

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.

And a physician goes to the Health Minister and says: I want to see these 220 health clinics the American taxpayer paid for; the Health Minister of Iraq said: Well, those, you have to understand, are "imaginary" clinics.

Seven thousand six hundred dollars a month to rent an SUV, \$45 a case for a case of Coca-Cola, \$85,000 trucks that have a flat tire and they are left beside the road to be torched in Iraq because they cannot fix a flat tire.

American taxpayer is going to pay for all of that. It is a cost-plus contract. You have a truck with a plugged fuel pump, do not worry, leave it behind. Yeah, it will get torched, but the American taxpayer pays for that. So when I hear somebody talking about profligate spending, I say to them this: We have had four votes on the floor of the Senate to set up a Truman Committee of the type Harry Truman led dedicated to root out waste, fraud, and abuse.

Four times we lost that vote. I am proud to tell you every Member of the Senate on this side of the Senate voted with me, but four times we have lost because there are some who talk a lot about spending but do not care how much is spent.

This is the greatest waste, fraud, and abuse that has occurred in the history of this country with this profligate contracting. I have only described the tip of the iceberg. I could spend an hour out here telling you stories about the way the American taxpayer has been fleeced by the massive amount of money that is shoveled out the door and the \$196 billion the President now wants; a substantial portion of it will also go to corporations and still no one is watching the store. Still no one is watching the store. In Iraq itself, \$8.9 billion is missing. Think of that. I daresay no one is looking for it.

Growth in government has a pretty hollow sound, it seems to me. The growth of spending, the waste, fraud, and abuse that is occurring under the nose of this administration, an administration that seems unconcerned, is the most significant waste, fraud, and abuse in the history of this country. We need to stop it. I will offer again the issue of a Truman commission to set up a special committee to investigate this and put an end to it.

On the question of who pays taxes, my colleague says: This is fixing the alternative minimum tax, but you are charging some others additional taxes. Let me remind my colleague who is going to pay additional taxes. The person who ran a hedge fund last year and made \$1.7 billion was the highest paid person in this country that we know. If you are adding that up, if someone asked: What is your monthly salary, that person would have to say, it is about \$145 million a month. Some would ask: What do you earn in a day. About \$4.5 million a day. That is a pretty big salary.

Do you know something more interesting about that? The people earning

at that level are paying an income tax rate in most cases of 15 percent. Think of that. There are no Americans going to work this morning working in ordinary jobs who are paying 15 percent income tax. I guarantee they are paying much more.

One of the richest men in the world, Warren Buffett from Omaha, said in his offices they got permission from his employees to figure out what happened with respect to the percentage of taxes paid by the employees. It turns out in that office, the lowest tax rate paid in his office is paid by the second richest man in the world, Warren Buffett. He said that is an outrage.

He said: I pay a lower percent of taxes from my income than my receptionist does. That is an outrage. Some want to correct that. I do.

My colleague from Texas would say: You are going to hurt people engaged in capital accumulation. Well, it seems to me the issue is one of fairness. Why is it that one group of people who makes hundreds of millions gets to pay a 15-percent tax rate. But a whole lot of other people who work hard all day, take a shower at night because their labor is important, come home with a meager paycheck and haven't made much progress with their salary in recent years, they look at their tax bill and are paying 25, 30, 35 percent, plus their Social Security taxes.

When my colleague talks about the growth of government, I say: Look in the mirror. When my colleague talks about taxes, I say: Look in the mirror and ask yourself whether you want a fair tax system.

More important than that, I want to talk for a moment about priorities. When we are told that \$196 billion ought to be made available, none of it paid for, for the President's priorities, and we don't have enough money for things at home, I ask a question about this young lady. Her name is Ta'shon Rain Littlelight. She is a beautiful young Indian girl from the Crow Reservation in Montana. Ta'shon was 5 years old. Ta'shon died.

I held a hearing in Montana with Senator TESTER on the Crow Reservation. This little girl's grandmother came to the hearing and held up this picture. She said Ta'shon died a very painful death, was in pain month after month. The kind of health care that should have been available to diagnose an illness which later became terminal was not available to this little girl. So she lived a painful last 3 months with a terminal illness and never got the health care she should have received. Not enough money for that, just not enough. Yes, this 5-year-old girl died. Not enough money for Indian health to deal with her.

I have shown my colleagues a picture of a little girl named Avis Littlewind. She was 14. She is dead as well. She took her own life. She lay in bed 90 days in a fetal position, missing school, 90 days, and somehow it didn't raise alarms anywhere. She took her own

life. No mental health treatment, no mental health treatment available on that reservation for that young lady.

I have shown my colleagues a picture of a woman brought into an emergency room—a Native American woman, as well. She had an 8-by-10 piece of paper attached to her thigh by a piece of masking tape, being transported on a hospital gurney from the ambulance to the hospital with a piece of paper attached by masking tape to her thigh that said to the hospital: If you accept this patient, understand that the contract health care money is gone for the year. You accept this patient on your own dime and at your own risk, this patient with a heart attack.

We don't have enough money for our domestic needs. The President says: No, I want \$196 billion for my priorities. I have just described the massive waste, fraud, and abuse with respect to the priorities of contracting in Iraq. I care about Indian health care for a lot of reasons. I chair the Indian Affairs Committee. We have struggled desperately to try to get the money we need for Indian health. That money is not available. Why? Because investment at home is not the priority. The fact is, these issues are life or death for a little girl like Ta'shon Rain Littlelight. This Congress can do something about it.

One hundred years from now, we will all be dead. But historians can understand who we were. They can look at what this country decided to do, what kind of decisions this Senate made by what we spent our money on. What did we think was important? Someone once asked the question, if you were charged with the task of writing an obituary for someone you had never met, and the only information you had was the check register from that person's checkbook, what could you write about that person? What you could write about that person is what you knew that person to value based on what they spent their money on. What did they invest in, contribute to? What was important to them? What was their value system?

The same will be true when historians evaluate what was important to us, what our value system was. So we have this dispute these days with President Bush and those on the other side of the aisle who are loyally supportive of the President's priorities at this point. I am not suggesting that we shouldn't work together. In fact, all of us have reached out to say: Let's find a way to reach compromise. But on issue after issue after issue—the alternative minimum tax, the Energy bill, the farm bill, appropriations bills—we have had great difficulty getting anything other than a cold shoulder from the White House. Democracy works and this system of government works only with compromise. It is the only way it can work.

The majority leader was here today once again seeking an opportunity to have unanimous consent requests

agreed to or negotiated. The farm bill is an awfully good example. We have now sent to the other side a list of things that we hope perhaps they might agree to. And if they don't agree to that, to give us a list back. Let's find a way to have common lists of amendments to bring the farm bill to the floor and finish it. That is a reasonable thing to do. Yet we can't get that done, can't get the first baby step in the right direction. All we get is hot air, a lot of rhetoric, discussion such as I heard this afternoon that somehow the majority is a group of profligate spenders, and the majority wants to increase taxes. What a bunch of nonsense. It is completely at odds with the facts. It is as if they believe that there are not cameras here and this isn't being recorded.

I was thinking, as I was sitting here, about a story I heard when I was a kid of Joseph Montgolfier from rural France. The story was in 1783. He was sitting in a big, overstuffed chair looking at his fireplace in his country home. And as he watched the fireplace he saw sparks and smoke go up the chimney. As he contemplated the smoke and the sparks, he thought: There is something taking the smoke and sparks up the chimney. That must be some sort of energy. And so several months later he was in a meadow in rural France with burlap bags he had dampened and straw he was burning and he fashioned the first balloon. And it was the first recorded evidence of powered flight. He discovered that hot air rises and used hot air to lift a balloon.

I was thinking about hot air today because I listened to what is supposed to somehow pass for informed debate, and it is nothing but hot air. Why don't you pass the appropriations bills. OK. Let's try one. I object, he says.

I don't understand that at all. Don't ask us to pass bills you are going to object to, if you are going to continue to stall and object. If you want us to pass legislation, appropriations, energy, AMT, if you want us to pass legislation, come to the floor this afternoon. Let's work together and work out a process by which we pass legislation that advances this country's interests. It is not as if we don't have significant challenges and significant interests. We do.

No one in this Chamber can suggest somehow that with the price of oil bobbing at around \$90 to \$100 a barrel that we don't have serious challenges and a need to pass an energy bill. The House of Representatives is doing an energy bill. We did one in the Senate prior to this. We tried to go to conference, and there was objection. So we couldn't even get to conference. But we will, I think and I hope, have the Energy bill the House is going to pass and then send over to the Senate next week. There is an urgent need to have conservation, efficiency, and renewable energy, as well as continue to use fossil fuels without injuring the environ-

ment. We can do all of those things, and should, but we will need some cooperation. We are not asking for the Moon. We are just saying this country faces obvious challenges.

No one party can do it alone. We have a 51-49 majority. All we need is some cooperation. All we need is for people who continue to come day after day after day with a two-word vocabulary, "I object," to see if they can't add a few words and say "I accept."

Let's work together. Let's join together to get things done. That is all we are asking. We only have a few days left in this session, probably a maximum of 12 or 13 days. I would hope all of us who are paid to work here and do the public's business would want to make those days productive on behalf of the country. We live in a great place. We should give thanks every day for this opportunity. Let's find a way to address these issues, invest in this country's priorities, pass an energy bill that we can be proud of that makes us less dependent on foreign oil, pass an AMT bill that is going to help avoid increased taxes for a lot of Americans who do not deserve to have an increased tax bill. We can do all of those things if we work together.

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

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

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, are we in morning business?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate is in a period of morning business.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent, if there is discussion of AMT today, that my remarks be placed in the RECORD at that point.

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

AMT

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I am pleased we are finally discussing solutions to the alternative minimum tax problem that is poised to swallow 19 million more filers this year. I would have rather gone through this process several months ago but better late than never.

Over the course of the year, I have given many speeches analyzing the AMT and describing the problem it poses for middle-class taxpayers in great detail. On February 12, I gave a speech on the history of the AMT. On February 13, I highlighted how the AMT affects individual income tax liabilities. On February 15, I discussed ways to reform the AMT and made the case that complete repeal is the best way to deal with the AMT.

Incidentally, I made the case that dealing with the alternative minimum

tax 1 year at a time could be problematic, and current events have proven me right.

On March 20, I pointed out the Democrats' budget had no room for AMT relief, not even for 1 year. On March 22, I explained why we need to repeal the AMT. On April 18, I made an appeal for quick action on the AMT to help taxpayers making estimated payments who are already paying the price for the lack of action in Congress. On May 14, I explained why the AMT relief or repeal should not be paid for with a tax increase someplace else on other people. On May 17, I criticized the conference report on the fiscal year 2008 budget resolution for not realistically addressing the alternative minimum tax problem. On that same day, I gave another speech exposing how Democratic offsets to the AMT relief would result in massive tax increases on other people.

On June 13, I discussed the inadequacy of the lead trial balloons House Democrats were floating as possible fixes for the AMT. This was to mark the occasion of the second quarter estimated tax payments coming due because we had taxpayers who file quarterly already being hit by the lack of action on the part of the Congress.

On July 24, I introduced legislation to protect taxpayers who should have been making estimated payments for 2007 but weren't because they did not realize Congress was failing to protect them from the AMT. In other words, if they didn't have to pay the AMT in 2006, why would they think they had to pay the AMT in 2007? By not doing it, they were violating our tax laws, probably innocently.

On September 19, I marked the occasion of the third quarter estimated tax payments coming due by again discussing the AMT problem and how little congressional leadership was doing about it.

I just cited 12 speeches delivered on the Senate floor over the past year. That doesn't even include press conferences, Finance Committee meetings, and other events where I have talked about the need for repeal of the AMT or, in the case of a shorter term fix, just making sure it was fixed for this 1 year and kicking the can down the road. I have been talking about the alternative minimum tax literally all year now. House Democrats finally managed to introduce a bill on October 30, and the majority leader turned to it in the Senate right before the Thanksgiving recess. Democratic leadership cannot blame Republicans for their own failure to act until almost literally the last minute.

As I said, I am glad we are finally discussing solutions, and the Senate leadership seems to realize that the AMT should not be offset. I also want to thank my good friend, Chairman BAUCUS, for all his hard work this year,