

are only now starting to recover." The majority of the American people we represent say opening that door would be "disastrous"—not just a bad idea, not one that would lead to discomfort, but one that would lead to disaster. It would not be just irresponsible to make that choice; we would be out of our minds.

Well, we are going to have to make up our minds and do that sooner rather than later. That is because today America has hit a milestone, but it is not one anyone is celebrating. Today is the day we hit our debt limit, which means we have reached the maximum amount the United States is allowed to borrow. It means that with each passing day, we are that much closer to the disaster that would come from defaulting on our debts—the day we would forfeit, for the first time ever in the history of this great country, the full faith and credit of the United States. This is the crisis Chairman Bernanke called "catastrophic," what Secretary Geithner warned 10 times over would make the great recession look small, and what the American people demand we avoid.

Defaulting on our obligations would be unprecedented, but it is not unavoidable. We can be responsible leaders and choose to open the other door. It might not be ideal, but we have to make a choice. Door No. 2 is a much better, safer, and smarter choice.

Let's be clear about what the debt limit does and does not mean. Raising the debt limit when it is absolutely necessary—and to do it right now—lets us pay the bills that have already come due. We borrow a lot of money in this country. That is not a new phenomenon or unique to one party; it is how America has done business for centuries. Borrowing a lot of money means we owe a lot of money. We cannot cut off our own ability to pay those debts.

Here is what it does not mean. The emergency we enter today is not about a penny of new spending. It is not about new programs or new taxes. It is not about creating new obligations, only meeting existing ones. The debt limit is about paying what we already owe.

If we do not act, if we allow the United States to default, the day of reckoning will be much, much worse than today. Things will be much, much worse for American jobs, families, and businesses than they already are. And the fallout will be felt around the world.

Right now, a lot of people are reaching for that first door—the one that leads to catastrophe and crisis. They are looking at this choice through a political lens, not an economic lens, and they are willing to risk the strength of our economy just to make a political point. We cannot afford to play these political games and trigger a default crisis that would lead to a catastrophe. We cannot afford to make unrealistic demands or hold hostage policies that affect real people. Speak-

er BOEHNER recently asked that everyone should act as an adult and reach a solution. I second that request. Let's open the second door and honor our obligations.

Once we avert this crisis, we can have another important adult conversation—a conversation about saving. One good way to do that—not the only way but a good, easy, obvious way—is to cut wasteful spending. Taxpayer giveaways to companies pulling in record profits is the epitome of wasteful spending. We all know which companies I am talking about—the five biggest oil and gas companies. It is time to make sure we take away incentives they do not need and we cannot afford. They can afford it. We cannot afford to give it to them.

That is a question that will come before the Senate this week. It is a question of fairness, really. The bonus checks taxpayers are writing to Big Oil are absurd and obscene. They defy common sense.

The big oil companies, we know, are not hurting. It does not need a hand, Big Oil. In the first 3 months of this year, the oil industry made \$36 billion in profits alone—not revenues, profits. That is \$12 billion a month. That is \$3 billion a week. It is pretty good money. Meanwhile, the American taxpayer is giving those same successful companies \$4 billion a year. So when you take these companies' profits and add in the handout you, I, and every taxpayer gives them, America is saying to Big Oil: You make \$3 billion a week for 52 weeks, and we will basically give you a 53rd week for free.

Well, what about the average American taxpayer, the one who is footing the bill for this Big Oil bonus? ExxonMobil now pays a smaller share of its income in taxes than the average taxpayer. This is not because the average American is paying more in taxes; it is because Big Oil is paying less.

Over the last 4 years, since Democrats have controlled the Senate, we have cut taxes for middle-class families nine different times. The Democratic Senate has passed a \$1.5 trillion tax cut in different ways. Again, the Democratic Senate has passed a \$1.5 trillion tax cut. And now families pay less in Federal taxes as a share of the economy than since 1950, when Harry Truman was President.

So this really is a question of fairness. It is about Big Oil paying its fair share. It is also a question of priorities. The people who want to keep giving Big Oil \$4 billion a year are the same ones who want to take the social safety net away from the sick, seniors, and the poor. These people kick and scream about investing in cancer research or protecting student loans that help so many afford the rising costs of college, but ask them to recognize the absurdity of giving Big Oil taxpayer money they do not need and they cover their eyes and plug their ears. Ask them to defend it, and they cannot.

That is what happened last week. The Nation watched the Big Oil bosses

try to defend it. Frankly, they did not do a very good job. It is not their fault for doing so poorly—they were trying to defend an indefensible position. But it is their fault for holding that position.

So this is a question of fairness and a question of priorities. It certainly is a question of economics. But it is not a question of gas prices. Independent, nonpartisan experts—and even some of the CEOs themselves—say taking away these giveaways does not have a thing to do with the price at the pump. Anyone who claims otherwise is simply not telling the truth.

Those distractions are disruptive to this debate. So are the gratuitous attacks on the patriotism of the debaters. One of those companies, ConocoPhillips, said using taxpayer money to pay down the deficit rather than pad Big Oil's pockets was "un-American." It is hard to comprehend that, Mr. President. ConocoPhillips said using taxpayer money to pay down the deficit rather than pad Big Oil's pockets was "un-American." That is ConocoPhillips' word, not mine. Attacking another's patriotism has no place in this debate. It is offensive that this company has done that; that is, saying that because we want to pay down the debt and not give these bonuses to these big oil companies is un-American? I do not think so. It is offensive that this company has done that and shameful that its CEO, whom we saw on TV this past week, refuses to recant or to apologize. I disagree strongly with his position on this issue. I disagree with his claim that only one side of this debate loves this country. I question his sense of fairness. I question his priorities. But I do not question his patriotism. He should not question mine.

Would the Chair announce morning business.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. COONS). Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business for debate only until 5 p.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

Mr. REID. I suggest the absence of a quorum, Mr. President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

THE DEBT

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. President, when word spread that American forces

found and killed Osama bin Laden, Americans gathered at Ground Zero, in New York's Times Square and in front of the White House to celebrate the news. For more than a decade bin Laden had been on the FBI's top ten most wanted list, and the announcement that our military conducted the successful operation in Pakistan filled us with national pride.

After nearly 3,000 Americans died in the September 11 attacks, bin Laden, the plot's mastermind, was named public enemy No. 1. The years following that tragic day, he eluded capture. Justice finally caught up with him, as a result of years of hard work and dedication from the brave men and women in our military and intelligence community. The death of Osama bin Laden allows us to close this chapter of the global war on terror, but it does not mean the end of the threat from al-Qaida or other like-minded organizations. We must remain vigilant, both at home and abroad, in the fight against terrorism.

The fact is, terrorism is not the only major threat to our sovereignty. There is one that lurks much closer to home, born and bred right here in this town. I am speaking about Washington's addiction to spending.

In testimony before Congress, Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen said the greatest threat to our sovereignty is not Iran; not al-Qaida; not radical Islam—it is our national debt. Most people don't think of spending in terms of a threat to our sovereignty; and those who do are rarely so blunt. But Admiral Mullen is right. We simply cannot continue to operate at this pace.

This year alone, the Federal Government will spend \$3.7 trillion while only collecting \$2.2 trillion. Does this sound like responsible budgeting to anyone? The average American family does not have this luxury. If you or I tried to run our household this way, the bank would eventually cut us off. It is time we apply that lesson to Washington. It is time we cut off the government.

This is long overdue. Our national debt stands at a jaw-dropping \$14.3 trillion. Foreign holdings account for almost half of these obligations, and much of that is owed to countries that are not always friendly to us. This is the very reason Admiral Mullen sounded the alarm on how big of a security threat our debt has become. Being indebted to countries with ideals, value systems and agendas that are often at odds with ours puts us in a very precarious position.

For example, China owns \$1.2 trillion of our debt. The Chinese Government contends that it won't use this liability for political advantage, but the government also claims there are no human rights violations in that country. Clearly, the Chinese Government's word is not a promise we should bank on.

Along with the Chinese, a portion of the list of foreign creditors reads like a

"who's who" of dictatorial regimes. Iran, Venezuela, Libya make up the rouges gallery of nations that owns some of our debt. These dictatorships, along with other oil exporting nations such as Saudi Arabia—whose role in spreading radical Islam is well documented—come in at No. 4 on the list of foreign creditors. We are currently engaged in an operation with our NATO allies against Qadhafi's regime, yet rely on it in part, no matter how small, to keep our government operational.

This is the problem with our reckless spending. We cannot put ourselves at the mercy of foreign governments. It is irresponsible and dangerous. We must act now to get our spending under control and pay down our debt.

We cannot run a country on a Visa card; nor can we keep kicking the can down the road for future generations to address. Our debt is a national security problem, and this one our brave men and women in uniform cannot save us from. It is up to us to make the tough decisions to get our economic house in order and the time is now to act.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

OIL AND GAS SUBSIDIES

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, the subsidies to oil and gas companies in the form of tax breaks cost the Federal Government in the neighborhood of \$4 billion a year. What most Democrats, including this Democrat, propose to do is to end those subsidies and to use the money to reduce our Federal budget deficit. This is not a particularly complicated issue.

If oil and gas companies were struggling, if a large number of jobs were at risk, if ending these subsidies threatened to increase the price families have to pay for gasoline or fuel oil or if ending them would create a drag on our fragile economic recovery—if any of those things were true, this might be a closer call. But they are not true. We are subsidizing massively profitable oil companies. Nearly every independent analyst—and even some from the oil industry itself—tells us this proposal will not alter the economic fundamentals that determine gasoline prices. Oil production, and therefore the jobs it creates, will not decline if we pass this bill. Struggling families and small businesses will not pay more because we end these subsidies. And by ending them, we can help close a budget deficit we all agree is a significant problem.

The arguments against this measure are misguided. Republicans have claimed it would increase gas prices. Independent economists disagree. For

instance, the nonpartisan Congressional Research Service reported last week that:

Prices are well in excess of costs and a small increase in taxes would therefore be less likely to reduce oil output and hence increase petroleum product gasoline prices.

Even the chief tax expert of the American Petroleum Institute said last week that the proposal:

... would not affect the global economics underpinning oil supply and demand, which explain today's gasoline prices.

That is an important point to keep in mind. The price of oil depends on a number of factors, one of which is supply and demand for this internationally traded commodity. Another factor, one which I and several other Senators believe bears further examination, is the role of speculation in that market. But the money we are talking about saving is relatively small in the context of a massive global marketplace for oil.

It is also small relative to the profits oil companies have reaped. The five companies that would be affected by the proposal we support made a combined \$76 billion in profit in 2010. That is not revenue; that is not sales; that is profit—\$76 billion. From 2001 to 2010, their combined profit approached \$1 trillion. With the price of oil in the neighborhood of \$100 a barrel, these record profits are likely to continue. These companies do not need taxpayer assistance.

At the same time, the money we spend helping them is increasing the budget deficit—a deficit our Republican friends say justifies making dramatic reductions in health care for our seniors, support for our college students, Head Start for our youngest students, and other Draconian cuts. Yet tax breaks for companies making billions of dollars a year in profits is something they say we can afford. I don't buy it.

More importantly, the American people don't buy it. The American people know these tax breaks we can't afford for companies that can more than afford to lose them are wrong. They know if we are going to get serious about our debt problem, we need to eliminate tax expenditures that contribute to our deficit. They know if we can't tackle such an obvious example of wasteful spending as this, further reform is unlikely. The American people recognize the fundamental unfairness of tax breaks for oil companies making billions in profits at the same time working families are told they will have to do with less.

Last week, with the CEOs of major oil companies testifying before the Finance Committee, they said they want to be treated like everybody else. I say, fine, let's do that. Let's tell the massively profitable oil companies not to expect tax subsidies from Uncle Sam. Let's expect those companies to give a little bit as we address the budget deficit, just as middle-class American