

Ms. SNOWE. Mr. President, I would like to express my support for provisions contained within the amendment offered by Senator TESTER, as they will make critical strides in addressing the reality that far too many of our Nation's veterans are finding it difficult—if not impossible—to find work in the civilian job market after they leave military service. Senator TESTER's amendment is illustrative of how our Nation's government should work, as it contains ideas from both bodies of Congress, both Republicans and Democrats, and the executive branch.

Over the past year, I have been particularly pleased to support many of the concepts contained within this amendment in other forms. I joined Senator PATTY MURRAY, chair of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, in June by cosponsoring the Hiring Heroes Act, which is the source of a great number of the sections of this amendment. I am also gratified to see that this amendment contains the President's September proposal to offer tax credits to businesses that hire unemployed and disabled veterans. As I said then, providing tax incentives for these hires is an excellent means of fostering job creation—in this case, it has the added benefit of helping to address veteran unemployment rates.

Earlier this week, Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta held a roundtable on veteran unemployment in which he noted that today's newest veterans—the men and women who have risked their health and their very lives by serving in places like Iraq, Afghanistan, and other parts of the world—are “the next greatest generation” which have “dedicated themselves to serving this country.”

On this point, Secretary Panetta could not be more correct. As a senior member of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, I have had no higher privilege than witnessing firsthand our exceptional servicemen and women on the frontlines in Afghanistan and Iraq. Their steadfast courage, leadership, and dedication ensures that our armed forces are second to none and the finest on the planet.

Yet despite their extraordinary commitment to this Nation, unparalleled technical and practical skills, and remarkable capabilities demonstrated under the most difficult conditions possible, too many of our Nation's veterans remain unemployed today.

Indeed, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics' October 2011 report, post-9/11 veterans have had a particularly challenging time finding employment, with more than 12 percent of them currently unemployed. Not only is this number far too high, but it greatly exceeds the nation's unemployment level for nonveterans. Our youngest veterans—those between ages 18 and 24—are experiencing even greater difficulty finding jobs, with unemployment rates exceeding 20 percent.

For our veterans—and our Nation—such statistics are nothing less than a

travesty. And that is why I so strongly support the efforts of this Chamber to lend a well-deserved helping hand to our veterans in their efforts to find employment. Indeed, when it comes to securing a job, is there any question that we all should be fighting for those who have so nobly fought for America?

The amendment before the Senate today is a crucial effort to do so. Some of its provisions will ensure that our servicemembers receive assistance in preparing for their transition to life as a civilian, looking for a job, and identifying good career options. Other provisions will establish a pioneering effort to identify equivalencies between the skills our servicemen and women develop in the military and the qualifications required for civilian employment. Still other sections will extend the opportunity for servicemembers and veterans to receive supplemental rehabilitation and vocational benefits, providing them additional time to prepare for the job market.

Efforts such as these are imperative in order to allow our veterans to prepare to be competitive in today's job market. Other items in this amendment, such as tax credits of up to \$9,600 for each unemployed or disabled veteran hired by a business, offer further help by encouraging companies to give our veterans the chance they deserve to work.

As Secretary Panetta said at the recent roundtable, “the best thing we could do to honor those that have served is to make sure that when they come back, they have some opportunity to be able to become a part of our society and not just wind up on the unemployment rolls.” Striving to increase those opportunities is the absolute least we should do.

In that light, I strongly believe we should take all reasonable steps possible to provide our servicemembers and veterans with the training they need to make the transition into the civilian workforce. We should also do all we can to encourage companies to hire veterans returning from Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere around the world.

For these reasons, I am very pleased to see the Senate considering the Tester amendment today. At the same time, it is my practice to vote “present” on legislation which contains the potential or appearance of association with the private business activity of my spouse. As such, and in consultation with the Senate Select Committee on Ethics, I voted “present” in this particular instance, despite my overwhelming support for the vast majority of this amendment.

Mr. President, over the past year, I have been pleased to support many of the concepts contained in H.R. 674, as amended and passed by the Senate today. This June, I joined Senator PATTY MURRAY, chair of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, by cosponsoring the Hiring Heroes Act, which is the source of a great number of provisions

in this bill intended to address the high unemployment rate of our Nation's veterans. This bill also now contains the President's proposal to offer tax credits to businesses that hire unemployed and disabled veterans—I have supported this proposal since the President announced it in September, and I continue to believe that providing tax incentives to businesses for hiring veterans is an excellent means of fostering job creation while helping to address veteran unemployment rates.

And of course, I could not be more pleased to have helped to author the repeal of the 3 percent withholding provision that is at the heart of H.R. 674. This provision will greatly aid small businesses that are hard-hit by current law requirements that withhold a portion of payments to contractors until they pay taxes on the earnings. By repealing this mandate, which threatens to overburden business owners and taxpayers alike, and stifle the economy at a time when we cannot afford any unnecessary obstacles in the road to recovery, H.R. 674 will help businesses, their owners, and their employees all over our Nation.

For these reasons, I was gratified to see the Senate pass H.R. 674 today. However, it is my practice to vote “present” on legislation which contains the potential or appearance of association with the private business activity of my spouse. As such, and in consultation with the Senate Select Committee on Ethics, I voted “present” in this particular instance, despite my overwhelming support for the vast majority of this bill.

VOTE EXPLANATION

● Mrs. HAGAN. Mr. President, I was unavoidably detained for rollcall vote No. 204, passage of H.R. 674 as amended. This legislation repeals the imposition of 3 percent withholding on certain payments made to vendors by government agencies. It also includes an amendment I supported to provide our veterans with greater job opportunities in today's difficult economy.

Had I been present for rollcall vote No. 204, I would have voted yea on final passage.●

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

ENERGY AND WATER DEVELOPMENT AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2012—MOTION TO PROCEED

Mr. REID. Mr. President, the next vote will be on cloture on the motion to proceed to the energy and water appropriations bill. That will be the last vote of the day. There will be no votes on Friday or Monday. There will be debate on this measure on which in a few minutes we hope to invoke cloture on the motion to proceed. Debate will begin Monday afternoon. Senators FEINSTEIN and ALEXANDER are the managers of that bill. We will start that on Monday. There will be a vote Tuesday morning on a judge. So have a good

break, and we feel pretty good about the work we have gotten done this week.

CLOTURE MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Pursuant to rule XXII, the Chair lays before the Senate the pending cloture motion, which the clerk will state.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, hereby move to bring to a close debate on the motion to proceed to Calendar No. 157, H.R. 2354, an act making appropriations for energy and water development and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2012, and for other purposes.

Harry Reid, Amy Klobuchar, Dianne Feinstein, Patrick J. Leahy, Richard J. Durbin, John F. Kerry, Charles E. Schumer, Al Franken, Tom Udall, Richard Blumenthal, Kirsten E. Gillibrand, Carl Levin, Jeff Merkley, Ron Wyden, Thomas R. Carper, Daniel K. Inouye, Benjamin L. Cardin.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the motion to proceed to H.R. 2354, an act making appropriations for energy and water development and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2012, and for other purposes, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Hawaii (Mr. INOUE) and the Senator from Florida (Mr. NELSON) are necessarily absent.

Mr. KYL. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Texas (Mrs. HUTCHISON), the Senator from Arizona (Mr. MCCAIN), and the Senator from Alabama (Mr. SESSIONS).

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. MCCASKILL). Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 81, nays 14, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 205 Leg.]

YEAS—81

Akaka	Durbin	McCaskill
Alexander	Enzi	McConnell
Ayotte	Feinstein	Menendez
Barrasso	Franken	Merkley
Baucus	Gillibrand	Mikulski
Begich	Graham	Moran
Bennet	Grassley	Murkowski
Bingaman	Hagan	Murray
Blumenthal	Harkin	Nelson (NE)
Blunt	Hatch	Portman
Boozman	Hoeben	Pryor
Boxer	Isakson	Reed
Brown (MA)	Johnson (SD)	Reid
Brown (OH)	Kerry	Roberts
Burr	Kirk	Rockefeller
Cantwell	Klobuchar	Sanders
Cardin	Kohl	Schumer
Carper	Kyl	Shaheen
Casey	Landrieu	Shelby
Chambliss	Lautenberg	Snowe
Coats	Leahy	Stabenow
Cochran	Levin	Tester
Collins	Lieberman	Thune
Conrad	Lugar	Toomey
Coons	Manchin	Udall (CO)

Udall (NM)	Webb	Wicker
Warner	Whitehouse	Wyden

NAYS—14

Coburn	Heller	Paul
Corker	Inhofe	Risch
Cornyn	Johanns	Rubio
Crapo	Johnson (WI)	Vitter
DeMint	Lee	

NOT VOTING—5

Hutchison	McCain	Sessions
Inouye	Nelson (FL)	

The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 81, the nays are 14. Three-fifths of the Senators duly chosen and sworn having voted in the affirmative, the motion is agreed to.

The Senator from Ohio.

Mr. BROWN of Ohio. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that after my remarks of no more than 12 minutes, that Senator COBURN be recognized for up to 15 minutes, and then Senator HARKIN be recognized.

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

OHIO'S ELECTION RESULTS

Mr. BROWN of Ohio. Madam President, on Tuesday, Ohio, my State, made history. Overwhelmingly, Ohio voters made a simple choice between what is right and what is wrong. They answered the question at the heart of any election: Whose side are you on?

Tuesday, Ohioans showed they stood with teachers and firefighters, with police officers and nurses and librarians, and other public workers and the middle class. They showed they want leaders focused on creating jobs rather than taking potshots at people who teach, who plow our roads, who guard our prisons, who teach our children, and who safeguard our public health. They showed they are ready to rebuild what was once a national consensus: that our Nation's strength is rooted in the strength of our middle class.

There used to be a consensus among educators and elected officials, community leaders, and business leaders that our economy is designed to build a strong middle class, to help people become part of that middle class. We used to see that consensus on Medicare and Pell grants, on civil rights and women's rights, on tax and economic policy, and we used to have that consensus on collective bargaining rights.

Rights earned at the bargaining table provide a path to the middle class for millions of workers who belong to unions and millions of workers who do not belong to unions. Collective bargaining is the tool we have had in this country for three-quarters of a century for labor and management relations in a democracy. Collective bargaining has helped minimize strikes and work stoppages because it allows a process where people sit down at a table, talk to one another, disagree, come to agreement, come to a consensus, a process to resolve disputes.

In Ohio, balanced budgets and collective bargaining have coexisted for nearly three decades. Collective bargaining not only strengthens middle-class jobs, it protects public health,

and it protects community safety. During the passage of the legislation called S. 5 earlier this year, which was rammed through the legislature by the Republican Governor and the Republican majority in the House and Senate, even though a number of Republicans dissented on it, I had a roundtable in a church right on Capitol Square in Columbus.

A young teacher said to me from the Columbus suburbs: You know, when I sit at the bargaining table and bargain on behalf of my teachers, I do not just bargain for better wages and higher and better pensions and health care. She said: I also bargain for class size because I know my colleagues can learn better if class sizes are smaller.

Then a police officer said: When I bargain, I not only bargain for better wages, of course, and better benefits for my members, the Fraternal Order of Police, I also bargain for safety vests because it matters to me that the men and women who wear the badge work in the safest possible conditions.

But somewhere along the way we lost this consensus that we once had in this country. From what we have seen at statehouses across the country, you would think teachers and nurses, you would think sanitation workers and firefighters, you would think police officers and librarians caused the fiscal crisis and the budget deficit.

We hear Governors around the country, we hear Washington pundits talk about the privileged class of public sector workers. Now who is playing class warfare, when, in fact, they go after public workers to the point that I have heard young teachers tell me—and I have heard parents who have kids in college at Bowling Green or Akron U or University of Toledo or Xavier say: You know, my daughter or my son were going to be teachers. But I am not sure they want to be with the attacks that the Governor and conservative politicians have made against teachers.

So who are these privileged elite who have been attacked by conservative politicians? They are the people who clear snow off our streets. They are the people who run into burning buildings to save people and property. They are the people who teach our children. So let's be clear. It was recklessness on Wall Street that caused the financial crisis, not teachers, not librarians, not mental health counselors, not sanitation workers, not cafeteria workers at Mansfield Senior High. It is a crisis made worse by our Nation's economic tilt away from manufacturing.

Thirty years ago, more than 25 percent of the GDP in our country was in manufacturing. Only about 10 percent was financial services. That has almost flipped now. Financial services is about one-quarter of our GDP, and manufacturing is only 10 or 11 percent. You know what it has done in your home State of Missouri, Madam President, what this means for middle-class workers. We have moved far too much into

financial services because of government policy and far too much away from manufacturing.

States face budget crises because people do not have jobs—do not have these good-paying jobs and cannot pay taxes, so the revenue does not come. Yet instead of a balanced approach to State fiscal problems, we have had an ideologically motivated approach to destroy collective bargaining.

In the elections last year in my State, 1 year ago this week, there was a sweep, as there was in some other States, of Republicans all saying: Put us in office and we will fix this problem with all of the lost jobs. They won, in large part, because of lost jobs. That is what elections are about. Yet almost from the beginning, the Governor and the radicals in the legislature in my State did not do a lot about jobs. What they did a lot of was attacking collective bargaining rights. They attacked women's rights. They attacked voting rights.

That is not what we should be doing. We should be working together in job creation. They seem, in many ways, more interested in payback than in progress. That is not shared sacrifice. As the middle class didn't happen on its own, it will not unravel on its own either.

Tuesday, Ohioans took an important step in protecting the very rights of collective bargaining that people of all stripes in our country have enjoyed for 75, 80, 85 years. It is an important step in protecting the very collective bargaining right that created our middle class.

Our mission is to continue to build a strong middle class and help people become part of the middle class. It is about creating jobs and fairness. For too long there has been class warfare in this country, waged from the top, aimed at the middle class. When the wealthiest people in this country continue to do better and better, and the wide swath of people in the middle—70 to 90 percent—have barely had a pay increase in 10 years, you know that is what happened. They love to say that our side commits class warfare. What has happened is they have committed the class warfare, we are just pointing it out. The class warfare they have committed has been class warfare waged from the top and aimed at the middle class.

That is a big reason we have seen this decline in the middle class. Tuesday, this week, Ohio pushed back, and we will continue to do so because this Nation is exceptional, because of our continued struggle to form a more perfect union, where opportunity grows and expands for all. It is not restricted to a privileged few. We do so because we are a nation and my State is a State that speaks more loudly and fights harder and stands up for the dignity and the honor of fair play.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. COBURN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that following Senator HARKIN, the Senator from Georgia, Mr. ISAKSON, be recognized.

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

MEDICARE AND YOU

Mr. COBURN. Mr. President, myself and Senator BARRASSO are two of the three doctors in the Senate. Both of us have practiced for over 25 years. We have put out several reports. Every year, Medicare recipients receive a message from Medicare, called "Medicare and You." What we thought we would do is come to the floor and tell our colleagues, as well as the American people, that we also put out a "Medicare and You" report. There is a lot that wasn't in the "Medicare and You" report this year.

I ask unanimous consent to have a colloquy between myself and the Senator from Wyoming, Dr. BARRASSO, as to what we are reporting in our Medicare and You statement.

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

Mr. COBURN. This booklet, which will be available on coburn.senate.gov and barrasso.senate.gov to every Medicare patient out there, explains what has actually happened to Medicare in the last year and a half. It explains that \$530 billion has been cut out of Medicare. It explains the physician reimbursement cuts were not addressed when we addressed health care and, consequently, a 27-percent cut is coming if Congress doesn't change that.

It explains that Medicare Advantage—both the options and the number of people eligible for that—has been taken away by the Affordable Care Act. It explains that the CLASS Act was put in to save money, but it won't, and it has now been abandoned by the administration. The fact is there is an independent payment advisory board, whose sole purpose is to cut payments for Medicare procedures and supplies and drugs to save money—even when that will instigate the loss of available drugs.

Finally, it creates a \$10 billion trust fund for an innovation center that is a smokescreen for a rationing board very similar to the IPAB.

I want Dr. BARRASSO to go over the Medicare cuts now, if he will.

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I congratulate and thank Dr. COBURN for his significant leadership in this area. Medicare patients all across the country are getting a thick book—150 pages or so. In Wyoming, it is about 150 pages, and it is called "Medicare and You, 2012."

Under Dr. COBURN's leadership, we have prepared a report, also called "Medicare and You, 2012," but it is, as I do week after week, a second opinion about the big book people are getting at home. The cover is quite distinct from the book that goes to other Medicare patients around the country, because this starts by saying "Your Medicare Program was cut \$530 billion

by President Obama's controversial health care law and used for a brand new program for someone else."

That is the fundamental problem here. When we talk about Medicare, we think of our parents and others, and I think of so many of my patients on Medicare. We need to strengthen Medicare. What this administration did by taking \$530 billion from the health care law has not strengthened Medicare; it devastated Medicare and our seniors on Medicare to the point where the Medicare Actuary said the funding will be exhausted by 2016—5 years from now. We go through that in this report.

My concern is that my patients and Dr. COBURN's patients will see their health care impacted by a denial of care, by care being refused because of the limitations within the law and the significant impact on physicians, hospitals, nursing homes, hospices, and home health agencies, which are a lifeblood for seniors, all as a result of what we have seen passed and signed into law by this President.

It is interesting, because we recently heard from the Senator from Ohio, who talked about the vote in Ohio on Tuesday. What was not brought up is that there was another ballot initiative specifically related to the Obama health care law. Those same people he was praising so much also voted by 2 to 1—a margin of over a million voters—that they did not want the Obama health care mandate to apply to them. This is no surprise, and the popularity of this health care plan has continued to fall ever since it was signed into law.

I ask my colleague, Dr. COBURN, about some of the issues that will impact not just the patients through the payment mechanism but their ability to see a doctor under this Medicare change.

Mr. COBURN. The other thing Medicare recipients should recognize is that under the laws as previously set, the reimbursement for your physician in January is scheduled to decline 27 percent. When I talk to seniors in the State of Oklahoma, one of the No. 1 problems that somebody turning 65 has is now finding that physician who will care for them under the Medicare payment guidelines. What was never spoken of was the fact that there was no fix in the health care bill for the very real need to attract more physicians into caring for seniors.

As we have seen, Congress may or may not fix that—it is \$300 billion to fix that. That is the cost of it. Whether we fix it or not, the fact is we are playing with the access of Medicare patients to care. Denied access is denied care.

If you live in a community much like mine where no new doctors have been coming in because there is a shortage of primary care doctors, and those who do come in will not take the lower reimbursement for Medicare because they cannot afford to, it may mean that you have to drive 70 miles to get that care. That is not access, and it is

not health care. It means you don't have available health care because the government runs the program so poorly.

Let me finish up, since we don't want to go over our time. The other thing I want to talk about for a minute is this innovation center. In the health care law, we set aside a \$10 billion slush fund for innovation in payment and procedures for Medicare patients. We are going to be spending \$10 billion to figure out how to pay for it more cheaply and limit the combinations, or increase the combinations of combining these things so that the reimbursements are less.

First of all, I don't understand why it is going to take \$10 billion, but it is a slush fund. No. 2 is that if you don't like the results of that, there is nothing we can do about it except reverse the Affordable Care Act, Obamacare. No. 2, you can't sue. You have no injunctive relief. You have no opportunity to express your desire in a court of law or through an administrative procedure to challenge their elimination of paying for certain procedures that may in fact save the country money but may in fact also hurt the very patients who are on Medicare.

We have this fund that we cannot find out anything about; no rules have been put out on it, and we cannot find the details of it. Yet, we know what the purpose of the fund is. It is like the IPAB fund. It is designed to ration the care that seniors need to control the cost of Medicare.

What do we know about Medicare? One dollar of every three dollars spent on Medicare doesn't help anybody get well and doesn't keep anybody from getting sick. The reason it doesn't work is because of the government's mandate—we have all these stories about shortages of drugs. The reason there are shortages of drugs in our country is because Medicare has mandated prices 90 percent of the time so low that we only have one supplier. Some of them either have a technical problem or have decided to stop making a drug that is critical to our seniors because we have a price control bureaucracy.

There are large problems with the Medicare law. They need to be recognized and addressed. They need to be fixed, and the last thing we ought to do is spend \$10 billion figuring out how not to get somebody treatment, or lessen the availability of treatment through the innovation council.

I yield the rest of my time to the Senator from Wyoming.

Mr. BARRASSO. We have talked about this. There is a program that his patients and mine have enjoyed, called Medicare Advantage, and there is an advantage for patients signing up for that program. About one in four Americans on Medicare signs up for Medicare Advantage. The advantages of this program are that it coordinates care, works with preventive care. Yet, the President has targeted that for elimi-

nation. By 2017, half of the people on this program, who say they like and have it, will no longer be eligible to participate in it because of this health care law. We explain that to the American people in our second opinion on "Medicare and You."

Finally, Dr. COBURN talked about the IPAB, the Independent Payment Board. It is a rationing board to me, a board designed to deny and refuse care. These are unelected bureaucrats. They don't need to have a medical background or don't necessarily need to see patients. It is specifically related to cutting the amount of money that is paid for patients to have procedures, to see physicians, and to get the care they need, which is why there is great concern throughout this country and why the President's health care law becomes more unpopular every day.

Mr. COBURN. If the Senator will yield for a moment, one of the reasons our cancer cure rates are a third better than England is because we don't have an IPAB and they do. The No. 1 reason survival rates from cancer in England are lower is because treatments are denied by their IPAB for the best treatments, which will save more people's lives at the best price. That is something that should not be discounted.

I yield the floor.

Mr. BARRASSO. This health care law continues to be bad for patients, for providers, for the doctors who take care of them, and it is bad for the taxpayers.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

EDUCATION

Mr. HARKIN. Madam President, I would like to take this opportunity to talk about a bipartisan bill that was recently passed out of the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, the HELP Committee, which I chair and of which Senator MIKE ENZI of Wyoming is the ranking member. This bipartisan bill reauthorizes the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and would replace its current iteration, which everyone knows by the title of "No Child Left Behind." I want to start with a few words about the Federal role in education in this country since ESEA is a key part of that role.

While it is certainly true education is primarily a State and local function, the Federal Government does play an important role, and a well-educated citizenry is clearly in the national interest. A central Federal role is to ensure all Americans, regardless of race, gender, national origin, religion, or disability, have the same equal opportunity to a good education as any other American citizen.

Likewise, the Constitution expressly states that our National Government was formed specifically to "promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty." The general welfare, I submit, is greatly in danger when the populace is not adequately

educated, and education is critical to liberty. As Frederick Douglass so eloquently noted, education "means emancipation. It means light and liberty."

It is no surprise that the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 expressly stated that "schools and the means of education shall be forever encouraged." That law encouraged new territories to establish schools.

The Federal Government also encouraged States to establish public colleges and universities through the Morrill Act of 1862, which started the whole land grant college movement.

Moving into the 20th century, the Servicemen's Readjustment Act, known as the GI bill, provided grants to World War II veterans to pursue a college education.

In 1954, the Supreme Court struck down laws endorsing racial segregation in public schools.

In 1958, Congress authorized the National Defense Education Act, the first Federal loan program to students for higher education. That was one I borrowed money from when I went to Iowa State University.

That was followed by the Higher Education Act of 1965 and the Federal Pell grants enacted in 1972.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act was passed in 1965 and provided aid to States and school districts to improve education for children from low-income families.

In 1975, Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, which later became the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, which was to assist States and districts in educating children with disabilities.

In 1994, Congress passed the Goals 2000: Educate America Act and the Improving America's Schools Act.

In 2001, Congress passed the No Child Left Behind Act, which went even further in terms of what was required of schools to receive Federal funds.

I go through all this so you can see that the Federal role in education spans over 200 years, and its primary objective has always been to increase educational opportunity and to enhance educational attainment. This context is important to any discussion about the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

The original goal of ESEA was to provide resources to the schools with the most disadvantaged students. This funding was needed because many States and districts use education funding formulas that provide fewer resources to high-poverty schools. Again, when anyone wants to talk about this, I say go back and read Jonathan Kozol's book entitled "Savage Inequalities," written in the mid-1980s, in which he pointed out the gross inequality in our schools in America depending upon your ZIP Code—depending upon where you lived. We knew from that time that educating poor students actually requires more resources, not fewer, and title I was our attempt to

create a better, more equitable education system. Title I of ESEA has never fully realized that goal, but it has served as a significant source of funding to our most impoverished schools, leading to more educational opportunity for low-income students over the last 40 years.

In the early 1990s, a national consensus emerged around the idea that for the United States to remain competitive in the world economy, our education system needed significant improvements. Foremost among these was the movement for a “standards-based reform.” That was the idea that statewide academic standards and assessments aligned with those standards were a key lever for ensuring that all students received a good education. To that end, the 1994 reauthorization of ESEA required that States have one educational accountability system for all students, including racial and ethnic minorities, students with disabilities, and English-language learners. Along with Goals 2000, it required that States put in place standards and assessments so that we would actually know how students were doing.

During the next reauthorization—that was the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001—lawmakers felt compelled to be more prescriptive with States to ensure they improved their low-performing schools and focused on closing pernicious student achievement gaps. Therefore, NCLB, as it is known, defined “adequate yearly progress” for schools and districts. It required districts to implement public school choice, supplemental educational services in schools, and it set aside 20 percent of their title I funds for these activities. It also included a list of rigorous interventions for schools in corrective action and an additional category of “restructuring” for the most chronically low-performing schools with even more severe consequences attached.

What was the result of this more heavyhanded and prescriptive version of ESEA? Well, “The Proficiency Illusion,” a 2007 report by the Fordham Institute, found that State definitions of student proficiency varied erratically, and comparisons across the States were not valid.

A new term was coined in education. It was called the hockey stick. In reaction to the 2014 proficiency deadline that schools were to meet, what happened is that States backloaded the student gains needed to reach this goal. So it kind of came in the shape of a hockey stick lying on its side. So it was at a low level, and then all of a sudden, in the last 2 or 3 years, all of these proficiency standards would have to be met. That is why so many more schools are now failing to make adequate yearly progress across the country as we approach 2014. The slope gets steeper, and it gets tougher for them to make that yearly progress.

Another thing happened. Districts responded to the new restructuring cat-

egory by choosing the least prescriptive—and some would say the weakest—option. In effect, districts could do as much or as little as they wanted in these severely underperforming schools.

Lastly, the No Child Left Behind law drove a critical transparency and focus on the performance of student subgroups—which was good, but its prescriptiveness also led to a culture of compliance and not innovation. So they would comply, but nothing would be done to change the system.

Given this history, we must now ask what the next reauthorization of ESEA should look like. Should the Federal Government come down harder on States and districts, be more prescriptive, more punitive?

I strongly believe that we must maintain a robust Federal role. In looking at the most recent national assessment of educational progress—also called NAEP—scores, we see that more than 50 percent of the students who are eligible for free or reduced lunch—read that as “poor kids,” OK?—scored “below basic” on the fourth grade reading assessment, as compared to only 17 percent of students who were not eligible for free or reduced-price lunches. Fifty percent of the poor kids read “below basic,” compared to only 17 percent of kids who were not poor. On the eighth grade mathematics assessment, almost half—49 percent—of African-American students scored “below basic.” Got that? On eighth grade math, 49 percent of African-American students scored “below basic,” as compared to only 16 percent of White students.

Madam President, we believe in equal opportunity in this country, but you cannot have equality of opportunity when you have inequality of education. Our economy, our ethics, and our commitment to equal opportunity all demand that the Federal Government continue to have a strong role in ensuring an educated citizenry. But just as the Federal role has evolved from Federal land grants to student Pell grants, we must be willing to shift to new approaches when the old ones aren’t working.

I do not believe No Child Left Behind is the pinnacle of Federal education laws. I believe we can and must do better. Our bipartisan bill follows a different course, one of a more strategic partnership—partnership—with States and districts within Federal guidelines or Federal parameters.

In making this move, it is important to note that States have stepped up to the standards and accountability plate in recent years.

In 2009, the Common Core State Standards Initiative was launched, a State-led effort to develop high-quality standards that are common across State lines. Thus far, 46 States and the District of Columbia have adopted the English language arts standards, and 45 States have adopted the math stand-

In 2011, the Council of Chief State School Officers released its accountability principles for next-generation accountability systems, now endorsed by 45 States. These principles include setting performance goals for all schools and districts aligned to college- and career-ready standards; measuring student outcomes based on status and growth; differentiating between schools and districts and providing supports and interventions; and targeting the lowest performing schools for significant interventions. States committed through these principles to doing deeper diagnostic reviews as appropriate—looking at more than just student test scores and high school graduation rates—to better link accountability determinations to meaningful supports and interventions.

This is all being done by the States. So these commitments by the States have led me to believe we may be entering an era in which the Federal Government can work in partnership with States to improve our Nation’s schools, while continuing to provide a backstop to avoid returning to old ways of discrimination and exclusions. I think that is what the bipartisan bill passed by the HELP Committee last month does.

This bill, in many ways, resembles the ESEA blueprint released by Secretary Duncan almost 2 years ago. Our bill gets rid of AYP—the annual yearly progress—but it sets Federal parameters for State-designed accountability systems, which they are already doing. They are doing that on their own. These systems must cover all students, including students with disabilities and English-language learners; they must continue to measure and report on the performance of all schools; they must expect continuous improvement for all schools and subgroups of students; and they must provide for interventions in low-performing schools or schools with low-achieving student subgroups.

State accountability plans are also subject to peer review and approval by the Secretary of Education—an important safeguard on the quality and integrity of these systems. In short, we do not want to have a race-to-the-bottom type of system where States race to the bottom to see who has to do the least to meet these quality improvements.

The HELP Committee’s bill also sets the high bar of having students graduate from high school college- and career-ready. It also tightens the Federal focus on turning around persistently low-achieving schools—the bottom 5 percent—and our Nation’s dropout factories—those high schools that graduate less than 60 percent of their students—less than 60 percent of their students.

We focus on those schools with significant student achievement gaps. What I mean by that is sometimes you might have very good schools by all appearances—all the test scores are great, they graduate a lot of students—

but there are subgroups there—usually students of color, English-language learners, students with disabilities—who aren't receiving the proper type of education. But because the rest of the school looks so good, they are sort of not seen. They are sort of invisible. These are the achievement-gap schools which we have focused on and which, I might add, States have already said they are going to focus on too.

Our bill takes the significant step of closing the comparability loophole so that funds provided through title I ESEA will finally serve as additional dollars—not replacement but additional dollars—for our neediest students. And title I schools will get their fair share of Federal resources.

It also provides districts with more flexibility in how States and districts spend their Federal funds while ensuring that the resources designated to serve our most disadvantaged students get to those students. The bill incentivizes the development of rigorous and fair teacher and principal evaluation systems. We don't mandate it, but we do incentivize teacher and principal evaluation systems, and it provides these critical school staff with the support they need to continually improve teaching and learning.

The bill also leverages opportunities for more children to access high-quality early learning programs and adds new protections for some of our most vulnerable children—homeless kids and students in foster care—so they can be better served by schools.

Our bill strategically consolidates programs and focuses grant funds on a smaller number of programs to allow for greater flexibility. It invests in effective programs to train and support principals and teachers for high-need schools. It fosters innovation through new programs such as Race to the Top, Investing in Innovation, and Promise Neighborhoods.

So as I have said many times over the past few years, I believe this is a good bill. I am proud of our efforts. The bill is the result of many months of bipartisan negotiation and, as such it is a carefully crafted compromise. It does not contain everything I want, nor does it contain everything Senator ENZI wanted. I said the other day: This is not my bill and this is not Senator ENZI's bill, but it is our bill—and I don't mean just the two of us, but I mean our committee bill. It is, as currently written, a bill that moves us forward beyond the punitive nature of No Child Left Behind.

Last, I want to make clear that as this process moves forward, I believe it is crucial that we maintain the integrity and balance of this bipartisan compromise. We owe it to our kids and our Nation to produce a strong bill that will actually move the needle in improving our educational system. That will be the barometer that will guide me as this process moves forward.

To that end, I would note that, historically, education policy has been

done in a bipartisan fashion, and I believe the House must also maintain that approach. Without a bipartisan bill coming out of the House, I believe it would be difficult to find a path forward that will draw the support we need from both sides of the aisle to be able to send a final bill to the President that he can sign. Here in the Senate we have demonstrated it is possible to reach bipartisan consensus on ESEA. We all need to work together in a bipartisan way to replace No Child Left Behind with this new and better law.

With the reauthorization of ESEA, we are on the brink of change, and change many times is difficult. But we must work together to move from a culture of minimal compliance with Federal requirements to one of shared innovation, shared responsibility, and success for students. I look forward to working toward this new partnership and to the next chapter of an effective Federal role in promoting educational excellence and equity.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia.

VETERANS DAY

Mr. ISAKSON. Madam President, tomorrow I will join with what I hope will be every American in paying tribute to our veterans who have served us over 200 years to protect the liberty, the freedom, and the peace that all of us enjoy—our veterans from the Revolutionary War, veterans who created this great Republic, to our veterans who serve today in Afghanistan and the war on terror.

In the history of our country, every generation has been called at a time of trouble, and in America's good fortune every generation has responded. There are significant dates in the history of our country that remind us of the great military victories that we have had and the great sacrifices our soldiers have made: December 7, 1941, the terrible attack on Pearl Harbor; June 6, 1944, when Americans bravely stormed Omaha Beach and began the invasion of Europe which ran out Nazi Germany. We all remember, with horror and with terror, 9/11/2001 when New York, Washington, and all of America and all peace-loving people were attacked by al-Qaida, and just a few days later, September 20, when we began and initiated our effort to go after al-Qaida wherever it was, and now recognizing, a little over 10 years later, terrorists have been disrupted, bin Laden has been killed, and America and the world are a safer place.

In the financial and economic history of our country, there have also been significant dates which we should remember and significant responses which we also should recognize: the tragedy of October 1929 when the market crashed and the Great Depression began, the difficulty of Black Friday in 1987 when the markets had a terrible crash. Those were all memorable times, and we hated to see our financial and economic stability upset.

Well, there is another critical day coming in America's history, and it is coming 13 days from today on November 23, 2011, when the select committee we in this Senate and the Members of the House created to address our troubles economically in this country, which are rooted in our spending, rooted in our tax system, and rooted in our entitlement system—the select committee is to come back with at least \$1.2 trillion in cuts, revenue increases, or reform of entitlements over a 10-year period of time, to be matched with the \$900 billion that we cut in August to, hopefully, get us on some type of a track that will be a sustainable recovery in getting our balance back in line. But there is fear that a deal will not be reached, and that is a failure that is not an option, in my judgment.

Yesterday, there was an offer put on the table that involved revenues, involved the reform of entitlements, and involved spending cuts put on the table to begin the discussion to find common ground to have \$1.2 trillion or more in cuts. Unfortunately, as I understand it, the conversation ended, and they are not back at the table yet, and there are 13 days left to go.

As just one Member of the Senate, but as the father of three and grandfather to nine, someone who has lived in this country almost 67 years, I implore my colleagues on the select committee, and all of us in the Senate, to be supportive of their effort to get back to the table, to put all issues back on the table, and understand that failure is not an option.

Today in Greece, in Italy, in Spain, and in the European Union there is great fear. There is a search for leadership in those that can control their debt, control their entitlements, and control their spending.

America, as it led on D-day on June 6, 1944, as it led in the battle against al-Qaida and terrorists, must lead economically at this time more than ever. It is time for us to put forward a plan that gives us a chance to recover our economy over time, lower our debt and our deficit over time, and reduce our spending over time. It is not an instant, 1-day cure that we seek, but it is an amortization of our liabilities to get our leverage down and our hopes and our prosperity up.

So as one Member of the Senate, I implore our members of the select committee to come back to the table, to put every issue on the table, to forthrightly discuss them, and understand that November 23, 2011, is going to be a historic day in this country—historic because we found a solution and began a process or historic because we as Americans for the first time looked the other way.

As one Member of the Senate, I don't want to look the other way. I want to look my constituents square in the eye and say that I was willing to look at spending; I was willing to look at entitlement reform; I was willing to look at revenues.

I am willing to find a path forward so America can remain in the future what it always has been; that is, a beacon of economic security in a troubled world.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

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

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

VETERANS DAY

Mr. CARDIN. Madam President, tomorrow, Veterans Day, our Nation will pay our respect and honor to the men and women who have served in our military.

I know we say this frequently, but every day we should honor the men and women who have served our Nation in uniform. Every day we should have in our thoughts and prayers those who are currently in harm's way defending America's freedom. We want to make sure we do everything we can to make sure they have the support of this Nation to complete their mission safely and return to their families safely.

So I take this time to express the appreciation of this Senator, on behalf of the people of Maryland, to the men and women who have served our Nation, who are our veterans, their families, and those who are currently serving our Nation in the military service. They have defended this Nation and the freedoms we enjoy today from our traditional threats from hostile countries to our current threats that come from extremists and terrorists. Our men and women in our Armed Forces have served our Nation very proudly.

We need to show our appreciation by words and deeds, and I know I speak for the Members of this body that we need to make sure we provide the very best in health care to those who are returning from Iraq and Afghanistan and to those who have served our Nation. I have visited and seen firsthand our soldiers who have returned and how they are being treated, and I tell you we need to keep up this commitment.

I compliment my friend, Congressman RUPPERSBERGER, my colleague from Maryland, who started a program known as Miles for Heroes, where soldiers who were returning home would come into BWI Airport and Baltimore, but for them to get to their homes they had to purchase their own tickets in order to see their families. In many cases, our soldiers who returned home for treatment, their families could not afford to travel to visit them in the medical facility.

Congressman RUPPERSBERGER introduced a proposal where they could use frequent flier miles and donate that so our soldiers and their families could

get airline tickets to see each other. It has been extremely successful. We celebrated an anniversary of that not too long ago at the BWI Airport.

I mention that because I have filed S. 1776 to extend this program to hotel miles so families can not only have the transportation costs to visit their wounded warriors but also have a place to stay. I think that makes abundant sense, and I hope we will be able to act on that. To me, this is what we should be doing on Veterans Day, not only again showing our words but also showing our deeds.

When I was at Baltimore Washington International Airport, I had a chance to visit the returning soldiers, literally just coming home from Afghanistan and Iraq. It was an incredible experience to see their faces as they reunited with their families, having served this Nation in combat. But there was also concern on some of their faces because they do not know whether they are going to have a job to return to once they return to the work place. We took some steps to help them today in that regard by the passage of a bill that will provide incentives for employers to provide employment for our veterans returning home from Afghanistan and Iraq. That is exactly what we should be doing, showing our support for our veterans.

I wished to take this time to pay respect and to honor those who serve in our military. Tomorrow, on November 11, at 11 o'clock in the morning, I will be at Cheltenham at the veterans cemetery for a commemoration where we will pay honor to all the men and women who have served our Nation, and I will then express, on behalf of the people of Maryland and the people of this Nation, our gratitude for preserving our way of life and being a beacon of hope for freedom-loving people around the world.

CROSS-BORDER AIR POLLUTION

Madam President, earlier today we rejected the resolution by Senator PAUL that would have undone the cross-state air pollution standards. I voted against that resolution. I wish to compliment my colleagues for the strong bipartisan vote that rejected the resolution that would have prevented this regulation from going into effect. I wish to share with my colleagues some of my reasons.

This is a matter of a sense of fairness. Let me talk for a moment about Maryland. Maryland has done all it can to protect the health of its citizens with some of the most stringent clean air standards in the Nation. We have done that. We have enacted those standards. We have implemented those standards. But here is the problem: 50 percent of the smog that comes into Maryland that affects the health of Marylanders comes in from other States. Maryland can do everything it can to prevent the air pollution in our State, but it is coming in from other States, affecting the health of our citizens.

We have 140,000 Maryland children who suffer from asthma. Dirty air makes it difficult for these children to have a productive day in school. We have workers who cannot work on bad air days. It is critically important that we move forward with sensible cross-State air pollution standards. That is exactly what the Obama administration brought forward. Thanks to the vote in the Senate, those regulations will be able to go forward.

I wish to dispel another myth. Some say we cannot have clean air and job growth. We cannot have a clean environment. We have to choose between jobs and the environment. I tell you, we need to have a clean environment in order to get the type of job growth we want. I can give the number of people who lose days from work as a result of poor air quality and the effect it has on their health. I can talk about the productivity in the workplace as a result of illness that is generated because of dirty air. All that has absolutely been documented by our scientists. They can demonstrate that. But let me talk a little bit about concrete jobs in the Maryland example.

In 2007, the Maryland legislature implemented the toughest powerplant emission laws on the east coast of the United States. They used 2002 as a baseline and they reduced SO_x emissions by 80 percent by this year. They reduce NO_x emissions by 75 percent by next year. It will reduce mercury emissions by 90 percent by 2013. These are the major air pollutants we are aimed at reducing. Maryland has done that.

What impact has that had on our economy? Two thousand skilled construction worker jobs were created as a result of the investment that was made in clean air. We now have Brandon Shores, one of the cleanest coal-burning powerplants in the country. That is the legacy Maryland has given us. We have created jobs and have done what we can for clean air to help our children and help our community.

As I said earlier, there is very little more that Maryland can do. We have to rely now on the help of other States. It is for that reason that we have seen utilities that are supporting us. Constellation Energy, Exelon, PG&E have supported reasonable standards for air quality, and they recognize it is the right thing to do to have these standards apply to all States because pollution knows no State border.

I was encouraged by the vote we had on this issue. It was a vote for healthy air for our children, for jobs for our construction industry, and a stronger economy for America's future.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. KLOBUCHAR). The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. KIRK. Madam President, I wish to follow the remarks of my colleague in a colloquy, briefly, saying I agree with him which is why I voted to support restrictions on cross-State air pollution. Certainly coming from Maryland, I understand that one State can

pollute another, especially given the prevailing westerly winds. But even in the State of Illinois we estimate that the rule will reduce pollution in Chicagoland by 7 to 13 percent and in high-ozone time, the highest pollution, 24 percent.

We have also seen quite a number of our powerplants already reengineer their plants to control pollution, expecting this regulation which, by the way, comes from the Bush administration, the initial legislation, and pursuant to a Federal court order.

I commend my colleague and say there is bipartisan agreement that we control cross-State pollution. This rule, by the data that was provided by the Congressional Research Service, has a significant amount of benefit in reducing particulate matter that would be in the State of Illinois and especially Eastern States.

Mr. CARDIN. If my colleague will yield, we had a strong bipartisan vote on the floor on this issue. He is exactly right. All States in this country will benefit from it. Illinois is a State that also receives pollution from other States. Pollution does not know a State line. We cannot stop the air from traveling. I think my colleague is exactly right. This was not just the east coast. It happens to be at the tailpipe, as we say it, of the pollution in America, but the Midwest is very much impacted and this regulation will help the health of the people of the Midwest and throughout the country.

I thank my colleague for his comments.

HONORING OUR VETERANS

Mr. KIRK. I actually rose to speak on several other topics which I will do in turn. First, I wish to say tomorrow we are going to honor generations of veterans who wore the uniform of the United States. As a Member of the House, I worked to help save my congressional district's veterans hospital in north Chicago, IL, after Washington bureaucrats recommended its closure by the Department of Defense, by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

We actually arranged to bring the Department of Defense and the VA together in a naval hospital and a VA hospital, to combine them in what became the Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center, building on synergy and seamless care for Active Duty and veterans alike. It became the first combined VA-Navy hospital in the Nation. It is a world-class facility that delivers medical care to about 4,000 Active Duty at Great Lakes and about 42,000 recruits and an equivalent number of veterans in the region.

I like to think about the waiting room of this hospital in which grizzled veterans from—one I remember meeting from the battle of Savo Island, 1942, World War II right next to the rawest new recruits to the Navy, in the same waiting room about to receive care from the same nurses and doctors at this now combined Navy-VA hospital.

In the Senate, I became the new ranking member of the Military Con-

struction and VA Affairs Appropriations Subcommittee. Now we are going to see if we can expand this model of care, not just to one part of northern Illinois but to the country. We should go to the next level, not just integrating one set of hospitals but for the whole country.

Here, the greatest potential is in medical records. It should be the policy of this Congress, the Appropriations Committee and our subcommittee, that we create in the end one military VA health record so there is a seamless continuum of care for the men and women who have joined to protect our country from the first day they sign up as a recruit until their sunset years as a veteran.

I shared a draft of this speech with the chairman of our subcommittee, Chairman JOHNSON, and also Chairman CULBERSON of the House subcommittee, and the administration, to hopefully drive consensus in the House and Senate forward on this issue. I think we all now agree there should be more Defense Department and VA collaboration on health care but especially focused on health records.

With Chairman JOHNSON, we held a March hearing on the progress of moving forward to a military veteran—what is called—fully integrated electronic health record or IEHR. The system will provide servicemembers with a single medical record from their enlistment through their final days as a veteran. I wish to applaud Secretary Shinseki, Secretary Gates, and Secretary Panetta, his successor, for pushing the very separate Department of Defense and VA bureaucracies into a single common record system. The integrated health record developed jointly by VA and DOD is a very large and necessary IT project. It will encompass quite a lot of effort to be caring for around 15 million servicemembers, veterans, and eligible families each year.

For more than 20 years, these two executive departments built entirely separate health care systems, but the taxpayer did pay for both. A 20-year marine leaving Active-Duty health care would then, potentially, today, have three separate health care records—a military one, a veterans record, and a civilian care record through TRICARE. This meant that information on medical treatment or service-connected disabilities could easily be split between these records. VA doctors or VA benefits personnel would not have the complete information in assessing care for this American in uniform or just out of uniform.

The new system will hopefully eliminate paper records, missing files, and replace them all with a common record, complete with Active-Duty medical history that the VA medical care providers can access in all hospitals and clinics throughout the country.

A project of this magnitude, 6 years of work, several hundred million dollars in expense, is not without risk. It

is our responsibility to make sure both departments, DOD and VA, make the right cost-effective decisions to defend the hard-working taxpayer. In past years, normal practice inside Washington would be to give a project such as this to a massive government contractor that would hijack it into an unwieldy and proprietary system which rapidly became outdated, with technology that was only licensed to that contractor. In the Congress we cannot let that happen with this project. In times of physical austerity it is critical that the government work carefully with Chairman JOHNSON in the Senate and Chairman CULBERSON in the House to look beyond their own walls to cooperate and innovate and deliver more efficient and effective services.

It is imperative that VA and DOD ensure that it gets this right and not replicate problems associated with past developments of so many large IT systems. One of the most positive developments is the joint VA-DOD approach that will embrace best commercial practices by leveraging technology already used in the private sector through commercial off-the-shelf systems, and especially open-source coding so that the electronic health record can be billed at the lowest cost. This will ensure that the new system will benefit from innovative and new solutions being used by major medical systems and health care providers across the country.

An open source—that is an open computer-code approach—will, most importantly, prevent us, the government, from being locked into one single vendor. Instead the approach will allow not only innovation but will require a private firm to integrate their technology into the joint VA-DOD system. It will also encourage real competition as every vendor bidding on a new contract will have full, public access to the product completed by the previous vendor. This approach should ensure that the taxpayer is defended, that their dollars are well spent, and that servicemembers and veterans are well served by the system that we then develop.

I commend the VA and DOD on their willingness to break down the walls between their respective departments and work together on this project, especially on the eve of Veterans Day. If successful, this approach could serve as a model for cooperation between other government agencies serving similar communities, making the government smarter and leveraging private sector innovation and developing cost-saving technologies—like open source coding, like commercial off-the-shelf requirements—which is exactly the mindset we need to embrace in the cost-conscious environment we are in today.

In closing, I want to, once again, thank Secretary of Veterans Affairs Shinseki, our previous Secretary of Defense Gates, and our current Secretary of Defense Panetta for their vision in bringing this tough problem together. I

will tell each one of these Cabinet Departments that Chairman CULBERSON and I are looking forward, in about 2½ months' time, to meeting with their teams to assess the project and progress on developing a fully integrated, complete joint DOD and then VA health record to care for that American from the time they enlist until their final days as a veteran.

HIRING VETERANS

On November 11, 1919, exactly 1 year after the end of World War I, President Wilson designated Armistice Day to honor those who served during the great war. In 1954, Congress changed the name of the holiday to honor the service of all men and women in uniform that we now know as Veterans Day. For the last 22 years, it has been the honor of my life to serve in the U.S. Navy Reserve. I have seen firsthand the sacrifice of men and women who wore the uniform and, quite frankly, provided the freedoms that we enjoy as Americans.

This week we remember those who sacrificed everything in the defense of our Nation, and I am proud to support legislation that provides a new employment opportunity for those veterans. The VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011 is bipartisan legislation that the Senate has just passed to give our veterans the opportunity to learn new skills and reenter the workforce. Too often employers overlook the experience of our professional veterans. These men and women are typically highly effective, organized leaders who have been part of a team in a difficult environment. They have undertaken responsibilities few could imagine under extreme conditions—especially at young ages.

Across Afghanistan and Iraq, veterans are saving lives and using state-of-the-art medical equipment in austere conditions. When they return, these skills they have obtained do not necessarily quickly translate into civilian certifications that first responders need to qualify for a job. As a result, governments subsidize expensive training for veterans who are already, in many cases, substantially overqualified. The bill just passed in the Senate requires the Department of Defense, Veterans Affairs, and Labor to identify equivalencies between military service and private sector competencies. This change will translate military experience and certifications into civilian qualifications opening new career opportunities for veterans.

The legislation also reforms and improves the Department of Defense Transition Assistance Program to assist retiring servicemembers with resume development, educational options, and tools for separating from the military. The legislation will identify potential positions and industries in the private sector for our new veterans.

For unemployed veterans the legislation establishes a retraining educational benefit allowing veterans to go back to school for high-demand skill development and to obtain a technical

certificate or degree that prepares them to reenter the workforce. This bill also engages the private sector and expands the tax credit for hiring our returning heroes.

The legislation is particularly important to my home State where we have over 700,000 veterans. Across Illinois they enthusiastically take on new challenges and become teachers and corporate executives or public servants.

In 1901, a Knox County native and Illinois veteran, Charles Walgreen, built the foundation of one of our Nation's largest pharmacy chains. Chicago native George Halas served twice in the Navy and then spent 63 years at the helm of the Chicago Bears and helped found the NFL. Countless other citizens of our State served in the military but then made invaluable contributions to our Nation and its economy.

Despite what most Americans see on TV, Chairman MURRAY in the Senate and Chairman MILLER in the House demonstrated that Republicans and Democrats across the Senate and House can work together, and this legislation just passed as a result of that bipartisan cooperation.

Today our Nation's veterans are facing different adversities and are overcoming new challenges both in the field and when they come home. We owe these men and women everything, and this measure—a bipartisan measure—is one of the ways we can say thank you.

EUROPE'S DEBT CRISIS

I also want to take a moment to speak briefly on the subject of the European debt situation. I am concerned that we are now eyewitnesses to history, but few in the Senate are even watching major events that could hurt the incomes of Americans at home.

Margaret Thatcher once said: Socialists eventually run out of other people's money. We witnessed the end of communism in 1991 when Russia ran out of money. In 2011 we may be witnessing the end of European socialism as many of their economies go bankrupt. Events in Europe offer an immediate warning to our own banking system and is a long-term lesson to our society.

I thank my friend David Malpass for his work in helping to develop my view on these issues. In our view, Europe's approach to the run on Greek debt and then Italian debt and possibly this afternoon French debt shows that Europe's leaders are not addressing the problems squarely that they face. The current approach they have is unsustainable.

Yesterday we witnessed the interest rate Italy must pay to borrow funds rising to over 7 percent from the 6.4 percent on Tuesday and the 5 percent they had to pay at the beginning of the month.

Germany's Finance Minister suggested that Italy consider drawing on EFSF funds, implying that Germany doesn't recognize the true magnitude

of the systemic problem they face, still focused on Plan A when Plan A no longer is viable. As Malpass commented, this compares a popgun versus the charging financial rhinoceros that is needed.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel talked about a new European Union and new EU treaty structures. The United States should support increased financial restraints—tougher ones than the Maastricht Treaty provided. It is hard to see how Europe could undertake an entirely new treaty and then ratify it in the middle of this crisis. After all, the EFSF was hard enough.

Merkel's party also discussed ways to allow countries to exit the euro. This would be an immediate and severe threat to the current outlook, but her party is now no longer in the ascendency. It is losing strength to coalition parties that are more committed to the euro.

On Tuesday, French President Nicolas Sarkozy raised the possibility of what he called a two-speed Europe in a speech in Strasbourg, meaning that the eurozone countries would have different rules than non-euro EU members. These issues would all be fine to discuss if we were not immediately in a current financial crisis. There are many steps the United States should encourage to prevent this situation from jumping across the Atlantic. Unfortunately, none of them appear to be underway.

First, Italy should undertake major growth-oriented structural reforms in their labor market, but there appears to be little chance of that.

Next, Europe could temporarily back away from the Basel III mark-to-market and the bank capitalization levels they require, removing for now the threat their banks face: that they will be taken over or forced to excessively dilute their equity at the market bottom. Recall that the United States provided critical relief in this regard by reinstructing the FASB in March of 2009 to do this launching the equity market surge.

European Nations could also begin guaranteeing new liabilities at their banks. Remember, also, the United States took this step in October of 2008 through a fee-based FDIC guarantee of new bank issuance. The ECB could also purchase Italian bonds in the size needed in the secondary market with the goal of lowering the current yield. Remember, the Fed bought American mortgage-backed securities in December of 2008 instantly helping recover and resuscitate that market.

Unfortunately, right now none of these positive developments seem likely. The news tonight from Europe is fairly dismal, and I recall the collapse of German credit in July of 1931. It was that collapse that turned the recession of 1929 into the Great Depression.

Our Congress right now is rightly focused on the need to cut our own spending, but, unfortunately, the news that I have seen is the crisis abroad

could become the No. 1 economic story in the United States as early as next month.

Americans should watch this situation very closely. We should encourage Europe to take the actions I outlined above, and most importantly, we should make sure the supercommittee does its job and that we kick our own spending habit before we face the same future.

IRAN'S NUCLEAR PROGRAM

Lastly, I want to touch on a subject that I think most concerns me for the future of the country, especially next year.

When the history of the Iranian nuclear program is written, November 2011 is likely to be marked as the turning point toward conflict regarding Iran's nuclear weapons program. Recall that Iran has signed the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty, and her government claims they are taking no action in violation of that treaty. Recall also in 1979 Iran embraced supporting terror as government policy. Iran was then certified as a state sponsor of terror by Presidents Carter, Reagan, Bush, Clinton, Bush, and Obama. Recall also that Iran now has become the top financier for two major terror groups in the Middle East, Hamas and Hezbollah.

Iran has transferred nearly every type of weapon in its inventory—including cruise missiles—to Hezbollah. Recall also that Iran has started the massive refining of uranium, far above the 3 percent necessary to fuel a reactor—upwards of 20 percent—moving to the 98 percent needed to run an atomic weapon.

This week, the IAEA released a landmark report. It said the Iranians were accelerating their uranium enrichment. It said they had received design information through military personnel on nuclear weapons. But, most importantly, it showed how step by step the Iranians were working on a nuclear warhead for their long-range SHAHAB-3 missile to include the density and weight of a nuclear weapon as well as the inclusion of an electric generator inside that weapon—unnecessary for a conventional munition but absolutely required for a nuclear munition—that there were no submunitions, that the entire package was to go off at once, and that the critical design information behind that all pointed to a nuclear warhead. Our response should be, in my view, nonmilitary but the strongest nonmilitary means necessary.

For many years as a House Member I worked on what I thought was the critical sanction, which was to take advantage of the key vulnerability of Iran; that the mullahs had so mishandled their economy since 1979 that this oil-producing nation totally depended on foreign gasoline for their energy supplies. Our idea was to cut off Iran's supply of foreign gasoline and then to ensure that their signature under the nuclear nonproliferation treaty was genuine, real, and verifiable. After

working many years on this legislation, eventually the House of Representatives voted, with over 400 positive votes, for this legislation to help cut off Iran's gasoline supply. In fact, the bill was unanimous in the Senate, and last year President Obama signed this bill into law.

But the record now shows, according to Reuters this morning, that gasoline deliveries, despite the Obama sanctions, now have gone up 21 percent to Iran. Despite the comprehensive sanctions the United States has leveled against Iran, the International Monetary Fund reports that the Iranian economy grew faster than the U.S. economy last year. So, many of us, looking at the sorry record of sanctions enforcement, have gathered together on the idea of one last sanction that we think could avoid a conflict, that we think would deliver the decisive diplomatic weight to solve this problem, and that is to sanction the Central Bank of Iran itself. We would say any entity which does business with the Central Bank of Iran cannot do business with the United States, and we would force every financial and business interest in the world to choose between the \$300 billion Iranian economy and the \$14 trillion American economy.

We know the Central Bank of Iran is the central paymaster of Hezbollah and Hamas, two organizations Secretary of State Clinton has highlighted as sponsors of terror. We know the Central Bank of Iran is the central paymaster for the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps and especially their subunit, the Quds force, which Attorney General Holder highlighted, which tried to launch a plot through a Mexican drug cartel to blow up a Washington, DC restaurant. They talked about killing dozens of Americans—they even talked about killing Senators—in an effort to kill the Saudi Arabian Ambassador to the United States. We know the Central Bank of Iran also is the likely paymaster of the nuclear program of Iran itself.

This summer, something unique happened in the life of the Senate. In these partisan times, with so many differences expressed between Republicans and Democrats, 92 Senators joined in the Kirk-Schumer letter saying that we should sanction the Central Bank of Iran, that we should cripple the Iranian currency. For God's sake, at least we can have Iranian economic growth as slower than U.S. economic growth for 2012. It was a unique moment of bipartisan consensus, and the Obama administration even leaked to the New York Times that this action was under consideration. All indications are now that the Obama administration will take no major action against Iran, despite a United Nations report and despite a plot revealed by the Attorney General himself.

Recall that the IAEA was the organization that downplayed Bush administration accusations against Iraq and

its weapons of mass destruction program, and that following the fall of Saddam Hussein we consistently found that what the IAEA said about Iraq was exactly correct. So when the IAEA reports that the Iranians are working toward a nuclear weapon and a warhead aboard their SHAHAB-3 missile; when we learn that the Iranians are supporting terror through Hezbollah and Hamas with a plot to kill Americans at a Washington, DC restaurant; when we learn that Iranians have registered the names of every Baha'i family, all 330,000 in their country, that they have removed all Baha'is from universities, that they have kicked all Baha'i children and prohibited all Baha'i businesses from doing business with their government, we are worried that this is a government—probably the only member of the United Nations—where the head of state regularly talks about wiping another member of the United Nations off the planet, it seems as though we should take action.

I recall a famous quote from President Kennedy long before he was elected President when he wrote an essay called "Why America Slept" in which he talked about all the signs of a coming catastrophe in Europe and no action by the U.S. Government.

This week is the turning point for Iran. If the United States takes no action, then we set the Middle East on a course for conflict likely involving our allies in Israel, potentially also Saudi Arabia. The simple course of history right now I think would be improved if we leveled this sanction in a bipartisan fashion, giving our diplomats decisive weight to stop this program and, therefore, avoiding conflict. By taking the easy way out—by leveling no action against Iran—we actually are empowering those who would go to conflict more quickly.

I am dumfounded as to the reason we are doing this. Senators on this floor told me they suspected there was so much insecurity about the current price of oil that the administration will do everything possible not to have conflict or stress in the Middle East in order to ensure its reelection and keep prices low. But I would argue that nuclear weapons in the hands of the Iranians will automatically raise energy prices in the United States. I would argue that with the record of the Iranians transferring cruise missiles to Hezbollah, there is no doubt in my mind that the Iranians, once they build a sufficient stockpile of nuclear weapons, will transfer some of those to Hezbollah.

We also see hostile intent by the Iranians not just at the Israelis but at the Saudi Arabians, and that the path to further instability and danger is in not taking action rather than taking action.

This, on a Friday night in November, is the turning point on the Iran crisis. Many bureaucrats inside the administration would prefer we not know this

is the turning point. They would prefer we not realize the Iranian program is receiving decisive weight, and that according to experts the Iranians will have nuclear weapons either next year or, by their latest estimate, the year after. They would prefer we not realize that according to my scenario, they would build a sufficient stockpile so that we envision a possible future where by 2014 or 2015 the Iranians will have a sufficient number to begin transferring weapons to Hezbollah. And we certainly know that the moment the Iranians detonate a weapon, we will witness the launch of nuclear programs in Saudi Arabia and likely in Egypt.

The bottom line is this: Without decisive action on economic sanctions, we condemn the Middle East to a conflict that eventually may involve weapons of mass destruction. With action similar to action called for by those who saw history correctly in the 1930s, we could help protect the coming generation from such a conflict. A world in which the Iranians have nuclear weapons is one that we grant to our kids in a far more dangerous environment than the 21st century, rather than the one we should grant to them.

The Senate, hopefully, will vote on an amendment next week that I hope to offer to level this sanction on Iran. If opposed by the Obama administration, then I think we are condemning this region to an awful conflict, and I think we should protect the next generation from such a future by taking good, solid, decisive, nonmilitary sanctions action now.

With that, 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.

Ms. MIKULSKI. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

SOCIAL SECURITY

Ms. MIKULSKI. Madam President, I rise today to address one of the most important issues facing the supercommittee; that is, where does Social Security fit into their plans?

I know the supercommittee is doing a great job. They are working in a steady way to see how we can be a more frugal government, but while we are trying to be frugal, how we also meet our responsibilities for the national defense and also how we maintain our social contract.

To me, one of the most essential programs in the social contract; that is, the contract between the U.S. Government and its people, is Social Security. For more than 75 years, under every President, we have worked in a bipartisan way to ensure the security and the solvency and the safety of Social Security. Every President has agreed that Social Security should be undeniable, available to everybody, reliable,

that it is there when you need it, and inflation proof—inflation proof.

I was in the House when we were teetering on a collapse of Social Security. Ronald Reagan was in the White House. Tip O'Neill was the Speaker of the House. Bob Dole and Bob Byrd were in the Senate. We went to work and made sure Social Security was solvent for all of 30 or 40 years.

Under Bill Clinton, we also took positive forward steps. Under President Bush he wanted to privatize it. That is the way he saw entailing its future solvency. We fought that. But we still had money in the trust fund.

Now where are we? Well, there are those who say we have got to reduce the debt. Hey, I know we have to reduce the debt. I say to the Presiding Officer, we have had extensive conversations. The Presiding Officer has some very meaty ideas worthy of consideration. But let's make it clear, Social Security should not be on the table. When they say all options are on the table, let's put all options on the table for those programs that created the debt, that created the deficit. Social Security did not create our debt. Why it is part of the supercommittee conversation, debate, and even hit list, I do not know.

That casts no aspersions against any member of the committee. I am talking about somehow or other editorial boards that know everything about everything all the time have said you have to do something about Social Security. We know we have to reform Social Security to modernize it for a 21st century economy and a 21st century demography. We get that. But it does not belong in the supercommittee up against the wall with impossible deadlines, up against the wall with impossible mandates.

So while they are looking at revenue, discretionary spending, military spending, Social Security does not belong there. The reform of Social Security belongs in another environment. So that is position No. 1.

Position No. 2 is, what are we doing on Social Security? Well, I am concerned we are about to shred this social contract, and we are going to do it by doing something called the "chained CPI." Isn't that a terrible word: "chained CPI"? Wow. I am afraid we are going to chain seniors to poverty.

Let me tell you what a chained CPI is. When you read all of the books we get, policy books, chained CPI would cut Social Security by \$112 billion over 10 years. They do it by changing the way the cost of living is calculated. It is based on kind of this "theory." It is based on a "theory of human behavior," one of those "social engineering schemes." What it says is this: It assumes that a consumer will substitute lower cost items when the cost of what they normally purchase goes up.

Well, that means, again, "in theory," if the price of apples goes up, you are going to buy an orange. It sounds good. But for the debate on Social Security,

it is inappropriate because the market basket approaches by senior citizens, validated by every economic and marketing group, say their largest expenditure is health care, and the reason they do it on health care is because they need it to keep alive. This is not trading a latte for Dunkin' Donuts. This is not going from arugula to big lettuce. This is life. This is life on the line when we are about to cut the seniors' bottom line. We have to get real and talk about what is the way seniors live, what is it they need to do to stay alive, and what is their purchasing power.

So this is not BARB MIKULSKI. The Social Security people themselves say there is something called the market basket for elderly, CPI-E. It means they spend their money on health care, on food, and on energy, and in many cases housing. They cannot reduce those costs. Those are fixed costs for which they have no choice and no negotiating power. Our citizens, our senior citizens, cannot negotiate on their heat, they cannot negotiate much on their prescription drugs. Oh, they might go from a brandname to a generic. But if their cost of living is being squeezed down, they will not be able to do it. You cannot substitute your medication, your insulin, and substitute it for apricot juice.

If the cost of prescription drugs goes up, so does medication. I am concerned that this chained CPI—human behavior, untested, untried social engineering scheme—is going to become the basis by which we calculate the cost of living.

Let me go to some facts. By the way, this is not Senator BARB MIKULSKI talking, this is the Social Security Actuary, the Actuary actually giving accurate facts. Let's go to the A word. The Actuary actually giving accurate facts. First of all, they say this is a technical fix and does not mean a whole lot to seniors. Actually, the chained CPI will fundamentally restructure Social Security. If we do it, we will be complicit and complacent in creating a structurally induced poverty for old people.

What do we mean? Well, if you look at this chart—and this comes from the Actuary—if you go to the chained CPI and the purchasing power they talk of, first of all, it will go into immediate effect. Then it actually cuts—it is not like—you know how the seniors were upset they did not get a cost of living 2 years in a row? They will actually get a reduced benefit. And under the way this will be calculated, hypothetically if you are now getting \$15,132 in Social Security, if you are getting it when you are 65 now, 10 years from now your benefit will be reduced. Not only will you not get your cost of living, but your benefit will be reduced to \$14,572.

If you continue to live, and you are 85, it will be reduced to \$14,148. It compounds itself. So God forbid you even make it another 30 years. Because under what the chained CPI would do is you would essentially lose over close to

\$1,600 in benefits. I cannot believe this. I cannot believe we are even talking about it. Because if we are talking about going with the true market basket, what you should do is actually have this increase. I will not go through all of the numbers, but they are significant and they are severe.

There is another thing going around here on the floor: Oh, Senator MIKULSKI, why are you so upset? It will hurt future beneficiaries. Well, I am upset because no matter what time it affects a beneficiary, it affects a beneficiary. But what everyone fails to grasp is this will be an immediate—underline the word immediate—cut, according to the Social Security's Chief Actuary. If we pass this this year, this chained CPI begins December of 2012. So 1 year from this December, it would go into effect. That means if you are 65 years old, your benefit will be reduced that year. By the time 10 years later, your benefit will have been reduced five times as much. And if you make it to 85, your benefit will actually be reduced by 10 times as much.

This is, to me, a horrific idea. The current CPI-W, which is what we call the cost of living, was used in 1972. It was the only measure we had at the time. It was viewed as an advanced thing for an inflation-proof benefit. Now when we look at it, what we know is that we know the purchasing power—not the purchasing power, what is the market basket that seniors use. Chained CPI might be fine in other areas or other categories. I am not going to debate this here today.

But what I do want to do this time, this place, I want to sound the alert. I am going to ring the bell. I am going to be at my battle station saying to every member of our caucus, and every member of the people on the other side of the aisle, please, read up on this. Know what we are doing. If you are going to vote, I do not want to hear buyer's remorse a year from now. I do not want to hear buyer's remorse 2 years from now. I do not want to hear from the seniors in my home State of Maryland say: Where were you, BARBARA? Did you say anything? Did you do anything? So I am saying here today, get out our policy books and for God's sake read them. Read them. And do not read what this think tank or that editorial board says, read the Social Security Actuary. Because I am telling you, we are about to do something that is irrevocable.

I believe in old-fashioned values, and one of the great ones is honor thy father and thy mother. It is not just a great commandment to live by, it is sure a great public policy to govern by. The American people every day particularly who work hard now and live by the rules, go by the rules, pay into Social Security over a lifetime, we said to them: If you do that, your Social Security will be a guaranteed benefit. It will be a lifetime benefit. It will be reliable and undeniable. And it will be inflation proof.

FDR signed the bill that created that contract. Every President regardless of the party has kept that promise. And it is up to this Congress not to shred the social contract with the seniors of the United States of America.

I want to yield the floor to someone from the Finance Committee who has done so much work on this, such great work, such due diligence, and has a grasp of both the policy and the impact that it has on people.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. FRANKEN.) The Senator from Washington.

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, I thank my colleague, the senior Senator from Maryland, for her leadership on this issue for protecting seniors and protecting women. It seems to me every time we have a battle that is about undercutting the benefits to women in America, BARBARA MIKULSKI is on the Senate floor or in the halls and in various meeting rooms making sure that America knows what these proposals are.

I could not have been more proud of her when she led all the women Senators on the Democratic side of the aisle to push back on the Bush Administration's proposal to privatize Social Security. At that point in time, she most succinctly told Americans that women, more than any other in that age group, would suffer because they live longer, they depend on Social Security, and if Social Security was privatized, women would feel the brunt of it.

So I am proud to be out here this afternoon with her to talk about this proposal that has been—we cannot tell, because we do not know. We are not on the supercommittee. But it seems to be floating around in various forms, various organizations may be talking about it, the notion that we would change Social Security.

I know at home in my State of Washington, people seem to be confused when we are talking about our budgets. And we are obviously having to make tough budget decisions, as are people around dining room tables, around city halls, around our State capitols and here in Congress are having discussions about how to have a budget to live within our means.

But when you talk to them about the primary way—and one proposal that surfaced in the last budget negotiations in July was to automatically take \$300 billion of cuts right off the top as the major proposal out of a concept called chained CPI. When you think about that, the first shot of budget cuts would be on the backs of seniors, it is almost as if someone thought seniors cooked up exotic financial instruments and foisted them on the U.S. economy and somehow they should pay the price. We know that is not the case.

So why are people targeting these seniors now? And we are not sure if they are. We have just heard various

rumors that perhaps this notion of chained CPI, a change in Social Security benefits as my colleague just outlined, would be a proposal.

I am here to say, I am not for having the seniors in America share the brunt of sacrifice with a proposal such as this that would clearly be on the backs of seniors. It is not something they can afford. I know some of my colleagues may have endorsed a chained CPI, a change in the consumer price index to calculate inflation. But that is a cut that would increase over time. And literally, the longer you live, the more you are penalized. It is such a disproportionate impact to women who do live longer than men and count on those benefits for their living.

In my State, changes to the cost-of-living adjustment would hurt more than 1 million Washingtonians. Social Security has kept about 30 percent of Washington residents who are 65 and older out of poverty. That is what it has done for them. And what is more, 25 percent of seniors in my State live on Social Security alone. So there is a population that is depending on Social Security, and they are living on it alone, or it is making up—another 21 percent of them—it makes up 90 percent of their income.

I think this demonstrates that we cannot support these kinds of cuts, especially at the magnitude this proposal is talking about. The Social Security Office of the Actuary has reported that chained CPI would reduce the COLA by about .3 percent a year. So let's look at that example. A single woman, 65 years old in Washington State, would get a monthly benefit of about \$1,100 a month or \$13,300 annually.

By age 80, if chained CPI would pass, that would result in a \$56 per month or \$672 annual cut in that benefit. So that is less food, that is less medicine, that is less vital care for these seniors. If that individual actually lived to 90 years old, it would be an \$87 a month cut and a \$1,044 cut annually. If you think about the costs these seniors endure—and I for one have proposed changing the market basket of goods that the CPI is based on, because if you think about it, we have a market basket of goods for their CPI that are what the overall economy looks at.

But seniors have a much more expensive market basket of goods. They have to buy more medicine. They have other additional out-of-pocket health care expenses. And so their costs are going up at a higher rate. But this proposal, if you think about it, the average monthly cost of food for a single elderly individual is about \$231 per month. That is what the average is, about \$53 a week. That is based on data from the Elder Economic Security Standard Index. So an individual at 80 basically means they would have 1 week less groceries under chained CPI.

That is what it means. They would have 1 week left of groceries every month.

In my State, when you think about the average out-of-pocket health care

expenses seniors have for care, that average out-of-pocket expense rises by \$1,400 for an individual. If you think about it alone, the increase in health care out-of-pocket expenses basically wipes out where many seniors are for any kinds of remaining income. Certainly, if we put this kind of cut on top of that, it would make it clear that seniors would be getting less from Social Security. We recently, for the first time since 2009, gave seniors an increase to their cost-of-living adjustment. Now what are we going to do—go backward and take it away? For 75 years, Americans have been paying into Social Security with the promise that they would receive these benefits in their retirement years. Now is not a time to break that promise.

I think my colleague has clearly come to the floor with a message to our other colleagues who aren't here this afternoon, to say take a look at the details of this proposal. This is not a simple proposal about in the future someone is going to get less than they might under some other plan; this is about a cut in the benefit formula today that would impact seniors if implemented.

So I am here with my colleague to say our economic situation has not been caused by seniors coming to Capitol Hill and proposing that we have opaque derivative markets. It wasn't caused by seniors coming and saying: Let's go ahead and have the banks get rid of Glass-Steagall so the banks can do whatever they want. Seniors didn't come here and foist this economic situation on us. Yet, where are the other proposals to help fix that? Yet, the No. 1 proposal we saw circulating in July was, right off the bat, \$300 billion coming off the backs of seniors. That same proposal is still circulating in the Halls of Congress. My colleague and I are here this afternoon to say that it is not the proposal we should be considering.

So I hope our other colleagues will stand up to protect seniors, particularly women, who are living longer, and make sure they have these important Social Security benefits.

I thank the Chair and yield the floor. Ms. MIKULSKI. Would the Senator yield for a question?

Ms. CANTWELL. Yes.

Ms. MIKULSKI. First of all, I compliment the Senator for the really wonderful teaching she just did on this issue. She is a member of the Finance Committee, and with all they are doing in Social Security, hasn't there been a hearing in the Finance Committee on the chained CPI, and have experts and senior advocacy groups shared their views with the Congress?

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, I can say to the Senator from Maryland that in my time period there, I don't remember any hearing or briefing on chained CPI that was the focus of the hearing. I don't know if in the last 15 or 20 years somebody hasn't suggested or had a hearing on it.

Ms. MIKULSKI. How many years has the Senator been on the committee?

Ms. CANTWELL. Two years.

Ms. MIKULSKI. In those 2 years, this has not come up.

I have another question about the Finance Committee, which also has jurisdiction over health care. Is it the Senator's understanding that both in the supercommittee and other reforms, Congress's intent is to raise premiums and copayments and a variety of other things on seniors? Is that one of those things out there in the ether?

Ms. CANTWELL. I can tell the Senator from Maryland that there are lots of ideas that people are suggesting. I don't know the details of the supercommittee or to say the Finance Committee is backing up the supercommittee on those ideas. I know we have to live within our budget, and we have to make some tough decisions.

There are many positives in the health care law that are about allowing seniors to stay in their homes and receive care as opposed to going into nursing homes, which is very positive and helps reduce significantly the cost of health care. There are things in there that will help us get more transparency on drug prices. Many of us would like to have direct negotiations on drug prices and drive the costs down even further for seniors. And obviously there are reforms that will help us get more efficient in the delivery system. Those are things you can accentuate by moving more quickly.

I know the Presiding Officer, coming from Minnesota, with the Mayo Clinic, certainly understands about outcome-based health care, preventive medicine, and those things seniors would like to see in reform that actually deliver better care and drive down costs. Those are the proposals that I think we should be discussing, that are positive for seniors, will help seniors, and will deliver the kind of care that is more efficient and cost-effective. But asking them to take it right on the chin with something like this proposal, as my colleague outlined as well, is something we are not willing to do.

I thank the Chair and the Senator from Maryland for her tireless leadership on behalf of women in America and making sure they can make do in this tough economy.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

MORNING BUSINESS

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

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

TRIBUTE TO JERRY McENTEE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, in 1965, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., called the organized labor movement, "the principal force that transformed misery and despair into hope and progress."

And for three decades, Jerry McEntee has been a leader in the quest for that progress.

As president of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees since 1981, Jerry McEntee has been a driving force in the fight for a better life for American workers.

He has dedicated his union's resources to the struggle for greater economic and social justice for every man and woman in this Nation—regardless of age, race, gender, religion, sexual orientation or disability.

And he has literally given American workers a voice.

AFSCME has played a role in every struggle to protect collective bargaining rights, equal pay, good benefits, secure retirement, public services and worker opportunity for the last 75 years. And for more than 50 of those years, Jerry has been part of the fight.

At the helm of AFSCME, Jerry advocated for every piece of progressive legislation passed in the last three decades. The organization and dedication of Jerry and his 1.6 million brothers and sisters has been invaluable, whether we were raising the minimum wage or passing the Affordable Care Act.

And Democrats and our progressive allies are grateful for his leadership and support over the years.

As Jerry McEntee announces that he will retire next year from AFSCME's presidency, I am reminded that our work isn't over. Assaults on collective bargaining rights in Wisconsin and Ohio proved that.

The journey from misery and despair to hope and progress that Dr. King spoke of—a journey that Jerry McEntee has led for more than 30 years—is never truly over.

I look forward to working side by side with AFSCME, our friends in labor and all our progressive allies as we continue the work of my friend, Jerry McEntee.

The labor movement is better because of Jerry. America is a better place because of Jerry.

I congratulate Jerry on a career well spent in the pursuit of progress.

KENTUCKY ARMY NATIONAL GUARD

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I rise today to honor the Kentucky Army National Guard for surpassing its recruiting goal for the eighth consecutive year, a feat which appears to be without precedent in the U.S.

This recent achievement is indicative of the Kentucky Army National Guard's strong presence and dedicated service to the Commonwealth and to the Nation. Over 14,000 Kentucky Army and Air National Guard troops have