Udall	Warren	Wyden
Vitter	Whitehouse	
Warner	Wicker	

NAYS—3

Flake	Lee	Sessions

NOT VOTING—3

Cruz	Kirk	Manchin

The amendment (No. 386) was agreed to.

AMENDMENT NO. 349

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there will now be 2 minutes of debate equally divided prior to a vote in relation to amendment No. 349, offered by the Senator from Ohio, Mr. PORTMAN.

The Senator from Ohio.

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, this is a very simple amendment. It is a deficit-neutral reserve fund to help the most vulnerable kids among us to have better coordinated care under Medicaid.

It allows health care providers to deliver health care services to medically complex kids through models that coordinate care between providers, resulting in better care but also lower costs, including helping with regard to a problem, including across State lines.

These children with complex medical conditions make up about 6 percent of the children who get health care under Medicaid, but it is about 40 percent of the cost of pediatric care under Medicare and Medicaid.

This is an opportunity for us on a bipartisan basis, I know, to be able to help these kids to get the necessary care they need and actually allow the Medicaid system to realize some savings through efficiencies, such as reduced emergency room stays, hospitalizations, and other procedures.

I thank my colleague Senator BENNET, who will speak in a second on his cosponsorship.

I urge all my colleagues to support this commonsense measure to help these vulnerable kids.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Colorado.

Mr. BENNET. Mr. President, I also rise to speak in favor of the Portman amendment. This amendment is based on a bill I introduced earlier this year called the ACE Kids Act that recognizes the critical importance of Medicaid to children with severe medical conditions. It highlights the need for greater coordination and integration of care across the country for 2 million children.

Earlier this month, I met with Everett Ediger at Children's Hospital of Colorado in Denver. Everett is 8 years old and has spina bifida, a neurological disorder of the spine. It took his mom Maureen 2 years to get him signed up under Medicaid and to establish a system to coordinate all of his care.

While Everett was beating me at air hockey, he let his mom explain to me about the frustrating experience of trying to coordinate all of her son's specialists and the payments for his care.

We need to focus on children such as Everett all across this country.

I thank my colleague Senator PORTMAN for his leadership in offering this amendment.

I urge my colleagues to vote yes.

Mr. ENZI. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The question is on agreeing to the Portman amendment.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Texas (Mr. CRUZ) and the Senator from Illinois (Mr. KIRK).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from West Virginia (Mr. MANCHIN) and the Senator from Nevada (Mr. REID) are necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PERDUE). Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 96, nays 0, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 80 Leg.]

YEAS—96

Alexander	Fischer	Murray
Ayotte	Flake	Nelson
Baldwin	Franken	Paul
Barrasso	Gardner	Perdue
Bennet	Gillibrand	Peters
Blumenthal	Graham	Portman
Blunt	Grassley	Reed
Booker	Hatch	Risch
Boozman	Heinrich	Roberts
Boxer	Heitkamp	Rounds
Brown	Heller	Rubio
Burr	Hirono	Sanders
Cantwell	Hoeven	Sasse
Capito	Inhofe	Schatz
Cardin	Isakson	Schumer
Carper	Johnson	Scott
Casey	Kaine	Sessions
Cassidy	King	Shaheen
Coats	Klobuchar	Shelby
Cochran	Lankford	Stabenow
Collins	Leahy	Sullivan
Coons	Lee	Tester
Corker	Markey	Thune
Cornyn	McCain	Tillis
Cotton	McCaskill	Toomey
Crapo	McConnell	Udall
Daines	Menendez	Vitter
Donnelly	Merkley	Warner
Durbin	Mikulski	Warren
Enzi	Moran	Whitehouse
Ernst	Murkowski	Wicker
Feinstein	Murphy	Wyden

NOT VOTING—4

Cruz	Manchin
Kirk	Reid

The amendment (No. 349) was agreed to.

RECESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands in recess until 2:15 p.m.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 1:15 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mrs. FISCHER).

CONCURRENT RESOLUTION ON THE BUDGET, FISCAL YEAR 2016—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the time until 3 p.m. will be controlled by the Democrats and the time from 3 p.m. until 3:45 p.m. will be controlled by the majority.

The Senator from Maryland.

AMENDMENT NO. 362

Ms. MIKULSKI. Madam President, I call up my amendment No. 362.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Maryland [Ms. MIKULSKI], for herself, Mr. WYDEN, and Ms. STABENOW, proposes an amendment numbered 362.

Ms. MIKULSKI. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the reading of the amendment be dispensed with.

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

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: To establish a deficit-neutral reserve fund relating to amending the Equal Pay Act of 1963 to allow for punitive damages, limit the any factor ''other than sex'' exception, and prohibit retaliation against employees who share salary information)

At the appropriate place, insert the following:

SEC. _____. DEFICIT-NEUTRAL RESERVE FUND RELATING TO EQUAL PAY FOR EQUAL WORK.

The Chairman of the Committee on the Budget of the Senate may revise the allocations of a committee or committees, aggregates, and other appropriate levels in this resolution for one or more bills, joint resolutions, amendments, amendments between the Houses, motions, or conference reports relating to efforts to ensure equal pay policies and practices and to reform section 6(d) of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 (29 U.S.C. 206(d)) (commonly known as the ''Equal Pay Act of 1963'') to allow for punitive damages, limit the exception for unequal pay described in paragraph (1) of such section to business necessity rather than any factor ''other than sex'', and prevent retaliation against employees for sharing salary information by the amounts provided in such legislation for those purposes, provided that such legislation would not increase the deficit over either the period of the total of fiscal years 2016 through 2020 or the period of the total of fiscal years 2016 through 2025.

Ms. MIKULSKI. Madam President, my amendment is about paycheck fairness, a topic I know the Presiding Officer, the Senator from Nebraska, is absolutely familiar with. I come to the floor to finish the job we began with Lilly Ledbetter to end pay discrimination in the workplace once and for all. That is why I am offering this amendment, which is based on the bill I have offered in the past three Congresses. It is called the Paycheck Fairness Act.

My Senate colleagues and I want to be sure women get a raise. The way we want to do that is to put more money in the family checkbook by putting change in the Federal law book.

My amendment will do three things.

No. 1, it will stop retaliation in the workplace for sharing pay information. For years, the famous Lilly Ledbetter was harassed and humiliated just for asking questions about her coworkers' salaries. In many workplaces around the country, you are forbidden to discuss shared pay information even if

you are the same lab technician, computer operator or others. This would stop retaliation simply for asking not only what do you make but what do others make doing the same work.

It also stops employers from using any reason to pay women less. ''Oh, they are breadwinners.'' ''Oh, he is a family man.'' ''Oh, gee, they do a harder job,'' when it is the same job. We have to make sure it is equal pay for equal work.

This bill also allows punitive damages for women who have been discriminated against. When the only deterrent against pay discrimination is the threat of paying women backpay, discrimination can just be factored into the cost of doing business and treating it like loose change.

Now, people say to me: Hey, Senator BARB. You led the fight on Lilly Ledbetter to make sure we had equal pay for equal work. Didn't we solve that problem?

Well, we made a good first step. That bill kept the courthouse doors open for women who are discriminated against so there would not be a statute of limitations as defined by the original Supreme Court decision, but that was only a downpayment. What this amendment does is say we need to change the law so Lilly would not have had to sue in the first place. This amendment says: Put an end to the incentives that cause employers to think paying women less is just loose change.

This amendment would close loopholes in the law which allow pay discrimination to occur in the first place. It would also put an end to paycheck secrecy—yes, paycheck secrecy—that makes it harder to uncover discrimination. It would also prohibit retaliation against women for even talking about pay differences. These are loopholes that often stop women who have endured discrimination from being fairly compensated.

What are the facts? Women still earn 77 cents for every $1 a man makes. It is even worse for women of color. African-American women earn 64 cents for every $1 a man makes, Hispanic women earn 54 cents for every $1 a man makes. For women closer to the age of retirement, the wage gap increases to more than $14,000 a year. It not only affects their pay, but it affects their retirement, and it affects their Social Security.

When you earn less, you get less in your Social Security benefits because you are making smaller contributions to your retirement. Women's Social Security benefits are about 71 percent of men's benefits, and that is not because of the mommy factor, where women have taken time out of the workplace and the marketplace to be in the home with their children.

Women earn 23 cents less for every $1 a man earns, even when she does the same job and has the same education. Women do not get a 23-percent discount on their student loans. They do not get a 23-percent discount on their utility bill. They do not get a 23-percent discount on their mortgage. So we end up paying the bill just for our ability to work.

Madam President, I could go on and tell you compelling stories about my constituents who have shared them with me.

I have heard from Latoya Weaver. She lives in Great Mills, MD. She is a single parent to three children. She worked in guest services at a hotel. She found out that her pay of $8 an hour—$8 an hour—was $2 less than new males in the same position. So a new guy working in the same job, doing the same thing made $2 more. That makes a big difference when you are making $8 an hour rather than $10 an hour. She filed an EEOC lawsuit, and she prevailed. You cannot necessarily go to the EEOC in every case.

I heard from Donna Smith, who lives on Maryland's Eastern Shore. She worked as a retail clerk. She was also told not to discuss her wages, but she found out she was being paid less than a male clerk—not ''mail'' as in post office mail but ''male'' as in a guy—a guy clerk whom she actually trained and was doing the same exact job she did when she started. Again, in all of the effort to go to the EEOC, it was found that two other female workers were also discriminated against. No one would have known had Donna not sought out that information.

So we can see that paycheck fairness is absolutely needed.

There is a lot of mythology out there about the Paycheck Fairness Act.

Myth No. 1, that the bill would require employers to cut the salaries of their male employees. The Equal Pay Act currently on the books prohibits employers from lowering the wages of men to make up for discrimination against women.

Another myth, that the bill is unnecessary. Well, the facts speak for themselves. When American women who work full time year round are paid only 77 cents for every $1 made by their male counterparts, it speaks for itself.

The wage gap is not merely a matter of choice in their occupation; they are paid less in the same occupation with the same education.

Here is another myth, that the bill would subject employers to criminal penalties for refusing to disclose wage information. No part of this bill provides for criminal penalties for employers for any conduct. There is no criminal penalty in this bill.

Another myth is that the bill would require the government to set salaries for Federal employees. Again, nothing in the Paycheck Fairness Act allows the Federal Government to set salaries for a public or private employer. So I think that speaks for itself.

Madam President, I have a factual document from the National Women's Law Center. I ask unanimous consent that it be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the National Women's Law Center, May 2015]

WHAT THE PAYCHECK FAIRNESS ACT WOULD REALLY DO

For nearly 50 years, the Equal Pay Act has made it illegal for employers to pay unequal wages to men and women who perform substantially equal work. Although enforcement of the Equal Pay Act as well as other civil rights laws has helped to narrow the wage gap, significant disparities remain and need to be addressed. Women today still make only 77 cents for every dollar paid to their male counterparts. And for women of color, the gap is even larger.

The Paycheck Fairness Act would strengthen current laws against wage discrimination by protecting employees who voluntarily share pay information with colleagues from retaliation, fully compensating victims of sex-based pay discrimination, empowering women and girls by strengthening their negotiation skills, and holding employers more accountable under the Equal Pay Act. Opponents of the Paycheck Fairness Act have put forth rhetoric about the bill that is misleading—this document contrasts the various myths about the bill and explains what the Paycheck Fairness Act would accomplish in reality.

Myth: The bill would require employers to cut the salaries of their male employees.

Fact: The Equal Pay Act prohibits employers from lowering the wages of men to make up for discrimination against women. In fact, the first paragraph of the Act states: An ''employer who is paying a wage rate differential in violation of this subsection shall not, in order to comply with the provisions of this subsection, reduce the wage rate of any employee.'' The bill does nothing to disturb this longstanding rule.

Myth: The bill is unnecessary because there is no wage gap.

Fact: American women who work full time, year round are paid only 77 cents for every dollar paid to their male counterparts. This gap in earnings translates into $10,784 less per year in median earnings, leaving women and their families shortchanged. The wage gap is even more substantial when race and gender are considered together, with African-American women making only 62 cents, and Hispanic women only 54 cents, for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men.

The wage gap is not merely a matter of choice in occupation—women typically are paid less than men in the same occupation. This is the case whether that occupation pays high or low wages, whether they work in traditionally male occupations, traditionally female occupations, or occupations with an even mix of men and women.

Numerous studies show that even when all relevant career and family attributes are taken into account, there is still a significant, unexplained gap in men's and women's earnings. Thus, even when women make the same career choices as men and work the same hours, they earn less. For example, a study of college graduates one year after graduation determined that women earned only 95 percent of what men earned, even after accounting for variables such as ''job and workplace, employment experience and continuity, education and training, and demographic and personal characteristics.''

Myth: The bill would subject employers to criminal penalties for refusing to disclose wage information.

Fact: No part of the bill provides for criminal penalties for employers for any conduct. But pay disparities often go unnoticed because employers forbid employees from sharing wage information with each other. The bill enhances employees' ability to learn

about wage discrimination by merely banning retaliation against workers who inquire about their employers' wage practices or disclose their own wages. It does not ban pay secrecy policies altogether—in fact, employers with access to colleagues' wage information in the course of their work, such as human resources employees, may still be prohibited from sharing that information.

Myth: The bill requires the government to set salaries for federal employers.

Fact: Nothing in the Paycheck Fairness Act allows the federal government to set salaries for any private employer. But the tools for detecting and addressing pay disparities under the Equal Pay Act have been limited by courts over time. For example, courts have opened loopholes in the defenses that employers are permitted to raise when seeking to justify a decision to not pay workers equal wages for doing substantially equal work. Some courts have said that an employer may justify paying unequal wages even if there is no business reason for paying men and women unequal salaries. The bill also would require the Department of Labor to reinstate a survey instrument that will help the Department detect and remedy wage discrimination by federal contractors and would serve as a critical tool in the federal government's effort to enforce civil rights laws.

Myth: There is no need for the bill after the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act.

Fact: The Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act restored the protection against pay discrimination stripped away by the Supreme Court's decision in Ledbetter v. Goodyear. But, even after the Act, our existing equal pay laws remain weakened by a series of other court decisions and insufficient federal tools to detect and combat wage discrimination. The Act made clear that each discriminatory paycheck, not just an employer's original decision to engage in pay discrimination, resets the period of time during which a worker may file a pay discrimination claim. The steps taken in the Ledbetter Act are essential, as they enable workers to bring wage discrimination cases again. But the Ledbetter Act simply returned the law to what it was prior to the Court's decision. And wage disparities go undetected because employers maintain policies that punish employees who voluntarily share salary information with their coworkers. The Paycheck Fairness Act would update the Equal Pay Act by closing loopholes in the law and ensuring that workers will no longer be punished simply for talking about their own wages.

Ms. MIKULSKI. So here we are, in 2015. It has been almost 50 years since the first equal pay bill was passed. For 50 years we have tried to have financial catchup to get equal pay for equal work, and every time we make a reform, there are always other loopholes. We want to close the loopholes. We want to end discrimination. We want to end retaliation. And, most of all, we want to end the fact that women often end up for their whole lifetime earning less. It affects the way they raise their families. It affects the way they pay into their pensions, the way they pay into their Social Security. Now we need to pay our respects to them and pass the paycheck fairness bill.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, I want to thank Senator MIKULSKI for offering this really important amendment because I believe that real, long-term economic growth is built from the middle out, not from the top down. Our government and our economy should be working for all families, not just the wealthiest few.

We in Congress need to be focused on raising wages and expanding economic security and making sure our workers have the opportunity to work hard and succeed. That is exactly what the amendment the Senator from Maryland has offered will do.

It would build on the promise of the Equal Pay Act to help close the pay gap between men and women. Today, nearly half of our workforce is not earning equal pay for equal work. In fact, women across the country, as we know, get paid just 78 cents for every $1 a man makes for the same work. That is not just unfair to women, it hurts our families and it hurts our economy and we need to fix it.

Last year, at a hearing in the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, we heard from a woman named Kerri. For 5 years, Kerri worked for an auto supplier as a supervisor. She liked her job. She did it well. Her boss gave her glowing performance reviews for her work. But when that auto industry ran into trouble, her company had to file for bankruptcy, and it was through those bankruptcy court reports that Kerri found out she was making significantly less than the men she supervised.

After all those years of hard work, she found out her employer valued her work less just because she was a woman. She said she was heartbroken and embarrassed, but more than that, she told our committee last year that those years of lost wages affected her family for the rest of her life. And she is not alone.

Across the country, pay discrimination hurts women and families' ability to make ends meet and get ahead in the workplace.

I thank the Senator from Maryland for her extraordinary leadership in the fight for equal pay and for bringing this important amendment forward today. This amendment will help move us toward an economy where women get a fair shot at pay equity in the workplace and set us up to tackle pay discrimination head-on.

Pay discrimination, by the way, is not just unfair to women, it is bad for our families, and it is a real and persistent problem that hurts our economy.

It is important to remember that women's roles in our economy has shifted dramatically in the last few decades. Women now make up nearly half of our workforce. Today, 60 percent of families rely on earnings from both parents—up from 37 percent in 1975. More than ever, today women are likely to be the primary breadwinners in their family.

So we have to make sure working women can succeed in today's economy because their success is critical to families' economic security and to our Nation's economy as a whole.

According to a recent report, closing the pay gap between men and women would add $446 billion to our economy. I hope we can all agree that in the 21st century workers should be paid fairly for the work they do regardless of their gender, and I hope we can agree we need to expand economic security for more families. That should be our mission to move our country forward.

This amendment supports the basic principle of fairness in the workplace. It would help women, families, and our Nation's economy.

I want to make this clear: I am urging my colleagues to vote for the Mikulski amendment—the only proposal on the table right now that would move us toward a real solution to this problem.

Senator MIKULSKI has been our leader on this issue. I hope Republicans will join Democrats on real solutions and work with us to create jobs, increase wages, and expand economic security that benefits all workers and families, not just the wealthiest few.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, this is an important moment in the Senate each year because we try to define what our values are and the way we spend our money.

If you want to know a family's values, take a look at the family budget. Are they putting some money away for their young son or daughter to go to college, making sure they can own a home, paying their bills on a regular basis, or are they wasting money on things they can't afford? The budget tells a story about values.

This budget presented by the Republicans tells another story. It tells a story about America's future.

I have a friend back in Springfield, IL. He has been a friend for years and years. Ten years ago, his wife was diagnosed with Alzheimer's. His life changed dramatically. He could no longer go to work on a regular basis. He devoted every waking minute to his wife. She is still alive today and struggling, but that family was different. Their lives were different. Across America, families just like his family learn about the diagnosis of Alzheimer's every day. Do you know how often we diagnose an American with Alzheimer's? Once every 68 seconds. The millions who are now afflicted by that disease—many of them have a very tough future ahead of them, as do their families.

What does that have to do with this political debate? It has a lot to do with it. It has to do with some basic things. First, should we continue to cut the money for medical research in America? The Republican budget says: Yes. We can't afford medical research.

Really? Well, last year, we spent $200 billion in Medicare and Medicaid on Alzheimer's victims alone—$200 billion.

When we asked for $3 or $4 billion more for medical research in the hopes we can find a way to delay the onset of Alzheimer's or, God willing, even find a cure for it—we will more than pay back the money we invest in research. But the Republican budget says that is something we cannot afford in America today.

When it comes to those who are suffering from Alzheimer's, how do they get by? Many of them get by with Medicare, which, of course, is the insurance policy for the elderly and disabled. But this budget cuts Medicare. Many low-income victims of that disease and many others rely on Medicaid, but this budget makes dramatic cuts in Medicaid.

That is the vision the Republicans present to us in their budget—the vision of an America that cannot afford to do the research to find cures for diseases such as Alzheimer's, cancer, diabetes, and the list goes on. They see an America where we cannot afford to help people who are struggling to get by.

This budget proposes takes 26 million Americans off of health insurance. I will repeat that—26 million Americans off of health insurance. Is that the answer to America's future? Have you ever been the father of a sick child and not had health insurance? I have. I will never forget it as long as I live. I felt helpless and worried that my little daughter was not going to get the right care she needed. Thank God the day came when I was covered with health insurance and could get her the best. But I think about the millions of Americans who never saw that day and the fact that 26 million Americans would lose health insurance because of the Republican budget. We are a better nation than that. We should prepare for a better future than one where the have-nots are growing in number.

The sad reality is that the Republican budget, although it finally answers its political prayer and eliminates the Affordable Care Act, still collects all of the revenue from the Affordable Care Act. They will never be able to explain that one to us.

How will they explain to the millions of seniors who are under Medicare that they are eliminating the program that reduces the cost of prescription drugs? These are seniors on fixed incomes who are trying to stay healthy and independent at home and who depend on drugs that could be pretty expensive. The Republican budget eliminates that provision in the Affordable Care Act which helps those seniors pay for their prescription drugs—the so-called doughnut hole.

As I go through the lengthy list of what the Republicans have done in their budget, I have to ask, is this their vision of America—fewer people having health insurance, fewer seniors being able to afford the prescription drugs they need to get by, cutting Medicaid, where we provide prenatal care for moms so the babies are healthy? For goodness' sake, it is not only the right thing to do, it is the economic thing to do. A sick baby is a tough challenge for any family, but it is a challenge for all of us. The medical bills a premature baby might incur far exceeds the cost of good prenatal care so the mom and baby are healthy. But that is just another area of cutbacks when it comes to this Republican budget.

This budget is certainly not going to become the law of the land. I believe even some Republicans will have a struggle trying to vote for it or explain it.

More, importantly, though, I hope this budget is a chance for us to have a conversation about what middle-income America is going to look like in the future. I think that is the key to America's success.

We talk a lot about income inequality. To put it in a few words, it means that a lot of families are working hard every single darn day and they cannot make ends meet. They are living paycheck to paycheck. What are we doing for them? This Republican budget cuts the available college assistance for their kids to go to school. That doesn't help that middle-income family. This Republican budget doesn't invest in America when it comes to education. This Republican budget cuts back on the help to schools to make sure they are producing graduates with the skills to compete in the 21st century.

If we really want to focus on helping middle-income families, we cannot vote for this Republican budget. It is a set of priorities for them which America really cannot accept.

As Senator SANDERS has said—our ranking member on the Budget Committee—we need to work to give middle-income families in this country a fighting chance. This bill does not do that. Sadly, this bill makes too many cuts in too many critical areas.

I am going to offer an amendment to this bill. See if you like this idea. I think it is a good one. My colleagues will get to vote on it. Here is what it says. We have a tax code full of provisions to encourage businesses to do certain things. We give them deductions, credits, incentives to do things, such as drilling for oil, building wind turbines, so many things—some good, some bad; it depends on your point of view.

I suggest that we put a provision in our Tax Code that says we will provide a tax credit to companies that stay in the United States and don't bail out and head to a foreign country, companies that invest in American jobs by maintaining or increasing the number of workers in the United States compared to the number of workers overseas.

Secondly, those companies will get a tax credit if their corporation pays fair wages by paying most employees a wage so that a family of three doesn't have to depend on the government for a safety net program. That is about $15 an hour.

If a company keeps jobs in the United States and pays about $15 an hour as a minimum, we will give them a tax credit.

Those companies should also provide quality health insurance for their employees. Who would disagree with that one? They should also prepare their workers for retirement by providing a pension or 401(k) with fair employer contributions.

The last point is that those companies should support our veterans, our troops, and people with disabilities by giving them a chance to work there.

How about those companies? From where I am sitting, those are patriotic American companies that deserve a break in the Tax Code as much, if not more, than any other company.

I will bring that amendment to the floor and let my colleagues vote on it. I hope we can get a bipartisan consensus. We ought to create incentives for companies to stay in the United States, employ Americans, pay a good wage, provide health insurance and pensions, and give a break to veterans and people with disabilities who are applying for jobs.

Let's have some priorities that reflect the future of a growing, solid America—an America with a growing middle class.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

AMENDMENT NO. 362

Mr. SANDERS. Madam President, I rise in very strong support of Senator MIKULSKI's amendment on equal pay for equal work for the women of our country. Senator MIKULSKI has been a tireless advocate for policies that bolster the American middle class and has been a champion for many years for pay equity for women, and I thank the Senator from Maryland for all she has done. I also concur with the strong remarks made by Senator MURRAY, who has also been a champion for pay equity.

To my mind, it is very hard to defend the current reality in which women continue to earn 78 cents on the dollar compared to men. We want to end that discrimination against women workers. This is not only an issue of justice, it is also an issue of economics because when we establish pay equity in this country—equal pay for equal work—millions of women will receive higher pay and many of them and their families will leave the ranks of the poor. This is an extraordinarily important amendment for justice, and it is an important amendment for economic rights.

The pay gap we see in this country is found at every level of education and at every stage of a career. No matter how hard women work, it is next to impossible to overcome it because they move up the ranks, but there is still pay inequity.

The pay equity gap has a significant bearing on the economic status of female-led households. Only 18 percent of families headed by single moms have economic security. Female-headed

households are twice as likely to live in poverty as male-headed households, and more than half of poor children live in female-headed households. It is no surprise that a lifetime of lower earnings results in less retirement savings and fewer Social Security benefits for women.

Senior women are twice as likely as senior men to live in poverty, and the average senior woman receives approximately $4,000 less a year than a senior man.

Senior women are more likely than senior men to rely on Social Security as their sole source of income, especially if they are unmarried.

My State of Vermont has done better than most in terms of pay equity and, in fact, is first in the Nation in making sure women get equal pay for equal work. But even in the State of Vermont, which leads the Nation in this area, women are still only earning 91 cents for every dollar men make. We have done better than the rest of the country, and we still have more to do, but the rest of the country has a whole lot more to do if we are going to fulfill the promise of equal pay for equal work.

I hope very much that we will all be supporting Senator MIKULSKI's very important amendment.

In terms of the overall Republican budget—and I say this with all due respect—one of the reasons I suspect that the media is not particularly interested in this budget is because when they look at it, they find it to be so preposterous, so unbelievable, and so unrealistic that nobody really takes it seriously, and certainly many of the major provisions in it are not going to be turned into law.

I will go out on a limb, but I think I am fairly safe in saying that President Obama is not going to sign legislation that abolishes ObamaCare. Maybe I am wrong, but I think it is fairly safe to say that. The Republican budget wastes a whole lot of time and energy by proposing the repeal of ObamaCare.

I will tell everyone what the repeal of the Affordable Care Act would mean in this country, and I know people will think I am exaggerating. I am not exaggerating, and if I am not telling the truth, I want my Republican friends to come down here—or when they get the floor—and say: Senator SANDERS was inaccurate. Please tell me that. We have read the legislation, and I am not inaccurate.

If they repeal the Affordable Care Act, it will eliminate health insurance coverage for 16 million people. Sixteen million people would lose the health insurance they currently have.

Today, we are the only major country on Earth that doesn't guarantee health care to all people. Today, despite the modest gains of the Affordable Care Act, 35 million Americans have no health insurance. So the Republicans say, 35 million without health insurance—that is not enough. Let's raise that number to 51 million by eliminating the Affordable Care Act.

They go further than that. The Republicans say we should cut Medicaid by $400 billion over the next decade. Medicaid is the program that provides health insurance for lower-income Americans as well as—very significantly, older people who are in nursing homes. So if people think this is just a low-income issue—if people think it is not a middle class issue—think again, because it just might be your mom who is 90 years of age who is in a nursing home which is being paid by Medicaid. It could be your dad who is dealing with Alzheimer's in a nursing home being paid for by Medicaid.

What the Republicans propose is a $400 billion cut over the next decade which would deny health insurance to an additional 11 million Americans, including millions of children.

My arithmetic might not be too good, but I think if we add 16 million who lose health insurance through the ending of the Affordable Care Act to 11 million who lose health insurance by a $400 billion cut in Medicaid, that means—16 plus 11 is 27—27 million Americans would lose health insurance, almost doubling the number of people who don't have health insurance.

Does anybody in their right mind take this proposal seriously? It is beyond comprehension. It would cause massive chaos and disruption in the United States of America.

This means that low-income, pregnant women who need to make sure—as Senator DURBIN mentioned a moment ago—that they get the health care they need when they are pregnant would lose their health insurance. A kid who is in a car who has an automobile accident would lose his or her health insurance. A worker who feels a pain in his chest and needs to go to the doctor—he doesn't have any health insurance, doesn't go to the doctor, dies. Well, that is a result of cutting 27 million people off of health insurance.

So in a certain sense we needn't discuss the issue terribly much because it is such an absurd proposal that I don't think there are too many people who would take it seriously.

We should also understand that when my Republican colleagues talk about ending the Affordable Care Act, what they are also doing is denying over 2 million young adults the right to stay on their parents' health insurance plan until the age of 26. As a result of the Affordable Care Act—previously children would be dropped from their parents' health insurance when they reached 21. The Affordable Care Act keeps them covered until they are 26. So suddenly, if one is 24 years of age and they have health insurance through their parents' health program, they are gone, they are out.

The Affordable Care Act would bring us back to a very dark age in America's medical history. That was the time not so many years ago, before the ACA, when if a person had a preexisting condition—can we imagine that? Now we think it is so crazy. It is hard to believe this existed 7 or 8 years ago. A woman walks into an insurance company looking for health insurance and she says: Yes, I had breast cancer 10 years ago, and I had an operation dealing with breast cancer.

The insurance company says: Oh, you had breast cancer? We can't cover you. That might recur.

Somebody else walks in and says: Well, I had a heart attract or I had a stroke 8 years ago.

Oh, that is a preexisting condition. You are discriminated against. We don't want you. You might get sick again.

Incredibly enough, then, the people who needed insurance the most are the people to whom insurance companies said: Sorry, we are not going to provide insurance to you. The Republican budget brings back those dark days.

The Republican budget will say to insurance companies again that being a woman is an illness, being pregnant is an illness. Insurance companies would be able to discriminate against women and charge them extra for the crime of being a woman. Does that make sense to anybody? I don't think so. But that is, in fact, what is in the Republican budget.

We have worked long and hard. This is an issue that has been dear to my heart for a very long time, and that is the knowledge that many of our seniors cannot afford the prescription drugs they need. Because of the power of the pharmaceutical companies in this country, our people are forced into paying the highest prices in the world for prescription drugs. That is just the simple reality.

Another very serious problem is that generic drug prices are soaring. We have many seniors and many Americans who have a variety of illnesses. They go to the doctor, the doctor writes a prescription, and do we know what happens? I remember talking to a doctor in the northern part of Vermont who said her guess was that one out of four of her patients did not fill the prescriptions they wrote because they simply can't afford them. And when one is older, by definition, one is often sicker and one needs medicine.

The Republican budget resolution we are debating now would increase prescription drug prices for some 4 million seniors and persons with disabilities who are on the Medicare Part D Program by reopening the doughnut hole. For years we have tried to close that hole and make sure the elderly do not have to pay for prescription drug costs out of their own pockets. The Republican budget would undo the progress we have made.

The bottom line of the Republican budget suggests the huge philosophical divide that exists in this Chamber. But, interestingly enough, I don't think it exists within the American people. I think the more the American people

understand about the Republican budget, the more they will understand that something is fundamentally wrong with that budget.

Where many of us come from is we look at an America in which the wealthiest people are doing phenomenally well. I had a chart up yesterday which was, to me, really extraordinary. It pointed out that in the last 2 years, the 14 wealthiest people in this country—all multibillionaires—combined, saw an increase in their wealth in a 2-year period—14 people—of $157 billion. Fourteen people in a 2-year period saw a $157 billion increase in their wealth. That is literally beyond comprehension. That increase in wealth in a 2-year period is more wealth than the bottom 40 percent of the American people own in their entirety.

Some of us believe that when multibillionaires see a huge increase in their wealth such that the top one-tenth of 1 percent now own almost more wealth than the bottom 90 percent, maybe they should be asked to pay more in taxes. That is what we believe. Our Republican colleagues disagree. They have nothing of significance to say about income and wealth inequality, and their view is that if we want to deal with the deficit and we want to deal with the national debt, the only way to go forward is to make horrendous catastrophic cuts in programs that middle-income and working-class people desperately need—programs they desperately need.

So I have spoken a little bit about the Republican cuts in health care, but I also should mention that there are major cuts in education. I can tell my colleagues, because I have had a number of town meetings on this issue in my State of Vermont, almost all of the young people I talk to are extremely worried about the high cost of college and about the debts that are wrapped around their shoulders when they graduate from college.

What does the Republican budget do to address the crisis of the affordability of college and the deep debts millions of our young people face when they leave school? Well, instead of addressing the problem, they make it even worse. It is hard to believe, but it is true. The Republican budget would eliminate mandatory Pell grants. Pell grants are the Federal program that helps low-income and working-class students get help in going to college. So at a time when it is harder to afford college, the Republican proposal eliminates mandatory programs, cutting this program by nearly $90 billion over the next 10 years, which would increase the cost of a college education for more than 8 million Americans.

Now, what can we say about that? People today can't afford to go to college. Students are leaving school deeply in debt. And what the Republicans say is let's cut $90 billion in mandatory Pell grant funding and increase the cost of a college education for more than 8 million Americans.

I can tell my colleagues that in Vermont—and throughout this country, I know—working-class families have a very difficult time finding quality, affordable child care. The Republican budget addresses this problem by making a bad situation worse and by coming forward with a budget which would mean that 110,000 fewer young children would be able to enroll in Head Start over the next 10 years.

We need to expand Head Start. We need to expand preschool education. We need to expand child care. The most important years of a human being's life are 0 to 4 years old. Those little kids need the intellectual and emotional nourishment that good preschool education and child care provides them. What is the Republican proposal? Knock 110,000 kids off of Head Start.

Under the Republican budget, 1.9 million fewer students would receive the academic help they need to succeed in school by cutting about $12 billion in the title I education program which is focused on the needs of lower income kids. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act would be cut by $10 billion.

So here is the point. At the end of the day, what politics is about is which side are people on. Are people on the side of millionaires and billionaires and large campaign contributors or are people on the side of working families who are struggling to keep their heads above water economically, who are trying to figure out how they are going to send their kids to college. They are trying to figure out how they are going to help take care of their parents. They are trying to figure out how they are going to pay their rent or, in some cases, even pay for their groceries. That is what this debate is about.

What the Republicans are saying loudly and clearly is the rich are getting phenomenally richer; we are not going to ask them to pay a nickel more in taxes. Corporations are enjoying record-breaking profits, and we have major corporation after major corporation paying zero in Federal income tax because they stash their money in tax havens so they can avoid paying taxes to the U.S. Government, but we are not going to ask them to pay a nickel more in taxes.

That is what this debate is about. Which side are you on? I think the vast majority of the people in this country want the Senate to stand up for the middle class, for the working families of this country, and ask the billionaires and the large, multinational corporations to start paying their fair share of taxes.

With that, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, last month President Obama released his fiscal year 2016 budget proposal. Americans could be forgiven for thinking it was created in a vacuum, since the proposal completely ignores our current fiscal reality. Six years ago, when the President took office, our massive debt was already a massive $10.6 trillion. For the past 6 years of the President's administration, our national debt has increased by more than $7.5 trillion, to a dangerously high $18.2 trillion. That kind of debt slows economic growth, threatens government programs such as Social Security and Medicare, and jeopardizes America's future. But apparently the President is not concerned because the President's budget proposal would increase our national debt to a staggering $25 trillion-plus over the next 10 years.

Let me repeat that. Over the next 10 years, the President's budget would increase our national debt to more than $25 trillion. Now, I don't need to tell the American people that kind of debt is unsustainable. American families know you can't keep racking up debt indefinitely, and they know the solution to being in debt is not increasing spending.

It is too bad nobody in the White House has that same kind of common sense. The President's budget would increase spending by 65 percent over the next 10 years. If a family already in debt tried increasing spending that way, they would very quickly end up bankrupt. They would lose their home, their cars, their credit. Well, the government works the same way. The government may be able to keep up appearances a little longer, but sooner or later unchecked government spending results in financial ruin. It has happened in other countries, and it will happen here if we don't take action.

If we keep racking up debt the way we have been going, we are not going to be able to pay for our priorities. Social Security, Medicare, national defense, national security, infrastructure—all these priorities could face huge cuts if we don't get our Nation on a sound fiscal footing.

Last week, Senate Republicans introduced a budget blueprint for fiscal year 2016 that would balance the budget in 10 years and put our Nation on a path to fiscal health. Instead of ignoring our Nation's fiscal problems, it promotes spending restraint, it creates a framework for Congress and the President to come together on long-term solutions. While it is not a perfect plan—it doesn't solve every one of our Nation's problems—it gets things moving in the right direction.

First, the Senate Republican budget balances. The President's budget never balances—not in 10 years, not in 75 years, not ever. The President may think we can keep spending more than we take in indefinitely, but the fact is we can't. We need to get to a place where balanced budgets—not deficits—are the new normal. Under the Senate

Republicans' budget, our Nation would achieve a $3 billion surplus by the year 2025, and our budget encourages honest accounting.

For example, our budget would provide for the Congressional Budget Office to score legislation increasing the deficit by $5 billion or more not just over 10 years but over 40 years. Typically, the Congressional Budget Office estimates the cost of legislation over a 10-year period. These estimates can be misleading because many pieces of legislation start out by costing relatively little but end up costing huge amounts in the long-term. By looking at the 40-year cost of legislation instead of the 10-year cost, we can get a much clearer view of a bill's true cost and the effect it will have on the debt.

Our budget also makes economic growth a priority. Almost 6 years after the recession ended, millions of Americans are still struggling and opportunities for advancement are still few and far between. A big reason for that is the oppressive, big government policies and deficit spending of the Obama administration. Our budget would help get the government off the back of the economy by limiting the growth of spending and reducing the debt.

On the jobs front, the Senate Republicans' budget would pave the way for the removal of inefficient and ineffective government regulations that are making it difficult and expensive for many businesses to hire new workers and create new opportunities. Our budget also lays the groundwork for an overhaul of our outdated Tax Code, which needs to be reformed to lessen the tax burden facing families and to encourage businesses to create American jobs.

Yesterday, we celebrated the fifth anniversary of the President's budget-busting health care law. Five years on, the President's health care law has resulted in higher costs, lost health care plans, reduced access to doctors, and new burdens on businesses, large and small. The health care law's latest disasters include incorrect tax forms dispatched to nearly 1 million Americans and surprise tax bills for tens of thousands of households in this country. It is no surprise that according to a recent poll, over 60 percent of voters have an unfavorable view of the Democrats' signature law. Senate Republicans promised the American people we would do our best to repeal ObamaCare and replace it with real health care reform, and our budget provides the framework for that process to move forward.

ObamaCare has failed to provide the health care solutions the President promised. It is time to replace this law with reforms that will actually make health care more affordable and accessible and that will not put government between patients and doctors.

Finally, our budget would start the process of putting major entitlement programs such as Social Security and Medicare on a sounder footing going forward. Right now the Social Security trust fund is headed toward bankruptcy. If we do not take action, Social Security recipients could be facing a 25-percent cut in benefits in 2033.

Medicare faces similar challenges to those faced by the Social Security Program. Under the worst-case scenario, the Medicare trust fund could become insolvent as early as in 2021. That is just 6 short years away. The Senate Republican budget would help preserve Medicare by extending the trust fund solvency by an additional 5 years, which would protect retiree benefits while giving policymakers additional time to ensure that this program provides support to seniors for decades to come.

Our country is not in the best fiscal shape, but it is not too late to do something about it. Senate Republicans have proposed and produced a responsible budget that will fund our Nation's priorities while restraining spending growth and driving down our Nation's deficit. This budget will give the American people a more efficient, a more effective, and a more accountable government. I look forward to passing it this week and to getting our Nation back on the path to fiscal health, which starts with a balanced budget.

We cannot continue down the path we are on. The American people deserve better. We should give them better. For the first time in most of the years I have been here, we are actually going to have a budget on the floor of the Senate that balances in 10 years. That is something I think the American people who sit around their household and sit around their kitchen tables trying to make these hard decisions for themselves and their families—that is what they deserve and that is what they expect. That is what we are going to deliver.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nebraska.

AMENDMENT NO. 409

Mrs. FISCHER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to set aside the pending amendment and call up my amendment No. 409.

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

The clerk will report.

The bill clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Nebraska [Mrs. FISCHER] proposes an amendment numbered 409.

Mrs. FISCHER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the reading of the amendment be dispensed with.

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

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: To establish a deficit-neutral reserve fund relating to promoting equal pay, which may include preventing discrimination on the basis of sex and preventing retalition against employees for seeking or discussing wage information)

At the appropriate place, insert the following:

SEC. _____. DEFICIT-NEUTRAL RESERVE FUND RELATING TO PROMOTING EQUAL PAY.

The Chairman of the Committee on the Budget of the Senate may revise the allocations of a committee or committees, aggregates, and other appropriate levels in this resolution for one or more bills, joint resolutions, amendments, amendments between the Houses, motions, or conference reports relating to promoting equal pay, which may include preventing discrimination on the basis of sex and preventing retaliation against employees for seeking or discussing wage information, by the amounts provided in such legislation for those purposes, provided that such legislation would not increase the deficit over either the period of the total of fiscal years 2016 through 2020 or the period of the total of fiscal years 2016 through 2025.

Mrs. FISCHER. Mr. President, as a strong supporter of equal pay for equal work, I am pleased to offer this amendment to combat pay discrimination in the workplace. Our solution provides a reasonable, fact-based approach to equip Americans with the knowledge and the tools they need to fight discrimination. This amendment contains language similar to President Obama's April 2014 Executive order, clearly stating that employees cannot be punished for exercising their First Amendment rights by speaking with employers or coworkers about their wages.

Furthermore, this amendment does not authorize any new Federal regulations, nor does it compel employers to disclose salary information. It simply prevents punitive actions against employees seeking information.

Women want good-paying jobs. That means we need policies to promote economic growth and opportunities for all Americans. This is a simple amendment. This is an amendment that would create a deficit-neutral reserve fund to promote equal pay by reinforcing a commitment to existing law. Every Senator in here supports equal pay for equal work. That is existing law.

This amendment is a chance to not just reaffirm support for the principles of equal pay for equal work, but also for free speech. This free speech includes the right to discuss wage information with coworkers. This amendment would prevent retaliation from employers against employees who discuss wages with other employees or seek such information from their employers. Importantly, this amendment does not authorize any new Federal regulations, nor does it compel employers to disclose that salary information. It simply prevents punitive action against employees who seek or share wage information.

I believe this amendment is something all of us in this Chamber can support.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican whip.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, budgets are all about priorities. It is about living within your means and not mortgaging our children's future by overspending money we do not have that we are going to have to ask them to repay. When it comes to priorities, I cannot think of a higher priority for the Federal Government—I am not

talking about State or local government, I am talking about the Federal Government—I cannot think of a higher priority for the Federal Government than national security.

That was one of the basic reasons the United States of America was originally created—for mutual defense and national security. This budget, importantly, helps set the course for the future security of not only this country but also of the world, by funding our military services. It is no secret—because we see it in the headlines every day, we see it on television, we see it online—we are living in an increasingly dangerous world. We would prefer that it be otherwise, but the truth is different.

All we need to do is take a look at the stories from—well, let's pick last week. Russia is threatening to point nuclear weapons at Danish military ships, trying to bully another European country into not playing a role in NATO and its missile defense shield, in particular.

In the Middle East, Yemen is on the brink of a civil war that would bring even more instability to an already unstable region.

Then there is Iran. Just this last weekend, the Supreme Leader of the regime that the Obama administration is so committed to working out a nuclear deal with called for ''death to America.''

The American people understand this is an increasingly dangerous world and we are not safer today than we were when this administration started. In fact, things are more tenuous, less stable.

Last month, the Director of National Intelligence, James Clapper, testified before Congress that after the final analysis is complete, the year 2014 is likely to go down as ''the most lethal year for global terrorism in the 45 years such data has been compiled.'' That is a quote—''the most lethal year for global terrorism in the 45 years such data has been compiled.''

Preliminary data for the first 9 months of 2014 shows nearly 13,000 terrorist attacks across the world that have taken the lives of 31,000 people. That is just the first 9 months of 2014. With so many different threats out there, and untold twists and turns in global security in the coming months and years, we need a national defense that ensures our armed services are prepared not just to respond to today's threats but tomorrow's threats, whenever and wherever they occur.

The brave men and women who serve in the Armed Forces are, without a doubt, the best in the world. But they cannot fight wars and they cannot keep us safe, they cannot maintain the peace, without the backing from Congress to ensure they have the resources they need. This budget we will pass this week does just that. It keeps that sacred bond and commitment to our men and women in uniform, and it, in effect, says to them: If you are brave enough and you are patriotic enough to serve in the U.S. military, we will make sure you have the resources necessary to do your job.

The budget we are debating today provides $612 billion in defense spending for this year. Some people may say: That is too much money. Well, the fact is we know that the United States is the one irreplaceable national security force in the world, not just for us but also for our friends and allies.

A strong America, as Ronald Reagan demonstrated, means a more peaceful world. Ironically, those who want to slash our defense spending and say, we cannot afford it, are sending a signal that America is retreating from the world stage. When America retreats and its leadership recedes, then the bullies and thugs and pirates fill that gap. It is a law of nature.

This budget will provide certainty and stability in funding for our armed services, as they will not be required to make across-the-board spending cuts this year. In fact, under our budget, defense spending increases every year after fiscal year 2016. But the truth is, we do not have a crystal ball. We cannot forecast future world events that our armed services will need to respond to. That is why this budget also includes a deficit-neutral reserve fund to allow our military to react to a changing threat situation and make additional investments as necessary throughout the 10-year budget window. This fund could be used to further invest in world-class training for our armed services or otherwise enhance military readiness, or even modernize critical military platforms.

In other words, this fund will help Congress work together to increase defense spending further and to keep our commitment, not just to the brave volunteers who wear the uniform of the U.S. military, but our commitment as Members of Congress to do our job and to make sure the Federal Government does its job when it comes to national security. It does so while maintaining fiscal discipline.

I am committed to working with my colleagues to achieve both of these goals. It is so important for our military to stay prepared, because the problems facing our country have rarely been more significant. That is not just my assessment, that is the assessment of Dr. Henry Kissinger, the former Secretary of State.

Earlier this year at the Senate Armed Services Committee, Dr. Kissinger said, ''The United States has not faced a more diverse and complex array of crises since the end of the Second World War.''

Let me say that again. ''The United States has not faced a more diverse and complex array of crises since the end of the Second World War.''

The scale of the challenges we face is matched by the consequences of us handling these challenges poorly and failing to meet our responsibilities as Members of Congress to make sure our men and women in uniform have the resources they need to do the job we have asked them to do and which they have volunteered to do.

That is why it is so vitally important that we continue our commitment to our armed services, that we fund them fully and we give them the flexibility to react to changing conditions around the world. This budget does all of that. As threats continue to mount, this budget will ensure the U.S. military remains unrivaled and that it has the tools it needs to keep our country and the rest of the world peaceful and safe.

Mr. President, later on this afternoon, we are going to give all Members of the Senate a chance to vote on the President's proposed budget. I will vote no. That is probably no surprise to anyone, but I think everyone in this Chamber deserves the opportunity to express themselves by voting on the President's proposed budget.

AMENDMENT NO. 357

(Purpose: To raise taxes and spending by enacting President Obama's fiscal year 2016 budget)

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to set aside the pending amendment and call up my amendment No. 357.

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

The clerk will report.

The bill clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Texas [Mr. CORNYN] proposes an amendment numbered 357.

Mr. CORNYN. I ask unanimous consent that the reading of the amendment be dispensed with.

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

(The amendment is printed in today's RECORD under ''Text of Amendments.'')

Mr. CORNYN. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be allowed to address the Senate as in morning business.

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

The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. MCCAIN. If the Senator from South Carolina comes to the floor, which I believe he will, I ask unanimous consent that I be allowed to engage in a colloquy with the Senator from South Carolina.

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

UKRAINE

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, on Sunday, I was in the city of Chicago. I had been invited by the Ukrainian-American community to speak to a large gathering. There are many Ukrainian Americans who have chosen the city of Chicago to live in and work. They have

made an enormous contribution to the city and to the State of Illinois.

I spoke to several hundred, some of whom had not that long ago been in Ukraine. It was very moving because these people who love America but also love the country of their birth or origin are now watching their country being dismembered by Vladimir Putin and the Russians and watching the United States of America fail to help them, literally, at all.

In case my colleagues have forgotten, the United States of America, this President, has refused to provide not only defensive weapons to Ukraine—I would remind you what we all know; that there are literally hundreds, if not thousands, of Russian troops inside of eastern Ukraine, Russian weapons. Remember, it was Russian equipment—if not Russians themselves—that shot down the Malaysian jetliner, and we have sat by and watched it on the delusionary view of the President of the United States that he doesn't want to ''provoke Vladimir Putin.''

The Senator from South Carolina and I predicted every single move Vladimir Putin has taken. By the way, I am pleased to be again sanctioned by Vladimir Putin. I wear it as a badge of honor.

So we have watched as they went into Crimea, in order that Vladimir Putin could have the naval base at Sevastopol, then into eastern Ukraine.

Then a Malaysian airliner was shot down. We all seem to have forgotten about that. Sanctions have been imposed on Vladimir Putin, none of which have had any significant effect, and the aggression continues.

Now there is a pause while more Russian equipment comes into eastern Ukraine, and his next target will be the city of Mariupol so he can complete his land bridge ambition to Crimea.

Right now, he is having to resupply Crimea from air and sea, which is very expensive, but Mariupol will be next. Then, depending on whether he gets away with it, the pressure will increase on Moldova, and pressures are already being exerted on the Baltic countries as well.

Our European friends, with the leadership of the United States of America, is conducting itself in the finest tradition of Neville Chamberlain. It was in the 1930s when we watched Hitler go into one area of another, usually in the name of ''German-speaking peoples.''

So I must say the people—the wonderful Ukrainian-American group I spoke to on Saturday—is puzzled, sad, and angry that the United States of America will not even give them weapons with which to defend themselves.

We have given them, my dear friends, MREs. We have gone from the West and democracy's arsenal to the West's linen closet.

So I say, again, this is a shameful chapter in American history. It is shameful. It is shameful we will not at least provide these people with weapons to defend themselves as they watch for the first time in 70 years a European nation being dismembered.

Have no doubt about Vladimir Putin's ambitions, it is the restoration of the Russian Empire, and no one should have any illusions about that. Unless a stand is taken, day after day, week after week, Vladimir Putin, diverting attention from his economic troubles, will continue to commit aggression until he feels he has restored the old Russian Empire.

We are writing a shameful chapter in American history, the nation that used to stand up for people who were struggling for freedom and assist them. I remind my colleagues that the Ukrainians are not asking for a single American boot on the ground, they are just asking for weapons to defend themselves. Isn't that shameful.

MIDDLE EAST

Mr. President, I wish to speak about the Middle East. First, let me remind you of a couple of comments in recent months that the President of the United States has made, one concerning ISIS, which has now moved into Africa, Libya, and Tunisia—recent attacks. Of course, we know about their caliphate that they have set up in Iraq and Syria. Boko Haram has declared their allegiance. They are spreading like an epidemic.

The President of the United States said, speaking of ISIS: ''The analogy we use around here sometimes, and I think is accurate, is if a jayvee team puts on Lakers uniforms that doesn't make them Kobe Bryant.''

I say to my colleagues, I am not making that up. That is what the President of the United States said about ISIS.

Then, he said recently:

> Over the last several years, we have consistently taken the fight to terrorists who threaten our country. We have targeted al Qaeda's affiliate in Yemen—

In Yemen—

> and recently eliminated the top commander of its affiliate in Somalia.

This strategy of taking out terrorists who threaten us, while supporting partners on the front lines, is one we have successfully pursued in Yemen and Somalia for years.

Is one that we have successfully pursued in Yemen and Somalia for years.

Again, I tell my colleagues, I am not making this up.

Then, of course, Iran. The White House has repeatedly slammed the Israeli Prime Minister for comments made during an election campaign, statements he has clarified or apologized for.

But the White House continues to threaten a reassessment of American policy toward Israel because ''words matter.'' That is what the White House spokesman said—''words matter.''

But when Iran's Ayatollah Khamenei chanted ''Death to America'' in a recent address, the White House dismissed the remarks as aimed at a domestic, political audience.

General Petraeus said on March 20: ''The Islamic State isn't our biggest problem in Iraq.''

Our biggest problem in Iraq, according to General Petraeus, is Iran. He is right.

ISIS is a terrible and awful disease that is afflicting the Middle East and may in Africa. But when you look at what the Iranians are doing, they are in Sanaa in Yemen, they are in Baghdad, they are in Beirut, and they are in Damascus.

Today, as we speak, Mr. Soleimani, the head of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, is leading the fight in Tikrit. This is the same head of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard who sent thousands of copper-tipped IEDs into Iraq while our troops were there fighting and killed hundreds—hundreds—of American soldiers and marines, while we watch them retake the city of Tikrit, and then we will get the credit with the Iraqi people.

So David Petraeus, in answer to the question, ''You have had some interaction with Qasem Soleimani in the past. Could you tell us about those,'' Petraeus talks about those he met with:

> When I met with the senior Iraqi, he conveyed the message: ''General Petraeus, you should be aware that I, Qasem Soleimani, control Iran's policy for Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Gaza, and Afghanistan.''

That is what Soleimani claimed. It was probably not true at the time, but there is very little doubt that Soleimani and the Iranians are on the move. Our Arab friends, whether they be the Saudis, the UAE or many others, are keenly aware of this movement and success of the Iranians.

Very frankly, they do not understand this Faustian bargain that is now being attempted to be concluded by this administration and the Iranians in the form of a nuclear agreement, somehow thinking that if there is this nuclear agreement—and I am not on the floor today to talk about it—that somehow there will be a whole new relationship with Iran, the same people who recently said: ''Death to Israel.''

So you can understand why our friends in the Middle East and the Sunni-Arab countries are finding their own way, developing their own strategy, and have no confidence in the United States of America.

ISRAEL

Lately, there has been a lot of pressure on Israel as a result of the only free and fair election that you will see take place in that entire part of the world. There has been a harsh criticism of the things Prime Minister Netanyahu said during that campaign.

I point out to my colleagues sometimes things are said in campaigns that maybe we say in the heat of the campaign and maybe it is OK if we apologize.

Today, one of the most astute observers, in my view, Bret Stephens of the Wall Street Journal, had some advice for the Israelis. From his article in this morning's Wall Street Journal entitled ''The Orwellian Obama Presidency'':

> Here is my advice to the Israeli government, along with every other country being

treated disdainfully by this crass administration: Repay contempt with contempt. Mr. Obama plays to classic bully type. He is abusive and surly only toward those he feels are either too weak, or too polite, to hit back. The Saudis figured that out in 2013, after Mr. Obama failed to honor his promises on Syria; they turned down a seat on the security council, spoke openly about acquiring nuclear weapons from Pakistan, and tanked the price of oil, mainly as a weapon against Iran. Now Mr. Obama is nothing if not solicitous of the Saudi Highnesses.

The Israelis will need to chart their own path of resistance. On the Iranian nuclear deal, they may have to go rogue. Let's hope their warnings have not been mere bluffs. Israel survived its first 19 years without meaningful U.S. patronage. For now, all it has to do is get through the next 22, admittedly long, months.

I note the presence of my colleague from South Carolina, and I guess my question to him is: How in the world do we justify this delusionary idea that somehow an agreement with Iran on nuclear weapons—and I am not asking to go into the details of it now, because my colleague and I are in agreement that it is an agreement, as Henry Kissinger described, that was once designed to eliminate nuclear weapons and is now designed to delay Iranian acquisition of nuclear weapons—how do we translate that into believing that people who chant ''Death to America'' are going to be our friends, particularly in light of their aggression throughout the region and their successful movement in these parts of the world?

Mr. GRAHAM. If I could give my best answer to that, No. 1—and my colleague from Arizona has been more right than wrong for the last 4 years about what was going to happen in the Mideast if we made the choices the President made—No. 1, my colleague said if we don't leave any troops behind in Iraq, all our gains will come unraveled. At the end of the day, the sectarian rise in violence was a direct result of, I think, American troops leaving Iraq. We had a good thing going after the surge. It did work. After drawing the redline against Assad and doing nothing about it, ISIL was able to fill in that vacuum.

But here is the question: Given Iran's behavior today, what would they do with the extra money that would come into their coffers if sanctions were lifted? Let's say we got a nuclear deal tomorrow, and as a result of that deal sanctions would be lifted. Without a nuclear program, the Ayatollahs are wreaking havoc throughout the region. The pro-American government in Yemen has been taken down by Houthi militias funded by Iran. Assad in Syria has killed 220,000 of his own people and he is a puppet of Iran. John Kerry said that Assad was Iran's puppet. We have Lebanon, where Hezbollah is an agent of Iran that saved Assad and creating discontent all over the region. We have Shia militias on the ground in Iraq being led by the leader of the Revolutionary Guard in Iran.

So here is the answer to my colleague's question. How could anybody believe the money we would give them for sanction relief would go to hospitals and schools? Don't you think the best evidence of what they would do with money is what they are doing today? The administration has never tied behavior to sanctions relief. So my big fear, Senator MCCAIN, is that not only would the Arabs want a nuclear weapon of their own if we got a bad deal with Iran, but the money we gave the Iranians would go into their missile program to hit us, would go into further destabilizing the Middle East.

Does my colleague agree that given Iran's behavior there is not one ounce of moderation in this regime? Does my colleague agree there are no moderates in charge of Iran; that when President Obama speaks to the Iranian people, urging them to argue for this deal, they have no voice; that the last time the Iranian people rose up to petition their government they got gunned down? Does my colleague agree with me that President Obama has no idea what is going on inside Iran and no understanding what this regime is up to with the money they already have?

Mr. MCCAIN. I would respond to my friend, I wish the President of the United States, who issued some comment to the Iranian people about the necessity of a nuclear agreement, would have spoken up in 2009 when thousands and thousands of Iranians were on the streets in Tehran protesting a corrupt election and wanting freedom and he refused. They were chanting ''Obama, Obama, are you with us or are you with them?'' And he refused to speak out on their behalf. That is when he should have spoken up to the Iranian people.

I would also ask my friend: Is there anyone in Iran who is free to speak up? You either get killed or put in prison if you speak up. So my question is: Who was the President of the United States speaking to with those remarks?

Mr. GRAHAM. Well, all I can say is it would be like telling a North Korean to speak up. That may be a bit of an extreme example, but not too much.

The point we are trying to make to President Obama is that if he believes there is a moderate element in Iran, who are they? Who is in charge of this government he is trying to empower at the expense of the hardliners?

The assembly of experts are the people who pick the next Ayatollah. On March 10, they had an election—I think it was 46 to 24. Ayatollah Yazdi—I don't want to mispronounce his name—won the election to be in charge of the assembly of experts. Their No. 1 goal is to pick the next Ayatollah. He is widely known to be the hardest of the hardliners.

So I want the administration to explain to us, the Congress, who the moderates are and how do you square that circle with the election of the most hardline Ayatollah to pick the next Ayatollah? What information does the President have that there is a moderate element that we can empower in Iran?

Can my colleague name one moderate voice that has a real say in the Iranian Government?

Mr. MCCAIN. Not any who are alive or out of prison. I am sure there are many moderate voices in the Ayatollah's prisons throughout Iran by the tens of thousands.

But I would also ask my colleague: Is it not true that every manifestation of Iranian behavior—whether it be in Baghdad, where they now have significant control; in Beirut, where Hezbollah basically has control of the country; in Damascus—Bashir Assad would not be alive today or in Syria today if it hadn't been for the Iranians flying in hundreds of tons of equipment, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, and bringing Hezbollah out of Lebanon and into Syria. And now we see Soleimani, the leader liberating Tikrit, getting all the publicity. And the people of Iraq, naturally, are thanking him for freeing Tikrit from the forces of ISIS.

One other comment. I know other colleagues are on the floor, but David Petraeus, probably the most brilliant military officer I have ever had the honor of knowing, made a very interesting comment in an interview the other day and I would like my colleague's comment on it. He said the major threat in the Middle East and in the world today is not ISIS. It is not ISIS. He said it was Iran.

I think when we look at a map and we see where the Iranians are now in control, we have to give great credence to General Petraeus's assessment. Would my colleague agree?

Mr. GRAHAM. Let me not only say why I agree, but here is what is about to happen in the Mideast. Because of our lack of leadership, the Iranians have gone on a rampage. My colleague had a very august group of people today—some of the smartest people in the Mideast and the country, leading think tank folks—come before the committee today, and I asked the question: Do you agree with me that Iran is wreaking havoc? Three out of four said yes. The one lady said seriously destabilizing.

Whatever adjective you want to use, it is commonly viewed that the Iranian regime is projecting power in the most disruptive manner in recent memory. They are backing people who took down the pro-Yemen Government, and now we have lost the ability to follow Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula that is responsible for the attack in Paris.

Assad wouldn't last, as my colleague said, 5 minutes, and the Assad regime, which has killed 220,000 people and driven over a million people out of Syria, is putting pressure on Lebanon and Jordan.

The Shia militia on the ground today are probably war criminals by any classic definition, and they are being led by Soleimani, the head of the Revolutionary Guard, the biggest exporter of terrorism in the world.

Mr. MCCAIN. And responsible for the deaths of hundreds and hundreds of

American marines and soldiers. What do we tell their mothers?

Mr. GRAHAM. Exactly. So the point we are trying to make to the President and the Members of this body is that Iran is on a rampage without a nuclear weapon. Clearly they are not a moderate regime trying to live peacefully with their neighbors. They are trying to disrupt the whole Mideast and have influence unlike at any other time.

Here is what is going to happen. The Arabs in the region are going to push back. They no longer trust us. Remember when the head of the Saudi Arabian intelligence community said it is better to be America's enemy than her friend? We heard this twice in the Mideast on our recent tour—that people believe Iran is getting a better deal from America being her enemy than the traditional friends of this country.

So here is what is going to happen. Turkey is going to align with the Sunni Arab world and go after Iran themselves, and we are going to have a Sunni-Shia war the likes of which we haven't seen in 1,000 years, because without American leadership the whole place is falling apart.

Here is the legacy of Barack Obama. He tried to change the Mideast by giving speeches. And every time he was told by military leaders you should do A, he did B. He has reached out to the Ayatollahs, not understanding who he is talking to. He has empowered the most brutal, vicious, murderers on the planet today in Iran.

This Ayatollah in Iran is not a good man. He has blood on his hands.

The President is talking to the people who killed our soldiers by the hundreds. He is giving them resources they wouldn't have otherwise, and he is making a deal with the devil. At the end of the day, this is blowing up in our face.

If the President doesn't self-correct, we are all in trouble. And if this Congress sits on the sidelines and allows this nuclear deal with Iran to go unchecked, and we don't look at it and vote on it, then we own the consequences of it.

To every Member of this body I say: We have an independent duty, as does the President of the United States, to make sure the deal we do with Iran is a good deal for America and not a nightmare for the world. So we are asking our colleagues to take their independent duty seriously. We have a check-and-balance responsibility. Do not let this administration do a deal with the Ayatollahs in Iran who go to the United Nations and bypass us. If it is a good deal, we will vote for it.

As strongly as I know how to say it, I am telling my colleagues that our policies in the Mideast are failing, Iran is the biggest winner of America leading from behind, all our traditional allies are in a world of hurt, and they are going to take matters in their own hands.

I thank Senator MCCAIN for his leadership and for telling America about the right choices, even though they are the hard choices. I will continue to work with my colleague as long as I can to speak truth to what I think is the biggest foreign policy disaster in my lifetime unfolding before our very eyes.

Mr. MCCAIN. I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD the Wall Street Journal article entitled ''The Orwellian Obama Presidency,'' by Bret Stephens.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the Wall Street Journal, March 23, 2015]

THE ORWELLIAN OBAMA PRESIDENCY

(By Bret Stephens)

Under Mr. Obama, friends are enemies, denial is wisdom, capitulation is victory.

The humiliating denouement to America's involvement in Yemen came over the weekend, when U.S. Special Forces were forced to evacuate a base from which they had operated against the local branch of al Qaeda. This is the same branch that claimed responsibility for the January attack on Charlie Hebdo and has long been considered to pose the most direct threat to Europe and the United States.

So who should Barack Obama be declaring war on in the Middle East other than the state of Israel?

There is an upside-down quality to this president's world view. His administration is now on better terms with Iran—whose Houthi proxies, with the slogan ''God is great, death to America, death to Israel, damn the Jews, power to Islam,'' just deposed Yemen's legitimate president—than it is with Israel. He claims we are winning the war against Islamic State even as the group continues to extend its reach into Libya, Yemen and Nigeria.

He treats Republicans in the Senate as an enemy when it comes to the Iranian nuclear negotiations, while treating the Russian foreign ministry as a diplomatic partner. He favors the moral legitimacy of the United Nations Security Council to that of the U.S. Congress. He is facilitating Bashar Assad's war on his own people by targeting ISIS so the Syrian dictator can train his fire on our ostensible allies in the Free Syrian Army.

He was prepared to embrace a Muslim Brother as president of Egypt but maintains an arm's-length relationship with his popular pro-American successor. He has no problem keeping company with Al Sharpton and tagging an American police department as comprehensively racist but is nothing if not adamant that the words ''Islamic'' and ''terrorism'' must on no account ever be conjoined. The deeper that Russian forces advance into Ukraine, the more they violate cease-fires, the weaker the Kiev government becomes, the more insistent he is that his response to Russia is working.

To adapt George Orwell's motto for Oceania: Under Mr. Obama, friends are enemies, denial is wisdom, capitulation is victory.

The current victim of Mr. Obama's moral inversions is the recently re-elected Israeli prime minister. Normally a sweeping democratic mandate reflects legitimacy, but not for Mr. Obama. Now we are treated to the astonishing spectacle in which Benjamin Netanyahu has become persona non grata for his comments doubting the current feasibility of a two-state solution. This, while his Palestinian counterpart Mahmoud Abbas is in the 11th year of his four-year term, without a murmur of protest from the White House.

It is true that Mr. Netanyahu made an ugly election-day remark about Israeli-Arab voters ''coming out in droves to the polls,'' thereby putting ''the right-wing government in danger.'' For this he has apologized, in person, to leaders of the Israeli-Arab community.

That's more than can be said for Mr. Abbas, who last year threatened Israel with a global religious war if Jews were allowed to pray in the Temple Mount's Al Aqsa mosque. ''We will not allow our holy places to be contaminated,'' the Palestinian Authority president said. The Obama administration insists that Mr. Abbas is ''the best interlocutor Israel is ever going to have.''

Maybe that's true, but if so it only underscores the point Mr. Netanyahu was making in the first place—and for which Mr. Obama now threatens a fundamental reassessment of U.S. relations with Israel. In 2014 Mr. Abbas agreed to a power-sharing agreement with Hamas, a deal breaker for any Israeli interested in peace. In 2010 he used the expiration of a 10-month Israeli settlement freeze as an excuse to abandon bilateral peace efforts. In 2008 he walked away from a statehood offer from then-Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. In 2000 he was with Yasser Arafat at Camp David when the Palestinians turned down a deal from Israel's Ehud Barak.

And so on. For continuously rejecting good-faith Israeli offers, Mr. Abbas may be about to get his wish: a U.S. vote for Palestinian statehood at the United Nations. For tiring of constant Palestinian bad faith—and noting the fact—Israel will now be treated to pariah-nation status by Mr. Obama.

Here is my advice to the Israeli government, along with every other country being treated disdainfully by this crass administration: Repay contempt with contempt. Mr. Obama plays to classic bully type. He is abusive and surly only toward those he feels are either too weak, or too polite, to hit back.

The Saudis figured that out in 2013, after Mr. Obama failed to honor his promises on Syria; they turned down a seat on the Security Council, spoke openly about acquiring nuclear weapons from Pakistan and tanked the price of oil, mainly as a weapon against Iran. Now Mr. Obama is nothing if not solicitous of the Saudi highnesses.

The Israelis will need to chart their own path of resistance. On the Iranian nuclear deal, they may have to go rogue: Let's hope their warnings have not been mere bluffs. Israel survived its first 19 years without meaningful U.S. patronage. For now, all it has to do is get through the next 22, admittedly long, months.

Mr. MCCAIN. I thank my colleagues for their patience.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority whip.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, before the Senators from Arizona and South Carolina leave the floor, I want to say a couple of words about their contribution to our collective efforts on the budget.

As I said a moment ago, the No. 1 priority for the Federal Government is national security. And while we are all concerned about runaway spending—and the chairman of the Committee on the Budget has been quite determined to rein that in by producing a balanced budget over the next 10 years—it is due to the leadership of the Senator from Arizona and the Senator from South Carolina, along with our other colleagues on the Committee on the Budget, who also happen to serve on the

Committee on Armed Services, who I think have led us to a much better place—a place where we can all feel better that we are closer to making sure our military has the resources they need in order to meet the commitments we have asked them to make.

We maybe have a few things we need to still talk about, and we will keep talking until we get it right, but the fact is, without the leadership of the Senators from Arizona and South Carolina and others on the Committee on the Budget, we wouldn't be where we are today and able to hold our heads up high and say we believe in our duty to our men and women in uniform, we believe in America's leadership role in the world, and we will not shrink from that.

Mr. MCCAIN. I thank my colleague.

Mr. GRAHAM. I thank the Senator.

Mr. CORNYN. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

AMENDMENT NO. 471

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to proceed on behalf of Senator WYDEN, Ranking Member SANDERS, and myself to set aside the pending amendment and call up amendment No. 471.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The clerk will report.

The bill clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Rhode Island [Mr. WHITEHOUSE], for Mr. WYDEN, for himself, Mr. SANDERS, Mr. WHITEHOUSE, Ms. STABENOW, and Mr. BROWN, proposes an amendment numbered 471.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the reading of the amendment be dispensed with.

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

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: To create a point of order against legislation that would cut benefits, raise the retirement age, or privatize Social Security)

At the end of subtitle A of title IV, add the following:

SEC. ___. POINT OF ORDER TO PROTECT SOCIAL SECURITY.

(a) POINT OF ORDER.—It shall not be in order in the Senate to consider any bill, joint resolution, motion, amendment, amendment between the Houses, or conference report that would—

(1) result in a reduction of benefits scheduled under title II of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 401 et seq.);

(2) increase either the early or full retirement age for benefits described in paragraph (1); or

(3) privatize Social Security.

(b) WAIVER AND APPEAL.—Subsection (a) may be waived or suspended in the Senate only by an affirmative vote of three-fifths of the Members, duly chosen and sworn. An affirmative vote of three-fifths of the Members of the Senate, duly chosen and sworn, shall be required to sustain an appeal of the ruling of the Chair on a point of order raised under subsection (a).

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, for my colleagues, this is an amendment which relates to protecting Social Security.

Social Security is a program that has been an enormous success, that is at the heart of the American middle class, and that represents a solemn promise our seniors have earned over a lifetime of work. It makes a real difference in real people's lives. It is the difference between comfort and poverty for over 20 million Americans.

Rhode Island is a State where we count on Social Security. We value Social Security. We know how important it is. What I have heard firsthand from Rhode Island seniors over and over again is they want to make sure this program is solid and remains strong, not just for them but for their children and their grandchildren.

Sadly, for decades, the history of the Republican Party has been one of repeated attempts to undermine this bedrock of middle-class retirement security, proposing over and over again various types of security cuts and, believe it or not, even turning Social Security's assets over to Wall Street to manage.

This Democratic amendment establishes a point of order against any legislation that would reduce Social Security benefits, that would increase the Social Security retirement age, or that would privatize the program. This would help our moderate friends protect Social Security from rightwing attacks, and it would ensure that seniors, as a part of their American experience, can continue to count on benefits they have earned.

Social Security is at present projected to remain fully solvent through 2033. It does not drive our current budget deficits and should not be sacrificed to the quarrels over the budget. Ultimately, I think we will need to strengthen Social Security, and when we do, simply asking the wealthiest Americans to pay their fair share into the system can make that difference. Simply asking the wealthiest Americans to pay their fair share into the system can extend it another 50 years, while also making our tax system fairer to the middle class. So it is a true win-win. And we want to make sure we do not have to watch Rhode Island seniors and seniors across the country pay the price for a deficit they had no part in creating.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Rhode Island not only for his important remarks but for the work he has been doing for years to protect and defend Social Security.

Let's be clear about a number of facts. When people jump up and say Social Security is going broke—not quite true. As Senator WHITEHOUSE indicated, Social Security can pay out every benefit owed to every eligible American for the next 18 years.

When people jump up and say Social Security is contributing to the deficit—also not quite accurate. As everybody knows, Social Security is funded by the payroll tax, an independent source of revenue for Social Security.

The fact is that for many, many years, in a variety of ways, my Republican colleagues have been attempting to either cut Social Security or, in the extreme case, privatize Social Security and allow—force—Americans to go to Wall Street for their retirement benefits.

While this budget does not include a provision to cut Social Security, what I will say is, if my memory is correct, in three out of the four hearings held by the Budget Committee, there were Republican representatives—people who were asked to testify—who did talk about various ways to cut Social Security.

So what this amendment does is it establishes a deficit-neutral reserve fund—it establishes a budget point of order which prevents benefit cuts, a raise in the retirement age, or the privatization of Social Security benefits. That is what it does.

Now we are going to have a lot of people coming up here and saying: Well, we want to preserve Social Security.

What they really mean is that in order to preserve Social Security, they want to cut Social Security benefits—maybe not for the people on Social Security today but for future beneficiaries.

They say: Well, that is the only way we can protect Social Security.

Well, that is not accurate. I introduced legislation which, in fact, makes Social Security not only solvent until the year 2065—50 years from today—but also expands benefits. We do that by saying that it is currently very absurd that a multimillionaire is paying the same amount of money into the Social Security trust fund as somebody making $118,000. There are some very wealthy people who are paying all of their Social Security taxes in the first day or two of the year.

Right now, we have a situation where millions of people in this country depend upon Social Security, people who are getting benefits of $12,000, $13,000, $14,000 a year. That is how they are living. Those benefits should not be cut.

When we talk about a so-called chained CPI, which cuts COLAs for seniors and disabled vets, what we are talking about is cutting Social Security benefits for an average 65-year-old by more than $658 a year by the time that person reaches age 75 and a cut of more than $1,100 a year by the time that person reaches age 85. Those are very significant cuts for people who are

trying to live on $13,000 or $14,000 a year.

So here is the argument. Is Social Security important? Obviously, it is. As the middle class continues to decline, Social Security is enormously important for the elderly and the disabled people of this country.

Point No. 2: Do we have to cut benefits in order to save Social Security? The answer is, obviously, yes. But we are back to the same old question we debate all day here. Our Republican friends seem absolutely determined not to ask the wealthiest people in this country who are doing phenomenally well to contribute to the well-being of the American people. That is this overall budget. But on the issue of Social Security, what we have to do is raise the cap, which is now at $118,000, and start it at $250,000. Just doing that will enable us to expand Social Security to the year 2065 and expand benefits for lower income seniors.

This point of order is enormously important. It says there will be a need for 60 votes for any effort to cut Social Security, to raise the retirement—I don't know what world some people are living in. There are some who have come forward and said we should raise the Social Security retirement age to 70. Let's have people out there working at 68, 69, 70 years of age. Let's force them to keep working before they get their benefits. My God, that is a horrendous idea. They also say we should cut COLAs—cost-of-living adjustments—for disabled vets. What a terrible idea.

There is a way to extend Social Security for many decades and to expand benefits. This amendment says: Do not cut Social Security.

I think a number of my Republican friends will say: Well, we are not going to cut Social Security for anybody on Social Security today. That is not good enough. There are people out there who are 50, 55, 60, 63, 64, and they want to know that the benefits they will get are the benefits they will be able to live on. Don't cut benefits for working people, and that is what this very important amendment is about.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. ROUNDS). The Senator from Wyoming.

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the time until 4:40 p.m. today be equally divided between the managers or their designees and that at 4:40 p.m., the Senate vote in relation to the following amendments in the order listed, with no second-degree amendments in order prior to the votes: Sanders amendment No. 474, a side-by-side to the Ayotte amendment; Ayotte amendment No. 400 on vets; Fischer amendment No. 409, a side-by-side to the Mikulski amendment; Mikulski amendment No. 362 on equal pay; a Hatch amendment, the text of which is at the desk; Wyden amendment No. 471 on Social Security; and Cornyn amendment No. 357, the President's budget.

I further ask unanimous consent that there be 2 minutes of debate equally divided between the managers or their designees prior to each vote, and that all votes after the first in this series be 10 minutes in length.

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

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, for the information of all Senators, there will be up to four rollcall votes at 4:40 p.m.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

AMENDMENT NO. 471

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Vermont. I wish to add my support to our ranking member's remarks.

At present, somebody making $110 million a year—and there are people who make $110 million a year in this country—will make the same contribution or less to Social Security as somebody making $110,000 a year in salary. At best, they will pay the same despite the fact that they are making 1,000 times more. At worst, they will pay even less into it because they have treated their income as capital gains and they have dodged the payroll tax on it. To me, that makes no sense, particularly when more and more of our national income is moving up into the top 1 percent, the top 2 percent, the top one-tenth of 1 percent.

In fact, there has been a pronounced effect on Social Security's balances just from the increased income inequality. More and more of the income generated in the United States of America is moving to the wealthiest people, and that means the amount of income under $110,000 that is subject to taxation for Social Security is a smaller fraction of the total income package than it was before, which means there will be less income to support Social Security, and that is a significant part of why Social Security is underfunded and why it may only last for the next 18 years instead of longer.

First of all, I think Social Security is so important that even if there were not this fairness discrepancy, it is worth it to our country to have people know that they and their aunts and their uncles and their grandparents have the security of Social Security, and we should protect it at virtually all costs.

But even if that alone were not sufficient, the fact that everybody making under $110,000 supports Social Security and the billionaires make no greater contribution and perhaps less of a contribution than regular working folks is completely backward and completely wrong, but, unfortunately, that is the principle of primacy in this Republican budget. The principle of primacy in this Republican budget is that every tax loophole is sacred. Every tax loophole is nonnegotiable. Every tax loophole is to be defended at all costs. It doesn't matter what you have to cut, it doesn't matter what harm you have to do to Social Security or to other programs, nothing matters as much to this Republican budget as protecting every tax loophole.

When we consider who has the clout around here in this country to get tax loopholes, guess what—it is the corporations and it is the wealthy. Those are the guys who really do the mischief.

There are other tax protections for the middle class, and nobody wants to change those. But these tax loopholes that move jobs overseas and pay for that and allow companies to pretend their intellectual property is in another country when they only have half-a-dozen employees there and they are running big time across our country because they locate themselves for tax purposes in a tax haven—there is no benefit to that. We should fix that. But in this budget, all of that is kept sacred. It is the highest primary principle of this budget to defend every corporate tax loophole and every loophole that helps millionaires and billionaires, and I happen to think that is wrong.

We brought this up over and over again in the hearings in the Budget Committee. We have heard from experts—not only experts brought in by the Democrats, we even heard from experts brought in by the Republicans who said that revenue has to be part of the solution to our deficit and that many of these tax loopholes are—there is no justification for them. Even with this testimony and that support in the record, this budget still stands by its principle of Republican primacy, and that is that every tax loophole is sacred.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. SANDERS. How much time remains on the Democratic side?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. There is 6½ minutes.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, this is a very important amendment, and I hope the American people are listening.

Social Security is probably the most important Federal program ever developed in the modern history of this country. It is an enormously popular program, and it has been an enormously effective program. The truth is that it has significantly reduced poverty among seniors. Before Social Security, about 50 percent of seniors lived in poverty. Today, while the number is too high, it is somewhere around 10 percent.

The extraordinary beauty of Social Security is that in good times and in bad times—in an economic boom, depression, or recession—Social Security has paid out every check owed to every eligible American without fail. No one has ever received a letter that said: You know, we are in the middle of a recession, so we have to cut your benefits in half. That has never been the case. We take it for granted, but that is an extraordinary record.

Because we have a number of Republicans who simply do not like government programs, there has been for

many years an effort to either cut or privatize Social Security and give it over to Wall Street. What we hear are a lot of misleading arguments. The argument is, well, Social Security is unsustainable, and it is not going to be there. And they throw out all of these reasons. But the answer is that Social Security is absolutely sustainable, but, as Senator WHITEHOUSE just indicated, we have to deal with issues such as income and wealth inequality, which has resulted in a significant reduction in the solvency of Social Security because people's incomes have not risen, and therefore they contribute less to the Social Security trust fund, or many other people have gone way above the cap and are still paying less than they should.

The Republicans' solution seems to be—and I think there will be a side-by-side amendment that will say: Well, we are not going to cut Social Security benefits for those who are in the program right now. But essentially their language says that they will cut benefits for future retirees, people who are 55, 60, and 63 years of age. When we have so many seniors and elderly people who are struggling right now to make ends meet, I think the last thing in the world we should do is cut Social Security.

Over half of all Americans have less than $10,000 in savings, and these people, when they reach Social Security age, do not want to see their benefits cut. Two-thirds of seniors depend on Social Security for more than half of their income, and one-third depend on Social Security for almost all of their income. These people do not want to see their benefits cut.

Just 2 weeks ago, Senator WHITEHOUSE and I accepted petitions from 2 million people which said loudly and clearly: Do not cut Social Security. And in the polling I have seen in these tough economic times, Republicans say do not cut Social Security, Democrats say do not cut Social Security, and Independents say do not cut Social Security. Yet what our Republican friends are saying is that if you are 55, 60, or 63 and are not yet on Social Security, beware because we are prepared to cut your Social Security. Maybe we will raise the retirement age or maybe we will cut your COLAs through a so-called chained CPI.

I will say as the former chairman of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee that virtually every veterans organization has been loud and clear in opposition to the chained CPI because they understand that chained CPI does not just cut benefits for seniors, it cuts benefits for disabled veterans. Do we really want to be cutting benefits for disabled veterans? I hope we will not.

This is a very important amendment. It is an amendment that says: If you stand with the overwhelming majority of the American people who say we should not cut Social Security—yes, let's move forward to make it solvent beyond the 18 years that it is solvent, but do not cut benefits, do not cut COLAs, and do not raise the retirement age.

With that, I yield the floor.

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, I yield 3 minutes to the Senator from New Hampshire.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Hampshire.

AMENDMENT NO. 400

Ms. AYOTTE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to set aside the pending amendment and call up my amendment No. 400.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from New Hampshire [Ms. AYOTTE] proposes an amendment numbered 400.

Ms. AYOTTE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the reading of the amendment be dispensed with.

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

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: To establish a deficit-neutral reserve fund to maintain and enhance access, choice, and accountability in veterans care through the Veterans Choice Card program under section 101 of the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014)

At the end of title III, add the following:

SEC. 3___. DEFICIT-NEUTRAL RESERVE FUND TO MAINTAIN AND ENHANCE ACCESS, CHOICE, AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN VETERANS CARE THROUGH THE VETERANS CHOICE CARD PROGRAM.

The Chairman of the Committee on the Budget of the Senate may revise the allocations of a committee or committees, aggregates, and other appropriate levels in this resolution for one or more bills, joint resolutions, amendments, amendments between the Houses, motions, or conference reports relating to maintaining and enhancing access, choice, and accountability in veterans care through the Veterans Choice Card program, by the amounts provided in such legislation for those purposes, provided that such legislation would not increase the deficit over either the period of the total of fiscal years 2016 through 2020 or the period of the total of fiscal years 2016 through 2025.

Ms. AYOTTE. Mr. President, last year in this body, we heard and saw evidence about what was happening at some of our VA facilities—the manipulated wait lists, the delays our veterans had to endure—and, unfortunately, some of our veterans died waiting for care.

We passed a bipartisan bill, one on which we all worked together, and I appreciate that Senator SANDERS worked very hard on that bill. The Veterans Choice Program was part of that bipartisan bill, but this program has yet to be implemented in the way this body intended. The goal was to expedite care for veterans who had been waiting longer than 30 days or who live farther than 40 miles away from the VA hospital. In my home State of New Hampshire, we don't have a full-service veterans hospital, so too often our veterans are driving long distances—to Massachusetts or to other locations—to get the care they earned for having served and sacrificed so much for our country.

Recently, a study conducted by the VFW found that 92 percent of program-eligible veterans were interested in non-VA or private care options that they could go to. Yet that same survey found that 80 percent of eligible veterans were unable to access the Veterans Choice Program.

Barely 2 months after the program started—and we worked on it on a bipartisan basis in this Congress—the administration announced plans to divert money from this important program by saying it was underutilized. Let's be clear. It is underutilized because the VA is not implementing it properly. Veterans are not being told their rights, and we owe it to them to get this Veterans Choice Program right and give veterans the choice they want for private care options so they are not driving or waiting in line, given what they have done for our country.

Our veterans chose to fight on our behalf. We should honor the work we did together and ensure that this program is properly implemented by the VA, which is not happening right now. Our veterans want this choice. Let's get this veterans program right.

I urge my colleagues to support my amendment, which, again, is an amendment designed to support what we intended in this body—to ensure that veterans don't have to wait in line, that they can exercise private care options when they want to, thereby giving them the choice for the sacrifices they have made for this country. They deserve nothing less.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator's time has expired.

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, I yield 2 minutes to the Senator from Arkansas.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arkansas.

AMENDMENT NO. 481

Mr. COTTON. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to set aside the pending amendment and call up my amendment No. 481.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Arkansas [Mr. COTTON] proposes an amendment numbered 481.

Mr. COTTON. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the reading of the amendment be dispensed with.

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

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: To establish a deficit-neutral fund relating to supporting Israel)

At the appropriate place, insert the following:

SEC. _____. DEFICIT-NEUTRAL RESERVE FUND RELATING TO SUPPORTING ISRAEL.

The Chairman of the Committee on the Budget of the Senate may revise the allocations of a committee or committees, aggregates, and other appropriate levels in this

resolution for one or more bills, joint resolutions, amendments, amendments between the Houses, motions, or conference reports relating to United States policy toward Israel, which may include preventing the United Nations and other international institutions from taking unfair or discriminatory action against Israel, by the amounts provided in such legislation for those purposes, provided that such legislation would not increase the deficit over either the period of the total of fiscal years 2016 through 2020 or the period of the total of fiscal years 2016 through 2025.

Mr. COTTON. Mr. President, since its founding in 1948, Israel has been a strong and steadfast ally to the United States in the Middle East, a region characterized by instability and violence.

The U.S.-Israel relationship is built on mutual respect for common values, including a commitment to democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and ethnic and religious diversity.

Last week, President Obama and other administration officials suggested a fundamental rethinking of this alliance, citing Prime Minister Netanyahu's simple restatement of fact that there can be no Palestinian State until conditions change. The Palestinian Authority must, at a minimum, eject Hamas from its governing coalition, reclaim control of the Gaza Strip, accept a demilitarized eastern border, and recognize Israel's right to exist as a Jewish State.

Further, Prime Minister Netanyahu recently reiterated these points and his support for a two-state solution in principle. In this light, any suggestion that the United States may reconsider our support for Israel—especially our support at the United Nations—is wrongheaded and shortsighted, because the United Nations, regrettably, has consistently employed a double standard in its treatment of Israel, making false allegations against Israel while, even worse, ignoring even worse behavior by other countries.

The U.N. has often questioned Israel's legitimacy——

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The time of the Senator has expired.

Mr. COTTON. I ask unanimous consent for 30 seconds to conclude.

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

Mr. COTTON. The U.N. Human Rights Council has focused obsessively on Israel. The U.N. General Assembly has adopted 21 resolutions singling out Israel.

Because of this regrettable history, my amendment lays the groundwork for a restriction of funding to the United Nations should it take unfair and discriminatory action against Israel or attempt to impose a final settlement on Israel and the P.A.

My hope is this will not be necessary, but this Congress should be prepared to take actions to defend the U.S.-Israel alliance.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

AMENDMENT NO. 498

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to set aside the pending amendment and call up the Hatch amendment No. 498.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Wyoming [Mr. ENZI], for Mr. HATCH, proposes an amendment numbered 498.

Mr. ENZI. I ask unanimous consent that the reading of the amendment be dispensed with.

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

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: To establish a deficit-neutral reserve fund relating to legislation submitted to Congress by President Obama to protect and strengthen Social Security)

At the appropriate place, insert the following:

SEC. _____. DEFICIT-NEUTRAL RESERVE FUND RELATING TO LEGISLATION SUBMITTED TO CONGRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES TO PROTECT AND STRENGTHEN SOCIAL SECURITY.

The Chairman of the Committee on the Budget of the Senate may revise the allocations of a committee or committees, aggregates, and other appropriate levels in this resolution for one or more bills, joint resolutions, amendments, amendments between the Houses, motions, or conference reports relating to legislation submitted to Congress by the President of the United States to protect current beneficiaries of the Social Security program and prevent the insolvency of the program, by the amounts provided in such legislation for such purpose, provided that such legislation would not increase the deficit over either the period of the total of fiscal years 2016 through 2020 or the period of the total of fiscal years 2016 through 2025.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Who yields time?

The Senator from Vermont.

AMENDMENT NO. 474

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to set aside the pending amendment to call up my amendment No. 474.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Vermont [Mr. SANDERS] proposes an amendment numbered 474.

Mr. SANDERS. I ask unanimous consent that the reading of the amendment be dispensed with.

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

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: To establish a deficit-neutral reserve fund to protect and strengthen the Department of Veterans Affairs, hire more health care professionals for the Department, and ensure quality and timely access to health care for all veterans)

At the end of title III, add the following:

SEC. 3____. DEFICIT-NEUTRAL RESERVE FUND TO PROTECT AND STRENGTHEN THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS, HIRE MORE HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS FOR THE DEPARTMENT, AND ENSURE QUALITY AND TIMELY ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE FOR ALL VETERANS.

The Chairman of the Committee on the Budget of the Senate may revise the allocations of a committee or committees, aggregates, and other appropriate levels in this resolution for one or more bills, joint resolutions, amendments, amendments between the Houses, motions, or conference reports relating to funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs, which may include legislation that strengthens quality and timely access to health care by hiring more health care professionals at facilities of the Department and making necessary improvements to infrastructure of the Department, by the amounts provided in such legislation for those purposes, provided that such legislation would not increase the deficit over either the period of the total of fiscal years 2016 through 2020 or the period of the total of fiscal years 2016 through 2025.

Mr. SANDERS. This side-by-side is a simple and noncontroversial amendment. It creates a deficit-neutral reserve fund so the VA can have the health care professionals—the doctors and nurses—it needs to make sure the VA is providing quality care to all of our veterans in a timely manner. That is about it.

From what I heard—I will speak with Senator AYOTTE a little bit later—her amendment is simply making sure the VA implements the law we passed. I don't have any objection to that and I don't know that anyone should.

Our amendment simply says we want the VA to have the medical personnel—doctors, nurses, and staff—it needs to provide quality and timely health care to our veterans. I hope it will receive unanimous agreement.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The time of the Senator has expired.

Mr. SANDERS. I thank the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. AYOTTE). Under the previous order, there will now be 2 minutes of debate equally divided prior to a vote in relation to amendment No. 474, offered by the Senator from Vermont.

The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. SANDERS. Madam President, this is a pretty simple and straightforward amendment. Senator AYOTTE mentioned a moment ago we have had problems at the VA. No question about it; veterans have waited too long to get the timely and quality care they need. What this amendment does is establish a deficit-neutral reserve fund to protect and strengthen the Department of Veterans Affairs, to hire more health care professionals for the Department, and ensure quality and timely access to health care for all veterans.

If we talk to veterans organizations, they think the care within the VA is good once people get in there. I want to make sure we have the doctors and nurses to provide the quality and timely care our veterans deserve.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

Mr. ENZI. Madam President, I don't think we have a problem with this amendment. Again, I ask the Senator if he would be willing to voice-vote it.

Mr. SANDERS. Yes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. If there is no further debate on the amendment, the question is on agreeing to amendment No. 474.

The amendment (No. 474) was agreed to.

AMENDMENT NO. 400

The PRESIDING OFFICER. There will now be 2 minutes of debate equally divided prior to a vote in relation to amendment No. 400.

The Senator from Wyoming.

Mr. ENZI. Does the Chair wish to change places at this time?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Yes. Thank you.

(Mr. ENZI assumed the Chair.)

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Hampshire.

Ms. AYOTTE. Mr. President, I urge a ''yes'' vote on amendment No. 400.

Unfortunately, the bipartisan work we have done on the Veterans Choice Card has not been properly implemented by the VA. Our veterans want this choice of private care. The Senator from Vermont has worked very hard on this issue, which enjoys bipartisan support.

I urge my colleagues to make sure we get this right for our veterans. That is what my amendment does.

Mr. SANDERS. Would the Senator agree to a voice vote?

Ms. AYOTTE. I would.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I wish to thank my colleague from New Hampshire for her work on this amendment with my office. We have successfully completed language that I think moves us forward in the right direction.

I also wish to thank my colleague Senator SANDERS for his tireless efforts on behalf of veterans, indicated most recently by this amendment, which is fully compatible with the Ayotte amendment.

I urge support for this amendment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there any further debate?

All time has expired.

The question is on agreeing to the amendment.

The amendment (No. 400) was agreed to.

AMENDMENT NO. 409

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there will now be 2 minutes of debate equally divided prior to a vote in relation to amendment No. 409, offered by the Senator from Nebraska, Mrs. FISCHER.

The Senator from Nebraska.

Mrs. FISCHER. Mr. President, this amendment I think satisfies the desire for all of us to reassert and reaffirm our support for equal pay for equal work.

Senator MIKULSKI spoke earlier about an amendment that I questioned because it ends merit pay, which I think hurts workplace flexibility and truly limits career opportunities for women.

My amendment again reaffirms that support, equal pay for equal work. But it also affirms the course of free speech, because free speech includes the right to discuss wage information with fellow coworkers, and that reflects the President's action that he took in 2014 to prevent retaliation from employers against employees who discuss wages with other employees or seek such information from their employers.

This is an amendment I believe all of us can support. It again reaffirms equal pay for equal work and the nonretaliation clause.

I thank the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. AYOTTE). The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. SANDERS. Madam President, I appreciate Senator FISCHER offering her side-by-side on equal pay. I am glad to see that this is, in fact, a stronger amendment than what my Republican colleagues have offered in the past. However, this amendment still does not go far enough.

In my view, Senator MIKULSKI's amendment is a far better alternative. It is not enough to ban retaliation about discussing salary information. This amendment would not allow women to act on any information they discovered. It would not give women their day in court and the opportunity to get money owed to them after sometimes months—sometimes years—of discrimination.

I urge my colleagues to oppose this amendment.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the amendment offered by the Senator from Nebraska, Mrs. FISCHER.

Mr. SANDERS. Madam President, I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The yeas and nays have been requested.

Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Texas (Mr. CRUZ).

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 56, nays 43, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 81 Leg.]

YEAS—56

Alexander	Fischer	Murkowski
Ayotte	Flake	Paul
Barrasso	Gardner	Perdue
Blunt	Graham	Portman
Boozman	Grassley	Risch
Burr	Hatch	Roberts
Capito	Heller	Rounds
Cassidy	Hoeven	Rubio
Coats	Inhofe	Sasse
Cochran	Isakson	Scott
Collins	Johnson	Sessions
Corker	King	Shelby
Cornyn	Kirk	Sullivan
Cotton	Lankford	Thune
Crapo	Lee	Tillis
Daines	Manchin	Toomey
Donnelly	McCain	Vitter
Enzi	McConnell	Wicker
Ernst	Moran	

NAYS—43

Baldwin	Blumenthal	Boxer
Bennet	Booker	Brown
Cantwell	Klobuchar	Sanders
Cardin	Leahy	Schatz
Carper	Markey	Schumer
Casey	McCaskill	Shaheen
Coons	Menendez	Stabenow
Durbin	Merkley	Tester
Feinstein	Mikulski	Udall
Franken	Murphy	Warner
Gillibrand	Murray	Warren
Heinrich	Nelson	Whitehouse
Heitkamp	Peters	Wyden
Hirono	Reed	
Kaine	Reid	

NOT VOTING—1

Cruz

The amendment (No. 409) was agreed to.

AMENDMENT NO. 362

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there will now be 2 minutes of debate equally divided prior to a vote in relation to amendment No. 362, offered by the Senator from Maryland, Ms. MIKULSKI.

The Senator from Maryland.

Ms. MIKULSKI. Madam President, I rise to urge the Senate to agree to the Mikulski amendment on paycheck fairness. This finishes the job we started with Lilly Ledbetter. What it does is not wishful thinking, but the real deal, where employers would be prohibited from retaliation for sharing pay information. Punitive damages would be allowed. So it would be a real deterrent for discriminating on pay. It stops employers from using any reason to pay women less, where they fabricate: ''Oh, he is the head of the household,'' or whatever.

I also then remind my colleagues that in addition to what it does, I will tell you what it does not do. This bill would not require an employer to cut the salaries of male employees. This bill would not have any criminal penalties in it for refusing to disclose wage information. This bill does not require the government to set salaries for Federal employees or anybody.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator's time has expired.

The Senator from Wyoming.

Mr. ENZI. Madam President, I urge my colleagues to vote no on the Mikulski amendment. The specificity of it makes it corrosive to the privilege of the budget. The budget resolution is focused on expanding economic growth, and that growth comes from new jobs—over 1 million jobs, according to the CBO, if our budget takes full effect.

As the economy grows, putting more people to work is our best strategy to increase pay for women and men. We all want women and men to earn equivalent pay for the same job at the same firm. That is why Congress enacted the Equal Pay Act of 1963, which prohibits discrimination in pay on the basis of gender for substantially similar work. Congress also passed Title 7 of the Civil Rights Act to prohibit businesses from discriminating on the basis of sex. These laws empower women to demand equal pay, and they have. The gap has been narrowing.

I ask Senators to vote no on this amendment because of its specificity. It is corrosive to the privilege of the budget.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the amendment.

Mr. ENZI. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Texas (Mr. CRUZ).

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 45, nays 54, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 82 Leg.]

YEAS—45

Baldwin	Gillibrand	Nelson
Bennet	Heinrich	Peters
Blumenthal	Heitkamp	Reed
Booker	Hirono	Reid
Boxer	Kaine	Sanders
Brown	Klobuchar	Schatz
Cantwell	Leahy	Schumer
Cardin	Manchin	Shaheen
Carper	Markey	Stabenow
Casey	McCaskill	Tester
Coons	Menendez	Udall
Donnelly	Merkley	Warner
Durbin	Mikulski	Warren
Feinstein	Murphy	Whitehouse
Franken	Murray	Wyden

NAYS—54

Alexander	Fischer	Murkowski
Ayotte	Flake	Paul
Barrasso	Gardner	Perdue
Blunt	Graham	Portman
Boozman	Grassley	Risch
Burr	Hatch	Roberts
Capito	Heller	Rounds
Cassidy	Hoeven	Rubio
Coats	Inhofe	Sasse
Cochran	Isakson	Scott
Collins	Johnson	Sessions
Corker	King	Shelby
Cornyn	Kirk	Sullivan
Cotton	Lankford	Thune
Crapo	Lee	Tillis
Daines	McCain	Toomey
Enzi	McConnell	Vitter
Ernst	Moran	Wicker

NOT VOTING—1

Cruz

The amendment (No. 362) was rejected.

AMENDMENT NO. 498

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there will now be 2 minutes of debate prior to a vote in relation to amendment No. 498, offered by the Senator from Wyoming, Mr. ENZI, for Mr. HATCH.

The Senator from Utah.

Mr. HATCH. Madam President, saving Social Security will require Congress to work in a bipartisan fashion, but most of all it will require Presidential leadership.

In 2009, President Obama held a fiscal responsibility summit to talk about the need for entitlement reform. During the summit the President said:

> What we have done is kicked this can down the road. We are now at the end of the road and are not in a position to kick it any further. We have to signal seriousness in this by making sure some of the hard decisions are made under my watch, not someone else's.

I agree with what the President said then, even if he hasn't exactly followed his own advice. It is time to roll up our sleeves and get to work.

Every year we delay makes it more difficult to implement gradual reforms to Social Security that will allow us to avoid abrupt changes for future beneficiaries. Delay makes it more difficult for hard-working Americans to gradually adjust their plans and makes it more likely they will be hit with an uncertain blow to benefits or more taxes.

My amendment calls for a reserve fund to allow Congress to consider legislation submitted by President Obama to protect current beneficiaries and save Social Security for future generations.

I urge my colleagues to oppose the Wyden amendment, which does not seem directed at bipartisan discussion.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. SANDERS. Madam President, this is a very important amendment, and I hope the American people listen carefully to what is in it. As Senator HATCH indicated, it protects current beneficiaries. In other words, they are not going to cut benefits for those currently on Social Security. But if you are 63 years of age, 64 years of age, 65 years of age, watch out. They are going after you.

I would suggest there is a way to extend the solvency of Social Security, and it deals with raising the cap and asking wealthy people to contribute more. We can make Social Security solvent for the next 50 years without cutting benefits for anybody. I urge a ''no'' vote on the Hatch amendment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to amendment No. 498.

Mr. ENZI. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Texas (Mr. CRUZ).

The result was announced—yeas 75, nays 24, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 83 Leg.]

YEAS—75

Alexander	Daines	Kirk
Ayotte	Donnelly	Klobuchar
Barrasso	Durbin	Lankford
Bennet	Enzi	Lee
Blumenthal	Ernst	Manchin
Blunt	Feinstein	McCain
Boozman	Fischer	McCaskill
Burr	Flake	McConnell
Cantwell	Gardner	Moran
Capito	Graham	Murkowski
Carper	Grassley	Murphy
Cassidy	Hatch	Murray
Coats	Heitkamp	Paul
Cochran	Heller	Perdue
Collins	Hoeven	Portman
Coons	Inhofe	Reid
Corker	Isakson	Risch
Cornyn	Johnson	Roberts
Cotton	Kaine	Rounds
Crapo	King	Rubio
Sasse	Shelby	Tillis
Schumer	Stabenow	Toomey
Scott	Sullivan	Vitter
Sessions	Tester	Warner
Shaheen	Thune	Wicker

NAYS—24

Baldwin	Heinrich	Peters
Booker	Hirono	Reed
Boxer	Leahy	Sanders
Brown	Markey	Schatz
Cardin	Menendez	Udall
Casey	Merkley	Warren
Franken	Mikulski	Whitehouse
Gillibrand	Nelson	Wyden

NOT VOTING—1

Cruz

The amendment (No. 498) was agreed to.

AMENDMENT NO. 471

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. GARDNER). Under the previous order, there will now be 2 minutes of debate equally divided prior to a vote in relation to amendment No. 471, offered by the Senator from Rhode Island, Mr. WHITEHOUSE, for the Senator from Oregon, Mr. WYDEN.

The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, colleagues, Social Security is a promise between workers and seniors that should never be broken, and Social Security benefits ought to be protected and should not be cut.

The Congress needs to take steps to ensure that Social Security can pay full benefits for future generations and must avoid creating artificial roadblocks to the proper use of Social Security trust funds.

The House of Representatives has refused to do that even though Social Security trust funds today have a balance of $2.8 trillion, and should be able to pay all earned benefits until 2033.

Support this amendment. Don't privatize Social Security.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, I know all my colleagues are committed to preserving Social Security. We all want Social Security to be there for today's and tomorrow's seniors. However, the Wyden amendment is not germane to the budget resolution.

The Finance Committee has jurisdiction over the Social Security program, both its benefits and finance structure. The Budget Committee has no purview over the Social Security program.

Moreover, the Wyden amendment instructs the Finance Committee how to write the legislation—language that is inappropriate for a budget resolution. In fact, it is corrosive. It damages the privilege of the budget.

For this reason, I am compelled, as chairman of the Budget Committee, to raise a point of order against the Wyden amendment. I make a point of order that this amendment violates section 305(b)(2) of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974, and I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, this amendment is very clear, unlike the

Hatch amendment. This amendment says we do not support cuts to Social Security—not for current beneficiaries, not for future beneficiaries. That is what this amendment is about.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, pursuant to section 904 of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974, I move to waive all applicable sections of the act for purposes of this pending amendment, and I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Texas (Mr. CRUZ).

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 51, nays 48, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 84 Leg.]

YEAS—51

Baldwin	Heinrich	Murphy
Bennet	Heitkamp	Murray
Blumenthal	Heller	Nelson
Booker	Hirono	Peters
Boxer	Hoeven	Portman
Brown	Kaine	Reed
Cantwell	King	Reid
Cardin	Kirk	Sanders
Carper	Klobuchar	Schatz
Casey	Leahy	Schumer
Collins	Manchin	Shaheen
Coons	Markey	Stabenow
Donnelly	McCain	Tester
Durbin	McCaskill	Udall
Feinstein	Menendez	Warren
Franken	Merkley	Whitehouse
Gillibrand	Mikulski	Wyden

NAYS—48

Alexander	Ernst	Perdue
Ayotte	Fischer	Risch
Barrasso	Flake	Roberts
Blunt	Gardner	Rounds
Boozman	Graham	Rubio
Burr	Grassley	Sasse
Capito	Hatch	Scott
Cassidy	Inhofe	Sessions
Coats	Isakson	Shelby
Cochran	Johnson	Sullivan
Corker	Lankford	Thune
Cornyn	Lee	Tillis
Cotton	McConnell	Toomey
Crapo	Moran	Vitter
Daines	Murkowski	Warner
Enzi	Paul	Wicker

NOT VOTING—1

Cruz

The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 51, the nays are 48.

Three-fifths of the Senators duly chosen and sworn not having voted in the affirmative, the motion is rejected. The point of order is sustained and the amendment falls.

AMENDMENT NO. 357

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there will now be 2 minutes of debate equally divided prior to a vote in relation to amendment No. 357, offered by the Senator from Texas, Mr. CORNYN.

The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, President Obama's budget has gotten some pretty rough coverage in the media recently. For example, the Los Angeles Times called the President's annual budget ''. . . a strange, almost fictional document.''

An article in Politico said, ''As he prepares to deliver his budget on Monday, President Barack Obama is lurching to the left.''

Another Politico article said, ''It's a progressive's dream version of Obama, untethered from earlier centrist leanings. . . .''

The President's budget has not had a great voting history in the Senate. Since 2011, there were only 2 votes for the President's proposed budget and 1,023 votes against it. This is an opportunity for all Members of the Senate to express their views on President Obama's proposed budget.

I recommend and ask that my colleagues vote no on this budget.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I don't know whose budget Senator CORNYN is presenting, but it is certainly not the President's budget. The President's budget recommends raising the minimum wage, and that is not in Senator CORNYN's proposal.

The President's budget includes 2 years of free community college. That is what the American people want, and it is not in Senator CORNYN's proposal.

The President's budget talks about a fair tax proposal, not more tax breaks for billionaires, and that is not in Senator CORNYN's proposal.

I will vote no because I am not quite sure what is in Senator CORNYN's proposal, but it is certainly not what President Obama presented to the American people.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, do I have any time remaining?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator has 6 seconds remaining.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I say to my friend that this is the President's proposed budget. Senators can vote yes or no. I am glad to hear the ranking member of the Budget Committee, Senator SANDERS, is going to vote no. I will vote no, and I encourage all Senators to vote no.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, how much time do we have remaining?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator has 20 seconds remaining.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, if Senator CORNYN wishes to bring a proposal that has 2 years of free community college to the floor, which is in the President's budget, I invite my friend to do that.

Is the Senator from Texas up for that?

If Senator CORNYN wants to bring a proposal to raise the minimum wage to $10.10 an hour, which is in the President's budget, I invite my friend to do that.

Will the Senator from Texas introduce that?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator's time has expired.

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

Under the previous order, the question is on agreeing to the amendment offered by the Senator from Texas, Mr. CORNYN.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Texas (Mr. CRUZ).

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 1, nays 98, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 85 Leg.]

YEAS—1

Carper

NAYS—98

Alexander	Franken	Nelson
Ayotte	Gardner	Paul
Baldwin	Gillibrand	Perdue
Barrasso	Graham	Peters
Bennet	Grassley	Portman
Blumenthal	Hatch	Reed
Blunt	Heinrich	Reid
Booker	Heitkamp	Risch
Boozman	Heller	Roberts
Boxer	Hirono	Rounds
Brown	Hoeven	Rubio
Burr	Inhofe	Sanders
Cantwell	Isakson	Sasse
Capito	Johnson	Schatz
Cardin	Kaine	Schumer
Casey	King	Scott
Cassidy	Kirk	Sessions
Coats	Klobuchar	Shaheen
Cochran	Lankford	Shelby
Collins	Leahy	Stabenow
Coons	Lee	Sullivan
Corker	Manchin	Tester
Cornyn	Markey	Thune
Cotton	McCain	Tillis
Crapo	McCaskill	Toomey
Daines	McConnell	Udall
Donnelly	Menendez	Vitter
Durbin	Merkley	Warner
Enzi	Mikulski	Warren
Ernst	Moran	Whitehouse
Feinstein	Murkowski	Wicker
Fischer	Murphy	Wyden
Flake	Murray	

NOT VOTING—1

Cruz

The amendment (No. 357) was rejected.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

AMENDMENT NO. 545

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to set aside the pending amendment and call up Kirk amendment No. 545.

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

The clerk will report.

The bill clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Wyoming [Mr. ENZI], for Mr. KIRK, proposes an amendment numbered 545.

Mr. ENZI. I ask unanimous consent that the reading of the amendment be dispensed with.

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

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: To establish a deficit-neutral reserve fund relating to reimposing waived sanctions and imposing new sanctions against Iran for violations of the Joint Plan of Action or a comprehensive nuclear agreement)

At the end of title III, add the following:

SEC. 3____. DEFICIT-NEUTRAL RESERVE FUND RELATING TO REIMPOSING WAIVED SANCTIONS AND IMPOSING NEW SANCTIONS AGAINST IRAN FOR VIOLATIONS OF THE JOINT PLAN OF ACTION OR A COMPREHENSIVE NUCLEAR AGREEMENT.

The Chairman of the Committee on the Budget of the Senate may revise the allocations of a committee or committees, aggregates, and other appropriate levels in this resolution for one or more bills, joint resolutions, amendments, amendments between the Houses, motions, or conference reports relating to Iran, which may include efforts to immediately reimpose waived sanctions and impose new sanctions against the Government of Iran for violations of the Joint Plan of Action or a comprehensive agreement on Iran's nuclear program, by the amounts provided in such legislation for those purposes, provided that such legislation would not increase the deficit over either the period of the total of fiscal years 2016 through 2020 or the period of the total of fiscal years 2016 through 2025.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota.

AMENDMENT NO. 412

Mr. ROUNDS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to set aside the pending amendment and call up my amendment No. 412.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The clerk will report.

The bill clerk read as follows:

The Senator from South Dakota [Mr. ROUNDS], for himself and Mr. INHOFE, proposes an amendment numbered 412.

Mr. ROUNDS. I ask unanimous consent that the reading of the amendment be dispensed with.

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

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: To establish a deficit-neutral reserve fund to prevent the Environmental Protection Agency and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service from engaging in closed-door settlement agreements that ignore impacted States and counties)

At the appropriate place, insert the following:

SEC. _____. DEFICIT-NEUTRAL RESERVE FUND TO PREVENT CERTAIN CLOSED-DOOR SETTLEMENT AGREEMENTS.

The Chairman of the Committee on the Budget of the Senate may revise the allocations of a committee or committees, aggregates, and other appropriate levels in this resolution for one or more bills, joint resolutions, amendments, amendments between the Houses, motions, or conference reports relating to environmental laws and citizen suits, which may include prohibitions on the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency and the Director of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service entering into any closed-door settlement agreement without seeking approval from all State, county, and local governments that would be directly impacted by the agreement, by the amounts provided in such legislation for those purposes, provided that such legislation would not increase the deficit over either the period of the total of fiscal years 2016 through 2020 or the period of the total of fiscal years 2016 through 2025.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota.

Mr. ROUNDS. Mr. President, my amendment aims to prevent the Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service from entering into settlement agreements without seeking approval from State, county, and local governments that would be affected by the settlement.

All too often, rather than writing and implementing environmental regulations in an open, transparent process, environmental regulations are implemented as the result of citizen suits that establish arbitrary timelines that force the agency to rush through the regulatory process. As a result, regulations that affect all sectors of the economy are implemented without following the proper administrative procedures.

It is unfortunate, but legislating by lawsuit has become commonplace as agencies repeatedly miss deadlines and are challenged by citizen suits alleging improper agency action.

A 2014 report by the Government Accountability Office found that legal mandates do influence an agency's selection of regulatory options. These lawsuits leave inadequate time for agencies to analyze the options available to them. As a result of this shortened timeline, agencies cannot do a proper analysis of proposed regulations. This leads to inadequate time for notice and comment. It keeps the citizens in the dark about economic impacts of significant regulations and does not allow for State and local governments to provide input regarding how these regulations will affect them.

For example, in 2011, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service entered into a settlement agreement with environmental groups that will lead to the potential listing of more than 250 species. Millions of acres across the United States will be impacted. Yet no State or local government was allowed to give input into the process.

Similarly, the Environmental Protection Agency has entered into settlement agreements on issues such as regional haze, which have no impact on public health but cost billions of dollars in impacted States. While the EPA is willing to talk to radical environmental groups in the settlement process, they did not consult with the impacted States or communities.

A vote for this amendment is a vote to say that we should fix this problem and that we make certain that our State and local governments are given a say in settlement agreements that will have impacts within their borders. A vote against this amendment is a vote against transparency and a vote to give radical environmental groups more say in the process than the States or local governments where the impacts actually occur.

I urge my colleagues to support this amendment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Delaware.

Mr. COONS. Mr. President, I have come to the floor this afternoon to speak about our budget and how the choices we will make over the next few days will reflect our values and priorities.

As someone who has acted as a countywide elected official writing balanced budgets, I have long viewed them as not just a collection of numbers and programs but also really a statement about our basic values and a reflection of what we hold dear. We can say we believe in this or that, but at the end of the day, our budgets tell the true story. Over the last 2 years in this body, following the hard work and leadership of Democratic Senators PATTY MURRAY and BARBARA MIKULSKI, the previous chairs of Budget and Appropriations Committees, we have taken important strides to stabilize our government's finances, invest in our middle class, and protect the most vulnerable among us.

After a few really hard years, our economy has begun to heal and grow again. We are now in the longest period of uninterrupted private sector job growth in our Nation's history—a period in which our businesses have created 12 million new jobs. Today, our national unemployment rate stands at 5.5 percent, and the deficit has fallen nearly two-thirds since the depths of the great recession. At a time when the economies around the world are slowing down, ours remains, relatively speaking, a global bright spot.

We need to continue on this path. We need to invest in this growth. And in my view, it is the wrong time to hit the brakes on our economy's resurgence.

Unfortunately, the budget proposed by Senate Republicans misses the mark and would, I fear, reverse these gains. It denies our basic values by balancing the budget on the backs of the poor and middle class while cutting investments essential for our Nation's competitiveness and future.

It relies on some budget gimmicks to actually increase defense spending while making broad cuts elsewhere, and it uses overly rosy predictions about growth and our debt that has time and again proven false. It does all this while protecting tax breaks for the very wealthiest and corporations at the expense of working families.

It is my hope that we can reach a budget that is responsible, balanced, and fair, that takes stock of our needs today and what the future will demand of us. So I would like to take a few minutes and outline broadly what I think our budget priorities should be.

First, we need a budget that preserves our social safety net by building a circle of protection around the most vulnerable among us and protecting the promises we have made to our seniors. Part of the basic bargain we make in this country is that when one of our neighbors falls on truly hard times,

their country offers a hand up. We need to ensure these basic protections to health care, food, and a home are there for those of our neighbors in deepest need. It is also part of that same bargain that after a lifetime of work, you will be able to retire with dignity and some security. As workers, we all pay in to Medicare and Social Security, and we need to ensure that as future generations of Americans grow up, raise their families, and contribute to our economy, the benefits they have spent their lives paying into will be there for them, just as they were for previous generations.

Yes, we should have a conversation about how to responsibly bring our long-term health care costs under control, but we can't do it the way this budget does, by irresponsibly shifting costs to seniors and the poor.

For retired Delawareans, for instance, the Republican budget would reverse an important reform in the Affordable Care Act and would raise prescription drug costs by an average of $1,100 a year.

Second, just as we are there for each other when times are hard, we must rebound and grow together by making specific and thoughtful investments in our future. We need a budget that understands that without critical investments in infrastructure, research, and science, our economy will struggle to grow and support a strong middle class. We need a budget that invests in our middle class and gives working families a fair shot—an economy that is built on growth and opportunity. These investments in growth are the basic building blocks of our economy. They make up our economic backbone and help create an environment for our Nation's drive and dynamism to flourish.

Growth, however, requires infrastructure. We have a roughly $3.6 trillion infrastructure debt—investments in infrastructure that are due by 2020. Every year we put off investing in our roads, bridges, tunnels, and ports. Every year we fall behind our competitors, and we make it harder for our businesses to grow and create jobs. Growth also requires investing in research and development. Our long-term competitiveness depends on our ability to innovate faster than our competitors. Although businesses already invest a huge amount in R&D, the Federal Government plays a critical role through our national labs, through the manufacturing extension partnership, and other grant programs that either directly invest in or incentivize the research that leads to innovation.

Finally, growth in our country requires ensuring that every child has access to a quality education. It requires making it easier for families to send their kids to college and easier for young people to manage the costs of their college through managing student loans after school, and it requires strengthening the real connection between the classroom and workplace so education can be a sturdier rung to a longer ladder of opportunity.

Throughout our history our middle class has thrived and our economy has been strong when we made these sorts of investments in our economy and middle class. We need a budget that continues those investments.

Finally, we need a budget that lowers our deficit responsibly, in a way that is fair and forward-looking—not on the backs of the middle class and poor and not done in a way that kills jobs and stifles growth. Over the last few years we have done a lot to get our deficit under control, using about three-quarters of spending cuts and about a quarter of increased revenue. We have also benefitted from a steadily growing economy which has lowered our deficit.

As we move forward, we need balanced deficit reduction that preserves our investments in our future and our promises to each other. That will mean raising some revenues by asking the wealthy and corporations to pay a bit more, just as it will mean making hard choices over the long run about the true causes of our deficits and debt.

But let's be clear. We can do this while investing in our future and keeping our promises to our seniors, to our veterans, and to each other. The best way to lower our deficit is to grow our economy. So we need to invest in that growth. After all, an airplane needs an engine to take off, even in strong headwinds.

Over the coming days we will be voting on a wide series of amendments that will say a lot about our values and priorities. I would urge my colleagues to keep in mind that which has always powered our economy and will continue to into the future—an economy that gives families a fair shot and invests in the strength and opportunity of the middle class and those fighting to get into the middle class. That is how we build an economy. I hope we will dedicate ourselves to a budget that will help us do so, far into the future.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. DAINES). The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

AMENDMENT NO. 423, AS MODIFIED

Mr. RUBIO. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to set aside the pending amendment and call up my amendment No. 423, as modified with the changes at the desk.

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

The clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Florida [Mr. RUBIO] proposes an amendment numbered 423, as modified.

Mr. RUBIO. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the reading of the amendment be dispensed with.

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

The amendment, as modified, is as follows:

(Purpose: To increase new budget authority fiscal years 2016 and 2017 and modify outlays for fiscal years 2016 through 2022 for National Defense (budget function 050))

On page 14, line 2, strike ''$620,263,000,000'' and insert ''$696,776,000,000''.

On page 14, line 3, strike ''$605,189,000,000'' and insert ''$658,021,000,000''.

On page 14, line 6, strike ''$544,506,000,000'' and insert ''$657,496,000,000''.

On page 14, line 7, strike ''$576,934,000,000'' and insert ''$659,073,000,000''.

On page 14, line 11, strike ''$588,049,000,000'' and insert ''$588,239,000,000''.

On page 14, line 15, strike ''$546,685,000,000'' and insert ''$577,154,000,000''.

On page 14, line 19, strike ''$573,614,000,000'' and insert ''$580,468,000,000''.

On page 14, line 23, strike ''$586,038,000,000'' and insert ''$588,936,000,000''.

On page 15, line 3, strike ''$596,103,000,000'' and insert ''$596,065,000,000''.

Mr. RUBIO. Mr. President, let me begin by saying that I believe defense spending is the most important obligation of the Federal Government. That doesn't mean we throw money away or we put money in places where it doesn't belong or we fund projects that have no utility. But it does mean the most important thing the Federal Government does for America is to defend it.

We have benefitted from the fact that for the last 100 years, America has had the most powerful military force on the planet. This is especially true since the end of the Second World War. There have been times in our history when we tried to save money by cutting back on defense spending, and each and every time, it has forced us to come back later and spend even more to make up for it.

It is interesting to point out that in times in the past when we have taken a peace dividend—this idea that the world is no longer unstable or unsafe and we can now spend less on defense—each and every time, we have had to come back and make up for it later as a new threat emerged. I don't think we can make the argument that this is a time when the world is stable or peaceful. Yet this is a time of dramatic reductions in defense spending.

During this administration, first came the defense cuts of $480 billion over 10 years. Adding insult to injury, by the way, was that the savings found in the defense budget were redirected to already bloated domestic programs.

Secretary Gates wrote in his memoirs about the extent to which he was forced to cut costs, saying: ''[N]o other department had done anything comparable—even proportionally.''

This was then followed by tens of billions more in defense cuts each year through sequestration, which will add up to a total of a trillion dollars over the next decade, despite the warnings of three secretaries of defense and our entire military leadership.

All in all, inflation-adjusted defense spending has declined 21 percent since

2010. Even if we discount the drawdowns in Iraq and Afghanistan, it has still declined by a dangerous 12 percent. This is happening at the same time that China is undergoing the most expansive, most aggressive defense increase in modern history; at a time when Russia, despite being eviscerated by economic sanctions, has held their defense spending largely harmless; at a time when radical Islam around the world—both the rise of ISIS and the existence of Al Qaeda and other groups such as al-Nusra and the Khorasan group and others—poses an ongoing threat to the United States. This at a time when many of our potential adversaries and adversaries, such as North Korea and Iran, are developing long-range rocket capabilities that could reach the continental United States. This is the worst possible time to be reducing our defense spending, and yet that is what we are doing. We are setting ourselves up for danger.

I would recognize that people who have worked hard on this budget have tried to find new ways to address this through contingency funding. I respect the work they have done, and ultimately that may be where we end up. But before we do, it is important for this body to have a serious debate about how we are underfunding defense spending in this country and the dangers it poses for our future.

That is the purpose of this amendment. The purpose of this amendment is to replace the defense numbers in this budget with the projected fiscal year 2016 number from the fiscal 2012 Gates budget. This was the last defense budget, the Gates budget, that was put together solely on the assessment of the threats we face and the requisite military needs to deal with it. It is the budget that the bipartisan congressionally mandated National Defense Panel stated was the minimum required to reverse course and set the military on more stable footing.

With that, I ask unanimous consent that I be allowed to enter into a colloquy with my colleague from Arkansas, Senator COTTON.

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

Mr. RUBIO. I would ask Senator COTTON, who has extensive experience both serving in uniform and here in the Senate as well as in the House, his views on the dangers this poses, the rates that we are reducing military spending, and what it means to the long-term security of the United States.

Mr. COTTON. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Florida. I am pleased to offer this amendment with him. I do agree that it is critical we have this debate on what we should be spending on our military. While I respect the work of the Budget Committee, I also call attention to the views of the chairman and the ranking member of the Armed Services Committee on which I sit, that they would spend $577 billion on defense next year, which would eliminate sequestration.

I suggest, as the Senator from Florida did, that we need to look to the views of the National Defense Panel, which did draw from Secretary Gates' fiscal year 2012 budget, projecting into fiscal year 2016. While Secretary Gates had a reputation as a reformer, he had already found $450 billion of savings in the Department of Defense at that time. It is hard to say there is much fat left.

Second, as the Senator from Florida pointed out, that was the last time the Department of Defense engaged in what we should do in this body, which is the budgeting for the military based on the threats we face and the strategy we need, not having a strategy that is driven by the budget.

But that is not enough. As the National Defense Panel said itself, at $611 billion, that projection is not enough. Why is it not enough? Some of the threats the Senator from Florida identified. In the last 4 years, what have we seen? The Islamic State on the rise, rampaging across Iraq and Syria. Iran racing toward a nuclear weapon even as it asserts greater control and dominance over Baghdad, Damascus, Beirut, and now Sanaa.

We have seen Russian revisionism, invading a sovereign country in the heart of Europe, shooting a civilian airliner out of the sky in the heart of Europe, and China on the rise, developing military capabilities that are quite clearly directed against the United States and our allies in the first island chain. That is why we need this debate. That is why we need the military budget the Senator from Florida and I are proposing, because the eyes of the world are upon us, not just our enemies, but our allies as well, wondering if America will not only have the resolve to stand by its commitment but if it will have the capabilities to stand by those commitments, whoever the Commander in Chief may be.

But there is one final important group whose eyes are on this institution this week. It is our soldiers, our sailors, our airmen, and our marines, who are wondering if the elected representatives of the people will stand with them, will provide them the resources they need to be ready, to be trained, equipped, and ready to fight our Nation's wars so they do not have to fight them in the first place.

Earlier today, I had the great benefit of being able to meet with a group of Army majors and captains, the mid-career officers, just like the mid-career noncommissioned officers who are the backbone of our military. Two of those men I started officer candidate school with at Fort Benning 10 years ago this coming Friday, one of whom has been seriously injured.

To a person, they all said that training is down, families are strained, operations are stressed, equipment is overused, and they wanted to know, will the Congress of the United States give them the tools they need to fight and win our country's wars? That is why I am proud to stand here with the Senator from Florida to offer this amendment and say that, yes, we will stand by them. Yes, we will make sure they are ready to fight and win our wars so they do not have to fight them in the first place.

I yield back.

Mr. RUBIO. I would say there is not much to add to what the Senator from Arkansas has pointed out. As he well knows, the importance that we have made to the men and women of our armed services, that is, that we will never put them in a fair fight. It will always be an unfair fight to their advantage. They will be the best trained, best equipped, and best-taken-care of fighting men and women on the planet.

We cannot keep that commitment if we continue to reduce spending on the military and on defense at the rate we are going today.

I would add one more point, that is, that much of the world security today is based upon American military alliances that are built upon American military assurances, so, for example, in the Asia-Pacific region, where the Japanese, the South Koreans, and other allies in the region look to an American umbrella of defense to provide them certainty in the face of real risk, whether it is territorial claims made by China that are illegitimate, or the nuclear threat of North Korea.

Why haven't the South Koreans developed their own nuclear weapons? Because they believe the United States will be there to help them defend themselves. Why have the Japanese never felt compelled to use their technological know-how to build a nuclear program? Because they believe the United States is their ally and will come to their collective self-defense.

These countries do their own spending. The Japanese have a very capable military force and a great force multiplier in the region, despite not being called a military force.

The South Koreans are a very impressive fighting force and have a very courageous history. But that American security alliance in the region is critical to the long-term stability and security of that region, a region where a lot of global growth is happening on the economic front, where 50, 60, 70 percent of global trade and commerce transits through the South and East China Seas.

The U.S. Navy's presence in the region, along with our other branches, is critical for the defense of the region. The same is true with the NATO Alliance in Europe. It relies on American security guarantees. The same is true—if a terrible deal, God forbid, is arrived at by this administration with Iran, our partners and allies in the region, particularly Saudi Arabia and others, are going to look to the United States and say: Well, what are you going to do to help us be protected from an Iranian nuclear weapon, with the missiles they are able to acquire?

So what is going to happen when they turn and we say to them: We are

with you; we are going to be there; We are going to continue to work with you; we are going to continue to live up to our defense capabilities, but we do not have the capabilities to meet our obligations? In essence, you can talk pivoting to Asia, but you have to have something to pivot with. If we have eviscerated our military, we have eviscerated our naval capacity, if we are on pace, as we are now, to have the smallest Air Force and the smallest Navy we have had in a very long time, we can say whatever we want, but our allies will not believe us because we will not have the capabilities to meet it.

The other challenge we have is when we talk about modernization, we are not talking about the Commander in Chief today. When we decide how much money we are going to spend on modernizing our military capabilities, what we are deciding is what are the technologies and tools that are going to be available to a future Commander in Chief in 5, 10, or 15 years.

These innovative systems that we use today that have cut down on civilian casualties, that allow us to improve our targeting, our intelligence-gathering capabilities, that have made the United States the premier fighting force in all of human history—all of those things were developed a decade ago or longer, through years of experimentation and testing, through innovation.

So if we cut back on that now, in 10 years a future Commander in Chief will be faced with a threat to our national security, and will not have the latest, greatest technology on the planet to address it.

What about the asymmetrical capabilities that China and others are developing? Instead of trying to out-aircraft-carrier us, they build weapons to destroy aircraft carriers. As we try to adjust to that threat, what is going to happen in a few years if we do not keep pace?

The absence of a long-range bomber, the need to replace an aging submarine fleet, a Navy that is headed for a catastrophic low number of ships, all of these things need to be confronted, not to mention the fact that we are not modernizing at an efficient and effective rate our nuclear arsenal, which is a key part of our deterrence, in a world where China, Russia, and others have significant stockpiles of weapons, particularly the Russians.

All of those things are important. These are long-range, long-term decisions that will have an impact on a future Congress, on a future Commander in Chief, and on our children and grandchildren, who will be the ones who have to live in that world. I promise you that a world where America is no longer the most capable fighting force on the planet is a world that is more chaotic and less safe.

I look forward to having a debate on this. I encourage my colleagues to rally around these numbers. This is what we should be funding defense at. As my colleague, the Senator from Arkansas, accurately pointed out, and I am honored to work with him on this, strategy should not be driven by defense spending, the defense spending should be driving the strategy. In essence, to put it succinctly, we should not have a strategy that is based on limited resources. We are going to have to do the best we can with limited resources. We should first outline a strategy. This is what the strategy should be for the future of our country to keep us safe. Then we should fund that strategy, not the other way around. That is not what we are doing now. We are setting a dangerous precedent. More importantly, we are putting at risk the national security of this country. Once you have made that decision, it is very difficult to reverse it in a timely way. We have learned this lesson the hard way multiple times in our history. I hope we do not have to it learn it again.

I look forward to working with the Senator from Arkansas on this amendment, and with my colleagues. There is great respect for the work that has gone into this budget, and the work of many others who are equally committed to the national defense of our country. I acknowledge the hard work they have put into finding a solution to get more money into defense, but it is not enough. Everyone knows that. The sooner we deal with this, the safer our country is going to be.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, in response to the colloquy that just transpired, I would simply say that for all of the earnest and I am sure sincere spirit behind it, there is no willingness to even close one corporate tax loophole to support our Nation's defense, which I think puts into some context the priority in which that is held as a practical matter, as opposed to a theoretical matter.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. President, I have come to the floor today to urge this Chamber to wake up to the urgent threat of climate change. I have done this every week the Senate has been in session for nearly 3 years. Today is my 94th time. I have asked my colleagues to heed the warnings from our scientists, from our military and national security professionals, from many of our leading American corporations and executives, from their own home-State universities, and from so many of our faith leaders.

Since it is budget week, we would do well to also consider that for years the Government Accountability Office has placed climate change on its biannual high-risk list of the greatest fiscal challenges facing the Federal Government. But even so, there is no attention from the other side.

This risk is particularly great in coastal areas, such as in my home State of Rhode Island, where sea levels rise ever closer to infrastructure and property, and extreme weather exacts an ever heavier toll. Secretary of the Treasury Lew put it pretty plainly: If the fiscal burden from climate change continues to rise, it will create budgetary pressures that will force hard tradeoffs—larger deficits or higher taxes. And these tradeoffs would make it more challenging to invest in growth, to meet the needs of an aging population, and to provide for our national defense.

My Republican colleagues want to slash spending. Indeed, they have almost a fixation on slashing spending. They say they do not want to leave a financial mess for future generations to bear, but they ignore the need to slash our carbon emissions and don't care a bit about leaving an environmental mess for future generations to bear. They refuse because the polluters and their allies have built a fearsome political machine in Citizens United, and the polluters demand that the Republicans follow their denier script.

Well, unfortunately, nature won't wait for our politics to sort themselves out, and nowhere are these changes occurring more clearly than in our oceans. The changes in our oceans are real, and they are measurable. They follow the laws of biology, of chemistry, and of physics. Our steady flood of carbon pollution has real consequences.

Scientists from the University of California, Stanford, and Rutgers recently published a peer-reviewed paper in Science magazine on marine defaunation. ''Defaunation'' is a big word for the widespread loss of animal life in the ocean. Human activities, they argue, including overfishing, pollution, and carbon emissions, are wiping out sea life. Populations of marine vertebrates, including sea birds, mammals, and turtles, have decreased by an average of 22 percent over the last 40 years. Fish have declined by nearly 40 percent. Major fish species have crashed 90 percent. Coral is having massive bleaching and die-off. We are living, the authors say, in a time of ''empty reefs,'' ''empty estuaries,'' and ''empty bays.''

How is it that carbon pollution changes the ocean environment? Pretty simply, greenhouse gases in the atmosphere trap heat. That is not news. We have known that since Abraham Lincoln was President. Much of that heat goes right into the ocean. Globally, oceans absorb 90 percent of the heat captured by greenhouse gases.

Well, all that heat disrupts marine life. Corals, for example, will expel the algae living in their tissues when water is too warm, causing the coral to turn completely white and die in what is known as coral bleaching.

Other species that aren't stuck in one place like coral are literally swimming away. We have seen fish, accustomed to specific temperatures, migrating to cooler waters. Along the entire Northeast seaboard, the movement

of fish farther north and into deeper waters is well documented. NOAA has even developed tools to allow fisheries managers and scientists to go online and track the movement of different species through time.

I have had fishermen back home tell me they are catching fish their fathers and grandfathers never saw come up in their nets. One Rhode Island fisherman told me: ''Sheldon, it's getting weird out there.'' Forty percent of fishermen in the Northeast reported catching new fish species in places where they wouldn't expect to find them.

In a recent Center for American Progress survey, those who believe climate change is happening outnumber deniers four to one.

Just last week, the Providence Journal, my own home State paper, reported on the continuing loss of ice smelt from the waters of the Northeast. The smelt live in estuaries and bays in the wintertime, once making it a favorite for ice fishermen. But now where the ice-fishing cottages used to cover the ice, there are very few. That fishery has crashed. In Narragansett Bay, the winter flounder fishery has crashed.

From Maine comes a recent news article from our former Republican colleague, Olympia Snowe. It is titled, rather bluntly, ''Lack of Action on Climate Change is Costing Fishing Jobs.'' Senator Snowe reports that the shrimp fishery in the Gulf of Maine was closed this winter for the second year in a row because the shrimp are nowhere to be found.

The shrimp fishery has crashed, and the crash has been precipitous. As recently as 2010, shrimpers in the Gulf of Maine hauled in 12 million pounds of northern shrimp. By the time they had to close the fishery, the catch was down to less than 600,000 pounds. One likely culprit is warming seas. The Gulf of Maine is at the southern end of the shrimp's range, and the Gulf of Maine is warming exceptionally fast. An estimate from the Gulf of Maine Research Institute shows that water temperatures in the gulf rose eight times faster than the global average in recent years.

The rapid changes in the Gulf of Maine are causing things to get strange for the other fisheries as well. Our colleague ANGUS KING has come to the floor repeatedly to describe the northward march of the iconic Maine lobster.

Cod populations in the Gulf of Maine suffered for years from overfishing. Now the cod are struggling to recover as temperatures in the gulf increase. The cod might not return, instead seeking out cooler water elsewhere.

Another scientific fact: Warmer temperatures make oxygen less soluble in water. When oxygen is too low for marine life to flourish, that creates dead zones, which are growing around our oceans in size and in number. If carbon pollution continues at pace, global oxygen levels in the ocean are predicted to drop by more than 3 percent over the century. Do we tell the fish to hold their breath while we wait to wake up?

Carbon pollution also makes the oceans more acidic—another scientific fact. Ocean water has absorbed roughly a quarter of all historic carbon dioxide emissions, driving up the pH level of the oceans at rates not seen in perhaps the last 300 million years. To put 300 million years in context, that is more than 1,000 times as long as our species has been on this planet. We are gambling with very big changes that we have never seen in human time and that are a long way back in geologic time.

Acidifying waters make it harder for animals such as oysters or even the humble pteropod—a main component of the salmon diet—and a lot of other creatures at the base of the oceanic food chain to make their shells and develop properly from juveniles to adults.

Increasingly, those acidic oceans are hurting U.S. shellfish, and shellfish are a $1 billion American industry. More acidic waters have already cost the oyster industry in the Pacific Northwest nearly $110 million, putting 3,200 jobs at risk. The Pacific Northwest is being hit first by ocean acidification, but the effects are expected to be felt hardest in the Northeast—my home—according to a recent article in the journal Nature Climate Change. Conditions in the Northeast will jeopardize the $14 million annual mollusk harvest in my State of Rhode Island, putting my home State's coastal communities at real risk of economic harm.

Bill Mook, president of Mook Sea Farm in Maine, testified before the Environment and Public Works Committee last summer about the decline in oyster larva that he has linked to more acidic water. As he said, delicate shellfish hatcheries are ''canaries in the coal mine,'' the first victims of a growing menace.

Yet we still don't listen. From coast to coast and pole to pole, the oceans are warning us, and we still do not listen. The authors of the Science magazine paper warned that we are headed into ''an era of global chemical warfare'' on the oceans—and we don't listen.

We must wake up to the warnings that are coming from our oceans. The evidence is there for everyone to see. It is a matter of measurement, basic measurements of temperature, of pH, of sea level—real high school science class stuff—that are showing us these changes. Yet we won't listen.

Fishermen in Rhode Island and across the country are already feeling these changes. They see them around them.

Colleagues, if you are not a scientist, go ask the coastal and ocean scientists at your home State university. They will give you the answer.

I conclude by going back to what Senator Snowe wrote:

The loss of Maine's $5 million shrimp fishery should serve as a warning. A similar blow to our $300 million lobster fishery must be avoided at all costs. That will require honest, fact-based discussion and a genuine bipartisan commitment to solutions.

Well, we have had neither around here for a long time. There has been no honest, fact-based discussion, and there has been no bipartisan commitment to solutions. That has to change.

I hope Senator Snowe's fellow Republicans in the Senate will join with us Democrats in that honest, fact-based discussion and in a genuine bipartisan commitment to solutions. I hope our colleagues will unshackle themselves from the fossil fuel industry—which is an industry riddled with appalling conflicts of interest on this subject—and wake the heck up.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. CAPITO). The Senator from Montana.

AMENDMENT NO. 388

Mr. DAINES. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to set aside the pending amendment and call up my amendment No. 388.

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

The clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Montana [Mr. DAINES] proposes an amendment numbered 388.

Mr. DAINES. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the reading of the amendment be dispensed with.

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

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: To establish a deficit-neutral reserve fund relating to the designation of national monuments)

At the appropriate place, insert the following:

SEC. _____. DEFICIT-NEUTRAL RESERVE FUND RELATING TO THE DESIGNATION OF NATIONAL MONUMENTS.

The Chairman of the Committee on the Budget of the Senate may revise the allocations of a committee or committees, aggregates, and other appropriate levels in this resolution for one or more bills, joint resolutions, amendments, amendments between the Houses, motions, or conference reports relating to ensuring that State and local governments support designations of national monuments under section 320301 of title 54, United States Code, by the amounts provided in such legislation for those purposes, provided that such legislation would not increase the deficit over either the period of the total of fiscal years 2016 through 2020 or the period of the total of fiscal years 2016 through 2025.

Mr. DAINES. Madam President, as a fifth-generation Montanan and avid sportsman, I know firsthand how important Montana's lands and resources are to our economy and our way of life. I also know how important it is for Montanans to play a strong role in the management of these precious parts of our State. In Montana, we understand that our resource use must be done responsibly. We understand the importance of protecting our State's treasures so that future generations may continue to have the same experiences and job opportunities we have today.

We also know that the Montanans who use and live on the land every day best understand how to best protect those resources. But, unfortunately, the Obama administration's persistent efforts to stretch the true intent of the Antiquities Act threatens Montana's ability to manage our State's resources, and it is a trend we are seeing across other States as well.

Too often these unilateral designations completely ignore the needs of the local community—the farmers and ranchers, the sportsmen and small business owners directly impacted by these new designations. My amendment will establish a deficit-neutral reserve fund for legislation to ensure States and local governments support national monument designations.

This amendment in no way precludes the President from proposing a national monument. However, any bill or designation that has a potential to impact land management must be locally driven, not spearheaded in Washington, and must have local government and State support as well. This amendment ensures the people affected most by these designations have a seat at the table and their voices are heard.

AMENDMENT NO. 389

Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to set aside the pending amendment and call up my amendment No. 389.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Montana [Mr. DAINES] proposes an amendment numbered 389.

Mr. DAINES. I ask unanimous consent that the reading of the amendment be dispensed with.

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

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: To establish a deficit-neutral reserve fund relating to holding Members of the Senate and the House of Representatives accountable for failing to pass a balanced budget)

At the appropriate place, insert the following:

SEC. _____. DEFICIT-NEUTRAL RESERVE FUND RELATING TO HOLDING MEMBERS OF THE SENATE AND THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ACCOUNTABLE FOR FAILING TO PASS A BALANCED BUDGET.

The Chairman of the Committee on the Budget of the Senate may revise the allocations of a committee or committees, aggregates, and other appropriate levels in this resolution for one or more bills, joint resolutions, amendments, amendments between the Houses, motions, or conference reports relating to holding Members of the Senate and the House of Representatives accountable for failing to pass a balanced budget by the amounts provided in such legislation for those purposes, provided that such legislation would not increase the deficit over either the period of the total of fiscal years 2016 through 2020 or the period of the total of fiscal years 2016 through 2025.

Mr. DAINES. Madam President, I offer amendment No. 389 to the budget resolution to establish a deficit-neutral reserve to hold Members of Congress accountable for failing to pass a balanced budget.

Washington has balanced its budget only five times in the last five decades. Let me say that again. Washington has only balanced its budget five times in the last 50 years. This is completely unacceptable, and it threatens the prosperity of future generations. By strengthening accountability and demanding results, my amendment will help restore fiscal responsibility—I would call it fiscal sanity—in Washington.

I have introduced related legislation—the Balanced Budget Accountability Act—which would terminate the salaries of Members of the House and Senate if their respective Chamber does not pass a balanced budget. Simply put, no balanced budget, no pay. It is time to hold Congress accountable to the taxpayer. It is time to hit the Members of Congress in their pocketbooks if they can't pass a balanced budget.

Chairman ENZI's budget meets this commonsense principle, and by passing my amendment to the budget resolution we will reinforce our commitment to passing similar balanced budgets in the future.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. DAINES). The Senator from West Virginia.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mrs. CAPITO. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

LYNCH NOMINATION

Mrs. CAPITO. Mr. President, before turning to the budget resolution pending before the Senate this week, I would like to first discuss the nomination of Loretta Lynch to be Attorney General. Last week, I met with Loretta Lynch to discuss the legality of President Obama's Executive actions and her views concerned me.

President Obama and his administration have a record of overstepping legal authority on immigration, implementation of the Affordable Care Act, and imposing anti-energy regulations. Despite her qualifications, I am not confident that Loretta Lynch will exercise the independence needed to stand up for the proper separation of powers, and I will not support her nomination.

THE BUDGET

Mrs. CAPITO. Mr. President, turning to the budget, I rise in strong support of this resolution that delivers on the promise to balance our budget without increasing taxes. West Virginia families and families across our country understand they cannot continually spend more money than they take in. Each month families have to balance their budgets and decide how to spend their limited resources, make tough choices, set priorities, and account for unexpected expenses.

Unfortunately, annual deficits are routine for the Federal Government, but we have recently endured 4 straight years with an annual deficit of at least $1 trillion. Despite recent drops, our national debt now stands at $18 trillion. That totals more than $56,000 for every American.

American families cannot withstand spending more than they earn from month to month and neither should the Federal Government.

The debate on this budget resolution brings the Senate to an important crossroads. We can choose the President's path, which increases taxes and adds another $6 trillion to our national debt, or we can choose to support the responsible budget on the Senate floor this week. If we fail to make the tough decisions to reduce our Federal spending, we will leave mountains of debt to our children and our grandchildren.

Our first responsibility as leaders should be to leave our country better and stronger for the next generation of Americans. That starts by taking steps to balance our budget, and this budget balances in 10 years.

This budget provides us with the flexibility to address many of the important issues confronting our Nation, including evolving threats from terrorists. When West Virginians hear about ISIS, instability in Yemen, the failing state of Iraq, the first thing we think about is the safety and security of our own families. Terrorism hits close to home, and we must ensure we have the flexibility to fund a strong national defense. Like American families, we must have flexibility to account for unexpected expenses and unexpected threats as they arise.

This budget resolution gives us the ability to pass a long-term highway bill that is paid for. We must invest in our Nation's roads and bridges and do so in a fiscally responsible way.

This budget resolution paves the way for an extension of the State Children's Health Insurance Program—a bipartisan initiative which will, hopefully, be considered by the Senate in short order. This budget facilitates changes that help our rural hospitals continue to provide critical medical services in their communities.

Our Nation's priorities are reflected in this Nation's budget. I want to draw special attention to the energy provisions in this budget. I have said many times an energy economy is a jobs economy. Energy is at the forefront of many West Virginians' minds, whether we are paying for our monthly energy bill or checking the gas prices.

The production of coal and natural gas accounts for tens of thousands of