make the point this is not something new. They always tend to grow and grow. I have taken occasion with every President of both parties to plead with them not to send a supplemental; just do what we need in the regular appropriations process. But they always do it. And quite often we urge them to do it when there are, ostensibly, emergencies. Many of them are very legitimate.

On the other side of this coin, this is supposedly an emergency. We should have done it 2 months ago. The President should have asked for it earlier, the House should have acted earlier, and we should have found a way to act early, although it is hard to be too critical of the time in the Senate because we were not going to be able to move forward on it until the House acted.

If it is an emergency, if it is payback for what we have spent in defense, if it is to provide what we need on an emergency basis—homeland security, Coast Guard, whatever—in terms of making sure our country is safe, we should have already done it. To drag this out into next week would not be a positive thing.

I add that amendments that would be offered, if we don't get cloture, will make worse a bill that has a lot of problems. Substantive amendments would be offered that would cause problems. More spending would be added. The better part of valor is to vote for cloture, continue to work to try to pare it down to a more reasonable number, get it in conference, and get it closer to what the President wants so we can get our work done before the Fourth of July recess and get it to the President so he can sign it.

We are not unanimous on our side of this issue. The proper leadership position is to say, let's vote for cloture, go forward in the hours we have after cloture to cut it back and then get it into conference.

I urge my colleagues on both sides to vote for this cloture motion. Perhaps the cloture was filed too quickly. I understand, as majority leader, sometimes events or speeches prod you to do things that later maybe you wish you had not done. The fact is the majority leader filed it, and we will vote on it. After watching events the last 2 days, I think we should go ahead and support cloture.

With that, I yield the floor.

Mr. REID. Before the Senator from Mississippi, the Republican leader, leaves the floor, I express my appreciation for his leadership role in suggesting and advocating that we invoke cloture.

This is the right thing to do for the country. There are things in the bill I do not like. There are things in the bill the President does not like. But that is what conferences are all about.

We will get this thing out of here. There are some motions to strike. I understand we have been talking about bringing those forward for several days now. Good, let's have them come forward. We will vote as to whether or not they are good or bad motions. Let's get the matter to conference as quickly as possible so we can help our troops and we can help homeland defense.

The Republican leader's advocacy is something that is good for the country, and I appreciate that very much.

Madam President, I ask unanimous consent the statement of the Senator from New Jersey not appear interrupted and he be given, minus the time he has already taken, the full 30 minutes as the Republicans would be given, and then we will shorten the time.

I am reminded, of course, it is not the full 30 minutes but whatever he was accorded, following the initial discussion, prior to his beginning. The Democrats would have the same amount of time as Republicans; we would just shorten the time before 11 o'clock for those for and against the cloture motion.

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

The Senator from New Jersey.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Mr. CORZINE. Madam President, this morning I would like to take a few moments to talk about one of my favorite subjects: Social Security and the privatization plans that have been developed by President Bush's Social Security Commission.

As I have discussed in the past, I, like many Members, have serious concerns about these privatization plans, primarily because they involve deep cuts in guaranteed benefits. Those cuts would exceed 25 percent for many current workers and would exceed 45 percent for seniors in the future. The cuts would apply even to those who choose not to participate in these privatized accounts. In effect, they would force many Americans to delay their retirement.

Over the past few weeks, I have engaged in an ongoing dialogue with privatization supporters, including the Cato Institute and a few of the members of the Bush Commission. The Cato Institute criticized the national radio address I gave on April 27 describing the privatization program the Bush Commission proposed. I then responded with a critique of their critique. And then, most recently, I received a letter from 6 of the 16 members of the President's Commission with a critique of my critique of the Cato critique.

Unfortunately, their critique also is flawed, as I have outlined in a letter back to the six Commissioners, and as I want to discuss today.

The most fundamental disagreement I have with the six Commissioners concerns the deep cuts in guaranteed benefits included in the Commission's report. The Commissioners state:

> The Commission proposals do not "cut benefits" for anyone.

I am troubled by this statement, which, at best, is highly misleading. Essentially, the Commissioners are arguing that reductions in benefit levels, relative to those proposed under current law, should not be considered cuts. That is just wrong on its face.

The Commissioners reach this conclusion by assuming that the assets in the Social Security trust fund will be deleted in the future and Congress will refuse to take the steps necessary to honor the promises made to workers who now are paying into the system. They make this assumption even though they also assume that massive amounts of general revenue will be available to subsidize privatized accounts.

In effect, the Commissioners are arguing that Congress, having used Social Security funds for other purposes, now should be able to break its promise to retirees because there is not enough money in the trust fund.

To me, this is tantamount to a borrower telling a lender: I haven't saved enough, and therefore I have a right to default on your loan. And, moreover, the reduction in my payments to you should not be considered a cut or a loss to your income.

I do not think that adds up. Surely the lender in such a situation would experience the loss and view it as a real cut—just as seniors would experience a reduction in their promised benefits as a cut.

In my view, it is a distortion of the English language to claim that changing the law in order to reduce benefit levels, as the Commission has proposed, should not be considered a cut. This claim is especially problematic because the Commission's proposed cuts would be so deep for many beneficiaries—exceeding 25 percent for many current workers, and exceeding 45 percent in the future. By the way, these numbers are confirmed by the nonpartisan Social Security actuaries. The Commission should be open and honest about this. The numbers are in the report.

It also is important to emphasize, as I noted earlier, that the benefit cuts proposed by the Commission apply even to those who choose not to participate in privatized accounts. This belies claims that the Commission's plan is based on voluntary choice. It's not. Even those who do not choose to use privatized accounts will get cuts.

Supporters of privatization may believe that income from privatized accounts will offset the cuts in guaranteed benefits. That is the argument they make. However, this is problematic for at least two reasons.

First, the combination of reduced guaranteed benefits and income from private accounts in many cases would be less than the benefits under current law, even under the assumptions used in the Commission's report.

That is certainly one of the possibilities. And that is particularly true if one takes into account the administrative costs which are going to accompany these private accounts. In Great

Britain up to 40 percent of the returns in private accounts are used just to pay for administering the accounts. This takes away from income and really does undermine the ability to maintain the same levels of benefits.

Second, relying on the whims of the market is inconsistent with the principal goal of Social Security—guaranteeing a basic level of security, even when private investments fail.

As one who worked personally as a trader and as the head of a major financial firm, I understand that stocks can move down, or sideways, for extended periods. While all workers should save on their own in private accounts, the purpose of Social Security is to establish a floor below which they will not be allowed to fall. The Commission's proposals would drastically lower that floor.

This would be a mistake, especially when one considers that average benefit levels are now only about $10,000 a year—hardly enough to live on in many parts of the country. As I pointed out to the Chair on a number of occasions, the average benefit for women is closer to $9,000. That is not sufficient to provide a secure retirement in most parts of the country—certainly not in New Jersey and I suspect not in Michigan.

Another argument in the letter I received from the six Commissioners focused on what some people have referred to as the ''clawback'' provisions in their proposals. The Commissioners don't like the term ''clawback,'' and I am not going to get into a semantic debate with them about it. But my main point here is undisputed: each of the Commission's plans—there are three of them—would reduce guaranteed benefits based on amounts workers contribute to privatized accounts.

These cuts would be in addition to the direct cuts in guaranteed benefits that would apply to all seniors, even those who do not contribute to privatized accounts.

I think many Americans would see this as political sleight of hand—giving with one hand, and taking away with another.

Another issue addressed in the Commissioner's letter is whether this automatic benefit cut proposal would apply to ''near retirees.'' The six Commissioners argued that the Commission's plans ban persons older than 55 from participating in privatized accounts. However, this actually isn't clear from the text of the report. Nor have the Commissioners explained why older Americans should be banned from participating in privatized accounts if that is such a great idea. Why are they being left out of such a wonderful opportunity to reduce their guaranteed benefit?

Next, the Commissioners dispute my point that the Commission's plans would force many Americans to delay their retirement. On this point, I acknowledge that their proposal does not explicitly raise the legal retirement age. And I have never claimed otherwise. But my point is that their proposals cut benefits so drastically that the effect is the same.

Many people would be forced to work longer to build up more assets, in order to maintain the same level of retirement security. In fact, one of the Commission's plans would directly target benefit cuts at those who retire at 62. It seems clear that, as a practical matter, this will force many seniors to delay their retirement.

Another point in the letter from the six Commissioners is that their proposals would reduce the amount of general revenues that would be required to maintain the solvency of the Social Security trust fund. To the extent that they are calling for deep cuts in guaranteed benefits, that's right. But, by that logic, we could eliminate the need for any general revenues by eliminating guaranteed benefits altogether.

To me, this just isn't a good argument for the deep cuts in benefits.

I will not go into each and every argument raised by the six Commission members. But I ask unanimous consent that a copy of my written response to the Commissioners be printed in the RECORD at the end of my statement.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

(See Exhibit I)

Mr. CORZINE. Madam President, I have been very critical of the letter written by the six Commissioners, as I have been critical of materials prepared by the CATO Institute in the past. But I know they reflect deeply held beliefs, and I sincerely want to thank them for engaging in the debate. In my view, the debate that has begun here with the CATO Institute and the six Commissioners is a good thing because it highlights our differences for the American people. Every American has a stake in the future of Social Security.

It is disappointing that the Bush administration is trying to push this matter under the rug, and seems to want to defer the debate until after the November election. That would be wrong. The American people have a right to be part of this process.

Let me close and again emphasize the important points that Americans need to understand. The Bush Commission's privatization plans involve cuts in guaranteed benefits for many current workers of 25 percent, and future benefits for seniors could be cut as much as 45 percent. These cuts would apply even to those who choose not to invest in privatized accounts. And they would have the effect of forcing Americans to delay their retirement.

For these reasons, I strongly oppose these proposals, and I look forward to continuing this dialogue with those who are supporters of privatization. The future of Social Security is too important to be left out of the limelight and negotiated behind closed doors. We need to have an open discussion.

I thank the Presiding Officer for this opportunity to speak about privatization.

EXHIBIT I

U.S. SENATE,
Washington, DC, June 6, 2002.

Ms. LEANNE ABDNOR, et al.,
Boulder, CO.

DEAR MS. ABDNOR, MR. PENNY, MR. SAVING, MR. VARGAS, MR. COGAN AND MS. MITCHELL: Thank you for your letter of May 23.

I appreciate your apparent willingness to engage in a dialogue with respect to the report of the President's Social Security commission, and trust you agree that the future of Social Security deserves nothing less than a full public debate. Although we obviously disagree strongly about the merits of privatizing the program, I look forward to hearing more from you as we seek to educate the public about the plans you helped produce last December, along with the 10 other members of the Commission who did not sign your letter.

Having said that, I was disappointed by your letter and believe it presents several arguments about the Commission's report and my reactions to it that are, at best, misleading.

Perhaps our most fundamental disagreement concerns the deep cuts in guaranteed benefits included in the Commission's proposals. You attempt to obscure these cuts by arguing that reductions in benefit levels, relative to those promised under current law, should not be considered cuts. Instead, you begin by assuming that the trust fund's assets will be depleted and Congress will refuse to take the steps necessary to honor these promises in the future (even though you also assume that massive amounts of general revenue will be available to subsidize privatized accounts). You then use this assumption to claim that if Congress affirmatively reduces benefits through a change in current law, this should not be considered a ''cut.''

To me, this is tantamount to a borrower telling a lender: I haven't saved enough, and therefore I have a right to default on your loan—and, moreover, the reduction in my payments to you should not be considered a ''cut'' in your income. Surely the lender in such a situation would experience the loss of income as a real cut—just as seniors would experience a reduction in their promised benefits as a cut.

In my view, it is a distortion of the English language to claim that a change in the law that intentionally reduces benefit levels, as the Commission has proposed, should not be considered a cut. This claim is especially problematic because the Commission's proposed cuts would be so deep for many beneficiaries—exceeding 25 percent for many current workers, and exceeding 45 percent in the future. The Commission should be open and honest about this.

Furthermore, it is important to emphasize that cuts proposed by the Commission apply even to those who choose not to participate in the option of privatized accounts. This belies claims that the Commission's plan is based on voluntary choice.

The Commission's report also includes proposals for deep cuts in benefits for disabled individuals. These Americans would not be able to save in privatized accounts when they were disabled and not working. In any case, under the Commission's proposals, such disabled individuals would not have access to the privatized accounts until they reached retirement age. The treatment of the disabled again belies claims that the Commission's plan is based on voluntary choice. While I understand that the Commission expressed concern about the impact of its own proposals on the disabled, it nevertheless relied on savings from these cuts to make its numbers add up. Without these savings, the Commission's plans would not restore the Trust Fund to long-term solvency.

I recognize that you believe that privatized accounts will offset the cuts in guaranteed benefits. However, this is wrong for at least two reasons. First, the combination of reduced guaranteed benefits and income from private accounts in many cases would be less than the benefits under current law, even under the assumptions used in the Commission's report. Second, relying on the whims of the market is inconsistent with the principal goal of Social Security—guaranteeing a basic level of security, even when private investments fail.

As one who worked personally as a trader and as the head of a major financial firm, I understand that stocks can move down, or sideways, for extended periods. While all workers should save on their own in private accounts, such as 401(k) plans and IRAs, the purpose of Social Security is to establish a floor below which they will not be allowed to fall. The Commission's proposals would drastically lower that floor. This would be a mistake, especially when one considers that average benefit levels are now only about $10,000 a year—hardly enough to live on in many parts of the country.

You also argue that I wrongly accuse the Commission of adopting a ''clawback'' proposal. But yours is a semantic argument that rests on a very narrow and arguably incorrect interpretation of this colloquial term. Your claim is that this term applies only to reductions in privatized accounts, not to reductions in guaranteed benefits. However, even if one accepts this narrow definition, my basic point remains undisputed. Each of the Commission's plans would reduce guaranteed benefits based on amounts contributed to privatized accounts. These cuts would be in addition to the direct cuts in guaranteed benefits that would apply to all seniors, even those who do not contribute to privatized accounts. To many Americans, this will seem like giving with one hand, but taking away with another.

To defend your proposal for automatic cuts, you cite a quote from page 99 of the Commission's report that is highly misleading as presented. That quote states that ''no adjustments to traditional Social Security benefits would be made as a function of the accumulations in [privatized] accounts.'' This is technically true, but it obscures the more important point: traditional guaranteed Social Security benefits would be cut based on workers' contributions to privatized accounts. Thus, regardless of whether the market rises or falls, guaranteed benefits will be cut just as deeply, undermining the value of Social Security as a backstop against possible destitution.

Next, you argue that I was wrong to conclude that this automatic benefit cut proposal would apply to ''near retirees.'' More specifically, you argue that the Commission's plans ban persons older than 55 from participating in privatized accounts.

However, while the descriptions of two of the plans in the Commission's report prominently include the ban, in the description of Model 1, the ban is conspicuously absent. You may want to check pages 110, 119, and 131 in the Commission's report to see this clear difference in the descriptions of the three plans. If one were to apply basic principles of statutory construction to the text of the Commission's report, the obvious conclusion would be that Model 1 does not contain the same age limitation as do the other models.

I understand your claim that it was not the intent of the signers of your letter to apply the automatic cuts to those who contribute to privatized accounts under Model 1. However, given the language of the Commission's report, this still seems a reasonable interpretation of the intent of the Commission as a whole. You may want to raise this with the other members of the Commission and have the entire Commission submit a modification of its report to the Congress, if they share your intent. Such a submission might include an explanation of why older Americans are banned from participating in privatized accounts if, as you seem to suggest in your letter, such accounts do not put the guaranteed benefits of participants at risk.

You also dispute my point that the Commission's plans would force many Americans to delay their retirement. To clarify, I never said, nor did I mean to imply, that your proposal explicitly raises the legal retirement age. My point is that cutting the level of guaranteed benefits so drastically could have the same effect. This is because individuals would be forced to work longer to build up more assets, in order to maintain the same level of retirement security. Note that one of the Commission's plans would target benefit cuts at those who retire at 62. It seems clear that, as a practical matter, this will force many seniors to delay their retirement.

Another point you make in your letter is that the Commission's proposals would reduce the amount of general revenues that would be required to maintain the solvency of the Social Security Trust Fund. To the extent that you are calling for deep cuts in guaranteed benefits, I acknowledge that your proposals would have this effect, and have never argued otherwise. In fact, the benefit cuts associated with the change in indexing are so substantial that, by themselves, they would restore long-term balance. However, the high cost of privatized accounts then forced the Commission to rely on massive general revenue subsidies to achieve long-term solvency.

Your letter also complains about critiques that ''count 'current law benefits' but not the taxes required to pay them''. This complaint seems disingenuous, considering that the Commission itself depends on substantial transfers from the rest of the budget without making clear how those would be financed. Under the Commission's plans, these transfers would be necessary to fully fund privatized accounts and partially address trust fund solvency. Yet given projections of deficits outside of Social Security for the foreseeable future, one might have expected the Commission to explain whose taxes would be raised and whose services would be cut to generate the need savings. The Commission's report includes no such explanation. However, one way to reduce the need for such taxes is to not subsidize privatized accounts in the first place.

I do accept your point that investing in broadly diversified funds reduces risks. That is true and, again, I have never argued otherwise. However, while diversification reduces risks, significant risks remain. The value of even a diversified account can decline significantly at any time, and can stay depressed for years. If this were to happen when an individual is retiring, the consequences could be catastrophic without Social Security's basic level of guaranteed benefits.

Finally, it is hard to argue that the Commission represented a balanced forum for the open consideration of differing points of view. After all, the membership of the Commission was stacked from the beginning with those who support a shift to privatized accounts, and the Commission was specifically directed to promote such accounts. That is not your fault, and I do not blame you for holding policy beliefs in good faith. But it seems to many observers that the basic recommendations of the Commission were largely predetermined by President Bush when he selected such a one-sided group of members and then limited the scope of options they were allowed to consider.

In sum, I stand by my critique of the Commission's report and believe that the benefit cuts it proposes would be a serious mistake for our nation, and the millions of Americans who will depend on Social Security in the future.

I look forward to continuing our dialogue in the months ahead, and hope you will be able to convince the White House and the Republican congressional leadership to join in the discussion before this fall's elections.

Best regards,

JON S. CORZINE,
U.S. Senator.

(Mr. NELSON of Nebraska assumed the chair.)

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, will my colleague from New Jersey yield?

Mr. CORZINE. Yes.

Ms. STABENOW. I appreciate my colleague stepping in the Chair so I might come down for a moment before my good friend from New Jersey leaves.

I wanted to indicate my personal thanks to him—as well as my colleagues whom I know share this gratitude—for his willingness to come to the floor and articulate in such a precise way and an understandable way what the challenge is to this whole question of Social Security and privatization of Social Security; and the fact the Senator has been willing to put the time in to really make it clear what is at stake for people, I am very grateful. I thank him on behalf of the people of Michigan for doing that.

I wanted to ask one question before the Senator left. I know one of the things we talked about before is that Social Security is not just retirement. It is also a disability policy. If you are a worker and become disabled, your family is able to receive assistance, as a disability policy. If you, unfortunately, lose your life on the job, it is a life insurance policy.

Isn't it also true that we really have three parts to that system? I know the Senator from New Jersey spoke to that as well. This is not only a question of retirement, but it is a question of a security system—disability, life insurance, and retirement. That is why it is so critical that it remain in place.

I would appreciate it if the Senator might speak to that for a moment.

Mr. CORZINE. Mr. President, I very much appreciate the comments of my colleague from Michigan, whom I know has been so vocal about the need for a prescription drug benefit and the cost containment issue. Actually, we need a whole list of approaches to make sure our seniors in America have access to the American promise, and we need to work to make that happen. Prescription drugs must be part of that. Protecting Social Security must be, as well.

As it relates to the disability benefits, the proposals in the Commission's report would be even more devastating to disabled individuals than to retirees. Disabled people would not be able to build up assets in a privatized account if they are unable to work. And to the extent that they have assets in such an account, they would not be available until an individual retires. Even the Commission expressed discomfort with their own cuts in disability benefits, though in the end they relied on the savings from such cuts.

I very much appreciate the distinguished Senator from Michigan speaking out on this aspect of the Bush Commission's cuts. Because, as she suggests, these cuts do go beyond retirees, and also jeopardize the disabled and those young people who lose a parent. That needs to be understood by the American people.

Mr. President, privatized accounts can provide some benefits, if trees grow to the sky and the market never goes down or sideways. But if history is any guide, that is not really how the world works. In the real world, privatization would put at serious risk Social Security's floor level of support for the disabled, children, and our retirees.

Again, I thank the Senator for her question and for her support. I hope she will also see that same kind of support with regard to her efforts to contain the costs of prescription drugs, and to provide prescription drug benefits, both of which are serious and important issues for our country.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. MURRAY). The Senator is recognized.

Mr. NELSON of Nebraska. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that I be able to speak until about 6 minutes after 10.

STATE FISCAL RELIEF AMENDMENT

Mr. NELSON of Nebraska. Madam President, this morning I would like to talk about a very important issue that is affecting the States and the budgets at the State level.

While the national economy may be recovering from the recession, State budgets will take another 12 or 18 months to recover. Just last month, the National Governors Association and National Association of State Budget Officers found that over 40 States are facing an aggregate budget shortfall of $40 billion to $50 billion.

In my home State of Nebraska, the latest numbers show the highest unemployment level in 15 years. Tax receipts this year will be less than the previous year for only the second time in the history of the State. The State is cutting child care, rural development, and other essential services. Raising taxes to build up the budget cap and cutting aid to local governments will result in higher property taxes.

Many States face the same challenges as Nebraska. This is the appropriate time for some help to come from Washington. Part of the blame that can be assessed for States that are hurting can be laid at the feet of Congress.

A few months ago, this body passed—and the President signed into law—a bill to stimulate the economy and help workers. It wasn't a perfect bill. But then there are very few. But the economy was hurting, and it was, in fact, time to act.

But there were unintended consequences of that bill. Not only did the economic stimulus bill fail to provide State fiscal relief in certain areas, but by making some changes to Federal tax law, the bill unintentionally added to revenue shortfalls. This means that we, in effect, cut State tax revenue streams. This, in turn, has put at risk programs such as medical assistance to the most vulnerable individuals in this country.

I am concerned about the crunch that the States are facing. As a former Governor, I know how hard it is to balance a State's budget. And every State has to balance its budget. The most important thing is that we recognize that this shortfall will continue, and it will affect the most vulnerable among us.

This supplemental appropriations bill that is being considered—and other bills will be coming up in the area of appropriations—is an important opportunity to do something helpful.

My good friend, Senator SUSAN COLLINS, from Maine, will be speaking shortly as well on the Collins-Nelson proposal that would provide a temporary 1-percent increase in the Federal Medicaid matching rate. In Washington, we require that the States deal with Medicaid and that they provide the services, and we offer some assistance. It is an underfunded Federal mandate.

At the present time, if we increase the amount of State funding to a temporary 1-percent increase, we will assist the States in being able to deal with the challenges in their budgets. At the same time, this bill will also permit them to continue to provide in the short term for the rising demand in social services from the economic downturn.

The bill would provide approximately $8.9 billion in total fiscal relief to the States, which would allow them to expand—not contract—Medicaid and other health and social services.

States have worked very hard in order to be able to help people go from welfare to work. It is very important for us to help them continue that because if they are unable to continue, and they pull back on the Medicaid funding and they are not able to provide the social services, you could very easily have States returning to the process of bringing people from the workplace back into welfare. That is counterproductive. It works in the opposite direction. That is why we, in fact, must move forward and assist the States at this very important time.

The National Governors Association has embraced much of what we have proposed, and so have other organizations. And a number of cosponsors in our own body have stepped forward and said that this is the right thing to do, it is the right time to do it, and it is the right way to approach it.

The health care of Americans is part of our responsibility and our interest. We must, in fact, help the States so we do not end up with the tough choices that the States are having to make, involving reducing Medicaid benefits to those among our most neediest in our midst.

According to the National Governors Association, Medicaid spending has been a particular struggle for States since expenditures have risen by an average of 12 percent over the last 2 years, while the State's revenues rose a total of 5 percent, as in the State of Nebraska. It appears that the revenues are flat.

Medicaid spending has been driven by high increases in health care costs nationwide, particularly the cost of prescription drugs, an issue that we are going to be facing to move forward to help our seniors deal with the high cost of prescription drugs as part of Medicare. These same pressures on the health care system and on our citizens are affecting the Medicaid population as well.

States have exhausted the usual ways of balancing their budgets. And so, given the projection of continued deficits, this means that we must, in fact, step up to the plate at this time and help our States work through this partnership that we have with Medicaid, where the States have a matching obligation with the Federal Government, with our budget. I hope we will be able to do that.

In closing, as a former Governor, I can say, having worked with this program, that it is an essential program. But it is a partnership with the Federal Government. Now is an opportunity for the Federal Government to do its share in assisting the States in dealing with this very important problem.

I urge my colleagues to join with Senator COLLINS and myself in this effort to show the States that Congress is not indifferent to their budget problems, and we will step in and provide meaningful assistance at a time when Governors need it most.

Madam President, I believe my time is about to expire, so I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine is recognized.

Ms. COLLINS. Madam President, I rise today with my good friend, Senator BEN NELSON, to discuss the fiscal plight of our States. Here in Washington, consumed with our own budget challenges, we often forget that we have 50 partners in our efforts to provide needed health, education, and other essential services to our citizens. Our partners are our States and they need our help.

No one is more aware of the difficulties States are facing than Senator NELSON. As a former Governor, he understands that we are most effective when we work arm in arm, not toe to toe, with our partners, the States.

Senator NELSON and I have filed an amendment to the supplemental appropriations bill to provide emergency short-term fiscal relief to the States. Our amendment is needed, and it is needed now.