

reducing growth but would really begin to solidify public confidence that we have a smart plan to get out of this debt.

If we just slow the spending growth to 3.4 percent a year over the next 10 years, we could balance this budget without raising taxes. You have heard that said. It is true. This is true. We do not have to have substantial spending cuts; we can do it and still have growth.

Some programs need to be cut. Some programs have to be cut. Some programs are growing much faster than 3.4 percent. Medicaid is growing at 8 percent. It needs to be reformed. We can't sustain that kind of increase year after year after year.

Most Americans know the old story about the rule of seven. If you increase something at 7 percent a year on your savings account, it doubles in 10 years. So if you have 8 percent, you are seeing a 117-percent increase in spending over 10 years.

So if we allow 3.4 percent a year in spending growth, that means we would spend \$11,000 per person in 2022, 10 years out—\$11,000 per person by the Federal Government. That is a higher rate of spending per person than we had in 2007. Yet we are going broke.

We can reduce spending without affecting services. We can. Federal programs—many of them—are very wasteful, very inefficient, duplicative, and subject to fraud. I just held up the GAO 2012 report that listed a pile—page after page—of programs that are wasteful, duplicative, and so forth. We have social service, domestic disaster assistance, Internal Revenue Service enforcement efforts that all have duplicative gaps and are not properly managed. They talk about how the programs are duplicative, how the programs are mismanaged, how they need to be tightened up, and there is a whole list of these things. There are about 50 different major programs—51—that need reform. We haven't done any of that.

What does Congress say to the American people? Well, we don't have time to execute, carry out, or study GAO's report. That is too much work. Just send us more money. No, we don't have time to do this. You don't understand—these little programs, they do not save much money. They do not make any difference. We don't have to focus on them. Send us more money. You have to send us more money.

I think the American people may be getting tired of this.

Nine different agencies, according to GAO, run over 50 job-training programs for people with disabilities. This budget proposes to create more. We had an amendment offered at the Budget Committee that would create another job program. I mean, we have them all over the place. It sounded like a good idea. Something good happened in some State, so we have a plan to offer Federal legislation to do it here or expand it.

Last year alone, Washington paid out \$44 billion to people who, through deceit or error, did not deserve Medicare payments. Let me repeat. Forty-four billion dollars was paid out to people who, through deceit or error, did not deserve Medicare payments. That is more money than we spend running our national parks, the FBI, the Federal Aviation Administration, the Army Corps of Engineers' civil works projects, and the Internal Revenue Service combined. Forty-four billion is a lot. That is just about what the Federal highway budget is—\$44 billion. Fraud, deceit, and error out the door in Medicare alone.

Well, Mr. President, we have been at it a long time. I am very unhappy that the budget process has been shifted to the end of the week. I am very unhappy that we are at a point where we are not going to have as full a debate because people are going to be stressed, they are going to be here at night and maybe into the weekend. Somebody may say: Well, SESSIONS, it is your fault. Why don't you just yield back this time? But it would take every Senator here to yield back the time. And if I did, I am sure somebody would object. And I am not yielding back time now.

We have problems. We can yield, we can work through the night, we can compromise tonight and maybe save a few hours, or we can work to be as accommodating to our colleagues as we can. I am willing to do that. But I just have to say that this budget should have been up earlier. We should have reached an agreement with Senators MORAN and AYOTTE and given them amendments early in the week or last week, and we could have had the budget up Monday. We wouldn't have had all this fuss. We would have had Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and we would have had a full day, completed all amendments, and been out of here. But, oh no, I think there is something to the fact that it was considered to be a good idea just to carry this budget over to the end of the week and that Senators would want to leave and we would just wrap it all up, do it in the dead of night so the American people wouldn't see, perhaps, what is going to be done, wouldn't pay much attention to the votes, and we could get out of here and do the least possible public discussion of this bad budget that we can.

Now, some might say: Well, that is really not so.

I think it is so. We haven't had a budget on the floor for 4 years. Why? Senator REID said publicly that it is foolish to have a budget. Why did he say that? He meant it was foolish politically. I have said this before. He knows how I feel about it.

He said it was foolish—politically, basically—to have a budget. Why? Because writing a budget requires a party to lay out their vision for the future, to be prepared to defend it in public debate, and to have amendments on it. He has been controlling this Senate to

a degree no majority leader has ever controlled the Senate, and the one thing he is not able to control is the budget process: You have 50 hours and virtually unlimited amendments. He didn't want to do that. So he was willing to violate the law of the United States and not bring up a budget so he wouldn't have to do this.

Finally, this year the House got fed up. They have been passing an honest budget that lays out a future plan for America. They have defended it publicly. They have taken unfair attacks and abuse for doing their duty every year—like they are supposed to do.

So they sent over a bill this year. It said: No budget, no pay, Congress. If you don't bring up your budget, you don't get paid. So now we have a budget for the first time in 4 years. Maybe the House should be given a medal for that.

But I am not happy. I don't believe we are doing this right. I was disappointed that for the first time in 3 years, when a budget was brought up in the Senate committee, we had statements made one afternoon for a few hours before we even saw the chairman's mark. It was produced after that, and we had 1 day—the next day—to offer amendments. That wasn't a very good process, in my view.

If we really want to deal with the debt—the greatest danger of our time—and deal with it properly, why wouldn't we want to have an open public hearing? Why wouldn't we have had expert witnesses all year to help talk to us? We had a few hearings, but we could have had a lot more because this has complex questions for us to decide. We should have had more time in committee, and we should have had full time on the floor of the Senate. So I don't make any bones about it. I wish we had done it differently.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

PRESIDENT'S MIDDLE EAST TRIP

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, President Obama arrived in the Middle East today. It is his first visit as President to Israel and the West Bank.

Some in the press have focused on the fact that the White House has lowered expectations for what will be accomplished in the 3 days of the President's visit. Others, including Members

of Congress, have signed letters to the President.

Rather than prejudge what can be achieved by this trip or try to tie the President's hands concerning the Middle East, I want to simply make a few straightforward points.

First, no one who knows the Middle East can honestly expect momentous accomplishments from a short visit like this, especially when the new Israeli Government is still in the process of forming. But despite that, it is very positive that the President is traveling to the region, and this is as good a time as any.

Second, the peace process, as we have come to refer to it, between Israelis and Palestinians has been stalled for a dozen years. In many ways the prospects for an end to the conflict are worse today than in the mid-1990s, and there is plenty of blame to go around. Just traveling to Israel and the West Bank reaffirms this administration's interest in helping the parties find ways to make progress on the key issues. Ultimately, however, it is up to them, not the United States, to resolve their differences.

Third, it reaffirms President Obama's longstanding support for Israel. While during the Presidential campaign there were shameful attempts to portray the President as somehow not committed enough or supportive enough of Israel, that was pure politics. The record is abundantly clear that he has been, is—and, there is every reason to believe, will continue to be—a strong supporter of Israel. Top Israeli officials have acknowledged this.

That is not to say that we and the Israeli Government are going to agree on every issue. Israel and the United States share fundamental interests, but we are different countries and sometimes our interests diverge. That is to be expected.

Fourth, the President's visit is an opportunity for Israelis and Palestinians to recognize that the status quo is unsustainable. Maintaining this untenable limbo is neither in their interests nor in the interests of our great Nation. Unilateral actions by either side are harmful to the peace process. Rhetoric that dehumanizes or demonizes the other is harmful. Settlement construction in disputed territory is harmful. Incitement to violence is harmful. Both sides need to demonstrate that they want lasting peace through negotiations.

The President will also visit Jordan, which is facing increasing pressure from the flood of Syrian refugees, an issue that concerns us all. The fiscal year 2013 continuing resolution that is expected to pass the Senate this week includes additional assistance for Jordan and for Syria's other neighbors to help address these needs.

And, of course, there are growing concerns about Iran's nuclear program. I believe the President has wisely proceeded with caution in the way his administration has responded to this

grave threat. While some have urged the President to adopt a purely military policy toward Iran, the advice of our top military leaders is restraint. We should exhaust other means at our disposal to try to convince Iran to abandon its nuclear ambitions and to avoid another war in that part of the world.

Mr. President, I commend President Obama for traveling to the Middle East. Real peace with enduring security between Israelis and Palestinians has long been and remains a key goal of the United States. It is one toward which the Congress and the administration should work together.

FREE SPEECH IN THE AMERICAS

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, there is much at the Organization of American States that needs to be reformed, but the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, IACHR, is not among them. Yet that is what the Government of Ecuador and some other Latin American governments purport to be calling for when the OAS general assembly meets this coming Friday.

In reality, it is not about reform at all but a concerted effort to severely weaken the IACHR, the one institution in the Americas that has been a consistent, strong defender of free expression and other fundamental human rights that have been too often denied by those same governments.

I have spoken previously about the courageous work of Colombian lawyer Dr. Catalina Botero, the special rapporteur for freedom of expression. I have also spoken about the efforts by Ecuador's President Rafael Correa to intimidate and control what remains of an independent press in his country. So I will not repeat myself here.

But the United States is the largest contributor to the OAS, and we have provided additional funds in recent years to support the critically important work of the IACHR. I want to be sure Senators are aware of what is happening, as it could have serious consequences for our future support for the OAS. I ask unanimous consent that an article in the Washington Post by Cesar Gaviria Trujillo, former President of Colombia and Secretary General of the OAS, be printed in the RECORD.

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

[From The Washington Post, Mar. 19, 2013]

MUZZLING A FREE-SPEECH CHAMPION

(By César Gaviria Trujillo)

César Gaviria Trujillo is a former president of Colombia and past secretary general of the Organization of American States.

A historic showdown set to occur at Friday's meeting of the general assembly of the Organization of American States could determine the future of human rights protections throughout the Western Hemisphere.

A group of nations led by Ecuador is pushing to "reform" the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and its office on free-

dom of expression. The purported aim of these changes is to "strengthen" human rights protections. If implemented, however, the reforms will severely weaken the commission and make it easier for governments to ignore basic rights and limit free speech.

When I served as president of Colombia from 1990 to 1994, I saw how difficult it could be for national institutions to evolve and change without external pressure. As secretary general of the OAS between 1994 and 2004, I saw firsthand how effective the Inter-American Commission could be in providing this pressure when nations needed help to move forward on human rights.

The commission has played a crucial role, particularly in defending the principles of the Inter-American Democratic Charter. It has pressed for transparency and fair elections, and, equally important, it has intervened when governments sought to undermine judicial independence or free speech. A genuine democracy requires checks and balances as well as freedom of the press.

The changes being promoted would drastically curtail the autonomy that has been critical to the Inter-American Commission's success. One proposal would prevent the commission from obtaining funds from outside the region, effectively putting a financial stranglehold on the panel. As of this year, about a third of the commission's budget comes from Europe.

This measure would have a devastating impact, especially on the commission's Special Rapporteurship for Freedom of Expression, which for many years has led the fight for press freedoms throughout the region and has served as a constant thorn in the side of governments that do not believe in free speech. The office stands to lose virtually all of its budget, making it easier for governments to prosecute their critics, impose censorship and close independent media outlets.

Another reform under consideration would prevent states that have not ratified the American Convention on Human Rights from nominating members to the commission. This measure appears to be designed to limit the involvement of the United States and Canada, neither of which has ratified the convention though they are nonetheless subject to its monitoring and, most important, are major sources of financial and political support for its work.

Our region has made important progress on human rights since the dark days of the Cold War. Nearly all of this hemisphere's dictatorships have been replaced by democracies. Yet these democracies have at times trampled on free speech and other fundamental rights. The Inter-American human rights system is the best mechanism we have for ensuring that governments in the Americas do a better job of protecting these rights and freedoms.

So far, only a handful of countries have joined Ecuador in this determined effort to weaken our regional human rights system. Those governments that are truly committed to human rights and democracy must stand up for the commission this week and put an end to this ill-conceived campaign.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, during the past 50 years there has been significant progress in improving living standards in developing countries. Some of the successes have been particularly noteworthy: eradicating smallpox and almost eradicating polio, stabilizing population growth rates in many areas, longer life spans, lower infant mortality, fewer people living in poverty, the expansion of democracy.