better Senators and in many cases great Senators. KAY BAILEY HUTCHISON is a great Senator. She worked her guts out the whole time she was here. She is still here, but she is going to retire at this time and she has represented Texas well.

All I can say is she has been my friend all this time. When I needed help from her, she was always there. I tried to be there for her when she needed help as well. She has not only been a delight, but she is around but a very intelligent lawyer. She fought for what she believed—most of which I believed in—in a way nobody could truly ever get mad at KAY BAILEY HUTCHISON.

She is a wonderful person, wonderful mother, and we are going to miss her terribly. This is a body where we could use a few more women Senators—maybe a lot more than a few. They are very good people who work very hard and do a whole lot of good for the constituents of whom is KAY BAILEY HUTCHISON.

I remember at times when I had difficulties with the BRAC system and difficulties with special NASA problems, and so forth, we always worked together. We could always count on her to come up with intelligent solutions to some of the problems that should not have existed but did.

I have personally appreciated her very much during those times and in so many other ways as we worked together on legislation to help this country and as we worked to represent our respective States. I have so much respect for Texas, the people of Texas, and what they stand for. I have great respect for these Texan Senators who are two of the best we have ever had in the Senate.

Senator HUTCHISON has been an exemplary Senator, not just for women but for all of us. She has also set some standards that I think both women and male Senators are going to have to try to emulate.

I just want to say to the Senator that we love her, we appreciate her, and we wish her the very best. We are going to miss her. This is one Senator who will miss her greatly, and I want her to know that. All I can say is God be with her.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Mississippi.

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, I am pleased to recognize my colleague and commending and congratulating our distinguished colleague from Texas. Her service in the Senate has truly been outstanding and she has made an impact in our Committee on Appropriations. We have deliberated about the fiscal year, all the Federal agencies and departments of the Federal Government. She has been very careful. She is very serious about her responsibilities, and I am glad to be here today to wish her well in the years ahead and compliment her on a very distinguished career in the Senate.

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, Michigan and Texas have much in common, despite the fact they are North vs. South, cowboy boots vs. snowshoes, mesquite vs. pine.

One of the things we have in common is water. Our States are, economically, historically, and culturally tied to one another. Of Mexi-co, Michigan to the Great Lakes. And this shared interest has afforded me the pleasure of working alongside Senator KAY BAILEY HUTCHISON, a true Texas pioneer.

As the lead cosponsor of the Harbor Maintenance Act, Senator HUTCHISON has been an invaluable ally in the effort to ensure that America’s harbors receive the maintenance funding they need to stay open to commerce. Her efforts were instrumental in recruiting 37 cosponsors on our bill and in securing language regarding harbor maintenance for the first time in a transportation bill. Her efforts have made a significant difference in the lives of the thousands of American workers whose jobs are directly tied to well-maintained harbors, from the Port of Galveston to the scores of ports dotting Michigan’s shoreline.

Senator HUTCHISON has shown important leadership on other transportation issues, such as a more equitable formula for Federal surface transportation funding, and for adequate funding for State maritime academies, including academies in Texas and Michigan, that help meet the needs of our commercial shipping industry as well as the Department of Defense.

She has been an able and dedicated advocate for our ports. She pioneered the concept of the home-maker IRA, which helped millions of American women achieve greater retirement security. She has energetically pushed for stronger science and educational programs, including the establishment of a groundbreaking medical, engineering, and science academy in her State.

We shouldn’t be surprised at these and other successes. When she first graduated from the University of Texas Law School, she bumped up against the misguided tendencies of the law firms at the time to dismiss female candidates, no matter how talented. Undaunted, she walked into a local TV station and asked for a job as a reporter and became the State’s first female television reporter. She took a detour, but her experience covering politics led to the Texas House of Representatives, the State treasurer’s office, and eventually the first Texan woman elected to the U.S. Senate.

The Senate will miss her dedication, her quite effectiveness, her ability to seek practical, bipartisan solutions. She has made many a history-making history, and I wish her the best in whatever history-making endeavors she turns to next.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, I rise also to congratulate and thank a terrific Senator, KAY BAILEY HUTCHISON, and to wish her much success in her further efforts. I know she will provide great leadership in whatever she is doing. It has been wonderful to watch over the years, seeing the pictures of the Texan Senators and how they have grown, celebrating and going to baby showers. On top of all the other accolades today, Senator HUTCHISON is a devoted and wonderful mother to two beautiful children.

As everyone has said, she is the first and only woman to represent Texas in the Senate and will always have that distinction of opening doors and barriers. I know she agrees with me that once the doors open, we want to make sure more women are able to walk through that door as well.

I wish to congratulate her for all she has done. We have come together to fight for opportunities for women around the world at the Senate Women’s Caucus on Burma and other efforts she has led. I am very supportive of adding her name to the spousal IRA law. I think that is a very fitting tribute, and I am hopeful we can get that done as well.

I just want to congratulate her. I do want to have the opportunity to talk about something else, but I see my friend wanting to say a few words.

Mrs. HUTCHISON. Mr. President, if the Senator would yield for just a moment to let me say thank you to all the wonderful Senators who have spoken and said nice things. It is one of the few times Senators sort of pause and wish someone well, as they are leaving. It has truly been very touching, and I appreciate the kind words of the Senator from Michigan. It has been a distinct pleasure to have colleagues on both sides of the aisle feel we have done so much together. My hope is that as I am going out the door, the collegiality of the Senate will never change.

Thank you.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE APPROPRIATIONS ACT—Continued

THE FARM BILL

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, I also wish to speak about the importance of passing the farm bill and thank the Senator from Texas for her support as we passed a strong bipartisan farm bill in the Senate back in June when sent it over it the House of Representatives.

We have had 80 days since the farm bill expired. That is 80 days that farm families and small businesses have been holding their breath and wanting to know what is going to happen in rural America and agriculture across the country. I have not given up, nor have my colleagues here. Certainly, my partner here in the Senate, Senator ROBERTS, and our partners in the House, including Chairman LUCAS and
Ranking Member Peterson, all stand ready if we can get a positive signal from the House Republican leadership to get this done. There is no doubt in my mind that we can do it. For everyone listening, the issue is not differences in the commodity title, which I have uphold in this cloth that we work together and work out; the question is, as we are seeing efforts being worked on for a larger deficit reduction package, whether the House leadership will think rural America and agriculture are important enough to include. That is the question. It is whether the savings we have achieved in deficit reduction by eliminating unwarranted taxpayer subsidies and creating other efficiencies and tackling waste, fraud, and abuse, whether that is worthy of a priority in the effort that is being worked on. We have continued to point out the fact that the 16 million people across America who work because of agriculture deserve to be a priority.

I thank my colleagues on the committee in the Senate for making it a priority and for passing a bipartisan bill in July. For the life of me—I am appalled continually that the Republican leadership of the U.S. House of Representatives does not consider the security and the livelihood of 16 million people who live in rural America across this country to be a priority. We are including a final list of things that need to get done. We are not giving up. We are coming back next week, and we are going to be here, and we are ready at any moment to be able to do what we need to do.

Across this aisle, colleagues have worked in good faith in the Senate, and I am very grateful. I appreciate the support of the Presiding Officer in urging to get this done. We had a bipartisan meeting on both sides of the aisle who have come together to make tough decisions. We are willing to make some more, but we are not willing to give up on 16 million people who live in rural communities—small towns such as where I grew up in Claire, MI—who are counting on us to do the right thing and to give them the ability to plan, the ability to get help for the disasters they have seen, and the ability to know they can move forward and care for their families.

We have a disaster bill right now on the floor. As chair of the Agriculture Committee, there is no way I am going to allow a disaster amendment without being able to offer an amendment that relates to agriculture disaster which we have fully paid for in the farm bill.

So we are willing to do two tracks here if we come together, which I hope we will, on a disaster package. Certainly, people in rural America—farmers, not just this country—have felt the disasters other communities have felt. So I am proud to join with Senator Merkley and Senator McCaskill and others in putting forward the portions of the farm bill that deal with disaster relief as part of this package which is now moving forward. I hope we will have an opportunity to vote and come together on that, which is so important. That does not negate the disaster amendment bill. That is our desire to do that or the fact that we are laser-focused until the last moment we have available on getting it done.

Let me remind my colleagues that farming is the riskiest business in the world. There are a lot of risky things we can do. There are a lot of disasters that have happened.

I was pleased to have the opportunity to join with our colleague from New Jersey, Senator Menendez, last week to visit some of the coastline in New Jersey and to be a part of a group that looked at the devastation there. And there is no question, it is up to our country at times such as these, when people are wiped out, their homes are ruined, and they need the ability to come together and act on behalf of citizens in those States. I strongly support doing that. It is also our responsibility to acknowledge and recognize and help others around the country who are facing disaster now.

As I said before, there is no business that is riskier than farming. Thank goodness we have people who are willing to stay in farming and ranching regardless of what happens with the weather. Thank goodness they have a strong crop insurance system in place, and we strengthened that even more, which is incredibly important, in this farm bill. But we have had disasters happen that need to be addressed for those who farm for us.

In the spring we experienced late freezes in Michigan and New York and in Pennsylvania that wiped out food crops. A lot of small family farms, farms in northern Michigan, were wiped out. In my home State, late freezes and a spring frost caused them to lose practically their entire crop right off the bat. It warmed up, the buds came out, and then they had a deep freeze that killed everything. Our growers produce 75 percent of the U.S. supply of cherries. That is around 270 million pounds. The cherry producers experienced a 98-percent loss.

In our amendment in the disaster bill and in the farm bill, we give them some help because of the crop year this year having to pay to maintain the orchards and the trees, eating the costs and hoping the trees will bounce back next year and produce a crop. So they have all the costs of maintaining everything but no revenue coming in.

Cherry producers were also forced to fight spreading diseases such as cherry leaf spot and bacterial canker, making the trees even more costly to maintain and at risk of loss. They didn’t just lose their crop but had to invest a lot of money to save their orchards without having any dollars coming in. We give them some help. It doesn’t cover all the losses but some help to be able to stay in business. We do that through the farm bill.

Apple producers in most areas of Michigan and in New York and in Pennsylvania had about a 40-percent crop destruction, so they lost 60 percent. Think of one thing losing 60 percent of its income for a year or, in the case of cherries, 98 percent. We have things in place to support them when that happens. That is why we have disaster assistance, and that is why we have some speculate that we have something called the farm bill when things like this happen in agriculture or disaster assistance for agriculture, as we are proposing assistance for.

Also, in the summer we saw record-breaking drought, as we know. We heard story after story about families whose crops were left withering in the fields, entire corn crops devastated in Iowa, and wildfires in Colorado killing 2 people and forcing residents to evacuate 340 homes and causing the wildfires cost the State of Oklahoma more than $400 million this year alone according to a report that has just been produced by Oklahoma State University. That includes crops and livestock property loss from wildfires, and emergency costs.

I have heard so many times from my friend, the distinguished ranking member from Kansas, about what has happened in Kansas. We had the opportunity to be there and to hear from people directly in Kansas. My staff has walked in the field and seen that there is nothing there because of the drought and what it means.

This year represented the worst drought since 1956. That is a disaster. At the height of the drought this summer, over 80 percent of the contiguous United States experienced drought conditions—80 percent. We still have 11 States with exceptional drought conditions. Seventeen States across the country, in the Northeast, the Midwest, the South, the Great Plains, the Southwest, and on the west coast—every region except the Pacific Northwest has suffered from long-term drought.

Sixty percent of the farms in the United States experienced drought this year, and we saw severe droughts in 57 percent of farmland acres. By the end of this last October, over half of the pastures and ranges in the United States were rated poor to very poor. And 1,692 counties in the country, spread across 36 States, were declared a primary disaster area because of the drought.

By the way, there are a whole lot of issues around weather that we need to be talking about and dealing with, and we need to be doing that in the new year.

So this is what is happening for farmers and ranchers. On May 20 only 3 percent of our corn crop was rated poor or very poor, but by the end of September over 50 percent was rated poor or very poor.
poor. Our cattle inventories were at a 60-year low as farmers and ranchers have had to sell off their breeding stock because they don’t have the hay or grazing land to feed them. Low water levels in the Mississippi are affecting grain shipments, threatening to affect grain prices early next year as farmers try to plant their crops. We have seen reports that grain is piling up in elevators while farmers try to figure out alternative routes of shipping their products to market.

Hurricanes left hundreds of thousands of acres underwater. Hurricane Isaac caused destruction like nothing we could have imagined. As I said, I saw the damage up close from Hurricane Sandy. Weather disasters have destroyed millions of acres of farmland and affected millions of families in every State and corner of this country.

We are considering a disaster bill today. Well, the farm bill is a disaster bill, but it only has disaster assistance but it creates 5-year certainty for our growers, who deserve it. They deserve to know what is going to be happening. They deserve to know so they can go to the banker and talk about planning for the coming crop year and be able to plan as well as get immediate help.

I support passing a disaster bill, and agriculture should be a part of this, but it is not enough. We need to do that, and we need to have a 5-year farm bill in order to create the certainty we need.

We have spent so much time focusing on how we move forward with agriculture today and create the right kind of risk management tools for the future. I am very proud of what we have been able to do.

We—the members of the Agriculture Committees—have also been, frankly, the only committee to step up voluntarily and put money on the table for deficit reduction. We did it during deficit reduction talks. We have done it in the House and the Senate as we have written the farm bills. We are willing to be a part of the solution.

One of the things I find very frustrating is that if, in fact, it doesn’t get done this year, those who don’t want reform, those who want government payments even in good times may very well get another year of government payments that we can’t afford and taxpayers should not be paying for. So this really is about reform.

I hear colleagues talking on the other side of the aisle all the time about the things we shouldn’t be doing and the things we shouldn’t be paying for. Well, I would encourage them to join us in the fight to get a farm bill done to stop an area where we have all agreed we should not be providing government payments in the area of direct payments. There are two reasons the House who want to keep that going as long as possible, but it is not right in an era when we have to make tough choices for families and every other part of the budget to allow that to happen.

We passed a reform bill. We tackled fraud and abuse in nutrition. We consolidated and saved money. We tackled payments that have been given out for years that don’t make sense and that the government can’t afford. We listened to farmers to strengthen risk management tools, predominantly crop insurance. With all the weather disasters I have described this year, if we can strengthen crop insurance, we are going to give them a better safety net going forward for whatever comes in the coming year.

So there is a lot on the line. There is a lot on the line for 16 million people who have jobs because of agriculture and the food industry. There is a lot on the line for people who just want us to come together and work together. In light of everything going on, we did that kind of a farm bill. They did that in the House in committee.

All the Speaker and the leadership have to do is say: We care about rural America. We care about 16 million people who work every day, who are folks who do their jobs, and when the jobs have to get done, whether it is early in the morning or late at night, they do it, and they expect us to do the same thing.

There is no excuse—none—that makes any sense not to get a 5-year farm bill done, not to make sure we have the disaster assistance that is needed for farmers and ranchers, and not to get reforms that cut back on taxpayer subsidies we should not be providing, and the deficit reduction that is critically important as we come up to tell the American public and Congress we should cut Social Security.

I wish to thank everyone in this body for working with us to get a bill done of which I think we should all be very proud. We are going to continue to push as we go forward, hoping that at some moment the Senate Republican leadership will look around at the small towns in their districts and decide they matter and that they will pass a 5-year farm bill.

Thank you.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, as we continue to debate how to prevent this so-called fiscal cliff and how to go forward in deficit reduction, my Republican friends, apparently, want the American people to believe that making the wealthiest people in this country pay a few dollars more in taxes would amount to some kind of terrible sacrifice, and they are vicious and they are dishonest.

Yesterday President Obama’s initial proposal to do away with all of Bush’s tax breaks for people making $250,000 a year or more. I guess their new proposal coming out of the House is that only people making $1 million a year or more would see their tax rates go up.

Let me say a word about hardship and a word about sacrifice and it is not that the problems are that of the wealthiest people and of the billionaire celebrities, but of the people who are doing phenomenally well and who are being asked to pay a few dollars more to help us deal with deficit reduction, at a time when their tax rates are at a historically low rate. It is not equivalent sacrifice.

Veterans organizations that were there with me to say no to the so-called chained CPI—which would cut benefits for disabled veterans, which would cut benefits for widows and kids who lost their husband or their father in Iraq or Afghanistan and would be a thing of the past with the bipartisan reforms we have already done it. Some of them have come back from our wars without a leg, without an arm, many of whom have suffered as a result.

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This morning, in the Veterans’ Affairs Committee, I held a press conference, which included every major veterans organization in this country, representing millions and millions of veterans, people who have put their lives on the line to defend our country and many of whom have suffered as a result.

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What all of them said—and some of them made this statement far more poignantly than I can—is when we talk about sacrifice, they are there; they have already done it. Some of them have come back from our wars without arms or legs or maybe they have lost their eyesight. They have sacrificed, and it is not morally absurd to be asking on one hand the sacrifice of a multi-millionaire, asking him to pay a few dollars more in taxes, with asking people who have lost their limbs defending this country to make a sacrifice. That is not equivalent sacrifice.

Veterans of America, the American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Disabled American Veterans, the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, the Paralyzed Veterans of America, the Veterans of the United States Army, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Wounded Warrior Project, the Military Order of the Purple Heart, the National Military Family Association, the Vietnam Veterans of America, the National Guard Association, the Wounded Warrior Project, the United States Army, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Wounded Warrior Project, the United Spinal Association, VetsFirst.

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benefits for disabled veterans, raise taxes on low-income workers.

Let me tell you what this—what some call a tweak—would do. In terms of the chained CPI, more than 3.2 million disabled veterans receive disability compensation from the Veterans’ Administration—3.2 million veterans. They would see a reduction—a significant reduction—in their benefits. Under the chained CPI, a disabled veteran who started receiving VA disability benefits at age 30 would have their benefits cut by more than $1,400 at age 45, $2,300 at age 55, and $3,200 at age 65.

Does anybody in their right mind think the American people want to see benefits cut for men and women who sacrificed, who lost limbs defending their country? Are we going to balance the budget on their backs?

I challenge anyone who supports a chained CPI to go to Walter Reed hospital, visit with the men and women who have lost their legs, lost their arms, lost their eyesight as a result of their service in Afghanistan or Iraq.

Come Veterans Day and come Memorial Day, all the politicians go out and give speeches of how much we love our veterans. It is great to give a good speech on Memorial Day or Veterans Day but what about standing up for them now?

We have also made a commitment to the surviving spouses and children who have lost a loved one in battle by providing them with Dependency Indemnity Compensation benefits that average less than $17,000 a year. Do my colleagues truly think we should be cutting benefits for surviving spouses who lost their husband in Iraq or Afghanistan?

Further, we have made a promise to every American; that is, that above and beyond benefits for disabled vets, what we have said is a couple things: For those who are older, we have said Social Security will be there for them in their old age, in their time of need or if they become disabled, and we have said those benefits will also keep up with inflation.

Today, over 9 million veterans receive Social Security benefits as part of the tens of millions of Americans who receive Social Security, and more than 770,000 veterans receive Social Security disability benefits.

Let us be clear what this chained CPI would do because I think there are some people—I guess if someone is a Wall Street CEO guy and is making millions of dollars a year and has a great retirement package, when we are talking about hundreds of dollars a year, that is what they use for lunch. They do not have to worry about keeping their house warm or buying food. That is not within their world view.

Under the chained CPI—we should all understand this is no small tweak; this is not some administrative issue—under the chained CPI, average seniors who retire at age 65 would see their Social Security benefits cut by about $650 a year when they reach age 75. Again, I understand if someone is a Wall Street CEO, if one is a millionaire, hey, $650 a year is not a lot of money. But let me tell you, if you are a senior citizen living in Vermont or Minnesota and you have to worry about heating your home, you have to worry about putting gas in your car, you have to worry about prescription drugs, $650 a year is a lot of money, if you are living on $15-, $16-, $18,000 a year of income, most of that coming from Social Security. So if you retire at age 65, it is about a $650 cut when you reach age 75, and it is more than $1,000 a year when you turn 85.

I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the Record a chart which talks about annual cuts in Social Security benefits under the chained CPI.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the Record, as follows:
Mr. SANDERS. What the chart shows is that at age 75 the cut would be $653, a 3.7-percent cut; at age 85 it would be $1,139, a 6.5-percent cut; and at age 95, it would be $1,611, a 9.2-percent cut.

The rich are getting richer. We have growing wealth and income inequality in America. The wealthiest people in this country are paying the lowest effective tax rate in decades. We are going to balance the budget on the backs of seniors trying to get by on $15,000, $18,000 a year? Is that what this Congress stands for? I certainly hope not.

The fact of the matter is, the current formula for calculating COLAs is not too generous. And whenever I speak in Vermont, I say to seniors—and I speak to them quite often—there are some folks in Washington who think that your COLA—the formulation and how we reach a COLA for you—is too generous. Do you know what happens. They laugh. They invariably break out in laughter because they know that in the last 3 years, two out of those years they got zero COLA. They know this year they are going to get a 1.7-percent
COLA, which is one of the lowest COLA increases ever.

They also know the current formulation for a COLA does not fully take into account the escalating costs of prescription drugs and health care, which most seniors fund with their money. They are not spending their money on flat-screen TVs or iPhones or iPads. They are spending their money heating their homes, buying food, paying for prescription drugs, and paying for health care. These costs are growing much faster than general inflation. I think what most economists would tell you is that the current formulation for determining COLAs with Social Security is inadequate, too low, rather than, as the advocates of the chained CPI would suggest, that they are too high.

Furthermore—this has not been widely discussed—moving to a chained CPI would also result in an across-the-board tax increase of more than $60 billion over the next 10 years that will disproportionately hurt low-income and middle-income families the most. In fact, two-thirds of the tax increase under a chained CPI would impact Americans earning less than $250,000 a year, and many would be impacted by losing the earned income tax credit and the child care tax credit.

Maybe I am missing something, but I thought I heard from the White House and here on the floor of the Senate that we are going to raise taxes for people earning less than $250,000 a year. Maybe I am wrong. But I thought I heard that many times. Well, if you vote for the chained CPI, in fact you heard that many times. Well, if you heard that many times, including low-income working families. Under the chained CPI, low-income workers would see their taxes go up by 1 1/2 percent, mainly by cutting the earned income tax credit and the refundable child care tax credit. So if we are going to raise taxes for people earning less than $250,000 a year, we better reject this chained CPI.

Furthermore, I must tell you that I am disappointed, because I thought I heard a few weeks ago my friends in the White House telling us that Social Security—telling us truthfully, correctly—has nothing to do with deficit reduction. And Social Security is fully funded by the payroll tax, and that Social Security should be off the table in terms of deficit reduction. I heard that many, many times. So I wonder how Social Security has suddenly gotten back on the table, including a chained CPI, with automatic cuts to seniors and disabled veterans.

I think we should deal with Social Security. I think Senator Dick Durbin made a good point: Let’s deal with it. Let’s deal with it separately. Let’s determine how, in a fair way, we can make Social Security solvent for the next 50 or 75 years without cutting benefits.

I have ideas on that. Senator Begich has ideas on that. Senator Harkin and others. And the Presiding Officer has been thinking about ways that we make Social Security solvent and strong for 75 years without cutting benefits. Let’s keep that discussion, but not as part of a deficit reduction bill when Social Security has had nothing to do with deficit reduction.

I do not often quote Ronald Reagan, but this is what Ronald Reagan said on October 7, 1984: It was absolutely right. Ronald Reagan:

Social Security has nothing to do with the deficit. Social Security is totally funded by the payroll tax levied on employer and employee. If you reduce the outgo of Social Security, that money would not go into the general fund to reduce the deficit, it would go into the Social Security Trust Fund, so Social Security would be acceptable to the American people. Let’s keep that discussion. I do not think we should do with planning the budget or erasing or lowering the deficit. October 7, 1984: Reagan was right. I have to tell you that when Barack Obama was campaigning for President in 2008, he is the AARP on September 6, 2008, that:

John McCain’s campaign has suggested that the best answer for the growing pressures on Social Security might be to cut Social Security and raise the retirement age. Let me be clear. I will do neither.

September 6, 2008, Barack Obama. One of the astounding things about Congress and the inside-the-beltway mentality is how out of touch it is with reality. Americans are thinking about Social Security and Social Security is in the American job security, that they are too high.

What they also said, at a time when the rich are getting richer, yes, they should be asked to contribute more in taxes. I mentioned earlier that to the best of my knowledge, every single veterans organization has made it clear that they are strongly opposed to the so-called chained CPI, which would cut benefits for disabled vets.

The AARP and the every other seniors organization, including the groups to protect Social Security, the National Committee to Protect Social Security and Medicare, and others are saying do not cut Social Security benefits. The AFL-CIO has been very vigorous in protecting working families, saying do not cut Social Security, do not cut Medicare, do not cut Medicaid.

Here we are, the American people overwhelmingly want the wealthy to pay more in taxes and not cut Social Security and Medicare and Medicaid, organizations representing tens of millions of people are saying, ask the wealthy to pay more in taxes, not cut Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid.

What are we talking about here? We are talking about cutting Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid, and asking the wealthy to pay more but nowhere near as much as they should be asked to pay.

We wonder. We wonder why Congress has a 9-percent favorability rating. I will tell you that my phones today and I do not think this is an organized effort, by the way—my phones in my office—and you might want to check your offices, but my office phones are bouncing off the hook from people in Vermont and all over this country saying: Do not cut Social Security.

So I would say to the American people, right now a deal is being hatched which would cut Social Security and benefits for disabled veterans, raising taxes on low-income workers. If you think that is a bad idea, you might want to hold your Senator or Member of the House.

Let me conclude by saying, in my view, deficit reduction is a serious issue. We, as you know, have already cut $1.5 trillion in programs as a result of the agreements in 2010 and 2011, and up to this point the billionaires and millionaires have not contributed one nickel—one nickel—more in taxes. So deficit reduction is a serious issue.

I look forward to playing an active role in making sure that we address that serious fiscal cliff. But I will do everything in my power to make sure we do not balance the budget on the backs of veterans, the elderly, the children, the sick, and the poor, and low-income working people.

PUBLIC WANTS COMPROMISE ON FISCAL CLIFF. BUT SUBJECTS UNPOPULAR IN THIS POLL:

With the end of the year approaching, Americans give Obama his highest approval ratings in over a year and key advantages over Republicans in the battle over the so-called fiscal cliff. But I will do everything in my power to make sure we do not balance the budget on the backs of veterans, the elderly, the children, the sick, and the poor, and low-income working people.
Q: Do you approve or disapprove of the way Barack Obama is handling his job as president?

APPROVE—54%; DISAPPROVE—42

Q: Do you approve or disapprove of the way Obama is handling the economy?

APPROVE—48%; DISAPPROVE—45

Q: Do you approve or disapprove of the way Obama is handling taxes?

APPROVE—48%; DISAPPROVE—45

Q: Do you approve or disapprove of the way Obama is handling Budget negotiations to avoid the so-called ‘fiscal cliff’?

APPROVE—45%; DISAPPROVE—43

Q: Do you think Obama has a mandate to carry out the agenda he presented during the presidential campaign, or should he compromise on the things the Republicans strongly oppose?

OBAMA HAS MANDATE TO CARRY OUT AGENDA—31%; OBAMA SHOULD COMPROMISE—69

Q: Who do you think will be mainly to blame if an agreement is not reached?

(VOL) Both equally—2; (VOL) Neither—10; No opinion—3.

Q: In order to strike a budget deal, would you accept Cutting spending on Medicaid, which is the government health insurance program for the poor or is this something you would find unacceptable?

ACCEPT—28%; UNACCEPTABLE—68

Q: In order to strike a budget deal that avoids the so-called ‘fiscal cliff’, would you accept Cutting military spending or is this something you would find unacceptable?

ACCEPT—52%; UNACCEPTABLE—55

Q: In order to strike a budget deal that avoids the so-called ‘fiscal cliff’, would you accept Raising taxes on Americans with incomes over 250-thousand dollars a year or is this something you would find unacceptable?

ACCEPT—71%; UNACCEPTABLE—24

Q: In order to strike a budget deal, would you accept Changing the way Social Security benefits are calculated so that benefits increase at a slower rate than they do now or is this something you would find unacceptable?

ACCEPT—36%; UNACCEPTABLE—60

Q: In order to strike a budget deal, would you accept Capping the amount of money people can claim in tax deductions at no more than 50-thousand dollars a year or is this something you would find unacceptable?

ACCEPT—34%; UNACCEPTABLE—66

Q: In order to strike a budget deal, would you accept Capping the amount of money people can claim in tax deductions at no more than 50-thousand dollars a year or is this something you would find unacceptable?

ACCEPT—54%; UNACCEPTABLE—46

Q: How likely do you think it is that (Obama) and (Republicans in Congress) will agree on a budget plan that avoids the fiscal cliff?

Very likely—14%; Somewhat likely—36; Somewhat unlikely—26; Very unlikely—19; No opinion—2.

Q: If a budget agreement is not reached, who do you think will be mainly to blame—Obama (the Republicans in Congress) or (Obama) and (Republicans in Congress) or (the Republicans in Congress) or (Obama) or (the Congress) or Neither?

Republicans in Congress—47%; Obama—31; (VOL) Both—18; (VOL) Neither—7; No opinion—3.

Q: How concerned are you, if at all, about what may happen to the U.S. military if Obama and Congress cannot reach a budget agreement?

Very concerned—44%; Somewhat concerned—31; Not too concerned—14; Not concerned at all—9; No opinion—2.

Q: Has the leadership of the Republican Party been too willing or not willing enough to compromise with Obama on the budget deficit?

Too willing—14%; Not willing enough—76; About right—2; No opinion—4.

Q: Has Obama been too willing or not willing enough to compromise with the leadership of the Republican Party on the budget deficit?

Too willing—98%; Not willing enough—2; About right—5; No opinion—10.

Q: Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as . . .? Democrat—31%; Republican—24; Independent—35.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. UDALL of New Mexico.) The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. COONS. 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. COONS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business for a period of up to 20 minutes.

Mr. CHAPMAN. Mr. President, I am on a point of order.

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

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

Mr. MOULTON. Mr. President, I rise today with a heavy heart. When we first heard of the horrific shooting in Newtown, CT, on Friday, it was impossible for me not to react, not just as a Senator but as a parent, as a father. And as my wife and I spent the weekend reflecting on the heartbreaking loss of 20 innocent children and 6 of their teachers and faculty, as we talked to our own 3 young children about what had happened, we thought about the grief and the anguish for a whole range of different parents deeply touched by this tragic incident.

The first, of course, are the parents who lost their precious innocent children, their 6- and 7-year-olds in the massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School last Friday. Joel and JoAnn Bacon lost their precious, outgoing, red-haired daughter Charlotte, just 6 years old. JoAnn had recently bought Charlotte a new holiday dress in her favorite color—pink—and a pair of white boots. Charlotte had begged and begged to wear her new outfit early, and on Friday, December 14, the last day of Charlotte’s young life, her mother JoAnn agreed.

Steve and Rebecca Kowalski lost their active and athletic 7-year-old son Chase. Just 2 days before the shooting, Chase’s next-door neighbor had asked him what he wanted for Christmas, and I understand he pointed to his two missing front teeth.

Any of us who have had the special blessing and joy of raising young children, especially at holiday time, can
only imagine the unbearable sorrow of these families who now and forever will have a child-sized hole in their hearts and their lives.

We offer you whatever small measure of comfort we can in knowing that you are not alone in this across this country and around the world people pray for your healing, and we all hope that with time you and your families can come to understand and live through the grief of this moment.

We also think of other parents, parents who years before raised their young adult children to give back to their community and the next generation—young adults who chose to become teachers. In addition to the heros of school principal Dawn Hochsprung, school psychologist Mary Sherlach, and teacher Anne Marie Murphy, a mother of four herself, three other very young teachers gave their lives to protect the students in their care: Lauren Rousseau, a 30-year-old substitute teacher; Victoria Soto, a heroic 27-year-old teacher; and Rachel Davino, a 29-year-old whose boyfriend was planning to propose on Christmas Eve. Their parents too, their families are in our prayers.

Also in our hearts today are the families of the courageous first responders who rushed toward danger as everyone else rushed away. In any emergency, Mr. President, as you know, being a former police officer, our law enforcement officers face unknown danger with extraordinary courage. At Sandy Hook Elementary, police officers rushed to the site knowing full well that an armed gunman awaited them. What they found was unimaginable. Thank God they arrived as quickly as they did or the carnage might have been worse. But we need but reflect for a moment on what those police officers and firefighters and folks from the ME’s office ultimately found those heroes could not react as parents, as community members. They had to choke back their own grief and horror to carry out their professional responsibilities to catalogue, investigate, and document every detail of this tragic scene so that justice could be done and lessons learned. The scars of those long hours on a crime scene like this last a lifetime, and first responders all across this country in situations such as this bear them with honor and dignity and without complaint.

This tragedy, of course, also has ripple effects far beyond Sandy Hook and far beyond Newtown, CT. All over this country there are parents whose children struggle with mental illness, with mental health challenges, who don’t have the resources they need to cope. My office has had many calls from worried parents since Friday’s shootings, worried for many reasons, but one that stood out for me was a dad from North Carolina, DE, whose child is struggling with mental illness and who is working hard to try to find the resources to ensure appropriate care so that he won’t someday be watching the television with horror as the tragic actions of his child unfold.

We think of the story also shared online of the mother in Idaho, terrified, her own son has the capacity to kill, screaming for the ability to give him the intensive medical care, treatment, and intervention she believes he needs

Across this country, mental health care is a growing challenge for us. Between 2009 and 2011, States cut more than $2 billion from community mental health services. Two-thirds of States have significantly slashed funding in these difficult economic times, leaving parents seeking help for their mentally ill children often with nowhere to turn. We must do better for all these parents—the parents who lost their children at Sandy Hook Elementary, the parents who lost their children who were teachers and faculty, the families of those who were first responders, and families of those who were children with mental illness and mental health problems.

But, frankly, this week I also think about parents all over our country who have lost their children, just as precious and as innocent as those at Sandy Hook, to gun violence, outside the media spotlight. The truth is gun violence knows no boundaries of race or class, but our national response at times seems to touch on a few.

There were 41 murders in Delaware alone last year, 28 of them where guns were used as the murder weapon.

Sixteen-year-old Alexander Kamara was playing in a soccer tournament at Eden Park in my hometown of Wilmington this summer when he was shot and killed in execution style.

Dominique Helm, age 19, was standing with his teenage cousins on the steps of his Brandywine Village rowhouse last September when a gunman opened fire. He stumbled through the doorway and died in his living room as his mother Nicole ran to him. Stories like this are tragically, appallingly, common across our country every day. Every day, 94 Americans are murdered with a gun. It happens in our streets and in our neighborhoods. It happens in movie theaters in Aurora, CO, and houses of worship at Oak Creek, WI. It happens in high schools in Littleton, CO, and at a college campus in Blacksburg, VA. It happens outside a supermarket in Tucson, AZ, where one of the six people killed was 9-year-old Christina Taylor Green—a child herself born on 9/11, imbued with a sense of hope and a call to public service, who wanted to meet her Congresswoman Gabbie Giffords in order to learn more about public service.

They say nearly 40 percent of Americans know someone directly who has been a victim of gun violence. In Christina’s case, her father was my high school classmate back in Delaware. Gun violence touches families, communities, and neighborhoods all over this country.

So what do we owe these parents? What can we offer their families besides our thoughts and prayers? I believe we must fulfill our central responsibility of protecting the safety of our children and our communities, while also preserving the individual liberties guaranteed in our Constitution.

On Sunday night, we watched President Obama speak to a community reeling in shock and grief, for the fourth time in his time as President. He asked us as a nation whether we are doing enough to protect our children, and he gave us the painfully honest answer that we did not give ourselves after Fort Hood, after Tucson, after Aurora. He said, No, we are not. We are not doing enough to protect our own children.

Horrible crimes like these have a very complex web of causes—including, of course, mental illness. This complexity presents us with a complicated challenge. But the reality is the United States has the highest rate of gun deaths in the industrialized world, nearly 20 times higher than comparable nations.

In my view, this calls out for a comprehensive approach, for a thorough and searching examination of the causes of this uniquely American crisis. I believe it requires action by this Congress and our President.

I have received calls and letters, emails and Facebook posts from Delawareans around the State, Republicans and Democrats, doctors and teachers, parents and children. They have shared with me their grief and their ideas, and they have called for action.

The United States has a long and proud tradition of independence, of protecting ourselves, of exercising our right to self-determination, of hunting and of a sporting tradition that is enshrined in our second amendment. And it requires us to recognize the importance—the legitimacy—of the concerns of gun owners to know that in the debate that can and will and should unfold in this Chamber we will respect their right to bear arms and that we will respect and honor this most important part of America’s fabric. But every constitutionally protected right has its boundaries, its limitations.

I am troubled in particular by the thread that ties together too many of these tragic mass shootings: that the perpetrator had mental health problems, unaddressed, untreated mental illness challenges, and used military-style weapons and clips that have no place in everyday civilian life.

Several of my colleagues have already come forward with proposals—Senators MANCHIN, LAUTENBERG, WARNER, FEINSTEIN, and others, and I will touch on a few.

I believe reinstating the ban on high-capacity magazines, focusing on ammunition on the outrageously devastating impact of military clips and military ammunition particularly on children across all these instances—I
think we should focus on that, and re-
instate the ban on high-capacity maga-
zines in the next Congress.

In addition, Senator LIEBERMAN has called for a study to gain a better understanding of the linked issues of mental health, mass shootings, and the desensitization of violence in our cul-
ture. President Obama has picked that up and carried it forward, and is pro-
posing a commission with Vice President—Delaware’s own Joe BIDEN—will be chairing. It is my hope that out of this important work we can find a path forward that marries the

I oppose tax increases very strongly and have said over and over that we should not be touching tax rates. But I

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, I ask

The PRESIDENT. Mr. President, I ask

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk

Mr. HATCH. The fiscal cliff

The fiscal cliff

As parents, we can’t help but react

As parents, we can’t help but react

The legislative clerk proceeded to

THE FISCAL CLIFF
also understand, given the reality before us, that the Speaker has to move forward with a plan to force action.

Is it perfect from my perspective? No, but we cannot let the perfect be the enemy of the good.

The Speaker, in my view, is the only person in these negotiations trying to find a resolution. I commend him—I admire him—I back him—and I know he is working hard discussing this legislation with the members of the House Republican Conference as they move toward a vote.

I hope they support this plan. However, it turns out, if I was a member of the House, I would.

But I am a Member of the Senate and this leads me to ask: after the House passes “Plan B” and defeats the Senate Democrats’ tax bill, what is it that Senate Democrats want to do?

The House will presumably send its bill to the Senate. Senator Reid and the White House have already said it is dead on arrival in the Senate. I find that very curious indeed since so many Democrats seem to have wanted exactly what the Speaker is giving them. Then they complain that the Speaker’s plan isn’t balanced,” despite the fact that the President in a proposal was calling on more stimulus spending and for the continuation of so-called temporary stimulus tax provisions that the President now somehow wants to make permanent.

So would say to my friends on the other side of the aisle, what is it exactly that you want to do?

What is it that Senate Democrats and the White House want?

We are all waiting. The American people are waiting.

Enough of the games. Put your money where your mouth is, and tell us what you think is better than what is in the White House. I get it—call it the “Trust Fund” and inserting “Of the funds of the Commodity Credit Corporation, the Secretary shall use such sums as are necessary for fiscal year 2012”; (2) in subsection (b)(2)(A), by striking “The Secretary” and inserting “Of the funds of the Commodity Credit Corporation, the Secretary” and (B) by striking paragraph (A) of the “Trust Fund” and inserting “for fiscal year 2012”;

(4) in subsection (c)(2)(A), by striking “The Secretary shall use such sums as are necessary from the “Trust Fund” and inserting “of the funds of the Commodity Credit Corporation, the Secretary shall use such sums as are necessary for fiscal year 2012”; and (B) by striking “The Secretary” and inserting “of the funds of the Commodity Credit Corporation, the Secretary shall use such sums as are necessary for fiscal year 2012”;

(5) in subsection (b), by striking “September 30, 2011” and inserting “September 30, 2012 (except in the case of subsection (b), which shall be September 30, 2011)”;

(b) This section is designated by Congress as being for an emergency requirement pursuant to—


(2) section 4(g) of the Statutory Pay-As-You-Go Act of 2010 (Public Law 111-192; 2 U.S.C. 9503(g).

SEC. 102. (a) Section 196 of the Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996 (7 U.S.C. 7333) is amended—

(1) in subsection (a)—

(A) by striking paragraph (1) and inserting the following:

(1) IN GENERAL.—

(A) COVERAGES.—In the case of an eligible crop described in paragraph (b), the Secretary of Agriculture shall operate a noninsured crop disaster assistance program to provide coverages based on individual yields (other than for value-loss crops) equivalent to—

(i) catastrophic risk protection available under section 598(b) of the Federal Crop Insurance Act (7 U.S.C. 1508(b)); or

(ii) additional coverage available under subsections (c) and (h) of section 508 of that Act (7 U.S.C. 1508) that does not exceed 65 percent.

(B) ADMINISTRATION.—The Secretary shall carry out this section through the Farm Service Agency (referred to in this section as the ‘Agency’); and

(B) in paragraph (2)—

(i) in subparagraph (A)—

(I) by inserting “(except ferns)” after “ornamental nursery”; and

(II) by redesignating clause (ii) as clause (i) and (II) by redesignating clause (ii) as clause (ii)

(i) for which additional coverage under subsections (c) and (h) of section 508 of that Act (7 U.S.C. 1508) is not available, and;

(ii) in subparagraph (B)—

(I) by inserting “(except furs)” after “furbearing”; and

(II) by inserting “(including ornamental fish) and inserting “including ornamental fish, but excluding tropical fish”;

(2) in subsection (d), by striking “The Secretary” and inserting “Subject to subsection (i), the Secretary”;

(3) in subsection (k)(1)—

(A) in subparagraph (A), by striking “$250” and inserting “$290”; and

(B) in subparagraph (B)—

(i) by striking “$750” and inserting “$780”; and

(ii) by striking “$1,875” and inserting “$2,000”;

(3) LIMITED RESOURCE, BEGINNING, AND SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED FARMERS.—The additional coverage made available under this subsection shall be available to limited resource, beginning, and socially disadvantaged farmers, as determined by the Secretary, for an eligible crop, in an amount equal to assistance available under paragraph (1), less any fees not previously paid under paragraph (2).

(b)(1) Effective October 1, 2012, subsection (a) and the amendments made by subsection (a) (other than the amendments made by clauses (i)(I) and (ii) of subsection (a)(1)(B) are repealed.

(2) Effective October 1, 2012, section 196 of the Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996 (7 U.S.C. 7333) shall be applied and administered as if subsection (a) and the amendments made by subsection (a)(1)(B) were in force.
I was first elected to public office when the Reagan revolution was in full swing. Maximizing freedom guided the policies of that era, with tremendous success. My goal as a public servant has been to advance and maintain a policy framework that emphasized limited government. The three legs of the Reagan public policy stool.

One, dynamic, growth-oriented economics: two, the social values that make limited government possible; and three, a belief that government is less efficient than competition. Each is an essential component of the growth-based economy. It was no accident that the Reagan years showed us that expanding economic freedom should be the North Star, the guiding light of U.S. policy because it is the best way to achieve sustained and broad-based prosperity. Moreover, it emphasizes that a strong and sovereign America. In each of the three areas, maximizing freedom and the positive results that flow from that is the goal. Let’s turn to economic freedom.

The Reagan years showed us that expanding economic freedom should be the North Star, the guiding light of U.S. policy because it is the best way to achieve sustained and broad-based prosperity. That has proved to be correct, working for us. After all, it is our government spending actually creates economic growth. It doesn’t. It just moves money around by taking from people who produced it and could productively spend or reinvest it and giving it to government to spend. Consumption is the wrong target.

People only change their spending habits when they know they will have greater consistent income over time; for example, when they receive a raise or get a permanent tax cut. That is why temporary stimulus tax gimmicks don’t work.

If the problem with the economy is supposedly a lack of consumption, the government cannot solve that problem by spending for us. After all, it is our tax money that is being taken out of the economy and spent. When government borrows, it will eventually have to tax the people to pay back what it has borrowed. There is no free lunch. For every government transfer, taxpayers have to give up wealth they could have spent or invested. Keynesian demand-side economics assumes the government is more efficient at spending our money than we are. That assumption has proved to be incorrect time and again.

Wise policymakers will find the right balance between the need for more tax revenue and the need for more economic freedom. They will remember that there is no fixed economic pie that legislators should try to divide. They will remember that labor, capital, and technology are the real factors that drive long-term economic growth, not government spending. They will stop shacking would-be entrepreneurs and job creators with ever more burdensome regulations.

Here is some more good news about growth-based free enterprise. It is the most moral economic system ever developed. The three reasons are premised on the truth that success only comes by supplying something to others that they need or want. In the bargain, both sides benefit. Second, this system has produced incredible wealth around the world, lifting millions out of poverty. And third, it has produced incredible wealth around the world, lifting millions out of poverty. And third, it has provided material benefits, but that is only part of the story.

Free enterprise provides more than increased income and material prosperity. Those things help, but they are not what makes humans thrive. The key determinant of lasting happiness and satisfaction is what American Enterprise Institute president Arthur Brooks has called earned success. People are happiest when they do something they are good at, when they create value in the lives of others, and genuinely earn their income regardless of how much it is.

Brooks put it very well in his book “The Battle,” and I quote:

"Earned success gives people a sense of meaning about their lives. And meaning also