

let's also understand we cannot balance our budget with what the tea party is wanting us to do. We have a huge problem in this country with deficits. We have been a pretty good example of how we can balance the budget. We did it in the Clinton years. We spent far less money than we were taking in. We were reducing the debt. We were not having annual deficits. We know it can be done, but we have to do it in the right way, as we did.

We want to work with our Republican colleagues. We have proven we can do that with the two short-term CRs we have had. But I hope everyone understands that there is only so much the middle class of this country can take. There is only so much we can do to damage the basic fiber of our children, students, teachers, our nurses, and our seniors.

Head Start is a program that has been around for decades, and it helps a lot. It helps little boys and girls learn to read and do their math that they would not ordinarily have the opportunity to do. These are really poor children. H.R. 1 cuts hundreds of thousands of little boys and girls from that program. That does not help our country.

We know cuts must be made, but they must be smart cuts, and we want to do the best we can to work together to do whatever is reasonable to reduce this debt we have. We know it can be done. It has been done in recent history.

SCHEDULE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, following any leader remarks, there will be a period for the transaction of morning business. During that period of time, Senators are permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each. The first hour is equally divided and controlled, with the majority controlling the first 30 minutes and the Republicans controlling the next 30 minutes.

We hope to work out an agreement to vote on the 1099 and the EPA amendments to the small business jobs bill today. We have been trying to do that for several days. A number of Members of the Senate are attending the funeral for the late Geraldine Ferraro. Senators will be notified when votes are scheduled. They will be this afternoon at the earliest.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

TEA PARTY

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, anyone who follows national politics

knows that when it comes to a lot of the issues Americans care about most, Democratic leaders in Washington are pretty far outside the mainstream. That is why we have one Democratic leader coaching his colleagues to describe any Republican idea as extreme, and that is why other Democrats are attempting to marginalize an entire group of people in this country whose concerns about the growth of the Nation's debt, the overreach of the Federal Government, and last year's health care bill are about as mainstream as it gets.

I am referring, of course, to the tea party—a loosely knit movement of everyday Americans from across the country who got so fed up in the direction they saw lawmakers from both parties taking our country a couple years ago that they decided to stand up and make their voices heard. Despite the Democratic leadership's talking points, these folks are not radicals. They are our next-door neighbors and our friends. By and large, they are housewives, professionals, students, parents, and grandparents. After last fall's election, a number of them are now Members of Congress.

Later on today, we will hear from many of them outside the Capitol. These are everyday men and women who love their country and who do not want to see it collapse as a result of irresponsible attitudes and policies that somehow persist around here despite the warning signs we see all around us about the consequences of fiscal recklessness. They are being vilified because, in an effort to preserve what is good about our country, they are politely asking lawmakers in Washington to change the way things are done around here. So this morning I thought we could step back and take a look at some of the things they are proposing and then let people decide for themselves who they think is extreme.

At a time when the national debt has reached crisis levels, members of the tea party are asking that we stop spending more than we take in. In other words, they are asking that Washington do what any household in America already does. They want us to balance our budget, and they do this because they know their history and that the road to decline is paved with debt. Is that extreme?

They want us to be able to explain how any law we pass is consistent with the Constitution. This means that as we write new laws, they want us to be guided by the document that every single Senator in this Chamber has sworn to uphold. Is that extreme?

They want us to cut down on the amount of money the government spends. This year, the Federal Government in Washington is projected to spend about \$1.6 trillion more than it has. That means we will have to borrow it from somewhere else, driving the national debt even higher than it already is. What is more, the Obama administration plans to continue

spending like this for years, so that within 5 years, the debt will exceed \$20 trillion. Given these facts, you tell me: Is it extreme to propose that we cut spending?

What else? Well, a lot of people in the tea party think the health care bill the Democrats passed last year should be repealed and replaced with real reforms that actually lower costs. Is that extreme?

Here is a bill that is expected to lead to about 80,000 fewer jobs, which will cause Federal health care spending to go up, compel millions to change the health care plans they have and like, and which is already driving individual and family insurance premiums up dramatically. Businesses are being hampered by its regulations and its mandates. A majority of States are working to overturn it. Two Federal judges have ruled one of its central provisions violates the U.S. Constitution.

None of this sounds extreme to me. In fact, if you ask me, the goals of the tea party sound pretty reasonable. These folks recognize the gravity of the problems we face as a nation and they are doing something about it for the sake of our future. They are engaged in the debate about spending and debt, which is a lot more than we can say about the President and many Democrats here in Congress. They are making their voices heard and they have succeeded in changing the conversation here in Washington from how to grow government to how to shrink it.

In my view, the tea party has had an overwhelmingly positive impact on the most important issues of the day. It has helped focus the debate. It has provided a forum for Americans who felt left out of the process to have a voice and make a difference. It is already leading to good results.

It may take some time, but thanks to everyday Americans like these getting involved, speaking their minds, and advocating for commonsense reforms, I am increasingly confident we will get our fiscal house in order. Republicans are determined to do our part to advance the goals I have mentioned. That is why we have been fighting to cut spending in the near term, and that is why we will soon be proposing a balanced budget amendment. American families have to balance their budgets; so should their elected representatives in Washington. It is not too much to expect that lawmakers spend no more than they take in, unless you think it is extreme to balance the books.

That brings us to the heart of the matter. The last time the Senate voted on a balanced budget amendment, in 1997, the Federal deficit was a little over \$100 billion. Today, it is about \$1.6 trillion. Back then, the national debt was about \$5.5 trillion. Today, it is closer to \$14 trillion. Back then, the amendment failed by just one vote—just one. Today, Democrats are already lining up against it.

What is extreme is the thought that government can continue on this reckless path without consequence. What is extreme is thinking we can blithely watch the Nation's debt get bigger and bigger and pretend it doesn't matter. What is extreme is spending more than \$1.5 trillion than we have in a single year. This is the Democrats' approach. That is what is extreme.

The sad truth is, as our fiscal problems have become deeper, Democrats in Washington and many others in statehouses across the country have become increasingly less concerned about the consequences. Look no farther than the ongoing spending debate in which Democrats have fought tooth and nail over a proposal to cut a few billion dollars at a time when we are borrowing about \$4 billion a day and our national debt stands at \$14 trillion; the President has set the debate out entirely; and Democrats have the nerve to call anyone who expresses concern an extremist. If you are wondering where the tea party came from, look no further than that.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with the first hour equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees, with the majority controlling the first 30 minutes and the Republicans controlling the next 30 minutes.

The Senator from Washington is recognized.

TESORO TRAGEDY ANNIVERSARY

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I come to the floor this morning to mark the 1-year anniversary of a terrible tragedy in my home State of Washington, and to once again honor the memories of those who were killed.

On April 2, 2010, a fire broke out at the Tesoro refinery in Anacortes, WA, and claimed the lives of seven workers: Daniel J. Aldridge, Matthew C. Bowen, Donna Van Dreumel, Matt Gumbel, Darrin J. Hoines, Lew Janz, and Kathryn Powell.

These were men and women who were taken too young, with so much life to live and with so many people to live it with. They were workers who took on tough jobs, worked long hours during difficult economic times to provide for their families. They were people who made tremendous sacrifices and who embodied so much of what is good about the community they lived in.

They have been dearly missed. Even now, 1 year later, there is nothing we can say to make the pain go away for the mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, coworkers, and family members who still bear those deep scars of loss. But the Anacortes community is

strong, and while they have endured more than their fair share of pain over the years, their resiliency and compassion have carried them forward. Over the past year, we have seen homes and hearts and pocketbooks open to the families who lost so much because this community understands the pain of a loss such as this can't be overcome or forgotten. They know these families should never have to bear that pain alone.

We owe it to the Anacortes community to honor those they have lost. We owe it to them to do everything we can to make sure that such tragedies never happen again.

State investigators have determined that tragedy could have been and should have been prevented. The problems that led to what happened were known beforehand and they should have been fixed. That is heartbreaking.

Every worker in every industry deserves to be confident that while they are working hard and doing their jobs, their employers are doing everything they can to protect them. I want you to know I will keep working to make sure the oil and gas industry improves their safety practices, because we owe that to our workers and to their families and to communities such as Anacortes all across our country.

One year after that tragedy, my thoughts and prayers and condolences remain with the families who have endured so much pain, and my profound thanks goes out to the Anacortes community that has been with those families every step of the way.

I am proud to submit a Senate resolution with my colleague, Senator CANTWELL—which we will do later today—to recognize the anniversary of this tragedy on April 2, 2011, and I urge my colleagues to join in remembering those workers in Anacortes who were taken from us far too soon.

Mr. President, I yield the floor, and 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. BENNET. 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.

PUBLIC EDUCATION

Mr. BENNET. Mr. President, I wanted to come to the floor today to talk a little about the state of public education in this country, especially when it comes to the condition of poor children in the United States, in part because I think it is urgent that we fix No Child Left Behind—a law that is not working well for kids and for teachers, and for moms and dads all across the United States, and certainly in my home State of Colorado.

Sometimes people who aren't engaged in the work of teaching our

kids—which I think is the hardest work anybody can do, short of going to war—don't realize how horrific the outcomes are for children in this great country of ours, especially children living in poverty. When I am on this floor, where there are 100 desks—there are 100 Senators—I sometimes think a little about what the condition of the people here would be if they were not Senators, but if these 100 people were poor children living in the United States in the 21st century.

First of all, it is important to recognize that of the 100 Senators—or the 100 kids in this great country—42 of the 100 would be living in poverty. Forty-two out of the 100 would be poor. Of those Senators—now poor children living in this country—as this chart shows, by the age of 4 they would have heard only one-third of the words heard by their more affluent peers. They are living in poverty, and they have heard 13 million words. A child in a professional family has heard 45 million words. There isn't a kindergarten teacher in this country who wouldn't tell you that makes an enormous difference right out of the chute.

Also by age 4, only 39 of the 100 children can recognize the letters of the alphabet—just 39 of 100 by age 4. In contrast, 85 percent of the children coming from middle-class families can recognize the letters of the alphabet. Again, there is not a kindergarten teacher or a high school teacher who wouldn't tell you that makes an enormous difference to kids when they come to school in terms of their readiness to learn.

But what happens when they are actually in our schools? By the fourth grade, only 17 out of 100 children in poverty can read at grade level—17. That is fewer kids than there are desks in this section of the Senate floor. The entire rest of the floor would be kids who cannot read at grade level by the fourth grade. These kids are reading at grade level. Everyone else all across this beautiful Chamber would not be able to read at grade level in America in the 21st century. Only this section can read proficiently by the fourth grade.

What happens as they stay in school? It gets worse. By the eighth grade, only 16 of our kids can read at grade level. I could wander around the entire rest of this Chamber looking for somebody who can read proficiently, and I would not be able to find them. I have been in classrooms all across my State, all across the great city of Denver, and all across this country. In my view, there is nothing more at war with who we are as Americans or who we are as Coloradans than a fifth grade child reading at the first grade level. There is a lot of discussion on this floor about your moral right to this and your moral right to that. I cannot think of anything less American than a child in the fifth grade doing first grade math.

Speaking of math, in a world where technology and engineering and invention are going to dominate the 21st