Why did we choose that path? Because the American people have shown very definitively that they will not accept proposals in these very big areas, especially Social Security and Medicare, that are not reached on a bipartisan agreement. They want fairness. They want to make sure nobody is gaming anybody around here. That is why we have these supermajorities. Then, it is on fast track, so the proposal has to be voted up or down and it cannot be amended. Why is that? Because, as we all know around here, amendments are for hiding in the corners. Amendments are offered not for the purposes of accomplishing anything but for the purposes of giving political cover. In fact, we are going to see a couple of amendments just like that on this issue, one from our side and one from the other side, so that people will have political cover if they vote against this task force approach.

The simple fact is, if you really want to do something here, you have to have an up-or-down vote on a fast track, and everything has to be on the table, all entitlement and tax reform issues. Why is that? Because this has to be bipartisan. It is that simple. I would be happy to have a commission that focused only on spending reductions or adjustments to Medicaid and Medicare and Social Security programs, but there isn't anybody on that side of the aisle who will agree to that. They would be happy to have a proposal that addresses tax reform, such as has been proposed on occasion by the Senator from North Dakota, which is to try to collect the $300 billion of taxes owed and not paid every year. Nobody on this side is going to accept that. Everything has to be on the table. The key to protecting both sides' interests in this exercise, so that Social Security isn't treated inappropriately and so the tax increases aren't done inappropriately, if there are tax increases, is to make sure that the product has to be bipartisan and it has to be reported on supermajorities, which this does. That issue is addressed.

We are here again. I don't know that we will get the 60 votes needed to pass this. It has obviously been attacked from the right and from the left, which usually means you are on a pretty good course. Regrettably, the President put out his Executive order proposal which I think undermined it, but then he has come to support it. But it may be a little late to the dinner here. On our side of the aisle, some of our major interest groups have come out against it.

I know this much: We are getting to the point where we don't have too many alternatives around here. If we don't do something like this fairly soon, I genuinely believe that somewhere between 5 to 10 years from now, probably between 7 and 10 years, we as a nation will find it very hard to sell our debt. Countries will look at us and say: You cannot sustain your situation. You have run up a debt that you cannot pay back, and I am not going to lend you money or, if they do, it will be at a very high price. At that point, the options for us will be very few. They will all be horrific options for our children because they will all lead to a lower standard of living for us as a nation. They will all make our country less competitive in the world economically, competition which is very aggressive and totally global now.

We can wait. We can punt this thing one more time, as we have done year-in and year-out. We can say there is not a problem out there or if there is a problem, if you don't address it the way we want to on our side or the way you want to on your side, then we won't vote for it. In the end, we will not have been responsible as people who have been given the mantle of government. We will not be fulfilling our responsibility to govern. Instead, the postwar baby-boom generation will be the first generation in history to pass on to our children a country with less prosperity than we received from our parents. That will not be a very good testament to our responsibility as people in charge of governance.

This is a chance. This is the closest we have ever gotten to this opportunity. I don't believe we will get this close again at any time in the future. We can either take it or we can allow it to pass. I have often said that Congresses are good at handling the next election but they are terrible at handling the next generation. Unfortunately, for years this issue used to be over the horizon. It is not any longer. It is not only on the horizon, it is closing fast. The red flags are everywhere. We have even seen Moody's, the rating agency, put the United States in a special category with England, not on a watch list, but they have given us a new definition compared to the rest of the industrialized countries. There is no question but the clock is ticking and the hour is late. If we don't proceed to action that leads to actual activity, that leads to actual policy, in my opinion we will not be fulfilling our responsibility as people who are elected to govern and to pass on to the next generation a stronger America rather than a weaker one.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Arizona.

THE ECONOMY

Mr. KYL. Mr. President, it is time for the people of the U.S. Congress to be sure we are listening to what our constituents, the American people, are telling us. If it was unclear before, the Massachusetts Senate race should put to rest any doubts about what is really frustrating Americans. Americans have had it with the soaring level of spending and debt. They know that enormous spending and skyrocketing deficits take a bite out of the economy, dragging down our gross domestic product, our standard of living, and making investors and job creators very nervous. They are concerned about the unfathomable amounts of money now being spent.

For the first year of the Obama administration, the numbers are eye-popping. Consider, one, a wasteful $1.2 trillion stimulus that was a failure, according to the administration's own yardstick; two, a $410 billion omnibus Federal spending bill that increased nondefense spending by 10 percent; three, a $2.5 trillion government takeover of health care that this Senate passed on Christmas Eve. Hopefully, this will never actually become law. We have had two huge increases in the debt ceiling, with a third being debated now, and a massive budget that doubles the deficit in 5 years and triples it in 10. It is not necessary. It is not inevitable. We can and should prevent it. Remember, we have to borrow most of this money. Americans are very concerned about the amount of money we are borrowing from other nations such as China to help finance the exploding debt.

The administration and its defenders are still blaming President Bush for out-of-control deficits and debt, even though the other party has been in control of the Congress now for 3 years and the President has been out of office for over a year. Here are some important facts. President Bush's deficits ran an average of 3.2 percent of GDP, while President Obama's spending plans call for deficits that will average 4.2 percent of GDP over the next decade—in other words, an entire percentage point higher. From the day President Obama took office until the last day of fiscal year 2010, debt held by the public will grow by $2.3 trillion, according to the Office of Management and Budget. You can't blame that on President Bush. President Bush added less than that—about $3 trillion—to the debt during the entire 8 years he was in office. So in just 20 months, President Obama will add as much debt as President Bush ran up in 8 years.

This administration needs to take responsibility for its actions, start listening to what Americans are saying, and stop talking about the mess they inherited. Americans want Congress and the administration to stop their grand spending plans and focus on what is really needed for an economic recovery.

December saw another 85,000 jobs lost. Unemployment has not gone down; it is holding steady at about 10 percent. In my State, it is over 11 percent.

Mort Zuckerman wrote Friday in the Wall Street Journal:

> The problem in the job market going forward is not so much layoffs in the private sector, which are abating, but a lack of hiring.

That brings me to concerns over tax policy. Americans look ahead and they see new taxes on the horizon. Unless Congress takes action this year, taxes are set to go up by $2 trillion over the next decade, starting in 2011. The child

tax credit would be cut in half. Marginal tax rates will go up. Dividends and capital gains taxes will increase. It is no wonder that businesses are timid about hiring and investing and consumers are more cautious than ever about their own spending. Even if economists say we are technically out of the recession, dollars have not begun to flow because people and businesses are uncertain about what their burden will be in the coming years. They are very nervous that it will be higher.

We can eliminate some of that uncertainty and instill some much needed confidence in the economy by extending current tax law. Again, unless Congress acts, taxes will increase automatically. If the President is looking for a job stimulator, I suggest this is where to start. If he were to announce on Wednesday night that he is calling on Congress to keep taxes right where they are—in fact, if we can cut them in some areas, that would be even better—I think he would see businesses react immediately and positively to the news. But instead of increasing taxes, we need, as Zuckerman says, to draw up credible plans to bring down bloated deficits without triggering another downturn.

Let's keep something in mind about the American people: They know you can't spend what you don't have. The message this Congress and the administration have been sending to Americans is that even though they are bound by limits, Washington is not. As I said, it is time to start listening to our constituents and then act on their instructions. Stop spending, keep taxes where they are, reduce them where we can, and stop running up deficits.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Montana.

CONRAD-GREGG AMENDMENT

Mr. BAUCUS. Mr. President, Dr. Laurence Peter, the educator who came up with the Peter Principle, once said:

> Democracy is a process by which the people are free to choose the [person] who will get the blame.

In a democracy, that is the people's right. In a democracy, the people elect us to represent them. And in a democracy, the people elect us to be accountable.

But the chairman and ranking Republican member of the Budget Committee have come up with a process to shift the blame. They have come up with a process for Congress to punt our accountability away. They have come up with a process to outsource Congress's central fiscal responsibilities to a new budget commission.

I can see that a commission may be attractive to some. It is the easy way out. Senators can blame everything on the commission. Senators can say: The commission made me do it.

But we should not shirk our responsibility. Rather, we should do the job our constituents sent us here to do. We already have a process for doing so. It is called the budget process.

The chairman and ranking Republican member of the Budget Committee have proposed a new budget process. No one has shown greater zeal in taking on the budget deficit than the chairman and ranking Republican member of the Budget Committee. I commend them for their good intentions. But we should reject their new process—not their intentions but their new process.

Senators CONRAD and GREGG have said: Everything needs to be on the table, including spending and revenues. But why stop there? If Congress is going to outsource its central fiscal responsibilities, why stop there? Why not cede to this commission all of our responsibilities? Why don't we outsource all of this year's work and then adjourn for the year?

Come to think of it, if we do cede all of our powers to this commission, what is to stop them from inserting anything and everything they choose into the commission's one, nonamendable, omnibus vehicle? They can insert anything they want—anything.

That is the catch with this commission. If we were to cede all of our responsibilities to this commission, and we were to tie our hands so we could not amend its recommendations, then we would risk setting in motion some truly terrible policy.

Under the proposed fast-track procedures, we would not be able to amend the proposal. But what if we did not like the committee's recommendations? We would not be able to replace the commission's recommendations with our own.

It is clear from the statements of Senators CONRAD and GREGG that they have painted a big red target on Social Security and Medicare. That is what this commission is all about. It is a threat to Social Security and Medicare.

That is why the first amendment this Senator offered is to protect Social Security. Senators CONRAD and GREGG have proposed a system that will not allow Senators to offer amendments to protect Social Security later, after the commission has come up with its recommendations. That is why we have to vote to protect Social Security now, while we still can offer amendments.

We already have a process to address the budget. It is called the congressional budget process. Anytime we wanted to, we could use the budget process to address the budget deficit. Since the creation of the budget process, it has been the process that Congress has usually used to address fiscal challenges.

The chairman and ranking Republican member of the Budget Committee should skip the commission. They should go straight to their recommendation. They should bring it up in their committee. That is exactly why Congress created the Budget Committee, the budget resolution, and the reconciliation bill in the first place. That was the purpose.

We do not need a commission to do our work. We do not need a new process to shift the blame. Rather, to address our fiscal challenges, let us get to work on it now. Let us do the job the people sent us here to do. Let us reject this commission.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, what is the pending business?

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

INCREASING THE STATUTORY LIMIT ON THE PUBLIC DEBT

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of H.J. Res. 45, which the clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

> A joint resolution (H.J. Res. 45) increasing the statutory limit on the public debt.

Pending:

> Baucus (for Reid) amendment No. 3299, in the nature of a substitute.
>
> Baucus amendment No. 3300 (to amendment No. 3299), to protect Social Security.
>
> Conrad/Gregg amendment No. 3302 (to amendment No. 3299), to establish a Bipartisan Task Force for Responsible Fiscal Action, to assure the long-term fiscal stability and economic security of the Federal Government of the United States, and to expand future prosperity and growth for all Americans.
>
> Reid amendment No. 3305 (to amendment No. 3299), to reimpose statutory pay-as-you-go.

AMENDMENT NO. 3305 TO AMENDMENT NO. 3299

Mr. REID. Mr. President, is amendment No. 3305 the pending amendment?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. It is.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. REID. I have a cloture motion at the desk with respect to that amendment.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

> We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, hereby move to bring to a close debate on the Reid amendment No. 3305 to the Baucus for Reid substitute amendment No. 3299 to H.J. Res. 45, a joint resolution increasing the statutory limit on the public debt.