

30—there is no reason to wait—and if that type of bill were to pass where we have a two-stage process, let's go ahead and get the work out of the way.

I want to go back to the bigger picture for a moment and I will conclude momentarily. We have an opportunity right now where we have never been focused in the way we are right now—in the 4½ years I have been here—on something as important as this as it relates to us getting our house in order. We have never been this focused. What I am afraid of, in the name of political efficacy—people saying, Hey, look, let's take what we can get and get on out of here so we don't mess up our potential, on both sides of the aisle, for the 2012 elections—take what you have on both sides. Basically, let's think about it. For the other side of the aisle, the way all of the proposals before us are laid out, there is no dealing with trying to make the entitlements sustainable, so they can run in 2012 on the entitlement issue. With all of the proposals laid out right now, we don't deal with spending appropriately, so our country is probably going to have its debt downgraded, so Republicans can run on the fact that we haven't reduced spending enough. So if we look at it, this works well for everybody, except the citizens of our country.

Again, we are finally on the right topic, which is a rarity here. We are finally focused on the problem. We have two bills that don't go far enough. Again, I applaud both the Democratic leader and the Republican leader for putting forth proposals. We all know they don't do what they need to do—either proposal. We know the aspirational goals of each proposal don't take us far enough.

I would say to all: I agree. Let's don't default. Let's don't buck up against August 3. Let's pass a short-term time extension. Let's take us through the end of August or the first 2 weeks in September, or let's take a week, but let's finish our work in this body. Let's don't miss this seminal opportunity where everybody in this country and everybody in this world is looking at how undisciplined we have been and the opportunity we have before us to actually be disciplined and send a signal to the world that our future is not the future that Greece is seeing today; our future is the continuation of American exceptionalism all around this world. We are squandering that opportunity right now in this body at a time when we are finally focused on the right topic.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. ROCKEFELLER. 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. ROCKEFELLER. I thank the Presiding Officer, as I always do.

FAA REAUTHORIZATION

Mr. ROCKEFELLER. Mr. President, Senator TOM HARKIN is on his way from the meeting the Presiding Officer and I were just at because we both want to talk more about this National Mediation Board crisis and also the fact that the FAA is on hold, that we cannot do anything with it. What the House did—you see, one of the revelations of the modern era, which hopefully will last only a couple years, is that the folks in the House are willing to say “no” to the very end. In other words, the question I would raise is that my plan is to raise the stakes on the airlines, doing quite dreadful things to them, in hopes they will engage with the House Members to say we have to have an FAA bill.

As I said yesterday, all I seek is a clean bill of extension. That has been done 20 times on this FAA bill. It has taken us 4 years, and we have not been able to reauthorize it. There are some things to work out, but they can all be worked out.

The House sent over a message saying they did not like what we were doing on the essential air service. Well, the Presiding Officer knows what the essential air service means for rural communities, which is to have it in order that communities have an economic future of any kind at all. But, on the other hand, we have been willing to make reforms. In fact, the reforms we have suggested are more dramatic reforms than the House has suggested: put a cap on the number of airports—some quite dramatic things I actually hate doing in order to try to get agreement on that subject.

But what is more interesting is, that is not what they care about. Mr. MICA, who is my counterpart in the House, has often said he does not have a dog in the essential air service fight. Yesterday I was meeting with him and Secretary LaHood, who is completely with the Senate in our desire to get this done and to break the intransigence of the House, and my counterpart simply said—I said: Why did you send that over when that is not what you care about? He said: Well, sometimes it is a little political thing.

I was not shocked by that because that is why I knew he had done it, but what it says is they are willing to tank the Federal Aviation Administration unless the Senate caves to their position on the National Mediation Board, which would undo 75 years of labor law and which would take an extraordinary situation, which Senator HARKIN, when he gets here, if he gets here, is going to talk more about.

But the principle they want and they like is the fact that if you have an election—it could be a union election, it could be any kind of an election, but let's say for the purposes of this it is a union election—and people do not show

up to vote, as is always the case. Then for those people who did not show up to vote, their vote is automatically characterized as a “no” vote on the idea of certifying to get a union.

This is purely the work of Delta. Most of the legacy airlines are unionized. Delta is not. Delta's CEO makes \$9 million a year, their top management another \$20 million a year. They could practically pay for the whole Essential Air Service Program themselves. But they do not want to fool around with this language to protect their antiworker ambitions.

They have had four union elections in the last several years. They have prevailed. The airline has prevailed in all four of those elections. But they still want this language changed so that if you do not vote, you are put down as a “no” vote; that is, not to be able to organize. That is un-American. It is unprecedented in American history. And it goes against, as I said, 75 years of labor law. That is very dangerous.

What we have to do is to try and make it clear—frankly, the other airlines have been rather tepid in their support of my position. Airlines are a close group and they tend to stay together. They have to stop that. They have to make the House understand that if they persist in this rule, we will have a Federal aviation system that will shut down altogether. I am talking about air traffic controllers. I am talking about the whole deal. It is not a long process. It is a horrible process. It is an antiworker process which they are dumping in our laps. They want to see that happen. They are willing to see that happen. They will not compromise on the National Mediation Board. They will not compromise. They have said that. I have often talked with my counterpart over there, and he says: Well, I do not make those decisions. Those are made at a higher pay grade. He uses that word. Why does somebody run for public office if they simply take orders from other people? Well, that is sort of the way they do things over there in the House, but it is extremely dangerous.

The truth lies in the fact that the House provision that cuts the Essential Air Service Program by \$16 million—that is what it does. At the same time, the House has been willing to let \$150 million drain from the airport trust fund in less than a week. Every day we do not get this bill resolved, \$25 million drops out of the airport trust fund, which is flush for now but is becoming very unflush very quickly.

The FAA extensions are very necessary. They are not something which people walk around here talking about all the time, but if they find they do not have flights to get to their homes on the west coast or in the South or anywhere else, they will be very angry. People will be very angry. I do not know of any alternative but to ratchet up the pressure, to make those who are blocking this understand they are

causing a national disaster and they need to back off from that position.

They have said they will not. Well, will that be the final solution? It may very well be, and we have to understand that. But you cannot negotiate something which is so antiworker. You cannot negotiate that. The President has said he will veto it if it appears in the bill in any form. The House has voted for it. The Senate has voted against it. We have been very clear that it cannot pass over here and will not pass over here. So why are they playing that game?

The airlines are not now even paying for their use of the national airspace system. The carriers also do not appear to care about the impact on the dedicated FAA workforce that serves them—once again, 4,000 already having been furloughed. Most of the airlines are not even passing any savings on to the customers they serve. Why do I say that? Because they are having a tax holiday now because our extension ran out. So all of a sudden they do not have to pay taxes on jet fuel and a number of other things, so they are getting a lot of money. But what will you do with that money? Would you keep it for yourself or would you turn it over to the trust fund or would you keep ticket prices the same and not raise them? Well, they keep it. Frontier Airlines, I think Alaska Airlines, Virgin, all have kept their fares exactly where they were. They are trying to protect the consumer.

Delta and the other airlines are raising ticket prices as fast as they can, even though, because the time has run out on the agreement, they are getting endless millions of dollars. They are choosing to keep it and make a profit for themselves. That is unconscionable behavior in terms of national policy.

What are the real benefits to Delta from what they are doing? How badly were they harmed by the decision, the NMB decision? After the change, several unionization votes were held among components of their work force, which I have already said. None of those unions voted to organize. So what is their game? It is a game. It is politics. It is theology. You cannot let that stand. You cannot allow people to get furloughed who are serious about their jobs, who are engineers and technical people—the first 4,000. Many of them will not come back. They will choose to figure: Well, they will never get this settled. They will go out and find other jobs, and they will be able to get other jobs. It is unconscionable. It is almost you cannot believe you are in this situation, that you are in some “Disney World” somewhere where people do not take life seriously and do not take politics seriously.

I want to reiterate that the Senate appointed conferees—which is sort of necessary to try and reach resolution—on the very day the House sent over its FAA package for us to consider. We appointed conferees. More than 100 days later—1-0-0 days later—the House still

dragged its feet. The House has still not named any conferees.

What am I to make of that? They are not serious about this. So if they are not serious about it, do we then buckle because they are not serious or do we stand for what is right and what is fair for the people who work for the Federal Aviation Administration and also, frankly, for consumers of aviation all over this country?

I will tell you, you wait until some of these air traffic control systems shut down, the towers shut down because there is nobody to man them. Then business, American business and these airlines are going to understand how bad it is going to be. The only policy I know how to adopt is to try and drive home to them what they are actually doing to their own futures. They will shut themselves down if they continue on their course.

We can still get this process working again, but we need to get the FAA stable first. We should pass a clean extension, that which we have done forever. All extensions are clean. Senator CORKER was just talking about a clean extension on something else. We should pass a clean extension and then get to work finding a compromise on our remaining differences.

Mr. President, I yield the floor and await the presence of Senator HARKIN who will be speaking on this subject.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BROWN of Ohio. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. HAGAN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. BROWN of Ohio. Madam President, first, I wish to thank Senator ROCKEFELLER for his leadership on the FAA issue. It is so important in rural areas. It is so important to attract and retain a workforce. It is so important to the local economies in large cities like Cleveland, Cincinnati and Columbus and in smaller communities too. As Senator ROCKEFELLER said, our aviation system is absolutely critical for economic development.

People in big cities might make fun of small airports that they do not have all the hustle and bustle. But we do know medium-sized and smaller airports matter a great deal.

With the refusal of the House to take up a clean extension of FAA, nearly 4,000 employees across the country have been furloughed and dozens of construction projects have come to a halt. In this economy, some radicals in the House of Representatives have decided—because they have a political mission and ideology that does not quite fit with the majority of Americans—they are going to again hold hostage something that simply needs to be done; that is, what is called reauthorization of the Federal Aviation Administration.

As Senator ROCKEFELLER said, these furloughed employees may be forced to look elsewhere for jobs to meet their mortgage payments or pay for groceries—these are very skilled technicians and engineers. And what does this mean to these construction projects? FAA helps to pay, all over the country, for modernization of airports—rebuilding air traffic control towers, improving runways, and making countless safety improvements.

We have all heard stories—I do not recall that I have ever seen it, but we have heard stories of the Beijing or Shanghai airports or some of these airports—I have not seen them in the last many years—about the new technologies and the modern features of those airports. As a country we cannot afford to fall behind. We have to keep up.

Not passing a clean extension of the FAA bill is exactly the wrong thing to do. The unemployment rate in the construction industry is nearly double the national average. Yet we are idling cranes and we are idling bulldozers all because of a political mission, an ideology that some Members of the House—some radical Members of the House—have decided to inflict on us.

A clean extension of FAA has been done 20 times. All of a sudden it is not. I hope the House gets serious. I hope they appoint conferees and come to the table and work this out. I appreciate very much Senator ROCKEFELLER's leadership. He is making a difference on these important issues, and our House colleagues need to follow.

SUPPORTING AMERICAN MANUFACTURING

Mr. BROWN of Ohio. Madam President, I wish to talk also about another issue where we should have done a clean extension—as we have done dozens of times in this country. In the past three decades alone, we have avoided default by addressing the debt limit 38 times; 34 of those were with Republican Presidents. That is almost 90 percent of the time we have raised the debt ceiling—more precisely, avoided default—it has been under Republican Presidents.

A lot of us did not like it. We maybe made a public statement saying we did not like their fiscal policy, but we never stood in the way, we never tried to take hostage—take the government hostage or each other hostage by saying—almost like children—if I do not get my way, then I am going to block this and I am going stop—I am going to potentially throw our financial system and our economy into turmoil. What kind of behavior is that for adults?

Then, when I hear Speaker BOEHNER and some of his radical kind of cheerleaders on the far political right say we should do this again in 6 months, I wonder what are they possibly thinking, when we go through this right now.

I spend a lot of time with manufacturers around my State. I love seeing