

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Alaska.

Mr. BEGICH. Mr. President, still having the floor, let me respond. First off, I want to make sure, as the public is watching this, what that means. Keeping the tax rates where they are means millionaires and billionaires continue to get a bonus because that is what it is, with no disrespect to my colleague on the other side. I mean, corporations, businesses today—and I can speak about this, again with no disrespect to my colleague, as someone in the small business world. Our family is in this business. My wife owns four retail stores, started from scratch, just as I did in many of my businesses. The small business community—the small business community—benefits not by the people over the 2 percent, the top 2 percent; the small business community are the ones below that. Half of the businesses in this country, the small businesses, gross less than \$25,000. That is a fact.

So for us to just kind of continue business as usual and keep these tax rates where they are for the millionaire and billionaire club—that didn't help us the last 3 years. The fact is, right now they have those tax breaks. Right today, they have those. They had them last year. They had them the year before. And what happened to this economy? It crashed and burned almost to the ground. What has happened to the millionaire and billionaire club? They have more money in their bank accounts today than ever before. That is not me saying it; that is other independent data out there. Corporations have more cash on hand today than they have had in decades.

So for us now to say: Hey, let's give the millionaires and billionaires another bonus for the next year for running our economy into the ground doesn't make any sense to me and doesn't make sense to the people back home in my State, the Alaskans I talk to every single day. As a matter of fact, when I came here in January of 2009, we were in our fourth or fifth month, if I remember right, of losing 500,000 to 700,000 jobs a month. Do you know what that is equal to? That is the total population of my State every single month being lost.

People who are saying we have to make sure the millionaires and billionaires have this \$700 billion bonus, paid for by the taxpayers of this country, to drive us more into debt, and believe that is going to solve this economic problem is absolutely wrong. I have had to scratch nickles and dimes together to build businesses. I have done it before. I have succeeded and failed. That is not what grows business, giving millionaires and billionaires breaks. What makes a difference, for example, is the small business bill we passed, where we only got two votes on the other side, a small business bill that brought money to loan small businesses. That is what makes a dif-

ference, or extending the tax credit, which we did, not only during the recovery bill, the stimulus bill, which I know everyone on the other side hates, but also during our small business bill so people can buy equipment and depreciate it in the first year, write it off in the first year. That is of real benefit to small businesses. Extending the SBA loan program, expanding it from the limitations they had before to \$5 million to make sure that the front-end fees do not have to be charged, what did that do in my State? It tripled—tripled—the loan capacity of SBA to small businesses. That was supported on this side. You want to grow small business. That is how you do it, because the way it has worked, we drove into the biggest recession since the Great Depression.

So I respect the comments on the other side, but for us to say to the American taxpayers: Hey, we are going to give another \$700 billion to millionaires and billionaires, is beyond comprehension—beyond comprehension, especially when we tell them: Oh, by the way, it is going to be debt financed. So my son, who is 8 today, and his kids, my grandkids, maybe, in the future, will still be paying that bill because we were told that by Monday we have to make a decision.

I am not doing that. I didn't come here to play those games, to swap off the START treaty or national security for the benefit of millionaires and billionaires.

The other thing I have learned about this place, we can multitask. I came down here this morning, no one was on the Senate floor. I go to committee meetings—there is supposed to be 15, 25 people—2 people show up, maybe 4. I don't know what other people are doing. I am showing up because that is what I was sent here to do by the people of my State, to come here and work. For us to sit around and say we can only do one thing at a time—I talk to families every single day. They are doing multiple things every day, every single day. Why we can't, with all the staff we have, all the abilities we have, focus on more than one thing is ridiculous.

Again, no disrespect to the Senator from Tennessee. I mean him no ill words. I am frustrated. I didn't come here for these kinds of games. We put a 1099 amendment on the Food Safety Act. People are asking: What are we doing? I heard yesterday, why did we spend a week on the food safety bill. The other side wanted to delay it because it was good politics for them to delay and drag it out. So here we are. We have a deadline. We have to get this passed or we are going home. If you don't want to be around here, then go home. But the fact is, the American people sent us here, Alaskans sent me here to not just do one issue but to do multiple issues. That is what our country is about. It is complex. There is no single issue that drives the economy. But giving millionaires and billionaires a \$700 billion tax bonus is ridiculous.

I appreciate the comments. I am sorry my colleague objected to this one item because in order to build this economy, we have to have multiple things in play. This gives more tools to the private sector to grow their neighborhoods and businesses.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator has used 10 minutes.

Mr. BEGICH. I appreciate the opportunity to rant for a little bit and yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

SENATE AGENDA

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I see the Senator from Alabama here. I don't want to take time from him. Let me see if I can go back to the beginning.

The government runs out of money Friday. Taxes go up at the end of the month. Republicans have written a letter to the majority leader that says: Let's focus on those two things. Let's fund the government and let's keep the tax rates where they are which would be the single best thing we could do in the middle of an economic downturn to help create jobs, and then we are ready to go home.

We think we heard the results of the election. Our friends on the other side keep on insisting on an encore after a concert which attracted a lot of boos. What the American people were saying to us is, fund the government, keep the tax rates where they are, freeze spending, and go home. Bring the new Congress back in January, and let's begin to work on the priorities of the American people which are, No. 1, to make it easier and cheaper to create private sector jobs; No. 2, bring spending closer to revenues; and No. 3, be smart and strategic in dealing with terror. So one, two, three—those should be our objectives.

In the last 2 weeks in this so-called lameduck session, insisting on an encore after a concert that attracted a lot of boos shows a lot of tone deaf politicians.

What we Republicans have asked is extraordinarily reasonable. The President—and I give him great credit for this—had a bipartisan leadership meeting. It was the best one he has had since he has been President. It was constructive. As a result, the Republican and Democratic leaders who met together said: We will designate a smaller group to see if we can work out the tax part of this. Then, in the discussion that came afterwards, we, on our side, made it clear to the President and to the Democratic leader that after you fund the government—remember, the money runs out Friday. We have to do this. Nobody wants the government to shut down. After we deal with taxes—remember, they go up automatically at the first of the year—then we will go to wherever the majority leader of the Senate wants to go. He is the single person who can bring up something,

and if he chooses to go to the DREAM Act, if he chooses to go to Don't Ask, Don't Tell, if he chooses to go to a whole laundry list of other issues, that is entirely his prerogative.

We, under the traditions of the Senate, have the right to make the voices heard of the people we represent and amend and debate things. If the majority leader says: I have listened to the President. He thinks the New START treaty is the most important thing to go to next. He can bring that up if he wishes to. We can debate that. We would want ample time to do that. That is a part of the Senate tradition as well.

There is nothing in the letter that 42 Republicans signed that says anything about national security or the New START treaty. It talks about legislative proposals. We recognize that until some fortuitous event should occur that we might have the majority, it is up to the Democratic leader what comes up.

The Senator from Missouri was talking about the New START treaty. We are not talking about it. In fact, we are meeting on it. We are working with the administration to see if nuclear modernization can be properly done.

Mrs. MCCASKILL. Will the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. ALEXANDER. I will not. I will continue my remarks and the Senator may gain the floor later.

We are working on making certain that if the New START treaty is approved, we are not left with a collection of wet matches. We want to make sure the nuclear warheads we have work.

I am one Republican who is open to voting for the New START treaty. I see the advantages of the data and of the inspections that come from it. I know the tradition of disarmament and nuclear arms control. I am deeply concerned about the condition of the facilities that do our nuclear modernization. I am impressed with the progress the President is making in that area. Let's continue to make that progress. If the majority leader wants to move to that, he can. But instead this afternoon we get a long list of new proposals that have come in here that we haven't read, that haven't been through committee. It reminds me of Christmas Eve a year ago. Let's just bring a bunch of bills in here. Nobody has read them. It doesn't matter.

The American people said in November they didn't like that. So they sent a bunch of new people here.

With all respect, we understand what it is like to lose an election. We have lost a lot of them lately. We had very few Republicans elected in 2006. We had very few elected in 2008. We thought the people had something to say to us. We tried to learn from that. We hadn't been doing some things well. We are trying to work our way back. We are trying to re-earn the confidence of the American people going step by step. We think the steps that are appropriate

today are to keep the tax rates where they are in the middle of an economic downturn. It makes no sense to tax job creators at a time when unemployment has been above 9.5 percent for 16 out of the last 17 months and when it has only been that high for 30 out of the last 862 months.

What we are suggesting is the kind of thing that President Obama's former budget director has suggested, Mr. Orszag. He said: Let's extend it for 2 years because raising taxes in the middle of an economic downturn makes no sense because it doesn't create jobs. We would like for them to be permanent. That is a possible area of compromise. Keep the tax rates where they are, deal with funding the government, and then let's move to whatever subject the majority leader would like to move to, including the New START treaty, if he thinks that is the most important area.

I wish to make sure the Republican position is well understood. I understand we have printed in the RECORD our letter to Senator REID of yesterday which says very simply: Dear Mr. Majority Leader, we 42 Republicans believe that we should keep tax rates where they are because they go up at the end of the month, and we should fund the government because it runs out of money Friday. And after those two, we can move to whatever legislative item you would like to. Of course, we have no comment on whether you move to a treaty such as the New START treaty. That is our position. We believe that is a reasonable position.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alabama.

Mr. SESSIONS. I will be brief, but I do appreciate so much the comments of the Senator from Tennessee. He is one of our most valuable Members. He is an honest person. He can summarize complex matters in ways even I can understand. I think he stated honestly and fairly where we are today.

Not only did President Obama's own Office of Management and Budget Director, Peter Orszag, say we ought to keep the rates where they are, not go up on the upper income people at this time of economic stress and job loss, not raise taxes on them—although my colleague is saying that somehow if we pass this legislation it would be a bonus. For 10 years these rates have been at this level. We are talking about raising the rates if we don't take action.

I am going to recall that Senator ALEXANDER serves on the Budget Committee, as does Senator MCCASKILL. We worked hard on some important legislation together that I think will be helpful in containing spending.

We recently had a Budget Committee hearing a few months ago. I think Senators ALEXANDER and MCCASKILL were there. We had three premier, exceedingly well-known economists testify, two called by the majority and one

called by the Republican minority. That is sort of traditional. We had Mr. Zandi from Moody's, Allen Blinder of Princeton, and John Taylor of the Taylor rule. The violation of his rule by Mr. Bernanke was a significant factor in the bubble in housing. But Mr. TAYLOR was a Republican witness. All three said: Don't raise taxes now in this economy.

It is offensive to me a bit to have my colleagues stand up and in a demagogic way say: You are trying to give a tax benefit, a bonus to millionaires. I don't believe that is accurate. These three premier economists, two of them called by the Democratic majority, said: Don't raise taxes.

Do you think these economists were saying this because they want to help millionaires, or do you think they were making that opinion because they believe it would be best for the economy and help more Americans who are out of work get work?

Mr. ALEXANDER. Assuming the Senator from Alabama still has the floor, I agree with him, in answer to the question. The idea is that you don't raise taxes in the middle of an economic downturn because it makes it harder to create jobs. And that raising those taxes now makes no sense. That is simply the argument.

Mr. SESSIONS. And Mr. Orszag was a former Congressional Budget Office head and also was chosen by President Obama when he first came to office for that significant, premier center of the government, the Office of Management and Budget, a student of these issues, far more liberal in ways than I would be in a lot of matters. But he has indicated he did not think we should raise taxes now that he has left the administration.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Yes, that is his point. He wrote that in the Wall Street Journal shortly after he left the administration. I believe, in fairness to Mr. Orszag, he said tax rates ought to be differentiated, and he expects that we would have a big argument about the levels of taxation, if we are doing something in a permanent way. But he did say very clearly that given the length and severity of the economic downturn, that the logical thing to do would be to keep the current rates exactly where they are for at least 2 years because not to do so would clearly cause job loss.

If we are listening to the American people and we have our eyes open, making it easier and cheaper to create private sector jobs should be our main objective, and raising taxes on anybody in an economic downturn runs against that objective.

Mr. SESSIONS. I thank the Senator for sharing those thoughts. I would say it is concerning that this gets boiled down to some sort of an idea that we are just trying to protect the rich.

What we are trying to do is to do something to help this economy to allow the private sector to create jobs and reduce this unemployment, which

is maddeningly remaining at very high, unacceptable levels. Everybody, all the economists and others, tells us the economy will not come back until we have a lower unemployment rate. Raising taxes is not the way to lower unemployment, and we are talking about a significant increase to 39.6 percent on upper income taxpayers.

These are small businesspeople. I met one gentleman who has 10 fast food restaurants and 200 employees. He told me with the health care bill and the stress he is seeing, he expects to be laying off 70 of those employees. We do not need to even be laying off 7. We need to be able to hire more, if we can, so we can have more people working.

Then we have, in addition, a 2.9-percent increase on upper income people, a 2.9-percent additional tax for Medicare. That makes the total tax rate about 42.8 percent or 42.6 percent. Plus, my State of Alabama has a 5-percent income tax. That makes it 47 percent. Some have 10 percent income tax. Then we pay sales taxes. Then we pay property taxes, and other taxes, gasoline taxes and those things. So the idea that we can just continue to ratchet up taxes without consequence to the economy is not accurate.

I do remember and would say one more thing. I talked to a businessman at an airport of an international company. He is the CEO for North America. He told me they had sought to obtain an environmental chemical process in the United States at their plant, and he thought he had won it. The people in Europe, who evaluate the proposals—it would have added 200 jobs in my State of Alabama—they said: Sorry, you have lost because you did not count taxes. And tax rates are higher in the United States than for the competing company. They had plants all over the world. This other plant, in another country that had lower taxes, was going to get it. We lost 200 jobs in the United States as a direct result of higher taxes.

So I just want to repeat, it is an absolute myth that we can just raise taxes on productive enterprises and small businesspeople who do a subchapter S and take their money directly rather than through corporate taxes; that we can raise those taxes and it will not have a job impact. It will have a job impact. That is why all three of the economists who testified before the Budget Committee—two of them Democrats—said: Don't raise taxes now. That is why Mr. Orszag said: Don't raise taxes now.

I see my colleague seeking the floor, and I am pleased to yield.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri.

Mrs. MCCASKILL. Mr. President, I yield the floor so the Senator from New York can be recognized.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New York.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I thank my colleague for yielding the floor. I will be brief.

I would first like to ask my colleagues a question of any of my Republican colleagues. They say we have to do this by Monday. It is one of the most important economic issues we have. If today we were to offer you—certainly I would; I cannot speak for every one of my colleagues—we will keep the tax rates the same for everyone whose income is below \$1 million and have them go up to what they were in the Clinton years for people \$1 million or higher, how is that for a compromise? Would you accept it? Well, I would ask any of my colleagues to come on the floor and tell us why they would or would not accept it.

We all know there was greater prosperity in the Clinton years than there was during the Bush years. We all know there was less of a deficit—in fact, a surplus at the end of the Clinton years—and a huge deficit in the Bush years. We also all know just about every economist tells us that tax cuts, taxes for millionaires, do not create jobs. This is not capital gains. This is not an investment tax credit. This is personal income of millionaires and billionaires. It is one of the least effective ways to create jobs.

So, again, I would ask my colleagues, are you willing to accept that compromise? I am.

I would like the RECORD to show no Republican colleague has accepted that compromise.

I have another proposal I would like to offer before I yield back quickly to my colleague from Missouri.

ORRIN HATCH and I passed a bipartisan bill, a tax cut for small businesses and large businesses, called the HIRE Act. It said if you hired somebody during the course of 2010, and they were unemployed for 60 days, they did not pay payroll tax. It has been regarded as a success. Five million jobs have been created since it passed. We cannot attribute all of them to the HIRE Act, but certainly it had to do with a good number of them. I would like to see us move that bill right now. It is a tax cut. It is for business. It creates jobs.

So I ask unanimous consent—and I would like to do that now, not to wait until we give a tax break to millionaires. These could be retired people who do nothing, who have a load of money, not small businesses working hard that would get a tax break.

So I ask unanimous consent that the Finance Committee be discharged from further consideration of S. 3623 and that the Senate then proceed to its immediate consideration, the bill be read three times and passed, the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate, and that any statements related to the measure be printed in the RECORD.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, reserving the right to object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alabama.

Mr. SESSIONS. I would say as to the question raised by my esteemed colleague, I respect his economic judgment, but I respect the economic judgment more of Mr. Zandi of Moody's, Mr. Blinder of Princeton, and Mr. Taylor of the Taylor rule. They all have said without exception: Do not raise taxes in this economy, and those persons who might be making higher incomes most likely are the people who have the most employees and could be affected. They could pay for that by reducing employees. I would also cite him Mr. Peter Orszag, President Obama's own former budget director. Therefore, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I yield for my colleague from Missouri who graciously yielded to me.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri.

Mrs. MCCASKILL. Mr. President, sometimes we selectively like certain testimony and dislike other testimony around here. My friend from Alabama is so proud of Mr. Zandi. I think it is important we put on the record what else Mr. Zandi said.

Mr. Zandi said if we had not passed the stimulus, we would have a depression. Now I hear the other side saying there was nothing worse than the stimulus. Mr. Zandi said if we had not done the stimulus, we would have a depression.

Now, I think Mr. Zandi would also say, if he were here right now, that the least stimulative tax cut we could do is a personal tax rate at the very highest bracket. Do you know what he would say is the most stimulative thing we could do to the economy right now? Unemployment benefits. And what are we fighting over? They are blocking the most stimulating thing we can do for the economy to do the least stimulating thing for the economy for the millionaires and billionaires.

Let's go over that again to make sure we understand this. The same economist my Republican friend is hanging his hat on has said, time and time again, the only thing that stood between this country and a depression was passing the stimulus. Now my colleagues want to use that same economist to justify holding up unemployment benefits, holding up the START Treaty, national security, and holding up any other business of the Senate, judicial nominations, work that needs to be done, to protect the millionaires and billionaires.

We do not need to argue about whether tax cuts are good. I think we have shown that. The proof is in the pudding. All my Republican friends know we have passed tax cut after tax cut. We have passed tax cuts for almost everybody in America. We passed tax cuts through payroll taxes. We passed middle-class tax cuts. We passed tax cuts for small businesses, which they were busy opposing. That is rich. They

opposed the tax cut for small businesses, and now they want to go to the mat for the millionaires.

People need to understand what they are saying. The reason the economists say do not raise taxes in a down economy is because we want money to go into the economy in a recession. We are trying to get money to circulate. We are trying to get investment. We are trying to get people to buy things. So that is why we look at spending on an emergency basis like a stimulus. And we look at tax policy and figure out what is the most stimulative thing we can do with the Tax Code to help this economy. That is why we focused on the middle class and small businesses. And they are stuck with those millionaires.

Now, I am very blessed; my husband's first job out of college was in a steel mill. I worked my way through college as a waitress. My husband has been very successful in business. When I talk to him—and he is an economist, very bright—when I talk to him about the various things we can do to stimulate investment—he has invested in many businesses through the years, created thousands and thousands of jobs—when I ask him is a 3-percent differential in your tax rate going to make a difference in your investment decisions next year, he kind of laughs. It may make a difference in terms of how much money he has to invest in one thing or another, but this is not the engine of our economy—a 3-percent difference in the tax rate for people who make millions of dollars. What does make a difference is a tax cut for the rest of America.

Here is where their argument falls apart even further. How many times have we heard our friends on the other side of the aisle talk about the deficit? Here is the dirty little secret. They do not want to extend taxes temporarily because we have a down economy. They want to do it permanently. They want to go borrow trillions of dollars from China to make sure we keep this tax break there for the millionaires permanently. They are not focused on the next year. They are not focused on the next 2 years. They want to blow the lid off this deficit and not pay for a dime of it by extending them permanently.

So he can say: Well, we don't raise taxes in a down economy. Then they ought to immediately acknowledge that this should only be a 2-year extension. But they will not even acknowledge that at this point. We agree on permanent tax relief for the middle class. Book it, Danno. We agree on that. Let's get that done: permanent tax relief for the middle class. All of us agree on that.

I, frankly, think it is time we start looking at the deficit, take the least stimulative money that we spend, which is this extra money for millionaires, and put that against the deficit. We will never get this deficit solved if anybody thinks we can do it on discretionary spending.

I have worked hard on discretionary spending. Senator SESSIONS and I have sponsored an amendment and put it before the Senate time after time trying to get our colleagues to accept a cap on spending. We have not been able to get it across the finish line. I am confident we will in the coming months, and we will put a cap on spending. That is part of the equation: take a hard look at entitlements, figure out if we really need to be buying prescription drugs for millionaires with tax dollars when we are in debt. I do not know. I do not think that makes a lot of sense. That is part of the entitlement program I think we should take a look at, as to how many rich people we are buying prescription drugs for. Then, finally, we need to look at tax policy. If we can't bring the tax rate for millionaires—not talking about a corporate tax rate, not talking about capital gains, not talking about dividends, I am talking about the permanent tax rate—if we can't bring it back to the 1990s—find me a millionaire that didn't do well in the 1990s. I would like to meet one. Man, it was tall cotton in the 1990s for wealthy people in this country and, by the way, it hasn't been bad for the last 10 years. We haven't seen a lot of job creation after this tax cut. We created 22 million jobs in the Clinton years with the tax rate we want to go to for the millionaires, and they created 1 million after this tax cut was created—22 million versus 1 million. Really? We want to blow the lid off a deficit for that kind of job creation? No, we don't.

I wish to clarify one thing. Senator KYL didn't yield for a question. I didn't ever say there was a threatening on START in the letter written by the Republicans. I said Senator KYL today—and let me read the quote.

If taxes all can't be resolved and voted on and completed, and spending for the government for the next 10 months completed by next Monday, I don't know how there is enough time to complete START.

Keep in mind, we have had 16 hearings on START; close to 1,000 congressional inquiries. It is hard to find somebody who understands the threat who doesn't support START. They are saying: Well, the verification doesn't go far enough. We have no verification now.

So Senator KYL is the one who is saying that if we don't get everything done by Monday, they are done on the START treaty. I think I can speak for my colleagues on this side of the aisle. We are not done. We are not ready to go home. We want to stay here until we make sure we cut taxes for the middle class and continue that tax cut for the middle class. We want to stay here until we get that START treaty done, and we want to stay here and make sure we get an agreement to continue to fund the government. We will stay here, and I think most of us are willing to stay here weekends, all night, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, and the day after Christmas. I think we will stay here as long as it takes to complete this work.

So the sooner we find out the compromises they are willing to make, the better. Will they hold the middle class hostage, are they holding unemployment benefits hostage, and now will they hold the START treaty hostage for tax cuts for millionaires, the least stimulative tax break we can give? I hope not. For the sake of our economy, the future of this country, our grandchildren, deficit reduction, and national security, I hope not.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New York.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I wish to thank my colleague from Missouri for her outstanding words.

Again, let us take three facts. First, over the last decade, middle-class incomes have declined for the first time since World War II. Second, over the last decade, if you made over \$1 million, you did just great. Third, in 2001, when George Bush took over, until today, we have gone from a surplus of \$300 billion to a huge deficit. Yet what are my colleagues suggesting we do? That we hold up the entire government until we get tax breaks for the wealthy, the people who have done well, the people who have plenty of money, the people who, when they get a tax break, don't rush out to the grocery store or to the clothing store because they haven't had enough money to buy things.

That is what they want to do. It is hard to believe. It is hard to believe politics aren't at stake; that there aren't a group of very wealthy people who believe they made all their money all by themselves and they do not want to pay any taxes and that is what is pulling that party so far to the right.

My good friend from Tennessee talked about elections. I want him to come to the floor and tell me that in this election the electorate cried out: Give more tax breaks to the millionaires. Everyone knows they didn't. They said: Help the middle class. If our party had a fault—and I believe we did—we didn't pay enough attention to the middle class. But they are not going to convince us that because they won a few seats in the Senate and picked up the House that the election was a mandate to give more tax breaks to the people who need it the least—the millionaires and billionaires. Oh, no.

In fact, we are listening to the electorate far more than they are. We are saying: Give the middle class tax breaks and deal with the deficit not by preventing unemployment insurance from being extended, not by preventing the HIRE Act from being enacted, and not by preventing tax breaks for manufacturing or green energy. Oh, no. We want to do those things, and we want to deal with the deficit by not giving an extra huge tax cut to the millionaires and billionaires.

Here is another thing I don't want to hear from my colleagues, if they persist with this policy. I don't want to hear them say: The deficit is the reason we can't spend money on middle-

class needs such as education or transportation or unemployment insurance, because there are lots of middle-class people unemployed.

I don't want to ever hear that again. If they are willing to increase the deficit by \$300 billion or \$400 billion to give tax breaks to the wealthy—unpaid for—I don't want to hear about deficit reduction from the other side because they are not honest about it. "Deficit reduction" is code for giving more money to the wealthy and less money to the middle class.

I am somebody who believes in the American dream, and I think people who have made a lot of money in America are great. I think they are terrific, and they do create jobs. A whole lot of wealthy people—many of them—have inherited money, it is true, but many more made it by themselves. God bless them. But it is only a small percentage of the wealthy who are so eager to get a tax break when they know the country has so much trouble. Lots of wealthy people I speak to—Republicans in my State—say: You know what. I know the rates could go back up to what they were in the Clinton years for me, and I can afford it. If the money goes to a good purpose—improving our schools, building our roads or decreasing our deficit—I am all for it. So we are not talking about class warfare. We are talking about an economic problem America faces. Middle-class incomes are declining and they need a tax break. Upper incomes are greatly increasing and they can help reduce the deficit and improve America.

I have heard the economists whom my good friend from Alabama was talking about, and I believe that if you talk to them, they will also tell you that you get far more bang for the buck in other types of policies to get the economy going than in giving an additional huge tax break to the millionaires and the billionaires.

We are not going to stop. The Republicans have hidden for 15 or 20 years behind the idea of "don't increase taxes on anybody." Those are code words. It means, don't increase taxes on millionaires. That is what they care about. Because right now I have offered them a deal. Give everybody else the tax break except the millionaires. Are they going to take it? Of course not, because the millionaires come first in the economic books of my friends—most of my friends—on the other side of the aisle.

I remember when my Republican friends discovered the words "death tax." It had its effect in a way I didn't like, but it had its effect. Well, now we have the millionaire tax break. Millionaire tax. You know what. It is going to have the same effect, and we are going to finally be able to show America what the other party has been all about: tax breaks for the wealthy, above all—above the deficit, above helping the middle class, above creating jobs. The days of hiding behind the screen are over because the tax debate we are having now pulls back that

screen and shows exactly where my Republican friends are.

So again I repeat my offer. I see my good friend from Tennessee is on the floor. I would offer him, if he wants to improve this by Monday—here are more colleagues—I will offer this deal. We will take the tax break for everyone below \$1 million. Will you accept it—that is a great compromise—or are you going to say: Oh, no, we are holding out for the millionaires. Take it or leave it.

I can't speak for my whole party, but I can speak for myself and my colleague from Missouri and many others on our side. We can solve this problem tonight. Tax breaks for everybody else but not for the millionaires. Take it or leave it. You said you wanted to negotiate, here is an offer.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

Mr. ALEXANDER. I thank the Presiding Officer, and I thank the Senator from New York for mentioning me.

There is a little problem with our negotiating. We weren't invited to the meeting. The Senator from New York and I were in the Capitol doing our work, tending to constituencies, while the President and the Democratic leaders and the Republican leaders were at the White House. They had a very constructive meeting, from what I understand, and they designated certain Democrats and certain Republicans to see if they could come up with a compromise.

One of those who might have been at the meeting may have just walked onto the Senate floor and maybe he can inform us, but the negotiations are continuing where they should continue. I was delighted to see the President invite the leaders down to the White House for such a good meeting. I know they have had some joint meetings before, but we are never going to get anywhere in the Senate where we have a relatively equal number of Members—as we now do or are now about to—unless we swap ideas. So I assume they are down there swapping ideas.

I assume they can read the calendar, and I assume they can remember that last year we were standing here in the worst snowstorm in decades in the middle of the night—1 a.m.—voting on bills nobody had read. I don't think we want to do that kind of thing again. So we Republicans have said, very simply, let's deal with the tax issue because taxes go up automatically at the end of the month, let's fund the government because it runs out of money on Friday, and then, if we have any time left, let's do whatever the Democratic leader would like to do.

If he wants to bring up the new START treaty, that would be fine. We would have time to debate it. If he wants to bring up a whole string of other things, that is up to him.

What would the terms of the tax agreement be? I guess it will be whatever that group who discusses, our ne-

gotiators, come back with. If the President were to say, for example, he agrees with his former Budget Director, that raising taxes on anybody in the middle of an economic downturn makes it harder to create jobs—and in my words, therefore, makes no sense—he would probably get a welcome response on our side.

So while the Senator from New York is one of the most skillful debaters and negotiators anywhere on the planet, and he would be very good in any sort of discussion on taxes—he is a member of the Finance Committee, and he is chairman of the Rules Committee—he wasn't in the meeting and neither was I and those in the meeting are having the discussion and they will make a recommendation. My hope is they make a recommendation that permits tax rates to stay right where they are because raising taxes on anybody in the middle of a recession is a bad idea because it makes it harder to create jobs.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, through the Chair, may I ask my good friend from Tennessee a question?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Will the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. ALEXANDER. I will be happy to yield for a question.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I understand we are not in the negotiating room right now, but he and I are both in the leadership of our respective parties. We are good friends. I have tremendous respect and admiration for my friend from Tennessee. I do. I think he is a fine man, and we have passed some good legislation together. So I understand the negotiators are doing their negotiating, but we might be able to help.

Again, I repeat my offer: Will my colleague—just he and I can agree. That might break the ice. We will give tax breaks to everyone—Bush tax cuts—below \$1 million. We will continue their capital gains rates at the same rate, we will continue their dividend rates at the same rate but not the people above \$1 million because, as I mentioned, their incomes are doing fine. Most economists will tell you it is a highly inefficient way to get jobs or money flowing into the economy. Unemployment insurance, which my colleagues insist be paid for, is much better.

Let just he and I agree that that is a good idea, a good starting point. Will he?

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I am delighted to hear the eloquence of the Senator from New York. As I was listening to him I was reminded that most of the people whose taxes he is trying to raise live in New York. They are not in Tennessee. We are a relatively low-income State. So I admire him for his courage—it is almost a tax earmark to be so specific that we are going to raise taxes on just a small number of people, most of whom live on Wall Street and in New York. That makes a pretty good line.

But what I agree with is what I repeatedly said, what the Republican leader said, and the former budget director said. Let me just say it again because it makes very good sense, and I think most Americans would instinctively agree with this. We are in the middle of a very severe economic recession. We have had more than 9.5 percent unemployment for 16 out of the last 17 months. We have only had 30 months in modern history where we have had unemployment that high. Almost half of those months have been lately.

Making it easier and cheaper to create private sector jobs should be our main objective. Almost every economist—the President's former budget director, almost everyone who has looked at this—says raising taxes on anybody in the middle of an economic downturn makes it harder to create jobs.

We may want to have a big argument when the economy recovers about whether people in New York should pay more and people of more modest means in Tennessee should pay less. We could have that argument at some point. But what we are saying is at the end of the year, taxes are going up, almost everyone except some on that side seem to agree that it makes it harder to create jobs if we raise taxes on anybody. We are saying let's not raise taxes on anybody. We want that permanently. But most of us are saying, if we would do what Mr. Orszag says, that would have wide support here.

That is our position. We respect the position of the Senator from New York. Maybe someday we will have a debate about what the permanent tax rates ought to be. But right now the goal is to make it easier and cheaper to create private sector jobs. The single best thing we can do is keep tax rates where they are before they automatically go up at the end of the month.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I thank my colleague from New York and my colleague from Missouri who was here a moment ago and all those who came to the floor to talk. I assume my colleagues are aware of the fact that all across America there have been cable TV subscribers who have been calling in and asking for a refund because when they turned on C-SPAN to see the Senate they saw an empty Chamber and nothing going on, and at least now we give them a little activity on the Senate floor. But, unfortunately, that activity is not going to lead to anything meaningful. The Senator from New York even offers a legislative idea that doesn't seem to be greeted by any applause on the other side or any counteroffer of any conciliatory magnitude.

I was at the meeting the Senator talked about yesterday, and it was a historic meeting with the President and Senator KYL, Senator MCCONNELL, Senator REID, myself, the President,

the leaders of the House, as well and some members of the President's Cabinet—Secretary Geithner, for example. Vice President BIDEN was there.

I would say the reports generally have been accurate, that the President said: I want to change the environment, I want to change the dialog, I want there to be more meetings like this, open to suggestions from the other side about how we can work together and solve the problems facing our Nation.

Then the President did something which those of us who have been fortunate to visit the White House once in a while really considered to be rare. He stood up and said: I would like to ask the elected Members and the Vice President to come with me to my private dining room off the Oval Office.

We went in and had another cup of coffee and in a much more isolated and private setting had an even more candid conversation. I really felt good at the end of it. I felt we were starting at least to develop the kind of dialog the American people asked for in the November 2 election.

The President asked us, Senator REID and some others: Pick someone and let's sit down and talk about this tax situation. Let's try to find some common ground if we can, and I understand the group met this morning and again this afternoon. It is all, from my point of view, a very positive development and good for our Nation.

But what troubles me, I say to the Senator from Tennessee, is this letter. I see the letter is dated November 29, so it started circulating even before this peacemaking meeting we had. It seems that this letter which was sent to Senator REID is basically an ultimatum. The ultimatum is, we are not going to do anything on the floor of the Senate until we act on the tax measure and funding our government—nothing. It says basically that your side, the Republican side, the 42 Senators who signed it, are going to object to moving to any other item of business—anything.

Now we are back into the cable TV problem, where people are going to see this empty Chamber and wonder why, with all the things we could be doing in the Senate, why we can do nothing—nothing whatsoever, according to this letter—until we reach an agreement on the tax issue.

I think we all concede the fact that we need to do it. We all concede the fact we need to fund the government. But what is the point? Really, if we are going to draw a paycheck for coming into the Senate, shouldn't we at least do the people's business? Do we have to sit here with empty desks and an empty Chamber and quorum calls day after day because of this threat that says: Don't try to bring up another issue?

It strikes me as odd. I know the Senator from Tennessee is an industrious man. He served as Secretary of Education. He was a Governor. He plays

the piano. The man sings songs. He has more talents than most people I ever met. To think you would want us to just do nothing—nothing on the floor of the Senate.

The Senator from New York has offered an idea—I think a reasonable idea. Let's agree. Let's agree that people making \$1 million or less will have the same tax cuts that they had before, no questions asked, to invigorate the economy. But let's say to Paris Hilton and Bill Gates and Warren Buffett, no; you are not going to get a \$100,000 tax cut each year. If you make \$1 million, that is the average. We don't think that really invigorates the economy.

I would add as a postscript to what the Senator from New York raised, wouldn't it be reasonable for us also to say if we are going to give tax cuts to the wealthiest people in America, and add to our deficit in the process, shouldn't we help those who are unemployed in Tennessee—I see the two Senators from Tennessee—or Wyoming—I see the Senator from Wyoming is here—or Minnesota or Illinois? Do you think it is right for us to cut off unemployment benefits for people in the midst of this holiday season?

There are 127,000 people in the State of Illinois who will lose their unemployment benefits this month. Merry Christmas.

I know what those people receive. It is about \$300 a week. I don't know any of us who could survive on that. They try, they try to keep going. Yet we cut them off. There have been efforts on the Senate floor, unanimous consent requests to fund the unemployment benefits for another year, objected to by the Republican side of the aisle.

I find it hard to follow the logic on the Republican side that we cannot afford to help those who are out of work through no fault of their own but we can afford to give a tax break, a huge tax break to Warren Buffett—who is not asking for it, incidentally—Bill Gates, Paris Hilton, or any of these others. I don't follow the logic.

I think, although the Senator is fervent in his belief that tax cuts are the key to prosperity—some of us may question how much they are the key—it really is fundamentally unfair that those who are unemployed would face this kind of problem.

I am going to make a unanimous consent request on another issue that I think will help create jobs. It will save jobs in Tennessee and Wyoming and Illinois and Minnesota, and it relates to something that is not new because it is already on the calendar. For those who want to follow this and say where is this coming from, turn to page 73, the Calendar of Business of the Senate, and go to order No. 578, S. 3816, a bill I introduced with others to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, create American jobs, and prevent offshoring of such jobs overseas.

It was actually read the second time and placed on the calendar September 22 of this year. It relates to something

which has affected the Senator's State and mine. When a company in Tennessee decides to send jobs overseas, to close down a local production facility, and to ship those jobs and that production facility to another country—China, Mexico, wherever it happens to be—we reward them. We give them tax benefits and tax deductions to help facilitate that decision.

Many of us believe that is upside-down. If a company thinks it is in its best interest, profit motive and best interest to locate overseas, so be it. Let them make that decision. But we should not encourage it. We should not subsidize it. We should not reward it. The reward should actually go to the many businesses that stay in Minnesota and Illinois and Tennessee and Wyoming, hiring American workers, paying them a decent wage and giving them basic benefits and retirement. That is where the reward ought to be in the Tax Code. It should not be in the area where we are creating tax incentives for companies to move jobs overseas.

If the economy, prosperity, and jobs are really the No. 1 goal here—I think they are, and I think they should be—then let's change this provision in the Tax Code. That is what this does. It tries to slow down the exodus of jobs from the United States. It will save jobs in Tennessee and save jobs in other places as well. This provision called "Creating American Jobs and Ending Offshoring Act" that I introduced with Senators HARRY REID, BYRON DORGAN, and Senator SCHUMER is a simple bill with three common-sense provisions.

Let me describe it before I make the unanimous consent request. I will be brief.

First, we make two changes that discourage U.S. companies from giving out pink slips to Americans while they open their doors abroad. We will say to firms: If you want to shut down operations here and move them somewhere else, we are not going to let you take tax deductions on the shutdown expenses.

We also say to firms: If you want to sell your products in this country, we are not going to let you start making those goods abroad, ship them back to this country, and avoid paying taxes on your profits.

Second, we make it more attractive for companies to bring the production of goods back home. We say to firms: If you bring jobs home from another country, you don't have to pay your share of payroll taxes on those U.S. workers for 3 years, repatriating jobs from overseas back into the United States. It is not radical, it is basic.

There are a lot of folks who defend this loophole I am trying to close: the Chamber of Commerce, National Association of Manufacturers. They oppose this. Republican leaders have spoken out in the past against it, but I think these two brilliant leaders from Tennessee on the floor of the Senate are

not going to join that group. They are going to stand by their workers and companies from Tennessee. I am sure of that when I make this unanimous consent request.

So I hope they will join me in this effort. With this measure we can literally bring to the floor of the Senate a measure which will help save American jobs and create American jobs. We can debate it and get it over for a final vote in a matter of hours, and we can still have negotiations going on about taxes. We can walk and chew gum in the Senate. We can do more than one thing at a time. We should not be victims of an ultimatum that says: You will either do the tax cuts and funding the government or else.

So I am going to make this unanimous consent request that the Finance Committee be discharged from further consideration of Calendar No. 578, S. 3816, the bill be read three times and passed, the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate, and that any statements be printed in the RECORD.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection? The Senator from Tennessee.

Mr. CORKER. Mr. President, I reserve the right to object and say, as is the Senator from New York, the Senator from Illinois is most eloquent, and I always enjoy listening to his comments. I agree with him that many attributes regarding the senior Senator from Tennessee are all true—and many more, I might add. He is a multitasking person.

But I say the President's commission on deficit reduction actually is addressing this issue.

And they have actually made many bold steps in trying to address the many deficit issues, the tax expenditure issues which cause our country, in many cases, not to be as competitive as we could be around the world. So knowing that it is imminent, that this group is meeting on Friday, I object.

I would like to say for the C-SPAN watchers that there is not really much happening on the floor right now that matters. I would agree with the Senator from Tennessee, the senior Senator, that there is a great negotiation that is taking place, and I applaud the President for bringing members of both parties together. I think there is a lot of activity.

I just came in from the hallway. I know one of our negotiators was rushing to a meeting. I know that in a meeting about an hour ago, he had to step out because the President had called regarding this very issue we are talking about regarding taxes, regarding keeping the government operating. So I think there is work taking place in the Senate. I know there is work looking at nuclear modernization, and there is all kinds of activity throughout the course of this building and other buildings adjacent. It is just that here on the floor, we have somewhat of a charade taking place while that is occurring.

So I look forward to fruitful activity. I think most Americans realize that on Friday, our government is going to shut down, and I think what Republican Senators have said is that we think it is important that we deal with actually funding our government so it continues to operate past Friday. We think it is important to deal with the tax issues since forms are going out across our country—some have already gone out, as a matter of fact—and Americans want to know what they are going to be paying as it relates to tax rates.

And actually, what the letter said is any legislative item. I think the Senator from Illinois, whom I greatly respect, knows full well that things such as the START treaty are not legislative items, they are executive items.

That was excluded in our letter on purpose so that in the event the START treaty wanted to be brought to the floor by the leader, it could be brought to the floor. I know the President has said this is something of great national interest.

So all we are trying to do is prioritize. We know any debate that is taking place on the floor right now over taxes has no real meaning. The real debate will take place after these negotiators finish their discussions. I think, again, they are being done in a very fruitful and earnest manner, and after that the debate that takes place will be real. We will be talking about something we have given leaders of each party the ability to negotiate. So that is when the real debate will take place. I hope the C-SPAN watchers who were alluded to will actually tune in at that time. All of this discussion now is really not nearly as relevant as what is happening in other places. I think there is a lot of work taking place.

I would just add that I think all of us on our side have been watching as the majority party has met for hours and hours and hours each day trying to figure out what they feel should come to the floor. And we understand that. But I think what we have said is that instead of debating things that could be well debated next year, that do not have the urgency of causing government to continue to function, when you have two wars underway and you have all kinds of issues that need to be dealt with, we have said: Please, we ask you to prioritize. Let's deal with those most important issues first. If you want to bring up the START treaty, that is not a legislative item, that is an executive item, bring it up. But let's deal with those issues that are most important to the American people first. If there is time to deal with all of these other issues, certainly after that is done, we would be more than glad to stay as long as the other side would like to debate all of those issues.

I thank you for the time to speak. I thank the Senator from Illinois for all of the kind comments he has made about the senior Senator and me. I

thank him. I thank him for the leadership he shows on the other side of the aisle.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I wanted to give my friend from Tennessee time to make his objection in its entirety. I thank him for that. I am glad he clarified the fact that we could bring the START treaty to the floor. I sincerely hope we do. I think it would be a serious mistake for us to leave Washington for the holiday season without voting on that treaty on the floor.

This is a treaty which the President has worked on and which is supported by previous administrations, Democratic and Republican. It is an effort to reach an agreement with the Russians. It should be based on a premise that most Republicans applaud because it goes back to an earlier statement by President Reagan that we should "trust but verify." The fact is, for over 1 calendar year, we have not had any inspectors on the ground in Russia to verify the safety and treaty compliance of their nuclear weaponry.

Senator LUGAR, on that side of the aisle, a man whom I greatly respect, supports this treaty, and if there is one person in the Senate who is probably more expert than any other when it comes to this issue of nuclear weapons, nuclear weapon control and modernization, it is Senator LUGAR of Indiana. He supports this treaty and wants it to come forward. I hope Senators feel he is right. I think he is.

I hope we can do this. The notion that we do not have time—I said at an appearance a few days ago that we had time to create the Department of Homeland Security in a lameduck session because two extraordinary Senators—SUSAN COLLINS of Maine, a Republican, and JOSEPH LIEBERMAN, then a Democrat of Connecticut—worked overtime to put together a bipartisan bill which we considered in a lameduck session and literally reorganized the intelligence structure of America. It was an amazing undertaking and one I believe has served us well. We did it in a lameduck session, and no one stood up and said: I object; do not go forward. I object; I need 2 weeks. People really worked together to get it done.

We can do it in that same spirit when it comes to the START treaty. Let's get that done. Let's get the tax provision done. Let's get funding the government done. And let's get the START treaty done before we go home. We can do this. We are capable of doing this. But an empty Chamber and empty desks and no Senators on the floor will not achieve that.

I am glad the Senator clarified that he is not stepping in the way of considering the START treaty with this ultimatum that was sent out from 42 Republican Senators. I wish we could do a few other things, too, such as extend unemployment benefits, but apparently there is an objection to that.

So I hope we can work forward from this point in a more positive way. I

truly value my friendship and the fact that I can serve with these two fine Senators from Tennessee. Although I spent a lot of time extolling the virtue of the senior Senator from Tennessee, I guarantee you, next time, I will extoll the virtues of the junior Senator so that he has a positive feeling about our relationship.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

Mr. CORKER. Mr. President, if I can just briefly indulge, I wish to thank the Senator, and actually, based on his closing comments, I think he may have actually signed the letter himself had it been presented, because I agree that we should fund the government, we should deal with the tax issue, and that if we did that, there would be ample time to deal with the START treaty. It is not to say we do not want to deal with all of those other issues; it is to say: Let's prioritize based on those things that are of most national significance.

The issue he recalled regarding homeland security was of national significance at the time. I think most Americans would agree that making sure the government functions beyond this Friday is of national significance.

So I thank him for his comments. I thank him for his good humor and tone.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, I also rise to talk about the importance of creating jobs and how the Republican plan is the exact opposite. We have on our desks this letter that was put forward that says there should be tax cuts for all Americans. Well, you know what, that is the Democratic plan. That is the plan we have been putting forward that would create tax cuts on the first \$250,000 that every single American makes. But if you scanned the letter the Republicans signed, you find in the fine print, down there in the third paragraph that, no, it is not tax cuts for all Americans that they want; they want a version that creates bonuses, paid by the taxpayer, for billionaires. Bonuses for billionaires. That is the only version they want to see debated, the only version they say they will vote for, and it is the sole goal they put as an obstacle to every other important piece of legislation to get America back to work.

We have been trying so hard this year to get job-creation bills on the floor of the Senate, and we have endured a recordbreaking number of filibusters.

When I came here as an intern back in 1976, bills were passed by majority vote. Upon rare occasion, someone would say an issue is so important as to obstruct the Senate. But not our Republican majority. Not this year in 2010. Not last year in 2009. No. My colleagues have said: It is our goal to paralyze the Senate. It is our goal not

only to prevent legislation from occurring but to damage the executive branch by obstructing nominations in unprecedented numbers and to damage the judicial branch by obstructing nominations.

This attack on the American system of government has gone way too far, and now my friends across the aisle say: Unless we get bonuses for billionaires, paid for by the taxpayers of the United States of America, we will block every effort to create jobs in this country. At some point, it needs to be said on the floor of the Senate—and so I am saying it now—that is simply wrong. It is misguided to put the top priorities to be billionaire bonuses. I think the American public weighed in on this in the discussion over Wall Street. It is wrong to fund those bonuses out of the pockets of working Americans who are paying their taxes, and it is certainly wrong to bring this body to a standstill once again in order to get those bonuses for billionaires.

I would like to ask my friends across the aisle to reconsider the substance of their vision for America, a vision in which ordinary workers fund extravagant bonuses for the richest Americans—how big a bonus? An average of \$100,000. Now, I can tell you, in my working-class neighborhood, there are very few people who earn \$100,000 a year. There are folks who might not earn \$100,000 in the course of multiple years because they are working for minimum wage. They may be earning, if they can get a full-time minimum wage job, \$16,000. If they are working two jobs and their spouse is working, maybe they can bring home \$30,000 or \$40,000.

So I would suggest that stopping the business of the Senate to create a \$100,000-per-taxpayer bonus—and I say "bonus" because it is on top of the tax cut they would get under the Democratic plan—is simply completely out of touch with the challenges faced by ordinary working Americans who are trying to make ends meet, who would like to see us spend the funds in our Treasury to create jobs because they know the best program for any single person is the opportunity to have a living-wage job. It not only creates the finances that shore up the foundations of the family, it creates a sense of pride, it creates a sense of work ethic, it provides a strong example to our children, it builds a family. But a \$100,000 bonus for the richest Americans does not build those financial foundations for working Americans, and funding it out of the pockets of the working Americans is absolutely one of the most diabolical plots I could have ever imagined—in fact, I couldn't probably have imagined. If it would have been in a novel that my colleagues are bringing the work of the Senate to a stop in order to do \$100,000 bonuses for the richest Americans, funded by the rest of the taxpayers, I would have said: No way. That plot is beyond anything that could possibly happen on the Senate

floor. But today we have it right here in writing that it has to be the billion-dollar bonus plan or none at all.

But at any point, the Senate can, by unanimous consent, come back to its senses and pursue that which builds our economy, builds opportunity for working Americans. There have been a host of bipartisan bills that have said: There is a strategy that is estimated to create more jobs than any other per dollar invested, and that is low-cost loans for energy-saving renovations. This core idea recognizes that very few of us can go out and put double-paned vinyl windows in our house or full insulation in our house because we do not have the money in our bank account for the upfront costs. But if we can get a low-cost loan, then we can, in fact, pay for those vinyl windows out of the savings on our electric bill.

This basic concept is a concept now embodied in the HOME Star bill, a bipartisan bill. It is the basic concept embodied in the Building Star bill, which aims more at commercial buildings. It is the same basic concept embodied in the Rural Energy Savings Program, which is not only a bipartisan bill but is fiercely advocated for by our rural electrical co-ops that understand this would be a tremendous value to Americans in rural America. Knowing we can bring the Senate back to do good work through unanimous consent, I am going to ask for such unanimous consent.

I will start with a bill, which is the rural energy savings plan bill, supported by rural co-ops across America so rural Americans such as those in rural Oregon, such as those in rural Illinois, such as those in rural Tennessee, such as those throughout rural America everywhere can pursue these low-cost, easy-to-arrange loans through their local electric co-op. One of the reasons people get excited about this concept is, it is not just about the fact that your house now functions a lot better with these energy-saving renovations. It is not just about the fact that now the monthly cost of your electric bill or your gas bill goes down, often more than your loan payments would be, but it is the fact that through this kind of conservation, we actually create jobs—installation jobs and jobs producing the products for those energy-saving installations. Because virtually every aspect, from caulk to pink fiberglass to double-paned windows, is made here in America, manufactured in America. So people know they are not only creating jobs locally, but they are creating jobs in manufacturing America. If we don't build things in America, we will not have a middle class in America. People understand this at their core.

There is something else they like about this. Every time we address our energy needs domestically, we are decreasing our demand for foreign oil. Why does that make Americans smile? Because we would rather have red, white, and blue American energy and

American energy savings than import oil from overseas. When we buy that oil from overseas, the money goes out of the economy. It doesn't go into the local grocery store. It doesn't go into the local retailer on Main Street. It doesn't build the financial foundations of American families. It goes to places such as Iraq and Saudi Arabia and Nigeria and Venezuela. What is happening with the money that goes overseas to places such as that? Some of it ends up in the hands of terrorists who oppose our policies around the world.

It has been said by national security experts that our current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are the first American wars where we are funding both sides. What they are referring to is our purchase of foreign oil. So when we engage in energy savings here, we are doing what is right for our economy and for our families and for our national security.

By the way, these types of jobs cannot be shipped overseas, installation cannot be shipped overseas. Not only are the materials made in America, the installation can't be shipped overseas. It is the perfect strategy to help address the challenges in our current economy. That is why I have some hope my colleagues across the aisle will join in this unanimous consent to get this bill done so we can help folks in rural America get back to work, improve their homes, shore up their financial foundations and, in the process, improve our national security.

I ask unanimous consent that the Agriculture Committee be discharged from further consideration of S. 3102; that the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration, the bill be read three times and passed, the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table, with no intervening action or debate, and that any statements relating to the measure be printed in the RECORD.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BEGICH). Is there objection?

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, there must be something about the interval between the Thanksgiving holiday and Christmas and the effect it has on our Democratic friends. Again, this year, as they did last year, they begin to disappear for hours at a time into a room together, without any Republicans or any other kind of person there to talk and they get excited about issues and they come together. They persuade each other that they are right, and then they rush to the Senate floor after several hours and offer a bill of the most urgent kind. In this case, it is about double-paned vinyl windows. Here we are. The Senator from Oregon, a good colleague, a distinguished friend—this may be a good bill, but he is asking by his request that we not debate, that we not amend, and that we just pass it.

He is saying, at the same time, that this must be the most urgent thing before us. When he is finished with his other matters, I wish to say a little bit

more. But let me reiterate what I have said over and over again. We have suggested to the majority leader that we focus on dealing with funding the government first, since we run out of money Friday, and deal with the tax issue next since taxes automatically go up the first of the year. After we have done those two things, we move to whatever the majority leader brings up. He may wish to bring up the new START treaty. He could bring up the new START treaty today. We said nothing about that in our letter. So all this talk I just heard has nothing to do with our letter, with what has been said on the floor.

I will have more to say about that in a moment. But we should fund the government, keep tax rates where they are. Then I think what the American people said to us was: Go home, bring this new Congress back, and let's begin to deal with the debt. We have a report of the debt commission coming out. We should be making it easier and cheaper to create private sector jobs. The best way to do that is not to raise taxes on anybody in the middle of an economic downturn. That makes it harder to create jobs and makes no sense. We want to do that first. Therefore, I object.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, I appreciate that my good friend from Tennessee rose to defend his caucus's letter. I certainly enjoy working with him. Here I am talking about energy efficiency. We have had the pleasure of working together on a bill that is about deployment of electric cars that can save enormous amounts of fuel and have many beneficial effects that I have been speaking to in regard to the importation of foreign oil, cutting off that flow of oil from abroad, and the American money that goes out to buy it. I certainly treasure that relationship, that working relationship. But we couldn't have a more different perspective. We couldn't have a broader disagreement on this issue. I have noted that the Democrats have laid out a plan that provides tax cuts for all Americans. But my good friend from Tennessee just noted he wants the version that has no increase on anyone.

What he didn't explain—but I will—is that the difference between the two is additional bonus tax cuts for the richest Americans. Those are the tax cuts that are \$100,000 per person. Those are the tax cuts that will create a \$700 billion addition to the national debt over the next 10 years. When I have families who are struggling to get by on the best jobs they can find—and those jobs are paying near minimum wage, and they are lucky to make \$16,000 to \$20,000 a year, if they can find a minimum wage job—is it justifiable to give bonuses paid by other taxpayers or by additional debt on our children to the richest Americans to the tune of \$100,000 each? I would say, no, that is a bad decision. In that regard, we are coming from different places.

I can tell my colleagues, if there is something in the air in this period between Thanksgiving and Christmas, it is that it further increases or should increase our connection to the fact that American families are suffering. They need jobs, and it is our duty to create them, not our role to charge working Americans so \$100,000 bonuses can be handed out to the richest Americans.

I thank the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, if I could reflect for a few minutes on what we have heard. There is a lot of passion in the Senate. This is actually a place where there is supposed to be. We come here to debate the most important issues that are before us. Let me talk first about what Republicans have suggested. I have said this a few times during the debate, but I wish to say it again. We have suggested setting priorities in the Senate. We have a right to be heard. There are 42 of us now. There will be 47 after January. It is not our voices. It is the voices of the American people. They expect to be heard. Just a few weeks ago they said to us and to the entire country:

We have had a government of too much taxes, too much debt, too much spending, and too many Washington takeovers. We would like Members of Congress to focus on making it easier and cheaper to create private sector jobs, No. 1; bring spending under control so we don't have such a debt, No. 2; and be smart about terror, No. 3. That is what we would like to do.

This lameduck session is a period after an election where people usually listen to the voters. So our recommended view is we should keep the tax rates where they are, fund the government, consider the debt commission's report, which we hope to receive this week, and go home and bring the new Congress back, which was just elected, to begin to deal with jobs, debt, and terror.

If the President feels it is sufficiently important for the new START treaty to be dealt with before Christmas, his majority leader can bring it up any day he wants to. He has a right to do that tonight, this afternoon. He can put it on the floor, and we can have several days of debate. But remember, the government runs out of money Friday. Tax forms are being filled out because taxes automatically go up in January for almost everybody, and we are saying: Why have we waited so late to deal with this? Let's do it.

There is nothing wrong with priority in government. In fact, I respectfully suggest that for the last couple years the lack of priorities has been a big part of the problem. We have had a lot of very smart people in the government, but managers, leaders usually say: Here is the most important thing. Let's work on it until we fix it.

We do not have to go far back in history to have General Eisenhower, run-

ning for President in 1952, saying: I shall go to Korea. He did not announce 23 different things he needed to do. He said: I shall go to Korea. In October he said that, and in November he was elected. By the beginning of December he was in Korea, and he said: I shall spend my time on this until I get it done, and the people of the world and of the United States believed in him because they knew that a President of the United States who throws himself into almost any subject, with as much as he has for as long as it takes, can get a pretty good result.

We should be doing that with jobs. There is no magic formula on that. But virtually every economist who has testified—either those called by the Democrats or the Republicans—have said to us this simple fact that I bet most Americans would agree with: Raising taxes on anybody in the middle of an economic downturn makes it harder to create jobs. If our No. 1 priority is to make it easier and cheaper to create private sector jobs, raising taxes makes no sense as a policy. That is our position.

We would like for those tax rates to be permanent. The President's former Budget Director, Mr. Orszag, after he left the President's employ just a few months ago, said: Well, perhaps a 2-year extension of the current tax rates would be a good idea because it does make it harder to create jobs. He is aware, as all of us are aware, that for 16 out of the last 17 months unemployment has been at more than 9.5 percent.

So it is all right to consider a bill to deal with double-paned windows, but when tax rates are going up on everybody in America, including the job creators, if we want to take a step toward making it easier and cheaper to create private sector jobs, not more government jobs, we need to keep the tax rates right where they are right now and send that signal to the American people. All we are saying to the Democratic majority is, let's do that first, let's fund the government, and then let's go to the other issues.

The President, to his great credit, had a meeting yesterday which had a decidedly different tone to it. I had been mystified by the relationship of the President and the Republican leader over the last 2 years. I came up here 40 years ago in the Senate as a young aide. I remember Senator Howard Baker's story of when he first came here. I was his legislative assistant. He said he was sitting in there in the Republican leader's office, the phone rang, and it was President Johnson calling Senator Dirksen. He heard Senator Dirksen say: No, Mr. President, I can't come down and have a drink with you tonight. I did that last night and Louella is very mad at me.

Then, about 30 minutes later, there was a big rustle outside and the noise came up and two beagles came through the door with the President behind them and the President said to the Re-

publican leader: Everett, if you won't come have a drink with me, I will have one with you.

David Gergen told me that President Johnson called the Republican leader at 5 o'clock almost every afternoon. That was the kind of relationship they had.

Yet for the first 2 years, the current President and the Republican leader had only one one-on-one meeting because the whole attitude around here was: We won the election. We will write the bill.

So you jammed the health care law through last Christmas, which nobody had a chance to read, feeling pretty good about it. So there have been immediate, multiple efforts to repeal it from the day it passed.

Compare that with the relationship 40 years ago when the civil rights bill passed. It was written in the Republican leader's office, even though the Democratic majority was large and the President was a Democrat, because they not only wanted to pass it, they wanted it to be supported by the country. When it was passed, even though Senator Russell, for whom one of the buildings here is named, had opposed it for years—the Civil Rights Act of 1968—he went back to Georgia and said: It is the law of the land. We should enforce it, because he respected the process by which it had been done.

So this attitude that we won the election, we will write the bill, we will jam it down your throat whether you like it or not—that was the last 2 years, but that is over. When 47 Republicans come in, it is going to be a balanced Senate. There is going to be a change toward more balance, and that is an important part of what the American people voted for just a few weeks ago.

The President, to his credit, recognizes that. He had a meeting yesterday at the White House which had a decidedly different tone to it. Everybody who was a part of it says that, both Democrats and Republicans. One thing they talked about was taxes. We have to deal with it. So they formed a little group, and they are busy trying to work that out. The other thing is fund the government. We run out of money Friday. We are busy trying to work that out.

On the New START treaty, senators have very strong opinions: Senator KYL, Senator CORKER, Senator LUGAR. We respect the President on matters of national security, and if he says something is important, it is important to us, even if he is a Democratic President and we are Republicans. So the majority leader may want to bring that up. But he is the majority leader. It is up to him to bring it up. We cannot do that until we have the majority, which we hope we do someday. So he can bring it up.

So we have said: Let's set a couple of priorities around here: deal with taxes, fund the government, and then if there is time left, Mr. Majority Leader, bring

up what you want. If you want to bring up a bill about double-paned windows, that is fine. If you want to bring up don't ask, don't tell, that will take a week of debate. If you want to bring up a bill about this, that or the other, that is fine. You set the priorities.

There is one other thing I heard during this discussion: Why aren't we working?

I will tell you why we are not working. It is because of the schedule of the Democratic leader. Forty times he has brought up legislation, and then he said there will be no amendment and no debate. That is like having the Grand Ole Opry open and saying: There will be no singing. That is what we do. We offer amendments. We debate on behalf of the American people. This is the only body in the world where you have unlimited debate and unlimited amendment.

When you bring up any bill, whether it is the double-paned windows bill that was so urgently presented a moment ago, whether it is the New START treaty, which has to do with our nuclear modernization and our national security, we bring it up, hopefully, after it has had careful consideration by the committees, where the military experts and the foreign policy experts have weighed in, and then we have a debate and everyone gets to offer their amendments and everyone gets to say what they think about those amendments. If we have to stay Monday night, we should stay Monday night—and Tuesday night and Wednesday night and we can even stay Friday. We have not voted on one Friday this year. That is not because of the Republican schedule. We are not in charge of the schedule. So, why is there nobody here to debate? Because there is nothing to debate. The Democratic leader brings up a bill and then he says there will be no amendment and no debate.

My hope is that as a result of this more evenly balanced Senate and the good will of the Democratic leader, whom I greatly respect, and the Republican leader—he and Senator REID are very much veterans of the Senate. They respect this institution greatly. I would like to see us get back to the point at which we were not very long ago.

I can remember the Senate in the days of the late Senator Byrd and Senator Baker, with whom I first came to the Senate as a staff member. They basically had an agreement that worked like this: Senator Baker was majority leader for 4 years, Senator Byrd majority leader for 4 years, but they led their parties for 8 years. When they did, Senator Baker would say to the committees: Don't bring a bill to the floor unless it has the chairman and the ranking minority committee member both agreeing to it. Then, when it came to the floor, they would say: All right, let everybody offer their amendments. There might be 300 amendments. Then, after a while, they would offer a motion to agree to have no

more amendments, and usually they would get that. Then they would, by discussion, narrow that down to a number and then people would get their amendments. You might have to be here late one night. You might have to be here Friday. You might have to be here Saturday. Senators would say: Well, I wonder how important this amendment is. But the American people were heard on the floor of the Senate.

So it is my great hope that in the new Congress, where there will be a relatively even number of Senators—Democrats will still be setting the agenda, they can bring up whatever they wish—I would hope what we agree to do is to go back to this body being what it was and can be and should be.

We have 16 new Senators, 3 of them Democratic, 13 Republican. They ran for this office in very difficult races. It is not easy to do these days. They are here not just for their voices to be heard but for the voices of the people of their States to be heard—for the people of Kentucky, for the people of Wyoming, for the people of Pennsylvania, for the people of Delaware. They want to be heard here.

If we bring up the New START treaty or the double-paned window bill or the tax bill or whatever it is, the Senator from Delaware, the Senator from Pennsylvania, the Senator from Tennessee ought to have a chance to amend it, ought to have a chance to be heard. Then, after we do that, we can decide: OK. That is enough of that. Let's have a vote.

That is the way we do things. I think we can do that. I have seen it happen time and time again. We did it on the energy bill. We tried it on the immigration bill. Sometimes it works; sometimes it does not. It is a great way to legislate. So it would again be a joy to be a Member of the Senate.

This period between Thanksgiving and Christmas is not a great time to do very much. We have been here for 2 years. We just had an election. We are waiting for the new Members to come. They have their marching orders. I said to some of my friends the other day: My friends on the Democratic side keep insisting on an encore for a concert that drew a lot of boos.

I think what most Americans would like for us to do is keep the tax rates right where they are, fund the government before it runs out of money, consider the proposals for reducing the debt, and go home. If the President thinks it is important for us to deal with the New START treaty before Christmas, then he might say a word to the Democratic leader that after we deal with taxes and fund the government, that maybe that ought to be the next order of business instead of the double-paned window bill or any other variety of bills, all of which may be fine legislation. But you just do not walk in here 3 weeks before Christmas with some bill with nobody here and ask it be passed by unanimous consent.

That is not the way the American people want us to do business, and that does not give this body the respect it deserves.

So I greatly appreciate my friends on the other side and their passion for their point of view. I respect that passion. I think one of the cardinal rules of this body is never to question the motive of another Senator and always to respect the passion and point of view of another Senator. But I would like for us to get back to the point where you bring up something and we debate it—not you bring up something and you cut off amendments, you cut off debate, and then you do not do anything for a week. That is why nobody is here.

I will conclude with these remarks, by just restating our position. We sent this letter at the beginning of the week saying that the 42 Republican Senators want to use our voices to say that first we should fund the government, since we run out of money by the end of the week, and, second, we should deal with taxes so we can prevent a tax increase on anybody in the middle of an economic downturn. Then we should go to any other legislative item the majority leader wishes. Of course, he is free to bring up something like the New START treaty any time he wants to.

That seems, to me, to be a very reasonable approach, presented at the right time, in the right way, during a time when the President and the Republican and Democratic leaders are meeting together, when negotiations are going on about what the tax bill might be, when discussions are going on about how to fund the government, and when we are all in meetings right through this stretch about whether we are modernizing our nuclear weapons sufficiently so we can, in good conscience, vote to ratify the New START treaty.

Those are the most important issues, and that is what we should be talking about this month.

I thank the Presiding Officer and yield the floor.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

JOB CREATION AND SPENDING

Mr. LEMIEUX. Mr. President, I rise today to talk about the issues and the topics this body badly needs to get to. Just a month ago there was an election in this country, and the people of this country spoke loudly and clearly. What they said is they wanted this Congress to focus on two things: No. 1, they wanted us to focus on creating jobs. This is the most difficult economy anyone who is working now has ever had to experience.