

Senator THUNE on the floor. Does he wish to be recognized after Senator COBURN?

Mr. THUNE. Reserving the right to object, as of right now, BROWN for 5? COBURN?

Mr. REID. I understand he wants to speak for about 40 minutes. I am sure, knowing Dr. COBURN, if you have a short statement, he would not care. How long do you wish to speak?

Mr. THUNE. For 7 minutes.

We will work it out on our side.

Mr. REID. I ask that Senator THUNE be recognized. Senator COBURN wants to lay down his amendments. I will renew this consent request in a minute. I withdraw the consent at this time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The request is withdrawn.

#### REPEALING AUTOMATIC PAY ADJUSTMENTS FOR MEMBERS OF CONGRESS

Mr. REID. The recently passed Omnibus appropriations bill completed unfinished business from the Bush administration, which funded the Government to provide critically needed services for the American people. The omnibus that was signed into law last week also eliminated the congressional cost-of-living adjustment for 2010.

During debate on that bill, I sought unanimous consent of this body to take up and pass freestanding legislation to permanently end the automatic cost-of-living adjustment and instead require Members of Congress to vote for or against all future adjustments.

Especially in this hour of economic crisis, the overwhelming majority of Democrats and Republicans would agree that we should end this practice of automatic adjustments. Senator FEINGOLD has championed this cause for a long time, 17 years to be exact. I applaud him for his leadership. Others have tried to take this issue from Senator FEINGOLD, but it is his issue and has been, I repeat, for 17 years. This should have passed last Tuesday when I asked unanimous consent for the bill to pass. One week later, let's see who objects to passing this bill. It should have been done last week.

An overwhelming bipartisan majority of Senators is undeterred by the obstruction that took place last week. Passing this legislation to permanently end the automatic cost-of-living adjustment for Members is the right thing to do.

Absent any further objections, we should do so right now and pass it.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of S. 620, introduced earlier today.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The bill clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 620) to repeal the provision of law that provides automatic pay adjustments for Members of Congress.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the bill be read three times and passed; the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table, with no intervening action or debate, and any statements related to this bill be printed in the RECORD.

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

The bill (S. 620) was ordered to be engrossed for a third reading, was read the third time, and passed, as follows:

S. 620

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

#### SECTION 1. ELIMINATION OF AUTOMATIC PAY ADJUSTMENTS FOR MEMBERS OF CONGRESS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Paragraph (2) of section 601(a) of the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1946 (2 U.S.C. 31) is repealed.

(b) TECHNICAL AND CONFORMING AMENDMENTS.—Section 601(a)(1) of such Act is amended—

(1) by striking “(a)(1)” and inserting “(a)”;

(2) by redesignating subparagraphs (A), (B), and (C) as paragraphs (1), (2), and (3), respectively; and

(3) by striking “as adjusted by paragraph (2) of this subsection” and inserting “adjusted as provided by law”.

(c) EFFECTIVE DATE.—This section shall take effect on December 31, 2010.

Mr. FEINGOLD. Mr. President, I commend our majority leader for moving this legislation through the Senate. I have introduced legislation like this for the past six Congresses, and am delighted that, because of Senator REID's leadership, this proposal has finally passed the Senate.

Congress has the power to raise its own pay, something that most of our constituents cannot do. Because this is such a singular power, Congress ought to exercise it openly, and subject to regular procedures including debate, amendment, and a vote.

But current law allows Congress to avoid that public debate and vote. All that is necessary for Congress to get a pay raise is that nothing be done to stop it. The annual pay raise takes effect unless Congress acts.

That stealth pay raise mechanism began with a change Congress enacted in the Ethics Reform Act of 1989. In section 704 of that act, Members of Congress voted to make themselves entitled to an annual raise equal to half a percentage point less than the employment cost index, one measure of inflation.

On occasion Congress has voted to deny itself the raise, and the traditional vehicle for the pay raise vote is the Treasury appropriations bill. But that vehicle is not always made available to those who want a public debate and vote on the matter. As I have noted in the past, getting a vote on the annual congressional pay raise is a haphazard affair at best, and it should not be that way. The burden should not be on those who seek a public debate and recorded vote on the Member pay raise. On the contrary, Congress should have to act if it decides to award itself a hike in pay. This process of pay

raises without accountability must end.

I was pleased to join with the junior Senator from Louisiana, Mr. VITTER, in offering an amendment to the Omnibus appropriations bill recently. That amendment received strong support, support which was all the more remarkable because many of the amendment's potential supporters felt constrained to oppose it in order to keep the underlying legislation free of amendments. I commend Senator VITTER for his efforts to end this system. Now, thanks to our majority leader, we have a real chance to do so.

This issue is not a new question. It was something that our Founders considered from the beginning of our Nation. In August of 1789, as part of the package of 12 amendments advocated by James Madison that included what has become our Bill of Rights, the House of Representatives passed an amendment to the Constitution providing that Congress could not raise its pay without an intervening election. On September 9, 1789, the Senate passed that amendment. In late September of 1789, Congress submitted the amendments to the States.

Although the amendment on pay raises languished for two centuries, in the 1980s, a campaign began to ratify it. While I was a member of the Wisconsin State Senate, I was proud to help ratify the amendment. Its approval by the Michigan Legislature on May 7, 1992, gave it the needed approval by three-fourths of the States.

The 27th amendment to the Constitution now states: “No law, varying the compensation for the services of the senators and representatives, shall take effect, until an election of representatives shall have intervened.”

I honor that limitation. Throughout my 6-year term, I accept only the rate of pay that Senators receive on the date on which I was sworn in as a Senator. And I return to the Treasury any cost-of-living adjustments or pay raises during my term. I don't take a raise until my bosses, the people of Wisconsin, give me one at the ballot box. That is the spirit of the 27th amendment, and at the very least the stealth pay raises permitted under the current system certainly violate that spirit.

This practice must end, and I am delighted to say that thanks to Majority Leader REID, we have a real chance at ending it. I urge the House of Representatives to take this bill up and pass it right away, so we can assure the American people that we are serious about ending a system that was devised to provide us with regular pay increases without any accountability.

#### REVOLUTIONARY WAR AND WAR OF 1812 BATTLEFIELD PROTECTION ACT—Continued

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I now ask unanimous consent that Senator BROWN be recognized for 5 minutes—

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, if the leader would yield, I think the Senator

from Oklahoma will lay down his amendments, which would take up to a half an hour, 40 minutes. Whenever he concludes, I ask that I proceed.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senator from Ohio, Mr. BROWN, be recognized for up to 5 minutes; that Senator COBURN be recognized to lay down whatever amendments he chooses, and speak up to one-half hour; that following that time Senator THUNE then be recognized.

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

The Senator from Ohio.

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

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

AIG

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, the unemployment rate in my State of Ohio is 8.8 percent. The poverty rate is 13.1 percent. Lines at food pantries snake around buildings and down the street. In AIG, executives are receiving \$1 million bonuses. Failed executives, executives who have made a mess of their company, are receiving \$1 million bonuses. When the house of cards AIG built eventually collapsed, the Bush administration, then the Obama administration, provided financial support. They had no choice; doing nothing in the face of AIG's collapse could turn a national economic downturn into a full-blown, decades-long economic collapse. But what do you tell a Cincinnati who has lost her job or a Clevelander who has lost their home or someone in Mansfield, OH, who is standing in line at a food pantry when they hear that AIG executives are earning millions in bonuses as they suck up taxpayer dollars, tens and tens and tens of billions of taxpayer dollars like a vacuum?

I am going to tell them we are not only going after those bonuses, we are going after the corporate-centric, consequences-free culture that fueled those million-dollar bonuses. Many of my conservative colleagues don't believe in regulation. I would like one of them to stand with a straight face and tell the American public that overregulation is the reason AIG accepted taxpayer-funded Government aid and then gave million-dollar bonuses to its employees.

How did AIG dig itself into this hole? How did the Bush administration, which simply didn't do the regulation they should have done, let it happen? In the short-term, either AIG CEO Edward Liddy, installed by the Bush administration months ago, needs to renegotiate these bonus contracts to get taxpayer money back or the employees need to give up their bonuses voluntarily or Congress and the administration need to act to get these dollars back. That means we impose a one-time tax on these employees on so-called retention bonuses. If we impose a one-time tax on these employees that

approximates their net bonuses, so be it.

Usually after a statement that begins "in the short-term," there follows a statement that begins "in the long-term." Not this time. In the short-term, we need to return these bonuses to taxpayers, and in the short-term we need to change the rules of the road so no company, no matter how big, such as AIG, which accepts TARP funds, can fritter away those dollars on huge pay packages and lavish bonuses, as the Senator from North Dakota pointed out, while passing through those tax dollars and making whole companies such as Goldman Sachs of New York, Barclays in London, Societe Generale in Paris, Deutsche Bank in Germany, American taxpayer dollars passing through AIG executives' hands going directly to those foreign and domestic banks making them whole, when they made bad decisions just like AIG made bad decisions. In the short term, not the long term, maybe most importantly of all, we need to rewrite Federal regulations to prevent the arrogance and recklessness and the greed and self-aggrandizement from turning financial institutions into a weight around America's neck and pickpockets robbing the American people. It is what we have to do.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. COBURN. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mr. COBURN. I ask unanimous consent that instead of going in the order that the unanimous consent had requested, Senator VITTER from Louisiana be recognized for 5 minutes, then followed by myself, and then followed by Senator THUNE.

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

The Senator from Louisiana.

AUTOMATIC PAY RAISES

Mr. VITTER. Mr. President, I rise to applaud the action the Senate took by unanimous consent, passing my language to get rid of the automatic pay raises for Members of Congress through the Senate. I thank Senator REID for joining in this effort after my amendment was made in order on the Omnibus appropriations bill. I thank everyone who cooperated in passing this by unanimous consent. I was happy to give that consent for my part since my vote on an amendment on another bill was no longer at stake, so it wouldn't drain votes away from my amendment. We did come together to do that, and we did pass this through the Senate. Obviously, this is a bicameral legislature so the story is not over. I encourage everyone to come together and encourage—no, do more than encourage—pressure the House of Representatives

to do the right thing and pass this reform. The last week has proven what can be changed when we come together and listen to the voice of the people.

A week ago this wasn't on radar. This was not a possibility. Today it has passed the Senate. How did that happen? It happened because we brought up the issue. We came together. I joined with Senator FEINGOLD, who has been an advocate of this issue for some time. We had an open debate. The people's voices from around the country were heard, and we reacted to that in a positive way. I say that because it proves what can happen in the House. The House leadership has made clear they don't want to bring up this matter. They certainly don't want to pass this bill into law. But we can change that, even more than that, the American people can change that and call their House Members and demand that the leadership have a fair vote and pass this into law.

I thank Senator REID for changing his language from last week and adopting mine so there would be no further automatic pay raises in the near future, if this bill is adopted. Under his standalone bill filed last week, there would have been at least one more autopilot automatic pay raise to go into effect. Under my original language, which he adopted in this latest version which just passed through the Senate by unanimous consent, that is not the case. It would change the autopilot automatic pay raise system immediately. That was an important and necessary correction on his part. I thank him for making that correction. We are on a bipartisan roll. Let's keep it up. Let's bring that spirit, that public debate, let's bring that public pressure to the House of Representatives. When the people are involved and when their voice is heard, it is amazing what can change around here and what can get done.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

AMENDMENT NO. 680 TO AMENDMENT NO. 684

Mr. COBURN. Mr. President, I will spend some time tonight offering two amendments to the bill under consideration.

I begin by asking: Why is it in the midst of all the problems that face the country, the Senate is going to spend time on an omnibus lands package? It is no emergency. There is no crisis. There is nothing critical about it. Instead of working on the problems that are in front of this country, we will spend the next 2½ days or next 1½ days on a 1,243-page bill that has 170 separate bills in it that, in fact, for the average American doesn't come anywhere close to being a priority. One has to ask that question. Why are we doing this? We don't have anything better to do. We don't have anything more important to do. If that is the case, we probably should go on until we do have something that can make a significant change in the country.

I call up amendment No. 680.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Oklahoma [Mr. COBURN] proposes an amendment numbered 680.

Mr. COBURN. I ask unanimous consent that reading of the amendment be dispensed with.

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

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: To ensure that the general public has full access to our national parks and to promote the health and safety of all visitors and employees of the National Park Service)

At the appropriate place, insert the following:

**SEC. \_\_\_\_ . LIMITATIONS ON NEW CONSTRUCTION.**

(a) IN GENERAL.—Except as provided in subsection (b), the Secretary of the Interior (acting through the Director of the National Park Service) (referred to in this section as the “Secretary”) shall not begin any new construction in units of the National Park System until the Secretary determines that all existing sites, structures, trails, and transportation infrastructure of the National Park Service are—

- (1) fully operational;
- (2) fully accessible to the public; and
- (3) pose no health or safety risk to the general public or employees of the National Park Service.

(b) EXCLUSIONS.—Subsection (a) shall not affect—

- (1) the replacement of existing structures in cases in which rehabilitation costs exceed new construction costs; or
- (2) any new construction that the Secretary determines to be necessary for public safety.

Mr. COBURN. I spent about an hour this afternoon talking about the problems of the National Park Service. They are severe. I introduced into the record the GAO report on the problems at the Department of Interior, as well as the testimony of the acting inspector general, Mary Kendall, about the significant problems that parks are experiencing. Our parks are falling down. The maintenance backlog, according to the Park Service, is \$8.9 billion. But according to the testimony of the GAO, it is somewhere between \$13 and \$19 billion.

This is a very straightforward amendment. What it says is, before we start anything new and new parks, we are going to bring up-to-date what should be brought up-to-date in the parks we have today. That is important because they need to be fully operational. They need to be fully accessible to the public which many are not now because of maintenance backlogs. They need to pose no safety or health risk for both the employees of the parks and the Department of Interior as well as the American citizen, some 270 million who visit them every year.

This is a very straightforward amendment. It says we are going to do something we don't often do. We are going to prioritize how we spend money in the parks. What we are saying is, we are not going to do any new construction in terms of units of the national

park system until the Secretary—and this is left to the Secretary, not us—determines that the existing sites, the structures, trails and transportation infrastructure of the National Park Service are fully operational, fully accessible to the public, and pose no health or safety risk to either the public or park employees.

We have thought about other things. We want to make sure there is an exclusion in there. If something is going to cost more to repair than to build something new, we say build something new. The other thing, anything that the Secretary deems is important for public safety that is new, we let them do that as well. All this is saying is with this \$10 billion of new authorizations and \$900 million of mandatory spending accompanying this bill, the first thing we ought to do is take care of what we have before we start off on another project.

The crown jewels of our national parks are fading. They are fading because we won't take care of them. The backlog since the last time we considered this bill has grown by \$400 million. That is just what we know since the last time we considered this bill. The other thing we know from the GAO report is there is a marked risk to both employees and the public in many areas of our national parks. The other thing we know is many of our best parks, the Grand Canyon, for example, a large number of the trails are in such disrepair that they are closed. The people can't access them because we haven't said put the money where it needs to go to make sure we keep the things we have today operational and pristine. So it is straightforward.

What we also know is that the agency needs some help in terms of priorities. In spite of what we have had, oftentimes we are sending them messages to do something else that is not within these priorities. All we are saying is, we have these wonderful assets. Before we go create new assets and new things to enjoy, let's take care of the ones we have. We would not build a new addition onto our own homes when the whole rest of the home is collapsing from lack of maintenance. The first thing we would do is take care of the home, the maintenance of the home.

The bill in front of us actually has the potential to make the situation in our parks worse. It is because we are going to mandate certain things in the bill that will take away from true priorities of maintaining our existing structures.

A recent memo prepared by the Facility Management Division of the National Park Service reveals at least 10 States where the National Park Service backlog exceeds \$100 million. At least 20 States have facilities with deferred maintenance exceeding \$50 million. That excludes \$4 billion that is sitting there for roads and bridges in our national parks. This is in spite of the historically high appropriations levels we have sent to the parks.

I listed earlier—and I will not list again—all the things the National Park Service is responsible for. But it is a litany that, when you look at it, is almost incomprehensible that one agency can take care of everything we have asked them to take care of.

The USS *Arizona* now faces a maintenance backlog of \$33.4 million; the Gettysburg National Battlefield site, \$29.4 million; the Statue of Liberty Park has a backlog of \$196 million. Are we going to let it fall apart while we create something new or should we take care of what we have first?

What we do know from both the inspector general's report and the GAO is the Park Service is denying access in an increasing number of areas because of the growing maintenance backlog.

Representative ROB BISHOP is from Utah. The Dinosaur National Monument is largely inaccessible due to its overwhelming backlog. The center is designed so a kid can go in there and see, within the mountainside, the fossils that are there and see what scientists say about those fossils and then be able to put all that together in their mind. Unfortunately, no one has been able to access this building for 10 years—for 10 years—because we do not have enough money to fix the building and it has been condemned.

So here is an area where there is great educational value, great historical value and for 10 years the building has been condemned and we have not put the money there. This amendment is meant to fix what is wrong now before we spend money on new things.

According to the inspector general of the Department of Interior, financial management has remained a top challenge for the Department, and their work—this is the inspector general—has documented decades of maintenance, health, and safety issues that place Interior Department employees at a health and safety risk, as well as the public.

A report by the Coalition of National Park Service Retirees found widespread evidence of major problems that will be evident, including decreased safety for visitors, longer emergency response times, endangerment of protected resources, and dirtier and less well-maintained parks. The problem will only grow worse in the coming years if we pass this bill and do not prioritize the maintenance backlog.

It is noted that at the Grand Canyon, the cross-canyon water line is deteriorating so badly that it had 30 leaks this year and is in danger of failing entirely. Yet we did not spend any money on that in this bill. We did not authorize them to fix it. We are not about taking care; we are about solving our own political situation.

At Yellowstone, 10,000 gallons of raw sewage this past year leaked from a broken pipe and flowed into a trout-spawning stream in Yellowstone National Park. It is the absence of maintenance. We know the life expectancy of many of these infrastructures, and

yet we have not done anything about it.

Carlsbad Caverns—a great experience. Sewer lines were actually leaking into the caves because of deferred maintenance. Superintendent Benjamin said: Believe me, if there's sewage dripping down into the cavern, people are not going to believe we are doing a good job.

No kidding. Well, that starts with us.

The National Park System has grown to almost 400 units, 84 million acres, and a \$9.6 billion maintenance backlog. That is according to the Park Service. It is much higher if you look at the GAO's numbers.

We appropriated \$540 million for new land acquisition from 2001 to 2008. We have increased the number of National Heritage Areas since 2000 from 18 to 40. We added 10 more in January of this year. In the 110th Congress, 35 bills were introduced to expand the National Wild and Scenic Rivers.

The National Park Service already manages over 3,000 miles of scenic rivers. This bill includes 1,200 miles. But yet the maintenance dollars, the dollars put there to take care of what we have, are not there.

In April of 2008, the Congress passed and the President signed the Consolidated Natural Resources Act. That was another big lands bill that impacted land and property rights in over 30 States. It authorized \$380 million in new spending and not one way of paying for it and none of it for maintenance backlogs.

What we also know is this agency, the Department of Interior, is unable to prioritize the maintenance of existing obligations over new commitments. They get mixed signals. We say: Go do this new one. And then we send appropriations dollars and say: You have to spend it on this rather than taking care of a rotting sewage line.

Until we in Congress and the administration prioritize the maintenance of our existing national parks, these problems are going to grow. There is no excuse for it.

AMENDMENT NO. 679 TO AMENDMENT NO. 684

So I would put forward this is a simple amendment. It does not cost us anything. It actually saves us money because to repair something that is falling down—before it gets to that stage—is much cheaper than waiting until it is a catastrophe. Consequently, if we were to plan appropriately, and if we were to direct the funds appropriately, we would be repairing that which we need to repair so we do not spend extra dollars once they have failed.

My hope is we will get positive consideration of this amendment. This is a commonsense amendment. People at home would do the same thing. They take care of what they have before they go and add something else that is going to take away money that is required to maintain what they have.

I would say, again, individuals do not build additions to their homes when

the roof and the foundation is caving in and neither should the Park Service and neither should Congress.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the pending amendment be set aside and that amendment No. 679 be called up.

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

The clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Oklahoma [Mr. COBURN] proposes an amendment numbered 679 to amendment No. 684.

Mr. COBURN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that reading of the amendment be dispensed with.

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

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: to provide for the future energy needs of the United States and eliminate restrictions on the development of renewable energy)

At the appropriate place, insert the following:

**SEC. . DEVELOPMENT OF RENEWABLE ENERGY ON PUBLIC LAND.**

Notwithstanding any other provision of this Act, nothing in this Act shall restrict the development of renewable energy on public land, including geothermal, solar, and wind energy and related transmission infrastructure.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. COBURN. 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. COBURN. Mr. President, I wish to read this amendment because it is very short and very straightforward:

At the appropriate place, insert the following:

Notwithstanding any other provision of this Act, nothing in this Act shall restrict the development of renewable energy—

“Renewable energy”—

on public land, including geothermal, solar, and wind energy and related transmission infrastructure.

Very straightforward. We had a great experience with the harsh reality that we are energy dependent this past summer. It is going to come back again. Unfortunately or fortunately—depending on how you look at it—in the West, where the Government owns 1 out of every 2 acres, the vast majority of geothermal land resides.

What you will see—as indicated on this map—through this area, through southern California, along the coast of California, and Oregon, Idaho, Nevada, Colorado, New Mexico, some areas of Montana, Wyoming, and Arizona, is where the vast resources of a clean renewable energy exists: geothermal.

The only problem is, in this bill we gut a large portion of that and say we can never touch it. Well, why would we, if we believe in climate change—and I am a skeptic, but I will take that

point for a moment. Let's say we believe in climate change and we want to have energy produced that does not increase the CO<sub>2</sub> content of the atmosphere. Why would we pass a bill that takes and restricts a large portion of this area from geothermal?

We know in Nevada and Arizona, for example, solar is a massive source for clean energy. Yet in this bill, in both the wilderness areas and the heritage areas and all these other areas, we are going to restrict not only the utilization of geothermal and wind and solar but also the ability to capture it and move it somewhere else.

Well, if we take all this area for geothermal, and if you concentrate Nevada and Arizona in terms of the solar and then you look at the wind corridor that comes up through here, as shown on this map, and say you cannot send a transmission line anywhere across any of these properties, what we are doing is shooting ourselves in the foot. We do not want carbon-based energy. And now, where the Government owns 650 million acres, we do not want wind, solar or geothermal. Why would we do that?

I guess we are going to go all nuclear. We do not see any nuclear coming from the President. We do not see any nuclear coming from anywhere else. So what are we going to have? We are going to have no energy.

So we are going to limit hydrocarbon energy, and then we are going to take our greatest sources for wind, solar and geothermal and we are going to say: Sorry, that is off limits. You cannot use it here. You cannot extract it.

Geothermal is so powerful because it is a direct conversion. We capture steam and we capture a temperature gradient that turns a turbine that puts off nothing but water vapor—no CO<sub>2</sub>, no nitrous oxide, no sulfur dioxide. It is free energy. Yet in this bill we are going to take 2.2 million acres out of these areas and say: You cannot touch it for renewable energy. Why would we do that? So all this amendment says is you can do whatever you want on all these areas, as what we have done in the bill, but you cannot exclude it from renewable energy.

I am reminded, everybody wants renewable energy, but they just do not want it in their own backyard. Everybody wants us to have wind. We love wind. We have turbines like crazy in Oklahoma, like they do in North Dakota and South Dakota and several other States. We are happy to have it. But if you applied the same thing to Oklahoma, in terms of wilderness areas, we would not have any of the windmills that are generating a significant portion of our alternative renewable energy today in Oklahoma. More importantly, you would not be able to transport the energy you are creating that is renewable, that does not create CO<sub>2</sub>, that does not supposedly contribute to “climate change.”

We are going to pass a bill that is going to significantly restrict that.

What are we thinking? Why would we limit alternative renewable energy access in all these Federal lands, this extra 2.2 million to 3 million acres? Why would we do that? It is almost like we have a death wish. Either that or we are not thinking, we are not considering what we are going to need in the future. We are considering the short term, but we are not considering the long term.

So this map shows us specifically where geothermal is available. If you look down in southern California, we have heritage areas. Knock it out. If you look in Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico, we have heritage areas. We knock it out, saying: You can never utilize this land to capture clean alternative renewable energy. That is ludicrous.

So all this amendment does is say: Yes, you can. We are going to do everything else under the heritage areas, under the wilderness areas, under all the other restrictions we put in this bill, but we are going to capture renewable, clean energy for the American people. We should do nothing, given the fact that we are in trouble on energy and we don't even know it right now.

What we know is the supply-demand glide is going like this and we are in a recession now, and we don't feel it, but as we lock in and cut exploration for natural gas in this country, we will see a twofold increase in natural gas within the next 18 months. We know that because we have built reserves every year until this year in natural gas. We know we consume 4.6 trillion cubic feet of natural gas every year in this country. As they shut down the exploration for known areas of natural gas because the price is under \$4, what we know is the demand is not going to decrease significantly over what it is because we have gone to alternative sources for power generation—a lot of it natural gas—that the demand is going to increase and the supply is going to become static.

What is going to happen? The price of natural gas is going to go up. What is that going to do to utility bills? Before we do a monstrous cap-and-trade that is going to severely raise everybody's electrical rates in this country, we are going to limit an alternative supply for electricity with this bill, because we are going to limit the access to geothermal, we are going to limit the access to wind, and we are going to limit the access to solar, and solar thermal electricity generation.

I have trouble figuring it out. It must be my commonness being from Oklahoma, but I can't figure out why we would—I know we are going to cut one leg off in terms of going green over the next 20 years. I can't figure out why we are cutting off the other leg. I am wondering what we are going to use for power in this country. If we are going to severely limit alternative renewable, nonpolluting energy that is clean and we are going to massively limit—as the Department of Interior is al-

ready—exploration for hydrocarbon-based fuels, and we are going to limit the significance of coal, of which we have over 300 years available to us, what are we going to use for energy? We are also going to slow down the permitting process and the loans for nuclear, so what are we going to use? What is going to keep the lights on?

This amendment is about keeping the lights on in a way that nobody should be able to object to. It is not carbon based. It is a renewable, it is essentially almost free, it is something we can capture without any significant greenhouse effect. Yet we are going to limit it with this bill. I think it is significantly foolish on our part.

What we know is that this 140 million acres we see here, if we add in what is already in wilderness areas, what is already off limits in terms of national forests and Federal lands, you add in—and this does not include except a small portion of Alaska—we are going to markedly limit our resources. Ninety percent of all the geothermal capability in this country—a clean source for renewable energy—is found on Federal lands. As we grow the limitations on Federal lands, what we are going to do is take that 90 percent and we are going to take anywhere from 50 to 70 percent of that and say you can't have it. There are 29 million acres with solar potential in six southwestern States—these six States. If you can't transmit the power through power lines, if you can't disturb the soil to build, whether you put it above ground or underground, if you can't cross a river with a power line either overhead or under the river, how are we going to transmit the power? What we are saying is we believe in renewable, clean energy, but we don't.

The other point I wish to make is we now have in this country in wilderness areas alone 108 million acres. Do you know how many acres we have in developed land in this country? It is 106 million. Not counting the Federal lands outside of wilderness, which is 650 million acres, we have 108 million acres of wilderness and only 106 million acres of developed land. Where do we stop to the point where we don't steal away from the future potential energy production in this country? I am not talking carbon based; I am talking noncarbon based. How do we get the power from geothermal from these concentrated areas to the west coast and back to the upper Midwest if we can't cross any of these areas? And then, what is the cost and what is the line loss load when we have to do something such as this and then go underground and then come back up? It becomes prohibitive, and then we lose all advantage from renewable energy.

The other area we know where we have tremendous potential in all of these areas and others is biomass. We have a tremendous source. Approximately one-third of the 747 million acres across the United States is covered in forest land. Fifty-seven percent

of those forests are owned by the Federal Government. Also, 590 million wet tons of biomass are available in the U.S. annually—590 million tons. Sixteen percent of renewable energy generated right now from electricity comes from biomass and 3 percent of our total energy in the year 2000. I don't have the dates for where we are today.

Here is what the U.S. Forest Service says: "The technology to generate energy from wood has entered a new millennium with virtually limitless possibilities."

Yet, even if we generate it, we can't transmit it under this bill, or the difficulty of costs for transmitting it will be prohibitive.

Each of the designations in this bill—somebody challenge me on this—each of the designations in this bill specifically withdraw the land from future mineral and geothermal leasing. That includes the wilderness areas, the wilderness study areas, and the wild and scenic rivers. They are withdrawn. They can't be used. Right now, there are 708 federally imposed wilderness areas totaling 107 million acres of land in 44 States. That will go to 1.92 million acres with the passage of this bill. It is a small portion of the 2 billion acres in this country, but it still denies the fact that we have more land now in wilderness than we have developed. The prohibition from capturing clean energy, renewable energy, and nonpolluting energy is unfortunate.

One of the things that is wrong with this bill also is that we are viewing tomorrow's energy potential on all of these lands with today's technology. Just like when you go back and look at the old BLM studies and the Department of the Interior studies on the land, if you use old technology, you can say there is no energy there. When you use new 3D seismic and electromagnetic seismology, what we see is a whole great potential for all other sources, including geothermal.

The other concern I have with this bill, and the reason I have this amendment, is we recently had a Federal judge in Washington, DC issue a restraining order to halt the development of major oil and natural gas reserves on 100,000 acres of Federal land in portions of Utah, not because it was in a wilderness area, not because it was in a heritage area, not because it was along a scenic river, but because it was near there. So we are going to abrogate to the courts and the aggressive environmentalists the ability to stop even clean renewable energy sources by the wilderness area designations.

Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar, a former colleague of ours, recently ordered a secretarial order calling for the production, the development, and delivery of renewable energy; that it would be a top priority of the Department of the Interior, but this bill restricts that order. So here we have the Department of Interior Secretary saying this is our priority

and we are going to pass a bill that undermines that authority and that priority.

Secretary Salazar claims that this effort will include the identification of areas of high potential renewable energy, including geothermal, wind, solar, and biomass. It also includes mapping out transmission infrastructure to connect power to consumers.

Well, as we create all of these wilderness areas and heritage areas, guess what we are doing. We are limiting the ability to map out power transmission lines. In total, the lands bill will withdraw over 3 million acres from energy leasing, placing them outside the scope of Secretary Salazar's endeavors.

Majority Leader HARRY REID summed up the difficulties imposed by these designations when he discussed energy resources in Nevada. He said:

We know that our State has immense clean energy resources. However, the Federal Government's management of 86 percent of Nevada lands makes it challenging to explore and develop our enormous renewable resources.

The only area in this bill that does not affect geothermal is in the State of Nevada. It is the only area.

If we are serious about alternative energy, this amendment should be accepted, should be voted for, allowing us to have a wilderness area, but at the same time utilizing clean energy as a way to bring us to energy independence in the 21st century. So this is a very simple amendment. It says, OK, let's have what we have, but let's don't restrict it as far as renewable, clean energy. Let's use the renewable, clean energy that is available. This happens to be geothermal, but we know where the solar is, we know where the biomass is, and we know where the wind corridor is in this country. Why would we restrict it?

AMENDMENT NO. 675 TO AMENDMENT NO. 684

(Purpose: To prohibit the use of eminent domain and to ensure that no American has their property forcibly taken from them by authorities granted under this Act)

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to set aside the pending amendment and call up amendment No. 675.

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

The clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Oklahoma [Mr. COBURN] proposes an amendment numbered 675:

(Purpose: To prohibit the use of eminent domain and to ensure that no American has their property forcibly taken from them by authorities granted under this Act)

At the appropriate place, insert the following:

**SEC. \_\_\_\_ EMINENT DOMAIN.**

Notwithstanding any other provision of this Act (or an amendment made by this Act), no land or interest in land (other than access easements) shall be acquired under this Act by eminent domain.

Mr. COBURN. Mr. President, that is a straightforward amendment. The authors of this bill said we are never going to use eminent domain for any of this, even though they reference two or

three statutes that give eminent domain. Well, if that is the case, if we are never going to use eminent domain to accomplish the purposes of this, there should be no trouble accepting this amendment. This amendment just says we can't. On this bill, you can't use eminent domain to take the property away from somebody who doesn't wish to give their property.

Amendment 5 of the U.S. Constitution says:

No person shall be deprived of life, liberty, or property without due process of law, nor shall private property be taken without just compensation.

That is the Constitution. But the father of the Constitution said it a different way. He said, in a word:

As a man is said to have a right to his property, he may be equally said to have a property in his right.

Eminent domain is necessary and appropriate at times in this country for national defense, for the health and well-being of the country, for priorities that protect the public at large, and that makes sense. There are times when we have to use it. There is not a time associated with any of the parts of this bill that we should have to use eminent domain.

I have been assured by the authors of this bill that they have no intention of using eminent domain. If that is the case, then support this amendment, and we will never have a problem with it. The property rights folks in this country, of which about 100 support this amendment, would say that is great, so let's vote it up or down.

But if we vote against it, what is it going to tell them? What it is going to do is erode the confidence of landowners in this country. We say we are not going to take your land away from you without your permission, without there being a willing seller, but we have kind of a king's edge. We have our fingers crossed behind our backs because there may be some time when a bureaucrat has made a decision other than what we are saying tonight.

So the way to enforce that would be a straightforward message that says, according to this amendment, "notwithstanding any other provisions of this act, or any amendment that is made to this act, no land or interest in land, other than an access easement, shall be required under this act by eminent domain."

That is straightforward. Let's give them confidence that we are not going to take their land away against their will.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. THUNE. 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. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be allowed to speak for up to 12 minutes.

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

FISCAL YEAR 2010 BUDGET

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, the Senate will in a couple of weeks take up the fiscal year 2010 budget. It is a defining document. In many cases, the budget establishes a blueprint for the agenda, what is going to happen in the Congress.

We normally get a budget proposal from the President, and the Congress takes it up and acts on it. We have gotten that blueprint from the new administration. The Congress will, as I said, in a couple of weeks take up our version of that budget, put it into legislative form, and take action on it.

I think what most Republicans in the Senate are going to take issue with in this budget is the fact that it does spend too much, tax too much, and borrow too much. We believe the budget as proposed is going to be very harmful to the economy at a time when we ought to be looking at creating jobs. In fact, this budget could do the exact opposite. It could cost the economy a significant number of jobs because it is going to impose all kinds of new burdens on that economy.

The first point I would like to make with respect to the issue of spending too much—as I said, it spends too much, taxes too much, borrows too much, but if we look at the amount of spending in the bill on the surface, discretionary spending would increase by \$725 billion over 10 years. Mandatory spending would increase \$1.2 trillion during the same period.

Total spending in this year's budget for fiscal year 2010 is \$3.9 trillion or 28 percent of our gross domestic product. That means we would be spending more as a percentage of our gross domestic product than at any time since World War II.

That is a stunning and staggering fact when you think about it. At a time when a lot of Americans are being asked to tighten their belts in a difficult economy, this budget grows the size of Government by 9 percent for nondefense programs in fiscal year 2010, for a total of 20 percent growth in these programs since the year 2008.

There has been a lot of talk about revising the history of the past 8 years. But this budget spends more than the Bush budget every single year, and that is even after adjusting for inflation.

For those on the other side who have been critical of the overspending on the Republican side—and I don't deny the Republicans spent more than we should have when we were in control of this place, but this budget is staggering in terms of the amount of spending it includes—\$3.9 trillion for fiscal year 2010, and, as I said, 28 percent of GDP, which would represent the highest level of share of GDP at any time in this Nation since World War II.

With respect to the issue of taxes—and as I said, it spends too much which, obviously, any person who looks

at this would agree with, but it also taxes too much. If you look at the taxes in the proposal, there is on the surface a whole lot of new revenue that is raised just by allowing previous tax policy to expire. We are going to see tax rates increase on people at the higher income levels.

The argument by the Democrats in the Senate has always been—and by the President, for that matter—that 95 percent of the people in the country are going to get tax cuts, and these new taxes on the economy are not going to impact that many people.

We are going to take issue with that because if you look at the total amount of new taxation—and when I say “new,” I am talking about net new taxes because that is independent of the tax relief. What they call the make work pay tax credit that is included in this bill does reduce the tax burden on some Americans by a certain amount. But the overall tax burden on the American economy is going to grow by \$1.4 trillion.

Again, to put things in perspective, \$1.4 trillion is equivalent to the annual GDP of Spain. We are going to raise taxes by \$1.4 trillion in an economy that is in the middle of a recession.

Much has been made about the fact small businesses are going to be saddled with new taxes under this budget. There have been statistics thrown around. Make no mistake about it; if you are a small business with more than 20 employees and you are organized as a subchapter S corporation or an LLC and, therefore, the income you derive from that business flows through to your individual income statement, you are going to pay a higher level of taxes if you have a certain amount of income coming in.

So any company that makes \$200,000 or \$250,000 a year adjusted gross income because it flows through to the individual tax form, that individual could be facing much higher taxes. In fact, what has been determined through the analysis that has been done is that 60 to 80 percent of small businesses in this country will see their tax burdens go up because of the taxes included in this budget—\$1.4 trillion in new taxes, which, as I said, is the equivalent of the annual GDP of Spain in the middle of a recession.

The other point I would make to those who say this is not going to impact average middle-income Americans is, if you look at the energy tax in this bill, I don't know how you can get around the fact that is going to hit everybody across the board.

The administration has said the revenue raised on the cap and trade—we call it the energy tax component. It is going to be a tax on utilities because the utilities are going to pass this on. It is not going to be borne by the utilities. It will be passed on to consumers. The administration has indicated \$646 billion or \$650 billion in revenue will come in from this new cap-and-trade proposal or this new energy tax pro-

posal. I would argue that based upon additional analysis that has been done, it will be significantly more revenue coming in from that, which means it is going to cost the economy significantly more as well.

I refer my colleagues to an MIT study that was done in 2007 where they looked at a proposal, the Boxer-Sanders proposal—S. 309, I believe it was—and made an assessment as to what that would cost the economy. Bear in mind the President, while he was a Senator, cosponsored that proposal, and his proposal for a cap-and-trade regime is modeled very much after that legislation.

What MIT found when they modeled this was that it would cost the average household in this country \$3,128 in the year 2015 if this sort of cap-and-trade proposal were implemented and put into law.

As I said before, that assumes a much higher level of taxation, a much higher level of revenue coming in from this cap-and-trade proposal than does the President's budget.

I would argue that the President's budget dramatically underestimates the impact of the cap-and-trade proposal in terms of cost to the economy and the additional taxes that will be passed on, and that this represents a much more accurate review.

The Congressional Budget Office also has in their analysis concluded that by the year 2020, this could cost somewhere between \$50 billion and \$300 billion a year. The MIT study suggests it would cost more than \$300 billion a year. I think as more and more analysis is done and more and more data is captured about this cap-and-trade proposal, we are going to find it is extremely more expensive than what has been anticipated and what has been assumed in the President's budget.

The energy tax piece of this is going to be passed on to everybody. If you are a middle-income taxpayer, a lower income taxpayer, or a small business, energy costs are going to go up. The argument has also been made the make work pay tax credit would offset that. That is true up to a point, but that is up to \$400 for a single filer and \$800 for a couple filing jointly and phased out so that people in the middle-income categories are still going to be faced with this significant energy tax that is paraded by the new cap-and-trade policy that is assumed in the President's budget. Not only does it directly raise taxes—the \$1.4 trillion that I mentioned earlier which equals the annual GDP of Spain—the tax increase is going to be passed on to a lot of small businesses in this country. But there is this cap-and-trade tax, which is the secret job killer in this budget in terms of the enormous burden and cost it will impose on our economy, on small businesses, and on working families in this country.

As I said before, this budget spends too much, it taxes too much, and the other point I will make is that it bor-

rows too much. If we look at the amount of borrowing that is entailed as a result of this budget and what it does to our national debt over time, again, the numbers are quite staggering.

This budget doubles—doubles, Mr. President—the public debt in 5 years and triples it in 10 years. The amount of borrowing that we are passing on to future generations is going to double in 5 years and triple in 10. Just to put this in perspective, this creates more debt. The President's budget creates more debt than was accumulated under every President in this country from George Washington through George Bush. In other words, from the inception of our country, from our very first President, George Washington, to George Bush, his Presidency included—a lot of people have criticized the previous administration for adding to the Federal debt. In fact, during the Bush administration, it was about \$2.9 trillion that was added to the Federal debt. This is going to dwarf that by multitudes. It doubles the publicly held debt in 5 years and triples it in 10 years and accumulates more debt than was accumulated from the time of George Washington through the Presidency of George Bush.

That is a stunning amount of borrowing. We are getting to where even if the President's budget proposals and economic assumptions are accurate—and I would take issue with those—where the total amount of borrowing, the total amount of public debt is going to be about two-thirds of our GDP, those are numbers we have not seen at any time in this country since World War II.

There are incredible amounts of spending, incredible amounts of taxation, incredible amounts of borrowing, and lots of policy changes that we think are very bad for the country and very bad for our economy at a time when we need to be putting policies in place that will create jobs, stimulate the economy, and help expand it in a way that will make this country more prosperous and stronger for the future.

In the debate that will ensue in the next several weeks—and it will get underway in a couple of weeks—we are going to be making lots of arguments, as both sides will—those who are in favor of the President's budget proposal and those of us who are opposed to it—about the substance of it. I hope when we focus on the substance of it, the American people will tune in because they ultimately are the ones who pay the costs.

For the taxpayers of this country who bear the burden and responsibility of financing the many new initiatives that are paraded in this, it does create a lot of new initiatives. It does away with guaranteed student loan lending, a program that has been very successful across this country and moves everything back into direct lending of the Federal Government. It, as I said, creates an entirely new energy program, a cap-and-trade program, which

is a tax. Let's call it what it is. It is going to impose an incredible cost on our economy, not to be borne by corporate America; it will be passed on to the American consumers. If the MIT study that was done a year ago is right, there will be \$3,128 per household in this country to comply with the additional costs that will be imposed as a result of this new cap-and-trade proposal included in the President's budget.

It assumes some \$600 billion for health care reform. We have not seen specifics and details about that, but we are concerned as well about the direction in which that may be headed. There are lots of reasons to be opposed to this budget. There are lots of things we could and should be doing to get this economy growing again, but clearly, raising taxes, spending more money here in Washington, DC, borrowing more from our children and grandchildren is not the way to go about this.

I wish I could say I was presenting the worst-case scenario. The numbers we are seeing here are probably optimistic. I think the President's economic assumptions with respect to inflation, unemployment, GDP growth, and all those sorts of things are overly optimistic. I think they have dramatically understated, as I said, the cost of the cap-and-trade proposal. They have understated savings that will be achieved by reductions in our military spending as a result of drawdowns in Iraq. I don't think that is going to be nearly what they assume it is going to be. I think the actual deficits and debt that are going to come as a result of this budget proposal that the President is putting in front of us is going to be way beyond anything we are even contemplating now.

I have to say, what we are contemplating now is way beyond anything we have seen throughout our Nation's history. It is not fair to future generations for us to be saddling them with this enormous amount of debt. As I have pointed out before on the floor, we have had a tradition in this country of one generation sacrificing for another; one generation going without things so that future generations can have a better life. We have turned that ethic completely on its head with this budget by the amount of borrowing and spending that we are doing and in the amount of taxing. We are taking from future generations and asking them to sacrifice so we can have a better life today because we have not been willing or able to live within our means.

It is high time that Congress started taking the steps necessary to get this budget under control, to not buy into the spending spree. Since we have been here—and it has been a little over 50 days in this new Congress and the new administration—the level of spending is now at \$1.2 trillion—\$24 billion a day or \$1 billion an hour that we have spent already—and that is before we even get to this fiscal year 2010 budget, which

includes historic levels of spending, historic levels of taxation, the largest tax increase in American history, and historic levels of borrowing that asks future generations to make sacrifices which are not fair to ask of them.

It is our responsibility to live within our means. We can do that. We can put policies in place that will be additive in terms of creating jobs and growing our economy and making our country stronger. Going down this path is not going to do that. I hope as we debate this in the next couple of weeks that it will become clear to the American people who is standing up for the American taxpayer and what the costs are—the actual costs—that we are asking not only them to bear but asking their children and grandchildren to bear.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. UDALL of Colorado). Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to a period of morning business with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

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

#### ST. PATRICK'S DAY 2009

Mr. DURBIN. Well, Mr. President, it is St. Patrick's Day, and you might notice a lot of green ties on the floor of the Senate. I notice the Presiding Officer has a nice one on.

I wish to just say for a moment how proud I am to have a grandmother, who passed away, named Mary Margaret Gaul, who was always proud of her Irish heritage and convinced us as kids that is where God would hang out, that great Republic of Ireland. It meant a lot to us growing up as kids to celebrate St. Patrick's Day with my grandmother and to try to continue that tradition in our own time.

But it goes beyond just family connections. It is almost impossible to overstate the importance of Ireland's contributions to America. From our earliest days as a nation, Ireland and America have been united by unbreakable bonds of friendship, family, and a shared commitment to liberty and freedom.

There is a great quote from George Washington, who once said:

When our friendless standard was first unfurled for resistance, who were the strangers who first mustered around our staff? And when it reeled in the fight, who more bravely sustained it than Erin's generous sons?

In the more than two centuries since then, America has been enriched immeasurably by the contributions of the Irish, and Irish Americans, in every field and every walk of life.

And the contributions go both ways.

It just was not the "sons of Erin" who stood and fought on our side with George Washington in the Revolution, it was a son of America, Brooklyn-born Eamonn deValera, who, in 1921, became the first President of a free Ireland.

And it was another son of Irish America, former Senate majority leader George Mitchell, who helped broker the Good Friday Peace Accord nearly 11 years ago.

That hard-won historic agreement laid out a path to end more than 30 years of sectarian bloodshed in Northern Ireland and create a new province, a new government, and a new dream.

For more than a decade, the Good Friday agreement has inspired people around the world to believe it is possible to resolve old hatreds, it is possible to heal old wounds.

To paraphrase the great Irish poet and Nobel laureate, Seamus Heaney, it is possible—with courage and diplomacy—for cooperation to replace confrontation and hope to triumph over history.

We have been horrified in recent days by the reprehensible murders in Northern Ireland of two unarmed British soldiers and a police constable. The two soldiers were days away from being dispatched to Afghanistan. They were the first British soldiers killed in Northern Ireland since that Good Friday agreement. The police constable's death was the first terrorist killing of a member of Northern Ireland's new, carefully balanced police force. The police force was created a couple years ago, and it is an important symbol of political reconciliation.

Their deaths appear to be the work of isolated extremists who have no place and no support in Northern Ireland today.

If it is possible for any good to come from these despicable acts, it is in the reactions of people in Northern Ireland. In the wake of the killings, we have seen a renewed commitment to peace and reconciliation. Former enemies on both sides of "the Troubles" have condemned the killings and vowed not to retaliate with violence.

Martin McGuinness, Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland's power-sharing Government and leader of Sinn Féin, the political wing of the IRA, called the perpetrators of these killings: "traitors to the island of Ireland."

Leaders of Northern Ireland's two largest loyalist paramilitary groups—the Ulster Volunteer Force and the Ulster Defence Association—have also condemned the killings and vowed that they will not return to violence.

Most poignantly, we have seen the commitment to peace in the resolve of thousands of ordinary people in Northern Ireland.