

alter his budget to achieve those savings?

The fiscal commission recommends finding \$600 billion in entitlement savings, but the President's budget would increase entitlement spending by \$905 billion. That is in the budget he submitted already. How does he intend to achieve these savings in entitlements?

The fiscal commission's recommendations would reduce it by \$4 trillion, and the Ryan budget plan would reduce it by \$5 trillion; but the President's budget would increase the debt by \$10 trillion and would not produce any savings. How would the President alter his original budget to reduce the debt by \$4 trillion? I wish to see something more than a speech. Give me a break. I wish to see some numbers so we can discuss it.

Once the President engages, we can have that long overdue national dialog about solving the Nation's fiscal problems. But he has to acknowledge that we have one. As every witness has told us—and the debt commission chairmen, Simpson and Bowles, said this Nation has never faced a more predictable fiscal financial crisis. They see it coming. We have to change.

I hope in his speech the President will discuss entitlements, discuss whether it is good to burden American energy companies with new taxes, discuss whether we should tax small businesses even more, and discuss the military budget. I think a leading President should talk about that. Rather than trying to drain every cent of tax revenue from the American people, Washington should try to drain every cent of waste from the Federal budget.

I hope this doesn't continue the pattern of retreat that is already emerging, where the President supports deficit reduction in theory but resists it in practice, and he claims credit when he is forced to accept reduction. For a President to abdicate his responsibility to lead the effort to meet one of the greatest challenges in our Nation's history would be tantamount to a general leaving the battlefield in a time of war.

I hope we have a speech. I hope it is backed up with real numbers, and I hope and pray it represents a recognition by the President of the United States that we have a serious fiscal challenge before us.

Business as usual cannot continue. Change is necessary. I hope he intends to participate in that and help lead the good change that is necessary.

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

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

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SESSIONS. Madam 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.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

NOMINATION OF VINCENT L. BRICCETTI TO BE UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE

NOMINATION OF JOHN A. KRONSTADT TO BE UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to consider the following nominations.

The clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read the nominations of Vincent L. Briccetti, of New York, to be U.S. District Judge for the Southern District of New York, and John A. Kronstadt, of California, to be United States District Judge for the Central District of California.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. There will now be 1 hour of debate equally divided between the two sides.

The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. KIRK. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that I be allowed to speak out of turn as in morning business.

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

(The remarks of Mr. KIRK are printed in today's RECORD under "Morning Business.")

Mr. KIRK. 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. GRASSLEY. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. TESTER). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, the Senate will confirm two more of the President's judicial nominees. Both of these nominees are for seats termed "judicial emergencies." My Republican colleagues and I continue to demonstrate our cooperation. We have worked with the Democratic majority in moving consensus nominees through the committee and on to the Senate floor. With today's votes, we will have confirmed 17 judicial nominees in just 39 short days the Senate has been in session this Congress. Twelve of these confirmations were for those positions that are termed "judicial emergencies."

We have reported out of committee a total of 32 judicial nominees. That is 51 percent of the total nominees who have been submitted to the Senate by the

President of the United States. To date we have held five nomination hearings with 21 judicial and executive nominees giving their testimony. We have another hearing scheduled for tomorrow, with four judicial nominees and one executive nominee on the agenda. With this productive pace, we have taken positive action on 60 percent of the judicial nominations sent to the committee this year by the President.

Today the Senate will consider two nominations: First, Vincent Briccetti, nominated to be U.S. District Judge for the Southern District of New York. He received a B.A. from Columbia University and a juris doctorate from Fordham University School of Law. The nominee began his legal career as a law clerk for the Honorable John M. Cannella, U.S. District Court for the Southern District New York.

After a short term in private practice, he served as an assistant U.S. attorney. That was also for the Southern District of New York. Later, he became a deputy chief appellate attorney. After working as an associate attorney in a law firm, the nominee started his own firm in 1992 and, as I report to my colleagues regularly on the ABA standing committee on the Federal judiciary, that committee has unanimously rated this nominee "well-qualified."

The second nominee is John Kronstadt, nominated to be U.S. District Judge, Central District of California. He received his B.A. from Cornell University and juris doctorate from Yale Law School. He began his legal career as law clerk to the Honorable William P. Gray, U.S. District Court, Central District of California. This nominee practiced law for nearly 24 years, most recently as a partner with Arnold & Porter.

On November 14, 2002, Gov. Gray Davis appointed Judge Kronstadt to the Los Angeles County Superior Court. There he presided over criminal, civil, and family law matters. Again, reporting on the American Bar Association rating of this nominee, the nominee had substantial majority "qualified," a minority, "well qualified."

I support these two nominees and urge my colleagues to support them as well. I congratulate each of the nominees for their achievement and, more importantly, for their long period of public service which will continue after their confirmation by the Senate.

Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, I wish to express my strong support for California Superior Court Judge John A. Kronstadt, as the Senate prepares to vote on his confirmation to the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California. Judge Kronstadt was recommended to the President by my colleague, Senator FEINSTEIN, and will be a great addition to the Federal bench.

Judge Kronstadt has had a distinguished career. After graduating from Yale Law School, he served as a Federal law clerk for Judge Gray on the Central District of California. With his

confirmation, Judge Kronstadt will be returning to the same court where he served as a clerk. Following his clerkship, he was in private practice, specializing in complex litigation, anti-trust, copyright and securities. Since 2002, Judge Kronstadt has served as a superior court judge in Los Angeles.

I congratulate Judge Kronstadt and his family on this important day, and urge my colleagues in the Senate to join in voting to confirm this highly qualified nominee to the Federal bench.

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Mr. President, I am very pleased that we are considering the nomination of Judge John Kronstadt to the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California here today.

I had the privilege of recommending Judge Kronstadt's nomination to President Obama.

Since 2002, he has served as a judge on the California Superior Court for Los Angeles County.

Judge Kronstadt first came to my attention through the Judicial Advisory Committee that I have set up in California. This is a bipartisan committee that reviews judicial candidates for me based on their legal acumen, reputation for skill and professionalism, breadth of personal experience, temperament, and overall commitment to excellence in the field of law.

Judge Kronstadt stood out from among the candidates for the vacancy on this court because he has all of these qualities in spades.

He has an outstanding academic record, with a bachelor of arts degree from Cornell University and a law degree from Yale Law School.

He started his legal career on the very court to which he is now nominated, serving as a law clerk to Judge William Gray of the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California.

Judge Kronstadt also brings a distinguished background in private practice. Prior to becoming a judge, he spent roughly two dozen years as a litigator trying complex civil cases before Federal courts, State courts, and administrative agencies.

He started as an associate and then became a partner at the law firm of Arnold & Porter—first in Washington, DC, and then in Los Angeles. Between years with that firm, he also spent 15 years managing his own firm with three colleagues. That was the firm of Blanc, Williams, Johnston, & Kronstadt.

On the Los Angeles County Superior Court, his docket consists primarily of civil cases, ranging from employment litigation to contract disputes to intellectual property and other commercial matters. He has overseen some 250 trials, as well as countless pretrial proceedings.

He has amassed a stellar in his almost 9 years on the court: only one of his decisions has ever been reversed. Within the Los Angeles area, Judge Kronstadt is regarded as one of the fin-

est judges on the bench. Fellow judges, litigants, and local lawyers describe him as "incredibly smart," "very fair," "even-tempered," and a "hard worker" who "cares an incredible amount about the jury system."

He has been a leader on the bench, serving on the court's executive committee, and chairing its Community Outreach Committee, among other positions.

Beyond his educational and professional qualifications, Judge Kronstadt has also shown an impressive dedication to education and the teaching of students throughout his career.

Since 2002, he has spent roughly 1,500 hours as a volunteer with the Constitutional Rights Foundation, including serving as the foundation's president.

This is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization in Los Angeles that seeks to "educate young people to become active and responsible participants in our society" and to teach them about "the importance of civic participation in a democratic society."

Judge Kronstadt developed a program for the Foundation known as "Courtroom to Classroom." This program facilitates visits by judges to eighth and eleventh grade public school classrooms throughout the Los Angeles area.

Judges who volunteer provide copies of the Constitution to the students and organize mock trial activities to allow them to experience constitutional law and the courtroom at a young age.

And while in private practice, he developed a training program for the Los Angeles County Bar Association that reached over 1,000 new attorneys.

I am very pleased to support Judge Kronstadt's nomination. He has shown a firm commitment to the rule of law, and a dedication to public service in a variety of ways.

I believe he is eminently qualified to serve on the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California. The Judiciary Committee unanimously reported his nomination last month, and he is much-needed on the central district bench—that court has been designated as a judicial emergency district by the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts. I thank the leader for bringing his nomination to the floor, and I urge my colleagues to support his nomination.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I am proud to support Vincent L. Briccetti, a superb lawyer who will be a brilliant and experienced addition to the bench of the Southern District of New York.

Vince has reached the apex of his profession through sheer hard work and raw intelligence. The son and grandson of Italian butchers, Vince was born in Mt. Kisco, NY, and grew up working in the butcher shop while he went to school, eventually graduating from Columbia University and Fordham University School of Law. He spent many of his summers working as a waiter.

After graduating from law school, he earned a prestigious clerkship with

Judge John M. Cannella in the Southern District of New York, and then entered private practice for 2 years. Vince's dedication to the rule of law had already begun, but his public service commenced when he entered the U.S. attorney's office in the Southern District of New York in 1985. For 4 years, he tried an impressive array of cases, including a sweeping tax fraud case that earned him too many awards to list here today. He then became the deputy chief of the Appellate Division of the U.S. Attorneys' Office and defended the office's convictions and practices on appeal.

Following a distinguished career at the prestigious law firm of Paul, Hastings, Janofsky & Walker, he steered his practice back to White Plains and established his own law firm there. For the last 17 years, he has practiced as a criminal defense lawyer in State and Federal court. He has tried approximately 50 cases to verdict or judgment. I have heard from judges and practitioners alike that Vince is a lawyer whose involvement invariably improves the outcome of any specific case with which he is involved and who has in general been one of the Bar's great assets. He has treated his duty as a lawyer to dedicate time to pro bono work—through serving on the local Criminal Justice Act panel—not as an obligation, but as a calling. To quote former Federal district court Judge Stephen C. Robinson's letter to this committee:

On at least three separate occasions, when I had some doubt as to whether a party before me was receiving adequate and appropriate counsel, I asked Vince to take up the representation. Vince always stood ready to respond to my requests for assistance in the name of justice. I can tell you that all of the judges in our courthouse held Vince in the highest regard.

While he ran his own firm and represented clients, Vince also continued to assist the government by serving as a special prosecutor at the behest of the Westchester County District Attorney when he or she was conflicted out of a prosecution. The current district attorney in Westchester County has commended him as "possessed of the highest moral character and integrity."

Everywhere you go in and around New York, you hear superlatives about Vince Briccetti: That he is the very model of an ethical, fair, dedicated lawyer; that while he is a terrific advocate, there is no one you would rather see on the opposite side of a case to ensure a full and fair hearing of the issues at stake; and that he is a dedicated member of the New York community. It will be a tribute not just to Vince but to the bench when we add "thoughtful and brilliant federal judge" to the encomia. The time has come to confirm Vince for this judicial emergency vacancy that has been open for more than 18 months.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, we continue to work to bring down the number of judicial vacancies that have remained at historically alarming levels

for the last 3 years. One in every nine Federal judgeships remains vacant as judicial vacancies stand at 96.

I thank the majority leader for scheduling votes on two more judicial emergency vacancies. Vincent Briccetti has been nominated to fill a judgeship in the Southern District of New York and John Kronstadt to fill a judgeship in the Central District of California. I believe they both could be confirmed unanimously. They were reported by the Judiciary Committee unanimously more than one month ago.

With cooperation from both sides of the aisle, the Senate could consider many more of the 17 judicial nominees currently ready for final action, and could do so before the Senate takes its Easter recess at the end of this week. Doing so would fulfill our responsibility to help address the vacancies crisis that puts at serious risk the ability of Americans to get a fair and timely hearing for their cases in Federal court.

All 17 of the judicial nominations pending on the Senate's Executive Calendar were reported by a majority of the Judiciary Committee after members had an opportunity to review thoroughly extensive materials provided in response to our questionnaire, to question the nominees at a hearing, and to send written follow-up questions to the nominees. All of them are ready for final Senate action. With Federal judicial vacancies continuing to hover around 100, we should act responsibly by voting promptly on these nominations.

Two of the nominees currently awaiting a Senate vote have twice been considered by the Judiciary Committee and twice reported with strong bipartisan support, first last year and again in February. They are Susan Carney of Connecticut to fill a judicial emergency vacancy on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit, and Michael Simon to fill an emergency vacancy on the district court in Oregon. Two of the nominations have been reported favorably by the committee three times—that of Goodwin Liu to fill a judicial emergency vacancy on the Ninth Circuit and that of Jack McConnell, reported with bipartisan support to fill a vacancy on the District of Rhode Island. Another currently pending nomination has been reported favorably four times, that of Judge Edward Chen to a judicial emergency vacancy on the Northern District of California. All of these nominations have long been ready for a Senate vote. So are nominations now pending to fill a judicial vacancy on the DC Circuit, judicial emergency vacancies in Tennessee, Florida and another in New York, two vacancies in Virginia, two vacancies in New Jersey, another vacancy in New York, and a vacancy on the district court for the Northern Mariana Islands.

It is actually a sign of progress that we are today proceeding to confirm two

judicial nominees reported last month. I hope that we can work to restore regular order in considering judicial nominations and that, at a minimum, the Senate will be allowed to proceed before the recess to confirm those judicial nominations reported with bipartisan support. All 17 of the pending nominees have a strong commitment to the rule of law and a demonstrated faithfulness to the Constitution. All should have an up or down vote after being considered by the Judiciary Committee, and without weeks of needless delay.

If we join together we can make real progress by considering all of the judicial nominations now on the Senate's Executive Calendar. If the Senate were to take favorable action on the 17 judicial nominations currently pending and awaiting final Senate consideration, we could reduce vacancies to below 90. In fact, we would be able to reduce them below 80 for the first time since July 2009.

Federal judicial vacancies around the country still number too many, and they have persisted for too long. Whereas the Democratic majority in the Senate reduced vacancies from 110 to 60 in President Bush's first 2 years, judicial vacancies still number 96 more than 26 months into President Obama's term. By now, judicial vacancies should have been cut in half, but we have barely kept up with attrition.

Regrettably, the Senate has not reduced vacancies dramatically as we did during the Bush administration. In fact, the Senate has reversed course during the Obama administration, with the slow pace of confirmations keeping judicial vacancies at crisis levels. Over the 8 years of the Bush administration, from 2001 to 2009, we reduced judicial vacancies from 110 to a low of 34. That has now been reversed, with vacancies staying above 90 since August 2009. The vacancy rate—which was reduced from 10 percent at the end of President Clinton's term, to 6 percent by this date in President Bush's third year, and ultimately to less than 4 percent in 2008—has now swelled to nearly 11 percent.

The two nominations we consider today demonstrate that there is no reason the Senate cannot consider and confirm the President's nominations to the Federal bench in a timely manner. Both nominees show President Obama's commitment to working with home State Senators to identify superbly qualified nominees in districts with vacancies. I thank Senators FEINSTEIN, BOXER, SCHUMER and GILLIBRAND for working with President Obama on these nominations and congratulate them along with the nominees and their families.

Judge John Kronstadt has been nominated to fill a judicial emergency vacancy in the Central District of California. He currently serves on the Los Angeles County Superior Court and previously spent 24 years in private practice. Judge Kronstadt earned his B.A. from Cornell University and his

J.D. from Yale Law School. The Judiciary Committee reported his nomination unanimously on March 10.

Vincent Briccetti has been nominated to fill a judicial emergency vacancy in the Southern District of New York. An attorney for the past 30 years, Mr. Briccetti has spent time in private practice and as a Federal prosecutor. He was unanimously rated by the American Bar Association's Standing Committee on the Federal Judiciary as well qualified to serve on the district court. Mr. Briccetti earned his B.A. from Columbia University and his J.D. from Fordham University School of Law. The Judiciary Committee also reported his nomination unanimously on March 10.

I have thanked the ranking Republican on the Judiciary Committee, Senator GRASSLEY, for his cooperation this year. I see him taking credit for what he calls "our rapid pace." I am glad to see him echo my call to turn the page and end the days of tit for tat on judicial nominations. That is what I did from the first days of the Bush administration in spite of how President Clinton's nominees had been treated.

We have a long way to go to do as well as we did during President Bush's first term, when we confirmed 205 of his judicial nominations, bringing the vacancy rate down from 10 percent to just over 4 percent. We confirmed 100 of those judicial nominations during the 17 months I was chairman during President Bush's first 2 years in office. So far, well into President Obama's third year in office, the Senate has only been allowed to consider 77 of President Obama's Federal circuit and district court nominees. We remain well short of the benchmarks we set during the Bush administration.

The Senate must do better. We must work together to ensure that the Federal judiciary has the judges it needs to provide justice to Americans in courts throughout the country. Judicial vacancies on courts throughout the country hinder the Federal judiciary's ability to fulfill its constitutional role. They create a backlog of cases that prevents people from having their day in court. This is unacceptable. That is why Chief Justice Roberts, Attorney General Holder, White House Counsel Bob Bauer and many others—including the President of the United States—have spoken out and urged the Senate to act. I hope that we will follow their advice and make progress to ensure that the Federal courts are able to function for all Americans.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I yield back time on both sides.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The nomination of Vincent L. Briccetti, of New York, to be United States District Judge for the Southern District of New York, is confirmed.

The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the nomination of John A. Kronstadt, of California, to be United States District Judge for the Central District of California?

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant editor of the Daily Digest called the roll.

Mr. KYL. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from North Carolina (Mr. BURR), the Senator from South Carolina (Mr. GRAHAM), the Senator from Louisiana (Mr. VITTER), and the Senator from Mississippi (Mr. WICKER).

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 96, nays 0, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 58 Ex.]

YEAS—96

Akaka	Feinstein	Merkley
Alexander	Franken	Mikulski
Ayotte	Gillibrand	Moran
Barrasso	Grassley	Murkowski
Baucus	Hagan	Murray
Begich	Harkin	Nelson (NE)
Bennet	Hatch	Nelson (FL)
Bingaman	Hoeben	Paul
Blumenthal	Hutchison	Portman
Blunt	Inhofe	Pryor
Boozman	Inouye	Reed
Boxer	Isakson	Reid
Brown (MA)	Johanns	Risch
Brown (OH)	Johnson (SD)	Roberts
Cantwell	Johnson (WI)	Rockefeller
Cardin	Kerry	Rubio
Carper	Kirk	Sanders
Casey	Klobuchar	Schumer
Chambliss	Kohl	Sessions
Coats	Kyl	Shaheen
Coburn	Landrieu	Shelby
Cochran	Lautenberg	Snowe
Collins	Leahy	Stabenow
Conrad	Lee	Tester
Coons	Levin	Thune
Corker	Lieberman	Toomey
Cornyn	Lugar	Udall (CO)
Crapo	Manchin	Udall (NM)
DeMint	McCain	Warner
Durbin	McCaskill	Webb
Ensign	McConnell	Whitehouse
Enzi	Menendez	Wyden

NOT VOTING—4

Burr	Vitter
Graham	Wicker

The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the motion to reconsider is considered made and laid upon the table. The President will be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate will resume legislative session.

The majority leader is recognized.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that at 2:15 today the Senate proceed to morning business, for debate only, until 5 p.m. today, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

At 2:15, the Senator from Wisconsin, Mr. JOHNSON, will be recognized for up to 20 minutes for the purpose of his maiden speech. Further, at 5 p.m., I ask unanimous consent that I be recognized.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I have spoken to my counterpart, Senator MCCONNELL, this morning. We hope to get an agreement on a way to move forward on the small business bill. There are a few issues outstanding and we would like to get that done. We are going to do our utmost to get an agreement and complete that bill.

RECESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands in recess until 2:15 p.m.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 12:32 p.m., recessed and reassembled at 2:15 p.m., when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. WEBB).

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wisconsin.

PRESERVING AMERICA'S FREEDOM

Mr. JOHNSON of Wisconsin. Mr. President, it is my honor to represent the good people of Wisconsin in the Senate. It is an awesome responsibility—a responsibility I take very seriously.

Today it is my distinct privilege to address this historic body for the first time. It is a moment in time when our Nation is in peril. Not only do we continue to face the very real threat of international terrorism, but we also face a threat of our own making, one that challenges the very foundation of this Republic.

Our Nation was founded on the basis of God-given rights and individual liberty. The genius of our Founding Fathers' vision was rooted in their recognition that more often than not government was something to fear. Government necessarily limited individual freedom and, therefore, government itself must be limited—its potential for growth highly constrained.

During America's first century, this vision was largely upheld. The last century, however, has been an entirely different story. In 1902, the Federal Government spent 2 percent of the Nation's gross domestic product; State and local governments spent 5 percent. Government was close to the governed. The size, scope, and cost of the Federal Government was constrained by the Constitution's enumerated powers. The individual was preeminent, and government's role was modest and pedestrian.

This body played a key role in limiting Federal Government expansion. Debate in the Senate was unlimited. The cloture vote did not exist. As George Washington had said, the Senate was the saucer that cooled the tea.

All that changed in the 20th century's second decade. The Senate adopted the cloture vote and America adopted the 16th amendment. The Federal Government now had the power to tax income, and the Senate had made it easier for government to grow. And guess what. Government grew.

It did grow in reaction to real problems. Trusts had been formed that concentrated power and created monopolies that threatened free markets. Capital did exert too much power over labor. Balance was needed. As our Nation's prosperity grew, the elimination of poverty and retirement insecurity became a public responsibility. Private charity was simply deemed not up to the task. So government acted and government grew.

From 2 percent in 1902 to today, where the Federal Government spends 25 percent of our Nation's economy, and combined all levels of government in the United States now consume 39 percent. By comparison, the size of government in Norway is 40 percent; in Greece it is 47 percent; and in France, 53 percent. In the end, I don't believe Americans want to be like France or Greece. We haven't reached that tipping point yet, but we are extremely close.

There is a reason America holds 5 percent of the world's population and yet accounts for 24 percent of the world's GDP. It is because of freedom, the free market system and the American people. America became a land of unlimited opportunity because we were a nation of self-reliant people. Hard work was valued, personal responsibility expected, and success was celebrated, not demonized. I grew up in that America.

I am very sad to say what I have witnessed during my lifetime is a slow but steady drift and, I would argue, over the last 2 years a lurch toward a culture of entitlement and dependency. This is not an America I recognize. It is not an America that will work.

Even worse, we have granted entitlements and encouraged dependency with little thought as to how we would pay for it. We have racked up enormous debt, and now the bill is coming due. Time is running out.

Last week, the government almost shut down because we were arguing over a few billion dollars, but our debt and deficits are measured in the trillions. Our problem is a thousand times larger than the current debate. Most of us recognize this is simply unsustainable. Most of us know what programs need to be reformed. Most of us want to fix the problem. So let's start addressing these issues now before it is too late.

These are enormous problems and it is easy to become pessimistic, but