

across the country, trying to save their homes, to save their jobs, to save their health care. The bills pile up, and all too often there is not enough to pay them. Well, our country is in a deep hole too. But I would like to remind my colleagues that it was not always this way.

In January 2001, when George Bush became President, the Congressional Budget Office, which is the non-partisan accounting arm of Congress that does our budget outlook on a regular basis, projected that we would see surpluses straight through the decade. These budget surpluses, the product of President Clinton's responsible governing, were projected to be enough to completely wipe out our national debt by 2009, this very year. Imagine, a debt-free America this year. Well, President Bush fixed that.

Usually when American families have a surplus, they use it responsibly, they pay down credit card debt or make an extra mortgage payment. They put it away in retirement savings. They set it aside for college for the kids. Or they spend it on something they need, such as a downpayment on a car or a house. Well, President Bush chose tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans, a misguided war he would not pay for—an irresponsible economic policy, leaving a mountain of debt to the next administration. He, of course, had the enthusiastic support of a Republican Congress which was with him every step of the way into this debt.

Today, the difference between the expected surpluses left by President Clinton and the actual deficit run up by President Bush is a staggering \$8.9 trillion—\$8.9 trillion on America from the Bush administration and its Republican allies in Congress.

So that is what President Obama inherited—a legacy of reckless borrowing, bad decisions, compounded by skyrocketing unemployment and now a deepening recession that only adds to our country's fiscal woes.

President Obama is trying to help us dig our way out of this mess by focusing his budget on the policies and programs that will repair our economy and create the foundation for long-term economic growth and success. He proposed, and we passed, an economic recovery plan to create jobs and support struggling families and make badly needed investments in our infrastructure during this recession. It wasn't perfect. It probably will not be enough. But it was a good start.

Now, the same Republican Party that thought tax cuts for the rich and an unnecessary war in Iraq were good uses of President Clinton's budget surpluses, the same Republican Party that ran up an \$8.9 trillion debt on the country now has its leaders calling President Obama's plans "the fleecing of America's children." It is hard to imagine that this irony eludes them.

President Obama wants to cut taxes for working families, invest in renewable energy, help more young people

get a college education, and reform our broken health care system—key priorities for the future of America. But some Republicans who stood by while our country became more and more dependent on foreign oil, while the cost of a college education went through the roof, and while a crisis brewed in our health care system are calling these investments in our future "a remarkable spending binge." Once again, the "department of irony" appears to be open late on the other side of the aisle.

Families in America know we will not get out of this mess with the same failed policies that got us into it—that it is time for new priorities. That is what President Obama's budget offers.

Perhaps our greatest challenge, certainly one of our greatest challenges and opportunities, is presented by our broken and dysfunctional health care system. Unless we take serious remedial action and soon, right away, this recession we are living through now will seem like an economic speed bump compared to what will happen when that \$35 trillion in unfunded Medicare liabilities, against which we have set not one nickel, comes bearing down on us.

We had a lot of fighting in this body about that Recovery and Reinvestment Act. The Recovery and Reinvestment Act was nearly \$800 billion. Compare that to the Bush debt I talked about that they ran up of \$8.9 trillion. Where was the complaining then? Compare that to the \$35 trillion in unfunded liabilities we face for Medicare. Where are the serious ideas about how we address this problem?

When you put these problems to scale, you will see that wave of cost, that tsunami of health care cost coming at us is something we have to address. We are facing truly the financial ruin of our health care system and, if nothing is done, the financial ruin of our country. Every one of us should share the goal of making sure health insurance coverage reaches every American. President Obama's budget makes a downpayment on that badly needed reform. But it is not enough just to give coverage to everybody. It is not enough just to get everybody on board, if the boat itself is sinking.

We have two toolboxes out of which we can fix our health care mess. One reduces coverage, cuts benefits, pays providers less, and raises taxes. That is the old-fashioned toolbox. It will work, but it will be brutal. It will be wrong, and we should do everything we can to prevent it. The other toolbox reforms the health care system itself, making it more intelligent, sensible, helpful, and efficient; with an information technology infrastructure so every American can count on their own secure electronic health record, with improvements in the quality of health care so we maximize the effectiveness while reducing the cost; and with reform of having paid for health care so the health care we want is the health care we are paying for.

The President sees that all of this is doable—and that we need to start now. His economic recovery legislation put nearly \$20 billion into health information infrastructure. But the President knows there is much more to be done, that these delivery system reforms in health care cannot be flipped on like a light switch. It will require complex workforce, regulatory, and infrastructure changes. Then those changes will have to be implemented and administered. It will take some years, and we need to start now. The Obama budget starts us on that course to fix our broken health care system.

I find it unfortunate that our Republican colleagues don't seem to appreciate the seriousness of these problems and have become a chorus of naysayers with no solutions. It is time to pass a budget that lives up to the expectations of the American people. I hope we will.

I thank the Chair and yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Hampshire.

AIG BONUSES

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Madam President, I would like to applaud my colleague, Senator WHITEHOUSE, for his comments, particularly around health care. I know all of us believe that is critical for us to address.

I rise to express my outrage that AIG has paid over \$165 million in bonuses to executives at the company, after they received a \$173 billion bailout in taxpayer funds. We all know the economic conditions we are facing are very difficult. Unemployment continues to climb around the country and in my home State of New Hampshire. Families are struggling to make ends meet. Existing home sales are at their lowest levels in more than a decade. Small businesses around the country and in New Hampshire are working hard just to make payroll, to buy inventory, and to keep their businesses viable. In fact, this morning I heard from a small businessman in New Hampshire, Mark Lane, who is the head of Coed Sports-wear and Printed Matter, talk about the challenges he faces in this recession, trying to get access to credit to keep his business going.

Yet while small businesses and middle-class families are struggling to make it through these difficult times, the very people whose reckless decisionmaking helped put us in this precarious economic situation are rewarding themselves with bonuses paid for with taxpayer dollars. This is unconscionable.

We have been told nothing can be done about the bonuses to AIG employees because they are contractual commitments. Yesterday, we heard the CEO of AIG say he has asked the recipients of the bonuses to give the money back. I believe those employees should do that, and I hope they will. But we should make sure that when taxpayer money is used, we have done

everything possible to prevent the kind of excesses we have seen with AIG.

As a condition of providing financing to General Motors and Chrysler, the Treasury Department required the automakers to renegotiate their collective bargaining agreements with their workers. In order for their employers to get loans from the Treasury, auto-workers gave up cost-of-living increases to their wages and bonuses, among other benefits. It is our obligation, as we did with General Motors and Chrysler, to protect taxpayer dollars. That is why, in January of this year, I voted against releasing an additional \$350 billion in TARP funding. I opposed the release of this funding because I believed we did not have adequate accounting of the money the United States had already spent in the bailout. At the time I said: We need legislation to enhance transparency and to enhance taxpayer protections before we release additional money.

Earlier this year, Senator DORGAN introduced the Taxpayer Protection Act, something I quickly signed on to as a cosponsor. This legislation is designed to limit executive compensation, to prohibit the kinds of bonuses companies such as AIG, which have received Federal economic assistance, can provide to their employees or their executives. Today we are reminded that the use of taxpayer money should be held to the highest standards of transparency and accountability.

I am hopeful this administration—and we have heard the President say he is committed to doing something about the situation at AIG, and we know this Senate is committed to doing something about the situation at AIG with their executive bonuses—and this body will take the appropriate action to recover the taxpayer dollars AIG has so recklessly spent on bonuses. I intend to do everything I can to support those efforts.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

FISCAL IRRESPONSIBILITY

Mr. INHOFE. Madam President, it is my understanding we are confined to 10 minutes during this timeframe. I will do so, although after listening to the presentation of the Senator from Rhode Island, I wish I had a little bit more time. It is mind-boggling that anyone in this country would look at the budget as put forth by this administration and the spending in the omnibus bill of \$410 billion and the deficit for this year of \$1.75 trillion, the \$787 billion stimulus, as well as the national debt which, projecting forward 5 years, will double under this administration, if the President is successful in getting this spending done, and will triple in 10 years—it is going to be difficult for any Senator to stand and say there is anything fiscally responsible about the behavior of our current President. If you don't believe it, turn

on the TV and watch all the tea parties going on around the country. The people understand. They know the level of spending and how outrageous it is.

SIXTH ANNIVERSARY OF OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM

Mr. INHOFE. Madam President, today is a very significant day. Right now we are actually looking at the sixth anniversary of the Operation Iraqi Freedom. We sometimes have forgotten about the butcher from Iraq and how bad that was. I had personal experience during the first Gulf War of being there and seeing some of the things that went on, the horrible torture and the things that this particular dictator had done to that country. When we went in 6 years ago, it was a very difficult time because we went in with a military that had been downgraded during the Clinton administration. If you take a straight line in terms of what the expenditures were the day he took office, that is how much we reduced it in force strength, in our modernization program. In fact, this euphoric attitude people were talking about, saying the Cold War is over, we no longer need a strong military, that is the environment we had. I think, under those circumstances, we did an incredible job.

I have never been so impressed with an all-volunteer Army. I happen to have been a product of the draft. I believed that offered more discipline. When I went there—and I honestly believe I have made more trips to Iraq and Afghanistan than any other Member as the second-ranking member of the Armed Services Committee—I was privileged to be in places such as Fallujah during all the elections that took place and to see our young people, not all that well equipped, take on difficult odds. The marines in Fallujah were part of this, and it was incredible to watch. It was more than the World War II door-to-door style of combat.

Then I was very proud to be a part of the training of the troops over in Afghanistan. I say that because it was Oklahoma's 45th Division that was involved in training the Afghans on how to train themselves in the A&A. I feel that to have witnessed this, to have been over there in Bagdad, in Kabal, in that whole theater during this time was so impressive to me.

I can remember going into the various mess halls, with our troops there—and at that time, IEDs, at an unprecedented rate, were killing and maiming our soldiers—and the bravery they had. One of the questions they used to ask me, in the early stages of this war—6 years ago and 5 years ago—was: Why is it the American people do not understand what we are doing here? Why don't they understand if we do not stop the terrorism here, it is going to be back at our borders the way it was on 9/11? My response to them was I think they are. We are not getting good reporting out of the media. That started changing as improvements came along.

As I witnessed the opportunities that were there, our troops, all of a sudden, during this surge anyway, were gaining a lot more support, and that completely turned it around. GEN David Petraeus did a remarkable job. In fact, all our generals over there did.

So I think it is incumbent upon us today to remember this is the 6th year. This is something that was absolutely necessary for the safety and the freedom we enjoy here in this country. We should be applauding all our troops as they come back.

To me, it was a little unconscionable, just 3 or 4 days ago, when the White House was coming out with a program that would have impaired our wounded veterans coming back from Iraq and the Middle East from access to VA health care. Because of all the people—I am sure the phones are ringing off the hook at the White House—last night they backed away from that. But, nonetheless, we are not getting the support we should be getting now for our military at this time.

Keep in mind, if we went through an 8-year period of dropping down the support, and then we look at the budget that is in today, it is an inflated budget in spending in every possible area except defense. I think it should be our priority now, as we remember what happened 6 years ago today.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. McCAIN. Madam President, I come to the floor to discuss for a few minutes with my colleague from South Carolina the issue of climate change.

We all know the budget will be forthcoming. We already understand there will be some \$650 billion included in the budget for general revenues that would go as revenues from climate—here it is: \$646 billion over 8 years. According to some aides to the administration, it could be as much as \$2 trillion. Remarkable.

What we have done is we have gone from an attempt to address the issue of climate change through cap and trade to just generating \$680 billion or \$2 trillion without a trace of bipartisanship, without any consultation, without discussions. What we have done on the issue of climate change, by basically funneling \$680-some billion, is we have destroyed any chance of bipartisanship, and the administration is proposing a plan which will have a crippling effect in a bad economy on, particularly, parts of the country and lower income residents in the South and Midwest.

First of all, if we are going to do cap and trade, we should have generous allowances for people who are now operating under certain greenhouse gas emission conditions.

Second of all, any money, any revenues that are gained through cap and trade clearly should not go to just “general revenues.” Any funding