

is something now that is also fixed; and many other congressional actions that have made a difference not only in Massachusetts but in this great country. These are all shared successes, and I was proud to be part of each and every one of them.

I have always said in order to do our business as our country's leaders we must do our work in a bipartisan, bicameral manner to ensure the actions taken by Congress benefit all Americans, not just those of one political party or one political ideology. During my time here and now as I am leaving, I have been and still am deeply concerned about the lack of bipartisan efforts to solve our country's most pressing economic challenges and in turn move our country forward. Many times political party and personal gain is put before the needs of our country. I know we can do it better. The American people expect us to do it better. As I leave, I challenge the leadership on both sides of the aisle to make the process more open and transparent. I challenge Members to work with each other in a more open and honest manner, and I challenge the President and the congressional leadership to also work together immediately to address the concerns and needs of our country because, after all, we are Americans first and our country deserves better.

In closing, I see my staff here. Many of them were here from the beginning. They came from applicants, over 4,000, for a very select few jobs. I thank Vanessa Sindors, my chief of staff, and each and every one of the staff for the amazing work they have done in very interesting times. To come here as the 41st or the 60th Senator and have the media scrutiny and all the commentary from every special interest group around the country, in the middle of a Senate that was gridlocked—to come here and have an opportunity to make a difference and do it well without making any mistakes is something I think benefited Massachusetts but also benefited this great country. It allowed for the debate to resume once again to eliminate a supermajority so one side could ram through things in which the other side had no play or no involvement.

That is not what our country is about. That is not what this Chamber is about. We deserve better. The people of Massachusetts and the people of this country deserve better. They deserve to have their voices heard. Every person in this Chamber has one vote. To think that one side or the other, depending on who is in charge, is going to stifle that one Senator, from whatever part of the country, not to let him or her have their moment to express their views on something that is important to them and their constituency, to shut that off and put your thumb on it is not the way we should be doing it.

I am deeply concerned about any changes in the rules that are being proposed to eliminate the ability for both sides to do battle in a thoughtful, re-

spectful manner. If you see the movie "Lincoln," you see that even back then they were battling most of the time to convince each other to go one way or the other. Since when has it been a problem to have vibrant debate in the Senate, in this great Chamber? Since when? What is everybody scared about? I don't understand that. I am hopeful the leaders will come together and recognize we need to have that vibrant debate. That is what makes this Chamber unique among any other form of government around the world. To take that away and limit it I think is a big mistake.

I wish to say thank you, obviously, to the people of Massachusetts for entrusting me to sit in the people's seat for the past 3 years. I thank my colleagues who are here, with whom I have had some great friendships and opportunities to work together. As I said many times before, victory and defeat is temporary depending on what happens and where we go. All of us, obviously, may meet again, but I am looking forward to continuing on with those friendships, continuing on working with my staff.

I thank you for this opportunity to speak.

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I rise today to honor my colleague, Senator SCOTT BROWN, who will leave the Senate at the conclusion of the 112th Congress. Senator BROWN won a special election in 2010 to fill the seat of the late Senator Edward Kennedy, but his service to the State of Massachusetts began many years ago.

Senator BROWN began his career in public service in 1992, working as a real estate assessor for the town of Wrentham, MA. In 1998, he was elected to the Massachusetts House. Six years later, he was elected to the State Senate, where he was known as a strong advocate for veterans issues. As a State senator, he championed legislation that created a check-off box on State income tax forms for veterans to indicate service in Iraq or Afghanistan so that they could be efficiently notified of benefits.

His work on behalf of veterans is not surprising considering Senator BROWN has proudly served in the Army National Guard since enlisting at age 19 when he attended college at Tufts University. Once elected to the U.S. Senate, his commitment to military and veterans issues continued as he served on the Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs, Armed Services, and the Veteran's Affairs Committees.

Although his time in the Senate was short, Senator BROWN advanced several initiatives, including several that assist servicemembers and their families. He successfully included a provision in the 2012 National Defense Authorization Act, which made certain that members of the National Guard and their families receive a fair housing allowance when deployed overseas. Senator BROWN also worked across the aisle on legislation that demonstrated

his commitment to our troops. He fought to provide greater oversight at Arlington National Cemetery, ensuring proper burials of America's fallen heroes and secured a provision to create the Office of Service Member Affairs at the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau to help returning servicemembers avoid financial fraud.

The hard work and dedication that Senator BROWN has shown during his years of public service will surely bring him continued success in the future. I thank Senator BROWN for his service in the Senate and wish him the best.

I yield the floor.

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.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. 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.

MIDDLE-CLASS TAX RATES

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, the House of Representatives is back, and we welcome them. It is good to have them back in business in Washington. I hope the first order of business this week is to pass a bill that we enacted in July of this year which would protect 98 percent of American families from any increase in income taxes because of the fiscal cliff. I hope both Democrats and Republicans in the House agree these working families don't need a tax increase. Those who should pay an additional amount are those in the highest income categories. That is what President Obama said.

When we voted in the Senate, we said those families making \$250,000 or less should have no increase in income tax. I appeal to Speaker BOEHNER—before he takes another recess in the House—please call this measure and pass it. It will give peace of mind to literally millions of American families who are wondering what is going to happen January 1. These are many families who struggle from paycheck to paycheck. I have several letters.

From Lansing, IL, Linda wrote:

Please vote to keep middle class taxes from rising. \$2,000 will help me to keep food on the table and gas in my car. It could even help me help someone else. Please vote for the middle class.

I will.

This letter is from Jeremy in Princeville, IL:

I am reaching out to you to ask you to continue to push for extensions of middle class tax cuts. We are a family of four making one hundred thousand annually. A two thousand dollar increase will hurt our family in many ways. Our family is trying to better ourselves but a \$2,000 tax increase will hurt our bottom line and the chances of enhancing our children's lives.

Joan from Naperville writes:

Very high earners should pay more in taxes. And as a former small business owner, I know this will not hurt small businesses—very, very few of us make over \$250,000 a year . . . I know the gap between the rich and everyone is the greatest it's been since the Gilded Age. Smart, brave politicians helped give the middle class a chance—and we need that from you now.

She wrote that to my office. I support her, and I think she and the President are right. I am waiting for Speaker BOEHNER to finally break out of this back-and-forth as to whether the wealthy in America should pay a little bit more in taxes. For goodness' sake, that is obvious to everybody in America but the Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, get back to Ohio and ask some of those families about whether middle-income families should pay higher taxes come January 1. The answer is clear: They should not. It is within the power of Speaker BOEHNER to bring to the floor of the House today a measure that passed the Senate in July that will protect families making \$250,000 a year or less.

What I hear from the Speaker is, We won't protect middle-income families until you agree to raise the eligibility age for Medicare.

I have said to all who have asked, I believe in entitlement reform. I believe Medicare going broke in 12 years is a serious challenge to all of us, but I am loathe to see us make a policy change in Medicare in the closing days of this month that we have to live with and cannot explain.

Here is the part we cannot explain: If we increase the eligibility age for Medicare from 65 to 67, what is a person to do who retires at 63 or 64 with a medical condition? Where are they going to go for health insurance, the insurance exchanges created by health care reform? Remember the Republicans and their blood oath to kill that the first chance they got? Is that going to be the only rescue, the only option for a senior waiting for Medicare eligibility? Are the Republicans prepared to say they will now stand behind the insurance exchanges and make sure there is an affordable, accessible health insurance plan that covers seniors until they are Medicare eligible? That is the key question. Until they answer that, I basically think the proposal of raising that Medicare retirement age is one that cannot be supported in good conscience.

Let's get down to business. Let's protect the middle-income families in America. Let's do it now. Let's do it before January 1. Let's make sure they have the confidence of knowing their income taxes are not going up. One person has the power to do it, and that is Speaker JOHN BOEHNER. If he calls the bill that passed the Senate, as he is being urged to even by Members of his own party, we can give a good holiday gift—if not a gift, at least a holiday reference—to families all across America who are looking for some help not only in this holiday season but beyond.

VOTING RIGHTS

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, after a prolonged debate, a lot of television commercials, robo-calls, and literally tons of political literature, the 2012 campaign is finally over. America can breathe a sigh of political relief. When it was all said and done, more than 120 million Americans participated.

As we know, the American people have returned a divided government to Washington. We have a Democratic Senate with an increased majority, a Democratic President, and a Republican House of Representatives. Yet by a margin of 3.4 million popular votes and 126 electoral votes, President Obama was reelected.

Now that the dust has settled, we begin the time-honored tradition of inaugurating the President, swearing in new Members of Congress, and beginning a new session. The peaceful transfer of power and start of a new legislative session are what we are all about in a democracy. We don't anticipate any new obstacles with new Members of Congress assuming power. However, we can't say the same about many citizens who tried to vote in this election. Unfortunately, we know there were far too many voters who ran into obstacles and obstruction and unreasonable delays at the polls.

In his address to the Nation on the night of the election, President Obama said: "We have to fix that." He is right. As we move forward, we must look back and thoroughly examine the problems so many Americans have encountered when they tried to exercise their legal, constitutional right to vote. Many of these problems were traceable to new voting laws enacted by Republican-controlled legislatures across the country who were trying to make it harder for Americans to vote.

The ALEC, American Legislative Exchange Council, is a group of businesses that put millions of dollars together to create obstacles and obstructions for people to vote. Their idea was to diminish the vote among the poor, minorities, and the elderly because they believed those groups leaned Democratic. So if they could keep them away from the polls and discourage them from voting, it would help the Republican candidates.

It didn't work, but they sure tried, and they made life miserable on election day for millions of Americans who were just trying to do their civic duty. Too many people stood in long lines. Too many people were unable to vote because they could not wait in long lines.

For example, in Florida published reports indicate some voters waited in line for as long as 7 hours. They could not cast their ballots until 2:30 in the morning. Why would a voter hang in there? Some of them were just mad. They were mad that the State of Florida and this Republican-inspired organization, ALEC, were doing everything they could to deny their right to vote. They were darned determined to vote

even if it meant staying there 7 hours to vote.

Too many people were required to cast provisional ballots when they were, in fact, eligible and should have received a regular ballot. For example, Pennsylvania issued double the number of provisional ballots than it did in 2008. The provisional ballot is given to a voter when there is some question as to their eligibility. In many cases that question was raised because voters showed up at their polling place only to find their name missing from the registration books.

In Arizona more than 174,000 provisional ballots were cast. That is 7.4 percent of all ballots. That is higher than any previous election. According to a recent analysis by a leading Arizona paper, minority precincts—those with African Americans and Hispanics—submitted a disproportionately high number of provisional ballots. Arizona has declared war on those minorities who were voting, and they saw it when many of them could not get their ballot counted on election day. It was put in a separate box to be looked at later.

Across the States with new voter ID requirements, hundreds of thousands of people could not vote because they didn't have or could not obtain the required ID.

In Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Wisconsin many voters were confused by these new ID requirements and the extent they were enforced on election day.

In Pennsylvania, for example, even though a court ruled that the State's voter ID law could not be enforced during this election, some voters were still asked for an ID, and in some cases they were denied the right to vote.

Too many eligible voters were unable to register. On election day too many voters who thought they were registered learned that their names were not actually on the voter rolls. For example, Florida imposed owners' requirements on third-party groups, such as the League of Women Voters and individuals who traditionally have conducted voter registration drives. Those penalties were so awful, the League of Women Voters in Florida stopped registering voters for the first time in more than 70 years.

High school teachers faced fines of \$1,000 under the law if they helped their students to register for the first time and didn't follow the exact letter of their new statutory law. As a result, new voter registration in Florida actually dropped 14 percent. That is bad news. Overall voter turnout was down compared to 2008.

If this is going to be a healthy, growing, vibrant democracy, people who are eligible to vote should be given that opportunity, not penalized and denied. These problems—and other problems—encountered by voters at the polls were not limited to one State or region. These problems were experienced by voters across the country. Many of the problems that voters encountered on