

time. Finally, we were able to get that done. Then came the debt ceiling, and we spent 3 months on that—3 months of wasting time here in the Senate. Never have we done that. As I indicated and has been spread on the record of this body many, many times, under Ronald Reagan, the debt ceiling was raised 18 times just like that.

Also, Madam President, anyone who understands Washington—and there are a lot more people who understand Washington than the people who are in this Chamber—my friend says: have him—me—go deal with the Speaker. Well, the issue there is kind of stunning how my friend has said this: Go talk to the Speaker. Everyone knows the Speaker cannot move forward with any negotiations until this bill is defeated here, period. Obviously, that is the case. The Speaker cannot negotiate with me until this bill is killed.

So I repeat, the spending bill my friend the Republican leader complains about is not completed. The issue facing the American people is whether they are going to have tax relief the Democrats want to give them or whether they are going to face a shutdown that was first made very unpopular by Newt Gingrich. And there is going to be another one that will be just as unpopular.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The original unanimous consent is still pending.

Is there an objection?

Mr. McCONNELL. I object.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Objection is heard.

Mr. REID. We will both object, just for good measure—a bipartisan objection.

Would the Chair announce the business of the day.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will now be a period of morning business for up to 1 hour, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each, with the majority controlling the first half and the Republicans controlling the second half of the time.

The Senator from New York.

BUDGET NEGOTIATIONS

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I just listened with great eagerness to the discussion between the majority leader and the Republican leader, and I would like to make two points here and then several subsidiary points.

We need to do two things before we leave: We need to fund the government in a reasonable and rational way, and we need to help the middle class get tax relief because the middle class is suffering. We need to do both. As Leader REID said, to do both, you need both Democrats and Republicans to agree. If you try to do one without the other, you will not get anything done.

So last night Speaker BOEHNER sent a bill on middle-class tax relief that was

such a Christmas tree that we knew it could not pass. And he knew it could not pass. We know why he did it. He did it because he could not get enough Republican votes in his caucus without all of these killer amendments to get it through. He could not get it through without those amendments.

So the Republican leader says: Well, if we know it cannot pass, why don't we start negotiating? There is one point here. We do not have to convince Speaker BOEHNER to start negotiating. He knows that. But we have to convince the hundred votes in his caucus who do not believe we should give middle-class tax relief, who are wedded to these amendments that will kill the bill here in the Senate because they are so unpalatable. It is not 1 or 2 amendments; it is 10 or 12 or 15 amendments. We need to show those hundred that this bill cannot pass.

We have to give middle-class tax relief, and we have to fund the government. So why wouldn't we vote on it now, dispose of it, and move on with the ultimate negotiations which will talk in tandem about funding the government long term and middle-class tax relief?

Now, why don't our colleagues on the other side of the aisle want to vote on that proposal? Is it because they fear embarrassing defections from their own side—defections that would show once again how too many Republicans in the Senate do not want to extend middle-class tax relief no matter what is attached to it? That is not a good reason.

What are we waiting for? The House bill is on a road to nowhere, so let's let the air out of the tires, and then we can move on. We all know how it is going to end—not with either Chamber imposing its will on the other but with a negotiation. So let's remove this bill from the floor, give Speaker BOEHNER some of the freedom he may need to negotiate, and get this all done.

As, again, Leader REID said—and he said it so well—we cannot pass the bills without both Democratic and Republican votes in the House and the Senate. Negotiating to come to an agreement makes ultimate sense.

I heard the Republican leader say: Well, the government runs out by Friday. There is an easy way to deal with that, which Leader REID asked for in a unanimous consent request and was rejected: fund the government for a short period of time.

So the logic here is to do three things: Vote on this bill. Put it aside. Fund the government for another short period of time. And then negotiate in earnest and produce both things America needs: an omnibus funding resolution that funds the government that has been worked on very hard by the Appropriations Committee—deal with the outstanding issues in that proposal. There are still serious outstanding issues. Anyone who has been around here knows that issues such as Cuba and the environment and abor-

tion in DC are not easy to settle and have not been settled yet.

So we kill the bill the House sent to us—we vote on it. It will die. We know it does not have the votes. It probably does not have even the unanimous support on the Republican side. I would bet that is pretty likely. We do a short-term CR. We fund the government for a period of time. And we have earnest negotiations that will produce both middle-class tax relief and a funding resolution for the government. We should negotiate the two measures together because, as the leader said, you cannot pass them without both Democratic and Republican votes in either Chamber. Obviously, in this Chamber, there are not 60 votes without Republican support. And in the other Chamber—because too many people are against even the agreement, too many on the Republican side are against the agreement we had for \$1.04 trillion in spending—they will need Democratic votes.

Mrs. MCCASKILL. Madam President, could I ask a question of the Senator from New York through the Chair?

Mr. SCHUMER. I would be happy to yield to my colleague.

Mrs. MCCASKILL. I am confused. The House passed a bill last night and has sent it to the Senate. Correct?

Mr. SCHUMER. That is correct.

Mrs. MCCASKILL. This is a Republican bill?

Mr. SCHUMER. That is correct.

Mrs. MCCASKILL. And we are ready to vote on it?

Mr. SCHUMER. We are.

Mrs. MCCASKILL. And the Republicans will not let us vote on it?

Mr. SCHUMER. That is correct.

Mrs. MCCASKILL. I am confused.

Mr. SCHUMER. So are we all.

Mrs. MCCASKILL. Why would the Republicans not let us vote on their bill?

Mr. SCHUMER. One of the theories is that there is dissention even on that bill among the Republican side, as there was on the previous bill that had middle-class tax relief in it.

Mrs. MCCASKILL. That is why we vote, to determine whether there is dissention.

Mr. SCHUMER. Agreed. The Senator from Missouri is exactly correct. If we voted, it would move the process of both funding the government—very important—and getting middle-class tax relief—also very important—forward.

Mrs. MCCASKILL. Well, I would certainly urge every single Senator, be they Democrat or Republican, to come to the floor and ask the question: Why are we not voting today on the bill that was passed by the House? We are ready to vote. You know, the American people do not get this game. The bill was passed in the House. Why are we not voting? Why is the Republican Party blocking its own bill?

Mr. SCHUMER. The Senator from Missouri is, as usual, thoughtful, politically astute, and right down the middle moderate. It makes no sense to block it. It is holding up progress, particularly because the Republican House

has to be shown that this bill is not going to be the answer. The only way to both fund the government and provide middle-class relief is for Democrats and Republicans to get together, as the Democratic leader has said, almost until he is blue in the face.

Mrs. McCASKILL. With all due respect to my friend and colleague from New York, I thank him for the answers, because I was confused that the Republicans are keeping us from voting on a Republican bill. But it is not the House we need show anything. We have a tendency around here to get focused on the back and forth among ourselves. It is the American people we need to show that we are capable of standing up, casting a vote, seeing whether it passes or fails, and then negotiating and finding a way forward.

I would say to my colleague from New York, if the Republicans in the Senate are not willing to vote on their own legislation, then you have got to scratch your head.

I thank the Senator for the opportunity.

Mr. SCHUMER. Reclaiming my time, I would accept the modification of my argument made by the Senator from Missouri. The point, of course, we both agree on is we ought to vote. We ought to do it to show the world, whether it is the House, Senate, American people, or anybody else. That makes a great deal of sense.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I thank my colleague from New York and colleague from Missouri for putting in context where we are today. But let's take one step back and look at what is the issue. The issue is basic: Will the payroll tax cut that currently helps 160 million Americans continue after January 1? That is the underlying question.

After all of the back and forth and politics, we believe it should. The President believes it should. Economists tell us that is the way to help us out of a recession and create more jobs. We have come up with a way to pay for it so it will not add to the deficit. Our proposal: a surtax on the wealthiest Americans, not on the first million dollars in income each year but on their second million dollars in income, a surtax.

We ask across America: Do you think that is fair to ask that sacrifice? Overwhelmingly, not just Democrats, Independents, Republicans, tea party Republicans believe that is fair. But, unfortunately, many on the Republican side are indentured political servants to a Washington lobbyist named Grover Norquist. They have signed an oath that they believe supersedes any other oath, to the Constitution or to the people they represent, that they will never, ever vote for a tax increase for the wealthy—not one penny. Not one penny.

So they wanted to stop the extension of this payroll tax cut for working fam-

ilies. They came up with a bill in the House of Representatives. The bill in the House of Representatives passed last night. It is so bad that the Senate Republicans will not let us bring it to the floor for a vote. They know what is going to happen. We saw it in the last 2 weeks. The Presiding Officer can remember. Senator HELLER of Nevada put up a Republican alternative on the payroll tax cut, and on the first vote, out of 43 Republicans, 20 supported his measure, and out of the Republican leadership team, only Senator MCCONNELL voted for it. Clearly this is not a popular approach, even when it is written by Senate Republicans.

Now the House Republican approach is so unpopular they will not even call it on the floor—so unpopular. If anyone is wondering whether we are going to get home for Christmas, they should have listened to this exchange this morning, when the Republicans refused to even call their own vote.

I agree with the Senator from Missouri. We owe to it the American people to get to the bottom of this, and quickly, to assure them January 1 the payroll cut will continue for working families across America, to assure them that we will maintain unemployment benefits for the 14 million unemployed Americans struggling to find jobs—4 unemployed for every available job. It is basic that we need to do this, and if we are going to get down to it, then I am afraid our Senate Republican colleagues have to accept the reality.

There comes a moment for a vote. This is the moment, the vote on whether we are going forward to make sure that we extend the payroll tax cut for working families in a fair way. That is what is at hand.

BALANCED BUDGET AMENDMENT

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, in about 30 minutes, we will have a rare chance on the floor of the Senate—it does not happen often. We will have consideration of two efforts to amend the Constitution of the United States. We all take this seriously. Each one of us, before we could exercise our responsibility as Senators, swore to uphold and defend that Constitution. Now we are being asked to amend it.

How often have we amended the Constitution? In the past 220 years since we passed the Bill of Rights, we have amended it 17 times: to abolish slavery, to give women the right to vote, significant historic decisions. What comes before us today are two amendments which, frankly, do not stand the test of whether they meet constitutional standards.

I am going to vote against both. I thank my colleague, Senator UDALL of Colorado, for offering a version. Senator MCCONNELL, Senator HATCH have offered their own. I do not believe either one of them is right for America. Here is what it comes down to. If we pass either of these constitutional amendments, we will be forced to cut

government spending at exactly the wrong moment in time when it comes to our economy. When our economy is in trouble, revenues are down, we step in with stabilizers to try to make sure that we keep families afloat during difficult times and restore our economy to growth. Those stabilizers are threatened and endangered by these balanced budget amendments.

Secondly, the enforcement of these balanced budget amendments will be by our Federal courts. Can you imagine? Can you imagine that the day after we pass a budget, lawsuits spring up across America in the Federal courts challenging whether we have exceeded the constitutional requirement that no more than, say, 18 percent of the gross domestic product be spent, arguments that there has been a miscalculation? How long will that take to resolve in court and what happens to America in the meantime?

Then what remedies do the courts have? The Republicans have made it clear, because of their view, one of the remedies cannot be extending taxes on the wealthiest in America. They never want that to happen. Now they want to enshrine that theory in the Constitution. Turning to our courts for enforcement of spending is, in my mind, a direct violation of the spirit and letter of the law in the Constitution which gives to Congress exclusively the power of the purse. It is a bad idea. It is certainly not one we should support.

I also want to say that this approach is unnecessary. There comes a time—and we have reached it—when we need to have the political will, in a bipartisan fashion, to deal with our country's problems, whether it is the tax cut, extending the government's life into the next fiscal year, or dealing with our long-term deficit. It takes political will, maybe even political courage. It does not take a constitutional amendment.

Let's defeat both of these amendments. Let's show our respect for this Constitution that we have sworn to uphold and defend and not pass something that has not been thought through that may, in fact, harm America rather than help it.

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

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

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

BALANCED BUDGET AMENDMENT

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, the need for a balanced budget amendment is very great. You know how the national debt now is reaching a point where, if we don't intervene with a constitutional requirement for a balanced