

breakthrough. It was an experiment—a noble experiment. It has worked so well over these many years, where we have the legislative branch consisting of two separate bodies. It is bicameral in nature.

There has been conflict. The Founding Fathers built conflict into the legislative government because they believed that would be enough to offset the power of the judicial and executive branches of government. Over the years, things have been much worse than they have been in Washington in the last 3 months. Our country has been so successful as a result of the Constitution's guidance.

I repeat, the Constitution has been so successful because of the Great Compromise of the legislative branch of government.

In the early days of our country, there was conflict that went on all the time. They were, from the very beginning, thinking: Can this great country survive? Then we had the conflict developing prior to the Civil War. One Congressman and Senator, Henry Clay from Kentucky, was known as the Great Compromiser. He worked for generations to see what he could do to stop the dissolution of the Republic. He was successful in a very difficult time.

One Member of the House was enraged because Charles Sumner was antislavery. He was a fine, extemporaneous speaker. He was so able to express himself, Congressman Brooks came to the Senate floor with his cane and beat Senator Sumner with it. Senator Sumner never really recovered. He was off work for a couple of years, and he had a permanent disability as a result of that beating he took on the Senate floor.

Historic battles have taken place in our country which were much more difficult than what we have just gone through. What we have just gone through has been extremely difficult, but there was never any consideration that the Republic would fall.

In more recent years, we had the civil rights disputes. Mr. President, years before that, the Congress reacted to slavery, and we had the dissolution of slavery. Many years later came the civil rights movement. The debate that took place on the Senate floor was very heated. Filibusters took place that lasted for weeks, not days. There was tremendous acrimony as a result of that issue dealing with civil rights. But we worked through that. It was hard, and people at that time thought Congress was broken.

Congress is not broken. Congress works the way it should. Does that mean it is always a very pleasant, happy place? No. Do I wish it weren't as difficult as it has been in the last few months? I wish it was much better than that. That is where we are.

Through all the years and conflicts we have had, we have been able to come together and reach reasonable conclusions. The great experiment that started in 1787 has been very success-

ful. A number of people have identified our system of government, but I guess the best way to talk about it came from Winston Churchill who said about democracy:

It has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except for all others that have been tried.

I am not proud of the conflict we have had these last many months, but I am satisfied we have been able to come together to find a solution. It is not over until both Houses of Congress pass the legislation dealing with the debt crisis. It is not over until the President signs the bill.

After weeks of facing off against each other, and this partisan divide we have in the Senate, we were finally able to break through with an agreement, which is typical for agreements that are difficult. No one got everything they wanted. Everyone had to give up something. People on the right are upset, people on the left are upset, and people in the middle are upset. It is a compromise. It is not always easy for two sides to reach a consensus, but that is what we did. We did it on a bipartisan basis.

So I believe reasonable Republicans and Democrats alike understood in this case that without compromise our country faced a very difficult situation. But we did send a message to the world and to the American people that our great democracy is working; as difficult and as hard as it is, it works.

I look forward to working with my colleagues in the next 2 days on both sides of the aisle to pass this remarkable agreement that will protect the long-term health of our economy and avert default on our Nation's debt. We still have a lot of problems dealing with the debt. Today, Congress has a unique opportunity and responsibility to show the world what we can achieve, not in spite of our divided government but because of it.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

ESTABLISHING THE COMMISSION ON FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT PROCESSING DELAYS

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

The assistant bill clerk read as follows:

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

Pending:

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

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

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

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

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, let me say a word about the leadership in the Senate. I have the good fortune of working with Senator HARRY REID, our majority leader. In my role as whip, or assistant leader, I have been close at hand when most of the major decisions have been made. I have come to take the measure of this man from Searchlight, NV, and I have found him to be an extraordinary leader.

At first blush, most people would not choose him for his ringing oratory or a commanding presence. But I will tell you that he has created a leadership style in the Senate that is exceptional. I have watched him during the span of the last 2½ years, particularly as he has faced a myriad of challenges: a new President of his own party; passing the stimulus bill, when we didn't have 60 votes on the Democratic side and had to rely on a cross-over vote from three Republican Senators; dealing with the TARP crisis; the recession and what needed to be done to save financial institutions from dissolution; his efforts, as well, on the Health Care Reform Act, which might have been the mightiest political battle I have ever been engaged in; the Financial Reform Act—the list goes on and on.

Then comes this year with the new Congress—divided, with a Republican leadership in the House. He has had to face passage of appropriations bills, continuing resolutions, and now the most recent crisis over the extension of the debt ceiling. He is an exceptional leader.

I think the majority leader is such an exception because of his humility. He is not the first to the camera nor the loudest in speech. He is a person whose word is trusted and who works night and day until we reach our goal. I admire him so much as a friend, and I am proud to be part of his leadership team and Democratic caucus.

I would like to say a word, as well, about Senator MCCONNELL, the Republican leader. He stepped forward several weeks ago with an exceptional show of political courage when he made a suggestion about how we could find our way through this crisis. It was not a welcome idea on his side of the aisle, and many of his critics took him to task for suggesting how we could get through the debt ceiling crisis. I admired the fact he stood up and understood his responsibility—our responsibility—to the Nation beyond any partisan consideration. Senator MCCONNELL played a critical role in working out the agreement which will come before us and is now pending before the

Senate—or will be pending before the Senate shortly. I thank him. I thanked him last night personally, and I thank him publicly for joining in this bipartisan effort on behalf of the Senate with Senator REID and working directly with the President and Vice President.

I am also happy the leaders in the House—Speaker BOEHNER and the minority leader, Congresswoman PELOSI—were able to work together to come up with this agreement.

There are harsh critics of this idea because, as Senator REID stated earlier, what we have come up with as an agreement is not what I would have written and certainly not what any Senator would have written. There are parts of it that I don't care for at all and other parts I think are very wise. That is the nature of compromise. I do not believe I have compromised my principles as a person or as an elected official in coming to this agreement.

At some point, you have to sit at the table and look the other side in the eye and realize they feel just as strongly as you do, and the only common ground to be found between you is not when you give up or when the other side gives up.

Let me tell you what I think are the pluses and minuses of what we are about to consider during the course of this day. First, we have averted an economic crisis—if both House and Senate should approve this measure. The notion we would default on our national debt for the first time in our history—as of midnight tomorrow night—would be devastating to a weakened economy with more than 9 million Americans out of work. It would have raised America's interest rate on its own debts, adding to our national debt.

As I have said on the Senate floor many times, a 1-percent increase in the interest rate paid by America costs us \$130 billion more on our deficit. So the idea of interest rates going up would add to our debt, not solve our debt crisis.

In addition, it would force interest rates up all over America. Individuals, businesses, and families would feel it in their credit card bills, student loan debts, automobile loans, and home loans. Businesses trying to engage in borrowing to expand the size of their business for the developments they are undertaking would feel it. That is exactly the wrong thing to do, as the Federal Reserve strives to keep interest rates low to promote growth, for us on Capitol Hill to do something which would have the opposite impact. So averting this crisis was the No. 1 achievement of any agreement we reached among our leadership.

The fact we don't have to revisit this crisis on a weekly or monthly basis is also a positive step forward. There was a feeling on both sides of the aisle—though not as clearly spoken on one side—that to come back and do this over and over could not help but weaken the role and reputation of the

United States and the global economy. So we now have an agreement which will take us to February 2013, beyond the next Presidential election, giving whoever is elected or reelected an opportunity to govern and to manage the economy in a responsible way. I think those are the major achievements.

Secondly, we make a downpayment on the deficit. I think that cuts both ways. We need to address our deficit. This Nation cannot be great, cannot continue to grow while borrowing 40 cents for every dollar the government spends. That is an unacceptable approach, and we need to reduce that dependency on borrowing and reduce the debts we are creating. Reducing spending is the starting point.

I would question whether this is the right moment to do that. I happen to believe, as others do, when we are in a recession and trying to create economic growth, pulling back on spending on such things as training and education and the building of infrastructure makes the situation worse, not better. I didn't prevail in that point of view, and this does not reflect it. But the fact that we will be putting some money down toward reducing our deficit is a positive.

I am also glad that included in this agreement, when it comes to spending cuts, is protection for the most vulnerable people in America. I can't get over how many times Members of the House and Senate get up and make glowing speeches about cutting spending when those projects and programs they are cutting are safety nets for the most vulnerable people in America. We are talking about those who are unemployed and looking for work. We are talking about those who are elderly and poor. We are talking about those who are suffering from physical and mental disabilities. We are a great and caring nation. We have created a safety net of programs so we don't see the homeless on our streets any more than necessary because of the inadequacy of our programs, and we don't turn a blind eye when it comes to the suffering many families are going through.

I am sorry we are making some cuts, but we are protecting most of the safety net programs, such as Medicaid, the health insurance program for the lower income people in America. Who counts on Medicaid? One-third of the children in America have their health insurance through Medicaid. Almost 50 percent of the live births in America are paid for by Medicaid. In addition, many elderly people, even those on Social Security and Medicare, have to turn to Medicaid to sustain them in their nursing home and convalescent home settings. So protecting Medicaid as part of this package is very important as far as I am concerned.

I would also add, the approach we are using is more balanced than some. I want America to be strong and safe. Everyone does. It is part of our Constitution that we swear to uphold. But

there is money being wasted in the Department of Defense. There are contracts that are overrun, money overspent, and there is a lack of oversight. We can save money in the Department of Defense to reduce our deficit and not compromise by one penny the safety and security of the United States.

This agreement before us says both the Department of Defense and all other departments of the government have to look for savings and reduction in spending to move us toward our deficit-reduction goal. I think that is good.

What is missing in this package? What is missing is obvious. At its best, this package will reduce our deficit by \$2.1 trillion, maybe a little more, when it comes to future spending. Most of us believe unless we can reduce our deficit by \$4 trillion, which is almost twice as much, over a period of 10 years, we will not make the positive impact we need to make to spur economic growth and more confidence in the American economy. But Senator REID suggested, as part of this program, we create a joint committee to try to find a way to increase the savings and reduction in deficit in the years to come.

Some skeptics this morning have said that is a typical Washington cop-out; that we are going to create another joint committee. Haven't we had enough? One could make that argument, but I think it overlooks the obvious. We are committed to reducing our deficit. We are committed to creating a joint committee that comes up with specific programs that work. If we fail, there is a penalty. If the joint committee fails to produce a product enacted by the House and Senate, there is a penalty.

Under our legislative language—it is known as a trigger—it says: If you should fail to reduce the spending and reduce the deficit through the joint committee, there will be a price paid—even deeper cuts in spending on both the defense and nondefense sides.

I don't want to see it move in that direction. I hope we can find a more balanced approach and do it through the joint committee, working on a bipartisan basis with appreciation and respect for one another across the table, and we can reach that goal.

Erskine Bowles, former Chief of Staff to President Clinton; Alan Simpson, former Senator, cochaired the commission on which I served. They sat down and created a template for us to reach meaningful deficit and debt reduction over 10 years of over \$4 trillion. I took those ideas and with others—Senator MARK WARNER of Virginia, Senator CHAMBLISS of Georgia, Senator CRAPO of Idaho, Senator COBURN of Oklahoma, and Senator CONRAD of North Dakota—sat down with the Gang of 6, and we turned those ideas into what we thought was a legislative approach that would work.

I still think that has merit, and I still think it should be actively considered when we talk about the long-term

reduction of debt. It is bipartisan, it is honest, it achieves real debt reduction, and it does it in the fairest possible way. It puts everything on the table—everything. There are no sacred cows. Everything is on the table. It means it goes beyond spending cuts to the entitlement programs, which makes those of us on the Democratic side particularly nervous. But it also goes to revenue—new revenue—to reduce the deficit, which makes those on the other side of the aisle nervous. But what we should be nervous about is a continuing deficit and a weakening economy and a debt left to our children.

I believe this proposal that is before us now—this agreement of the leaders—should be adopted in a timely fashion. I hope we can move to it today. We are working out with the Republicans a schedule when these matters will be considered. There will be those on the right and the left who will be critical, and I can understand their thinking. It doesn't serve either side particularly well. But it is a compromise and a consensus.

I think of all the people who contacted my office from Illinois and beyond during the last several weeks, begging us to do something, to not let this economy fail, to work together and compromise and find a way to resolve our differences. I think this is a reasonable attempt to do that. I will support it, with some misgivings. But I believe it gives us the way to get through this crisis and to move to a better place where we deal with this deficit and debt in a responsible, bipartisan manner, asking for shared sacrifice from all those across America who can make a sacrifice. That is the nature of our Nation. It is the nature of our history, where time and again we have rallied as a nation to face even more daunting challenges in the past.

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

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

The assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BROWN of Ohio. Mr. 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.

RECESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate stands in recess until 12:30 p.m.

Thereupon, at 11:01 a.m., the Senate recessed until 12:30 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. WHITEHOUSE).

ESTABLISHING THE COMMISSION ON FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT PROCESSING DELAYS—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the time until 2

o'clock shall be equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

Who yields time? If no one yields time, the time will be charged equally between the parties.

The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum and ask that the time under the quorum call be equally divided between both sides.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. BEGICH. Madam President, I have come to the floor and talked many times of my constituents back home in Alaska and the importance of ensuring we have a balanced approach in how we deal with this incredible debt crisis we are in and how we manage to create some certainty not only for today but in the years to come. We want to make sure we not only create certainty but we also do what we can to protect working families, honor our commitment to seniors and veterans, and let our small businesses know that we stand behind them, we want them to be successful, and we want to create some certainty out there so they can expand their operations and opportunity.

I am sitting here in Washington, DC, and it is whatever temperature it is outside right now—maybe 100 degrees, with 80 or 90 percent humidity—and sometimes I think we could have gotten this done quicker if we had just turned off the air-conditioning. We probably could have gotten things done quicker, with better results. But we are where we are. We are in the last 24 hours or so before we have to make a decision as to what to do with the proposals, the solutions that have been presented.

I am here, but I wish I were home, to be frank with you. This last weekend, my son was celebrating his ninth birthday, and as a parent every birthday is huge and makes a difference. I know the Presiding Officer knows that very well. So while I am here, they were enjoying life, and it made me think about a lot of things.

I wanted to put this poster up because I think it is a great poster. I got this text during a committee meeting. This is my son, who just turned 9, with a real fish. For those who can't see it, it is the same height as he is. He caught this fish with his mother a few days ago. It is a 40-pounder king salmon. It is what we call a real fish. We consider this small in comparison to some others we catch.

But when I got this text—and that is what is so great about technology: He

sends me little notes and comments during meetings and wants to make sure I am connected to what he is doing back home. But this debate we are having—this moment in time—to figure out where we are going is about the Jacobs and the other children of his age and those not yet born. It is about what we are going to do for them. The Presiding Officer and I have already experienced and enjoyed many years of our life, and hopefully we will enjoy many more, but really it is about Jacob and the other children.

When I go back home, I get a chance to talk with the kids. I am sure the Presiding Officer has done the same, where you go into an elementary school—I know the Presiding Officer was a teacher in Sunday preschool—you go in and have conversations with the kids, and in their own way, which is sometimes very brutally honest, they tell you all about what they think is going on. And I will give a quote here in a second of what my son said to me. He doesn't understand everything we are doing, but he understands it is an intense time here because I am not home. I am not with him. So he knows it is important, what we are doing here, as we debate this solution and what will be the next step.

Is what we have come up with a perfect solution? No. Are there some issues about which I am still concerned? Yes. But does it move us down a path to start dealing with the spending, the deficit, and the debt, creating certainty and protecting those who need protection, such as our seniors and our veterans? Yes.

This proposal produces about a \$1 trillion downpayment on our deficit and debt. It lays out a process by which we can achieve another \$1.5 trillion in debt reduction if this joint committee can come back with a proposal.

In the process of all this, we will create certainty in the marketplace. We will create certainty for that small businessperson who has been thinking about expanding their business. They can do that because the markets will respond positively.

We will create certainty for the individual who was thinking about buying a house or a car because now there will be stable rates.

For those who are putting money aside for the education of their young family, as I have been putting aside for Jacob for his college, we will know now that the markets are better and safer, the bonds we invest in are safer, and our children's future is a little more secure if we do the right thing over the next 24 hours, still knowing it is not the perfect deal.

The proposal evenly splits cutting between half in discretionary and half in Pentagon waste, ensuring we still are a secure nation and protecting our defenses but cutting what I would consider opportunities within the Pentagon to reduce.

As we sit here today, I think about Jacob's future and the futures of all