

Women, Infants and Children Program or 500,000 people will lose important nutritional support.

Yet despite all of these developments since the President submitted an inadequate spending proposal in February, the White House continues to demand an arbitrary and irresponsible ceiling on spending. The White House continues to stubbornly oppose bipartisan initiatives to invest money to solve the real problems that face the Nation.

Soon, the first session of this 110th Congress will draw to a close, but there is still time to craft an appropriations proposal that makes a sincere attempt to meet the President in the middle of the road. I thank Senator THAD COCHRAN and his ranking members for their efforts as we move forward in completing the fiscal year 2008 appropriations process.

So the choice is clear—as clear as the noonday Sun in a cloudless sky. The President and the Congress must recognize that the people of this country expect their leaders—that is us, the people downtown at the other end of the avenue and those across the Capitol—to actually govern and address the real problems facing the country.

Democrats and Republicans in Congress are willing to work to resolve differences and complete a fiscally responsible package of appropriations bills. But to do the people's business, the Congress must be joined by a White House willing, at last, to jettison its political posturing, stop its political posturing. The tyranny of the veto threat has already dangerously delayed the Nation's priorities for far too long.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

TEMPORARY TAX RELIEF ACT OF 2007—MOTION TO PROCEED

Mr. REID. Mr. President, the American people are about to see what the Democrats have tried to do all year and what we have been prevented from doing all year because of the obstructionism of the Republicans.

President Bush is out giving speeches that we have to do AMT. We have to take care of that. He is giving speeches all over the country. He gives press conferences talking about why we aren't doing AMT. Everybody watch. Here is why we aren't doing AMT. They do not want us to do it. They want, at the end of the year, to say: Look, the Democrats are not doing AMT. Everyone should understand we are not doing it because the Republicans, all 49 of them, backed by President Bush, don't want us to do it.

Mr. President, we have offered them a proposal. We will have a vote with a

60-vote margin on them all—on the bill the House has passed. The bill has passed. The bill passed by the House fully funds AMT. They won't let us vote on that. So I say: OK, let's vote on Senator LOTT's proposal, which just eliminates AMT. And then I say: Let's work on the proposal we have from the Finance Committee that has come from Senator BAUCUS and Senator GRASSLEY which has some extenders in it that we need to complete this year and then doesn't pay for the AMT. The Republicans don't want the AMT paid for. How much more fair could we be? We are giving them a vote on virtually everything dealing with AMT. But, no, they won't do that. It is the way it has been going all year long. We can't do the farm bill. We can't do anything around here, Mr. President. That is why we have had to file cloture 56 times. They have objected even to bills they agree with just to eat up time around here.

So I am not going to ask consent to move, as we have previously. I gave the Republican leader a proposal earlier today, as I have in the past, to do just as I have outlined, covering every possible facet of AMT—60 votes on all of them. But, no, no votes on any of them. So now I am left with no alternative but to file cloture on the only measure dealing with AMT that is now before this body.

For the life of me, I don't understand what they are trying to accomplish. What I have heard recently, in the last hour or so, is that now what they want to do is—we have certain tax provisions that are expiring in 2011—they want to vote on those. Now, that is 3 or 4 years away, and we have something that is expiring in a matter of weeks. How do those things tie together? They do not.

This is an effort to thwart the progress of our slim majority, 51 to 49. The Republicans want to go around saying the Democrats aren't doing the work of this country. Well, we have a long list of accomplishments we are very proud of, but also the American people understand that we are agents of change and the Republicans are agents of the status quo. That is what this is all about. They want things to stay the way they have been, and we want to change things, and not only in Iraq. We don't have another long-standing debate on that. We want to change the course in Iraq, and we want to change course in the way this country has been headed for the last 7 years—into the economic doldrums.

And here today, what we want to do is finish a part of what we believe is an obligation to this country, and that is to make sure that when the first of the year rolls around, 19 million Americans don't have a tax increase. Everyone within the sound of my voice should understand, if that comes to be, it can go to 16th and Pennsylvania Avenue because that is what President Bush—he is the man who is pulling the strings on the 49 puppets he has here in the

Senate. That is too bad for the country.

I move to proceed to H.R. 3996. There is a cloture motion at the desk. I ask the clerk to report it.

CLOTURE MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The motion having been filed under rule XXII, the clerk will report the motion to invoke cloture.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the motion to proceed to Calendar No. 487, H.R. 3996, the AMT tax bill.

Harry Reid, Dick Durbin, Patty Murray, Max Baucus, Jay Rockefeller, Patrick Leahy, Daniel K. Inouye, Herb Kohl, Benjamin L. Cardin, Jeff Bingaman, Ted Kennedy, Carl Levin, B.A. Mikulski, Barbara Boxer, Debbie Stabenow, Maria Cantwell, Bill Nelson.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, and I will be.

Has the Senator not asked consent to go to the House-passed bill?

Mr. REID. No, I said I wouldn't do that. I am sorry if there was some confusion. I said I was not going to do that. I had been told by the staff that there would be an objection, so I indicated I was not going to do that. I apologize to my friend.

Mr. McCONNELL. May I ask the Parliamentarian, what is the state of play? On what was cloture just filed?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The motion to proceed to H.R. 3996 was made, and the motion to invoke cloture was filed on that.

The Republican leader is recognized.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I think we all can agree we should fix the AMT. We should have done it much earlier this year. Shortly, I am going to present a unanimous consent agreement based on a very simple proposition: Our time is running short; therefore, we should start the debate with the areas of broadest agreement and work from there.

So what can we all agree upon? We agree it is past time for Congress to act to ensure that 23 million American families do not face a major tax increase this year. While my side of the aisle believes we should permanently repeal the AMT, we are also prepared to ensure that middle-income Americans get tax relief this year.

We agree tax extenders are important to small business, to parents paying college tuition for their children, to teachers who buy classroom supplies with their own money. These issues are not controversial, and I believe a majority of the Senate supports them.

However, there is an area of strong disagreement. We disagree with the proposition that taxes must be permanently raised in order to extend current tax policy. By patching the AMT and extending other expiring provisions, we are simply maintaining the

status quo on tax policy. Why should some taxpayers be harmed when no single taxpayer will enjoy increased benefits?

So I recommend that we begin where there is a consensus—the AMT patch and tax extenders. We should require the controversial provisions, those raising revenues, be subject to 60 votes. In addition, my side of the aisle would like an opportunity for votes on our vision for tax relief and AMT reform, all of which we understand would be subject to 60 votes. Anything left at the end of the process would also be subject to 60 votes.

This would be a fair process for the short amount of time we have been given on this bill. Let's not tie up the Senate over disagreements; rather, we should build from areas of broadest consensus.

I do not anticipate the majority leader agreeing to the unanimous consent that I am going to now propound. I want to make sure he is engaged before I do that. Or maybe the chairman of the committee?

Mr. BAUCUS. The leader mentioned to me he had an urgent meeting he had to attend. It is up to the leader if he wants to propound his consent now or later.

Mr. McCONNELL. I thank the Senator from Montana. I gather he is saying he will take care of the consent for their side? I thank the Senator from Montana.

I ask unanimous consent at a time to be determined by the majority leader, after consultation with the Republican leader, the Senate proceed to consideration of H.R. 3996, the House-passed AMT bill, and it be considered under the following limitations: There be 1 hour of debate on the bill, equally divided between the two leaders or their designees, followed by a vote on a motion to invoke cloture on the bill; provided further, that if cloture is not invoked, then the only amendments in order to the bill be the following, and be offered in the following order: A substitute amendment to be offered by Senator McCONNELL or his designee, which is to be an unoffset AMT extension and an unoffset extenders package; a Baucus or designee first-degree amendment to the McConnell substitute which is to be a set of offsets for the extender package; a Sessions amendment related to AMT and exemptions; an Ensign amendment which is an AMT repeal and extends other expiring provisions; a DeMint amendment which relates to AMT and flat tax; provided further, that there be an additional 2 hours for debate on the bill, equally divided between the two leaders or their designees; that there be a time limitation of 2 hours for debate on each amendment equally divided in the usual form, provided that each amendment would require 60 votes in the affirmative for adoption and that each amendment that does not require 60 votes then be withdrawn; I further ask that, notwithstanding the

adoption of any substitute amendment, the other amendments be in order, and finally that following the consideration of the above amendments, 60 votes be required for passage of the bill as amended, if amended.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Montana.

Mr. BAUCUS. Mr. President, this is a very interesting proposal. I think it is constructive. Now the Senate is engaging on this issue. At an earlier point, a couple or 3 weeks ago, the leader propounded a consent on this subject, and it was objected to and the Senate took no action. But here the distinguished minority leader is suggesting a process. He is suggesting a way, perhaps, to resolve this question. I think the basic implication of his suggestion is that we must and should very definitely pass legislation this year that prevents about 19 million Americans from paying the alternative minimum tax for tax year 2007 when they fill out their tax returns next year.

There are provisions which are interesting, which I have not seen until this moment—I daresay which I think the leader has not seen until this moment—which have to be worked out before I think there can be an agreement. But there may be something here, the beginnings of something so that we can work out an accommodation. I very much hope that is the case.

Over the next hours and day or two perhaps we can find a way to reach an agreement on what the procedure should be, what amendment will be offered by whom, et cetera.

I again thank the distinguished minority leader, but on behalf of the leader, on behalf of Senator REID, I must object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard. The Republican leader.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I thank my friend from Montana. We will continue discussions in the hope we can get a result that is mutually satisfactory to virtually all the Members of the Senate in the very near future.

I yield the floor.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. BAUCUS. Mr. President, I underline the urgency of curing this alternative minimum tax problem and also underline how strongly the Senators on this side of the aisle are attempting to get that legislation passed as soon as possible. We tried, on this side, to get AMT legislation up before the Senate and passed so that American taxpayers will not have to pay it. That was objected to by the other side. We made

many attempts. There were many suggestions by the majority leader to bring up legislation to prevent the alternative minimum tax from going into effect. They were all objected to by the other side. We are here again trying to get resolution.

The leader filed cloture on the House-passed bill so we can get a vote on the issue in an attempt to move the issue forward. I commend him for that. Again it was, in a sense, objected to by the other side because they offered just now a package which is somewhat in the right direction but also has complications in it which raise questions to the degree we can fully get AMT passed. But I want to underline the importance of this body passing legislation to prevent the alternative minimum tax from affecting about 19 million Americans. We all know this is a pernicious tax, it is a stealth tax. It was not intended to have this effect on so many middle-income Americans. Unfortunately, it has this effect because when it was enacted years ago it was not indexed, and each year more and more American taxpayers have to pay the alternative minimum tax. Soon we will get very much to the point where most Americans—I will not say most, but a vast number of Americans will have to pay the alternative minimum tax, and that is not what we want. We did not intend that. We are trying to get it solved.

There is another issue, and that is this: The IRS has sent the 2007 tax forms to the printer. They were sent to the printer on November 16. So each day that we daily here, each day the Congress does not correct this problem, it means it costs the Government more money to correct the forms, to correct the programs that it has to utilize when paying taxes online, whether it is various providers—it is the wrong way to do business.

It means a lot more frustration for taxpayers. Just think, if you are a taxpayer and you are beginning to figure out what your income tax is going to be, and suddenly out of the blue, Congress does not change this AMT, it causes huge problems. Just think of the withholding provisions. Americans have a certain amount of dollars withheld from their income as taxes every year, from every paycheck, for example. The calculation assumes the AMT, pretty soon, if it is not corrected—assume AMT will be corrected. If it is corrected, those changes have to be made on the taxpayers when they withhold.

I hope, again, we get this done. Senator GRASSLEY, the ranking member of the committee, and I have offered a proposal. We have a package we agree on, Senator GRASSLEY and I, to take up and pass legislation which says: OK, nobody has to pay AMT in 2007 who didn't pay it in the previous year. That is the tax year 2007. We are providing it doesn't have to be paid for. That is a big step. But I say that because it is

my judgment that because the President—because Republicans so adamantly said it cannot be paid for, and because we need 60 votes, that it will not be paid for. That is just a judgment I made. I suggest we bring up legislation, pass an AMT patch for 1 year, and also include the extender provisions which will be paid for.

That is where we are going to end up. Everybody knows that is where we are going to end up. If that is where we are going to end up, let's just do it, not go through this kabuki here, these games, not use this as leverage to offer amendments that are going nowhere and will never be enacted, that are just political. But we are unfortunately in a position where we are not yet free to pass legislation that we know at some point we are going to end up with; that is, AMT not being paid for and all the extenders paid for.

I again underline how much we on this side of the aisle are trying to get the AMT passed. Up to this point we are being blocked by the other side. We are going to keep trying. The earlier we get this passed the better because the forms can be sent out more quickly, the computer programs changed more quickly, and we are going to keep at it because it is the right thing to do. And, second, we are going to do it anyway. If it is the right thing to do and we are going to do it anyway, why don't we do it now?

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

(The remarks of Mr. CASEY pertaining to the introduction of S. 2407 are printed in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll of the Senate.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

The Senator from North Dakota is recognized.

MEDIA CONCENTRATION

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, about 2 hours ago, the Commerce Committee of the Senate took some action on a bill I offered along with my colleague, Senator LOTT from Mississippi. I wish to talk about the Media Ownership Act of 2007 for just a moment. I hope, perhaps,

the Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission may take note and watch what the Commerce Committee did.

This issue is very important. It has been around for a long time. It deals with media concentration. Some years ago—in 2003—the then-Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, Michael Powell, rounded up two other votes and by a vote of three to two passed a new FCC rule allowing a relaxation of ownership limits for television and radio stations, and for newspapers, and here is what they concluded back then. It is almost unbelievable. They said it will be OK with them if, in the largest American cities, one company owned eight radio stations, three television stations, the newspaper, and the cable company—they would all be owned by the same company. They said that would be just dandy.

Well, the fact is, it was not fine with me, and I fought it. Senator LOTT joined me back then. We offered a resolution of disapproval of the FCC rule and it passed the Senate. In the meantime, the Federal court of appeals stayed the rule, and so the rule never went into effect. But it was unbelievable to me that the Federal Communications Commission thought that what we really needed in this country was more concentration in the media.

Well, the idea is not dead. The current Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission came up recently with an idea of relaxing ownership rules, and he announced—in an op-ed piece in the New York Times and then in a press release he was going to propose a new set of rules that relax the ownership restrictions. So he said: We are going to announce the rule in November, and I am going to ask for a final FCC vote by December 18.

He says his proposed rule is a real compromise. It is going to allow the ownership of the newspaper and a television station in each of the 20 largest markets in our country. These top 20 markets, by the way, cover one-half of the population of America. He will relax the ban that exists on cross-ownership between newspapers and television stations.

Now, I do not know that anybody is lying awake at night in this country thinking about our most serious problems and deciding that one of the biggest problems in America is that newspapers are not allowed to buy television stations. We have a cross-ownership ban for good reason, in my judgment, but apparently the Chairman of the FCC has been lying awake thinking: We have to fix this. So he has come up with a rule that says: Well, let's let newspapers buy television stations.

We just passed a bill, S. 2332, over in the Commerce Committee that would stop what the FCC is doing and would not allow them to proceed with the December 18 date. It would require that the American public be allowed to weigh in on these issues. We say in our

bill that passed unanimously in the Commerce Committee that you have to have a process that is fair to the American public. You cannot decide to announce, "Here is my rule," in November, and then drive it through to a conclusion in December.

The Chairman says: Well, but we had six hearings around the country. We did this. We did that. None of those hearings would have given people an opportunity to comment on this rule because the rule did not exist when he held the hearings. He waited until the hearings were all done and then announced the rule and then has tried to jam this home by December 18. That is what the Chairman is trying to do. It is unfair, and it makes no sense.

With respect to concentration in the media, let me say this: I do not think it has served this country's interest to have the concentration in radio and television, and it certainly does not serve this country's interest to decide that we ought to allow the newspapers now to buy the television stations. I think that concentration is injurious to this democracy. We need the free flow of information.

It is interesting, most of what people will see, hear, and read in America today—Tuesday, December 4—will be controlled by about five or six major corporations with respect to television, the Internet, radio, and the newspapers. About five or six major corporations in this country have a substantial amount of control of what kind of information is available to the American people. And some believe there needs to be greater concentration?

We held a hearing recently in the Senate Commerce Committee, and the Parents Television Council, which is considered to be on the right side of the political spectrum, came and weighed in with opposition to the proposal by the Federal Communications Commission. The witness was from Los Angeles. He said: I have in my office in Los Angeles, CA basic advanced tier cable where I get 48 channels. But he said: That isn't 48 different voices. Then he went down the list of who controls those channels—Time Warner, etc. He just went down the list of the 4 or 5 or 6 big companies that control those 40-some channels.

So it goes back to what I have said for long time. When the FCC is trying to relax these ownership rules, they say: Well, you now have a lot more choices. You have more channels. You have more networks. You have more Internet sites. My response was: Yes, there are more voices from the same ventriloquist. Really, this country is not, in my judgment, served well by a Federal Communications Commission that is just hell bent on deciding: We need to have greater concentration in radio, television, or newspapers.

Now, take a look at what has happened with radio concentration. In one town in North Dakota—a town of about 40,000 or 50,000 people—one company