

we face in this new session. We are all concerned about the size of the economic stimulus plan. Eight years ago, the Federal Government was actually running a budget surplus. Today we estimate a budget deficit, by the end of the year, of \$1 trillion. That deficit is a reflection of poor choices that have been made at many levels of Government, but we cannot let the bad choices in the past prevent us from making the wise choices we have to make now to end this economic crisis.

It is interesting that economists from all across the political spectrum have come to the same conclusion about what America needs. Nobel Prize-winning economist Paul Krugman, who is put in the category of liberal or Democrat, said recently:

It is much better, in a depressed economy, to err on the side of too much stimulus than on the side of too little.

He publicly wondered whether three-quarters of a trillion dollars is enough. Martin Feldstein, President Reagan's chief economic adviser, said:

Without action, the economy will continue to decline rapidly.

Mark Zandi, who advised Senator McCain during his campaign, said:

My advice is, err on the side of too big a package rather than too little.

All the great minds, economic thinkers, are coming to the same conclusion: We need to act, act decisively, and act boldly. But we need to act responsibly too. We do not have a day to waste, but we do not have a taxpayer dollar to waste either. We have to make sure the dollars are well spent, not in the creation of Government agencies but in the creation of good-paying jobs right here in America; not in investments in bureaucracy but investments in our economy that will help our Nation grow in the years to come.

We need to include smart spending and targeted tax cuts for the middle class so they can cope with the challenges, the economic challenges they face. We have to make sure the money that is spent by Congress is spent responsibly so we do not end up with embarrassing earmark projects that have not been subjected to public scrutiny and review in advance. We need to make sure programs are authorized and funds are pumped quickly into the economy but in an efficient way.

We need to invest in jobs for American workers. States have identified almost \$18 billion in road and bridge projects ready to launch within 90 days. Every \$1 billion of Federal funds can create up to 35,000 private sector, good-paying American jobs and generate \$6.2 billion in economic activity.

There is a lot of work to do. Our States are struggling. They don't have the money to keep the safety net Americans will need as the economy weakens. They cannot help colleges and universities that need a helping hand. Nineteen States are considering cutbacks in basic health care; 18 States are cutting services for the elderly; 20

States are cutting or proposing to cut K through 12 and early childhood education. The list goes on and on.

I see my colleague from Montana, and I will be happy to take the chair so he can continue his remarks, if necessary, but the last point I will make is that the mortgage foreclosure crisis is at the core of our problems in America. We cannot come to grips with a rebirth of the American economy without dealing with the mortgage foreclosure crisis. It is a crisis that, as I mentioned earlier, hurts the families losing their homes and those living in the neighborhoods and towns around them. We are all in this together. What we need to do is work with major financial institutions to renegotiate these mortgages so people who still have a job and can make a reasonable mortgage payment can stay in their homes.

I got off the phone with one of the major bankers in the city of Chicago, a friend of mine. He said: We get it. We are going to have to do things much more boldly to deal with mortgage foreclosure. The programs we put together, the voluntary programs, have not worked, they have not touched enough people. More and more homes are facing foreclosure, more people are heading to bankruptcy, and that has to come to an end. The housing industry, much like the automobile industry, is one of the staples of our economy and we have to deal with putting it back on track.

Last month, Credit Suisse estimated 8.1 million homes were likely to be lost to foreclosure by 2012. If the economy continues to worsen, they believe foreclosures will exceed 10 million homes.

We are going to have to come up with the money to turn this economy around. It will mean more debt in the short term but, if the economy starts moving forward again, it, frankly, is the only thing that we can look to in the long term for America's future. I urge my colleagues in the Senate, Democrats and Republicans, to try to find a common ground where we can work together.

Just a day or two ago, President-elect Obama came up to meet with Democrats and Republicans, House and Senate leaders, just a few steps from this Senate floor. There was a conversation about ideas. I know him pretty well, having served with him, and I have been his friend for a number of years. I know he was genuine and sincere when he turned to one of the Republican leaders and said: If you have a better idea, I want to hear it. I want an opportunity to bring in all ideas, Democratic and Republican, so we can come up with the best package to serve the American people. It is not about one political party taking credit. Let's take credit as a Congress and as an administration in turning this economy around.

We are going to have that chance, to stabilize our economy and to rebuild it in the future. I look forward to working on a bipartisan basis to achieve that.

Mr. TESTER. Mr. President, I join the Democratic whip in his comments. I think it is critically important that we work together in these economic times to solve the problems this country faces. We don't have problems as Democrats or Republicans with the economy, we all have problems with the economy, and I think the American people are looking forward to us working together for solutions to our economic mess.

ORDER FOR RECESS

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that at 12:45 p.m. today, the Senate stand in recess subject to the call of the Chair.

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

The Senator from Montana.

MONTANA NATIONAL GUARD

Mr. TESTER. Mr. President, as we begin this new year and this new Congress, I would like to ask the Senate to stop and reflect on the service of the men and women of our military. Every day, hundreds of thousands of men and women in all branches of our military are performing jobs that place them in harm's way and at the tip of the spear.

In particular, I would like to thank the 229 men and women of the Montana National Guard who have deployed or will be deploying this month.

Just in the past week, 46 airmen from the Montana Air National Guard security forces left the sub-zero temperatures in Montana for training at Fort Bliss, TX. From there, they will head to Kyrgyzstan.

Another 120 soldiers of the Montana National Guard's 639th Quartermaster Battalion left Helena for Fort Lewis, WA before they leave for Iraq.

And later this month, 63 soldiers from our 189th Aviation Battalion will go to Fort Sill to prepare for a tour in Iraq.

We feel a great deal of pride when sending our strongest and most dedicated Montanans overseas. We feel a great deal of hope too.

Leaving Montana to answer the call of duty isn't just another assignment. It is a symbol of commitment and courage. We will always appreciate their service, their hard work, and their willingness to protect Montana and America.

They say Montana is just a small town with a lot of long streets, and that means that when 229 guardsmen deploy overseas, it impacts a great deal of the State.

Businesses lose talented members of their workforce. Cities and towns lose cops, firefighters, doctors and other professionals in the community.

And most important of all, families have an empty seat at the dinner table. Family schedules get changed. Mothers and fathers become single parents for a little while.

Americans will never forget the sacrifices National Guard families make at home.

Sharla and I join all Montanans in sending our thoughts and prayers to these men and women as they complete their mission.

As Montana's only member of the Veterans Affairs Committee, I look forward to working to serve them as honored veterans when they all come home.

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

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

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, a few days ago, we all counted down the final seconds of 2008. In Israel they had something else to count all through last year. From January until December of 2008, a terrorist group launched more than 3,262 rockets and mortar shells into Israeli cities. These were deliberate acts of violence, provocation, and murder. The group responsible was Hamas. Hamas is a terrorist organization founded on one principal goal: destroying the state of Israel. Its charter says there is no value to international conferences, political initiatives, or dialogue. It says there is only one approach to the political situation in the Middle East, and that is jihad.

So it was no surprise when the terrorist group Hamas staged an illegal coup against the forces of President Mahmoud Abbas, the legitimate President of the Palestinian people. It was no surprise that Hamas rejected Egyptian and Arabian calls for an extension of the cease-fire Egypt had negotiated.

It was no surprise that when Israel voluntarily and unilaterally dismantled settlements and withdrew from Gaza in 2005 that Hamas saw this not as an opportunity to build peace but to instigate war, to continue to terrorize and kill Israelis in their places of worship, their schools, and their homes.

Since that year, Hamas terrorists have used Gaza to fire more than 6,300 mortars and rockets into Israel, reaching major cities, and pushing ever closer to the capital.

No country would be expected to sit on its hands and simply allow its citizens to endure these kinds of vicious attacks without taking action to stop the responsible party. If I am sitting in New Jersey, and rockets are landing around my house, near my children, and near our schools, my No. 1 goal, my immediate goal, is to stop the rockets. So in December of 2008, Israel sent its military to Gaza to achieve a direct goal: stop the rockets.

And now we all hope strongly that this goal can be achieved as quickly as possible. But we recognize it must be pursued if Israel is to have the sovereign right to protect itself and its citizens. Israel's acts to stop the Hamas rocket attacks are a response to the daily risk of death faced by the 900,000 Israeli citizens who live within

rocket range. These innocent civilians have been forced to live constantly under the threat of mass casualties. No nation—no nation—should have to wait for the death toll to rise enough before it can act. No nation needs to wait until enough schoolchildren have fallen victim to a rocket attack before it stops rockets from falling on its cities. The launching of rockets and mortar fire is an invasion of Israel's sovereign territory. It is no different from dropping bombs out of airplanes. It is no different from any other act of war. There is no question that Israel has a right and an obligation to defend its people.

We mourn the loss of all innocent life, and the death of Palestinian civilians as a result of this conflict is tragic. There are a great many Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank who completely reject the Hamas ideology. They want to live in peace and build the Palestinian state for themselves and for their children. They are, however, Hamas hostages. Hamas has hijacked Gaza, not to build a state in which you can live in peace and prosperity but to use it as a base to launch attacks against innocent civilians in Israel.

Let us remember it was Hamas that chose to end the cease-fire, Hamas that chose to fire a continuous barrage of rockets. To date, it is Hamas that deliberately uses civilians as human shields and launches its attacks from heavily populated civilian areas, putting them at risk. It is Hamas that has spent its money on rockets rather than on food for the hungry. It is Hamas that would rather focus on the rhetoric that calls for the destruction of the State of Israel than on relief for its own people.

Israel and the United States have proven their commitment to helping innocent civilians in Gaza. In stark contrast to the terrorist group of Hamas, Israel has taken significant steps to prevent civilian casualties. They give warnings of impending attacks, they drop leaflets, and make phone calls to targeted areas to warn the citizens they are in danger, even if that means losing the element of surprise and putting the lives of their own soldiers at risk.

Israel and the United States have actively provided humanitarian assistance to Gaza. Since December 26, 10,000 tons of humanitarian aid have been delivered to Gaza in coordination with Israel, the Palestinian Authority, international organizations, and various other donors.

The United States Government, through the U.S. Agency for International Development, is continuing to deliver humanitarian supplies to the people of Gaza. The United States has provided medical and food supplies to health care facilities. We support the UN, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and other nongovernmental organizations as they continue their relief efforts.

We all want peace in Gaza and hope it can come very soon. But peace cannot be achieved so long as Hamas continues its missile attacks. If a just and lasting cease-fire is to occur, it is incumbent upon Hamas to immediately and permanently halt all attacks against the Israeli people.

I rise today to express unwavering commitment to the welfare, security, and survival of the state of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state. That is what the resolution before us affirms. As the resolution states, the ultimate goal of the United States is a "sustainable resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, that will allow for a viable and independent Palestinian state, living side by side in peace and security with the State of Israel." This will not be possible as long as Israeli civilians are under threat from rockets. As this resolution correctly lays out, Hamas must end the rocket and mortar attacks against Israel, recognize Israel's right to exist, renounce violence, and agree to accept previous agreements between Israel and the Palestinians.

Today, the Senate must stand in support of the state of Israel, stand in support of its right to defend itself against terrorists, stand in support of its right to exist. Having said all of this, of course, we urge Israel as it defends its sovereignty and its people to use every option it can to limit the loss of innocent lives. So let us vote for a resolution that demonstrates our commitment to one of the strongest allies the United States of America has in the world, and let us do all we can to make it a peaceful 2009.

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

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

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

RECESS FOR JOINT SESSION OF THE TWO HOUSES

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands in recess subject to the call of the Chair.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 12:46 p.m., recessed subject to the call of the Chair, to reassemble in the Hall of the House of Representatives for a joint session, and at 2:30 p.m. reassembled in the Senate Chamber when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. NELSON of Nebraska).

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican whip is recognized.

SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL

Mr. KYL. Mr. President, I would like to speak to two subjects. The first deals with a resolution the Senate unanimously adopted this morning.