

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

century economy, how are we doing in math? Seventeen of our kids in the eighth grade are proficient mathematicians.

When I took the job as superintendent of schools in Denver, a district of 75,000 children, one of the greatest cities in the greatest country in the world, on the 10th grade math test that the State administers, in that district of 75,000 children, there were 33 African-American students proficient on that test and 61 Latino students proficient on the test; fewer than four classrooms of kids proficient on a test which measures—if we are honest with ourselves, which we are not—a junior high school standard of mathematical proficiency in Europe. That is what we are doing to our kids.

By the end of high school, if this Senate were a classroom of poor children in this country, only 57 of us would be around to graduate and only 25 are actually ready for college or ready for a career. That is one-quarter of this room; 75, we can just write them off, 75 of these desks.

It gets even worse after that because, of our 100 children, only 9 will graduate from college. These two rows of desks represent children coming from ZIP Codes where they are living in poverty and who ultimately make it through to graduate from college. That is it—two rows in one section of the Senate. No one in these rows will graduate from college, and no one in any of these desks from here to the other side of this floor will graduate from college. That has been true for a generation.

If we do not do things differently, it is going to be true for this generation of kindergartners, if we do not change what we do.

Sometimes people think this is someone else's problem, that it is not a question of national interest. I cannot imagine why anybody would think that, but some people do. McKinsey, the consulting group, has done a study which shows the effect of this dropout rate we have creates a permanent recession in our economy as great as the one we have been through. In other words, if we were graduating these kids from college, our economic growth would be far greater than it is right now. We can see the effect in this recession we just came out of. For people with less than a high school diploma, the unemployment rate was 15.3 percent. We can see the numbers here. But if you had a bachelor's degree or higher, your unemployment rate was 4 percent; 15 percent versus 4 percent in this recession we just went through.

But the point is also that it creates a chronic recession, a drag on our economy, not to mention the fact that if we go to the prisons of this country and we ask people did you graduate from high school, the answer is that somewhere in the neighborhood of 85 percent of the people in our prisons are high school dropouts. It doesn't take a lot of imagination to see how we might start solving that problem by actually

graduating kids from high school and getting them ready for college.

Again, this is not about we are kind of sort of doing OK. Nine kids from poverty, on average, are making it through to a college degree; 91 are not. It is not as though those odds are somehow fairly distributed across the population in the United States of America.

There are huge international implications for all this as well. We can see, these are our students compared to our international peers on the eighth grade math test. We can see our Anglo kids are scoring up here—Korea, Singapore, Japan, Anglo kids in the United States of America. The U.S. average is here, so we have to go Hungary, England, Russian Federation, U.S. average. I don't know why we would not want to be first, but we are not first.

But look at how our Latino kids are doing and our African Americans kids are doing. Armenia, Australia, Sweden, Malta, Scotland, Serbia, Italy—our Latino kids, way down here. Keep going, Malaysia, Norway, Cyprus, Bulgaria, Israel, Ukraine, Romania, our U.S. African-American students—right above Bosnia, two steps above Lebanon. Think of it through the eyes of one of our African-American students living in a neighborhood in poverty in Chicago or Denver or Los Angeles or Boston. What are the odds that they are actually going to be able to graduate, that they are going to be able to contribute to the democracy, contribute meaningfully to our economy, compete in this global economy? They are long. They are long and they know they are long.

We cannot fix this problem from Washington. But we can call attention to the question. We can create policies and suggestions about how people ought to do the work differently. Having served as a superintendent in an urban school district for almost 4 years and having spent time with our kids, spent time with our teachers, I know we can succeed. The kids have the intellectual capacity to do the work. There is no doubt they do. But they are in a system that was designed deep in the last century. In fact, if we are honest about it, a lot of the way the system was designed was in colonial America.

In my judgment, it is time for the burden to shift from the people who want to change the system to the people who want to keep it the same. There were nights sometimes in the school board meetings when people would come and they would say: MICHAEL, how do you sleep at night doing this and doing that and trying to change this and worrying about that?

I would say to them: The reason I can sleep at night is that I do not think we could do any worse than we are doing. We ought to think about stopping what we are doing and figure out how to change the way we think about recruiting, retaining, and inspiring teachers in the 21 century. We ought to elevate

standards so we are not kidding ourselves across the country about whether we are competing with our international rivals and stop cheating our kids by telling them they are succeeding, when they are not, compared to the kids across the globe. We have to get out of the business of measuring things that do not make any sense to anybody right now who is working in the schools. Who cares how this year's fourth graders did compared to last year's fourth graders? What we need to know is how this group of fifth graders did compared to how they did as fourth graders, compared to how they did as third graders. That is common sense, but it is not the way the law works today.

I see my colleague from Georgia, but I wish to say this first. We cannot keep No Child Left Behind the way it is. It is contributing to the problem that is out there. It is making the work harder to do, not easier to do, for our teachers, for our principals, and for our kids. Our moms and dads are right to point out it is measuring the wrong thing and thinking about data in the wrong way. We ought to take this opportunity in a bipartisan way to fix No Child Left Behind, to lift some of that burden from our kids and from our teachers and our principals.

What we have to do as we are doing that is, we have to point to the places where it is actually working to demonstrate that the fact that you are born into a ZIP Code defined by poverty doesn't mean your life is going to be defined by poverty. We need to point to examples of people who have managed to struggle through, our schools that have managed to struggle through and beat the odds and are sending 95 and 98 percent of their poor children on to get a college degree. We need to be asking ourselves why we are not achieving that at scale.

I am the proud father of three little girls. I can tell you that if anyone in this body faced the same odds for their children or for their grandchildren that poor children in America face, there is no way we would not be talking about this issue night and day. In fact, people might give up. I might give up and rush home and say: I am going to take my kids out of that place they are in and I am going to put them in a place with the finest teachers and I am going to give up this Senate floor to make sure, as a parent, that I am involved in their education.

There is no way we would accept these odds for our own children. What I would argue is, the children I am talking about are our children. Remember, 42 out of 100 are living in poverty in this country. What is our answer for them?

I look forward to working with my colleagues on both sides of this aisle to not make excuses, to not find a reason why we cannot lead, to not find a reason why we cannot fix No Child Left Behind but, instead, to create some hope for children all across our country

living in urban and rural areas who are suffering this horrible plight.

I yield the floor.

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

Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that remaining time for the majority be reserved.

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

Mr. ISAKSON. I would like to be recognized as in morning business. I guess we are in morning business?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. That is correct.

THE BUDGET

Mr. ISAKSON. First, I wish to commend the Senator from Colorado and try to ratify what I heard him say. I came in after the first part of his speech, but I know his focus was on the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and No Child Left Behind. He is exactly right. There are reforms that do need to take place. We have gone 3 years without a reauthorization, and reauthorization, hopefully, can happen this year. When it does, we can improve the plight of our children, and we can reform the way we do some of the things we do in SEA to open new opportunities for our kids. But accepting the status quo, he is right, is not good enough. We need to make those reforms, and we need to make them now. I look forward to working with the Senator from Colorado in the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee when that issue comes up, to reform ESEA, get it reauthorized, to empower our teachers, our students, our parents, and raise the level of education for all Americans.

I congratulate him for his great contribution to the State of Colorado and, further, to the Senate.

I wish to steal a line he just gave us 1 minute ago. When I walked in, he was saying there are some things Congress cannot do. He is right. Education does take place at the local level. There are some things we can fix in Washington, but it is primarily done at the local level.

But there is one thing Congress can fix; that is, our spending, our debt, and our deficit. For just 1 second, I wish to speak not in the tone of a politician, not as somebody who is a part of the institution, trying to talk about what he thinks, I wish to talk about what I think the people of Georgia think. The people of Georgia do not understand why we cannot do in Washington what they have had to do during the last 3 years. During the economic travails of the last 3 years, every American family has had to sit around their kitchen table, reprioritizing how they spend their money to deal with lower returns on their investments, the consequences of unemployment or underemployment. They have had to adapt to difficult economic times. Yet when they

turn on the television and they look at C-SPAN, they do not see us adapting to the economic times we find ourselves in as a country. I was in the real estate business for 33 years and I do not understand a lot of things, but I understand leverage.

Leverage is a marvelous thing in capitalism. If you have proper leverage in real estate or proper leverage in business, it can make a lot of things happen. Leverage is good, but too much leverage is a death sentence and we are at a precipice in this country. We are at a precipice where we are about to fall off. If we all fall off, there is no recovery because continued deficit spending and continued increasing debts results in two things: inflating the dollar in future years to pay that debt off with cheaper dollars, which devalues every asset of every American family, and increasing the interest rates to unsustainable and unpayable amounts.

I lived through that one in the post-Carter years in 1980, 1981, and 1983 when we dealt with the Misery Index in America—double-digit inflation, double-digit unemployment, and double-digit interest rates. In my home State of Georgia today we have double-digit unemployment, 10.4 percent. Interest rates are low, but it is arbitrary, and they are getting ready to go up. The yield spread curve between 2-year Federal debt and 10-year U.S. debt is triple, which indicates the markets that are buying our debt are already looking out in the future and saying interest rates are going higher, three times what they are now, maybe more.

If you look at inflation, inflation is arbitrarily low right now. But with what is happening to food and prices, contributed by gasoline and petroleum, what we see happening in the world marketplaces, it is an inevitable factor, unless we get our arms around our debt and our deficit.

We owe about \$14 trillion in debt. The deficit this year is over \$1.5 trillion. Those are unsustainable numbers. We do not have to pay the debt off today. We do not have to reduce the deficit to zero. But we have to get ourselves on a glidepath to reducing our deficit and, in turn, reducing our debt over time. It means we have to sit down at our kitchen tables, the floor of the Senate and the floor of the House, prioritize what we are doing, and get to the business the American people expect us to get to.

We are playing some political games right now with short-term CRs, when the big votes, the big debates, and the big decisions loom ahead—first, the debt ceiling, later the fiscal year 2012 appropriations.

There are three things I hope we will do: No. 1 is recognize our system is broken and is not working. I did a little research. Most of my years in Congress, more dollars have been appropriated through omnibus appropriations than through legitimate debate and budget units on the Senate floor. We did not do any last year. The reason

we are doing a CR this year on last year is because it was an omnibus appropriation.

We are not spending our money like the American people have to spend theirs. We are not prioritizing. We are not looking at cost-benefit analysis. We have to change our system. I am pleased to have joined with former Governor Shaheen of New Hampshire, a Democratic colleague, to introduce the Biennial Budget and Appropriations Act for the Congress, an act which mimics what 20 of our States, 40 percent of the country, already does: appropriate on a 2-year cycle rather than on a 1-year cycle; appropriate in odd-numbered years so that in even-numbered years, which also happen to be election years, we do not do appropriating, we do oversight. We spend a year not making political promises of what bacon we are going to bring home, but we spend a year looking for savings and redundancy and duplication and waste in Federal spending.

If we do not spend a minute looking back, we can never spend a minute looking forward. Right now we do not spend any time looking back and seeing where money is being spent and where it might be saved. We do not reprioritize what was introduced and established years ago. The Biennial Budget and Appropriations Act requires the President of the United States to submit a biennial budget, requires Congress to act on the independent budget units in a 2-year fashion, in the odd-numbered years, and requires the oversight in even-numbered years of every function of the Federal Government.

We do not do oversight anymore, and we are paying a terrible price for it. That is the first thing we need to do. Second, we need to understand that we need to appropriate our money the way the American people appropriate their money. They measure the benefit compared to the cost, and if the benefit to their family is not equal to or greater than the cost, they do not spend the money. But in the Congress, we do not measure cost-benefit analysis. We measure how much more we can spend in continuation than what we appropriated in a previous year. That is a broken system, and it is a broken cycle.

I commend Senator CORKER on his introduction of the CAP Act, which is the second part of what we need to do; that is, put ourselves on some type of fiscal constraint through a balanced budget amendment and through a spending cap.

A little known secret is 2 years ago the Nation of Israel confronted problems such as the ones we have today—burgeoning debt, a bigger deficit, and spending problems. Prime Minister Netanyahu and their Finance Minister sat down at their kitchen table in Tel Aviv and established a biennial budget process, 2-year appropriations rather than 1, of even-numbered year election oversight and odd-numbered appropriating.