

dubbed the 80th Congress as the do-nothing Congress—passed 906 bills. I don't even know if he would have a definition of what we have done.

So a do-nothing Congress is something I am not proud of. It is clear to me that betting on Congress getting religion after the election is also a risky gamble—a gamble with America's future, a gamble with the next generation. We tried that with the supercommittee, but it failed. That is the reason we are here today facing the fiscal cliff. The sunset of the Bush tax cuts, the tax extenders, the end of emergency unemployment benefits, sequestration, those are all meat axe cuts, and we know that.

The Congressional Budget Office says the fiscal cliff could cut the GDP by 4 percentage points next year and send the economy back right into a recession. Look at the time we have wasted. The supercommittee fell apart almost 1 year ago, and yet here we are. Instead of voting on a real and permanent solution to our financial problems, we are getting ready to vote on yet another temporary measure that will allow us to leave before we have addressed a single one of these most critical issues.

What has happened since the supercommittee shut down with no agreement? One thing that has happened is our long-term national debt has topped \$16 trillion a couple weeks ago. That is a figure that is almost impossible to wrap your mind around. But I think you can wrap your mind around this: Each one of us who lives in this great country is now in debt \$50,700, every man, woman, and child.

Sixteen trillion dollars is roughly the same as our country's entire economic output for the first time in 40 years. The last time our debt was 100 percent of GDP was right after World War II. We were fighting to save our Nation, to save a society, to save a way of life. This has been self-inflicted, and we can't keep going on this way.

We have reached what the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform called the moment of truth. The report it prepared for the President almost 2 years ago—in fact, that was the title of its report, *The Moment of Truth*. And while the commission faced the moment of truth with a comprehensive bipartisan plan for reducing our debt, Congress has yet to do so. Now is the time. We know how to fix things. Congress has done it before.

In the early 1990s, our economy was faltering because deficits and debt were freezing capital. But Congress sent a signal to the market that it was capable of being fiscally responsible. And it was. The result was the longest economic expansion in history: the creation of over 22 million jobs and unprecedented wealth in America, with every income bracket rising—every income bracket, not just the chosen few.

The budget framework put together by Congress and the White House led to the first balanced budget in genera-

tions and put our country on track to be debt free this year, in 2012. If we had stayed the course, we would be debt free as a United States of America right now. Let me repeat that. This year we would have been debt free.

But we got totally off track with tax cuts, two wars, and expansion of the prescription drug benefits for Medicare recipients—none of which was paid for. All great ideas, but none was paid for. And the 10-year \$5.6 trillion surplus forecast in 2001 has become a debt of more than \$16 trillion. That is a \$22 trillion swing in less than a decade. It is unbelievable. It is mind boggling.

But we can get back on track if we follow a simple formula, roughly the same one the Bowles-Simpson debt commission recommended. We have to curtail spending, we have to have a fair revenue stream, and we have got to look at cutting the fat; and, to do that, an overhaul of our tax system so it is not only more equitable for everyone but also encourages the kind of entrepreneurship that makes our country the bedrock of the global economy.

In America, we need a tax system where everybody pays their fair share, and where American businesses are free to do what they do best: outproduce, and outinnovate competitors all around the world. To keep a bright future, we have to reform our entitlement programs so we can preserve the benefits. There is serious trouble ahead if we don't act.

Think about this. In 2016, Social Security disability is basically insolvent; 2024, Medicare insolvent; 2033, Social Security will only be able to deliver 75 cents on the dollar, a 25-percent discount.

The American people are hungry for plain talk on our debt. That is why a few weeks ago in Charleston, WV, we hosted Senator Alan Simpson and White House Chief of Staff under Bill Clinton Erskine Bowles. They packed the house, and they spoke the truth. What they were saying is, give the American people the facts, show them the options the way we did at our fiscal summit, and they will do their part to get our country back on the right track. They always have. That is what makes this country so great.

So don't sell the United States of America short. Don't sell the American people short because this is an election year. They can tell when you are dealing straight with them or when you are playing politics. Right now, there is no more time to play politics.

In fact, I got a letter yesterday from James of Clarksburg, WV, talking about the summit. Here is what he said.

It is time for responsible Members of the Senate like you to take to the floor and tell your fellow Senators, "It is past time for us to take responsible action to address the fiscal crisis which is our responsibility to the people who sent us here—because it is just that. There is no excuse for delaying action until after the election."

No excuse to delay it just because of an election.

James got it exactly right; there is no time to waste. I am not naive. I understand some of the choices we face are going to be hard for some of us to make. I know Republicans don't want to talk about new revenue, and I know Democrats don't want to talk about entitlement reform. But we need to start thinking more about the next generation than of ourselves, or the next generation than the next news cycle or the next flight out of Washington.

Millions of Americans are struggling in this tough economy, working overtime to pay their bills, find a job, and find a way forward for their families. They are looking to us for the leadership they need. They are looking to us for solutions. They are looking to us to come together and do what is best for the country in a balanced and practical way. They are simply looking to us to do our job, and I intend to do that to the best of my ability.

Winston Churchill once said: You can always count on Americans to do the right thing—after they have tried everything else.

I think we have tried everything else, including kicking the can down the road 12 times before. Now it is time for us to do the right thing. This temporary step is the wrong thing at the wrong time. We have work left to do, and we need to stay and do it. The people of America expect us to do better, to stand up for them, to put politics aside. The people of West Virginia can be assured that I will always stand, and I will continue to try to do the best that I possibly can for them and for the people of this great country.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. HAGAN). The Senator from Rhode Island.

HONORING RUSSELL TRAIN

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Madam President, this week the conservation community mourns the passing of a great American leader, a passionate individual, and an inspiration and friend to many, Russell Errol Train.

President Nixon first named Russell Train as Under Secretary of the Department of the Interior and then as the first Chairman of the new White House Council on Environmental Quality from 1970 to 1973. Russ Train then became the Administrator of the EPA, serving there from 1973 to 1977. He was at the forefront of the legislation that became the bedrock of our country's environmental policy: the Clean Air Act, the Safe Drinking Water Act, the Endangered Species Act, the Toxic Substances Control Act—laws that keep the American public safe and that protect our American natural resources.

His desire to protect wildlife and habitat predated these years of public service. He founded the Wildlife Conservation Foundation in 1959 and then the African Wildlife Foundation. When

the World Wildlife Fund was established in the United States, he became its first President.

This week the World Wildlife Fund U.S. CEO Carter Roberts described Russell Train as “a true national treasure and an inspiration to all of us who embrace conservation as their life’s work.”

Mr. Roberts went on to say:

Undoubtedly, Russ would prefer that we not spend a lot of time mourning his passing. He would want us to redouble our efforts to save the animals and places we care about, to solve the problems of climate change and resource scarcity, and to build leadership capacity in those countries where it is needed most.

So it is with his legacy in mind that I come to the Senate floor today, as I try to do every week, to discuss climate change, the science behind it, and the reality of the changes we are already seeing. This week I will focus on how the carbon pollution that is causing these climate changes is also affecting our oceans and causing an equally threatening problem—ocean acidification.

Sea water absorbs carbon dioxide; and when it does, chemical reactions occur that change the concentration of carbonate and hydrogen ions in a process that lowers the pH of sea water, commonly referred to as ocean acidification.

Since the Industrial Revolution, we have burned carbon-rich fuels in measurable and ever-increasing amounts, now up to 7 to 8 gigatons each year. We have raised the average parts per million of CO₂ in our atmosphere from 280 parts to 390. By the way, the range for carbon dioxide in our atmosphere for the last, say, 8,000 centuries has been 170–300 parts per million. So we are well outside of that range. Indeed, in the Arctic, measurements have already reached 400 parts per million.

The oceans of the Earth have absorbed more than 550 billion tons of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. That is approximately 30 percent of all of our carbon dioxide emissions. The good news is that absorbing all this carbon has significantly reduced the greenhouse gas levels in our atmosphere. The bad news is that because of all this carbon absorption, the ocean pH has changed globally, representing a nearly 30-percent increase in the acidity of the ocean. By the end of the century, ocean pH is predicted to change further, leading to a 160-percent increase in acidity.

This is where we are so far. This is what is projected. This rate of change in ocean acidity is already thought to be faster than anytime in the past 50 million years. A paper published in *Science* this year concluded that the current rate of CO₂ emissions could drive chemical changes in the ocean unparalleled in at least the last 300 million years.

The authors of that *Science* study in March warned that we may be “entering an unknown territory of marine

ecosystem change.” As the pH of sea water drops, so does the saturation of calcium carbonate, a compound critical to marine life for the construction of their shells and skeletons. Some organisms absorb calcium and carbonate directly right out of the water, others out of the food they ingest, but changes in the concentrations of these chemicals mean the building blocks become less available to make the shells of species such as oysters, crabs, lobsters, corals and the plankton that comprise the very base of the food web.

As oceans get more acidic, it gets harder and harder for these important species to thrive, and it puts at risk the economies that depend on these species.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

Mr. REID. I appreciate very much my friend from Rhode Island yielding, and I appreciate his focusing attention on something we do not focus on nearly enough—and that is a gross understatement—and that is our oceans. I admire the work he has done in so many different areas. We thought we had a path forward to do some good for oceans. It did not work out the way Senator WHITEHOUSE and I wanted. We will come back again because we have to do something about oceans. We study everything else but not our oceans, and most everything else depends on what happens in the ocean.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. I thank the leader.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST— EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. REID. Madam President, we currently have 17 district judges on the calendar, 14 reported by voice vote. For the people within the sound of my voice, what that means is they are not controversial. Twelve will fill judicial emergencies. These are places around the country where we have judges who are tremendously overworked on these important cases.

We have heard this kind of joke: What are you trying to do, make a Federal case out of it? What that means is the Federal system is so good that people look at it as being the best there is as far as judicial activity.

I am disappointed to say my Republican friends on the other side have informed me they will not agree on votes on any of these nominees. Republicans can offer no reason for blocking these bipartisan consensus district court nominees. I understand why they didn’t want us to do circuit courts—I understand that. I may disagree, but I understand that because Democrats have set boundaries in the past, as when we would no longer accept circuit court judges. But this is district court judges.

Historically, the Senate has considered district court nominees as late as October in Presidential election years. In the past five Presidential election years, Democrats have never blocked a

district court nominee from receiving a vote on the Senate floor, never. But our Republican colleagues are setting new standards for obstruction, not only in all the legislation but in judges.

For the 28 district court nominees we have considered this year, I filed cloture 19 times. In other words, we have had to break a Republican filibuster on 67 percent of the district judges we have considered and confirmed. President Obama’s district court nominees have been forced to wait 300 percent more than President Bush’s nominees; three times more. Only two people whom the President nominated this year have been confirmed. The kind of qualified consensus nominees who in years past would have been confirmed in a matter of minutes are now taking weeks and months, languishing with no action. These votes should be routine.

There should not be a fight that delays action on important job measures. In September 2008, right before the last Presidential election, Democrats confirmed 10 of President Bush’s district court nominees in 1 day. More than half of the Nation’s population, 160 million Americans, live in the part of the country where there has been a judicial emergency declared. That means more than half the people in this country seek justice from courts and judges that are strained to the breaking point under a backlog so intense an emergency has been declared.

The chairman of the Judiciary Committee, of course, knows I am here. He wants to be on the Senate floor, but the time did not work. He has done a remarkably good job getting the judges out. With 1 out of every 10 Federal judgeships standing vacant, Americans can no longer wait on fair and speedy trials, and that is what they have to do. They cannot rely on them.

Republicans should work with Democrats to confirm consensus district court nominees now. Refusing to do so is irresponsible. The Senate could act today and put highly qualified judges on the Federal bench, judges supported by both Democrats and Republicans.

I hope we can get something done before we leave. I don’t want to file cloture on these nominees before the end of the year. It is not the way we should be working around here. We should be working together.

I have a consent request. I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to executive session to consider the following nominations: Calendar Nos. 674, 675, 676, 760, 761, 762, 818, 828, 829, 830, 832, 833, 834, 835, 875, 876, and 877; that the nominations be confirmed; the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table, with no intervening action or debate and that no further motions be in order to any further nominations; that any statements relating to the nominations be printed in the RECORD.

Further, Madam President, before you rule, we have the gamut. We have California, Utah, Connecticut, Maryland, Florida, Oklahoma, Michigan,