

months. Berzon's careful reporting led to important safety improvements, and not one worker has died since these changes took effect. I applaud Alexandra Berzon, her editors, and everyone at the Las Vegas Sun, which has a storied history of solid investigative journalism.

This newspaper started on a string many years ago—in the 1950s—by a man by the name of Hank Greenspun. He was a crusading newspaperman. He was the first person in the entire country to take on Senator McCarthy and the awful things he was doing to America and about America. He took him on personally on one of McCarthy's visits to Las Vegas.

He also did something else which was very courageous. Nevada had a very powerful Senator. His name was Pat McCarran. He was noted for his use of power, and Hank Greenspun, of the Las Vegas Sun newspaper, took after him big time. McCarran asked all the strip hotels to no longer advertise in that newspaper, and they followed the demand of Senator McCarran. A lawsuit was filed. We only had one Federal judge, and that one Federal judge—even though he had been appointed by McCarran in an antitrust action, which is not a jury trial—ruled in favor of the Sun. He won that lawsuit.

He took on McCarthy, he took on McCarran, and that was only the beginning of this great newspaper and the things it has done, and now they have won a Pulitzer. Hank Greenspun must be smiling from heaven.

Someone who is a modern-day icon of this newspaper was a man who taught me in high school. Fortunately, he and I, unexpectedly, were elected, independently, Governor and Lieutenant Governor at the same time. He served 8 years. His name was Mike O'Callaghan, Governor of the State, and a very popular person. He could have gone on to make huge amounts of money in other places. He decided not to do that. I was a lawyer. I drew up this big contract where he would go to work for Hank Greenspun running his newspapers. I met with him, handed him the contract, and he said: We don't sign contracts; we shake hands. So they shook hands, and that was the beginning of a relationship that is historic in Nevada. My dear friend Mike O'Callaghan died in church; he went to mass every morning, and died as a young man in church, where I am sure his good thoughts are still coming forward.

With Hank and Mike, I am sure, as I have indicated about Hank, they are looking down from this place we call heaven at this wonderful time for this newspaper.

The kind of reporting Alexandra Berzon did is a model for reporters everywhere to follow. Of the 21 Pulitzer Prizes, only one—the Public Service Award—the one that the Las Vegas Sun was awarded—doesn't come with a cash prize. All the others come with a \$10,000 cash prize but not this one. It comes with a medal. But this medal is

going to mean much more to Alexandra than any dollar amount would. It is a reminder that journalism, in its most fundamental role—as a disinterested watchdog for our communities and our citizens, our country—benefits all of us.

RECOGNITION OF THE REPUBLICAN LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader is recognized.

GITMO CLOSURE

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, yesterday, I pointed out that the President's war funding request contains up to \$80 million to close the U.S. detention facility in Guantanamo Bay. The administration says Guantanamo will be closed by next January. What they haven't told us is what they plan to do with these killers once it closes. Well, Americans want some assurances that closing Guantanamo will not make them less safe. Frankly, that is a very important and understandable request.

Guantanamo currently houses some of the most dangerous men alive. These are men who are proud of the innocent lives they have taken and who want to return to terrorism. One person who is there, and whom we don't know what we will do with, is Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, the mastermind of the 9/11 attacks. We captured him while he was planning followup attacks to 9/11, including plots to destroy a West Coast skyscraper and to smuggle explosives into New York. If we hadn't captured him, he may have succeeded in launching the same type of attack on the west coast that he carried out on the east coast. This is a man who brags about decapitating the American journalist Daniel Pearl, with the following quote: "... with my blessed right hand." How does transferring Khalid Shaikh Mohammed make the country safer?

Another person at Guantanamo that the administration doesn't know what it will do with in 9 months is Ali Abd al-Aziz Ali, who served as a key lieutenant for Khalid Shaikh Mohammed during the 9/11 operation. How does transferring him make the country safer?

Then there is Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri. He was al-Qaida's operations chief in the Arabian Peninsula and the mastermind behind the attack on the USS Cole which killed 17 sailors in 2000. How does transferring or releasing him make our country safer?

These are just 3 of the 240 terrorists that the administration doesn't know what to do with. The one thing they do know is that they claim they are going to close Guantanamo in 9 months, even though they can't say yet whether the alternative is as safe and secure. All of this, despite the fact that after visiting Guantanamo for the first time recently, Attorney General Holder said

he was "impressed by the people who are presently running the camp" and that "the facilities there are good ones."

That was certainly my impression when I went there a few years ago.

The administration needs to tell the American people what it plans to do with these men if it closes Guantanamo. Two years ago, the Senate voted 94 to 3—94 to 3—against sending these men to the United States. Foreign countries have so far been unwilling to take any of them in significant numbers—understandably. Even if countries were willing to take them, there is an increasing probability that some of these murderers would return to the battlefield. The Defense Department recently confirmed that 18 former detainees had returned to the battlefield and said that at least 40 more are suspected of having done so. These are people we have already released who are back on the battlefield.

Earlier this year, the Saudi Government said that nearly a dozen Saudis who were released from Gitmo are believed to have returned to terrorism.

The administration has made a priority of closing Guantanamo, but its first priority should be to assure the American people that the detainees at Gitmo will never again be able to harm Americans.

ENTITLEMENT SPENDING

Mr. President, I wish to say another word in addition to my comments yesterday about the President's welcome gesture on wasteful spending. The Cabinet has been asked to find \$100 million in savings over the next few months and this is clearly a step in the right direction, but it is just a step. Current levels of Government spending and debt are completely and totally out of control and the threat of a fiscal catastrophe is very real. The only way to address this out-of-control spending is to get at the heart of the problem, which is entitlement spending. A lot of people do not realize that nearly 70 percent of the money the Federal Government spends every year is mandatory spending on very popular programs such as Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, and on the interest we have to pay on the national debt.

Entitlements are the heart of the problem. As Willie Sutton put it: That's where the money is. And if we don't find a way to address this spending, we will be in very serious trouble as a nation. Fortunately, Senators GREGG and CONRAD have a proposal on the table that addresses entitlement spending head on, by forcing Democrats and Republicans to come together and make the kind of tough choices necessary to steer the country out of an otherwise inevitable financial shipwreck. It deserves much more attention than it has received, and it deserves a vote here in the Senate.

Cutting \$100 million in waste is certainly good, but let's put it in context. The amount of money the President asked the Cabinet to save yesterday,

\$100 million, is about how much we will spend every single day on interest on the stimulus bill we passed a while back. Mr. President, \$100 million in savings is certainly good. It amounts to about 33 cents for every single American. Compare that to entitlement spending where, in order to meet all our current and future entitlement promises, we would have to extract \$495,000 from every American household—\$495,000 from every American household. The way I see it, there is simply no question as to where the priority should be.

I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

NOMINATION OF CHRISTOPHER R. HILL TO BE AMBASSADOR TO IRAQ—Resumed

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senate will proceed to executive session to consider the following nomination which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

Nomination of Christopher R. Hill, of Rhode Island, a Career Member of the Senior Foreign Service, Class of Career Minister, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the Republic of Iraq.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Massachusetts is recognized.

Mr. KERRY. Mr. President, I know we are here to discuss the nomination of Christopher Hill to be our Ambassador to Iraq. I want to talk about that for a few minutes.

But I have to say, as I was sitting there listening to the distinguished minority leader complaining about the interest we are paying on the debt, I almost choked on the absurdity and irony of the situation in which we find ourselves. The reason we have to have an enormous stimulus plan is because of the mismanagement of our entire economy and Government over the course of the last 8 years. Not once—the Senator from Rhode Island will know this—not once did the President of the United States George Bush veto a spending bill—not once. It was under the leadership of the Republicans as the chairs of all the essential spending committees of the Congress. They had the House, they had the Senate, they had the White House. During that period of time, they took a \$5.6 trillion surplus and turned it into a \$10 trillion debt and about a \$5.6 trillion deficit—the most irresponsible period of fiscal management in the history of this country. Not to mention what they did with respect to the management of the regulatory process of our country,

where, as we know, deals were allowed to be made on Wall Street that had no business being made. Regulators were taken out of the industry itself and it was like putting the fox in charge of the chicken coop in the most overt sense possible, so regulation went out the window.

We are paying the price for that today. The American taxpayer is paying the price. The average homeowner is paying the price. Retirees are paying the price. Workers—unprecedented numbers of people laid off because of the hollow, empty Ponzi scheme investments and commission schemes that were engaged in on Wall Street and elsewhere. It is staggering.

To listen to them come to the floor with no alternative plan—they don't offer any alternative as to how you put America back to work. They just say: No, don't spend this money. Oh, my God, we are building up a terrible deficit—despite the fact that for 8 years they were silent about the deficit. There is something in public where you earn the right, sort of a moral level of rectitude or of justification for saying the things you say. I have to tell you, it is hard to listen to some of these folks, who were so much a part of that, without even accepting responsibility for it. They don't come down and say, you know, we made a blooper of a mistake or, boy, did I misjudge this or that or whatever. It is a wholesale flip-flop transition that is absolutely staggering in its proportions. Judging by the polling numbers on the President reflecting the decisions he is making, tough decisions about how to get the country moving again, I think the American people get it. I hope we are going to spend our time more profitably around here than playing the traditional political game of delay and obfuscation and those tactics.

The reason I mention that is the reason we are on the floor today debating the nomination of Christopher Hill is more of the same. It is exactly part of the same process of politics as usual in Washington, DC. There is no reason that for the last 2 weeks, while the Congress of the United States was on its Easter break—many Members back home or traveling the world, dealing with a lot of issues—there is no reason we did not have an ambassador in Iraq, which is what General Odierno wants, what General Petraeus wants, what the President wants, what the American troops need and deserve.

Time and again, Senators have come to the floor and said there is no military solution in Iraq. The reason we are drawing down our numbers of troops there now is to transfer authority to the Iraqis themselves so our troops can come home and so they can assume responsibility for their country. As all of us know, that cannot happen completely and properly until and unless the political issues of Iraq are resolved. As the Washington Post noted, we have not had an ambassador in Iraq since last February. So we have

gone all this time with the principal issue which needs to be resolved, which is political, without the principal player, who is the Ambassador.

It is stunning to me that a few Senators have decided not just to register their opposition—which they can do. They have a right to do that, come to the floor, speak against the nomination and let's have a vote. He is going to be overwhelmingly supported to be the next ambassador to Iraq. But we will have delayed and diddled and who knows what opportunity may have been delayed or lost as a consequence of our not having the principal political player on the ground in Iraq in order to help negotiate.

The fact is, Chris Hill, when you look at the record, even some of the arguments that are being made about him by the few who oppose him do not stand up. They do not stand up to scrutiny. In over three decades of service at the State Department, as ambassador to complicated, difficult parts of the world—Ambassador to Macedonia and Poland, to South Korea—Chris Hill has proven himself to be one of America's most talented diplomats. Today we are asking him to take on one of the most challenging diplomatic posts, one that if you look at his record through the years he has been preparing for in different ways in each of these different posts.

Senator LUGAR yesterday joined in the effort to get this vote and to approve this nomination. I appreciate enormously the partnership Senator LUGAR has provided for years on the Foreign Relations Committee, as a partner to now-Vice President BIDEN, and now working with me and with the rest of the committee. Senator LUGAR believes in calling things the way he sees them and in making judgments based on the facts—above all, in trying to have a foreign policy presence for the United States that is bipartisan, where the politics end at the water's edge. The fact is, Ambassador Hill's decades of diplomatic experience, as Senator LUGAR has pointed out, give him the skills that matter the most in Iraq—the ability to achieve our objectives in a complex, challenging, sectarian, volatile, complicated environment.

This is exactly the experience Chris Hill brings to this effort. He was one of the principal players in helping to resolve the civil wars in the Balkans. Many of us remember how difficult and, frankly, gridlocked that particular situation looked. He has worked on multiparty international negotiations. He has dealt with hostile regimes in the six-party talks on North Korea's nuclear program. Several times he has conducted his diplomatic efforts alongside a sizable military presence.

His next assignment will require him to bring every single one of these experiences to the table. He will have to do it working against the clock as we finally bring our troops home from Iraq.