually look at those programs that we do need to cut—those that are dated, those that are duplicative, those that are dysfunctional. Sure, let's cut those.

But at the same time let's keep the good programs and make sure that they are adequately funded. I believe that avoiding the sequester and the meat-ax approach to cuts really helps us to have better governance. We will have a more frugal government, and we will have a more sensible way of spending.

It also gives us this top line funding for 2014 and 2015 for the Appropriations Committee. It means that we can write an omnibus bill. What does an omnibus bill mean? We on the Appropriations Committee have 12 subcommittees. We would like to have brought these subcommittees up one by one and have the House exercise their due diligence in looking at the bills to see what they want to add, subtract or change.

We could not do it because we failed to have this budget agreement to give us the top line. What we will now be able to do is for 2014 we will be able to bring them all up at one time in a bill called the omnibus. I hope it is a bus that really moves. It will enable us to make smart choices about our investments in America instead of government on autopilot through a continuing funding resolution.

This agreement saves America from lurching from one continuing funding resolution to another. It is a fair compromise. For 2014 it is \$45 billion above the House-proposed budget, but it is \$45 billion below the Senate-proposed budget. Our budget leadership met in the middle and really thought that would be an adequate compromise. I would have preferred the 1.058 level, but it is adequate.

The bipartisan agreement also, as I said, prevents harm to the middle class. What America is looking for, though, is not only numbers and programs and so on, they want us to get our act together. They want us to really do our job, and do it in a way that is sensible and civil.

I believe that is what was done in that budget committee. They want us to work together across the aisle and across the dome. This bipartisan agreement shows what can be done when we do meet in the middle to make progress for the middle class and for those people who are neither right or left but want to take the middle of the road.

This compromise is not perfect. Compromises never are. For me, some of the pay-fors were not exactly what I was happy about. For example, they require new Federal employees to pay more for their retirement and working-age military retirees to receive smaller COLAs. I would have preferred an agreement that closed tax loopholes or canceled some of those out-of-date farm subsidies left over from the 1930s.

However, by avoiding the sequester, we also will be able to avoid furloughs. If you talk to the civilian employees at Defense, and you talk to Federal employees in the domestic agencies about this whole idea of furloughs and sequester, some of them had to have a double furlough, such as at the FBI. We were facing furloughs in the FBI. We did not have gas for the FBI cars. That is not right.

We want to make sure we continue to fund our government and meet our responsibilities. I cannot stress enough how important this bipartisan agreement is. If we continued the path that we left and the sequester was left in place, it is would cost our economy 800,000 jobs in 1 year—800,000 jobs.

Maryland already lost 21,000 jobs because of the sequester. We have important Federal agencies. We have over 250,000 contractors, both in defense and civilian agencies, and the ripple effect through my State had an impact on institutions like Johns Hopkins and the University of Maryland and on major flagship companies like Lockheed Martin, and it was really significant.

By passing this, we have a certainty that enables us to keep those jobs. The Appropriations Committee is ready to write a funding bill that will create jobs today and jobs tomorrow. Jobs today and important investments in infrastructure, education, research and development, and jobs tomorrow.

Let's take this bipartisan agreement, and we will produce a bill. We on the Appropriations Committee will produce a bill that meets our national security needs, our compelling human needs, and at the same time lay the groundwork for a more prosperous America.

I urge my colleagues to support this bill and end gridlock and deadlock. Let's get on with making sure that we have certainty and reliability in funding the government of the United States of America.

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

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

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. REED. Mr. President, in 12 days, unemployment insurance will expire for 1.3 million Americans. This will impact virtually every State. Over the course of the next year, it will set back millions of hard-working families, slow down job growth, and slow our economic recovery.

Today I filed three amendments to the Bipartisan Budget Agreement Act. The amendments would extend UI for 1 month, 3 months, or a year respectively. While I believe the best policy is to extend unemployment insurance for 1 year in order to keep our economic recovery moving forward, I am willing to work with my colleagues who object to extending it for the full year to find a path forward.

What we must, I think, provide is at least a message to those people that they will not see their benefits eliminated on December 28, and that we will, in fact, be working to make sure that this protection is in place for families all across this country. Over the next several days I will be coming to the floor seeking consent and urging my colleagues to extend unemployment insurance.

The expiration of unemployment insurance will be devastating to families across the entire Nation who rely on this as the last remaining source of support, in many cases for people who have worked hard for many years and because of this economy have lost their jobs.

This is a stressful time.

My home State of Rhode Island has an unemployment rate of 9.2 percent. We have been struggling since 2008 and 2009. This is very difficult for people. This difficulty will be particularly hard to bear as we celebrate the holidays—at a time when people should be able to consider and count their blessings—they will instead be looking