

still last month some Senators expressed further concerns. So guess what. The administration responded even further and put up an additional \$5 billion over the next 10 years. In response, the directors of our three nuclear weapons laboratories sent me a letter saying they were "very pleased with the new plan," and they said:

We believe that the proposed budgets provide adequate support to sustain the safety, security, reliability, and effectiveness of America's nuclear deterrent within the limit of the 1,550 deployed strategic warheads distinguished by the new START Treaty with adequate confidence and acceptable risk.

Last week, the person responsible for running our nuclear weapons complex, who was originally appointed by George W. Bush, told the Wall Street Journal:

I can say with certainty that our nuclear infrastructure has never received the level of support we have today.

That is a ringing endorsement, Mr. President, one that is completely persuasive—or ought to be—to any reasonable mind with respect to this issue. If Senators are still concerned, then I suggest they go see condition 9 of the resolution of ratification. It says if any of this funding doesn't materialize in the coming years, the President is required to report to Congress as to how he or she will respond to that shortfall.

Every other issue that has been raised is also addressed in the resolution as well. If you are worried about modernizing our strategic delivery vehicles, declaration 13 gets at that concern. Conventional prompt global strike capabilities—look at conditions 6 and 7, understanding 3, and declaration 3.

Tactical nuclear weapons are likewise covered in the resolution. Verifying Russian compliance is also covered. Even the concern raised about rail mobile missiles has been addressed in the resolution of ratification.

Obviously, there is room for someone else to come in and say you need to do this or that; not everything has been covered. We completely remain open to any reasonable and legitimate efforts to improve on or guarantee some safeguard that somehow is not included in a way that it can be without obviously trying to scuttle the treaty itself.

I have reached out to colleagues. We have had terrific conversations. I thank my colleagues on the other side of the aisle who have sat with us in a lot of efforts and inquired and helped us to navigate this process. But make no mistake, we are not going to amend the treaty itself. We are willing to accept resolutions that don't kill the treaty, but we are not going to get into some process after all that has been said and done by all of the different bipartisan voices that have inspected this treaty and found it one that we should ratify.

Mr. President, I have been through all the folks who signed and endorsed it, et cetera. I simply say I hope in the next hours we will have a healthy de-

bate. I hope we can also work out—everybody knows the holiday is upon us—I hope we can work out reasonable time periods on amendments. We are certainly not going to prolong debate. I think most Senators have a sense of where they feel on most of these issues.

We look forward to working with our colleagues in a very constructive way to try to expedite the process for our colleagues. We have other business before the Senate, as well, and we are cognizant of that.

This is truly a moment where we can increase America's hand in several of the greatest challenges we face on the planet. First and foremost, obviously, if we are truly committed to a non-nuclear Iran, if the United States can turn away from reducing weapons with Russia in a way that sends a message to them about our bona fides and clean hands in this effort, it would be a tragedy if we didn't take this opportunity in order to strengthen the President's and the West's and the U.N.'s hands in trying to deal with this increasingly threatening issue.

I hope our colleagues will warmly rise to that challenge in the Senate.

I thank the Chair and yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Louisiana is recognized.

BOEMRE PAPUA, NEW GUINEA VISIT

Mr. VITTER. Mr. President, I rise to discuss an issue that is very important to Louisianians and folks along the gulf coast and very important to the entire country, which is continuing the *de facto* moratorium—the "permatorium" is what many folks have called it—in terms of drilling, energy production in the Gulf of Mexico.

There is one particular headline I want to point out in this context that is very frustrating and baffling. If it weren't so serious, it would be comical. Over the last several months, Louisianians have grown increasingly frustrated with the Interior Department in particular—and in particular, what used to be called MMS but is now the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Regulation, and Enforcement or BOEMRE. Louisianians have come to pronounce that "bummer." That is because that agency hasn't been doing its work to issue permits to get Americans back to work to produce American energy.

Related to that, earlier this week I publicly announced a hold on Dr. Scott Doney to be chief scientist at NOAA until Interior and BOEMRE show that it is capable of responding to a letter I had sent it about this "permatorium," the sad state of affairs, and until they are willing to explain to Congress findings in an IG report I had requested back in June.

Since June of this year, not a single new exploration plan or deepwater permit to drill has been approved by these bureaucracies—not a single one—idling billions of dollars of assets and forcing

companies to cut their 2011 investment in the gulf to one-third of what it was a year ago.

Time and again we have heard from BOEMRE and Interior Secretary Salazar that they don't have enough people to issue permits. They need more staff and they need to dedicate resources. They need more money and they need to focus on this permitting program. I have also been told that Interior needs more money—specifically \$100 million additional.

In light of all these claims, all of these requests—more people and more money—and in light of the enormous frustration we feel in Louisiana and in the gulf, I want to get to this little newspaper headline I referenced a few minutes ago. It came out yesterday, and it reads: "BOEMRE Team Returns from Papua, New Guinea Visit After Sharing Technical Expertise with Officials."

It reads:

Experts from the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Regulation and Enforcement (BOEMRE) recently completed a technical assistance workshop on offshore oil and gas regulatory programs for the Government of Papua, New Guinea. The workshop was sponsored by the U.S. Department of State's Energy Governance and Capacity Initiative.

This is the same Interior Department that can't get a single exploration plan, not a single deepwater permit to drill out the door; the same Interior Department and BOEMRE that claims they need more money to hire more staff to get this job done.

Apparently, they have plenty latitude and staff and money for a 3-day workshop in Papua, New Guinea, to discuss offshore permitting, which they can't get done in the United States.

I think we need to take a little time to explain to the Government of Papua, New Guinea, that the last thing in the world they want to do, assuming they are interested in creating jobs at home through a workable permitting process, is to talk to these folks. These are the same folks who can't get a single deepwater permit or a single exploration plan out the door.

As I said, this would be comical except it is not because it is dead serious, and it is losing American jobs and it is exporting economic activity from our country overseas.

The Interior Department is crushing domestic energy production that is destroying good-paying jobs, losing revenue for the Treasury, and making America more energy insecure. If I can give one simple recommendation to BOEMRE this holiday season in regard to expediting the permitting process, maybe they should keep their staff planted in their seats at home. Maybe they should pass on the next trip to Papua, New Guinea, and the next workshop with our partners around the globe. Maybe they should focus on getting the first exploration plan and the first new deepwater permit out the door. Maybe they should get that job done and put Americans back to work

producing American energy before more of these outrageous trips and expenses.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee is recognized.

OMNIBUS APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. CORKER. Mr. President, I know the START treaty is going to be before us soon. I realize we had a motion to proceed to that today. I think I have indicated a willingness to support the treaty if all the t's are crossed and the i's are dotted on modernization. I know there are a number of commitments that are forthcoming from the White House and other places regarding modernization.

My hope is the same on missile defense. I am very concerned we are doing this in the middle of an omnibus, which is a 1,924-page omnibus. I am very concerned about a treaty of this substance, this seriousness, dealing with nuclear arms, being taken up in such a disconcerted way.

I voted against the motion to proceed. I do hope, as the leaders indicated, all of those who wish to offer amendments—and I know there will be a number of serious and thoughtful amendments that matter—will be heard. I am still skeptical that can be done in an appropriate way.

Again, I think this treaty, with the t's crossed and i's dotted, with the appropriate time allotted, whether it is now or it ends up being in February, and if the resolution is not weakened in any way, is still something I will plan to support. But I am very skeptical we can do that appropriately during this lameduck session, with this omnibus before us.

Let me turn to the omnibus because that is what the American people are most focused on today. I cannot tell you how disappointed I am that an appropriations bill of this size—one that has an increase in spending and over 6,000 earmarks—as a matter of fact, I know the Chair is aware of this because we had a great conversation this morning about spending. We had a large number of people on the Senate floor yesterday talking about our concern for fiscal issues. But the bill is 1,924 pages long. These are just the earmarks. These are just the earmarks, not the bill itself I am holding.

I am stunned that, after the message that was sent during this last election, Congress will basically say—or many Members—to the American people: We understand you are very upset and that you have concerns that are true concerns about the country's fiscal condition. Yet we don't really care.

Mr. President, it is my hope that what will happen is that saner heads will prevail and that what we will do is pass a short-term CR—a continuing resolution, for those who may be listening in and don't know what that is. That would give us the ability to operate the government through February

or March so that people such as the Presiding Officer, who was just elected, and myself and others who care so deeply about the fiscal issues of our country would have the ability to put spending constraints in place.

I think everyone knows our country faces—and these are not rhetorical issues—a crisis as it relates to these issues. The world markets are watching us. I think we have seen our interest rates on our bonds rise pretty dramatically even since the tax bill came out. And that was a tough vote for me because, again, in order to create certainty and to ensure that the economic prosperity of this country resumed and that we continue on the pace we are on today, I felt it was important to go ahead and get that behind us.

But I always thought and I hoped—and still do—that what we would move to very quickly is really driving down spending in relation to our country's gross domestic output. I have offered an amendment to do just that, as I did that on the tax bill. I plan to offer the same on this particular discussion we are having now. But I am unbelievably disappointed that we would even consider punting the spending issue for a year. That is what we would be doing. In essence, if this omnibus bill were to pass, we would be passing a huge spending bill.

Again, let me go back. Typically, appropriations are handled one bill at a time. There are typically 12 appropriations bills. What happens when we do that is we are able to pick out wasteful programs here on the floor and maybe defund those, and we are able to really scrutinize all of the programs of government, which is what the American people want us to do. Instead of that—especially in a climate where the American people almost revolted at the polls, and I know you know this very well—instead of carefully considering our spending, what we are being asked to do is to vote on 1 bill that has all 12 of those appropriations bills packed into it, again with 6,000 earmarks, and we are asked to vote on that here in the next few days. I think it is reprehensible, and I say that respectfully.

I know people on our Appropriations Committee have worked together in a very serious way over the last year. I know they have. And I know the Appropriations Committee is a committee that probably has the most bipartisan spirit of any committee in the Senate. So I can understand their desire to want to finish their work. But it is being done inappropriately. This is not the way serious people conduct their business. They take up these bills one at a time. Sometimes there are two or three, when they are very small appropriations bills, that are banded together. That is called a “minibus,” if you will. But to do this all at once flies in the face of everything we know to be good government. All of us know this is not the right way to fund government.

A much better way for us would be to pass a short-term continuing resolution bill, as I just mentioned, to kick this down to February or March and allow us to look at something like the amendment I have offered where we take spending that is at an alltime high of 24 percent of our gross domestic product today and over the next 10 years take it down to our 40-year average of 20.6 percent. CLAIRE MCCASKILL and I are cosponsoring, in a bipartisan way, a bill or an amendment—depending on how it is offered—to do just that, and there may be other things.

We know the deficit reduction commission just spent a tremendous amount of time—and I know the Presiding Officer has talked personally to leaders multiple times—they spent a tremendous amount of time this year looking at what we as a government need to do to be responsible; to make sure people around the world view our credit as something in which they are willing to invest; to really make sure that, for these pages who sit in front of me and who work so hard here, we are not, in essence, living a life and layering debt upon debt on top of the balance sheet they will have to deal with.

I cannot believe that, in the atmosphere of just having that report come forward, having us look at how Draconian the problem is and some of the tough decisions a courageous Congress would need to make to put our country back on the right path, we would even consider passing this massive piece of legislation that, in essence, would kick the can down the road for a year and basically let the wind out of this momentum that has been building for us to actually do the right thing. I can't imagine we would do that.

I know the Chair knows our debt ceiling vote is going to be coming up soon. It is going to happen sometime in April, maybe May. Maybe it will drag out as long as the first week in June. That is a vote where we vote to raise the amount of debt this country can enter into. I know a lot of people say it is irresponsible not to vote for a debt ceiling increase because we have already spent the money. It would be like going out and running up a credit card bill and then not paying it. But I think it is irresponsible not to act responsibly prior to taking that vote.

What I am so disappointed in is that a vote on this omnibus bill before us probably prevents us from going ahead and doing some things this spring that we know are responsible and will really drive down the cost of government to an appropriate level.

So I know there is a lot of pressure, probably, in the caucuses—maybe the caucus on the other side of the aisle that meets at lunch; I know there is a meeting again tomorrow—I know there is a lot of pressure to get this out of the way. But I know with every cell of my body that passing this omnibus right now is absolutely the wrong thing to do for the country from the