

Senator BROWN has charted his own path in his short time here in the Senate, and I expect the ventures he undertook while serving here will continue. I wish him and his family the best.

THANKING LUTHERAN CHURCH CHARITIES

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, this past week we have all watched, grief-stricken, the terrible school shooting in Newtown, CT, and the heart-breaking funerals of those beautiful little children. There are no words to adequately express our sorrow for those touched by this tragedy. But there is an organization that is helping to bring comfort and healing to Newtown in a way that requires no words.

One day after the massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School, a group of golden retrievers from the Chicago area made a cross-country journey to provide solace to the Newtown community. The Lutheran Church Charities sent five of their "comfort dogs" to help console grieving family members and others touched by the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting. Accompanying these special dogs are handlers who are trained to speak or pray with mourners or simply to sit quietly with them.

In all, nine comfort dogs from Lutheran Church Charities have helped to comfort Newtown residents. Some of these remarkable dogs attended President Obama's speech at an interfaith gathering at Newtown High School, another comforted mourners at Newtown's Christ the King Lutheran Church, the location of funerals for two of the slain children. The dogs even made an appearance on CNN with host Don Lemon.

This is how Tim Hetzner, president of Lutheran Church Charities, explained the dogs' healing powers: "Dogs are nonjudgmental," he says, "They are loving. They are accepting of anyone. It creates the atmosphere for people to share."

That is exactly what they have done in Newtown.

A woman visiting a Newtown memorial told one reporter: "It's a very solemn time. With the dogs here, it seems like it's a little ray of sunshine."

A child from Newtown said simply that the dogs "help you get over how sad it is."

Sadly, the comfort dog program began after another gun tragedy. In 2008, after a gunman killed five students at Northern Illinois University, a group of dog caretakers associated with Lutheran Church Charities visited the NIU campus in hopes of offering a healing distraction to students. The trip was so successful that a few weeks later students petitioned university leaders to bring the comfort dogs back.

The initiative has since grown from a handful of dogs in the Chicago area to 60 dogs in 6 states. Comfort dogs have traveled across the Nation to console

people in the aftermath of major tragedies such as Hurricane Sandy and the tornado that hit Joplin, MO.

When the K-9 comfort dogs are not responding to a tragedy, they visit people in hospitals, nursing homes, and parks. Each dog has a Facebook page, Twitter account, and email so those who meet the dogs can keep in touch.

The unconditional love of comfort dogs has helped countless children and adults to cope with tragedy and begin to heal from their suffering. On behalf of a heartbroken but grateful Nation, I want to express my heartfelt thanks to all of the comfort dogs of Lutheran Church Charities especially Abbi, Barnabas, Chewie, Chloe, Hannah, Luther, Prince, Ruthie, and Shami—and to their handlers.

I yield the floor.

TRIBUTE TO CHRIS COWART

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, I rise to pay tribute to a staff member of the Senate Armed Services Committee who will be retiring at the end of this session of Congress. Her name is Christine Cowart, and for the past 6 years, she has served as the Chief Clerk of the Committee. She had previously served a term of 8 years as Chief Clerk under Senator Sam Nunn.

I know that 14 years sounds like a lot of time to most people, but that barely scratches the surface of Chris' service to the Senate. In fact, Chris holds a special place in the record books. In an organization like the Senate, known for some long-serving members, Chris would fall within the top ten list of longevity for senators, and no member currently serving has been here in the Senate longer than Chris.

The mere fact that she will be completing almost 41 years of service to the Senate is truly a remarkable accomplishment, especially in today's world where changing jobs has become the norm. And if that were all of her record, that would be amazing. But that is only part of the story. Chris made invaluable contributions to getting each of 41 of the 51 total National Defense Authorization Acts we have done annually since 1961. As Chief Clerk, it was her duty to shepherd the Armed Services Committee's annual set of hearings, meetings, and briefings that lead up to the DOD Authorization Act each year. Her duties also included showing the ropes to new senators and new staffers alike.

Chris took to heart the ideals of service she dedicated almost all of her adult life to service to her country and to the Senate. I remember Chris recounting how her father had escorted her here to the Russell Senate Office Building for her first interview with the Committee in the summer of 1972, shortly after she graduated from college. She said she didn't have any difficulty in deciding what to do after her father told her, "Take the job."

Chris' father was a career Navy man, having flown maritime patrol aircraft

for the Navy during World War II and thereafter. He instilled in Chris the value of patriotism and service to country that she so exemplifies in her life.

During her service to the Committee, she served as mentor, confidant and advisor to the staff as they experienced weddings, divorces, births and deaths.

Chris has been a rock for the Committee, and I know I speak for all of the members and staff when I say, "Chris, thank you for your service to the Armed Services Committee, to the Senate and to the country. You have set a standard of dedication and professionalism for all of us, and we will miss you!"

BALANCED BUDGET

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, I rise today to discuss our Nation's need to adopt a balanced budget amendment and to bring the Senate's attention to the Alabama Legislature's recent call for Congress to send such an amendment to the States for ratification. This is a thoughtful and well-reasoned resolution. Many other States have made similar resolutions. Our Nation is on the precipice of the most predictable fiscal disaster in our history and Congress has failed to act to remove the danger. U.S. gross Federal debt is now over \$16.3 trillion; U.S. debt per person is over \$53,000, higher than that of Greece; and for the fourth straight year, our Nation's deficit will exceed \$1 trillion. The Federal Government cannot continue spending more than it takes in, and the people of Alabama clearly know that.

The American people understand the necessity of living within one's means and balancing budgets. We see that as American families across the Nation are working to pay off their debt. In fact, American families have improved their balance sheets by reducing their outstanding credit card debt by 17 percent since 2008, over \$150 billion. The people expect no less of their State governments. Forty-three of the 50 States, including my home State of Alabama, have balanced budget requirements.

Unfortunately, as States and families across the Nation cut spending and balance budgets, the Federal Government continues to spend more and has increased its debt by more than \$4 trillion since 2008. This spending course will at some point wreck our economy, just as it has wrecked that of Greece, Spain, and Italy. Now, more than ever, it is crucial that Congress adopt a balanced budget amendment and send it to the States for ratification. The surging debt crisis we face is so significant that we must have a balanced budget constitutional amendment. It has come close to passing before. When Senators and Congressmen have no alternative but to live within their means, like so many of our States, they will figure out a way to do it. But if Congress is not required by the Constitution to

budget responsibly, then history has shown that Congress will not act responsibly.

The people of Alabama understand these issues and the importance of balancing the budget. That is why the Alabama State Legislature has passed a resolution urging Congress to send a balanced budget amendment to the States for ratification. The people of Alabama are well aware of the dangers we face. Introduced by Senator Arthur Orr of Decatur, AL, with several of his colleagues in the legislature, this resolution acknowledges that “the budget deficits of the United States of America are unsustainable and constitute substantial threat to the United States government.” The resolution calls for Congress to pass a balanced budget amendment, and if the Congress fails to do so, then for Congress to call a constitutional convention to propose such an amendment. I applaud Senator Orr and his colleagues, Senators Scofield, Sanford, Holtzclaw, Williams, McGill, and Beason, for bringing attention to this issue and introducing this resolution. We will only see more grassroots movements like this to pass a balanced budget amendment if Washington continues to fail to meet the challenges of our time.

It is not just my constituents in Alabama who are upset. Recent polling has shown that this Congress has one of the lowest approval ratings in history. The American people are becoming disillusioned and losing faith in their elected government as we fail to address the crises of our day. Indeed, we are not even working openly to deal with this great challenge. It is sad that Congress cannot even perform its basic business, as seen in the failure of the Senate to pass one regular appropriations bill this year or a budget in nearly 4 years.

The Senate is supposed to be the world’s great deliberative body. Unfortunately, the leader of this body and his majority party will not even propose a budget to the American people. When I came to the Senate in 1997, I voted for a balanced budget amendment that fell one vote short of the 67 it required for adoption. How much better off would we have been today, how much less debt would we have placed on our children and grandchildren had that amendment been passed? Last year, Republicans put forward a plan to cut, cap, and balance our Nation’s budget which would have solved all our fiscal problems. But the Democrat majority would not let it pass.

I applaud the members of the Alabama legislature for adopting and Governor Robert Bentley for signing this resolution. House Speaker Mike Hubbard and Senate Pro Tempore Del Marsh and their members have spoken clearly. This resolution exhibits leadership and wisdom not found here in Washington, DC. It is time we listen to the States and to our constituents and adopt a balanced budget amendment to the United States Constitution.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD this resolution adopted by the Alabama Legislature and signed by Governor Robert Bentley urging the United States Congress to submit a balanced budget amendment to the States or to call a convention to propose such an amendment to the United States Constitution.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

Whereas, the reluctance of the federal government to incur debt and other obligations was established early in American history, with deficits occurring only in relation to extraordinary circumstances such as war; yet for much of the 20th century and into the 21st, the United States has operated on a budget deficit, including the 2010 budget year, which surpassed an astounding \$1,300,000,000,000, an annual deficit that exceeded the entire gross state product of many of the states; and

Whereas, an exception to this pattern was at the turn of the 21st century; in FY 2001, America enjoyed a \$128 billion budget surplus; and

Whereas, since FY 2001, America has been burdened with 10 consecutive years of deficits, to-wit:

FY 2002: \$158 billion deficit
 FY 2003: \$377 billion deficit
 FY 2004: \$413 billion deficit
 FY 2005: \$318 billion deficit
 FY 2006: \$248 billion deficit
 FY 2007: \$161 billion deficit
 FY 2008: \$459 billion deficit
 FY 2009: \$1.4 trillion deficit
 FY 2010: \$1.3 trillion deficit
 FY 2011: \$1.5 trillion deficit (estimated);

and

Whereas, as of January 2011, America’s accumulated national debt exceeded \$12 trillion now estimated at over \$13 trillion; and

Whereas, the Congressional Budget Office projects that, if current trends continue under the White House’s proposed budget, each of the next 10 years has a projected deficit exceeding \$600 billion and

Whereas, the budget deficits of the United States of America are unsustainable and constitute a substantial threat to the solvency of the federal government as evidenced by the comments of Standard and Poor’s on April 18, 2011, regarding the longer term credit outlook for the United States; and

Whereas, Congress has been unwilling or unable to address the persistent problem of overspending and has recently increased the statutory limit on the public debt and enacted a variety of legislation that will ultimately cause the federal government to incur additional debt; and

Whereas, the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform in its report *The Moment of Truth* includes recommendations to reduce the Federal deficit that have not been considered by the United States Congress; and

Whereas, the consequences of current spending policies are far-reaching; United States indebtedness to governments of foreign nations continues to rise; costly federal programs that are essentially unfunded or underfunded; mandates to states threaten the ability of state and local governments to continue to balance their budgets; moreover, future generations of Americans inevitably face increased taxation and a weakened economy as a direct result of the bloated debt; and

Whereas, many states have previously requested that Congress propose a constitu-

tional amendment requiring a balanced budget, but Congress has proven to be unresponsive; anticipating situations in which Congress at times could fail to act, the drafters of the United States Constitution had the foresight to adopt the language in Article V that establishes that on application of the Legislatures of two-thirds of the several states, Congress shall call a convention for proposing amendments; and

Whereas, in prior years the Alabama Legislature has called on Congress to pass a Balanced Budget Constitutional Amendment, many other states have done the same, all to no avail; and

Whereas, a balanced budget amendment would require the government not to spend more than it receives in revenue and compel lawmakers to carefully consider choices about spending and taxes; by encouraging spending control and discouraging deficit spending, a balanced budget amendment will help put the nation on the path to lasting prosperity; Now therefore, be it

Resolved by the Legislature of Alabama, both Houses thereof concurring, That the Legislature of the State of Alabama hereby respectfully urges the Congress of the United States to propose and submit to the states for ratification a federal balanced budget amendment to the United States Constitution; and be it further

Resolved, That, in the event that Congress does not submit a balanced budget amendment to the states for ratification on or before December 31, 2011, the Alabama Legislature hereby makes application to the United States Congress to call a convention under Article V of the United States Constitution for the specific and exclusive purpose of proposing an amendment to that Constitution requiring that, in the absence of a national emergency (as determined by the positive vote of such members of each house of Congress as the amendment shall require), the total of all federal appropriations made by Congress for any fiscal year not exceed the total of all federal revenue for that fiscal year; and be it further

Resolved, That, unless rescinded by a succeeding Legislature, this application by the Alabama Legislature constitutes a continuing application in accordance with Article V of the United States Constitution until at least two-thirds of the Legislatures of the several states have made application for a convention to provide for a balanced budget; and be it further

Resolved, That, in the event that Congress does not submit a balanced budget amendment to the states for ratification on or before December 31, 2011, the Alabama Legislature hereby requests that the legislatures of each of the several states that compose the United States apply to Congress requesting Congress to call a convention to propose such an amendment to the United States Constitution; and be it further

Resolved, That this application is rescinded in the event that a convention to propose amendments to the United States Constitution includes purposes other than providing for a balanced federal budget; and be it further

Resolved, That the copies of this resolution be provided to the following officials:

1. The President of the United States.
2. The Speaker of the United States House of Representatives.
3. The President of the United States Senate.
4. All members of the Alabama Delegation to Congress with the request that this resolution be officially entered in the Congressional Record as an application to the Congress of the United States of America for a convention to propose an amendment to provide for a federal balanced budget in the

event that Congress does not submit such an amendment to the states for ratification on or before December 31, 2011; and be it further

Resolved, That copies of this resolution be provided to the Secretaries of State and to the presiding officers of the Legislatures of the other states.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

IN MEMORY OF LOST LIVES

Mr. LIEBERMAN. Mr. President, I rise in honor of the innocent lives that were lost in Newtown, CT, on December 14, when a madman murdered 26 students, teachers, and administrators, as well as his own mother. The terrible act of violence that occurred that day has left the whole Nation wounded and shaken. In the wake of this tragedy, Mr. Albert Caswell penned the following poem:

WE NOW SO WEEP

IN MEMORY OF ALL THE LOST LIVES AND THE TRAGEDY AT SANDY HOOK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
(By Albert Carey Caswell)

We Now So Weep

We . . .

We now so weep . . .

All in our hearts so very deep!

All in this pain to so repeat!

Forever now so to keep!

We now so weep!

And from all of this heartache!

What must we now so take!

And what sense from all of this,

must we now so make?

All so very deep,

deep down inside all of our souls to so create

. . .

That there is a battle!

And there is a fight!

That which but so rages on this very night!

Of Good Vs. Evil . . .

Of wrong or so right!

And that hate is hard,

as it makes me weep!

It makes me cry!

When, I so see those tears in your parent's eyes!

And that our moments together upon this earth,

are such so very short ones there so first!

So hold your families close,

and always remember what but means the most!

All in your hearts so very deep!

As all across this nation,

we now so weep . . .

As the tears run down our faces so deep!

At this evil our souls so tries to defeat!

All in these our darkest hours of heartbreak, which now so beat . . .

As it's for them we now so weep!

And for all of those love ones,

who so lost their most precious daughters and sons . . .

Thy Kingdom Come,

for heaven but lies for each of them!

Their parent's most precious children so to keep!

And for all of those educators,

who were so slain so all in such grief!

Knowing full well,

all of the pain that their loved ones must now so keep!

The kind of pain,

that which only Heaven can bring such relief!

For a child!

Is but the very hope of the world!

So very innocent and so very precious,

oh such beautiful little boys and so girls . . .
With their sweet little smiles unto us as so unfurled . . .

As all around them such happiness so swirls . . .

Touching all of our hearts,
as was their part,
these most precious boys and so girls!
With their little voices and so little curls . . .

And who could so cast out such vile evil upon as so hurled?

Because, a child is but The Brightest of All Lights!

The Brightest of all Bright!
So listen on the wind,
and you will hear this my friend . . .
our Lord crying for all of them!
To take a child's life,
but stands at the very top of evil's darkest of all heights!

With all of their futures so up ahead,
so very shinny and bright!

As it's for all of them,
we now so weep!

And for all of those dedicated teachers,
whose very being was to so nurture our true heart's delights!

Who so heroically towards evil so ran,
"lock the doors, look the doors",
as she so cried out all in her most courageous fight!

As all of their children are but so now motherless now!

As a young teacher who so hid her children,
to so escape past a door,
as the evil came in she so fooled and so lured . . .

sacrificing herself . . .

All so they could escape,
why now up in heaven she's so adored!

Our children,
are but our most precious of all gifts from above!

For these are our greatest gifts to our world,
of our true loves!
Such shear delights!

As no more joyful Christmas mornings,
will they so see so in sight . . .

Or Hanukkah's,
so surrounded by their families with such smiles so very bright!

Not to grow up to be so very tall!
Not to have children at all . . .

Oh but the sad shame of it all!
No Weddings, No Birthdays, No Proms, or Graduations for one and all!

As a parent's greatest of all nightmares,
has now come to call!

To bury our children,
with tears in eyes to their knees they now fall!

As out across this nation,
we so try to so make sense of it all . . .

But, the answer is so very clear,
as it's as old as time is so here!

It's The Struggle!
It's The Fight!

As out across this great nation . . .
I bid to you to so hold your families close . . .

On this very night!
And remember our love and time together,
but means the most!

And that this battle is not over,
so wrap your hearts all in this clover,
of all of those teachers love and courage so showed!

All in that selfless sacrifice!
Because, the darkness is no match . . .

for the light in our hearts that which evil ignites!

Goodness!
Evil!
Darkness!

Light!
Those brave hearts who evil must fight!
Who bring their light!

As against the darkest of all evils,
as onward we fight!
Rise!
Rise Up To Heaven My Child,
with but tears in your eyes!
As our Lord's Littlest of Angels now so fill the skies!
And do not so worry because in our Lord's arms you now lie!

Mommy!
Daddy!

I'm already in Heaven so don't you so cry!
Up here, there are candy canes to so taste,
and Christmas trains to so ride!

And there are puppies up in heaven,
and the most beautiful of all butterflies . . .

And because you won't ever turn seven it now makes me so cry!

And when their comes a gentle rain,
your tear drops shall wash down upon your parents to so ease their pain . . .

Until, one day up in Heaven you shall all so meet again . . .

And you won't have to cry anymore!
Mothers, Fathers, Sisters, Brothers, Grand Parents and all the others . . .

Somehow!
Someway!

Find the strength on this day!
All in what their short live's so had to say!
And so try!

To so carry them all in your hearts out on your way!

As you so wipe all of those tears from your eyes . . .

And from out of all of this heartache you must so realize,

that your children and your loved ones are Angels now up in Heaven on high!

And isn't that but where we all so wish to wake, so you and I?

Goodness!
Evil!

Darkness!
Light!

Those brave hearts who evil must fight!
Together in enjoined,
as we battle on into the darkest of all nights!

And now we so weep!
Amen!

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

The following reports of committees were submitted:

By Mrs. BOXER, from the Committee on Environment and Public Works, with amendments:

S. 847. A bill to amend the Toxic Substances Control Act to ensure that risks from chemicals are adequately understood and managed, and for other purposes (Rept. No. 112-264).

By Mr. AKAKA, from the Committee on Indian Affairs, with an amendment in the nature of a substitute:

S. 1763. A bill to decrease the incidence of violent crimes against Indian women, to strengthen the capacity of Indian tribes to exercise the sovereign authority of Indian tribes to respond to violent crimes committed against Indian women, and to ensure that perpetrators of violent crimes committed against Indian women are held accountable for that criminal behavior, and for other purposes (Rept. No. 112-265).

By Mrs. BOXER, from the Committee on Environment and Public Works, without amendment:

S. 2251. A bill to designate the United States courthouse located at 709 West 9th Street, Juneau, Alaska, as the Robert Booechever United States Courthouse.

S. 2326. A bill to designate the new United States courthouse in Buffalo, New York, as the "Robert H. Jackson United States Courthouse".