

here we cannot pass anything unless we get Republican votes. It is a fact of life.

We have issues we have to complete this year. So we have to understand, as I explained to the Speaker yesterday, we are going to have to do this together. We cannot magically say 53 Democrats are going to pass something here. In the House, even though the Republicans have a majority, they know we have a bicameral legislature, and they have to get something passed over here also.

I am very disappointed in what the Speaker has done to get a vote over there that he thinks will pass. He keeps adding ideological candy to the proposal. Last week, they were supposed to have a vote. At that time, they could not get the Republican votes to do it. I suggested they go to either the former Speaker, NANCY PELOSI, or STENY HOYER, the minority leader over there—I do not know the exact title—but the two leaders, PELOSI and HOYER, and the suggestion was turned down.

This ideological candy they have added to this bill to get rebellious, rank-and-file Republicans on board is not going to sell over here.

They recently added a provision to fast-track the controversial pipeline proposal attractive to the tea party, which is not opposed by President Obama. It is not opposed by him. He is saying this is such a big deal that, for example, the State of Nebraska feels it would—unless there are some major changes made—badly damage that most important aquifer we have in that part of the country. In fact, it is probably the biggest, most important one we have anywhere in the country.

So as was announced yesterday by the Secretary of State, she said: If the Republicans are trying to push this on me, I cannot make a decision in 3 months. That is what the legislation calls for. If they do that, I will have to turn it down. The Secretary of State has said that in writing.

In effect, as some have said, what they are trying to do is kill the hostage. The hostage is the Keystone Pipeline. If they push this through, it is bound and doomed to failure.

But to tell everyone where they are coming from—they, the Republicans—JIM JORDAN, who is a Republican Congressman, said about the Keystone Pipeline:

Frankly, the fact that the President doesn't like it makes me like it even more.

I repeat, the President has not said he does not like it. But as a result of what has happened in Nebraska and other places along that pipeline, there are some major studies that need to go forward.

President Obama and the Democrats in the Senate have already declared the House legislation dead on arrival. Yet—after weeks of delay—Republicans are going to vote on it tonight. They are wasting time catering to the tea party folks over there, when they

should be working with us on a bipartisan package that can pass both Houses. We have offered solutions—serious, good-faith proposals with bipartisan support.

If Republicans continue to block these reasonable plans to cut taxes for 160 million workers, there, of course, will be consequences. Middle-class Americans will notice when they open their paychecks in January they will have less money to spend, and they will have Republicans in Congress to blame—no one else.

Also, for the third time in 2 weeks, Senate Republicans have filibustered a qualified nominee, one of the President's nominees.

Last night, they blocked confirmation of Mari Aponte to serve as Ambassador to El Salvador—the job she already has. She has done it well for 15 months. She has finalized an important international anticrime agreement with the people of El Salvador and forged a strong partnership with El Salvador in many different areas during her time as Ambassador.

I hope the Republicans will come to their senses before her term expires at the end of the year and approve this good woman.

I had a Republican Senator come to me after the vote and say he believed Republicans wanted to vote for her, and he was glad I moved to reconsider the vote. I hope that, in fact, is the case.

Last week, Republicans blocked the nomination of Richard Cordray to serve as head of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau—the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. Mr. Cordray has a record of protecting consumers from predatory lenders.

Two days before that, Republicans blocked the nomination of Caitlin Halligan to be on the Court of Appeals for the DC Circuit. She is an exceptionally well-qualified person, with a great resume, an exceptional legal mind. She was blocked.

All three nominees were qualified. All three had bipartisan support. All three were committed, enthusiastic public servants. Yet Republicans opposed their nominations for one purely partisan reason: to deal a blow to President Obama.

This kind of Republican obstructionism has, unfortunately, become very commonplace. But it also has consequences, and Republicans aiming to hurt the President have once again harmed our country instead.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

A BALANCED APPROACH

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, today the House of Representatives will vote on a bill that extends the

temporary payroll tax cut as well as unemployment insurance and which will not add a dime to the Federal deficit. In other words, the House bill would do both of the things the President and Senate Democrats have described as their top legislative priorities before the close of this year.

So it was surprising, to say the least, to read this morning that President Obama and my friend, the majority leader, are now plotting to block this very legislation—even to the point of forcing a Government shutdown—over the inclusion of a job-creating measure that the President thinks will complicate his reelection chances next year.

That is what is happening in Washington this week, and the American people need to know about it. So let me repeat what is unfolding right now in the Capitol.

Yesterday, the members of the Senate Appropriations Committee—Democrats and Republicans alike—agreed to a spending bill that would fund the government through the end of the fiscal year; that is, next September 30. Today, Republicans in the House will consider a bill that contains the President's top priorities: an extension of the payroll tax cut and unemployment insurance.

But here is the problem: The House bill also includes a provision to accelerate construction of the Keystone XL Pipeline, a project that has been described as the biggest shovel-ready project in America. Evidently, the President does not want this project approved before his election next November—because a small fraction of very liberal voters he is counting on to get reelected do not like the pipeline.

We have already had 3 years of environmental studies. This project was not only ready to go from an environmental point of view, it is shovel ready. It will produce jobs almost immediately, as soon as the President signs off on it.

Here is a project that would create tens of thousands of jobs, as I indicated, right away. It also would not cost the taxpayers a dime to build. It is being built by the private sector. It would reduce the share of energy we import from unfriendly countries overseas, and it is a project which everybody from labor unions—labor unions—to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce says they support because it would create tens of thousands of jobs right away.

The Teamsters support getting the pipeline started right now. The AFL-CIO supports getting the pipeline started right now. This is the kind of project the Democrats themselves, including the President, have been saying all year they want.

But the Presidential campaign seems to be getting in the way, to the point that my friend, the majority leader, now says he is willing to hold up a bipartisan bill to fund our troops, border security, and other Federal responsibilities rather than letting the President

decide if this pipeline project should move forward.

Let me say that again. The President and the Democratic majority leader, my friend, HARRY REID, are now saying they would rather shut down the government than allow this job-creating legislation to become law. That is what would happen if they succeed in blocking this bipartisan funding bill from coming to the floor for a vote.

House Republicans are giving the President everything he asked for today. They just think that instead of simply providing more relief to those who continue to struggle in this economy, we should also help prevent future job loss and incentivize the creation of new private sector jobs, all at the same time.

That is what the House bill does. It goes beyond government benefits—beyond government benefits—and takes us a step toward addressing the jobs crisis at hand.

Most people would view this proposal as evidence that the two parties are putting their best ideas on the table and addressing both sides of this jobs crisis—the relief side and the incentive side. Most people would call it a balanced approach.

Unfortunately, the President does not seem to be happy these days unless he has an issue over which to divide us. If the Republicans are proposing it, he is against it, regardless of how many job losses it prevents or how many private sector jobs it would help create, and he is not even trying to hide it.

The majority leader signaled yesterday that he and the President are so determined to turn even the most bipartisan job-creating legislation into a political issue that he will ask his Members to hold off signing the government funding legislation—that they have already agreed to on an bipartisan basis—just to hand the President what they view as a political victory this week.

This is not just irresponsible, it is reckless. The House is about to pass a bill we believe—certainly going to consider today—would help working Americans by extending the temporary payroll tax cut, help unemployed Americans by extending unemployment insurance, and which would help Americans looking for work by accelerating the construction of the single biggest shovel-ready project in America. This is the biggest construction project in America, ready to go. It only needs a signoff from the President of the United States.

It deserves to pass with broad bipartisan support. They had a vote on that earlier this year in the House. Forty-seven House Democrats voted to get this project started. So I would suggest that our friends put the political games aside and give the American people the certainty and the jobs they deserve. Take up the House bill, pass it right here in the Senate, and send it to the President for a signature without theatrics and without delay.

I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business for 2 hours with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with the time equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees, with the Republicans controlling the first half and the majority controlling the final half.

The Senator from Maine.

Ms. SNOWE. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to be recognized for 20 minutes.

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

BALANCED BUDGET AMENDMENT

Ms. SNOWE. Madam President, this morning I rise to speak to the question the Senate will be focused on over the next day or so regarding a constitutional amendment to balance the budget. I do not think there is any doubt that we have to reverse this fiscal recklessness, not just for our time but for all time.

I have consistently and vehemently championed a balanced budgeted amendment for the past three decades in both the House and the Senate to prevent precisely the kind of fiscal quagmire we are enmeshed in today, with our Federal Government borrowing an astonishing 40 cents of every dollar we spend.

In my 30 years in Congress, I have cosponsored a balanced budget amendment 18 times. I spoke or made statements in favor of it 35 times. So I have had some experience in this battle to get the Federal Government to balance revenues with expenditures.

I learned that without a self-restraining mechanism, the debt over time only goes in one direction—up. In fact, since 1981 we have debated a constitutional amendment to balance the budget in the Senate on five different occasions and on four occasions in the House of Representatives through 1997. In the meantime, we have seen what has happened with the mounting debt.

The impending vote to amend the Constitution represents an unambiguous choice between changing business-as-usual in Washington or embracing the status quo that we can no longer afford, that has brought this country to the edge of our fiscal chasm; the status quo that has led to more than 3 years without passing a Federal budget; the status quo that has brought us the first ever downgrade of America's sterling AAA credit rating;

the status quo that was exemplified by the supercommittee's inability to agree on \$1.2 trillion in debt reduction over the next 10 years.

Now we have two competing balanced budget proposals pending before the Senate in a partisan duel that has become regrettably all too predictable in Washington. Our Nation is on the edge of a fiscal cliff and 20 million Americans are unemployed or underemployed. There should not be two competing proposals on an issue as critical as our Nation's fiscal health and survival.

We have been in legislative session for 86 days since July 1st, yet we can only consign about 8 hours or so to the idea on debating the mighty question of a constitutional amendment to balance the budget.

Prior consideration in the Senate, whether it was in 1982—it was 11 days; in 1986 it was 8 days; in 1995 it was more than a month; in 1997 it was another month. We are giving 8 hours to debate two competing proposals rather than addressing the differences through the amendment process so we can ultimately resolve the question once and for all of whether we should have a constitutional amendment to balance the budget.

Amending is consistent with the tradition and practice of the Senate. Yet, regrettably, we will be denied that opportunity which is unprecedented, frankly, on this question. It is a question that clearly deserves much greater deference than is being accorded in the Senate.

Thomas Jefferson once wrote,

I place economy among the first and most important republican virtues.

And, yes, that is republican with a small "r."

He went on to say,

Public debt is the greatest of dangers to be feared.

He wrote in 1798:

I wish it were possible to obtain a single amendment to our Constitution . . . I mean an additional article taking from the Federal Government the power of borrowing.

Jefferson understood the perils of borrowing. We are not even going as far as Thomas Jefferson was advocating. But he also recognized the danger of debt and deficits do matter.

He said:

One generation should not pay for the debts of another no more than we should pay the debts of a foreign nation.

Jefferson could not have been more right. We have now entered what some economists have labeled an economic danger zone because our gross national debt is approaching 100 percent of gross domestic product. Our outstanding Federal debt exceeds the size of entire economy. There is no question that high levels of debt have stunted economic growth, costing millions of American jobs at a time when we are experiencing the longest period of long-term unemployment and the worst postrecession recovery in the history of