

Volunteers are already at work sandbagging, getting ready to fortify the levees. I went to the Moorehead facility building this weekend to bag sandbags. We do that inside. They cannot freeze; the sandbags cannot freeze. It would be like stacking frozen turkeys. They have to be unfrozen when we stack them.

The sense of community solidarity in tackling this challenge is incredible. I was struck by how much the community has unified once again around preparing for these floods, and it was fun. So I would urge folks in the area to go down to the Moorehead facility building in the next few days and weeks and sandbag.

What I took away from being there this weekend and from talking to local and community leaders is that they are doing all that they can to prepare for these floods with the resources they have. But they need our help. I am determined to make sure we are doing all we can on a Federal level to help these communities through the next few months.

Right now, Congress needs to appropriate supplemental funding for FEMA's Disaster Relief Fund. FEMA has said they are reserving their remaining disaster relief funds for immediate needs until we appropriate the supplemental funding. Yet the longer we wait, the longer communities in the Red River Valley have to wait on important flood mitigation efforts such as removing the remaining homes in the floodplain.

I have contacted the FEMA Administrator urging him to exhaust all available options while Congress approves the President's request of \$5.1 billion in supplemental funding for the Disaster Relief Fund.

I stand ready to support Chairman INOUE in any of his efforts on this or any other bill on the Senate floor to approve this \$5.1 billion in supplemental funding.

Once again, I commend the communities in Minnesota's Red River Valley for their flood mitigation preparation for this year.

As the ice melts and the water rises, I will continue to fight to get Federal funding out to these communities to make sure we are doing all we can to support them in their flood preparations and in their recovery over the coming months.

I yield the floor.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

TAX EXTENDERS ACT OF 2009

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of H.R. 4213, which the clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 4213), to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to extend certain expiring provisions, and for other purposes.

Pending:

Baucus amendment No. 3336, in the nature of a substitute.

Reid (for Murray/Kerry) further modified amendment No. 3356 (to amendment No. 3336), to extend the TANF Emergency Fund through fiscal year 2011 and to provide funding for summer employment for youth.

Coburn amendment No. 3358 (to amendment No. 3336), to require the Senate to be transparent with taxpayers about spending.

Baucus (for Webb/Boxer) amendment No. 3342 (to amendment No. 3336), to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to impose an excise tax on excessive 2009 bonuses received from certain major recipients of Federal emergency economic assistance, to limit the deduction allowable for such bonuses.

Feingold/Coburn amendment No. 3368 (to amendment No. 3336), to provide for the rescission of unused transportation earmarks and to establish a general reporting requirement for any unused earmarks.

Reid amendment No. 3417 (to amendment No. 3336), to temporarily modify the allocation of geothermal receipts.

McCain/Graham amendment No. 3427 (to amendment No. 3336), to prohibit the use of reconciliation to consider changes in Medicare.

Lincoln amendment No. 3401 (to amendment No. 3336), to improve a provision relating to emergency disaster assistance.

Baucus (for Isakson/Cardin) amendment No. 3430 (to amendment No. 3336), to modify the pension funding provisions.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Montana.

Mr. BAUCUS. Mr. President, we are now on our sixth day of consideration of this important legislation to create jobs and extend vital safety net and tax provisions.

This legislation would prevent millions of Americans from falling through the safety net. It would put cash into the hands of Americans who would spend it quickly, boosting the economy. And it would extend critical programs and tax incentives that help create jobs.

Now, we had a productive week on the bill last week. By my count, the Senate has considered 29 amendments on this bill. We have conducted 10 rollcall votes.

As I count it, there are nine amendments pending. Those amendments are:

The underlying substitute amendment, the Murray-Kerry amendment on the TANF emergency fund and summer employment for youth, the Coburn amendment on transparency, the Webb amendment on executive bonuses, the Feingold-Coburn amendment rescinding unused transportation earmarks, the amendment by Senator REID of Nevada on geothermal receipts, the McCain amendment on the use of reconciliation to change Medicare, the Lincoln amendment on disaster assistance, and the Isakson amendment on pension funding.

On Friday, we reached a unanimous consent agreement that, after the Senate resumes consideration of the bill tomorrow, we will conduct up to four rollcall votes in relation to the following amendments: the side-by-side

amendment to the Coburn amendment on transparency, the Coburn amendment, the Murray amendment on youth jobs, and the side-by-side amendment to the Murray amendment.

And so Senators should be aware that we will have up to four rollcall votes at about 10:15 tomorrow morning.

We further agreed that at 2:30 p.m. tomorrow, the Senate will vote on the motion to invoke cloture on the substitute amendment. And we hope that we might conclude action on the bill thereafter.

Today, we will continue to process cleared amendments throughout the day.

I thank all Senators for their cooperation.

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

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak in morning business for up to 6 minutes.

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

VIRGINIA JOB FAIR

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I rise today, and while I am speaking as in morning business, it is actually speaking in support of the legislation the chairman of the Finance Committee talked about, just taking it in a slightly different direction.

We spend a lot of time talking in this body about the necessity for us to focus on jobs and how Americans feel about that search for jobs. We read about unemployment numbers at 9.7 percent. While we say, with some relief, the numbers did not pop up during February, those numbers are still way too high.

I had a personal experience—I was not planning on speaking on the Senate floor, but I wanted to share with my colleagues and others an event that happened—actually is still happening—about 45 minutes south of this Chamber.

My office had decided to sponsor a jobs fair, where we would bring together more than 30 Federal agencies. We located this jobs fair down 45 minutes, as I mentioned, south of here at the University of Mary Washington at their Stafford campus.

For those who do not follow all of the ins and outs of Northern Virginia, we are blessed in Northern Virginia and Virginia overall with actually a rather low unemployment rate. Statewide our unemployment is about 7 percent, and in Northern Virginia our numbers are even much lower.

As I mentioned, we put together this jobs fair, not unlike what the Chair has done or other Senators have done. We were well represented with over 30 Federal agencies—from TSA to the Peace Corps to the Fish and Wildlife Service. We put out the word, not knowing exactly what kind of response we would get. This is the first jobs fair I have hosted as a U.S. Senator.

At first we were a little worried. Last week, last Wednesday we only had about 75 RSVPs for this jobs fair on a

college campus south of Washington. But by that Friday night we had almost 3,000 folks signed up. By yesterday afternoon, we realized, oh, my gosh, our numbers were topping out about 5,000, and we were warning people that perhaps all of the accommodations we put in place were not ready to handle this many folks. We extended the hours of the jobs fair from noon to 12 to actually 4 o'clock today.

When my staff started showing up this morning about 6:30 or 7, there were 500 people waiting in cars, many of whom had been sleeping there for hours. By 9 o'clock, when the jobs fair was supposed to start, 3,000 people were in line. I showed up there about 9:30, and, regrettably, before noon, we had topped out over 5,000, probably closer to 7,000 folks clogging the roads trying to come to this jobs fair in Stafford County, VA.

Unfortunately, we had to cut it off at that point and put out the word that we would try to have another jobs fair with these Federal agencies and some private sector partners within the next few weeks. The response was overwhelming.

As I mentioned earlier, I spent an hour simply going up and down the line of folks who were waiting. Many of these folks were people who had graduate degrees; almost all of them had college degrees. They looked like any of the kind of workforce we would see crossing any parts of our Nation's Capital today.

I heard story after story of folks who had never ever expected to show up at a Federal jobs fair, folks who had never ever expected to see their lives turned topsy-turvy by unemployment, or by folks who were still unable to change jobs because of their constraints on health care.

None of these folks were looking for a handout. They were just looking for that opportunity to talk with some of the 35-plus representatives from Federal agencies about the possibilities of getting a job. All they wanted to do was try to do a better job for themselves and their families.

So as we return to the debate on the so-called tax extenders bill, and when we work, as I know I have with the Presiding Officer, on efforts to kind of free up credit for small business owners or when we talk about how we can provide other kinds of incentives with the private sector to jumpstart the economy, while it was great to provide the possibility of these jobs in the public sector, the vast majority of jobs will and should be created in the private sector.

As we think about this piece of legislation right now, to make sure our Tax Code is supportive enough of those private sector efforts, I saw the reason for those efforts this morning in the thousands in one of the most prosperous parts of our country, in Northern Virginia.

I came back more charged up than ever that what we do here is terribly

important and that the folks there in that line didn't understand rules about filibusters or holds or all the other procedural back and forth that sometimes seems to dominate the floor. What they did want us to do was to put that aside, put our partisanship aside and get the job done of trying to create more and more jobs all across the country. It is my hope in the coming weeks, when we have the next jobs fair, we will have the same kind of response. I look forward to the day, hopefully in the not too distant future, when we have a jobs fair, whether it be in Virginia or in Minnesota, that we get a few folks but that we don't get overwhelmed with the kind of literally unprecedented number of the 7,000 folks we saw today.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

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

THE SPACE PROGRAM

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, that great philosopher, that observer of the national scene, Yogi Berra, once said: "You better be very careful if you don't know where you're going, because you may not get there." A bit of that policy is now the perception of President Obama's manned space program. There is a concern that the administration doesn't know where they are going and they may not get there.

I said "perception" because in reality the President has laid out a visionary manned space program. However, the way the administration rolled out the space program—much to the chagrin of a number of us who were trying to get through to the White House about the way they should roll it out—it was rolled out as a part of the budget and left for people to draw their own conclusions.

Among the aerospace and space community, particularly in areas such as Houston at the Johnson Space Center, Huntsville at the Marshall Space Flight Center, and Florida at the Kennedy Space Center, I can tell my colleagues that the perception is that the President has killed the manned space program. In fact, that is the farthest thing from President Obama's mind. He is an enthusiastic fan of the space program. As a matter of fact, we heard him speak many times about how as a little boy his grandfather took him to see the return of some of the Apollo astronauts coming back from the Moon. When he tells that story, his face lights up and you can see the enthusiasm he

has. As he interacts by radio with the astronauts on board the space station and on board the space shuttle, you can see the enthusiasm he has.

Unfortunately, some of his advisers have not given him correct information about how to lay out his vision. So, happily, over the course of the week-end, the President has said he is going to come to Florida on April 15 and he is going to lay out his vision for the space program. What is it? Well, we can anticipate that the President will say what he already had his Administrator of NASA say in our committee hearing last week, which is that the goal is Mars. Mars is the next logical goal. We were on the Moon 40 years ago. There could well be interim steps on the way to Mars: possibly the Moon; possibly rendezvousing and landing on an asteroid; possibly—and very likely—to go to one of the moons of Mars such as Fobos, before going actually to Mars. Why? Because it would expend a lot less energy to land on a moon of Mars and return than it would to go on down to the red planet.

The President actually laid out in his robust budget proposal to the Congress a \$6 billion increase for NASA over the course of the next 5 years. Compared to other agencies of the government, NASA did very well. The President is also to be commended for his budget proposal in which he said what everybody knew he had to say—which the Bush administration had ignored—which was we have this \$100 billion asset up there in orbit called the International Space Station. We are completing it now and we are equipping it now where we can get a crew of several astronauts—not just one, two, or three—on board to use it as a national laboratory, as it is technically designated. What he said was that we are not going to stop it in 2015. We are going to at least carry it out to 2020. Again, that was the logical thing that everybody knew. But if you can believe it, in the previous administration, it had not been budgeted to continue beyond 2015 the International Space Station which we haven't even completed yet, and of which the last four flights will not only complete the construction, the equipping, but will take up major scientific experiments such as the alpha magnetic spectrometer which, if it works, is going to open our understanding of the universe and what the origins of the universe are.

So the President laid out a fairly good plan that had some good things in it, but he left himself open to misinterpretation so that not only is there the perception that the President has killed the manned space program, but there is outright hostility toward President Obama and his proposals for the Nation's human space program.

Why did that occur? Well, No. 1, the President didn't make the declaration. Why is that important? Because only a President can lead the Nation's human space program. Of course, the best example of that was that after the Soviets had surprised us in the late 1950s

with Sputnik and then they surprised us again in 1961 by putting the first human in orbit, Yuri Gagarin—and we didn't even have a rocket that was strong enough to get us into orbit with our little Mercury spacecraft. We had the plan to go into suborbit with Alan Shepard, and after Shepard came back, it took that bold stroke of President Kennedy to say, In 9 years, we are going to the Moon and will return safely. That is leadership. That is a declaratory judgment. That is stepping out and being bold.

If we are going to Mars, it is going to take the President to say that; not to tell his NASA Administrator in the Space Subcommittee hearing in the Senate last week that the Administrator can say that the goal is Mars. It has to take the President to say that and he has to set out a specific timeframe. It can be approximate, but it has to be a reasonable timeframe. He then has to say to NASA: You figure out the architecture; you set the benchmarks. So is it to go back to the Moon for a temporary mission? Is it to go to an asteroid? Is it to go on and try to go straight to Mars? Then we will unleash the creative spirit, the human ingenuity of Americans as we have seen in this extraordinary program. The heartbeat of every American is a little faster when they see some of the extraordinary, heroic accomplishments we have had in the American space program, both manned and unmanned space accomplishments.

The President let himself be misinterpreted. He said in his budgetary message that he was cancelling the Constellation program. The Constellation program was a program that was announced 5 or 6 years ago by President George W. Bush, but the Bush administration never funded it. In fact, they starved NASA so that the building of the new rocket is not ready when the space shuttle is now being set for retirement. Why is that? Well, that decision on the space shuttle came as a result of the destruction of *Columbia* over the skies of Texas on reentry back in 2003.

The investigation commission, headed by a Navy admiral named Gehman, called the Gehman Commission, otherwise known as CAIB, the Columbia Accident Investigation Board—they refer to it as the acronym CAIB—they said, after a decade, at the end of the decade: If you are going to continue to fly the space shuttle, you are going to have to recertify all these orbiters that have been going on since the early eighties.

The decisions were made to shut down the space shuttle program at the end of the last decade. We find the shuttle program is, in fact, coming to an end without the new rocket being ready and, therefore, we have the angst that is in this aerospace community, this close-knit family called the NASA family who are going to be seeing so many of the men and women who are so dedicated to this program being laid off because if you are not launching

Americans on American rockets, then the jobs are not there.

Unfortunately, those decisions we tried to avert over and over. In the last 5 or 6 years in the Senate, we put additional money into NASA's exploration program to try to speed the development of the rocket. Over and over, the previous administration cut us off at the knees, would not support it, and we could not get the votes in the House of Representatives to keep that additional money. As a result, we have a rocket that is just in its testing stages, a capsule that has not been built, and, as the President's advisers looked at it, they saw it was going to be well on into this decade before it would be ready, so they up and announced they are going to cancel this program called Constellation, which was the development of the Ares rocket and the development and construction of a capsule called Orion. But they also said: We want the R&D of a heavy-lift vehicle. There came the disconnect because people who do not understand the space program were making decisions. I lay it at the feet of some of the folks in OMB, the Office of Management and Budget. If you are going to build a heavy-lift vehicle, the likelihood is you cannot do that entirely with liquid rockets; you need solid rockets to propel that massive weight up into low Earth orbit.

The solid rockets are what we are testing now. Thus, the President allowed his administration to be perceived that they were killing the manned space program when, in fact, there was nothing further from what he intended.

What are we going to do about it? Let's go back to the announcement made over the weekend. I commend the President. I am very thankful to the President that he has said he is coming to Florida for a major discussion and announcement on the human space program. This will occur April 15. It will occur in Florida. I assume it will be at the Kennedy Space Center or somewhere close by, which is the logical place, from whence we have sent Americans into the cosmos.

I think that is a step in the right direction for the President. But he needs to be prepared with specifics because of the perception that he has killed the manned space program. Because of the hostility he has generated because of that perception, the President needs to be prepared with specifics of the goal, the timeframe, the benchmarks, the suggested architecture, and how he would take his budget to flesh out moving toward that goal.

May I give some suggestions to the President on how he might achieve that. In the first place, there are four additional shuttles manifested to fly and, with that, the completion and the equipping of the International Space Station.

But there is a fifth shuttle that can fly because the external tank is there. It is referred to as the "mission on demand" because, in effect, it is a rescue

shuttle to go up, if a space shuttle got marooned, and rescue them.

What about a rescue for the last and the fifth shuttle? The risk is minimal because the mission would be to the space station. If the worst happened on launch, just like Columbia, that a piece of the delicate silicon tiles fell off and knocked a hole in the wing, of which they then could not come back into Earth without burning up, then they could take safe sanctuary in the International Space Station because now it is large enough to accommodate additional crew members until a rescue spacecraft could come to rescue them to take them back to Earth.

The risk to safety is minimal on a fifth shuttle flight. The President should announce he is asking NASA to do that fifth flight.

By the way, the money is already there. If the four flights, as scheduled, get off between now and the end of the fiscal year, September 30, there is the money in the first quarter of fiscal year 2011 for an additional flight. You don't have to get any additional money. It is budgeted. The President should announce that.

The next thing the President of the United States should do is say we are going on a full-scale, aggressive R&D program to develop that heavy-lift rocket that is going to get us up into low Earth orbit so we can assemble things and go to whatever the next station is—the Moon, asteroid, the Moon of Mars. That aggressive R&D effort should be the continued testing of a solid rocket booster, not unlike the one that has already been successfully tested.

Concurrent with that, there should be the development of a crew exploration vehicle, otherwise known as a capsule, that would carry astronauts up into low Earth orbit on this heavy-lift vehicle that would allow us to do the assembly and all the other things we want to do. This does not have to take away from the President's proposal that commercial companies are encouraged to compete against each other to have a cargo and human ferry service to and from the International Space Station, for that can go on concurrently. Although I must say, in a couple weeks, we are having a hearing in our Space Subcommittee. We are going to look at the commercial rocket competitors and whether they need the \$6 billion the President has recommended over the next 5 years in order for them to get humans to and from the International Space Station. The President should then clearly say we are going to do an aggressive R&D effort to build a heavy-lift vehicle.

Because of the angst among space workers in the middle of a recession, some of whom have already been laid off, others of whom are getting pink slips and others of whom fear for their jobs, let us remember a recession is not a recession if you have been laid off from your job. It is a depression. The angst of this economic recession with

losing their job and not knowing where to turn elsewhere is among them. Therefore, my next recommendation to the President would be that he address those fears.

He has already said he wants to spend \$2 billion to help the center that is going to be the most impacted. I have had estimates that with the layoff of the shuttle program, it is about 5,000 jobs. The President should address that point. He should point out in his budget the \$2 billion he offered to modernize the Kennedy Space Center, how that will affect jobs, and what part of that 5,000 could be ameliorated.

Then the President should say—and it is my humble, respectful suggestion—there are plenty other jobs in the aerospace community, and he is going to try to bring them into places such as the Kennedy Space Center, that is going to feel the effects of these layoffs, to help people on a temporary basis until we can get back into the business of launching humans.

I humbly, respectfully request that the President say: The commercial boys who are bidding in a competition to be the service to and from the International Space Station have to hire, if they are the successful bidders, those people who are so skilled and who have not missed a beat in all these, 10, many years of which the American space program has been so tremendously successful. That is the next thing I would respectfully ask the President to do.

Then, I think the President has to directly confront his critics, those who, in political parlance, are taking cheap shots at the President—and he has left himself open to those cheap shots—that he would directly confront them head on and say: The American space program is not a partisan program, it is not an ideological program; it is an American program, and it has always been run that way. That is the way he should say he is going to continue to run that program and that he should get those people to quiet down, get in the harness, and let's all pull together what we all want to do, which is go out there and explore the heavens.

By the way, on that fifth shuttle flight, some people have asked me: What can it do? What is its function, other than just flying an additional shuttle? There is a lot of equipment, a lot of experiments that can be put in it, and it can take up an additional component, attach it to the space station and add volume to an already expansive space station that will allow us to do experimentation in the zero gravity of orbit for years and years to come.

For all these reasons, I am so grateful to the President that he has stepped forth and said he is going to come and address this issue. I respectfully request that he consider some of the suggestions I have made.

At the end of the day, it is what he wants, it is what the Nation wants because every American heart beats a little bit quicker when they happen to

witness the extraordinary feats of Americans in space and the peeling back of the frontiers and the new knowledge and scientific results that we have of the spinoffs as we develop these incredible flying machines.

Mr. President, it is an urgent plea that I make to the White House. Listen to some advice. Stop listening just to the budget boys and OMB. Listen to the cries of an American people who once again want to be challenged and inspired, as President John F. Kennedy inspired the Nation and the Nation came together and did what was considered to be almost the impossible. It wasn't impossible. It was extraordinary, and it was an American achievement.

Mr. 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.

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

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

Mr. McCAIN. I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

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

IRAQI PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

Mr. McCAIN. Mr. President, these are days when we Senators take to the floor to express our anger and criticism of actions or events we disagree with. But then there are days we rise happily to pay tribute to great and noble achievements. Today is such a day.

The people of Iraq went to the polls yesterday and struck a blow for freedom and democracy that has resounded across the world. As opposed to Iraq's last national elections in 2005 which saw the country rigidly divided along sectarian lines, with most Sunnis refusing to participate altogether, the election yesterday was broadly inclusive, with a host of cross-sectarian lists competing for the vote.

Early reports indicate turnout was high among Iraq's nearly 19 million registered voters. Over 50,000 polling stations were up and running across the country with more than 200,000 Iraqis observing the election.

Loud speakers in mosques that once implored Iraqis to take up arms and kill Americans appealed to them yesterday with a different purpose: to express their desire for a better Iraq—not with bullets but with ballots, not with bombs but with ink-stained fingers.

Tragically, as most of us feared, yesterday's events did not proceed without incident. Al-Qaida and other terrorists lashed out with acts of barbaric violence against innocent Iraqis—women and men, fellow Muslim and fellow Arabs, even young children. Although these criminals did take the lives of at least 37 people, Iraqis were not deterred. They voted by the millions anyway, and in so doing they defied the enemies of their great nation. The Iraqi

people deserve the lion's share of the credit for making yesterday's election such a resounding triumph for democracy.

Iraq's Government, its High Electoral Commission, and its security forces all conducted themselves with distinction. I congratulate them all. It has been Iraqi courage, Iraqi sacrifice, and Iraqi endurance over many years of hardship that are now bringing about the country's emergence as an increasingly free society.

Yet Iraqis have been fortunate to have committed allies in their struggle for justice. I thank America's civilians and diplomats, as well as those of our coalition partners and the United Nations for supporting our Iraqi friends in this election and throughout the countless challenges that preceded it.

Most of all, I want to express my deepest gratitude to America's men and women in uniform who have given more to our mission in Iraq than could ever be asked of them. As our troops return home in the months ahead, as they must, it will be with the knowledge that their mission has been worth fighting for, with the thanks of a grateful nation, and with an honor won for themselves that time will not diminish.

Our fellow citizens who have served in Iraq these past several years have done what many once believed to be impossible. It was once assumed that Iraq was unfit for democracy, that Iraq's people could not practice it, and Iraq's culture would not allow it.

It was once assumed that America was trying to "impose" democracy on Iraq, or perhaps "export" it to Iraq. It was once assumed that no manner of additional U.S. troops could succeed in helping Iraqis to secure their country. These were all popular assumptions, especially in this town—popular but wrong. Thankfully, the United States followed a different course. Because we did, Iraqis are showing that freedom and democracy are Iraqi dreams and, increasingly, Iraqi realities. Iraqis are choosing to resolve their differences through cooperation and dialogue not violence and repression. They are demonstrating that Iraqis share the same basic aspirations as you and me: safe neighborhoods, opportunity for themselves and their children, equal access to justice, a chance to elect those who would govern them, and to live under laws of their own making.

Yesterday the citizens of Iraq once again reaffirmed that a nation's past need not determine its future when citizens of courage are devoted to a just cause that is greater than themselves.

I will be the first to admit that Iraq still faces many difficulties: a limited but lethal terrorist threat, the unhelpful meddling of some of its neighbors, weak political institutions, a still developing economy, and a culture of distrust that will take a long time to heal.

There is much hard work still to be done in Iraq, and the United States

must remain fully seized with it. In the weeks ahead, we must support our Iraqi friends in the arduous task of forming their new government. In the months ahead, as U.S. troops return home, we must deepen and expand America's diplomatic and economic engagement with Iraq. In the years ahead, the United States, especially our Congress, has a responsibility to continue providing the critical support, including the necessary resources to strengthen Iraq's young democracy.

We have given much to this effort already, but now is not the time to scale back. Although our military mission is ending, our commitment to Iraq will endure, and must endure, for a long time to come. The fruits of this commitment are already becoming evident for the United States. We have not seen eye to eye with the current Iraqi Government at all times. I am fairly certain that we will have our share of disagreements with future Iraqi Governments. But this does not change the fact that Iraq has transformed in just 8 years from a principal enemy of the United States to a rising partner in the fight against violence, extremism; from a generator of insecurity to an emerging source of stability in the midst of a volatile region; and from one of history's most reprehensible tyrannies to a growing inspiration for people across the Middle East who still yearn for freedom and justice in their own countries.

When Iranians look at a democratic Iraq today amid violent and bloody military crackdowns in their own country, they must be thinking: Why not us? When Syrians look at a democratic Iraq today among the stifling climate of oppression in their own country, they must be thinking: Why not us? And when our friends in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and other nations in the region, where liberty is not assured, watch a peaceful transition of power in Iraq from one freely elected government to another, they must also be thinking: Why not us?

The citizens of Iraq are now writing a new and hopeful chapter for their country, but also for the region as a whole, whose people are increasingly looking to emulate Iraq, its freedoms, its rule of law, its security of human dignity, its equal rights, and equal justice. This is the start of something new and wondrous in the Middle East, a renaissance of sorts, and Iraq is at the very forefront.

The war in Iraq is ending, but America's partnership with the new Iraq is only just beginning. No matter where any of us stood in the old debates of the past, Americans should all be able to agree now that the emergence of a free and democratic Iraq is one of the greatest strategic opportunities in all of U.S. foreign policy.

America and our allies have created this opportunity. Iraqis have expanded it and seized it. Now let's all come together to usher in a new era of liberty not just for Iraq but for the entire Middle East.

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 proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, I rise this evening to speak about a simple amendment that would go a long way to save a lot of jobs in our timber industry and our forested communities.

To give a little bit of background, the collapse of the housing market has devastated the timber industry and the many rural communities that depend on it, resulting in major job losses. Because of a fate tied to the housing industry, the timber industry is one of the hardest hit by the current recession, with timber prices at a record low. That precipitous drop in timber prices has created a unique and very threatening problem for companies that harvest timber on federally owned lands. Specifically, a lot of companies bid for contracts to harvest timber and they did so right before the housing market and then the timber market collapsed. So those companies bid. Some won contracts, and those that won those contracts won them at a very high price for the timber. They could make a profit selling that timber when they harvested it, but by the time the process was completed, the timber prices had fallen through the floor. At the current record-low timber prices, harvesting under contract would cost more than the timber is worth. So the companies would lose money by going forward, resulting in major losses and leading to layoffs and lost jobs.

This takes us to an interesting point where there are two possibilities: one is a contract with the Forest Service, and one is a contract with the BLM, Bureau of Land Management. If a company is fortunate enough to have a contract with the Forest Service, they can apply for and receive an extension, giving them more time to act on the contract and harvest the timber. Given the unique circumstances we find ourselves in, that is of great value. It makes sense. It is a simple way to save jobs. But, unfortunately, if your contract is with the Bureau of Land Management—and that Bureau manages 69 million acres of forested land across our Western States, much of it prime timberland—the same rules are not set up for companies that happen to do business with the BLM rather than the Forest Service. Their only alternative is harvesting timber at a loss and to lose the contract and lose the business altogether. This makes no sense as a policy. In Western States such as Oregon where Forest Service and BLM lands are side by side, you can find yourselves on the Forest Service land one moment and BLM land the next. It

is practically arbitrary whether a company is working with an agency that can give them a commonsense extension, as the Forest Service can, or an agency that cannot give them that commonsense extension, which is the BLM.

My amendment is simple. It allows companies to apply for a contract extension and authorizes the BLM to review and grant those applications so we can save those jobs. It applies the same rules to the BLM that the Forest Service already has in place. Indeed, the language of the amendment is identical to a companion bill that has already passed the House. Furthermore, the Congressional Budget Office has determined there is no significant financial impact for this bill.

I have spoken to many of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle, and I haven't found anyone who has an objection to this amendment. This is one of those commonsense opportunities to cut a little bit of redtape; a commonsense opportunity to assist companies that were caught in an unexpected trap; a commonsense opportunity to strengthen our rural resource-based companies and the jobs that go with them.

So I put forward this amendment, and, as I noted, everyone I have spoken to on both sides of the aisle says it makes a lot of sense, but some objection has been placed anonymously. So I simply wish to ask that any colleague who has an objection to this effort to help the timber companies, to help our rural resource-based communities, to please come and talk with me because I am sure that whatever concern you have, I should be able to get a good answer for your concern.

We have in this Chamber the opportunity to help some of the hardest hit communities with a simple amendment such as this. I hope we can seize that opportunity. That is the type of bipartisan problem-solving Americans are hoping to see in the Senate.

Thank you. Thank you to my colleagues who have been so helpful in reviewing this amendment on both sides of the aisle. Thank you to my colleagues who will be helpful as we try to put this commonsense amendment in place.

Thank you, Mr. President.

PBGC GOVERNANCE

Mr. KOHL, Mr. President, I rise to talk about the importance of retirement security and the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation, the Federal agency responsible for insuring the pension plans of nearly 44 million Americans. Unfortunately, this vital agency in November of 2009 reported a total deficit of nearly \$22 billion. Furthermore, the PBGC said its potential exposure from financially weak companies that may not be able to honor their pension payments is currently about \$168 billion, an increase of \$121 billion from the prior year.

The American Workers, State, and Business Relief Act includes provisions

to offer limited pension funding relief to companies that provide defined benefit plans. While this relief is much needed, I am concerned about any such action that could increase the liability of the PBGC in its current state. As we found at an Aging Committee hearing last year, the agency sorely lacks the oversight and policy direction it requires.

There is little doubt that an improved PBGC governance structure is necessary. The PBGC's boards consist of only three members: the Secretary of Labor, the Secretary of Treasury, and the Secretary of Commerce. These three members obviously have their own agencies to run, and are doing so during an economic crisis.

The Government Accountability Office has indicated for years that the PBGC board members do not have enough time or resources to provide the policy direction and oversight required by the agency. In 28 years, the full board has met only 20 times. These findings have been echoed in reports by the McKinsey & Company consulting group and by the Brookings Institution.

The role of PBGC is too crucial to allow its governance to slip through the cracks. And we have seen devastating results when it has. The former PBGC Director was able to adopt a risky investment strategy just months before the market downturn and inappropriately involve himself in the bidding process, with little more than a rubberstamped approval from the board.

We must ensure that these problems do not impact the ability of the agency to function going forward. I have crafted an amendment based on the PBGC Governance Improvement Act, a bill I introduced with Senators BENNET, MCCASKILL and FEINGOLD, which would significantly improve the PBGC board's governance oversight structure. First and foremost, the amendment would expand the Board's membership, requiring it to meet at least four times a year, and ensuring that the board retains continuity during a change in administration. The amendment would also ensure the PBGC Advisory Council, inspector general, and general counsel have full and direct independent access to the entire board. Finally, the amendment would require the PBGC director to recuse him or herself from potential conflicts of interest, to include any involvement with the agency's technical evaluation panels. These small commonsense changes are a bare minimum needed to make sure the PBGC is secure and taxpayer's are protected.

The role of the PBGC is a vital one, now more than ever. For 44 million Americans with defined benefit pension plans, PBGC is the only thing that stands between the secure retirement they have worked so hard for, and the prospect of living without the retirement income they have earned. We must get the PBGC back on track, or

face the possibility of absorbing its obligations as taxpayers.

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, I understand the concerns raised by Senator KOHL, and agree that these are serious issues that need to be addressed. While I believe that short-term, targeted pension funding relief is critically important and should move as quickly as possible, I would welcome the opportunity to work with my colleagues to pursue longer term solutions addressing the many challenges facing our defined benefit pension system, including PBGC governance.

I plan to hold hearings in the HELP Committee this year addressing the state of the defined benefit system and the PBGC. I look forward to discussing with Senator KOHL the ideals and goals reflected in the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation Governance Improvement Act of 2009, and I thank him for bringing this important legislation to my attention. I hope that we can work collaboratively on legislation to improve the security of defined benefit pensions and the agency that insures these plans, as well as on broader initiatives to build greater retirement security for all working families.

Mr. BAUCUS. I applaud the chairman of the Select Committee on Aging for raising this important issue. I look forward to working with him and the chairman of the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee on addressing the shortcomings he has highlighted.

Mr. KOHL. With those assurances, I will not offer my amendment and look forward to working with Chairman HARKIN and Chairman BAUCUS on improving the PBGC.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. UDALL of New Mexico). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. KAUFMAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that on Tuesday, March 9, after any leader time, the time until 11 a.m. be for a period for the transaction of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with the time equally divided and controlled between the two leaders, with the Republicans controlling the first portion; that at 11 a.m., the Senate resume consideration of H.R. 4213 and proceed as under the order of March 5, with all provisions of that order remaining in effect.

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

UGANDA RECOVERY ACT

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, I am a cosponsor of a bill introduced by Senators FEINGOLD and BROWNBACK, the Lord's Resistance Army Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act. I am one of the 62 cosponsors of this legislation, and I believe this broad bipartisan support speaks to both the ur-

gency of this issue and the importance of this legislation.

On a continent plagued by man-made tragedy, the Lord's Resistance Army stands out as a manufacturer of that tragedy. The U.S. State Department describes the LRA as "vicious and cult-like." Formed in the 1980s to overthrow the Ugandan government, the LRA engaged in such widespread violence that at one time, about 2 million Ugandans were displaced from their homes. The LRA massacred, mutilated and abducted civilians, and forced many into sexual servitude. An estimated 66,000 Ugandan youths were forced to fight for the group.

The good news is that the Ugandan government has now largely pushed the LRA out of Uganda. The bad news is that the scars it has left behind are raw and real for Ugandans; and that meanwhile, the LRA has moved into parts of Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the Central African Republic, continuing to spread violence and terror. Between September of 2008 and July of 2009, the United Nations estimates that LRA violence claimed 1,300 civilian lives, that the LRA abducted another 1,400 civilians, and that more than 300,000 were forced from their homes.

This legislation, which 63 Senators support, would take a number of steps to address both the aftermath of the LRA's rampage in Northern Uganda and its continuing violence in Uganda's neighbor nations. The Act would require that within six months, the United States develop a comprehensive strategy for dealing with the LRA, including an outline of steps to protect the civilian population against LRA violence. The act would authorize funding under the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 to provide humanitarian assistance in areas affected by LRA. And it would provide assistance for reconstruction and for promotion of justice and reconciliation in areas of Uganda recovering from the LRA's depredations.

It is unfortunate that despite the broad and bipartisan support for this legislation, apparently only one Member of the Senate objects to it and is able to block its consideration. As with so many measures before the Senate, there is little doubt that this bill would win overwhelming passage were it allowed to come to the floor.

But the innocent victims of LRA violence, past and present, need our help. The objection of one Senator should not be allowed to thwart us responding to that need.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

REMEMBERING JOEL WAHLENMAIER AND JAVIER BEJAR

● Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, I ask my colleagues to join me in honoring the memory of two respected and dedicated public servants, Fresno County Sheriff's Deputy Joel Wahlenmaier and