

then Republicans coming to the floor saying, Isn't it a shame we can't move appropriations bills.

The last thing I want to mention is the alternative minimum tax. This will affect 19 million Americans if we don't change it. Some are in higher income categories. Many are not. We want to make sure we correct this problem and move forward with it. I think the responsible thing to do is, if you are going to cut a tax, either raise another tax or cut spending. I think that is responsible. Republicans reject that. They say we want to cut taxes and we don't want to pay for it. We want to add to the deficit and it is OK, and they can prevail because we don't have 60 votes. It takes 60 votes to accomplish something here on the Senate floor of controversy.

So what we offered to them is their way of looking at the world. We will let you cut this tax and not pay for it, just add to the deficit, the old Republican way of doing things. You prevail. You win. And their answer? No, we won't even let you go to the bill under those circumstances. It is pretty clear; it is a question of blocking and intransigence.

In addition to the fact that the Republicans are blocking the farm bill, an attempt to deal with the mortgage crisis in America, bridge building for the State of Minnesota and all other States, and dealing with the alternative minimum tax, it is pretty clear they want this Congress to end without any accomplishments. They had a do-nothing Congress which cost them control in the last election. They are determined to do everything they can to make sure we do nothing in this Congress.

Sadly, the message to the American voters is we need more votes. If you want real change in Congress, we need more Senators to come to this floor who want to accomplish things, rather than stop things and block things. That is what we have seen repeatedly here, this day and every day during the course of the session. I had hoped a handful of Republican Senators would stand up and say: Enough. We have a responsibility to the people of this country, a responsibility that goes beyond our party responsibility. We need to pass a farm bill, we need to do something about the housing crisis, we need to give real tax relief to American families.

We are still waiting for those voices, and I hope they will come to the floor and accomplish that. In the meantime, we will continue to make our offers to the Republican leadership, to find a responsible way to move forward. I hope they will accept this opportunity and I hope we can get something accomplished. It is clear, as this empty Chamber passes hour after weary hour doing nothing, the American people are fed up with it. I think they are fed up with it enough to want real change in the next election.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia is recognized.

THE MIDDLE EAST

Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, last week the Middle East observed a historic anniversary, in fact, a historic anniversary for all of mankind, for the 29th of November was the 60th anniversary of the U.N. resolution partitioning the State of Israel and providing a homeland for the Israeli people. I had the opportunity to be in Israel while that celebration was taking place. Another event took place in Annapolis, MD, the home State of the Presiding Officer, last Tuesday, the 28th of November, when 18 Arab Nations, the Palestinian Authority, and Prime Minister Olmert of Israel met in Annapolis, to try to begin the process for the roadmap for peace in the Middle East. I think all of us are encouraged, happy, and rewarded that the result of that conference was an agreement between the Palestinian Authority and Israel to try, over the next 12 months, to reach an agreement by the end of 2008, which will in fact bring about peace in the Middle East.

All of us have great hope, but all of us have great wonder how we get from the agreement to try to actually having that happen. Since I had the occasion to be in Israel, I thought I would share for a second the fact that, as complex as the Middle East is, as challenging as the issues are that face the nation of Israel and the Palestinian Authority, there are some simple steps upon which we can build to possibly get to a true roadmap to a lasting peace in the Middle East.

There is no question, from having gone there, that the first step is security. The State of Israel deserves the security to live in peace and without intimidation and without threat. Not long ago, Israel took its settlements out of Gaza, moved those settlements out of Gaza to its perimeter. Within months, Hamas took over as the leading authority in Gaza, a Palestinian area, and instead of securing it for themselves began a method of intimidation and threat and terror against the people of Israel. Last Saturday, I stood on the last Israeli outpost overlooking Gaza, talking to an Israeli man and Israeli woman who lived in the settlement outside of Gaza, as a rocket went off and was fired into that very settlement, a practice that every day continues to take place, to intimidate, to threaten, and to terrorize.

As long as elements of terror such as Hamas and Hezbollah in Lebanon continue to disrupt, we will never be able to reach a platform upon which we can have a roadmap to peace. But security could possibly take place. I want to commend the Palestinian Authority on its initial steps in the West Bank, one village at a time, to attempt to bring about peace and security on that side of Israel and in that area of the dilemma.

I met with the Foreign Minister, Riyad Maliki, of the Palestinian Authority, who passionately convinced me that he and his leadership are inter-

ested in seeing to it that they deliver on that security, because they understand that without security there can never be any peace, without peace there can never be a Palestinian State.

This President, George Bush, whom I commend for bringing about the Annapolis conference, was very courageous 6 years ago when as President of the United States he declared he would support a homeland and security for the Palestinians and the people of the Middle East accepted and acknowledged Israel's right to exist and respected its state.

I believe the desire is in the Palestinian people to have their homeland. I believe the will is there to see to it that is accomplished. But as long as terror, through the elements of Hamas and Hezbollah, continue to threaten and intimidate the people of Israel, it will never happen.

So the first step, following that agreement at Annapolis, is for the Palestinian Authority to secure Gaza and to secure the West Bank. But you do not go to the Middle East, as I have four times in the last 5 years, and not realize in the end it is also all about Iran.

As long as there are state sponsors of terrorism, whether it be Hezbollah or Hamas or whether it be infiltration of terrorists or IEDs into Iraq, you can never truly have peace and security.

But this President deserves great credit for setting up the conference at Annapolis. Condoleezza Rice deserves great credit for five times traveling to the Middle East, from one Arab state to the other, encouraging those states to attend. It should not go unnoticed by anybody, us in America and Ahmadinejad in Iran, that when finally pressed, the 18 Arab states all came to Annapolis because, in the end, they all want peace. But in the absence of security and the presence of terror it cannot happen.

I commend our President for bringing about the conference in Annapolis. I commend the people of Israel for making the first step in Gaza and acknowledge their concern now that that first step has only been rewarded with acts of terror against their own people and encourage the Palestinian Authority to continue to work in the West Bank, and later in Gaza, to root out terrorism, bring about security, so the State of Palestine and the State of Israel can live in harmony. And for us in the free world, one of the biggest threats to our security is lessened because people are living together in peace and not in terror and not in fear.

In closing, I wish to acknowledge the great ally we have in Israel, the resilience of their people, to that young man and woman I met on the hill overlooking Gaza, who daily meet the threats of rockets coming from terrorists, and let them know that we in America are with them, and one day peace and security can become a reality if we begin to get the security in

the areas of the West Bank and in Gaza.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota.

OBJECTIONS

MR. DORGAN. Mr. President, what is happening in the Senate is going to give frustration a new meaning. I cannot begin to explain how unbelievably frustrating it is for people elected to come to this body, they say the greatest deliberative body, to be at parade rest day after day after day, unable to move because of two simple words uttered almost routinely every day by the minority: I object. I object to everything. I object. I object.

Mark Twain once was asked if he would engage in a debate. And he said: Of course, as long as I can take the negative side.

They said: We have not told you what the subject is.

He said: That does not matter. The negative side will take no preparation.

It takes no preparation to say "I object," to take the negative side of everything. Yet that is what has happened. We have people posing as a set of human brake pads, determined to stop everything in the Senate. Maybe that would make not much difference if there were not things that were so urgent and in need of being done.

I sat here for a while this afternoon and saw something quite stunning. My colleague stood up and said, on the appropriations bill that passed the Senate by a wide margin, over 80 votes on transportation-housing and so on, she wanted to bring the conference report up to the Senate. There was an objection by the Republican leader of the Senate: I object.

Then, immediately afterwards, Senator CORNYN from Texas stood up and said: I do not understand what all of the problem is, the way the majority is running this place, why do we not get appropriations bills to the floor of the Senate?

This was immediately after his side had already objected to bringing an appropriations bill to the floor of the Senate. It is as if they think no one is watching. These are illusionists who provide no illusion. Nobody is watching, they think. This is all done in broad daylight. They say: We object to bringing appropriations bills to the floor of the Senate. Then they stand up and seek recognition and ask: Why are you not bringing appropriations bills to the floor of the Senate? Do they believe people do not watch and listen and understand?

It is absolutely beyond me. Now, let me describe this "I object" strategy. I object to appropriations bills, they say. Do you know this year we even had to file a cloture petition to shut off a filibuster on a motion to proceed to the appropriations bill that would fund homeland security needs.

We are in this process of waging a war on terrorism to protect our coun-

try, and we cannot bring a bill to the floor earlier this year on homeland security appropriations to fund the programs without having a filibuster by the other side on a motion to proceed, not even on the bill, but a motion to proceed to the bill. That describes what the other side has done all year long.

Now, in December, they come to the floor and they say: Well, where are the appropriations bills? Well, I will tell you where they are; you objected to all of them. You took all the action necessary to try to prohibit us from moving these appropriations bills. That is the case.

Alternative minimum tax, they call it AMT. It is a fancy way of describing an alternative tax system that recalculates your tax. It is going to affect millions more Americans. We should fix that. Why have we not fixed that today? Because the other side has objected. The Republican leader has objected. That is why we have not fixed it.

The farm bill. Why have we not finished the farm bill? Because the Republicans have objected. We wanted to come out here and finish it. We have made unanimous consent requests. We have an offer in front of them now with the amendments and so on, but they continue to object.

I have said often, if farmers behaved the way this Congress—and especially the minority—behaves, they would not have a crop to plant because they would not get time. They would not have a crop to harvest if they got it planted because they would not have time. They would object. They would not milk the cows when the cows were fresh. I mean they would not have a crop or cows. You cannot put all these things off, nor should the Senate put them off.

An energy bill. Well we tried to go to conference on an energy bill. There was an objection on the Republican side. So now we are hoping to try to be able to consider an energy bill that comes from the House. I hope we can round up the votes for it. But we never got to conference because of an objection on the Republican side.

Now my colleague, as I listened this afternoon, said the proposal on the alternative minimum tax by the Democrats was more taxes on the American people, a substitution of taxes and to accommodate the growth of Government.

Let me take both those proposals. This issue of the growth of Government is fascinating to me because this President has proposed more spending than any President in the history of this country, by far. We have in front of this body right now a proposal by this President for \$196 billion, none of it paid for, to support the war in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Now, \$196 billion, that is \$16 billion a month, \$4 billion a week, all of it added to the Federal debt, none of it paid for. We have someone over there stand up and say we are the big spenders, we are

the ones who want to spend money, after the President has asked for \$196 billion in additional spending that he wants.

He said that \$22 billion we wanted to invest in this country was too much money. We were \$22 billion apart, with respect to the President's budget and our bipartisan approach on the appropriations committee. He said: No, that is too much money, that \$22 billion to invest in our country's roads and bridges and health care and energy. That is too much money to invest in our country, but I want \$196 billion, none of it paid for, all of it outside the budget, for my priorities, the President said.

It is interesting to me that even as we are told by my colleague from Texas and others that this is growth in spending and that somehow the profligate spenders are on this side of the aisle, and I must say I have held now 12 hearings on the issue of waste, fraud, and abuse in the countries of Iraq and Afghanistan in the prosecution of these wars. Waste, fraud, and abuse by contractors, a massive amount of money shoveled out the door by this administration to contractors.

Let me tell you what the result has been: A blind eye. No one seems to care. You want some nails? I know where there are 50,000 pounds of nails lying in the sand. You know where it is? In the country of Iraq, 50,000 pounds of nails lying in the sands of Iraq in a pile.

You know why? Because the contractor ordered the wrong size. But it did not matter, throw them away, reorder. It is a cost-plus contract. The American taxpayers are picking up the tab. Do you want to see waste, fraud, and abuse? This is a hand towel provided to American soldiers.

I ask unanimous consent to show the item on the floor of the Senate.

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

MR. DORGAN. This was provided to American soldiers by the subsidiary of Halliburton Corporation. They ordered hand towels under their contract for the American soldiers. Well, guess what. The guy who ordered these was the order manager sitting in Kuwait. His name was Henry Bunting. He came and testified before my hearing. He said: I ordered these towels, but I ordered white towels, plain white towels. My supervisor said: You cannot do that. You need for our name, Kellogg, Brown and Root, the subsidiary of Halliburton, to be embroidered on the towel.

He said: Well, that is going to triple the cost. He was told: It does not matter. It is a cost-plus contract. The American taxpayer pays for this. Katy bar the door. Spend whatever you like. The American taxpayer will pay for it. Two hundred and twenty million dollars to a contractor to rehabilitate health clinics in Iraq. The \$220 million is gone. The contractor has it all, and there are 20 health clinics built.