

President Obama's 28 percent cap would reduce the benefit from the home mortgage interest deduction. For 5 years now, our Nation has been experiencing a bursting of the real estate bubble. Current headlines indicate that this trend will continue for a time. Limiting the value of the home mortgage interest deduction would apply additional downward pressure on home prices—not only for high end homes, but for all homes. By repeatedly proposing to limit the benefit of the home mortgage interest deduction, is it the President's intent to further depress housing prices, or is this mere collateral damage from his desire to raise taxes.

But the damage from this cap does not stop at the housing market. President Obama's 28 percent cap would also reduce the benefit from the charitable contribution deduction. This would almost surely reduce the amount of contributions people would make to churches, synagogues, temples, soup kitchens, shelters, universities, and museums. Is that the President's intention? Does the President know that these revenues might never materialize because the elimination of this deduction will step up pressure for direct government assistance for the poor, for students, and for the arts?

Finally, this cap would reduce the benefit of the State and local tax deduction. I touched on this point earlier. High-tax States are able to soften the blow of their high taxes by pointing out to their citizens the Federal deductibility of such taxes. So, my colleagues from high-tax States might want to talk to their governors about the impact the President's proposed cap would have on State and local public finance.

I want to be clear about something. Our Tax Code is a colossal, awful mess. And tax expenditures must be a part of any conversation about tax reform. But I want to emphasize that the conversation about tax expenditures should happen in a conversation about broad based tax reform—reform that flattens the code while lowering rates.

The conversation about tax expenditures should be a sober one in the context of a meaningful discussion about tax policy. Unfortunately, the President has chosen instead to target tax expenditures willy nilly with little regard for the policy implications of these tax hikes.

Make no mistake, whatever the President wants to call it—reducing spending through the Tax Code, closing loopholes, or making people pay their fair share—these are tax increases plain and simple. And they are tax increases on the middle class.

There has been some criticism in recent days about Republicans for their commitment to a pledge many of them took against any net tax increase.

I have to admit I am at a loss here. Conservative Republicans, convinced that taxes are already high enough, promise their taxpaying citizens that

they will never support a net tax increase.

They gave their constituents their word, and are sticking to it.

Meanwhile, President Obama, who promised not to raise taxes on the middle class when running for office, vows to break this promise at every opportunity.

And yet it is the conservative Republicans who are somehow lacking integrity? Hardly.

I don't care how many blows I take from sophisticated Washingtonians and professional leftists for sticking by my pledge to the people of Utah. I will resist any effort by the President to include tax increases as part of the deal to increase the debt ceiling. I will do so for a number of reasons. First, our Tax Code needs a fundamental overhaul. It is a complicated mess that is lacking in fundamental fairness. Yet the President's proposal to reduce tax expenditures for deficit reduction, is a proposal to maintain a tax code that grows more burdensome by the day. The President's proposal essentially robs the government of the revenues that it might use later to flatten the Tax Code and lower rates.

More importantly, I oppose the President's proposed tax hikes as a matter of principle. Flattening the tax base without any offsetting rate reduction is a tax increase.

My friend, the ranking member on the Senate Budget Committee, Senator SESSIONS captured the point well in an interview the other day. I will quote Senator SESSIONS:

We have to be honest and recognize that if you are going to eliminate systematically a host of deductions and keep the money or spend it for new programs, then you've raised taxes. . . . It just is unless we've changed the English language.

The campaign against tax expenditures is a campaign for a tax increase.

It is a tax increase that could send the wrong signal to those Americans who sacrifice current consumption and save for retirement. It could raise the bar for those Americans who want to experience the American dream of home ownership. It would mean the residents of high tax States would face even higher State and local taxes. And it could mean a cutback back in the volume of charitable giving.

This is shared sacrifice that the Nation cannot afford.

I prefer shared prosperity by cutting taxes and giving the small businesses and businesses the opportunity to use that money to hire people and get people working and get more people paying taxes. I think it is abysmal that the bottom 51 percent do not pay income taxes, and 23 million of them get refundable tax credits from the government that are far more than the payroll taxes they might have to pay, which are Social Security payments.

I listened to my colleague from Vermont saying we cannot do anything on Social Security, we cannot do this, cannot do that, the poor people are

going to be hurt. Where are they going to be when Social Security is bankrupt? Where are they going to be when Medicare and Medicaid are bankrupt? The way we are going, that is where they are going to be.

We cannot keep spending like this, and we have to quit playing the phony game with tax expenditures.

All I can say is we have to get with it around here and we have to start working together as Democrats and Republicans in the best interests of the American people, and that is reforming this awful Tax Code, getting taxes down for everybody, and taking care of the poor but also expecting everybody to have some skin in the game—except the really poor—and help our country pull out of the mess we are in.

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

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

The Senator from Wyoming.

Mr. BARRASSO. I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection.

SECOND OPINION

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I come to the floor, as I have week after week since the health care bill was signed into law, with a doctor's second opinion about the health care law because the President repeatedly made promises to the American people as the health care bill was being debated and even after the health care law was signed. He promised to improve, not hurt, the quality of medical care in this country.

We now know the President's health care law actually makes the problem of health care in this country worse. In fact, since this bill was signed into law, we have learned that it makes the cost of health care worse. We know it makes the American's ability to get health care worse and the ability of individuals to keep the care they like—it makes their ability to keep that care worse.

Today, I would like to first talk about the cost of care.

President Obama promised American families they would see their health insurance premiums go down because of the health care law, and he actually told them they would go down by over \$2,000 per family. Well, now we know that is not the case. In fact, Americans have seen their premiums increase 19 percent since the time the President signed his health care bill into law.

I was looking at the front page of the Sheridan Press, Sheridan, WY, yesterday. Headline, front page:

Health care premium increase. County administrative director said the county's cost to provide health care coverage for its employees will increase by about \$360,000 this year.

We are talking about 1 county—1 out of 23 counties in Wyoming, \$360,000 for county employees.

You know, throughout this entire health care debate, the President promised the American people that if they liked their health care plan, his health care law would let them keep it—another broken promise. Employers all across the country have made it clear that the health care law's mandates are too expensive and threaten their ability to offer insurance to their employees.

A recent study by McKinsey & Company, which is a reputable national consulting firm, produced a report entitled "How U.S. health care reform will affect employee benefits." They surveyed over 1,300 employers across diverse industries, geographies, and employer sizes. The results confirmed what Republicans and American workers and their families knew all along, and they knew it long before the President and Washington Democrats forced this health care law down their throats. Overall, the report says, 30 percent of employers will probably stop offering employer-sponsored coverage in the years after 2014 when the Obama health care law goes fully into effect. Among employers with a high awareness of the health care reform law and what is specifically in the law, then the proportion of those who will definitely or probably stop offering coverage jumps to 50 percent, and upward of 60 percent will pursue other options. So at least 30 percent of employers would actually gain economically from dropping coverage even if they completely compensated their employees for the change through other benefit offerings and higher salaries.

Apparently, the President's promise that "if you like the health insurance you have today, you can keep it" translates into "you may very well lose your coverage."

As former Congressional Budget Office Director Doug Holtz-Eakin's analysis confirms, if employers decided to drop coverage—which is in their economic best interest to do in many cases based on their economic evaluation—the cost of Federal insurance subsidies would skyrocket.

Remember, the White House and Democrats in Congress met behind closed doors. They acted swiftly and covertly to pass a law without regard for how its provisions would impact each and every American family.

Then the question is, Will Americans actually have the ability to get medical care they need from a doctor they want at a price they can afford? The President promised that his law would increase access to affordable care. Some groups tell a different story.

In April 2010, a month after the President signed his health care plan

into law, the Association of American Medical Colleges estimated that based on graduation and training rates, this country would have a shortage of 150,000 doctors over the next 15 years. In May of the same year, the American Medical Association issued the results of its survey showing the impact of low payment rates and the threat of future payment cuts on Medicare patients' access to care. The AMA found that one in five physicians currently restricts the number of Medicare patients they see. The AMA study shows that nearly one-third of primary care physicians restrict the number of Medicare patients they take into their practice.

All any of the Members of the Senate need to do is, at home on the weekend, talk to someone in your community, someone who is on Medicare, someone who is trying to find a doctor, a doctor to care for them, and see how very difficult it is for someone on Medicare to find a doctor to care for them.

Well, later last year, the Association of American Medical Colleges related updated physician shortage estimates. The September 2010 study said that by 2015, doctor shortages will be actually 50 percent worse than originally projected. By 2020, there will be a shortage of 45,000 primary care physicians and a shortage of 46,000 surgeons and medical specialists.

So I find it ironic that we have a health care law that is passed that actually doesn't put money into training doctors to treat you but puts money in to hire IRS agents to investigate you. Absolutely astonishing.

These studies clearly demonstrate that the President's health care law will only make it harder for Americans to see their doctor. In fact, Washington only expanded the ability for folks to get government-approved, government-mandated, government-subsidized coverage. They did not expand the ability for the American people to get actual medical care. There is a huge difference between medical coverage and medical care. When you take over \$500 billion away from our seniors on Medicare not to save Medicare but to start a brand new government program for someone else, well, that is a way to make the problem worse. When you force 16 million more people onto Medicaid, a program where half of the doctors in the country won't see those patients, that also makes the problem worse.

On the front page of yesterday's USA TODAY, Wednesday, July 6, the headline is "Medicaid payments go under the knife." State cuts could add to shortage of doctors.

The second paragraph:

Some health care experts say the cuts, most of which went into effect July 1, or will later this month, could add to a shortage of physicians and other providers participating in Medicaid.

The article goes on:

Under the 2010 health care law, more than 16 million additional people will become eligible starting in 2014.

So already we have a situation where doctors are reluctant to take care of people on Medicaid. Yet the President's solution to the health care dilemma in this country is to put more people into a system that is already broken. We are giving individuals and families an insurance card but not really giving them access to the care that has been promised.

Adults are not the only ones waiting in lines to get into doctors offices as the lines get longer. In fact, children enrolled in Medicaid have a harder time accessing medical care than children who have private insurance. Yet that is the President's solution to the needs of this country.

On January 16 of this year, the New England Journal of Medicine published a study conducted in Cook County, IL. It is President Obama's hometown of Chicago. People were calling medical offices asking for appointments. They were asking for appointments for children with chronic conditions or acute conditions and telling the offices—these were kind of secret shoppers—the person had Medicaid or private insurance. What they found is 66 percent of the time when the researcher called for an appointment and they mentioned Medicaid, they were denied an appointment. But only 11 percent of the researchers calling for appointments who said they had private insurance—only 11 percent would not get an appointment. So there you have 66 percent denied if they had Medicaid and only 11 percent denied with private insurance. Those Medicaid patients who did get an appointment, well, they faced wait times twice as long as kids with private insurance—an average of about 6 weeks. As one caller was told when asked what kind of insurance the person had—when that person said Medicaid, the receptionist at the medical office said: Medicaid is not insurance. Yet that is what the President and the Democrats base their entire health care plan on—16 million more on Medicaid.

Here it is over a year after the law has been signed, and the President's health care law has made health care in America worse. Premiums are higher, and the lines at doctors offices are longer. It is more difficult to get a doctor to care for you. This is not what the President's health care law was supposed to do, and it is not what the President promised the American people last year. He promised that the health care law would make health care better for all Americans. Each week, we learn that the promises are coming up empty and health care in America under this health care law has been made worse.

That is why week after week I come to the Senate floor as we learn more things about the health care law that passed the Senate, passed the House, was signed by the President, and, in my opinion as a doctor who practiced medicine for 24 years, has actually been bad for patients, bad for providers

and nurses and doctors who take care of those patients, and bad for the taxpayers.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Mexico.

Mr. UDALL of New Mexico. Mr. President, I have two things I would like to talk about. First, I wish to deal with the resolution we have on the floor that we had a vote on today, which was this motion to proceed to S. 1323, a bill to express the sense of the Senate on shared sacrifice and resolving the budget. I think it is important that we realize what is in this sense of the Senate. The findings the Congress makes here are very important, and I would like to read these three findings.

The Wall Street Journal reports that the median pay for chief financial officers of the S&P 500 companies increased 19 percent to \$2.9 million last year. And then you compare that with the middle class over the last 10 years—the median family income has declined by more than \$2,500. Mr. President, 20 percent of all income earned in the United States is earned by the top 1 percent of individuals. Over the past quarter century, four-fifths of the income gains accrued to the top 1 percent of individuals.

So we conclude in this sense of the Senate—it is the sense of the Senate that any agreement to reduce the budget deficit should require that those earning \$1 million or more per year make a more meaningful contribution to the deficit reduction effort. And that is what we have been talking about today; that is what our leaders are doing—meeting at the White House with the President—is trying to come up with a budget deal and a resolution to this that involves shared sacrifice and involves putting us on a path to better budget responsibility, reducing the national budget deficit. Clearly part of this has to do with millionaires paying more of their fair share.

Now, we got 74 votes on the motion to proceed, but I heard many people say—many Senators walked on the floor and said: Well, I am voting for the motion to proceed, to invoke cloture on the motion to proceed, but I am not sure I support the bill. But I think the 74 votes show a little bit of bipartisanism in terms of a mix of revenue and expenditure cuts. That is the point I wanted to make on this resolution.

First of all, I hear things from the White House that worry me because what has been said when we talk about a package—and they are talking about the overall package—is they say: We are going to have a ratio of 1 to 3, meaning 75 percent cuts and only 25 percent revenue, so three-quarters in cuts and one-quarter in revenue.

Now, how does that compare to how we got out of deficit situations in the past? I think that is one of the most important things to look at because we were in a big hole in the 1980s. The Reagan administration took us down

that road and President Clinton and President Bush 1 had to deal with that situation. What did they come up with? They came up with an agreement which was basically 55 percent revenue and 45 percent cuts. So it was about a 50-50 situation.

I urge the President to look at the budget. We have only been briefed in a very cursory way on the budget KENT CONRAD has prepared, but it comes in at about 50-50 in terms of revenue and cuts.

We have to realize we are at the lowest Federal revenue we have seen in 60 years and the highest Federal expenditures we have seen in 60 years. So we have to work at both sides of this. So that is where I hope the President comes in with some kind of proposal as he is negotiating this, and I look forward to him doing that.

NEW MEXICO WILDFIRES

The other topic I wish to speak about is the wildfires in New Mexico. I spent the last week in my State of New Mexico. I stayed there. I started to go to the plane, and I kept hearing the reports from my staff, and one of the most shocking was the entire community of Los Alamos—12,000 people—was evacuated because a forest fire was coming in their direction. As I kept getting the reports and the evacuation had started to take place, I thought: Well, the best thing to do is to not fly out but to go back to the community of Los Alamos and the surrounding communities and try to assist in any way I could.

I want to talk a little bit about that. I think there are some lessons to be learned in terms of budgets and deficits and how we should invest. But first I want to thank the Senators who helped me while I was gone. As the Presiding Officer, Senator FRANKEN, knows, we are assigned weekly duties in terms of presiding, and I was supposed to preside last week. So three of my colleagues, Senator DURBIN, Senator MERKLEY, and my cousin, Senator MARK UDALL, stepped up to help me with presiding time. I had an amendment that was on the floor when we were dealing with the rules package, and Senator HARKIN helped me with that proposal. So there was a real team effort within our Democratic caucus to help me to be able to work on the wildfire issue out in New Mexico and stay there and have my capable staff and the other Senators help out. I really thank everybody for that team effort.

The wildfires that are raging across New Mexico are not only in New Mexico. A number of States have been hit: Texas, Arizona, Florida, and my home State of New Mexico. Generally, what we see in this country is the fire season starts at the southern part and moves up to the north as we go through the summer season. In the Southwest, we have had an extraordinary fire season. I was just briefed by Secretary Vilsack when I was out there. He spoke in the southwest region about 1,600-plus fires burning 1.5 million acres. This is still

very early in the fire season. We could see a lot more burning going on. Then, the thing that really hit me was the fact that we were told this is the driest recorded summer since the Forest Service has been keeping records. So it is pretty remarkable we are in this kind of situation where we have a drought and then we have fires that heat up.

This particular fire, for New Mexico—the name of it is called the Las Conchas fire right near Los Alamos. As we speak, it is more than 135,000 acres. It is almost three times as big as the previous fire situation we have seen.

What happens with these forest fires in our dry, arid region is we get extreme heat within the forest, and we get what are called crown fires, where the tops of the trees—these trees may be 30 to 50 to 100 feet tall, and the fires burn in the top of the crown. They can spread when there is a 40- or 50-mile-an-hour wind, as there was in some cases here. They can be in the crown of the trees and they can jump out a mile in advance with embers and create additional fire in front of it. As a result of the heat—very intensive heat; I think close to 1,000 degrees right in the heat of the fire—it makes the soil unable to absorb water any longer, which is something that creates a situation when we get our rainy season, which occurs right after the fire season, we can have serious flood situations. The soil will not absorb water, so when the rains come all of the soil on the surface washes off. It washes into the reservoirs. It can fill them up with silt. Some of those are used for recreation, for fishing; others are used for drinking water. For example, several of the communities in northern New Mexico get 40 percent, 50 percent of their drinking water from these reservoirs. So these kinds of forest fires can be absolutely devastating to communities.

But the one thing we were thankful for, because of the Federal firefighters, is the worst case scenarios didn't occur. One of the things that was expected—and I think many saw this covered on the national media—is this might get into the National Laboratory, the Los Alamos National Laboratory; that there was going to be radiation released and those kinds of things. In fact, we dodged a bullet there. It didn't go into Los Alamos National Laboratory. The labs and the residences were protected.

There was another fire burning nearby that threatened the Santa Fe watershed. The fire changed directions and because of the skillful firefighting it didn't get into the watershed. So we dodged a bullet. But many other areas—many other areas—were severely impacted, and many other groups were.

For example, New Mexico's Indian pueblos—we have 19 pueblos in New Mexico. Some of them were terribly impacted by this: the Nambe Pueblo, the Santa Clara Pueblo, San Ildefonso Pueblo, the Ohkay Pueblo, Owingeh

Pueblo, and many other pueblos. One of the most damaged pueblos was the Santa Clara Pueblo. The Governor is a gentleman by the name of Walter Dasheno. He and some of his counselors had come to a meeting. Eighty-five percent of this Indian reservation has been burned in the last two big fires. What they said when we were sitting in a room—and these are the elders from the pueblo who came to talk to us—they said: Our hearts are in a very sad state. The fire devastated our religious sites, our sacred sites. We had medicinal plants we would collect in this area. We can't do that any longer.

With great emotion these elders said: We are never going to see this forest in the same condition again. So, obviously, the loss was great at Santa Clara, but it was all across New Mexico, of those pueblos that I just named, and it is a very significant loss.

The first thing I wish to do in speaking today is to thank all the firefighters who were involved in this effort. I think we have fighting just this one fire 2,600 firefighters from all over the Nation—15 different States. It is incredibly tough work—difficult, tough, dirty work.

I met many of these firefighters out on the front where they were fighting the fire. Some of them would talk about how they had been away from their families for 2 weeks. They hadn't had a shower. They were sleeping in tents. It is a tremendously trying occupation, being a firefighter, but they believe in it. They show up every day, and they do an incredible job. They were supported by our National Guard which guarded the community of Los Alamos while the people were evacuated to make sure there wasn't any crime going on. The State police patrolled the roads to try to make sure they could keep order. Local law enforcement, local firefighters participated, the local fire departments.

So it was an incredible effort by our community pulling together. One of the most remarkable things is the expertise at the Federal level in Federal land management agencies and firefighters. These teams are headed up—typically, we will have a type 1 and a type 2 team, and the head of the team called the incident commander will probably have 20, 25, 30 years of experience in fighting fires every summer around the country. These are career people from the Bureau of Land Management, the Forest Service, the Park Service, and a variety of other Federal agencies that step to the plate and help out when we get in these emergency situations.

As I said, they come from all over the country to work in the States that are impacted, and then as the fire season spreads north up to Colorado and Wyoming and Montana, those same firefighters move on to continue the battle up there.

One of the points I take from this, one of the things I learned from this—and I think President Lincoln said this

very well: Government does for people what they can't do for themselves. Collectively, we pull together when we hit situations where if we have an individual who has a home in Los Alamos, there is not much he can do with a big forest fire coming in his direction. But we can organize as a governmental entity to say when we get big catastrophic fires such as this, we are going to have people who are competent, who are capable, and who have all of this experience in fighting fires who will come together and help out. That is something we need to protect.

When we think of debating budgets and deficits and all of that, there is a very important function that government serves out there, and we need to protect that safety net function, that collective function where we help each other. I think this firefighting is a great example of where government is needed and we could be devastated if we didn't have the expertise that the government has in terms of fighting fires.

The other thing I saw at these fires—and it was pretty remarkable. When I have been to tornado sites in New Mexico, when I have been to some of the flood situations, what stands out for me is how New Mexicans pull together in this situation—New Mexicans helping New Mexicans. The pueblos I talked about that were so impacted by the fires, they actually opened other sites on their reservations so the evacuees coming out of Los Alamos, the 12,000 people—several of these pueblos said: We are going to open our convention center and let them set up cots, and we are going to feed the people. We are going to do everything we can to help with this situation.

At the same time, their particular pueblo was being devastated by a forest fire. So there was an extraordinary outpouring of goodwill that New Mexicans have shown in this kind of emergency situation. It is remarkable to see in a time of need people pulling together and doing that in such a way that it brings tears to your eyes.

There was one individual I want to talk about. I was in talking to a group of people who were training for a charity that was going to help the evacuees—help them serve meals, help them set up cots, help them be organized. I got a question from the floor, and the individual said to me: I have lived in Los Alamos, and I had to come down here. I am an evacuee, but I found a friend who was able to put me up. I know there are other people who do not have that situation. So I am out here today training with the American Red Cross because I want to help the others, and I want to try to give back.

That is the spirit we have seen in New Mexico, that even if you were in need and had been driven from your home, you were still trying to help out. I think it is a pretty remarkable story.

One of the things we are going to have to do as we look across the country—and we see floods in the Midwest

and wildfires in the Southwest and tornadoes—all of these things require a disaster relief bill, they require disaster relief funding for agencies that deal with fires and all these other natural disasters.

These things are very costly for local government. FEMA steps in and helps out with the Governor making a request. The Forest Service helps out. There are burn area rehabilitation teams that move in right after a fire to try to protect the erosion so there are not bad floods.

We have to try to do everything we can to make sure we maintain, once again, in this deficit situation, that kind of responsibility. The Federal Government has to help. Even within a deficit situation, we have to have a disaster relief kind of effort. The idea that we are going to somehow change the way we do disasters now, that we are going to take money away from Medicaid in order to put it into disasters, is I do not think a very good idea. So I think when we talk about how we do disaster relief, we need to remember we are all in this together, and when disasters hit, we need to help each other.

To show you the kind of pressure we are under in New Mexico, Secretary Vilsack, with the Forest Service, was out in New Mexico, and the one plea he made to the congressional delegation—because we were talking to him about watersheds that mean clean drinking water and that kind of situation—the Secretary said: I have a program that is called the Emergency Watershed Protection Program. It is for all over the country. It is for when we get into these kinds of wildfires, floods—whatever the situation is. He said: We have \$9 million—\$9 million—in the account. He said: Already, before your requests or any others have come in from New Mexico and other States—I know there are five fires down in Florida and fires in Texas and Arizona—we have \$45 million in requests.

So there is \$9 million in the account, \$45 million in requests. What we are talking about, when we talk about watersheds, is drinking water not deteriorating and that kind of thing. So we need to remember there is a lot the Federal Government does in a shared way with local communities to protect those communities.

My final note, to talk a little bit about the biggest picture here. That is about climate change and global warming. We are seeing these wildfires, droughts, and floods as we have never seen before. I have seen Senators from all over the country talking about these disaster situations. The scientists tell us we are putting too much carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, we are warming the atmosphere. In the West—what the scientists tell us—it is going to be twice as hot in the West, the computer models show, than in other places in the country. While the climate scientists are very cautious with their modeling and what they say,

they say: You cannot point to any particular storm. I cannot say that particular fire that occurred in New Mexico—the Las Conchas fire—was caused by global warming or climate change.

They also tell us—and this is the part we need to listen to—the scientists tell us what we are going to see as a result of this is more severe weather events, meaning more severe: If you get into a drought situation, it is going to be a more severe drought, which is exactly what we are seeing in New Mexico right now. When you get floods, you are going to see a more severe flood. You are going to see more severe wildfires. These are all what we are seeing today in New Mexico. We are seeing them across the Nation. We have seen extreme floods in New Mexico, catastrophic forest fires.

We are seeing droughts we have not seen before. The Forest Service has been keeping records for 117 years, and they reported to us there is no record for how dry we are right now. This is the driest year we have ever had, which laid the groundwork for the wildfires we had with the wind and all the other things that occurred.

So we cannot put our heads in the sand in terms of climate change, in terms of global warming. We have to look at these things and realize we are contributing to them, and we need to put policies in place, solid policies that put us on a path to reducing that carbon dioxide pollution that is out there.

With that, I thank the Presiding Officer very much and thank the Senate for the time and yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

Mr. LEE. Mr. President, I stand before you today to discuss a problem that is of concern to 300 million Americans. It relates to our national debt, a debt that will soon cross the \$15 trillion threshold.

We have been asked to raise the debt limit, extend the Nation's credit one more time. This we have the power to do but we have to ask ourselves the question: Should we exercise that power? Should we incur additional debt yet again without any plan moving forward to change fundamentally the way we spend money in Washington, DC?

Our current law requiring us to raise the debt limit periodically every time our existing line of credit dries up dates back to 1982. We have raised the debt limit since 1982 nearly 40 times. I fear if we do it again this time without any permanent binding plan in place, legal restrictions changing the way Congress spends money, we will be right back to the same trough a few months later. That is a problem because as we do this over time we inevitably put pressure on our financial system, pressure that will soon cause our economy dire circumstances, pressure that will in time result in excessive job losses, skyrocketing interest rates, and lots of other economic conditions that would be, to say the least, unpleasant.

It is for this reason that 100 Senators from around the country have canceled

their plans they previously made to spend time with their constituents in their respective home States this week. That had been our plan, to spend time in our home States. We canceled those plans so we could come back here and have serious, earnest debate and discussion surrounding the best path forward toward moving in the direction of a balanced budget, toward figuring out what conditions, if any, would satisfy the American people who are understandably concerned about the prospect of yet another knee-jerk reflexive debt limit increase.

The American people understand the fact that if we choose to do nothing more than say: Well, if we are going to raise the debt limit by \$2 trillion, let's make sure we cut \$2 trillion from our anticipated spending—they understand that kind of promise is one that is not binding on the Congress if those spending cuts are stretched out over the course of 10 or 15 years or more, as has been discussed, because we here in Congress cannot bind the Congress that will be sworn into power in January of 2013 or January of 2015 or January of 2017. We cannot bind a future Congress. We can make suggestions they can follow, but we cannot bind them—unless, of course, we choose to do that, which has been done only 27 times in our Nation's history, which is, amend the Constitution. That will bind a future Congress. That, I believe, is what we have to do in order to change fundamentally the way we spend money in Washington, to make sure we are not headed back to the same trough a few months from now to do exactly the same thing, leading us closer and closer to the dire circumstances I described a few minutes ago.

While we have been here this week, convening during a week that was previously scheduled for a recess, we as a group of Senate Republicans have come together and offered a real meaningful solution. We have offered to raise the debt limit. We have introduced legislation today with 21 Republican cosponsors in the Senate which is a piece of legislation we are calling the Cut-Cap-Balance Act. Here is what it says. It says we will raise the debt limit. We will do so only under three circumstances, only after three very specific conditions precedent have been met.

The first two relate to immediate spending cuts to discretionary spending, and statutory spending caps making sure we start putting ourselves right now on a statutorily mandated glidepath toward a balanced budget.

The third step, which is by far the most important, involves passage out of both Houses of Congress by the requisite two-thirds margin a balanced budget amendment to the Constitution—one that would cap spending as a percentage of GDP, and one that would require a two-thirds supermajority in order to raise taxes. Upon each of those conditions being met, then the debt limit would be raised, but only then.

We would not raise it without those conditions having been met. Because if we do not meet those conditions, we will not be able to look our constituents in the eye and say: We have done what needs to be done in order to make sure we get to where we need to be, in order to get to the point at which we will no longer be in a position of having to go back to the same trough every few months to go through the ceremony of raising the debt limit yet again.

We have to remember that every time we do this, we run an increased risk that we will start having to pay higher and higher yields on our Treasury instruments. Every time that happens, we incur more expenses that relate to our ability to remain current on our debt interest payments. Every time interest rates, yields on those debt instruments, go up by 1 percentage point, we have to spend an additional \$150 billion a year in interest once our debt instruments catch up with the increased rate. That is a lot of money. That means if we were to return—let's say if interest rates were to go up 3 percent, we can soon find ourselves in a position in which we might be spending as much as \$700 billion a year on interest. We are currently paying about \$250 billion.

Mr. President, \$700 billion a year is roughly what we spend on national defense. It is roughly what we spend on Social Security in an entire year. It is close to what we pay in Medicare and Medicaid combined at the Federal level in an entire year. So where is the difference going to come from when interest rates start to creep up? Even if they go up 3 percentage points, they would still be below their historical average. That money has to come from somewhere, and it will. It will end up coming from the various programs that Americans are most concerned about.

So whether you are a conservative, and you might be most concerned about that money coming from our defense budget or, on the other hand, if you are a liberal, and perhaps you are most concerned about it coming from entitlements, you ought to be concerned about our practice of perpetually raising the debt limit and engaging in perpetual deficit spending, especially when that deficit spending is now in excess of \$1.5 trillion every single year.

This potentially threatens every Federal program out there. It also interferes with the ability of each American to find the prosperity he or she seeks, the ability of each American to live his or her life in the way he or she chooses. That is distressing. It interferes with the liberty of the individual, which is what we have been elected to protect.

I am very proud to be part of this 21-Senator coalition consisting of a group of Senators who are concerned enough about this issue that they are willing to say: We understand that we cannot just not raise the debt limit. There are enough people who are concerned enough in this country about not raising it. The abrupt halt in spending that

would bring about would create enough uncertainty and chaos that many are unwilling to face that prospect.

So recognizing that reality, we have taken the bull by the horns and we are willing to do one difficult thing. In order for us to raise the debt limit, we have to be willing to set things in motion in such a way that will solve the underlying problem and will create permanent structural spending reform within the Congress.

I wish to close by responding to an argument made recently by Timothy Geithner, the Secretary of the Treasury, to the effect that we in Congress are essentially mere surplus when it comes to the debt limit increase. He argued that, as I understand it, section 4 of the 14th amendment somehow independently authorizes the executive branch—perhaps the Treasury Secretary, perhaps just the President—to somehow raise the debt limit without consulting Congress, without an act of Congress in place.

That argument is not accurate. That argument is based on an improper reading of the 14th amendment. The language to which he refers reads, in part, as follows:

The validity of the public debt of the United States, authorized by law, shall not be questioned.

Adopted in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, this provision simply acknowledges the fact that we can't ignore our debt obligations, that when interest or principal comes due on our national debt, they have to be honored. You will notice that in the middle of it, set off by commas, is a phrase that says "authorized by law."

To create law in this country, you have to move something through Congress. That something has to be presented to the President for his signature or a veto. You cannot make a law in the U.S. Government without Congress. Article I, section 8, clause 2 makes that point clear by giving the authority to Congress to incur debt in the name of the United States.

So, necessarily, by definition and operation of the plain text of the Constitution, you cannot raise the debt limit without an act of Congress. If anything, section 4 of the 14th amendment simply makes clear that which I wish Secretary Geithner would acknowledge—which is that he has a legal and a moral obligation to make sure that if the debt limit is not increased, during whatever time it remains in limbo, during whatever time we face the debt limit-induced shortfall, it is his obligation to use the first tax revenues coming in the door to pay our debt obligations, pay the interest being accrued on our national debt. It is his obligation not only as a fiduciary or quasi-fiduciary but also the very provision of the Constitution, section 4 of the 14th amendment—the same provision he cites—binds his hands and requires him to make sure that interest gets paid and prohibits him from bring-

ing about a default on our national debt, which is what he has been threatening on many occasions.

There is a way forward. The circumstances in which we now find ourselves are, to be sure, threatening, intimidating and daunting and they are circumstances that bring about substantial disagreement within this body and the other body that meets down the hall from us. But there are answers and solutions to which we can agree.

I believe the Cut-Cap-Balance Act provides the proper solution which can appeal to liberals and conservatives, Democrats and Republicans alike. I call on all within the sound of my voice to look at this legislation and jump on board and become part of the solution. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island is recognized.

TALL STACKS

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I rise to speak about a serious public health issue in Rhode Island and to commend the EPA for its actions to address it.

Rhode Island has the sixth highest rate of asthma in the country. According to our Department of Health, more than 25,000 Rhode Island children or 11 percent of children in our State—more than 1 in every 10 kids—suffer from asthma, and 82,000 adults in Rhode Island, which is also about 11 percent of our adult population, also suffer from this chronic disease.

From 2005 to 2009, asthma was the underlying cause or a contributing cause of death for 240 people in Rhode Island, including 4 children.

In 2009, there were 1,750 hospital discharges in Rhode Island for asthma cases. Those hospital stays cost about \$8 million—in just that 1 year—in direct medical costs, not counting the costs associated with days of work and school missed or the medication for on-going treatment.

On a clear summer day in Rhode Island, many of us have had the experience commuting to work and hearing a warning on drive time radio: Today is a bad air day in Rhode Island. Infants, senior citizens, and people with respiratory difficulties should stay indoors today.

In fact, yesterday was just such a day in Rhode Island. An air quality alert was issued by our State Department of Environmental Management, warning that ozone was expected to reach dangerous levels in the southern half of our State by afternoon. They recommended that all residents limit physical exertion and take refuge in air-conditioned environments for the better part of the day. In addition, Rhode Island's public transit operator, RIPTA, offered free bus rides all day long to keep people out of their cars.

These are real costs—costs paid in freedom, in reduced quality of life, in medical bills, in burdened public services to respond to the health risks of dirty air, and in more missed days of work and school.

There is still a lot to learn about the causes and cures of asthma. But we

know air pollution triggers asthma attacks. We know air pollution is a preventable problem. Armed with this knowledge, Rhode Island has taken great strides to reduce air pollution.

In 2006, Rhode Island passed a law to prohibit cars and buses from idling with their engines on.

In 2007, Rhode Island passed a law to retrofit all State school buses with diesel pollution controls.

In 2010, Rhode Island began requiring heavy-duty vehicles used in federally funded construction projects to install diesel pollution controls, adhere to the State anti-idling law, and use only low-sulfur diesel fuel.

RIPTA has voluntarily retrofitted half its bus fleet with diesel pollution control equipment.

However, Rhode Island cannot solve its air pollution problem on its own. We could stop driving entirely and shut down every industry in our State, and we would still have problems with ground-level ozone and particulate matter pollution. Why is that? Because, as EPA has determined, most of the pollution that lands in Rhode Island is sent to us by other States. Much of that out-of-State pollution comes from virtually uncontrolled Midwestern coal-fired powerplants that are tied to excessively tall smokestacks that send pollution hundreds of miles away from the source.

Last month, at my request, the Government Accountability Office completed a report about tall smokestacks at coal powerplants. Here is what the report said: In 1970, the year the Clean Air Act was enacted, there were two tall stacks—stacks over 500 feet—in the United States. By 1985, this number of tall stacks had grown from 2 to more than 180. Utilities and industry literally built their way into compliance with the Clean Air Act.

The trend continued. As of December 31, 2010, at the end of last year, 284 tall stacks were operating at 172 coal powerplants in the United States. These tall smokestacks are associated with 64 percent of the coal generating capacity in our country. Most of the coal generating capacity in our country vents its pollution through tall smokestacks.

Most of the tall stacks—207 of them or nearly three-quarters of them—are between 500 and 699 feet tall; 63 of them are between 700 and 999 feet tall. The remaining 14 are over 1,000 feet tall. The tallest stack at a coal powerplant in the United States is 1,038 feet, which is at the Rockport Powerplant in Indiana. This graphic compares some of these stacks with some of the well-known landmarks in our country. Here is the Statue of Liberty, at 305 feet; the Washington Monument, at 555 feet; and here are stacks at 1,000 feet, 1,038, and 12,004 feet—the Empire State Building in New York and the Willis Tower in Chicago.

As I have noted in previous floor remarks, once a stack gets over 1,000 feet, it has to be actually marked on aviation maps as a hazard to avoid plane collisions.

What do I mean when I say the utilities built their way into compliance with these tall stacks? In the early days of the Clean Air Act, some States allowed pollution sources to build tall stacks instead of installing pollution controls. The concept was that pollution sent high enough into the atmosphere would be sent far away from the source and it would not contribute to the air pollution problem in that State and everybody would be happy.

The problem is, this air pollution causes problems downwind in other States. As the GAO report put it, "Tall stacks generally disperse pollutants over greater distances than shorter stacks and provide pollutants greater time to react in the atmosphere to form ozone and particulate matter," which are the precursors to asthma. Yet public health policy has not yet caught up with this practice. Rhode Island pays the price.

Making matters worse, the GAO found that more than half the boilers attached to these tall stacks at the coal powerplants have no scrubber to control sulfur dioxide emissions—none. Approximately 85 percent of these boilers went into service before 1980, so they are antiquated and dirty and they run the pollution up the tall stack and it ends up being dumped on Rhode Island instead of cleaned up at the source. Nearly two-thirds of boilers connected to these tall stacks have no postcombustion controls for nitrogen oxide—controls that are vastly more effective than so-called low NO_x burners. Again, uncontrolled at the source, they dump the pollution up the tall stacks, export it elsewhere, and it is not their problem, but it then lands on Rhode Island.

Here is a graphic that shows more than 70 coal plants which have tall stacks at boilers that operate without scrubbers or postcombustion nitrogen oxide controls. These boilers are sending hundreds of thousands of tons of unabated pollution up very tall smokestacks, into the jetstream, and the jetstream delivers it downwind onto States such as Rhode Island.

As the GAO indicated:

In the Mid-Atlantic United States, the wind generally blows from west to east during the day . . . ozone can travel hundreds of miles at night with the help of high-speed winds known as the low-level jet. This phenomenon typically occurs at night . . . due to the ground cooling quicker than the upper atmosphere, which can allow the low-level jet to form and transport ozone and particulate matter with its high winds.

The map shows a typical prevailing wind pattern in the spring. Notice how the prevailing winds send so much of the pollution up and over to Rhode Island and other States along the eastern seaboard. In fact, five of the States on this map—Ohio, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Illinois, and North Carolina—have been identified by EPA as contributing significantly to Rhode Island's pollution problems.

The electricity that comes from these uncontrolled powerplants, which

don't stop the pollution at the start but instead jet it up into this low-level jet so it gets dumped in other States—the electricity coming from them might seem cheaper to consumers than electricity from a pollution-controlled powerplant. But that is not so. That would be wrong to consider or to conclude. The costs weren't cheaper. The costs just got shifted. They got shifted from the companies and the consumers in the polluting States to the lungs of children in Rhode Island and other downwind States. It is the lungs of children and adults and seniors in Rhode Island that are actually paying for that cheap electricity.

Happily, and at last, the EPA has begun to remedy this unfair and wrongful public health situation by requiring utilities in upwind States to control their pollution under the good neighbor provision of the Clean Air Act, because while a tall stack will send uncontrolled pollution farther than a short stack would, the most effective way to reduce pollution is to install pollution controls.

Prompted by petitions from our downwind States, the Bush EPA attempted to set pollution limits for States that contribute to unhealthy pollution levels outside their borders. However, on review, the DC Circuit Court of Appeals told them they had not gone far enough. So the EPA went back to the drawing board and crafted the cross-State air pollution rule that has been announced today, which will cap the pollution that can be produced in upwind States, such as Ohio, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Illinois, and North Carolina. Those caps were designed based on each State's contribution to pollution in States such as Rhode Island, and it will ratchet down whenever EPA tightens air quality standards based on the latest and best science.

As I said, that rule was finalized today. So I thank the EPA. I commend the EPA for finalizing that cross-State air pollution rule. I also urge EPA to update the national ozone air quality standard based on the recommendations from the CASAC—the Clean Air Science Advisory Committee. This will lead to further pollution reductions in States upwind of Rhode Island and further benefit Rhode Islanders.

These rules will bring us closer to the day when the coal powerplants on this chart start taking responsibility for their pollution and stop exporting that pollution into Rhode Island and other States, when they install pollution control equipment rather than sending their pollution to where it becomes someone else's problem, and to when Rhode Island children can play outdoors safely without the risk of an asthma attack. I am looking forward to that day, and I know the people of Rhode Island are too.

When you drive in and that morning radio tells you today is another bad air day and that children and seniors should stay indoors and can't play,

can't take a walk, can't engage in anything that involves any exertion, it is frustrating when there is nothing you can do about it. The Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management could pass regulations until it was blue in the face. The Rhode Island General Assembly could write new laws all day long and it would make no difference because the bombardment of outside pollution on our State is what is driving these health problems. That is why EPA is so important. We would have no voice in this if it were not for a National Environmental Protection Agency that can look out for small States such as ours that are on the receiving end of this kind of a pollution dump from the uncontrolled coal-fired plants in the Midwest.

I thank very much the Presiding Officer, I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. 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. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I would like to add a few words this afternoon about the ongoing negotiations on the Federal budget and on our rapidly approaching debt ceiling.

I think we all agree that the situation we face is one of enormous importance and complexity. I believe every responsible person also agrees a failure to act would have awful repercussions that would jeopardize or worsen our fragile and tentative economic recovery. So I think the responsible view is, it is imperative we act and it is also clear to do so will require every side to make concessions.

I rise this afternoon, however, because it is my strong belief that any agreement we reach must be based on real savings and must not be made at the expense of our most vulnerable citizens. That is why I am so concerned about reports that Social Security and Medicare have been raised as possible sources of deficit reduction. Cuts to Social Security and to Medicare benefits should not be on the table. Social Security is not the cause of the deficit, never has been the cause of the deficit, and beneficiaries of Social Security should not be made to shoulder the burden of deficit reduction.

Social Security is funded through the contributions of our Nation's workers and businesses. It has an enormous surplus and is projected to be fully solvent for another quarter century. So while I would agree with steps to strengthen Social Security, any changes should be considered independent of our effort to reduce the deficit, and we should not cut Social Security benefits.

I helped cofound the Senate defending Social Security caucus for this very reason. The solvency of the Social Security program can be extended significantly just by applying payroll

taxes to a greater portion of the earnings of millionaires and billionaires. What we have seen in this country is a huge shift of income going more and more to the uppermost economic reaches and less and less to the middle class. The middle class has actually lost income in the last decade. So the contributions to Social Security are lower because there is less income to draw it off of and the income that is above the \$106,000 Social Security cap is where the explosion of income has been and they contribute not a nickel from that income to Social Security.

So there is a lot we can do to support Social Security, but what we should not do is give in to any of the calls to put our seniors' security at risk in the stock market by privatizing Social Security or increasing the retirement age so that a construction worker or a waitress who works on their feet all day long has to put in more years of service at that age—when their body, frankly, might not be up to it any longer—or to cut benefits through backdoor methods by lowering the cost-of-living adjustment.

The Rhode Island seniors I have heard from at my community dinners and senior centers around the State I have visited are very concerned what would happen if their benefits were cut.

Audrey, from Middletown, told me that after her husband died, she had many expenses but, as she said, “no income except for his Social Security check which enabled me to go on living—simply but adequately without being a burden on my sons and losing my dignity as well.”

Two very important points Audrey makes. One is that Social Security is not just a benefit to Social Security recipients. It is a benefit to the children of Social Security recipients, on whom their parents might otherwise be a burden. It is an American value that senior citizens who have worked hard all their lives, who have played by the rules, who have built the America we now enjoy should be able to draw on so as not to lose their dignity at the end of their life.

That is a principle that is worth defending.

Ronald from Cumberland, RI, had been on Social Security for a number of years. He wrote to say: It seems that it's always the people who need the help the most who get cut from the Federal Government. Why is this? No Social Security cost of living adjustment for 2 years, yet prices for the basic needs still rise. In a country like the United States of America, this should not happen.

These people who are living on Social Security income are not living high off the hog, and they should not be the targets of our cost-cutting zeal.

The threat to the Medicare Program is just as real. Earlier this year, Republicans over in the House of Representatives passed a budget that would end the Medicare Program as we have come to know it for future generations. I can

remember being at a senior center in North Providence, and a gentleman sitting at a table said to me: You know, I have helped build this country; I have fought in its wars; And I understand that the Republican proposal will protect Medicare for me; but I am not willing to let Medicare for my children be thrown under the bus. That would make me feel awful. It simply isn't right for me to stay on it and stand for the program to be taken apart and dismembered for everybody else.

That was a moving statement for me to hear, and we need to honor that.

Estimates suggest that the House Republicans' proposal would end up forcing a typical 65-year-old senior to pay, on average, \$12,500 each year in out-of-pocket expenses starting in 2022. That is more than double what a senior is estimated to pay than if the current system of Medicare stayed in place.

In Rhode Island, the average senior only gets about \$14,200 per year from Social Security to begin with. So if you are going to ask people who now have \$14,200 a year, who aren't getting cost-of-living adjustments by 2022 to pay \$12,500 for Medicare, that would be a massive exercise in poverty creation, and what Medicare and Social Security have done is lifted the burden of poverty from America's seniors. I think sometimes we are blind to what life might be like without them, when some of our colleagues so cavalierly suggest that we should do away with these programs, privatize them, or turn them over to the insurance industry.

The Republican budget would also reopen the Medicare prescription drug doughnut hole. We went through a lot of effort to close that doughnut hole in the Affordable Care Act. That doughnut hole will be gone in 10 years, thanks to the Affordable Care Act. The Republicans all voted against the Affordable Care Act. They all voted against closing the doughnut hole. And now in their budget on the other side they want to unwind that part of the bill and take away the protections we have provided for seniors in the doughnut hole. That would cost millions of dollars to seniors in Rhode Island starting next year if it were put into law. That is not something off in the future. That is right now, thousands of Rhode Island seniors having to cough up millions of dollars because of this Republican House budget plan. That is something I think we need to defend against. That is the wrong place to look.

It is especially the wrong place to look as we find our Republican colleagues fighting so hard to protect tax breaks for millionaires and billionaires. I have given the speech repeatedly already, so I won't dwell on it now. But when our Republican colleagues stand and say, We are against tax hikes, it is important for Americans to look behind the curtain and see who they are defending, because I will tell you, everybody in this Chamber, Republican and Democrat alike, be-

lieves that ordinary American families earning ordinary levels of income should be exempt from any tax hikes. That is not even on the table.

When our Republican colleagues talk about defending against tax hikes, they are talking about defending the oil industry from having subsidies they don't need and that taxpayers pay for taken away. They are talking about protecting the top 400 income earners in the country who, on average, pay Federal taxes, actually paid in—this isn't a theory, this isn't a rate; this is what they actually paid in, according to the IRS—18.2 percent. These are people who made on average more than \$¼ billion, with a B—\$1 billion with a B, in 1 year. And God bless them. What a wonderful thing it is to make more than \$¼ billion in 1 year. But they pay taxes at lower rate than a truckdriver in Rhode Island does on average; the guy who wakes up every morning and gets into his clothes and puts on his boots and gets in the truck and goes out there and works all day, pays the same tax rate as the person earning over \$¼ billion.

They can talk about tax hikes until they are blue in the face. It won't take away the fact that is the way it actually works in this country, and they are defending that and going after Audrey and the folks on Medicare in Rhode Island and Ronald from Cumberland. That is not right, and we need to argue about that and fight back.

We can never overlook what Medicare and Social Security have contributed to our Nation's prosperity. It is not just the benefit for the Medicare beneficiary, it is not just the benefit for the Social Security recipient. It is the freedom we all feel knowing we will have a dignified old age; that we won't be at the mercy of Wall Street, that we won't be at the mercy of a private insurance company; that we will have the efficient and effective services that Medicare and Social Security deliver. We can know that now and enjoy that. We have more freedom as Americans now because we can make bolder choices in our lives knowing that we don't have to defend ourselves against that kind of poverty and that kind of misery in our old age. Our children can make bolder choices in their lives knowing that they don't have to safeguard against a parent's illness ruining their own financial futures, ruining their family's financial futures.

Imagine how awful it must feel for a parent in that circumstance, if in your old age you become grievously ill and the only resource you have is to essentially wipe out your children who feel a moral obligation to take care of your medical expenses and put themselves into poverty and misery as a result of your illness. What an awful human tragedy that is for the people involved. And we don't experience that tragedy in America. We don't experience it because Medicare and Social Security are there.

The challenge before us is a formidable one, but I truly believe we can

reach an agreement on the deficit and the debt ceiling without compromising the security and the well-being of our seniors. I believe the Democratic Budget Committee's proposed budget is a good model for how we can actually do it, and I look forward to continuing this discussion. It is not necessary, in order to solve our immediate deficit problems and to get through this debt limit fight, to take our seniors and put Social Security and Medicare that they have relied on at risk; to take this country whose prosperity Social Security and Medicare do so much to support, and knock that down with a tax on Social Security and Medicare. It is not right, it is not necessary, and we should stand against it.

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

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

THANKING SENATE PAGES

Mr. REID. Mr. President, first of all, I express my appreciation to you, presiding all these hours you have this afternoon, but I also wish to take just a minute and thank these pages. This is the first time since 1974 the Senate has been in session during a July 4 recess period—since 1974. These young pages had places to be with their families during the summer vacation period. They are juniors in high school. They have some plans, I am sure, that we interfered with. But regarding the work we have done this week, while there has not been a lot of time on the floor, there are a lot of things going on all over Washington. There have been meetings at the White House, there have been meetings with the Vice President, with the President, with the Speaker, and others, working on this very important issue.

When these eight pages in later years reflect back on the fact that they were here the first time since 1974 when we were in session over a July 4 recess period, they should reflect that we were here for important reasons. If we do what is right, we will rein in this debt the country has and protect the most needy of our country.

I apologize for keeping them here. They should not have had to be here this week, but they have stayed because they have an obligation as pages to be here and they accepted that. They have kept the Senate running smoothly. We need them. They are helpful to us. They didn't have to be asked; each one of these eight pages volunteered: Naomi Biden, Brynn DiNino, Claire Karsting, William Maas, Aliza Reisner, Morgan Wissel, Keira Harris, and Chaffee Duckers.

I appreciate very much their service and wish them the best in their edu-

cational endeavors in the years to come.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent the Senate proceed to a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

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

TRIBUTE TO BARRY MANILOW

Mr. REID. Mr. President, for nearly 40 years, legendary singer and songwriter Barry Manilow has inspired and dazzled millions of people with his musical talents. He has sold more than 80 million records worldwide and has written countless iconic hits.

However, I come to the floor today not to discuss his talent but to recognize my friend for another one of his remarkable accomplishments—his ongoing efforts to help preserve music education in public schools in Nevada and across this country.

In recent years, significant budget cuts to public education have forced schools to eliminate a number of important programs. Sadly, music programs are often one of the first casualties. In response to this disturbing trend, Mr. Manilow started the Manilow Music Project, which helps public schools continue their music programs. The project donates instruments and materials to public schools and provides music scholarships to high school students to further their music education at the college level. Since 2008, the organization has donated hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of instruments and materials to secondary and high school music programs across the country.

A wonderful example of the impact of the Manilow Music Project occurred last year in Nevada. During one of Mr. Manilow's recent tours in Las Vegas, in exchange for donations of new or gently used musical instruments, he offered tickets to attend one of his concerts. The collected instruments, valued at more than \$500,000, were then donated to fifteen schools in the Clark County School District, the school district that serves the Las Vegas Valley. This gift—the largest donation of its kind for Clark County—has provided more than 600 students with the opportunity to experience the joys of playing a musical instrument.

In addition to his donations to the district, Mr. Manilow has also helped foster music appreciation. He recently invited four different Clark County School District school choirs to perform in his holiday shows and provided show tickets valued at more than \$30,000 for nearly 500 students and their parents or chaperones.

I would like to thank Barry for his dedication to the Las Vegas community and his efforts to keep music alive in Nevada's schools. I am so pleased

that he has been able to share his love of music with thousands of aspiring musicians.

VA'S MENTOR—PROTÉGÉ PROGRAM

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I would like to recognize the accomplishments of the 24 participants in the Department of Veterans Affairs' Mentor-Protégé Program who are working to help veteran small business owners. In these hard economic times, it is more important than ever to provide this critical support to our veteran entrepreneurs.

The goal of the Mentor-Protégé Program, which was started in 2010, is to bring together established companies with service-disabled and other veteran-owned businesses. Through these partnerships with established regional businesses, veteran business owners receive guidance on financial and organizational management, business planning and technical aid. They also develop long-term business relationships with their mentor partners.

Veterans hire veterans because they know what they are getting. Veterans are well trained, disciplined team players who can deliver results in challenging conditions. At a time when the Department of Labor reports almost 10 percent of all veterans are unemployed, and 27 percent of veterans between the ages of 20 and 24 are unemployed, it is imperative we do everything in our power to tackle this issue. The Mentor-Protégé program holds the promise of fostering an environment where veteran-owned businesses can succeed in helping to revitalize our economy while hiring veterans in the process. These veteran-owned small businesses are exactly what our Nation needs to continue on the road to economic recovery while getting our country's heroes the jobs they deserve.

While I am optimistic about the potential of the VA's Mentor-Protégé Program, I have heard from several companies participating in the program who have expressed concerns with delays in VA's verification process. I urge VA's Center for Veterans Enterprise to expedite the verification process so that these companies can get to work in repairing our economy as quickly as possible.

Businesses in Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Tennessee, Alabama, Texas, New Mexico, and California are serving as a model of just how successful a program of this nature can be. The names of the businesses that are participating in the program, both as mentors and protégés, are:

ASM Research, Inc. of Fairfax, VA, and Coley & Associates of San Antonio, TX, AUI Contractors, LLC of Fort Worth, TX, and Unified Services of Texas, of South Lake, TX, Bear Construction Company of Rolling Meadows, IL, and Opcon Inc. of Chicago, IL, Booz Allen Hamilton of McLean, VA,