

Few can see past the speeches and the political battles to the doctor over there that is tending the infirm, and to the hospital that is receiving those in anguish, or feel in their heart painful wrath at the injustice which denies the miracle of healing to the old and to the poor.

Those injustices do not exist like they used to because of Medicare, but they still exist. Potentially, they are still out there. The old and the poor among us still seek help and healing, and it is still our responsibility to act not on political impulses but with human concern and compassion. It is still our responsibility not to be motivated by short-term politics but to be moved by the people who need Medicare, the people who count on the safety net to keep them from poverty, illness, and worse—death.

If we pay attention to those people, we will notice something else also. While Republicans are tripping over themselves trying to decide whether they want to kill Medicare, do you know who has not changed their minds at all? The American people. We are on their side. They have not wavered one inch. They have been as constant as the Republicans have been erratic. They have been consistent, and they have been clear: They do not want us to destroy their Medicare—their Medicare. We owe it to them to listen.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 3 p.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I 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.

Ms. MURKOWSKI. 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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.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.

MINISTERIAL ARCTIC COUNCIL MEETING

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, last week, I was honored to participate in a very historic trip to attend the seventh ministerial meeting of the Arctic Council in Nuuk, Greenland. I attended with Secretary of State Clinton, as well as Secretary of the Interior, Secretary Salazar.

The Arctic Council was founded in 1995. It is an intergovernmental association. There are eight member states within the territory that is contained

within the Arctic Circle. The group includes Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, the Russian Federation, and the United States. There are also six permanent participants representing the indigenous people of the region.

The trip was historic for a couple reasons. It was the first time a Secretary of State had led the U.S. delegation to the Arctic Council meeting. The fact that not only Secretary Clinton led it as Secretary of State but she was joined by a second Secretary, the Secretary of the Interior, certainly made that historic. It was also the first time a Member of Congress had attended the Arctic Council meeting.

We met with Foreign Ministers of the eight Arctic Council nations and the representatives of indigenous groups to discuss issues that are related to Arctic governance, climate change, and environmental protection. We watched the Ministers sign a historic search-and-rescue agreement.

The Arctic Council also increased its organizational structure. They formed a standing Secretariat that will be established in Tromsø, Norway. They also established criteria for the admission of new observers to the Council. The People's Republic of China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Italy, and the European Union are all seeking observer status to the Arctic Council, which might cause some to wonder why are all these non-Arctic nations interested in what is going on within the Arctic. I think that speaks to the evolving role of the Arctic in geopolitics in the world as we know it today.

The search-and-rescue agreement, the first ever legally binding agreement among Arctic states negotiated under the auspices of the Arctic Council, will strengthen the cooperation on search and rescue between Arctic states.

As the Arctic sea ice decreases, maritime activities are clearly on the rise in the Arctic. Aviation traffic is also on the rise as we see new polar aviation routes across the Arctic airspace in several directions. But limited rescue resources, challenging weather conditions, and the remoteness of the area render the operations difficult in the Arctic, making it very important that we have this coordination among the Arctic nations.

Under the agreement on the U.S. side, the Coast Guard will be the lead Federal agency for the search and rescue in the Arctic. While we applaud the role the Coast Guard plays historically—a very long, distinguished history of operating and conducting rescues in the Arctic—the current status of the Coast Guard's service and aviation fleets makes conducting search-and-rescue operations in the Arctic very challenging. With the scheduled decommissioning of the POLAR SEA, the Coast Guard will maintain only one—only one—heavy icebreaker in its fleet, and it is not expected to return

to service until the year 2013. They are doing some work on that vessel. While the Coast Guard does have a medium-endurance icebreaker, the HEALY, the cutter is clearly not equipped to handle the thick, multiyear ice that is present within the Arctic.

On the aviation side of the Coast Guard operations, the Coast Guard C-130 aircraft stationed in Kodiak, AK, are the only aircraft in their inventory that are capable to make the direct flights to the Arctic.

To give some sense of the scope, here is a map of the Arctic. The United States is up here. Everything is upside down. I apologize for that, but that is the way the world is. Kodiak is an island off the southern part of the State. Barrow is down here. This is where the air assets are stationed in Kodiak. To get to any search-and-rescue operations in the Chukchi Sea, in the Beaufort off Barrow or Prudhoe, it is over 900 miles. It is the same distance as the distance between Washington, DC, and Miami. If there were an incident in Miami, the helicopters would have to fly from Washington to get there to provide for the rescue.

Given the often harsh weather conditions in the Arctic, combined with a lack of infrastructure to provide for any forward deploying basing of helicopters, the Coast Guard's C-130s possibly can provide the search part of the rescue, but it is very difficult to get to the rescue site. This lack of maritime resources and shore-based infrastructure to protect our aviation resources places the Coast Guard and the United States in a difficult situation in the Arctic. Without concerted efforts and a focused policy for the Arctic, the United States and our Coast Guard are going to continue to be ill-equipped to conduct the search-and-rescue operations that are going to become increasingly necessary as amounts of sea ice continue to diminish and the levels of maritime vessel traffic increase. As former Admiral Allen, former Commandant of the Coast Guard, would say: I cannot discuss too much about climate change, but I can tell you there is more open sea that I am responsible for in the Arctic. We are clearly seeing that.

It has been projected that a seasonal ice-free Arctic Ocean was decades away and that maritime shipping through the Northwest Passage, through the Northern Sea route above Russia and direct transit across the Arctic Ocean was going to be few and far between. But last year, Russia sent a large ice-breaking bulk tanker through the Northern Sea route and across the Arctic, carrying hydrocarbons bound for Asia. The Russian Federation has received 15 icebreaker escort requests to provide navigational support through the Northern Sea route for this year. Compare that to last year when they only had three requests. We can see the level of commerce stepping up.

Transit through the Northern Sea route or the Northeast passage, as it is

also called, cuts 5,000 miles and 8 days off the Suez route between Europe and Asia. We can see why other nations would have an interest in what is going on up there. If they can cut their transit time, it is money and an opportunity for them.

Interest in the Arctic by both the general public, the media, and the Arctic and the non-Arctic nations continues to grow for many reasons. The Arctic is a vast area. We can see from the map it is essentially one-sixth of the Earth's landmass. It has a population within the Arctic area—this red line, if we can see it, is essentially all of the Arctic nations. In the governments that are contained within, there are some 4 million people who live in this region, with over 30 different indigenous people and dozens of languages. While the land is clearly massive in size and relatively barren, it is not like Antarctica, where there are no indigenous people and no governance. The eight Arctic nations are sovereign governments with laws that govern their land and their people.

The Arctic holds, clearly, vast amounts of energy. We have known this for some time. But until recently, the resources of the Arctic were deemed to be too difficult to access. They are covered with ice. They are difficult to access, and they are expensive to develop. With increasing access and high energy and mineral prices, the Arctic's wealth, which is estimated to contain approximately 22 percent of the world's remaining oil and gas reserves—22 percent of the world's remaining oil and gas reserves within the Arctic area—is obviously of great interest. It is now being actively explored and developed. Six of the eight member nations of the Arctic Council are exploring or developing energy resources in their own waters.

This makes energy exploration perhaps among the more important and perhaps the most serious issues for Arctic policy as we move forward. This includes conventional oil and natural gas but also the methane hydrates and some of the less conventional forms. Offshore Alaska, we are estimating about 15 billion barrels of oil in a concentrated area of the Chukchi Sea, and over in the Beaufort Sea about 8 billion barrels.

We have suffered serious delays in exploration, but I am hopeful we will see exploratory wells prove up this next summer. While the U.S. Geological Survey tells us the region has the world's largest undiscovered oil and gas deposits, we also think it holds huge amounts of other minerals, such as coal, nickel, copper, tungsten, lead, zinc, gold, silver, diamonds, manganese, chromium, and titanium. The potential for the mineral resource is equally significant.

There is a natural and sometimes reflective tendency to question how in the world it can ever be safe or even economic to drill and produce in such harsh, misunderstood, and clearly dis-

tant environments. But it is happening. It is happening today, and the technology and the engineering behind some of the existing and proposed activities are advancing rather rapidly.

While we struggle in the United States with moving ahead with offshore development in Alaskan waters, our neighbors are rapidly moving forward on Arctic energy development. Russia, which is just 53 miles from Alaska's shoreline, is turning its eye to the Arctic's vast energy reserves as they are building the first offshore oil rig that can withstand temperatures as low as minus 50 degrees Celsius and then heavy packed ice around it as well. As their oil production is in decline, they are also reducing taxes and bureaucratic hurdles to encourage new oil development within the Arctic.

Norway has been exploring and producing energy in the Arctic the longest of the Arctic nations. They have found the way—led the way—for energy development and other activities, such as fisheries, to coexist. They also lead the world in developing technology to clean up oil in Arctic waters.

Energy development, as well as protection of the environment, must go hand in hand. It is as simple as that. I was pleased the Arctic Council announced the formation of a new task force that will negotiate measures for oilspill preparedness and response throughout the region. The decision to launch these negotiations is evidence of the strong commitment to proactively address emerging issues within the region and to create international protocols to prevent and clean up offshore oilspills in areas of the region that are becoming increasingly accessible to exploration because of a changing climate.

One question I was asked seemingly everywhere I went when I was in Greenland was: What is the U.S. position on the Law of the Sea Treaty? When is the Senate going to move on this treaty? The U.S. delegation reiterated its support for the ratification of the Convention for the Law of the Sea. I happen to believe it is crucial that the United States be a party to this treaty rather than an outsider who hopes our interests are not going to be damaged. Accession to the Convention would give current and future administrations both enhanced credibility and leverage in calling upon other nations to meet Convention responsibilities. Given the support for the treaty by Arctic nations and the drive to develop national resources, the treaty will also provide the stability and the certainty that is vital for investment in our maritime commerce.

It should be pointed out that the United States is the only Arctic nation that is not a party to the Law of the Sea Convention. The treaty was first submitted to the United States for approval back in 1994. It has not been approved yet. Canada and Denmark joined the treaty in 2003 and 2004, respectively. But until the United States

accedes to the treaty, it cannot submit its data regarding the extent of its extended continental shelf to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf established under the treaty. Without a Commission recommendation regarding such data, the legal foundation for ECS limits is much less certain than if the United States were a party to the treaty.

Russia submitted an extended continental shelf claim in 2002 that would grant them 460,000 square miles of the Arctic Ocean's bottom resources. We can see the green is Russia's extended Continental shelf, but this lighter green is the area Russia has submitted to the Commission. This is an area the size of the State of Texas, California, and Indiana combined. Denmark and Canada are also anxious to establish their own claims in the Arctic. Norway's claim is currently under review by the Commission on Limits of the Continental Shelf.

According to the U.S. Arctic Research Commission, if the United States were to become a party to the treaty, we could lay claim to an area the size of the State of California. So if you look again, Alaska—again, up on the top—this area here is the area that is within the United States EEZ, this 200-mile area. But this area here—an area again about the size of the State of California—is what our mapping indicates we would be able to submit a claim to the commission for if we were party to the treaty.

So this whole area, again, would be area the United States would be able to claim. If we fail to accede to the treaty, and we are sitting on the outside, we have no right to move forward with our claim. If we do not become a party to the treaty, our opportunity to make the claim and have the international community respect it diminishes considerably, as does our ability to challenge the claims of any other nation.

Some have described the scenario in the Arctic as a "race for resources" or even an "arms race." But after seeing the international cooperation at the Arctic Council, I believe what we have is an opportunity. This should be a race for cooperation, a race for sustainable management within the Arctic. The Arctic offers a great opportunity to work collaboratively. It is one area where the Obama administration can highlight the international cooperation in the implementation of its U.S. foreign policy. Think about what the administration is poised to do with the "reset" with Russia. I think the Arctic is a perfect area to do just that.

What does the future hold for the Arctic? I believe the pace of change in the Arctic absolutely demands greater attention be focused to the Arctic. It was music to my ears to hear the Secretary of State acknowledge the United States is an Arctic nation. We are an Arctic nation because of Alaska and its people. That was incredibly significant to hear that not only as a U.S. citizen but for the other Arctic nations to hear

that statement from our Secretary of State.

The implications of the dynamic changing Arctic for U.S. security, economic, environmental, and political interests depend on greater attention, greater energy, and greater focus on the Arctic itself. But it will take robust diplomacy and very likely recognition, as Secretary Clinton has reminded us, that the interest in the Arctic is not just limited to the five Arctic coastal States or even the eight countries that make up the permanent members of the Arctic Council. It will take a level of cooperation, a level of collaboration to include the non-Arctic states as well. But I am pleased that ever so slowly the United States seems to be waking up to the fact that we are an Arctic nation and willing to take up the responsibilities as such.

I am confident with the leadership of the Members of Congress, the administration, and from the Arctic community at large, we can continue to highlight the strategic importance of the Arctic for the United States. I believe the Arctic Council meeting may be just the turning point for American leadership in the Arctic.

With that, Mr. President, I thank you for your attention, I yield the floor, and I 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. 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.

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, I ask to speak in morning business.

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

SENATE BUDGET

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, I am deeply concerned by our growing financial crisis and really deeply angered by the failure of this Senate to take any meaningful steps to address it. I am going to announce steps I will take to try to force this Senate to do its job since our Democratic leaders seem determined to prevent the people's work from being done.

As ranking member of the Budget Committee, I see quite plainly that the process the statutory act requires is not being followed at a time in which we have never faced a greater systemic long-term debt crisis as we face today. The act calls for a budget to be produced by April 15, the Budget Committee to have meetings by April 1, and here we are toward the end of May, about to recess, and we have not even had a hearing in the Budget Committee on the markup of a budget.

Budgets, of course, are able to be passed by a simple majority in the Senate, and they have given the majority

party in the Senate the opportunity—really the responsibility—to set forth their vision about the financial future of America, to set forth their priorities, how they would conduct the people's business.

We know the House of Representatives met that deadline. They passed a historic budget. But the Senate has not done so. All we have seen from Majority Leader REID are political games, cynical games, distractions and gimmicks to avoid confronting the fiscal nightmare we are now facing. How else can you explain why, in the middle of the crisis, Democratic leaders have not even produced a budget, have not even allowed the committee to meet to work on one? We have not even met to mark up one. We are required by law to produce a budget in committee and pass that budget on to the Senate floor, but this process has been shut down. We have not produced a budget in 754 days. Let me repeat. This great Senate, in a time of financial stress and danger, has not passed a budget in 754 days and has, it appears, no intention of doing one this year.

Today I join with the newest member of our Budget Committee, Senator KELLY AYOTTE of New Hampshire, to send a letter to Senator REID, signed by every Republican Senator in the Senate, pressing him to finally allow the Senate to begin work on a budget. But we are told in the media that the Democrats' refusal to put forth a budget is just good strategy, that it is best that they avoid putting a plan on paper.

Here is an excerpt from a recent article in the Wall Street Journal. Fittingly, the article is entitled "Democrats Unhurried in Work on Budget." I would say that is true. This is what the article said:

As a political matter, the Democratic strategists say there may be little benefit in producing a budget that would inevitably include unpopular items. Many Democrats believe a recent House GOP proposal to overhaul Medicare is proving to be unpopular and has given Democrats a political advantage. They loath to give up that advantage by proposing higher taxes. Senate Democrats plan to hold a vote on the Ryan plan hoping to force GOP Senators to cast a vote on the Medicare overhaul that could prove politically difficult.

This is astonishing. It is the position of the great Democratic Party that their vision for deficit reduction is so unpopular or unfeasible that they won't even articulate it in public, let alone offer it up as a budget?

The heads of President Obama's fiscal commission warn that an economic crisis may be just 1 year or 2 years away.

That was the testimony they gave us in committee. It could be a year, a little sooner or a little later, said Erskine Bowles, Chairman of the commission, along with Alan Simpson, who said it could be 1 year, in his opinion, that we could have a debt crisis—not a little warning from people who spent months hearing witnesses and studying the

debt situation facing our country. But it appears the leaders of the Senate would prefer to hide in the hills and take shots at Republicans from a distance. Is that what they prefer?

Chairman PAUL RYAN and the House GOP had put forward a plan to get this country out of a looming, Greek-like debt crisis, make our economy more competitive, and save Medicare for future generations. It is an honest, courageous plan that will improve the quality of life for millions of Americans and do the job short term and long term. It may not be perfect. I am not saying it is perfect. I am saying it is a serious plan, seriously considered, that confronts both long-term and short-term problems and reforms Medicare and puts it on a path to salvation. But all we hear are attacks.

By contrast, the budget the President sent forward doubles our national debt and puts our entire country at risk, even though the President promised it would "not add more to the debt" and have us "live within our means." Those were the President's words. In the 10 years of his budget, analyzed by the objective Congressional Budget Office, they tell us the lowest single annual deficit out of those 10 would be \$740 billion—a stunning amount. They would average almost \$1 trillion. The last years—8, 9, and 10—of his 10-year budget do not show the debt going down but going back up to \$1 trillion. It was the most irresponsible budget that has ever been presented to this Nation. It is a stunning failure to lead at a time of financial crisis. It doubled the debt. It increased the debt over the projections of our baseline as it is. Instead of helping, it made it worse because it raised taxes and raised spending, and it raised spending more than it raised taxes.

So where do our colleagues in the Senate stand? They refuse to put forward their own plan. Last week, Senate Majority Leader REID said the Democrats don't need a budget. "There is no need to have a Democratic budget, in my opinion." He said it would be "foolish" to present one. The only thing that is foolish is violating the Congressional Budget Act in such a cynical attempt for political gain. The decision not to produce a budget is not a decision based on what is best for our country but based, as you can see from the quotes of the staffers and actually Senator REID's own quote—it was designed for political advantage.

The Ryan budget is honest. If anybody confronts the budget situation in an honest way, they know the budget is going to have to have some bad news. It is going to have to tell people things cannot continue as they are today but we are going to have to do better. We are going to have to reduce spending. So maybe for some people that is not popular. Isn't that what we are paid to do here, serve the national interest, tell the truth about what is happening in our country?

We find ourselves in the remarkable position this week of having Senate