

workers. For us, this means ship-building jobs, it means an impact in keeping smaller shipyards in Washington State busy, and it means keeping icebreakers that help save places such as Nome, AK, by cutting paths through the ice.

However, that is not the only thing in this legislation that I am proud we got a decision on. Our economy in Alaska, Washington, Oregon, California, and Hawaii has been threatened by hundreds of thousands of tons of debris washing ashore as a result of the tragic tsunami in Japan nearly 2 years ago.

That is why this legislation asks NOAA to take a closer look at tsunami debris and makes sure we are putting an accurate assessment in place to protect the west coast. If NOAA decides tsunami debris is a severe marine debris event, then they will need to present a specific coordination plan developed to meet that threat. And they will need to work with local governments, counties, and tribes to ensure there is a coordinated effort to protect our economy and environment from tsunami debris. In the Northwest we have already seen ships, docks, and various other forms of debris float ashore. Oftentimes, our local communities have had to pay more than their share of the burden and expense of cleaning up the tsunami debris.

With over 165,000 jobs and nearly \$11 billion in our coastal economy from fishing, to tourism, to various activities, we want to make sure that tsunami debris does not hurt our coastal economies. All we need to do is ask the mayor of Long Beach, who said, "An uncoordinated or unmanaged response to this debris event is a blow that Long Beach and the Columbia-Pacific region cannot endure." This is about getting a plan in place for local communities to coordinate, to have opportunities to work together, and to remove debris as cost-effectively as possible.

Third, this legislation has important language protecting Washington waterways in very precious parts of the Pacific Northwest. Recently, Canada announced that over the next decade they would double the production of the Alberta tar sands oilfields. Today, fifteen billion gallons of oil is already shipped through Washington waters. A spill in a heavily populated area, around the San Juan Islands or in the waters of the Strait of Juan de Fuca could cause billions of dollars of damage and harm businesses throughout the region. The response cannot be, especially if the spill occurs in Canadian waters, don't worry, just call the Americans.

I am proud this legislation looks at the potential threat caused by supertankers and whether they are equipped to respond to a spill that could occur from corrosive tar sand oil. Thanks to this legislation, the Coast Guard will have to prepare a study that will analyze how much vessel traffic will increase in the region due to the proposed increase in tar sands oil produc-

tion and transportation, whether the movement of tar sands oil would require navigating through our fragile waters, it would look at the oil spill response plans and response capability in the U.S. and Canada's shared waters, identify the tools needed to clean up this kind of an oil spill and estimate the cost and benefits to the American public of moving this oil through our waterways. And, this assessment has to be completed in 180 days.

I want to make sure our fishing fleets, our restaurants, our resort economy, and everything that is so important to us in the Northwest, is protected.

This legislation is good news for coastal communities, for jobs in Washington State and across our country, and I wish to thank both the chair and the ranking member of the subcommittee and full committee for making sure we have given the Coast Guard the resources it needs to protect our economy, keep our public safe, and protect our environment. We have much more work to do, but in a Congress that is down to its waning days, it is important that this legislation has seen action and is on its way to the President's desk.

I thank the President, and I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alabama.

LIMITING SPENDING

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, something special happened earlier today. An important principle is being established in the Senate, and that principle is that we will adhere to the budget agreement we made with the American people 16 months ago. In other words, we agreed, in at least certain accounts, to have a limit on spending. Spending will still increase every year over 10 years, but not as much as it would have increased. We agreed that we would abide by the limit and we would not spend more than that.

We have had four consecutive bills brought to the floor of this Senate—cavalierly, I would suggest—directly in violation of the spending limits we agreed to just a little over a year ago. As a result, I or some other Member of the Senate made a budget point of order. That budget point of order said that the legislation before us violates the budget limits, it spends too much, and we object.

Each time, our Democratic leadership moved to waive the budget point of order. To forget the budget. To spend above the budget. To not worry about the budget. Just spend the money because this is a good bill, they said. It has good proposals, and anybody who opposes it is against these good proposals.

So we now have had four votes and for all four of those votes, the Senate has said: No, we are not going to waive the budget. We are going to live within the agreement of spending we reached just last year.

There is no reason these bills couldn't have been brought in within the budget. There has been no reason they shouldn't be within the budget. Some were not over the budget spending by much, but we have to adhere to that principle. I have been very proud that Members of this Senate in sufficient numbers have said: No, we are going to honor the promise we made to the American people, and we are going to do that, and we are not going to bust the budget.

So I think it is sending a message, and the message needs to be received.

Initially, the spin in this body has been, Oh, Senator SESSIONS and his objectors don't want any good legislation to pass. They are just using the Budget Act to block it.

But I think we are changing that now, and I think the American people are going to see what has happened. We have had seven votes on the budget. The last four have been successful in enforcing the budget. I think the American people are going to start asking, why are you, Senator, voting to waive the budget every single time? Didn't you agree to certain spending limits? Every time a bill came up, why did you vote to spend more than you agreed to spend, spend more than you told us you were going to spend?

I think that is the message that ought to be coming out of here. I will go a little further. If somebody has to have legislation passed, don't blame the people who raised the budget point of order; blame yourself if you don't bring it to the floor in a way that does not violate the budget. That is important. I think that is being established now, and that is what I think we should expect of anyone who wants to move legislation in the U.S. Senate. If a Senator wants to get the vote and get the legislation passed, be sure they comply with the agreement we made.

What agreement was that? Sixteen months ago, in August, the debt limit had been reached, and it was put off and delayed, and we got to the very last minute, and they reached this secret agreement—not publicly as it should have been, but we reached an agreement, and the agreement included at least some limits on spending. I didn't like the way it was done, but it did propose certain limits. It exempted 98 percent of Medicare spending from being cut. It exempted the food stamp program. Medicaid was totally exempted from any cuts. But many parts of the budget were controlled, had their spending levels controlled by the budget. As a result, the agreement was passed and the debt ceiling—the limit on the amount of money that can be borrowed by the U.S. Government—was raised by \$2.1 trillion.

We are now borrowing about 40 cents of every dollar we spend, and the Congress can limit, as the Constitution provides, how much the U.S. Government can borrow. We had just about reached that limit. Spending was going to have to drop 40 percent—right across

the board, perhaps, unless the debt limit was raised. So we raised it so we could continue to borrow. But the promise was that over 10 years, the level of spending would be reduced by the same amount that we raised the debt limit.

So we raised the debt limit by \$2.1 trillion, and spending was promised to be reduced over the next 10 years by \$2.1 trillion. Now we have already spent that \$2.1 trillion. I hate to tell my colleagues but by January and February, this body is going to be right back here dealing with the question of hitting the debt limit again. This year, it looks as though we will have another deficit well over \$1 trillion. In fact, the first 2 months of this calendar year were extraordinarily bad—almost \$300 billion in debt in the first 2 months. If we continued at this rate, the deficit would be the largest ever in the history of the Republic. So something needs to be done about that.

We made an agreement the last time we increased the debt limit. For us to go back on that, to not follow the budget agreement before the ink is dry on it—before barely a year is gone—to continue bringing up bills that violate that agreement, then the American people would have a right to have no confidence in us and to wonder what is going on: You promised us you were going to reduce the growth of spending, and as soon as the shoe starts getting a little tight or the belt starts squeezing, you cut and run, Senators.

So far, at least in recent weeks, we have been doing rather well on this path of saying we will adhere to the budget agreement. I think on each one of the votes, we have had some Democratic support, but it is mostly Republicans that have held to the budget.

Where are we today? We are talking about the fiscal cliff. The President campaigned around this country, and he said: I have a balanced plan, and that balanced plan is going to have so much in spending cuts and so much in tax increases, and it needs to be balanced. You Republicans have to have more tax increases. Our country needs to get itself on a sound financial path. And I have a deficit reduction plan.

He ran a television advertisement in the last months of his campaign that said: I have a plan to pay down the debt. Earlier this year, his budget director came before the committee and would not disavow the claim that the President has a plan to pay down the debt. I would just say that is one of the greatest financial misrepresentations ever, that the President of the United States would tell the American people: Don't worry, elect me, I have a plan to pay down the debt. He has no such plan—nothing close to it.

Under the score of the Congressional Budget Office, over the next 10 years, we will add \$9 trillion in debt to the deficit of the United States.

That is almost \$1 trillion a year for 10 years in additional debt. It goes down some in the midyears, but in

years 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10, the deficits go up every year. That is not what I thought the President was talking about or, I think, the American people thought he was talking about when he said: I want a plan that will pay down the debt. I am going to raise taxes and we are going to pay down the debt and we will have spending cuts also.

What is it we now know about his plan? This is the essence of it, as shown on this chart I have in the Chamber. This chart is an outline of the President's deficit reduction plan. This is what the President is proposing to do. He started off a few weeks ago at \$1.6 trillion in new taxes. Now he is talking about \$1.4 trillion, I understand. That is the latest iteration of the tax increases: \$1,400 billion in tax increases.

Where will that money go? Will it change the debt course of America? Will it put us on a sound path? Can we go home at night and say: Wow. I am glad they finally got their act together.

Let's examine what they are proposing. They are proposing to spend above the BCA, Budget Control Act, limits I just talked about that we agreed to only 16 months ago. Those limits include the sequestration of \$1.2 trillion in spending. Those limits are in law. The law would have to be changed to avoid these cuts. The President proposes to change the law and to eliminate \$1,200 billion of those cuts—\$1.2 trillion off the table—that is 60 percent of the cuts that were agreed to when we raised the debt ceiling by \$2.1 trillion. It would wipe out 60 percent of it just like that. That is new spending above the law in effect today, busting the limits I just mentioned. Busting the limits that we have been successfully enforcing.

In addition to that, he has no funds to pay for the doc fix, also known as the sustainable growth rate for doctor payments. If we do not fix the sustainable growth rate, physicians will have a 25 percent or so cut in their reimbursement rates for doing Medicare work. For many of them, it is half the work they do. Such a reduction could not be tolerated, so it has to be fixed and the President knows that. It costs about \$400 billion to fix it but the President provides no money for that. That cost must be added to the spending in his plan.

The Social Security contribution holiday, or payroll holiday, is another is more spending he doesn't include, that has to be accounted for. If we do not pay as much into Social Security as we would otherwise, then the U.S. Treasury has to borrow that money and put it into the Social Security trust fund. People get more money in their paycheck but less money goes into Social Security. That is another \$110 billion in spending in the President's plan.

The Administration wants to spend \$50 billion more on transportation and \$30 billion more on an unemployment insurance extension.

Overall that totals \$1,790 billion in new spending in the President's plan.

Do they have any reductions in spending? Yes. They are talking about \$400 billion in mandatory spending reductions. Most of that, apparently, will be reducing—maybe \$300 billion of it—payments to providers in Medicare and Medicaid—providers: that is your doctor and your hospital—cut them some more. They were already cut deeply when the President's health care law passed. Whether that will ever stick, I have my doubts.

But let's assume it does stick. That would mean the President's plan results in \$1,390 billion in higher spending—\$1.39 trillion. Remember he wants new higher taxes of \$1,400 billion. Recall, under the current path, under the current spending limits in the Budget Control Act, we are increasing the debt by \$9 trillion over the next ten years. Under the President's plan, whereby he raises taxes \$1.4 trillion and raises spending \$1.39 trillion, we would add to the debt \$8.99 trillion. What does it mean? It means we are going to have a major tax increase and virtually the same amount of new spending—no net cut in spending but a major new increase in spending of \$1.39 trillion. That is a fact, and it is a very troubling fact.

I would add one more thing. I see my colleague is here. I believe the President of the United States should not lull the American people into believing that he has a plan that is going to pay down our debt or get us on a sound financial course. He has two goals, it seems to me: raise taxes and raise spending. That is exactly what this plan does. It has no reform of Medicare, Social Security, Medicaid or food stamps—the largest and fastest growing entitlement programs we have—no plans to fix any of that. He refuses to talk about that, saying anybody who talks about that just does not like old people and does not care about America.

We need some leadership. We need some honesty. We need a President of the United States who will look the American people in the eye and explain to them we are living beyond our means. We do not have the money to continue to borrow 40 cents of every \$1 we spend. We cannot continue on this path, as expert after expert has warned us.

I will just say, I am proud that, again, today this Senate—at least a good, solid minority—stood firm—and said: No, we are not going to waive the budget. We are going to stand by the limits on spending that were part of the Budget Control Act.

But I am not pleased how this whole process is going right now with Speaker BOEHNER and the President. It looks like it is not likely to lead to any changes in our debt course. Even after raising taxes \$1.4 trillion, if the President had his way, we will still be on basically the same debt course. How can we allow this opportunity to get away from us? We are going to raise taxes big time yet not use any of it, in effect,

to pay down debt. The question is, will we reduce the annual deficits that will average almost \$1 trillion a year for the next 10 years and get worse in the outer years?

We have to deal with that. There is no escape from that. There is no way we can get around it. Any mature person who loves this country knows we have to confront it. It cannot just be done by raising taxes. We are going to have to reduce spending in this country. Cutting spending is not going to hammer the economy. We do not have to throw people in the streets, but we need a sustained effort to reduce the growth in spending in this country. If we just do that, we would surprise ourselves that we could get on a sound course before too many years.

I thank the Presiding Officer and yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

MEDICARE

Mr. FRANKEN. Mr. President, I have come to the floor to talk about Medicare. My esteemed colleague from Alabama just talked about Medicare reform. The Presiding Officer and I—all of us—pay into Medicare every month, so we are entitled to Medicare benefits when we reach age 65. The fact that we are entitled to these benefits is not bad. In fact, it is very good for so many millions of American seniors. The fact that many call it an entitlement only means we have a right to expect to get the benefits we paid in for. Entitlements, in this case, should not be a pejorative.

We have heard a lot about entitlement programs recently and about the place of Medicare in the conversation about our Federal deficit. We just heard the Senator from Alabama talk about that. He said there is no discussion of reform of Medicare. But in these discussions sometimes I think a critical component is missing, which is we already reformed Medicare, and these reforms extended the life of Medicare by 8 years while expanding benefits for seniors.

During the recent campaign, as the Presiding Officer has pointed out, we saw a lot of ads about the so-called \$716 billion in cuts to Medicare and how terrible that was, is, and will be. I would like to take just a few minutes to explain what these savings were, what they are, and what they will be.

The two biggest sources of the \$716 billion are, one, insurance companies overcharging the government for Medicare Advantage and savings in payments to hospitals.

First, Medicare Advantage. As the Presiding Officer knows, as people watching no doubt know, seniors can choose to get their Medicare benefits directly from the Medicare Program or get them through a private insurance program that gets paid by Medicare, which is called Medicare Advantage.

Before we passed the Affordable Care Act, we were overpaying those private

insurers by 14 percent. These insurers were getting much more than they should have based on the benefits they were providing to seniors. So we cut what Medicare gives to these private insurance companies. Over the next 10 years, we are going to cut these insurance payments by 14 percent, which CBO scored in 2010 as saving Medicare \$136 billion over 10 years.

We were told by some of our colleagues that insurance companies were going to leave the market, that we were not going to have Medicare Advantage anymore. So far, enrollment in Medicare Advantage has gone up by 11 percent. That is many billions of dollars we were able to take—instead of overpaying insurance companies—to extend the life of Medicare.

Second is the lower reimbursements to hospitals. Why does this work out for hospitals? When we insure 31 million more people, and those 31 million people go to the emergency room, go to the hospital, the hospital is no longer on the line to pay for that.

They are not left holding the bag. Those 31 million people now have insurance that pays for it. So the hospitals are now able to take lower reimbursements for Medicare patients. That is why it works out. So when people talk about the \$716 billion, this is a huge part of what they are talking about. It is not cuts to benefits. It is not shifting costs to seniors. It is streamlining the program and making it more efficient.

We took these savings and we reinvested the savings in the program. We overall extended the life of Medicare by 8 years. That is entitlement reform, extending the life of the program. That is what we are talking about when we talk about reforming Medicare. That is what we did. But not only that, we actually expanded benefits for seniors.

I go to a lot of senior centers around Minnesota, nursing homes. I have to tell you seniors are very happy we expanded their benefits. They are happy about the new free preventive care they get, wellness checkups, colonoscopies, mammograms. They know an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. This saves us all money and keeps people healthier.

What else are we doing with this money in addition to expanding the solvency by 8 years? We are closing the doughnut hole, the prescription drug doughnut hole. I have to tell you, seniors are very happy about that too. For more than one-third of seniors, for them, Social Security provides more than 90 percent of their income. For one-quarter of elderly beneficiaries, Social Security is the sole source of retirement income. So when they hit their doughnut hole, that is serious.

Sometimes they have to make choices between food and heat and medicine. Because we are closing the doughnut hole, in many cases, people do not have to make that choice anymore. This is important stuff. When I was running for the Senate, a nurse

who worked in Cambridge, MN, a town north of the Twin Cities, came to me and told me that in the hospital she worked in very often they would admit a senior who was very sick and the doctors would treat this senior and get them back on their feet and send them home with their prescriptions.

As this started happening, they would call the drug store, the pharmacy a few days later, 1 week later, and say: Has Mrs. Johnson filled these prescriptions? The pharmacist would say: No; because she was in her doughnut hole. A couple weeks later, Mrs. Johnson would be back in the hospital. How wasteful is that? How wise? That costs a tremendous amount of money to our system. This is saving money. This is health care reform. This is Medicare reform. It is improving people's health and saving money at the same time. So we have increased benefits. We have extended the life of Medicare. That was done as part of health care reform. That is Medicare reform.

In the election we had a discussion about this. There were a lot of ads about it. We know what Governor Romney would have done to Medicare. He said very explicitly that—and again the Presiding Officer has quoted this. He said very explicitly he would restore those billions and billions of dollars in overpayments to private insurance companies for no reason, for no good effect, just so, I guess, these insurance companies could have more profit. Instead, we reinvested this money into Medicare. But he would have given it to the insurance companies. He would have replaced this health care law. He would have made the 8 years we extended Medicare vanish. Governor Romney supported raising the Medicare eligibility age. If we raise the age from 65 to 67 as he suggested, that means hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of seniors would no longer have access to Medicare.

They would end up receiving Federal subsidies in the exchanges and some of them would go to Medicaid. They would be—these 65- to 67-year-olds—by definition, older and as a population sicker than the other people in the exchanges and in Medicaid. So they would make both these programs more expensive.

They would also make Medicare more expensive because they would be the youngest and least sick and be taken out. Although this sounds like a reasonable compromise, trust me, it is a bad idea. It would cost the health care system twice as much as it would save Medicare. This is exactly the kind of bad idea which explains why we pay twice as much as other developed countries around the world for our health care and in many, if not most, cases with worse outcomes.

Medicare reform was an issue in the campaign because we already did it. We extended the program by 8 years. It is not like it was a secret. It was part of the conversation during the election. In the election, the American people