

As Democrats and Republicans continue their discussions, I am proud that PETER is bringing a Vermont perspective and Vermont values to the debate. He understands the dangers the United States faces if we default on our debt, but the burden of addressing our mounting national debt must be shared fairly. Budgets are a reflection of our national priorities, and we simply cannot balance our budget on the backs of the most vulnerable alone.

I applaud PETER for bringing his reasoned and responsible message to the debate. I ask unanimous consent that an article on Congressman WELCH from today's *The Hill* be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

REP. WELCH: PARTISAN DIVISION BEGS CLEAN VOTE TO RAISE NATION'S DEBT CEILING

(By Mike Lillis)

Lawmakers seeking a bipartisan deficit-reduction plan to accompany the looming debt-ceiling vote are deluding themselves about the efficiency of Congress, according to the Democrat spearheading the push for a clean debt-limit bill.

Rep. Peter Welch (D-Vt.), who has emerged in recent weeks as the staunchest proponent of a standalone debt-ceiling hike, said the parties are simply too far apart ideologically to reach a budget deal in time to avoid the market turmoil many fear would attend inaction on the debt limit.

In a sit-down interview with *The Hill* from his fourth-floor Longworth office, Welch noted the recent fight over 2011 spending took the country to the very brink of a government shutdown.

The battle over the long-term budget will be even tougher to resolve, he warned, and thus should be tackled separately from the must-pass debt-limit hike.

"If the leadership thinks it can make progress on some steps that would move us toward a better long-term sustainable budget—fine," Welch said Monday. "But if any of us are candid—and we saw how just the simple question of trying to keep the lights on in the government brought us to the midnight hour—do we realistically think that the gap between the [Democrats'] approach on the budget and the [Republicans'] approach on the budget can be bridged in that period of time?"

Congress's systemic dysfunction was on display last month, Welch charged, when Standard & Poor's revised its U.S. debt-rating outlook from "neutral" to "negative." That move was largely influenced not by fiscal considerations, he noted, but by "a lack of confidence in Congress and its ability to make the compromises that are required to get from here to there."

With that in mind, Welch last month spearheaded a letter urging Democratic leaders to unite behind a clean debt-limit bill. It was endorsed by 114 Democrats. The potential economic fallout of flirting with default, he warned, is too serious to saddle the debt-ceiling vote with politically charged budget conditions.

"This is not a matter of ripping up the credit card; this is a matter of paying off the credit card," Welch said. "And if you don't allow us to do that . . . we're basically saying we're going to stiff our creditors."

For almost a century, Congress has set a cap on the nation's debt, allowing the government to issue bonds to fund its deficit spending—up to a certain level.

Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner has projected the government will surpass the current \$14.3 trillion ceiling on May 16. Recognizing the improbability that Congress will act before then, Geithner on Monday told lawmakers he can take "extraordinary measures" to stave off default for several more months. He set the new deadline at Aug. 2.

All sides of the debate agree that Congress will ultimately raise the debt ceiling. The question remains how it will do that.

Republican leaders have insisted that the debt-limit vote be coupled with a strategy for bringing down deficits over the long haul—a sentiment shared by a growing number of Senate Democrats.

"The vehicle upon which something is likely to be achieved to reduce government spending is the debt ceiling," Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) told reporters Tuesday. "I don't intend to vote to raise the debt ceiling unless we do something significant about the debt."

In the House, Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-Va.) suggested Tuesday that Republicans might stage a vote on a clean debt-ceiling bill just to prove it can't pass—a strategy Welch blasted as a "political stunt."

Rep. John Larson (Conn.), chairman of the House Democratic Caucus, said this week that Democrats are "amenable" to strategies that couple the debt-ceiling vote with a long-term deficit-reduction plan—with a major caveat.

"They just have to be consistent with not touching Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid and dismantling the social compact between the American people and [their] government," Larson told *The Hill* on Tuesday.

Therein lies the trouble, as GOP leaders are eyeing cuts to all of those programs as part of their deficit-reduction plans.

Leaders from both parties, representing both chambers, will meet Thursday with Vice President Biden in the first official attempt to reach a long-term budget agreement.

Welch, a chief deputy whip, doesn't have much faith in a quick resolution.

"The more the clock ticks, the more apprehension you'll start to see in the markets," he warned. "When this happens, it could happen very quickly—and with devastating consequences."

It's not the first time Welch has emerged on the national stage amid a thorny budget debate. In December, he was among the fiercest opponents of the agreement between Obama and McConnell to extend the George W. Bush-era tax cuts through 2012, even for the wealthiest Americans.

This week, he tempered that criticism with a bit of pragmatism.

"It was not a great deal, but it was the best deal [we could get]," he said. "My criticism also acknowledges that the president had his reasons, and we in the House—the Democrats—didn't have the votes."

Welch was also highly critical of the cuts to low-income energy subsidies contained in Obama's 2012 budget proposal—cuts Welch said would "literally freeze" his constituents who rely on them to pay their heating bills.

"A lot of us understood that the president was making a statement," Welch said Monday of that critique. "I respected what motivated the president."

In some sense, Welch's rise to prominence is as improbable as passage of the clean debt-ceiling hike he's lobbying. The third-term liberal is a relative newcomer to Capitol Hill. And the Vermont he represents hardly shares the national political reputation that characterizes many of its New England neighbors.

Yet lawmakers on both sides of the aisle say Welch's emergence is no accident. Rep.

Jim Cooper (D-Tenn.), a Blue Dog leader who shares a Capitol Hill apartment with the liberal Welch, said his roommate studies hard and uses his experience as a state legislator to great advantage in Washington.

"Peter is a nerd, just like me," Cooper said in an e-mail. "He actually takes the time to read legislation and understand the issues, which has become a rarity in Washington. Coming from state government, where you need to balance the budget every year, he understands the importance of paying for legislation. This has made him a key consensus builder in the House and one of the strongest advocates of fiscal responsibility in the Progressive Caucus."

Rep. Peter Roskam (Ill.), the Republican chief deputy whip, called Welch "a happy warrior"—the rare legislator who "firmly believes in a set of principles" but is also quick to engage the other side.

"When the country looks at Washington, they feel like members are just talking past each other," Roskam told *The Hill* this week. Welch, on the other hand, "is very engaging."

The bookshelf in Welch's office tells a similar story. It holds volumes by Nancy Pelosi as well as T. Boone Pickens; it boasts the 9/11 Commission Report but also a collection of poems by Rumi, a 13th-century Persian poet and mystic.

Welch is also one of the few Democrats willing to go face to face with Sean Hannity, the conservative—and characteristically combative—Fox News pundit.

Welch conceded Monday that he "got the Democratic treatment" during his recent Hannity appearance. But only by reaching across the aisle, he said, will lawmakers in Washington ever be truly effective.

"A lot of us get in arguments as though it's an ideological battle to be won, rather than a practical problem to be solved. . . . That doesn't work for the country," he said. "I hope that we all can take a step back—all of us—and see that there's real advantage to us trying to work together."

HONORING THE MILITARY AND INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITIES

Ms. SNOWE. Mr. President, I was pleased to join Senate Majority Leader REID and Republican Leader MCCONNELL in offering the strongest possible support for the Senate resolution honoring our heroic military and intelligence communities responsible for carrying out the mission that resulted in the death of one of the most reviled murderers and nefarious menaces of our time—Osama bin Laden.

As a senior member of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, I cannot begin to commend our Armed Forces and intelligence professionals enough for their absolutely exceptional and flawless heroism in conducting the most perilous and consequential of operations. With the highest level of perseverance, professionalism, service, and sacrifice conceivable, our bravest and finest joined forces and brought the day of reckoning and justice that long awaited this wretched terrorist.

This landmark event is indeed a significant stride in the war on terrorism. Since 9/11, the efforts of our tireless and dedicated Armed Forces and intelligence operators have sought to keep our homeland safe and make the world more secure. On May 1, 2011, these efforts culminated in the death of one of

terrorism's global leaders, marking a decisive milestone in the war against terror. We are blessed with such brave and valiant men and women serving this country at home and abroad. These heroes have made selfless sacrifices and put their lives on the line for our Nation. While we are sleeping at night, they are fighting on our behalf. During this now-legendary May 1 raid, their mettle and courage were brought to the forefront for all the world to see.

As a result of the horrendous events of September 11, 2001, that are etched upon our consciousness for all time, we will never be the same. Out of the rubble of September 11 rose our resolve, out of despair grew our determination, and out of the hate that was perpetrated upon us stood our humanity. We illustrated in word and deed that the iconic American spirit is stronger and more permanent than any pain or suffering that can be inflicted upon us.

If the likes of Osama bin Laden laid bare the unimaginable cruelties of which humankind is capable, it also imbued forever within our minds the heights to which the human spirit can rise—even and especially in the face of the most daunting of circumstances. The resilience we recaptured as a country remains pressed upon our national psyche and the memory of the inspirational sacrifices of so many heroic Americans who perished that September morning will forever have a home in our hearts and our prayers.

I think about all of the servicemen and women who willingly joined the military specifically to fight because of what happened on 9/11, and the sacrifices of their families and the lives that have been lost. Today, and every day, we express immeasurable gratitude to the over 6,000 Americans in Iraq and Afghanistan who have given their lives to make the world a safer place. Without their vital contributions, we could not have achieved this milestone today. This resolution will stand as a testament that without the stalwart efforts and unwavering dedication of our valorous men and women in uniform and within our intelligence community, this threshold moment in our nation's history would not have been possible.

While justice has been brought to the face of terrorism for the last decade, we must remain vigilant. In the aftermath of bin Laden's death, the threat posed by al-Qaida and other terrorist groups continues real and unabated—and we must remain on high alert. British statesman Edmund Burke once famously said “all that is necessary for the forces of evil to win in the world is for enough good men to do nothing.” These heroic patriots whom we laud today tracked their target with precision, preparation, and patience, as well as an unmistakable sense of duty and valor reserved for only the best among us, and they delivered a death knell that will reverberate for generations to come.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

TRIBUTE TO ERICA QUIN-EASTER

- Ms. SNOWE. Mr. President, women-owned businesses are growing at one and a half times the national average in the United States. This astonishing statistic alone is impressive, but it should also be noted that despite this growth women owned small businesses face unique challenges. Thankfully there are programs in place that provide guidance to these entrepreneurs by individuals with specialized knowledge in women's business issues.

Today I commend and recognize an exceptional woman who epitomizes the core values of entrepreneurship with conviction and competence—Erica Quin-Easter, a microenterprise coordinator at Maine Centers for Women, Work & Community in Presque Isle. Ms. Quin-Easter was recently named Maine's 2011 Women in Business Champion by the U.S. Small Business Administration, and she is being recognized today for this achievement at a luncheon in Bangor. This is a richly deserved honor as Ms. Quin-Easter continuously focuses on enhancing women's abilities to bring to fruition their dreams of small business ownership.

Maine Centers for Women, Work & Community was founded in 1978. It serves as the only statewide comprehensive women's economic development organization in Maine. In 2008, Ms. Quin-Easter joined the Maine Center for Women, Work & Community at the Presque Isle location. The Presque Isle location serves Aroostook County, our State's largest and northernmost county. Since joining Women, Work & Community, Ms. Quin-Easter has assisted nearly 500 entrepreneurs on topics from loans to taxes to business plans.

Ms. Quin-Easter also strives to educate the greater small business community, extending her reach beyond those who may utilize the center's resources. For example, this past March she wrote an article for the Bangor Daily News to enlighten small business owners on taking control of their business finances. Work such as this demonstrates Ms. Quin-Easter's commitment to ensuring that small businesses throughout Maine prosper. She also assisted in organizing a day-long seminar for women called “ALL for Women”—Aroostook Leadership and Learning for Women—to connect them with other business and community leaders and mentors to assist in gathering insight and confidence to reach for their dreams of self employment.

In addition to Ms. Quin-Easter's excellent work for small businesses, she continually seeks to enhance and promote her community. As a long-time musician and composer, Ms. Quin-Easter recently collaborated with poets and musicians to arrange “(F)light.” This piece will showcase Women in Harmony, a 60-member chorus of women's voices in Portland, with whom Ms. Quin-Easter previously sang.

Furthermore, Ms. Quin-Easter works on the board of directors for Momentum Aroostook Board and Wintergreen Arts Center. While engaging in these philanthropic endeavors, Ms. Quin-Easter is also a University of Maine Canadian-American Center fellow. For one person this is an extraordinary workload, but Ms. Quin-Easter's daily energy and enthusiasm shine throughout all her work. Her many contributions to Maine, and Aroostook County in particular, demonstrate her commitment to enhancing cultural diversity across our State and helping others improve their own conditions.

Erica Quin-Easter is truly an inspiring individual. Her dedication to encouraging and counseling women entrepreneurs and small business owners is exemplary and inspiring. I thank Erica for her tireless work on behalf of women and congratulate her on the distinction of being named “Maine's 2011 Women in Business Champion” by the U.S. Small Business Administration, a very well deserved honor.●

HONORING WORLD WAR II VETERANS

- Mr. VITTER. Mr. President, I rise today to acknowledge and honor a very special group of veterans. In appreciation of their selfless service to our country, Brookshire's Grocery and Super 1 Foods have sponsored a World War II Heroes Flight that will take 33 World War II veterans to Washington, DC, free of charge. A group of 27 veterans will be in Washington May 10–12, 2011, for this very special trip.

I want to take a moment to thank all these brave veterans visiting our Capital city this trip:

Peter Ballas, Shreveport, LA; Sam Canter, Blanchard, LA; Nick DeFatta, Shreveport, LA; Les Eckhard, Shreveport, LA; Chuck Fellers, Shreveport, LA; Mason Ferguson, Shreveport, LA; Dale Foster, Homer, LA; James Fraiser, Minden, LA; Bootsie Frazier, Shreveport, LA; Aubrey Gaston, Choudrant, LA; Frank Guraedy, West Monroe, LA; Bobby Harrell, Shreveport, LA; Snookie Harrison, Shreveport, LA; Ken Hawkins, Bossier City, LA; Robert Hawkins, Shreveport, LA; Gene Hodgkins, Monroe, LA; Pete Johnson, Shreveport, LA; Dorothy Kneipp, Keithville, LA; Glenn Murphy, Alexandria, LA; Don Odom, Homer, LA; Earl Owens, Shreveport, LA; Frank Porter, Shreveport, LA; Ray Rushing, Shreveport, LA; Grady Shows, Shreveport, LA; Don Tompkins, Bossier City, LA; Wilmer Warrington, Shreveport, LA; Fred Wells, Shreveport, LA.

While visiting Washington, DC, these veterans will tour Arlington National Cemetery, the Iwo Jima Memorial, the World War II Memorial, the U.S. Capitol, and other sites. This program provides many veterans with their only opportunity to see the great memorials dedicated to their service.

Thus, today, I ask my colleagues to join me in honoring these great Americans and thanking them for their devotion and service to our Nation.●