

are there for them that have been there for me. It is important we save Medicare, but we can't save it by looking the other way or by taking it off the table. We can't demonize a Democrat or a Republican for making a constructive decision to save Medicare.

Instead of trying to make it the political issue of the 2012 election, we should make it the personal issue of each Senator. We should sit around that kitchen table, work together, and try to find a meaningful solution to a problem that saves Medicare for future generations, and also doesn't cause an escalation in our debt and deficit. We are capable of doing it, but we have not demonstrated a will to do it.

I challenge my colleagues to do the same thing, and I challenge my colleagues to do one other thing—to hold a tele-townhall in the next couple of weeks. Talk to 3,500 of the citizens in your State and listen to the questions they are asking. They are scared, they are worried, and they feel threatened, and Washington is making it worse.

Madam President, I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. HAGAN). The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mrs. HUTCHISON. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

NATO

Mrs. HUTCHISON. Madam President, I rise today to voice concern about the current state of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. In 1949, more than 60 years ago, the United States joined with 11 other nations to create the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO, in order to ensure the mutual security of the member nations. From the beginning, the United States has served as NATO's backbone and provided a major share of the cost in manpower and resources. We have consistently answered the call of our NATO allies when they needed us, even when there was no clear United States interest involved.

For example, in 1993 the U.S. military answered the call to participate in the NATO air action to enforce a U.N. ban on all unauthorized military flights over Bosnia and Herzegovina. After the Dayton Peace Accords in 1995, the United States stationed over 10,000 personnel in support of peacekeeping missions in Bosnia. For the following 9 years we continued to retain a large number of forces there.

In 1999 the United States again stepped up and provided a major share of the military resources for operations in Kosovo. At that time I argued that we were assuming too many commitments in areas of the world where our own interests were vague. When President Clinton announced that he intended to send 4,000 U.S. troops for peacekeeping in Kosovo, I said:

If we think the United States has the responsibility to go into all these civil conflicts, we are going to dissipate our resources and we're going to place a heavy burden on our taxpayers.

Today, after years of involvement with NATO-led operations in the Balkans, our forces are still a major component of the NATO Kosovo force, and we are still contributing approximately 800 troops to that effort.

In fact, of the 22 nations now in NATO contributing troops in Kosovo, the United States military makes up approximately 13 percent of the total force. As far as cost is concerned, the U.S. taxpayer is still footing a very large bill for our presence in Kosovo. In fiscal year 2010, the President asked for \$252 million to pay for operations in Kosovo. In fiscal year 2011 it was \$312 million. Now as part of the fiscal year 2012 Overseas Contingency Operations Transfer Fund, the President is asking for \$254 million.

With this example in mind, I am now deeply concerned that we appear to be in the same position again, this time with NATO in Libya. On March 31, NATO assumed command and control of operation Unified Protector, and was thereafter responsible for enforcing the no-fly zone over Libya. With this transfer of authority and responsibility from the United States to NATO, there was also an implicit understanding that all of NATO member states would be expected to dedicate the necessary resources to adequately enforce U.N. Resolutions 1970 and 1973. However, almost immediately after taking command, NATO requested a 48-hour extension of support from American fighter aircraft. This request for continued support from American air assets seemed to be at odds with the President's statement that coalition forces would be able to keep up the pressure on Qadhafi's forces. So, once again, our Nation is called upon to provide a large share of the resources and funding for another NATO mission that is not in the vital security interests of the United States.

Indeed, Secretary of Defense Roberts Gates stated on April 21 at a DOD press conference that "while it is not a vital interest for us, our allies considered it is a vital interest. And just as they have helped us in Afghanistan, we thought it important, the President thought it was important, to help them in Libya."

We are now on track to spend more than \$800 million of U.S. taxpayer money this fiscal year on operations involving Libya. I ask, with significant concern, how are these operations going to be paid for? Where is DOD planning to get the extra almost \$1 billion to spend on this operation? What programs will need to be cut to fund this third operation in which we are now involved: Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya? Will the President be submitting a supplemental appropriations bill on Libya?

With the example of Libya in our minds, let us be clear as to exactly

what our allies are contributing to the efforts in Afghanistan. As part of the International Security Assistance Force, which is the command in charge of operations in Afghanistan, the United States is contributing 70 percent of the total force, with 46 nations contributing the remaining 30 percent.

As we review the landscape of American military commitments overseas, let me emphasize that with U.S. forces deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan we should not also be participating in such a major way in an open-ended conflict in Libya, where we have no clear, vital national security interests. Moreover, I believe our NATO allies who do have a vital interest in Libya should be willing to play a lead role in terms of funding as well as military resources. The fact is, NATO and the Arab League should be shouldering the brunt of the military and financial burdens associated with Operation Unified Protector, just as we are doing in Afghanistan, and have been doing in Iraq.

If we had all members of NATO contributing proportionately to the mission in Libya and also had the Arab League providing comparable financial and military assistance, the overwhelming commitment of our own U.S. forces would be lessened to a manageable degree. I am frustrated that our NATO allies continue to contribute such a small amount of resources for operations that are in the vital interest of many NATO member states. In Libya, I believe if the U.S. military were to stop providing to our allies our unique military capabilities, NATO operations for both the no-fly zone as well as the civilian protection mission would be seriously degraded and could terminate.

How have we arrived at this unfortunate state of affairs? Why is it that NATO nations are unwilling and unable to effectively operate against a weak and isolated nation such as Libya without significant military contributions from the United States? One reason we are in this position is because many NATO members are not contributing enough of their gross domestic product to defense. Instead, many NATO members simply look to the United States and the American taxpayer to pay for any gaps in defense capabilities. Because many NATO nations do not invest strategically in their military capabilities, they are heavily dependent on the United States to pay for advanced equipment such as intelligence, reconnaissance, and surveillance platforms to support their NATO operations.

I agree with Secretary Gates' recent assessment, that NATO is turning into a two-tiered alliance in which very few members except for the United States take on the hard power combat assignments. Instead, the majority of the NATO partners limit themselves to soft power work such as delivering humanitarian aid. Indeed, of the 28 NATO members, only 5—the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Greece,

and Albania—exceed the agreed-upon ratio of 2 percent of gross domestic product to be spent on defense.

Two decades after the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the U.S. share of NATO defense spending has now risen astoundingly to more than 75 percent. Secretary Gates put all of our efforts under NATO alliance operations together at 75 percent. We are all aware that the United States is facing very hard and real serious fiscal constraints. Hence it is clear that we can no longer continue to pay for the vast majority of NATO operations that are not in the vital security interests of our Nation. It is time for the United States to ask our allies to step up and keep the agreement they made when they became part of NATO, or for the United States to consider reducing our spending level that we now provide to NATO and also move to redeploy a large portion of our military presence in Europe back to the United States.

I have spoken on the floor many times about my concerns for maintaining such a large military presence in Europe and I will continue to fight for spending cuts to a largely unnecessary and expensive U.S. military presence on the European continent. It was decided in the last administration to cut back to two brigade combat teams in Europe, in Germany. We have now had the two be expanded to four. The other two are now in limbo. So there are now four brigade combat teams in Europe. Two were supposed to move back to the United States and the military construction to house at least one of those has been done at a cost of over 400 million taxpayer dollars. So we have the capability to bring home troops, taxpayers have spent \$400 million in pursuit of that, the barracks sit empty, and we still have four brigade combat teams in Europe, in Germany.

Unfortunately, here is the message we are sending to our European allies by that military presence, and by our operations in support of NATO, that American taxpayers are willing and able to shoulder the burden for their defense, and that there are apparently no consequences if the Europeans fail to do their fair share.

We need to change that message. We need to make our Nation's current financial difficulties a priority. Our message should be that NATO has been a valuable alliance for 60 years, and it can be in the future, with a concerted effort by our allies to share the burden. That means truly sharing. The United States should lead when and where our capabilities are essential. We do have vast capabilities. When they are essential we have shown we will always be there. But others can lead where they have the capability to do so, and they need to do it with personnel and with the appropriate level of funding.

The complacency of our allies is increasingly a threat to our national security for we are shouldering more and more of the burden, even where our involvement is not in the vital interests

of the United States. The American taxpayer can no longer afford to write endless checks for NATO operations. It is time for our allies to shoulder their responsibilities and reduce their dependence on U.S. military forces.

We want to maintain our military strength. We have the greatest military in the world. There is no doubt about that. But to keep our military strong, we cannot over-deploy our forces. I have talked to people who have been to Afghanistan six times on rotations—six times. Most of our people who have gone to Afghanistan have gone more than once, and that is following all of the time they have been to Iraq as well. We must keep our military strong by not overburdening them because our allies are not doing their share and supplying the troops they agreed to provide when they became members of NATO. For us to keep the strength we have, or to handle the big operations where we have the unique capabilities, we must be smarter about allocating and sharing the responsibilities. We can continue to lead and take the biggest share, but not 75 percent of the share and continue to remain strong, especially with the financial constraints we have today.

We are in the midst of negotiating how we can lower our deficit so we don't hit that \$14 trillion debt ceiling without a plan for bringing down the deficit so we will never have to lift that debt ceiling again. So it is in everyone's interests for our allies to step up to the plate. They made agreements. It used to be a 3-percent gross domestic product commitment that was required for NATO. Now we are talking 2 percent, and only five countries—only five countries—meet that test. That is not a sustainable alliance. If we allow them to drag down their strongest member, it will not be in the interests of anyone if something big happens that requires an immediate and robust response.

So I appreciate that Secretary Gates, in his final days in office has talked very straight to our NATO allies. I hope they are listening, and I hope they are prepared to act. Yes, they have financial constraints too; we understand that. But it is time the burden be shared. It is time we have a real alliance in which we remain strong so we maintain the strength to respond to the big emergencies when we are called. Being dragged down by smaller contingencies that can be handled by others, whether it is Kosovo or Libya—and, certainly, we also are concerned about the situation in Syria and Yemen—we can let others be in the lead in those areas so that when the big things happen—such as Afghanistan which will continue to require our commitment—those major efforts can be led by the United States with our unique capabilities and our commitment.

Our military remains the best in the world. Our equipment is the best in the world. Our training is the best in the

world. We need to maintain that strength with an alliance that accepts its responsibility for burden sharing. Where we are required to lead and are uniquely capable we will do so but we cannot allow ourselves to be continually placed in the position where these contingencies drag down our capabilities for the future.

So I applaud Secretary Gates for starting this dialogue in earnest. We have talked about it for a long time—for years, actually. We have talked to our NATO allies about stepping up to the plate. Even in good financial times that didn't happen but for a few. I will say that Great Britain has always been there, and we have had other strong alliances, including Australia—not in NATO but certainly a strong ally. Canada is also a strong ally, but it is time for us to reassess our contributions in NATO to preserve our strength so that we are there and prepared for major operations, which is in all of our interests.

Thank you, Madam President. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

EXTENSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

Mrs. HAGAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the period for morning business be extended until 6 p.m., with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

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

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

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 782

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I am going to wait until the Senator from Illinois arrives before making a motion, but I wish to explain what I am going to do. I am going to make a motion when he does arrive.

I have an amendment. First of all, being the ranking member of the Environment and Public Works Committee, I have more than just a passive interest in this EDA bill. But one of the things I have been trying to do is get people to understand we have all these