

that have gone by since they last passed a budget. They could have taken 179 trips to the Moon or built three Pentagons.

Well, today it looks like that is all about to change. It is nice to see that after years of playing budget peekaboo, Senate Democrats are finally ready to take up their most basic of responsibilities—and only a few weeks after the chairwoman of the Budget Committee indicated they might skip it, for the fourth year in a row.

There is an indication now that the majority is committed to passing a budget. What is unfortunate is that it has required so much pressure for them to do so. It is in stark contrast to the House of Representatives, who have taken their duties very seriously.

Over there, committee hearings have been held, budget resolutions have been marked up, amendments have been considered. More importantly, the House has passed serious budgets annually, as the law requires. They have laid out their priorities for the public to see: their plans to control spending, to save our most important social programs from collapse, to reform an outdated anticompetitive Tax Code, and to streamline government bureaucracies that are literally suffocating job creation.

They have done their jobs while Senate Democrats have tried to keep their priorities a secret.

We know Senate Democrats do not like the House budgets. And we know they do not even support the President's budgets—at least not with their votes. What we have not known for nearly 4 years is what they are for because they have refused to put their plans for the country down on paper and actually vote for them.

It is my hope the Democrats' sudden interest in passing a budget is not just another attempt to actually raise taxes. As I have said repeatedly, we are done with the revenue issue. The President has already said the so-called rich are now paying their "fair share," and, of course, middle-income families are already on the hook for new taxes as a result of ObamaCare.

So the question is, Who would be in the firing line this time? And at what cost?

Look, struggling families should not have to pick up the tab again for Washington's inability to live within its means. We need to start solving the actual problem, which is spending, and we need to do it together.

So if—and I say if—Democrats are finally ready to confront the massive fiscal and economic challenges facing our country, and to do so in a serious way, I assure them they will find partners on this side of the aisle.

As for the debt limit, there is no need to wait for final resolution of the House's short-term legislation before we start putting a long-term debt reduction solution together in the Senate. If the bill the House passed yesterday is signed into law, Congress will

have another 3 months to take the debt challenge—to take it on seriously—but that does not mean we should wait a minute longer to start working on it. There is no reason, for instance, that the Finance Committee should not begin preparing the critical spending reforms that will be necessary, for example, to get my vote and the vote of many of my colleagues for any kind of long-term increase in the debt ceiling.

So let's get the process moving. No more brinksmanship. No more last-minute deals. The American people have already had to wait 4 years—4 years—for a budget from Senate Democrats. They should not have to wait nearly as long for us to confront a debt that threatens the economy, our jobs, and the future of our Nation.

Yesterday I laid out the realities of the fiscal challenges we face as a country. We have delayed facing them long enough. Let's put the politics aside and finally do the work we were sent here to do.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. UDALL of Colorado. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. UDALL of Colorado. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be recognized to speak for 10 minutes as in morning business.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

WILDFIRE RELIEF

Mr. UDALL of Colorado. Mr. President, I rise to speak in favor of a critical issue for my State; that is, much needed wildfire relief.

I wish to be more specific. Colorado has been in dire need of emergency watershed protection funds since fires raged in my State just 6 months ago. Just 6 months ago we were in the news not only in our country but around the world because of fires in our State.

This is an important issue, one of the most important issues confronting my State because the last fire season was the worst, literally, on record. Although the fires no longer burn, the threats they pose to entire communities persist long after the final embers are extinguished. Literally, hundreds of thousands of Coloradans remain vulnerable to flooding and tainted water supplies in the aftermath of these fires.

To people not from the West, the reason why this is an emergency may not be immediately clear, so let me explain. In my State, the Hyde Park and the Waldo Canyon fires—these are two fires that were all over the news—tragically took lives, burned more than

100,000 acres, and led to catastrophic property loss. President Obama declared them national disasters, and he actually came to Colorado and joined me and the rest of the delegation to visit the scenes of destruction, where over 300 homes were destroyed in Colorado's second largest city, Colorado Springs.

But that initial impact in those initial scenes could pale in comparison to threats these communities will face in the coming days, months, and years. Why is that so? Because once a mountainside is stripped of all its trees and foliage and the soil is burned down to bedrock, there is nothing left to hold back the water and debris as it races downhill toward our communities.

Without rehabilitation and restoration, the watersheds that provide municipal and agricultural water are at risk from landslides, flooding, and erosion. In turn, that could result in serious infrastructure damage, water supply disruptions, and even loss of life.

Stabilizing and protecting these communities' watersheds is simply the right thing to do and, moreover—and this is important—taking action now is also fiscally responsible. Quite simply, if we do not do the repairs now, we will pay more later.

When Coloradans came to Senator BENNET and me to share these needs confronting our State, we immediately went to work. We delivered on the promise of providing fire relief when the Senate passed the emergency supplemental spending bill in December of last year, which also provided much needed relief funds for Hurricane Sandy victims. That was a bipartisan bill supported by Senate Republicans and Democrats alike. But the Republicans in the House regrettably gutted the bill and sent back legislation that explicitly cut out wildfire relief.

In that context, let me make one point absolutely clear. This is an emergency. Some people question the need for funding and have asked why we wouldn't limit dollars to just Hurricane Sandy areas, such as the bill does before us today. The short answer is it is a fiscally smart thing to do, the right thing to do, and the fair thing to do.

This bill is an emergency appropriations bill for all national disasters, not just Hurricane Sandy. It is our best hope of seeing wildfire relief.

I emphatically note the Colorado emergencies occurred before Hurricane Sandy, and the West should not have to continue to wait. Very few emergency supplemental bills pass Congress. This bill is passing now, and it should include aid for Colorado and other States across our country.

We, as Americans, are in this together. When deadly disasters strike, we all support each other. I know the Presiding Officer's home State of Hawaii has experienced natural disasters. We stand together when we get into these situations. That is why I am so frustrated that the House of Representatives dismissed Colorado's needs and

ruined our chances, the West's chances, of immediate wildfire relief when lawmakers there failed to include emergency watershed protection funding for Colorado in this disaster relief legislation.

This neglect is particularly disappointing, because if the House had quickly taken up the Senate-passed disaster assistance bill at the end of last year, we would not be in this desperate position today. I say this somewhat reluctantly; I served in the House for 10 years. But I have to say the House is setting a dangerous precedent of arbitrarily legislating disaster relief funds. Communities across this country, and not just those affected by Hurricane Sandy, are at risk of catastrophic flooding and contaminated drinking water.

But House Republicans are either sending a message that the West doesn't matter or saying they don't care about certain communities once the TV cameras are focused elsewhere.

What is the latest development in this ongoing fight to help wildfire victims? Yesterday, I introduced an amendment to the House-passed disaster relief legislation that would help national disaster areas repair their drinking water supplies and the systems that back up those water supplies. This amendment would not add a single cent to the bill and instead simply reverses the House's decision to exclude all States other than those affected by Hurricane Sandy.

No one questions that we need to help hurricane victims in the Northeast. But wildfire relief is not pork. I will say that again. Wildfire relief is not pork. Colorado's record-setting wildfires in 2012 displaced tens of thousands, destroyed more than 600 homes statewide and tragically resulted in deaths. Wildfires destroy communities, and their devastation persists for decades.

These restoration projects of which I speak must get started now before our spring snow melt sends tons of ash and sediment into our water supplies and buries homes and infrastructure under mudslides and floodwaters.

As I said earlier, I know these fires may seem to be old news for some, but Coloradans are living under the ongoing threats every day. I wish to remind all of my colleagues that in the past the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the NRCS, had the flexibility to provide EWP assistance for earlier disasters before moving on to the needs created by subsequent events.

As of December, 2012, an estimated \$47 million was needed to mitigate damaged watersheds in the aftermath of other Presidentially declared Stafford Act disaster areas in Arizona, Colorado, Louisiana, Florida, Minnesota, Mississippi, New York, Utah, and Wisconsin, North, South, East, and West.

Of the \$180 million the House approved for Sandy-related emergency watershed protection relief, only \$30 million has been requested. Yet the

House bill is saying other communities cannot have access to these funds to protect their own people. It is senselessly wasteful to leave these other communities behind to suffer the effects of less-recent disasters, whether they faced wildfire, hurricane or flood.

Mr. President, I am not being an alarmist. Coloradans unfortunately have already experienced some of these effects. For example, the usually crystal-clear Poudre River has been flowing black—literally flowing black due to ash and runoff from the fires. This forced the downstream city of Fort Collins to shut off its water intake for over 100 days. Senator BENNET was on site just a week ago, and the pictures were tragic and they compel action.

Further downstream on that important water course, the Poudre, the city of Greeley shut off its water intakes for 36 days and is still only able to take a small fraction of its normal intake.

I have a photo here that shows a water main that supplies 75 percent of the backup drinking water supply for the city of Colorado Springs, our second largest city, south of Denver. This pipeline used to be buried 8 feet deep but is now exposed due to runoff. It has been exposed because of the runoff from the fire area, and, of course, it will be exposed to more runoff.

You can see the effect of what is happening after these fires. How much more of an emergency do we need, when our most basic resource—drinking water supplies for three of Colorado's largest cities and its families and businesses—is threatened?

Let me share one more example. The flood potential in the burned areas is now 20 times higher than before the fire, which means that areas are experiencing 100-year floods from the same amount of rainfall that would have caused a 5-year flood before the wildfires.

Look at this photo. This is Highway 14, which is the major east-west artery through northern Colorado. This mudslide is one of many that occurred during one very minor rainstorm after the High Park fire. These mudslides on our major roads put people, property, and commerce at risk. Already families in the Colorado Springs vicinity, which I mentioned earlier, have received at least four flash flood warnings since the Waldo Canyon fire. Stabilizing this ground and restoring the burned areas on both Federal and private land is critical to public safety, public health, and the prevention of another disaster.

So as I begin to close, I would just say, don't get me wrong, I support the recovery of the communities devastated by Hurricane Sandy, but I want to ensure that my colleagues understand the gravity of the situation we are facing in Colorado and in other States that are confronting disaster needs. The Senate delivered when it came to providing fire relief, in part because of my colleague Senator BENNET's great work on the Agriculture Committee, but the House unwisely

sent us a package that turns a blind eye to Colorado and the West. If we do not act soon, communities across this Nation will see unnecessary flood risks, contaminated water supplies, and the potential looms for tragic deaths caused by our inaction. That is simply not acceptable.

So when someone asks whether the EWP—the emergency watershed protection provisions and program—is necessary, critical, or even an emergency, the answer is an emphatic yes. For many of our communities in Colorado, this is their No. 1 priority in Congress, and I, for one, am not going to let their critical needs go unmet. Mark my words. This is not an issue I am going to let die. It is not an issue Senator BENNET will let die. We are going to keep at it until we stabilize these soils, protect our water supplies, and stand up for the people of Colorado and the people of our country.

I thank the Acting President pro tempore for his attention, and I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Colorado.

Mr. BENNET. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for 7 minutes on the same topic as my colleague.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. BENNET. Mr. President, I wish to thank my colleague, the senior Senator from Colorado, for his remarks and for his commitment to this important issue, and I rise today to speak briefly about the disaster bill that is in front of the Senate and to address an issue of enormous importance to the people of Colorado.

We have in front of us a disaster bill to respond to the widespread damage caused by Hurricane Sandy along the east coast, and we should obviously pass this bill to help our fellow citizens in their time of need. It is in that exact same spirit that the Senate passed a disaster relief bill at the end of last year that helped victims of natural disasters all across this country—not just the victims of Hurricane Sandy but also the victims of the devastating wildfires in my home State of Colorado and other States across the West.

We worked very hard to get that money into the bill the Senate passed in December. With the leadership of MARK UDALL, we were able to successfully make the case that Colorado has a significant need for resources to help protect communities affected by the wildfires. We worked closely with the Senate Appropriations Committee, and they answered Colorado's call for help, and I thank those Members—Members from both sides of the aisle—who supported us. That was hard to do. It was hard to do, but in the end the idea that we are all in this together prevailed.

The House, however, let that bipartisan bill die at the end of last session, and now Congress has to start anew. Now here we are, asked to consider a

House-passed bill that leaves Colorado behind, a bill where the House arbitrarily stripped out the money that would help our struggling communities in Colorado, and we are told this bill is unamendable. We are told the House has drawn a line in the sand and won't take any changes. Like my senior Senator, I am stunned by this and profoundly disappointed.

So let me tell my colleagues what this means for the people of Colorado. The Waldo Canyon and High Park fires in the summer of 2012 were the first and second most destructive fires in Colorado's history. They tragically resulted in the loss of life for several Coloradans. The fires destroyed hundreds of homes and caused millions of dollars of damage to critical infrastructure and some of the worst and most lasting damage to our watersheds. As anyone from Colorado or the West knows, our watersheds and the clean water they provide are the lifeblood of our communities.

Here is a hilltop that was completely devastated by the fires of 2012 and a road near Fort Collins that was overrun with sediment and debris in a mudslide after the High Park fire.

Here is the Poudre River after the fire, running completely black as the sediment, ash, and soot are washed off the singed hillsides into the water. This river provides drinking water for the cities of Fort Collins and Greeley, CO, home to one-quarter of a million people—home to 250,000 people—and home to agriculture and businesses that rely on having clean water to get through the day.

I recently met with the water providers at the treatment plant for this area, situated just yards from the charred mountains. They showed me a mason jar of black water, just like this. It could have been pulled directly from the Poudre. That is, unfortunately, because of our inaction and our foolishness, our shortsightedness, and that is what communities can expect if we don't start recovery work in these watersheds.

The resources provided under the USDA's emergency watershed protections—the EWP Program—would directly help these communities in Colorado. We fought for those resources, for the EWP Program, in the Senate bill last December, and reason prevailed. Republicans and Democrats came together and said: We understand the people of Colorado need this; they need our help. And I again thank our friends on the Senate Appropriations Committee for helping to make that happen. Yet we stand here today with a bill that doesn't include these funds, the funding stripped out, while an unmet need of \$20 million persists in Colorado alone. And it is not just our State, there are 51 other projects across 19 other States that need these resources to recover from their disasters. This is a major national issue, and it is crazy that we are standing here in this position today. Lest any-

body think this is a decision that somehow is fiscally disciplined, let me stand on this floor and guarantee you that as these hillsides wash into the river in the spring snowmelt, the cost of restoring these water treatment plants, the cost of making sure we have clean water will dwarf the \$20 million we are talking about today.

To conclude, it is incredibly unfortunate, given the history we have in this country of coming together after a disaster, that the House would not follow our lead in the Senate and provide us these resources. There are reasons we are the United States of America, and one of those reasons is that we come to each other's aid at moments of natural disasters and help our friends and neighbors in other States. We make sure they get through to the next year.

Perhaps adding insult to injury is that funding for Colorado was stripped under the rationale, as I said, that the House was somehow being fiscally responsible, even though the exact opposite is true. The reality of this situation is that it is fiscally irresponsible because we can say with 100 percent certainty that the cost of fixing these problems later will be significantly more than it is now. So an ounce of prevention in this case is clearly worth a pound of cure. Any household or small business understands that making these investments today is the right move, instead of just waiting for the next disaster to happen, instead of waiting for matters to get worse, although that is the habit of this town, as the Acting President pro tempore will come to learn. The House just couldn't put rigid ideology aside and do something for the country as a whole.

Mr. President, I am not going to oppose the Sandy bill. We need to help our fellow citizens on the east coast. But this is a real head-scratcher for me and I know for the senior Senator from Colorado, even for this place. We are going to continue to work with our colleagues in the Senate to get these resources signed into law, but the fact is we had it done. We had it done in the Senate, in a bipartisan way, with the help of our friends on the Appropriations Committee and both Republicans and Democrats on this Senate floor. The House of Representatives let Colorado down, and now we are going to have to go back and find a way to make it right.

With that, Mr. President, I yield the floor, and 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.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. 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.

THE NATIONAL DEBT

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, in 2008, a prominent Democratic politician said that adding \$4 trillion to the national debt was "irresponsible and unpatriotic."

In 2009, this same politician said, "I refuse to leave our children with a debt they cannot repay. We cannot simply spend as we please."

Again, in 2010, this same individual said, "It keeps me awake at night looking at all that red ink."

Then in 2011, he echoed the statements of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, ADM Mike Mullen, when he said, "The greatest long-term threat to America's national security is America's debt."

And then finally, in 2012, this same politician said he was running for reelection "to pay down our debt in a way that is balanced and responsible."

Well, you might have guessed who this was. These are statements made by President Barack Obama.

Unfortunately, the President's actions have not come close to matching his own rhetoric. Since he took office, the gross national debt has increased by nearly \$6 trillion. Indeed, the President has served at a time when we have accumulated far more debt than any other President in American history.

After spending his first term maxing out America's credit card, the President is demanding yet another increase in the debt limit. The President argues he is merely asking lawmakers to pay the bills that have already been racked up. And he continues to blame others—certainly not himself—for trillion-dollar annual deficits and skyrocketing debt. But he fails to acknowledge that his stimulus bill borrowed more than \$1 trillion, increasing the debt by that amount; and, secondly, that Obamacare will spend more than \$2 trillion in its first decade.

Those on this side of the aisle, Republicans, have shown our willingness to pass a budget that stabilizes our public finances. Indeed, I applaud the reaction of the White House and of Democrats in the Senate saying that for the first time since 2009 they are willing to take up and pass a budget in the Senate—the first time since 2009. It is long overdue but welcome news.

Likewise, we are willing to make compromises—not on principle, but we are willing to find common ground, and we are willing to take tough votes. Indeed, that is part of the budget process because we know—whether it is a family budget; whether it is a small business; whether it is a county, city, State or the Federal Government—priorities have to be established in a budget because we know they always involve tough decisions: What is the most important? What do you have to have? What are the things you want but you need to delay because you don't have the money to pay for it now? What are the things you would like to have but you simply cannot afford?

Those are decisions that are made by every family in America on a daily