

There is a major problem with this approach. Washington does not have a revenue problem; it has a spending problem. Again, the numbers back this up. Traditionally, government spending is about 19 percent of our gross domestic product. Since President Obama has been in office, government spending has been much closer to 25 percent of our gross domestic product. This administration has raised Federal spending to the highest peak since World War II.

How do we solve this spending problem? We do it through cut, cap, and balance. Cut now—the House bill immediately cuts over \$100 billion in spending; cap for the future—the spending cap mechanism in this bill caps spending over the next 10 years, bringing it down to less than 20 percent of our gross domestic product within the next 5 years—and the balance is for a balanced budget amendment, something our entire Republican caucus supports in the Senate, as do many in the Democratic majority, at least according to their on-the-record statements.

This bill prohibits the Treasury from borrowing unless a balanced budget amendment is sent to the States for ratification. Let's pass a balanced budget amendment and give the people back home the decision about whether they want to require us to operate under a balanced budget amendment. I think you will find they overwhelmingly do. Unfortunately, the Senate majority, with no plan of their own for reining in the out-of-control spending, will not allow us to have a debate on this bill.

Last Friday they moved to table the Cut, Cap, and Balance Act, effectively ending any consideration of the bill. All this reminds me of the debate over the House-passed budget we had a few months ago. The majority over here had strong words of criticism but no budget proposal of their own. Again, strong words of criticism and no plan of their own. Only this time it is worse.

With our Nation on the brink of default, the majority clearly believes it is better to score political points than have a debate on the merits of our proposal. They control the floor, the agenda, and the amendments that are accepted. If any member of their caucus wants to change the bill, they certainly have that option. But instead of having the debate, we get political theater from the majority.

This is not what our constituents deserve. They deserve a real debate. They sent us here to work together to prevent a catastrophe on par with what has happened in Greece, Ireland, and Portugal. They want to see us get our fiscal house in order. That is what the root cause of this crisis is all about. We are not just having a debate on raising the debt ceiling. If that were all this discussion was about, it would have been over months ago. Nobody wants a default.

The debate that is going on today is about a much bigger problem: the out-

of-control spending that has put us in this position time and time again. Cut, cap, and balance is one way to solve the problem. It is a solution that helps us avert an immediate meltdown and brings a sense of fiscal responsibility to Washington where it is so badly needed.

Madam President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

THE MILITARY PAY ACT OF 2011

Mrs. HUTCHISON. Madam President, I rise today to speak about the Military Pay Act of 2011. We were on the brink of closing down government earlier this year, this spring, and we came to a responsible conclusion and continued our government. We were also able to continue the tax cuts that have helped spur our economy as best they could in light of the spending and the debt that has been accumulated. Now we are looking at yet another potential government shutdown. It is so important that we make priorities.

We know what is happening right now in Washington. Everyone is focused on whether there is going to be an agreement to lift the debt ceiling because if there is not, then we have the potential for default, depending on the decision of what gets paid first. We do have revenue coming in that can be spent even if the debt ceiling is not lifted. However, the President can choose the priorities. What I am asking we do today is set some of those priorities. What I am asking is we take our military personnel out of any limbo. Let's go back to what we did earlier this year when we were in the continuing resolution debate which also had the potential for shutting down government. When that happened in April, I joined with my colleague on the House side, Representative LOUIE GOHMERT. We both introduced a bill, the Ensuring Pay for Our Military Act, Senate bill 724. We have 80 cosponsors of that legislation. We have 80 out of 100 in the Senate who stepped up to the plate and said: Yes, we need to take care of our military even if government shuts down. That was April. Since then, I have introduced a new bill. The new bill is Senate bill 1365, the Protecting Military Pay Act of 2011. That one sets two priorities. It sets paying our debt, the interest on our debt and our military. Those are the two priorities. Social Security is in a different account, and it will automatically be paid from that account. I actually am cosponsoring another bill that is also cosponsored by many Senators and many House Members that

would require the President pay our debt, interest on our debt, our active-duty military and also Social Security recipients even though that would automatically happen. The legislation I introduced in April that would take care of our active-duty military is supported by the Military Officers Association of America; the AMVETS, the American Veterans; and the National Military Family Association. The new bill I have introduced that has the debt to be paid off along with our military sets the priorities, and here is what it does: It says if we have any kind of government shutdown or we have a situation where we do not lift the debt ceiling and, therefore, we have to prioritize our spending according to the revenue that is coming in, there are two things that will be done: We want to pass the law so there can be no discretion that you will pay the debts and you will pay the military. You will pay the active-duty military. That is what the bill does simply and clearly.

Here is the situation: If the debt ceiling is reached, \$29 billion would be set aside for August to the payment of our debts, \$2.9 billion would be added to that for active-duty military pay. So you are allocating out of the billions that would be coming in in August, you would allocate those as the first two priorities and Social Security would be paid out of the Social Security fund. I am going to ask our majority leader to let these bills come up—at least one of them that says we will pay the debt, we will pay our military, and we know that Social Security will be paid.

It is tremendously damaging for our military to be getting the news in Afghanistan and Iraq of all the upheaval in Washington because they are getting the news, of course. For them to worry: Oh, my gosh, what happens August 2 if my paycheck isn't there for my wife or my husband to be able to use that to pay the mortgage or the basic expenses? I want to put it in perspective. We have people in the military with boots on the ground by the thousands who are making under \$20,000 a year. Those are people who are living paycheck to paycheck. They don't have the luxury of having a big savings account with that kind of income, especially if they have children. My goodness, they are making under \$18,000 a year, some of these younger junior members of the enlisted corps, so I don't think we ought to make them worry for 10 seconds if they can pay their basic bills for their housing and the food for their families.

In my State of Texas there are 28,000 brave men and women deployed in the support of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. There are more than 97,000 servicemembers deployed who are married and have children waiting for them at home. There are 145,000 troops deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan who are working long hours every day in the desert heat to protect our freedom, to make sure we are doing everything we can to root out the terrorists who

have attacked America. These men and women all raised their right hand and volunteered to go to defend this Nation. The very least we can do while we are in this kind of budget negotiation, which is making a lot of people nervous—I have faith that we are going to do the right thing in the end, but it is not clear yet and we are a week away. I don't think we ought to make these people think about whether it is going to happen and if there is going to be a delay in a paycheck.

I hope we will be able to bring this bill up. I can guarantee if the majority leader will bring up my bill, it will pass. It has 80 cosponsors. The new bill is the same thing except it makes the debt payment the priority, which you would hope would not have to be done, but nevertheless let's assure that our debtors know we are going to pay the interest on the debt, and our military—who are in harm's way right now—will not worry about their family having the paycheck they need.

We have about a week. All of us had hoped it wouldn't take this long, but we have our different views, there is no question about it. I am one who believes we should raise the debt ceiling only with reforms that will assure the markets not just for the next week or the next 6 months, but for the long term, that not only are we going to pay our debts but we are going to bring down the cost of government so we will not have to raise the debt limit again.

We must take the reform actions we can take right now. We can fix Social Security for 75 years with relatively little cuts in increases with Social Security COLAs and with a trajectory that will put us on an actuarial table for an age that has certainly changed since Social Security passed. Very little change. It wouldn't affect anyone who is in the upper area of going into Social Security. The bill I have introduced wouldn't affect anyone age 58 and above or 55 and above. We can do the big things that will show our debtors and the rest of the world we can live within our means and our democracy can work to do the things that will make us good not for the next week, not for the next 6 months, but for our children and grandchildren. That is what we ought to be doing right now, and I have faith. We are going to have to do something temporary for the next few months while we work out the details, but I know if we get together, we can do this. I don't want our military to have to worry about it for 1 week or 3 months or 6 months because they deserve better.

Thank you, Madam President.

I yield the floor.

Mr. THUNE. Madam President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota.

THE BUDGET

Mr. THUNE. I am happy to cosponsor the legislation of the Senator from Texas. She is absolutely right, there is

no more deserving group of people in this country than our military and we need to make sure under no circumstance they are not paid, and her legislation would do that. I hope we can get it to the floor and that it is acted upon very quickly.

We are a week away now from the time in which we would have to request additional borrowing authority in order for our Federal Government to pay its bills. We have known it is coming for some time. We know generally at least when that date is. It strikes me as most Americans observe this debate, the thing they are probably most concerned about is how this is going to impact them and their economic circumstances. Frankly, I think all of us ought to be looking at this with an eye toward how is this going to impact the economy. What is this going to do to get people back to work and to grow the economy? There has been a lot of discussion about that. The President made yet another speech last night in which he tried to claim the high ground in this debate. Frankly, I think the President has relegated himself to the sidelines in this debate simply because many of the things he was proposing to do as a part of this debt limit increase would be very counterproductive when it comes to the economy. I would also add that the President continues to sort of assign blame and blame the previous administration for the circumstances in which we find ourselves and, clearly, he inherited a difficult set of economic circumstances. I think we would all concede that.

What I would argue is the President has made that situation worse. He has made it much worse. If you look at since this President took office, we now have 2.1 million more people unemployed than there were when he took office. We have seen the Federal debt grow by 35 percent since this President took office. The number of people receiving food stamps today has gone up by 40 percent since this President took office. He has added \$11,000 to the debt of each individual in this country since he took office. Gas prices are up. They increased almost 100 percent since this President took office. The cost of health care has gone up 19 percent since this President took office despite assertions during the debate on the health care bill last year that it was actually going to reduce health care costs. We have seen all of these economic circumstances worsen on this President's watch.

It strikes me as we look at this debt debate that we ought to be thinking about what can we do to get out of this economic downturn. We are growing at a very sluggish rate, a little under 2 percent. We have unemployment that is over 9 percent, 9.2 percent. As I said, there are 2.1 million more people unemployed than when the President took office. Clearly the focus of our discussions as we lead up to this vote on the debt limit ought to be about the

economy, getting people back to work, growing the economy.

Frankly, I think there are a couple of things we have to do to get out of the debt situation. One is we have to cut government spending. Secondly, we have to get the economy growing and expanding again. So, clearly, that ought to be the focus.

When I said the President, in his proposal—at least as it has been reported because we haven't seen any proposal from him, but in the reporting about his discussions with congressional leadership, it has been suggested that the President has consistently advocated for more revenues, more taxes, and, in fact, as recently as last Friday, when there was still “a big deal” on the table—we were still looking at a possibility of actually striking an agreement—the President upped the ante even further. He moved the goalpost yet again. He wanted \$400 billion more in higher taxes.

It strikes me, and I think most Americans right now, that the worst thing we can do in an economic downturn and when we have 9.2 percent unemployment is raise taxes. There isn't a tax I can think of that will create a single job in this country. It would only make it more difficult and more expensive for our small businesses to create jobs. So that was a nonstarter. I think it became clear over time that it was going to be a nonstarter despite the President's insistence that tax increases be a part of whatever deal gets struck here.

As we find ourselves where we are now, I think it is important to think about where we have come from and to look at the time that has now passed and where we stand today. I think it is important to point out, as we talk about budgets and we talk about spending and we talk about debt, our job is to pass a budget. That is where it all starts. We haven't passed a budget now in 818 days. In fact, the last time the Senate approved a budget was back on April 29, 2009. So it has now been 818 days since the most recent budget was approved by the Senate.

So we are operating without a budget. Imagine how complicated it would be for any State government, any business in this country, if they continued to operate without a budget. That is what we have been doing in Washington now for 818 days.

So January 6 of this year came around and we knew this debt limit vote was coming and was out there. Secretary Geithner wrote to Congress asking that the debt limit be increased. That was back in January. At that time, the Obama administration was also pushing for a clean debt limit increase; in other words, a debt limit increase that did not include any kind of spending reductions or spending reform. He just wanted a \$2.4 trillion blank check to raise the debt by that amount.

Well, we came to February of this year—of 2011—when it came time for