

budget matters. I thought it was important that he take a look at that.

I would have hoped, though, that someone would come to us, come to the bargaining table on behalf of the Republican caucus with ideas to improve a proposal already cut from the Republican cloth. Democrats are still willing to sit down and negotiate. My door is still open. I say again that I appreciate that several of my Republican colleagues have reached out to me in the last few hours hoping to reach a compromise. Senate Democrats welcome their input and look forward to working with them on a path forward.

My friend the Republican leader must generate some more action on behalf of his Republicans. The two parties must work together to forge an agreement that preserves this Nation's economy. We will need input from reasonable Republicans, including my friend the Republican leader, to get this done. But, unbelievably, another filibuster stands in our path. Republican filibusters have become routine. From the smallest measure to the greatest measure of national importance, they stall and delay and use every procedural trick in the book to keep this body from doing its job. But a filibuster at this late hour and when so much is at risk is irresponsible; it puts our economy at risk.

A majority vote was good enough for the Speaker's proposal in the House yesterday, but Republicans believe it is not good enough for the Senate today. And I have heard from my friends on the House side, to show how they are gaming the system over there, that they are going to have a vote on my proposal on suspensions. For those of us who served in the House, this is for naming courthouses and little measures that are of little importance. But this important matter, this matter dealing with the debt limit of this country, will take a two-thirds vote to pass. So they have gamed this system from the very beginning.

As I said earlier from the New York Times article:

The facts of the crisis over the debt ceiling aren't complicated. Republicans have, in effect, taken America hostage, threatening to undermine the economy and disrupt the essential business of government unless they get policy concessions they would never have been able to enact through legislation.

So they are going through, as I understand, on the House side, an effort to vote on our legislation, setting up a two-thirds standard to get this done, recognizing, of course, as I will outline here in a minute that a filibuster at this late hour here in the Senate and when so much is at risk is really irresponsible, and to say it puts our economy at risk is an understatement, and that is for sure. A majority vote was good enough for the Speaker's proposal in the House, but Republicans believe it is not good enough for the Senate today.

Rather than filibuster, I ask my Republican colleagues to work with

Democrats to make our proposal better. We have offered a reasonable, rational way for Republicans to help us avert default.

But let me tell you about the legislation at issue, how we believe how reasonable our legislation is.

This legislation was written by Democrats with both parties' principles in mind. It would avert default while cutting \$2.5 trillion from the deficit over a decade. It includes no revenues—a concession to House Republicans and Senate Republicans. It establishes a joint congressional committee to find additional savings this year and guarantees that the committee's recommendations will see an up-or-down vote on the Senate floor. It takes into consideration that—that committee must take into consideration proposals like the Gang of 6. Literally every single spending cut has been voted on or endorsed by Republicans in both Houses. That is the gist of the legislation: \$2.5 trillion and extending the debt ceiling until March of 2013—a pretty fair deal.

We have made some changes to this proposition. We hope it becomes more amenable to Republicans. We have improved the program integrity language to allow for more savings by combating government waste and fraud.

We have removed a measure that would have raised revenue by selling the spectrum—some \$15 billion—which will be done, and we should do it now, but it caused what is called a blue slip problem, which says if you have any revenue measures, according to our Constitution, they have to originate in the House. So it presents a so-called blue slip problem. I just eliminated it from this bill. It was \$15 billion out of \$2.5 trillion.

We also added a process conceived by my friend Senator McCONNELL to allow two additional votes over the next year and a half, two motions of disapproval before the President can raise the debt ceiling.

This proposal also protects Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid benefits.

As you can see, this legislation was designed to appeal to our Republican colleagues as well as to our Democratic colleagues. We are willing to listen to ideas—I have said this several times—from Republican Senators to make this proposal better. But to say the time is short is an understatement. We can amend the underlying legislation that is here before us in the so-called message to the House. We still have time to do that. We could do it tonight and we could still meet the deadline on Tuesday. But we need to do it soon. That is why, at 1:10 in the afternoon this Saturday, I hope I have more Republicans contact me to see if they can work out something to work with us.

Already the economy has gone from bad to worse. Stocks continued a weeklong slide yesterday. I know my Republican colleagues love this country, every single one of them. I believe

they want to do what is best for our economy, every single one of them. But I have to say—and I say this for the third time:

The facts of the crisis over the debt ceiling aren't complicated at all. Republicans have, in effect, taken America hostage, threatening to undermine the economy and disrupt the essential business of government unless they get policy concessions they would never have been able to enact through legislation.

That is why together we must avert a default that would jeopardize veterans' benefits, senior citizens' benefits, Social Security payments, and checks for troops, even troops on the front line. It would also effectively raise taxes on every American family: Vermont, Illinois, Kentucky, Idaho, Nevada, all over this country. Oregon. All of the Senators on the floor. Even Wyoming, which does not pay much in the way of taxes. We could do that. It would effectively raise taxes on every American family. And businesses would also suffer by the increase in the cost of everything from groceries to their mortgages.

So I urge my Republican friends to join me and move forward with the only compromise plan that is left—in fact, the only option left at all—to save this country from default.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The minority leader is recognized.

DEBT CEILING NEGOTIATIONS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, there is nobody in the Senate I respect and admire more than my counterpart, the Democratic leader. But we have been subjected, last night and again just a few moments ago, I would say to my colleagues from Wyoming and Idaho, to some Orwellian discussion about what is a filibuster. Most Americans, when asked the question "What is a filibuster?" would believe it was delaying something—delaying something.

So we have the astonishing development here that my good friend the majority leader is delaying a vote on something he wants to pass. We were prepared to have this vote last night. We are prepared to have this vote momentarily. We are prepared to have this vote at any point.

I want to disabuse my good friend of the notion that somehow it is going to pass. We just—he has not seen it yet, but we just delivered a letter to his office with 43 of my colleagues on it saying they are not going to vote for it. The House of Representatives is going to speak at 2:30 on this issue. They are not going to vote for it.

With regard to the 60-vote threshold, let me quote my good friend the majority leader:

March 5, 2007: "In the Senate, it has always been the case, you need 60 votes."

January 30, the same year: "60 votes are required for just about everything."

Now, look, we know that on controversial matters in the Senate, it has for quite some time required 60 votes. So I would say again to my friend, it is pretty hard to make a credible case that denying a vote on your own proposal is anything other than a filibuster.

We know that August 2 is Tuesday. The American people are frustrated with us. They want us to come together and reach an agreement. The measure my good friend is offering is not acceptable to the Senate, is not acceptable to the House, will not pass. I think the American people would appreciate it if we go on and get that out of the way and get serious about talking.

With regard to talking, let me say who ought to be in the talks. The majority leader, myself, the Speaker, and the minority leader of the House spent most of last weekend talking to each other. In fact, we were called down to the White House for a meeting around 11 o'clock on that Saturday, and I suggested the President give us a chance to go up to the Hill and see what we could work out together. We came close enough together to where my good friend, the majority leader—while I understand he believes he didn't fully endorse it but at least went down there to advocate what we thought we could agree to on that Sunday afternoon. The President said no.

I became convinced that even though my friend, the majority leader, and I would love to work this out, we can't do it by ourselves. It has to have the only person who can sign something into law. There are 307 million Americans, but only 1 can sign something into law.

My suggestion to my good friend, the majority leader, is let's vote on his proposal. It is not going to pass. Let's get to talking to the administration again in the hopes that we can come together behind something that can pass both the Senate and the House and be signed into law before Tuesday.

I don't blame anybody for being confused about what has been going on in Congress this week. I will take a moment to explain what is going on right now.

Last night, the Democrats, who control the Senate, proposed a bill that would lead to the largest debt ceiling increase in the history of the United States and which completely ignores the roots of this crisis. This bill has one goal: to get the President through his next election without having to have another national debate about the consequences of his policies. The President wants to make sure this kind of debate doesn't happen again, even as he gets Democrats in Congress to give him permission to add trillions more to the debt. That is what the Reid bill does. It is not going anywhere, as I described. It will not pass the Senate. It will not

pass the House. It is simply a non-starter.

Senate Republicans refuse to go along with this transparently political and deeply irresponsible ploy to give the President cover to make our debt crisis even worse than it already is. Forty-three of us, as I indicated, have now signed a letter to the majority leader pledging that we will not vote for his \$2.4 trillion debt limit amendment, which, if enacted, would result in the single largest debt ceiling increase in the history of the United States.

Moreover, as I indicated earlier, we will soon know with certainty that this bill can't pass the House of Representatives, as they will be voting on it shortly.

Since there is no possibility this bill will be enacted into law, I say again to my friend that he can hold the vote on his proposal here and now. We are ready at any point to go on and have that vote and not waste another minute of the Nation's time on this reckless piece of legislation we know will not pass.

Earlier this week, the majority leader told the Speaker of the House he was wasting the Nation's time by proceeding with a bill Senate Democrats pledged to block, which the majority leader himself helped put together but which he decided to oppose, as I indicated, after the President said he didn't like it.

The question now is this: Why would my friend, the majority leader, waste the Nation's time by refusing to vote on his own bill—his own bill—which we also know will fail? Why would he not take his own advice and get it over with? The answer seems to be obvious. The Democrats are running out the clock. They want to delay the hard work of negotiation until the August 2 deadline they have been warning us about all summer.

The Democrats' entire strategy this particular week, since last Sunday, has been to run out the clock so the Nation focuses more on the August 2 deadline than their own failure to do something about the underlying problem.

Republicans have now passed two pieces of legislation that would put us on a path to fiscal sanity—not one but two have passed the House of Representatives. Democrats spent the last few weeks figuring out how to avoid that particular bill.

Democrats have spent their time talking about the tea party instead of talking about a solution. They have done absolutely nothing but stand in the way of a meaningful solution to this crisis and criticize Republicans for having the audacity to suggest we might try to balance the books.

Now we are reduced to this. They would not even allow a vote on their own bill. They are delaying the inevitable so they can avoid doing anything responsible. It is simply indefensible.

Once again, I ask my good friend the majority leader to let us vote on his

legislation. Let's get this irresponsible bill that we know will fail up for a vote so we can get down to the real work of negotiating a solution to the crisis with, as I indicated, the only person in America who can sign something into law, the President of the United States.

The lesson from last weekend is, anything two parties agree to here doesn't mean a thing if the President decides he doesn't like it and that the Democrats will abandon their own agreements if the President doesn't support them. Look, I don't blame them. I have been leader in the party when we had a Republican President. It is a tough spot. One is not a free agent. But we don't have time to go through that again. We have a couple days to work this out, and we cannot do it without the President.

Republicans have proposed solution after solution to this crisis. It is time for our friends on the other side, including the President of the United States, to figure out how we are going to come together and solve this problem.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I believe my distinguished Republican friend must be a little bit confused because he is usually totally logical. He tells the American people this morning he was called to the White House last week and said: Mr. President, let us do the deal, and now he is telling the President he wants the President to do the deal. That is somewhat illogical.

I wish to make sure everybody in the Senate understands clearly that when negotiations took place last Sunday, in a meeting between Leader PELOSI, me, the Speaker, and Senator MCCONNELL, we tried very hard to work something out. But everyone should understand, when we left that meeting, we did not have anything worked out. We had nothing worked out. They were focusing on a 6-month extension, trying to come up with a trigger for the joint committee, which we have never been able to accomplish.

It is OK they keep talking about an agreement the President overruled, but the President cannot overrule an agreement we don't have.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Will my friend yield on that?

Mr. REID. Yes, I am happy to.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Then it proves my case, if that is the case. We cannot reach an agreement without the President. We tried to. I will concede the point. My friend says he didn't actually agree to that. I take his word for it. But it makes my point that there simply is no way, under our constitutional system, for my friend and I to work this out. We have to have the President at the table. I think the approach we tried last weekend—we both agree it did not lead to an agreement.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, the President of the United States, in the presence of Senator MCCONNELL, Senator

DURBIN, Senator KYL, and the House leaders, said to all of us: No President in history has spent as much time as I have on a compliant basis—meaning with leaders—trying to come up with some effort on this budget problem we are having today. The President has spent hours, days, and weeks of his time working on this. As we know, he believed he had—as I understand it—two tentative agreements with the Speaker. The Speaker backed out of both of those.

The President—and I have not spoken to him this morning, but I did several times yesterday—is willing to work with anybody who can give him a proposal. That is my point today. As I said earlier—a letter is coming, terrific—I have not received it yet, but I am sure it is coming. The Republicans say they will not vote for my legislation. What will they vote for? Do they have any ideas? Let me know. I will be happy to work it in. We have gone so far as to even accept the Republican bill we got from the House as a shell. Nobody has to worry about it being my bill. If we work something out, it will be the Boehner bill, if that makes everyone happy.

Mr. McCONNELL. If my friend will yield, I think the answer is a bill the President agrees to sign. That is what we were trying to achieve last weekend. We don't have time to ping-pong stuff across the Hill anymore.

I think the majority leader and I are probably in basic agreement that, with 2 days left, the only legislation Congress has time to deal with, and should deal with, is something the President says he is willing to sign. I am certainly not critical of the President for not spending time on this. He has spent enormous time on it. But we have not gotten a result yet.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, we are here dealing with reality, not a world of fantasy. We are dealing with reality. The reality is, the debt ceiling is fast approaching, and we have to raise it or default on our debt. We have a matter before this body that would increase the debt ceiling until March of 2013. It would reduce the debt by \$2.4 trillion on basically issues that the Republicans voted on. They talk about, I don't think we need to do the overseas contingency fund because the wars that were started—and still going on—by President Bush cost a lot of money, trillions of dollars. The Congressional Budget Office and the Office of Management and Budget have said those wars are winding down. As a result of that, we will save \$1 trillion. They have scored it. That is a reduction in our debt.

I also think that if the Republicans have some way they want to improve my legislation, please let somebody know. If they don't want to call me, call the President of the United States. But we have to work forward. Mine is the only proposal we have. If mine passes, we will continue to push this because it should pass because it is the only proposal we have left.

My friend says let us vote. We say the same thing. Let us vote. We want to vote. Why in the world, on something as important as this, can't we have an up-or-down vote as they had in the House? To underline my point, my friend, the assistant Democratic leader, the whip, served in the House longer than I did. They are taking up over there today, as I understand it, what we call a consent calendar, which are issues that are of minor importance, no controversy whatsoever. They are taking up extending the debt ceiling on that calendar. I think that is unheard of.

We are willing to vote right now, but 60 votes we are not willing to take because this should not be filibustered. We are not going to agree to the 6-month proposal because, as I indicated in my prepared remarks, that would mean we would be back in this mess in a matter of weeks. We want to be fully engaged.

I repeat to the people who are supposedly sending me this letter, what do you want? What do I say to my caucus because my Republican colleagues haven't come up with any alternative. It is easy to do. We can amend my legislation. In the meantime, that will not happen, and we are going to proceed forward and do the best we can to overcome this filibuster.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I will wrap up my comments by pointing out again the comments from my good friend, the majority leader, about the nature of the Senate. He said it has always been the case that we need 60 votes. We all know that. It is widely known in the country as well. Most people believe a filibuster means we are trying to delay something.

I wish to make clear to the American people Senate Republicans are ready to vote on cloture on the Reid proposal in 30 minutes, in an hour, as soon as we can get our colleagues over to the floor. We are ready to vote. By requiring 60 votes, particularly on a matter of this enormous importance, is not at all unusual. It is the way the Senate operates.

I will not belabor it any further. We are happy to vote at any time the majority leader thinks it would be appropriate to vote on his proposal.

I yield the floor.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, a filibuster is known all over America as a way to stall, prevent votes. That is all this is about. If my Republican colleagues are so anxious to vote, let us have a vote. We would move this matter down the field very quickly.

Finally, the matter that is now known as the Reid amendment, is that the President's first choice? No. He wanted to do what he called the grand deal. He thought he had that worked out with the Speaker. But the President knows what I have put forward is good for the country. It extends the debt ceiling and reduces the debt.

I say to my friend the Republican leader the President will sign my legislation. My friend says he wants something the President will sign. He will sign this. We can pass it tonight and get it through the House and he would sign it tomorrow.

So, Mr. President, I would hope the world understands, our country understands—because all Senators understand—this is another filibuster being conducted in an effort to prevent our moving forward to handle the debt situation we have in our country.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

ESTABLISHING THE COMMISSION ON FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT PROCESSING DELAYS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of the motion to refer the House message to accompany S. 627, which the clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to concur in the House amendment to S. 627, an act to establish the Commission on Freedom of Information Act Processing Delays with an amendment.

Pending:

Reid motion to concur in the amendment of the House of Representatives to the bill, with Reid amendment No. 589, to cut spending, maintain existing commitments, and for other purposes.

Reid amendment No. 590 (to amendment No. 589), to change the enactment date.

Reid motion to refer the message of the House on the bill to the Committee on the Budget, with instructions, Reid amendment No. 591, to change the enactment date.

Reid amendment No. 592 (to the instructions (amendment No. 591) on the motion to refer), of a perfecting nature.

Reid amendment No. 593 (to amendment No. 592), of a perfecting nature.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the time from 1:30 to 7:30 is equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees in alternating 30-minute blocks, with the majority controlling the first block of time.

The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, those who are following this debate—and I think many across America are—should understand what just happened. There was a discussion about the filibuster. A filibuster is a Senate rule that does two things: It says you cannot move an item to a vote, and you have to wait a period of time to have what is called a cloture vote. In order to pass a cloture vote, you need 60 votes, not a majority. So I would just correct, if I can, the record. A filibuster does more than delay the vote; it establishes a higher vote requirement—60 votes, not a majority.

Yesterday, the Speaker of the House brought before his body of 435 Members