

being blocked. The impact on our overall economy is huge, and it is because of policies of this administration.

USA TODAY this morning: "Will gas prices stall U.S. upturn? Consumers could cut spending again."

It is not in the best interest of this country for us to have energy policies that make it more expensive for Americans to gas up their cars. It does not help the economy of this country when the policies of this administration do things that make it more expensive and harder for small businesses to create jobs and hire people. We are trying to get people hired, back to work.

That is what we need to focus on—jobs and the economy. When the administration's policies cut into our ability to use energy sources from within this country—red, white, and blue energy jobs; red, white, and blue energy as well—and just send more money overseas, that does not help us as a nation, it does not help our economy, and it does not help strengthen our communities. We are so blessed in this country with wonderful families, wonderful communities, and wonderful land. Yet we do not seem to be making wise decisions on a daily basis with the policies coming out of this administration.

It is interesting to see who is actually benefiting from these increased costs because we know American families are not benefiting, we know American taxpayers are not benefiting, and we know people trying to get their kids off to school are not benefiting. Who is benefiting from this huge increase in the cost of energy and the cost of oil? All we need to do is go to the front page of the business section of today's New York Times: "Fears About Mid-east Oil Pay Off for Russia." For Russia, Mr. President. "Whatever the eventual outcome of the Arab world's social upheaval, there is a clear economic winner so far: Vladimir V. Putin." Right there, that is the winner. The economic policies of this administration to limit our ability and curtail our ability to use American energy, American oil, to keep down the cost of gasoline, are benefiting Russia.

It says:

Russia, which pumps more oil than Saudi Arabia, is reaping a windfall from the steep rise in global energy prices resulting from instability in oil regions of the Middle East and North Africa . . . Russia does not have any oil wells standing idle . . . Right now Russia is pumping oil at its top capacity.

In a country where we and this Congress in particular choose winners and losers in energy, the winner seems to be Russia because of the policies of this administration.

The Hill newspaper this morning said: "Pump pain for Obama." This clearly lies specifically at the feet of the President because of the policies of this administration.

We have had a situation in the Gulf of Mexico where there has been a moratorium, which is extended almost permanently, shutting down the use of oil

reserves for the United States. The administration—so happy, and pronounced the moratorium—has not until this week allowed for an additional permit and finally one when the price of gasoline went up at the pump 38 cents on average, about \$3.50 per gallon.

The Department of Interior, last October in the Federal Register, had a solution. They had some ideas about this because the Department of the Interior admitted—the President's own Secretary and his Department of Interior admitted that what they were doing in the Gulf of Mexico would have an impact.

It says:

The impact on the domestic deepwater hydrocarbon production as a result of these regulations is expected to be negative.

What it means is that it is going to cut down on American sources of energy. We need energy security. We as a nation need to do it in an environmentally responsible way, and we need to focus on economic growth. This administration does not seem to be willing to make that distinction about energy security and economic growth and the needs we have to help make our economy stronger.

What is the administration's position? What, as of October of last year, was their position on all of this to say: OK, we know we are going to have impacts in the gulf. They didn't say: Oh, I know, we can go onshore and look on Federal land. They didn't say: Let's go to Alaska to explore. This is this administration's position. They said:

Currently, there is sufficient spare capacity in OPEC—

In OPEC, in the Middle East—

to offset a decrease in Gulf of Mexico deepwater production that could occur as a result of this rule.

The rule that they are going to shut down the gulf.

Therefore, the increase in the price of hydrocarbon products to consumers from the increased cost to drill and operate on the Outer Continental Shelf is expected to be minimal.

That is the administration's solution. They do not expect anything to happen. They are not worried about it. And if there is a problem, just buy more oil from OPEC, send more American dollars overseas. That is the administration's position? And what about the impact on our economy?

We do have a Secretary of Energy. One would think he would be concerned about the cost of energy and the impact on American families. Not so when we look at some of the statements he has made. In the past, he said:

Somehow we have to figure out how to boost the price of gasoline to the levels of Europe.

That is the proposal of the Secretary of Energy—figure out how to boost the price of gasoline to the levels in Europe. How much does gasoline cost in Europe? Almost \$8 a gallon.

The President, when he was a Senator and running for President, did not

seem to think high energy prices were a problem. He just wanted the price to go up gradually. He said the problem is when things go up too quickly.

The American people who try to put bread on the table for their kids, clothing on their backs, get them off to school, and then go to work themselves, notice this. They know every time the cost of a gallon of gasoline goes up by a penny or a nickel or 38 cents, as it has most recently, the economy will suffer as a result. It is specifically a result of the policies of this administration, the policies that ignore the need for American energy.

At a time when we need to be focused on jobs, that we need to realize the amount of uncertainty in the Middle East, there is now sticker shock at the pumps, and it is the policies of this administration that are keeping us from developing the energy security we need.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Nebraska.

#### FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

Mr. JOHANNES. Mr. President, I rise today to speak for a few minutes about our current fiscal situation.

Over the next few weeks, we are undoubtedly going to have a very robust debate on our country's future and the tremendous issues we face. We are going to have a debate about the need for fiscal responsibility. One thing all of my colleagues should be able to agree on is that our current level of spending and borrowing and debt is just simply not sustainable. When you are bringing in \$2.2 trillion but you are spending \$3.8 trillion annually, something is seriously wrong. Adding \$1.65 trillion to the national debt each and every year is not the answer. We simply cannot afford to continue in this direction.

For too long, the answer of Washington was: We will be all things to all people—promising everything with really no plan to pay for it. The result now is that we face a financial crisis unlike anything our Nation has ever seen. While Americans are making very tough, painful decisions in their daily lives, their government still refuses to make the same difficult choices.

I come from a State where its citizens really do believe that less government is better government. But even if my colleagues disagree that less government is better, we would be hard-pressed to find anyone who can argue with the numbers. Numbers do not lie, and they cannot be spun.

Let's take a look at the numbers, grim by any economist's viewpoint. We are currently borrowing 42 cents on every dollar. For every dollar spent today, every dollar spent this year by the Federal Government, 42 cents is borrowed. Can you imagine an average family charging nearly half of all of their spending to a credit card? It

would not take long for that family to face bankruptcy.

What is happening with our Nation is we are absolutely losing control of our destiny. I heard the Senator from Wyoming talk about the oil issues and the fact that we are shipping our resources out of this Nation. That is absolutely true. But what is also happening is that for every dollar borrowed, we have to find a banker. Looking at this chart, who are our bankers out there? China, Japan, other foreign holders, oil exporters, the UK. And we begin to understand the point. Billions of dollars annually are being borrowed from foreigners who have really no home interest in our Nation.

The interest payments on our debt will increase to almost \$1 trillion by 2020—an increase of 370 percent since 2009. Again, just look at the chart. The numbers do not lie—a nearly 380 percent increase by 2020. The American people are absolutely appalled at trillion-dollar annual deficits. Just imagine, therefore, trillion-dollar annual interest payments. And what if current interest rates go up, which many project they will? Each 1 percent increase in interest rates equals—get this—\$140 billion in additional debt. Our interest payments alone will eventually bankrupt our country before we even begin to think about providing services to our citizens, and everything will suffer. If you like education, guess what. It will suffer. If you want to build more roads and bridges, guess what. It will suffer. Our society will suffer. Probably most important, for those of us in the Senate, the legacy we leave behind for our children and grandchildren of a diminished standard of living because we could not get our spending under control is absolutely a horrific legacy. Our country's national debt totals nearly 70 percent of our entire gross domestic product. Looking down the road, within 10 years our publicly held debt will be at the 90-percent threshold.

While the American public looks on at this Enron accounting with utter amazement, they can't imagine 90 percent of their paychecks going to pay off debt. Yet their government continues to recklessly add to the debt year after year after year, trillion-dollar deficits, trillion-dollar deficits as far as the eye can see.

Well, this is just enormous. It is a record-setting annual deficit. The alarm bells are sounding, the red lights are flashing, and the flags are waving. We have to stop it.

While this discussion would not likely even acknowledge the entitlement iceberg headed our way, we have to come to grips with the reality that we can't finance what we have promised. Yet some object to \$61 billion in spending reductions. In the grand scheme of what we are dealing with, that is hard to imagine. How can we possibly attack a massive debt if we can't even come to agreement on \$61 billion out of a \$3.5 trillion annual budget?

Now, I acknowledge \$61 billion is significant. I acknowledge many of these programs are programs I like. But if we don't come to grips with this, those programs will not exist. Yet many are saying: Well, let's do a little nip and a tuck. Let's maybe get \$4 billion out of this. That is only fourteen onehundredths of 1 percent in reductions. Does anyone really think that is a serious effort? Nobody is buying that. The media is not buying it, and the American people aren't buying it. I just did nine townhall meetings all across my State, and they are not buying it back home. It is time to roll up our sleeves. It is time to say: Look, we can't go on doing this.

It is my intention to be on the floor of the Senate on these issues a lot in the weeks and months ahead. I believe we are at a tipping point. If we don't turn this around, we may lose the ability to control our own destiny.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. SHAHEEN). The Senator from Tennessee.

Mr. CORKER. Madam President, I understand I have up to 10 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. That is correct.

The Senator from Nebraska has suggested the absence of a quorum.

Mr. JOHANNIS. Madam President, I withdraw my request.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

Mr. CORKER. Madam President, if the Chair will let me know when I get within 1½ minutes of my time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Chair will so advise.

Mr. CORKER. Madam President, I rise today to speak also on the matter of our country's unlimited spending, the fact that this last month, February—I don't know if many people know this; it was just published—we had the largest budget deficit for 1 month in recorded history of \$223 billion. Those numbers were just released.

I know we have some measures we are going to vote on this week regarding reductions in spending. I realize the Republican version likely will not pass and the Democratic version likely will not pass. Hopefully, we will then sit down and work out something to allow government to be open with, hopefully, a long-term CR. I know we are having a lot of difficulties in our departments as they try to manage their budgets not knowing what we are going to do.

As the Senator from Nebraska mentioned, \$61 billion is a drop in the bucket as it relates to trying to solve our country's problems. That is why I have brought forth something called the CAP Act. I have tried to do it and I have done it in a bipartisan way. There are numbers of people in this body who have supported the CAP Act. I think the Chair, a former Governor, and other people here—and Tennessee families who have to live within a budget—realize that around here we have abso-

lutely no construct. We do not know where we are going in the future. We never have a plan.

What we do is what we are doing this week: we fight and debate over issues that take us almost nowhere. Yet we do not have a long-term plan as it relates to spending. I think everybody in this body knows when we have \$3.7 trillion in spending this year, and we have \$2.2 trillion in income, trying to solve this problem by only dealing with discretionary spending makes no sense. If we did away with all discretionary spending during this year—all discretionary spending including defense—we still would not have a balanced budget. All of us know it is the mandatory programs that have to be added into this. What we need to do is create a comprehensive budget, a straitjacket for Congress.

I, along with others, have offered something called the CAP Act. It takes us from where we are today over a 10-year glidepath to the historical average of spending in this country relative to our country's output. That is about 20.6 percent of our country's economic output. I have tried to not message. This is not a messaging bill. It is a bill that I truly hope to pass. I have been meeting with numbers of my Republican colleagues and Democratic colleagues. I have numbers of meetings set up over the course of the next several weeks to try to build consensus.

Here is the way it would work. We would pass it as a statutory bill. What it would do is take us from where we are today—and that is a little over 24.5 percent of spending relative to our country's output, which is way out of line. By the way, I am not here to cast blame. I think both parties can recognize some of the contributions they have made to getting us where we are as a country. But the fact is, we know we cannot continue on today's path. We know that. We have to not just look at discretionary spending.

I have heard so many of my colleagues talk on the Senate floor about trying to solve this entire problem with only a very small percentage of the budget. That makes no sense. Everybody understands that. I know everyone here wants to ensure that the entitlement programs seniors benefit from are here for the long term. We want other seniors to benefit from them. Yet we know the way these programs are set up, they are not sustainable. There is not a person here, I don't think—there may be a few, but I think most of it would be rhetoric, though I don't want to cast judgment—who doesn't know these programs cannot continue as they are.

So this bill would require us to start today, working ourselves down to 20.6 percent of our GDP. Again, that has been the historical average for 40 years. This isn't something to try to overreach. For what it is worth, what that would mean to our country is that over the course of the next 10 years—as opposed to the course we are on now,

the alternative CBO scenario and what they deem most likely to occur without our action—we would spend \$7.63 trillion less than we are now spending. This is how it would work. There is a formula in here.

This is a 10-page bill. There are not a lot of “whereases” in this bill. It is just a business document, something the former Governor from New Hampshire might be accustomed to looking at. It is a business document that puts in place statutory limits that are formula driven to take us from here to there.

If we don't meet those requirements, then after 45 days—and there are targets each year of spending relative to our economy. By the way, this joins everybody at the hip in wanting our economy to grow because if our economy grows rapidly, those targets are much easier to hit. But if Congress doesn't act, if we don't have the courage to act, then there would be automatic sequestration on a pro rata basis, depending on the enumerator, what the size of that particular budget appropriation is relative to the overall budget. So on a pro rata basis, we would have sequestration that would take out those monies.

Now, none of us wants to see that happen, so that would force us to actually do what any Congress acting responsibly needs to do; that is, to actually work together each year to meet those requirements.

I have heard so many people recently, especially on the other side of the aisle, talking about focusing on discretionary spending only, basically cutting out some of those things that might make our country stronger. There are some things certainly in all of these bills, as the Senator from Nebraska was mentioning, where I might have differing priorities. But the fact is, when we try to do it all only on discretionary spending, we are not only not solving the problem but it prevents us from actually looking at some aspects that might otherwise make our economy grow.

Again, this bill, the CAP Act—with CLAIRE MCCASKILL signed on as an original cosponsor with me, and others are looking at it—would cause us to look at everything. So, again, first, a comprehensive look at spending relative to our economy at historical levels. Everything is on the table and on budget. Sequestration would be in place, and it would take a two-thirds vote of Congress to override these spending limits.

Again, I did not come here to message. I didn't come to move the bar beyond what the other side might be doing just to make a name for myself or create publicity. I came to solve our country's problems. I look at these young people in front of me, and I don't think they have any idea what our irresponsibility is doing to them. We talk about future generations, but I think all of us know we are actually at a point now where we have been so irresponsible that this is not just going

to affect future generations, it is getting ready to affect us.

There is a lot of turmoil in this world today. For that reason, the United States has been perceived as a safe haven. Our interest rates continue to be low because of the rest of the world's turmoil. The fact is, if and when—and we hope that when is soon—everything settles down, as people begin to again look closely at where we are as a country, and if we continue to not act responsibly and show the world we have the ability to at least put in place this framework that causes us to work together and get to the place we all know we need to get, then I fear interest rates, over time, are going to run from us, and that interest relative to our debt payments is going to continually consume more.

In closing, Madam President—and I appreciate the time—I have gone around the State of Tennessee and conducted 43 townhall meetings talking about this type of approach. I know numbers of Members on the other side of the aisle have talked about what they believe is an appropriate level of spending relative to our country's economy. I believe this bill is not out of line. I know this bill is at least appropriate. There are a number of people who think it should be lower, but this is something that would cause us to first agree on where we are going.

It is difficult for a body such as this, with 100 Senators and 435 House Members on the other side, to agree on little matters when we don't have any idea where it is we are trying to go. This would create a target for us. It would create a straitjacket for Congress. It would cause us to prioritize.

So I am going to continue talking about this until, hopefully, we pass it and actually have a process that causes us to work together in a constructive way.

With that, I yield the floor, and I thank the Chair for the time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Louisiana.

#### GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. VITTER. Madam President, I rise to focus on another grave threat to our economic recovery and jobs: skyrocketing energy prices, and particularly the price of gasoline at the pump.

Madam President, I don't have to point out to Americans all over the country, and Louisianans all over my State, because they see it in front of them every time they go get a new tank of gas, the ever-increasing energy prices, the ever-increasing prices at the pump. Right now, on average, nationwide, the price at the pump is \$3.51 a gallon. That is about 80 cents higher than the average price a year ago. Most Americans know it is not stopping there. They see \$4 gasoline coming sooner rather than later, and who knows how far it will go beyond \$4 at the pump?

This is a real threat. We are trying to come out of the worst recession since

the Great Depression and this is an immediate threat to put the brakes on any recovery we may be mounting, and it is surely a real threat and a real hit to Louisiana and American families. It is a direct hit to their pocketbooks.

Louisianans, like all Americans, hear talking heads on TV, national economists, saying we don't have any real inflation. Listen, they are hit every time they go to the pump. They know there is inflation in key prices such as gasoline, and that is a big hit to their family budget.

This has sparked somewhat of a breakthrough in thinking among the ranks of the Obama administration. Let me explain what I mean by that. Recently President Obama's Energy Secretary, Secretary Chu, focused on supply and he said we need to increase supply to temper prices and mitigate the increasing price at the pump. He said we need to do this by convincing the Saudi Arabians to increase their supply of oil on the world market: “That's going to mitigate the price increase.” He said further, “We're hoping market forces will take care of this.” I at least give Secretary Chu and the Obama administration marks for this breakthrough understanding that supply is a big part of the equation. In fact, it is half of the supply and demand equation that yields price.

Recently the White House Chief of Staff Bill Daley made a comment that also went to supply. He said this weekend, on some of the weekend talk shows, that we need to consider opening the Strategic Petroleum Reserve to put more product on the market, to increase supply—also to temper prices, to stop these ever-increasing prices. Again, I at least give Mr. Daley and the Obama administration credit for finally realizing, and it is a bit of a breakthrough, that supply is a big part of the issue.

Where I disagree, where I want a further breakthrough, is that they need to focus on domestic supply we can create and that we can control in America. Unfortunately, they are not doing that yet.

I have come to the floor many times to talk about the virtual shutdown of the Gulf of Mexico to energy production since the BP disaster. I will mention that again because that is at the heart of this issue. The administration understands we need to increase supply. What about domestic supply? What about the Gulf of Mexico? What about all of our other vast energy resources that we are taking off the table and shutting down? What about that supply? That is the first place we should turn, that is the first action we should take. That is what can help us control our own destiny.

Instead, there has been a virtual shutdown of the Gulf of Mexico to energy production. That has reduced direct and indirect employment in the oil and gas and service industries. It threatens 93,000 jobs for every year until 2035 unless we reverse it. It could