

code and adding higher tax rates is going to have an impact on small businesses and therefore on our economy and on jobs. This is ultimately about jobs. It is about everyday economic concerns people in Ohio and around the country have.

In this budget document, we do see some honesty, but it does not make me optimistic at all. Acknowledging the impact this budget will have on the economy, the President's budget actually concedes unemployment rates next year higher than this year, and the year after higher than this year. His prediction is that unemployment rates will be 8.9 percent in 2012 and 8.6 percent in 2013—totally unacceptable and a testament to the fact that Washington cannot continue to rely on short-term sweeteners and budget spending gimmicks to grow our economy and get the country out of this fiscal mess.

Again, I am disappointed in the budget we have seen today. I hope the Senate will work its will, put together its own budget, taking the President's budget and other ideas but then coming up with something that actually does address the very real fiscal problems we face, bring such a budget to the floor of the Senate, have it debated by both sides, and work out what we have not done in this Senate for over 1,000 days, which is prepare a blueprint for the fiscal and economic future of our country. Until we get such a budget, I fear we will continue to see this lack of economic growth and job loss that all of us would like to see addressed.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.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

RELIGIOUS LIBERTIES

Mr. JOHANNIS. Mr. President, I rise today to comment on the developments of the past few weeks which, in my view, have been incredibly tragic but maybe, on the other hand, reassuring. On the one hand, it is tragic that our own government launched an attack on first amendment rights. The President launched this assault unapologetically in the black-and-white print of a rule that clearly restricts religious liberties. It says contraceptives and abortion-inducing drugs must be provided free of charge to women. What the President did not anticipate by his rule was the backlash it would generate.

It is reassuring, on the other hand, to know that Americans will make their voices heard when their constitutional rights are being trampled. For the first time in many years, people of many

different faiths, as well as the defenders of the Constitution, have found a unifying rallying cry. They are sending the message that enough is enough; it is time to stop this administration's march into every single facet of our lives. At issue is one of the very basic rights in this country. It is one of the basic rights this country was founded to protect. It is the right to freely exercise religion—a right this President pledged to uphold when taking the oath of office.

Many Americans were lulled into complacency in 2009 by promises that apparently the President did not intend to uphold. Back then I came to the Senate floor to address this identical issue. In the thick of the very contentious health care debate, I urged my pro-life colleagues and the pro-life community to stand up against the health care bill that was being considered here in the Senate. I pointed out that the Hyde amendment, which prohibits taxpayer dollars from being used for abortion, was absolutely absent in the bill, something that now appears to be no accident whatsoever. On that day I shared the National Right to Life's very real concerns that the bill "tries to conceal that unpopular reality with layers of contrived definitions and hollow bookkeeping requirements." Unfortunately, though, empty promises that the bill respected life were enough to convince my presumably pro-life colleagues to support the bill. After all, they had heard the promises straight from the President's mouth.

Remember when the President told Americans "under our plan, no Federal dollars will be used to fund abortions, and Federal conscience laws will remain in place." Congress ignored the warnings, charged forward, blurry eyed, voting in the middle of the night, and passed the health care bill that we all now know violates the very conscience rights the President himself by his own words promised to protect.

As the law is being put into place, we are truly heading into uncharted waters for this Nation. On Friday, after weeks of criticism, the President announced a so-called compromise. We were told by his Chief of Staff that it will be that way or it will be the highway. So what is the compromise? It would still force every plan to offer free contraceptives and abortion-inducing drugs, even plans offered by religious organizations with deeply held religious beliefs.

The President claims religious employers with objections won't technically be required to offer the coverage because insurance companies will be forced to offer it free. What? Are we, as Americans, expected to believe that the many religious organizations paying the employer's share of the health care costs are not paying for these services? What kind of accounting gimmick is that? What kind of sleight of hand is that?

The President is blinded by his ideology. This fight is about religious and

moral beliefs. It is not about accounting. What we have witnessed this past week is another attempt to hide the unpopular reality with layers of misleading rhetoric and hollowed promises. The truth? The truth is that many individuals who object to contraceptives and abortion-inducing drugs as a matter of religious principle will still have to provide them and pay for them. Don't fool yourself; they are not going to be free. Drug companies don't walk in and give away free drugs. Pharmacists don't dispense them free. Of course, the cost will be passed along to every employer and every American in the form of premiums that we pay. Calling these services free is flat wrong. There is a cost and, unfortunately, it is a high one at that. They come at the cost of our religious freedoms.

The administration's position is that it can force insurers to provide contraceptive coverage for "free" because the drugs are cheaper than the cost of being pregnant. Our government said that at the very highest level. That logic is unprecedented and it is downright disturbing. Who is to say that in days to come the administration won't order health plans to cover abortion free on the premise that it is cheaper than the cost of prenatal care, birth, and caring for human life? The same twisted logic could apply for physician-assisted suicide and a whole array of controversial procedures.

Many out there may try to refute this by repeating the President's claim that the law prohibits mandated abortions, but that same claim promised to protect the religious liberties he is now forcing many to violate. Well, many of us will not sit idly by and watch this unprecedented effort, and I am not alone. The President should listen to the country. The gimmicks of the 2009 bill may have put some to sleep. This time Americans are not being fooled. Americans of all faiths, all beliefs, of different views on a whole variety of topics share a love for their Constitution and the rights embodied in that Constitution. Well, they are awake now and their eyes are fully open.

As a Catholic myself, I could not be more proud of the Catholic bishops for standing strongly. Their statement rejecting the President's smoke-and-mirrors compromise is compelling and it is spot on. The bishop said:

... today's proposal continues to involve needless government intrusion into the internal governance of religious institutions and to threaten government coercion of religious people ... to violate their most deeply held convictions.

And they go on to say:

In a Nation dedicated to religious liberty as its first and its founding principle, we should not be limited to negotiating within these parameters. The only complete solution ... is for HHS to rescind the mandate of these objectionable services.

Yes, we were told by the President's Chief of Staff negotiating is over, it will now be our way or the highway.

Well, the bishops responded. The bishops called the President's attempt to appease them unacceptable. Yes, America has been awakened and now Congress must act on their objections.

There is legislation waiting to be debated that would protect the religious liberties granted in our Constitution. The legislation introduced by Senator ROY BLUNT holds President Obama to his promises. This legislation continues the 200-year tradition of this great Nation ensuring those who believe in the sanctity of life are not forced to have a hand in someone else's death. It protects conscience rights across the board. There is a bottom line and the bottom line is this: If President Obama is allowed to dictate to religious organizations what beliefs they will be allowed to hold or not to hold, then this country we all love will be a much different place and it will be a much different place for our children and grandchildren.

If the President succeeds, then our Constitution is no longer the defining document of a great Nation. Well, we do know the position of this administration, and I stand here today to categorically reject it.

I yield the floor, and I note the absence of a quorum.

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

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Tennessee.

Mr. CORKER. 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.

THE BUDGET

Mr. CORKER. Mr. President, I came down today to talk about the highway bill we are on, and I want to say I appreciate the way we are dealing with each committee's portion of the bill as we go along. I know we are on the base bill at present, but before I get into that, I do want to make some comments about the budget.

I know we have had an inability in the Senate to pass a budget over the last 1,100 days. I know the Acting President pro tempore—a friend of mine—led a city and had to do this each year. We had to do the same in our State and city. I think those of us who come to this body are always shocked at the lack of fiscal discipline that takes place in Washington in general, but I have to say in looking at the administration's budget that was put forth today, it makes a mockery of the American people.

Our State has been blessed. We have had Governors who have been Republicans and Democrats, we have had people on both sides of the aisle, and our State has been governed well for a long time. I believe if a Governor of our State put forth a budget such as the

budget put forth today, they would be run out of our State because it is not a serious budget.

I know the Acting President pro tempore and I have been to many meetings and looked at some of the proposals that have been put out by groups like Bowles-Simpson, and it is stunning to me when we know the biggest issue our country faces is ourselves—meaning our own inability to deal with the fiscal issues that are before us and to deal with all of the reforms we know have to take place. When we know we are our own greatest enemy, to have a document that has been put out the way this one has been put out in almost a flippant way, is almost to say we don't have to deal with this serious issue that our country has to face which is pretty unbelievable.

There is no focus on the kind of tax reform that I think so many of us support that would broaden the base and lower marginal rates and have tremendous economic growth. There is no focus on dealing with programs such as Medicare and Social Security that people depend upon, that people have counted upon all of their lives and yet we know they are not going to exist in a very short amount of time unless we do something. Instead, this document totally puts its head in the sand on these issues. It doesn't deal with them.

To the Acting President pro tempore I will say that I think it is irresponsible for a President, facing the kinds of issues our country is facing and who is seeking another term, not to lay out what he believes is the approach for us to deal with these issues, just as I believe, by the way, that whoever the Republican nominee is, I think it is incumbent upon him to do exactly the same. I think all of us need to know what our Chief Executive Officer's plans are for this country as they relate to, again, the most important issue we have to deal with.

The most appalling about it is we have millions of people looking for jobs right now. Unemployment is exceptionally high. I think almost every Member of this body who talks to people out there who actually are part of small business job creation knows they will tell us they are concerned about the future of our country. That is the biggest overhang that is keeping them from investing. So these issues are tied together in a most unique way. The greatest threat to our future is our inability to deal with fiscal issues. Our Chief Executive Officer, the President, has laid out a laughable document, one that, again, makes a mockery of the American people; yet at the same time it is us acting on real fiscal discipline that actually would drive our economy to grow and create jobs.

TRANSPORTATION ACT

I am very disappointed, which brings me to the point at hand. We have a highway bill. It is the first time I think we have dealt with a highway bill since I have been in the Senate for 5 years. We keep kicking the can down the

road. It is my understanding that the EPW Committee passed this out 100 percent—Rs and Ds passed this out. Apparently they did some very good work, working together, to pass a base bill.

It is also my understanding, though, that the Finance Committee is charged with paying for this and has come up with pay-fors that work like this: We are going to spend this money over a 2-year period but we are going to pay for it over a 10-year period. Again, I look at the Acting President pro tempore, somebody I know was responsible in the job he had prior to being here, and I am sure he is in this job too. But here is what we are doing: We are going to have Republicans down here constantly railing against the President's budget. My friends on the other side of the aisle won't do that out of respect, but I am sure they are wondering what in the world has been handed to us. At the same time, we have a piece of legislation on the floor that we are going to be dealing with that candidly does a lot of the same thing. We are going to spend money over the next 2 years and yet we are going to pay for it over the next 10. I think that is absolutely irresponsible. I hope before this highway bill leaves the floor we will either reduce the amount we are spending on it—which I hate to see happen because I know we do need to spend money on infrastructure around our country—or we will figure out a way to pay for it where if we are going to spend money over a 2-year period, we will also generate revenues to pay for it over a 2-year period. This bill does not do that.

I do want to remind my Republican friends—I know we had some Republican support on the Finance Committee—that one of the things we railed about most with the health care bill that has divided our country in so many ways was that we took 6 years worth of cost and 10 years worth of revenues. All of us said it was a sleight of hand, and it was a sleight of hand; there is no question. I mean it was not honest in the way it was presented. But even since that time, with this most controversial bill, what we have done is actually moved away and now we are talking about in this highway bill spending money over a 2-year period but using pay-fors over a 10-year period. What that means is the next time we pass a highway bill under this same mode, we are continuing to run up tremendous debts. These young people who are sitting before us as pages, who come here to learn about how our country operates, want to see, hopefully, Senators acting in a responsible way.

The fact is there will be a lot of focus today on the President's budget, and I know there is a lot of disappointment on both sides of the aisle regarding what that budget says. But the thing we can do in this body over the next week or so as we are looking at this highway bill is to ensure we don't fall into that same trap here in Congress in