

COMPREHENSIVE IMMIGRATION REFORM

Mr. REID. Mr. President, last week, after the Nation celebrated the second inauguration of President Obama, I expressed a hope that this Congress would be characterized by its commitment to finding common ground.

I am pleased that a bipartisan group of eight Senators—four Democrats and four Republicans—will announce an agreement on a framework for comprehensive immigration reform as early as this afternoon.

No one denies America's immigration system is broken. As I have said, this is one of the most important legislative missions Congress will undertake this year. I applaud these eight Senators for setting aside partisanship to tackle a crucial issue facing our Nation.

This is a positive first step, but the true test of our congressional leadership will be to pass a comprehensive bill.

As a Senator from Nevada who has for years witnessed firsthand the difficulties our broken immigration system presents for immigrants and their families, it is very important to me personally that we finally resolve this issue. So I pledge that I will do everything in my power as the majority leader to get a bill across the finish line. Nothing short of bipartisan success is acceptable to me.

President Obama has already taken commendable executive action to suspend deportation of outstanding young men and women who were brought to this country illegally by their parents. I thank President Obama for his leadership and for making comprehensive immigration reform a top priority of his administration.

I am also pleased President Obama will present to the Nation his own ideas to fix the current broken immigration system during a visit to Las Vegas tomorrow. With bipartisan support building in both Houses of Congress, and a President who is eager to solve this issue, there is no reason we should not pass comprehensive immigration reform immediately. It will be good for our economy and good for immigrant families. But successful immigration reform cannot be piecemeal, and it must include a path to citizenship for an estimated 11 million undocumented individuals in our country.

Legislators must craft a comprehensive solution that, among other things, continues to secure our borders; punishes unscrupulous employers who exploit immigrants and undercut American wages; improves our dysfunctional legal immigration system; and requires the 11 million people who are undocumented to register with the government, pay fines and taxes, and go to the back of the line—not to the front of the line. They have to learn English, work, pay taxes, and stay out of trouble. Only then they, as I have indicated, get to go to the back of the line. But they do obtain legal status, which is so important.

The framework proposed by the bipartisan group of eight Senators meets these criteria. I hope we will soon have a bill to send through the committee process and bring to the floor for a vote.

I have long said when my Republican colleagues were truly ready to craft a commonsense legislative solution that was tough, fair, and practical, we would stand ready to cooperate. We have been doing this alone. It is good to have some friends and partners in this effort.

For years Democrats have been eager to pass comprehensive immigration reform, but the Republicans have been unwilling to work to find common ground. I am glad things have changed. I am so happy to see that my Republican colleagues—at least some of them—finally seem ready to find a bipartisan way to correct the flaws in this Nation's immigration system instead of just complaining that the system is broken.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

Mr. REID. Would the Chair announce the business of the day.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 4:30 p.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

Mr. REID. 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. GRASSLEY. 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.

FEDERAL SPENDING

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, during the next few weeks and months Congress and the President will again have an opportunity to demonstrate that we are serious about dealing with deficits and debt by reducing spending. We have the debt limit issue coming up, we have the sequestration issue coming up by March 2, and we have the continuing resolution issue coming up on March 27. So those are three very real times—and important times—to deal with deficit and spending.

The reason we need to address the Federal runaway spending is obvious to everybody who has a family budget and wonders why Congress cannot live the same as families live—within our income.

The reason we need to address the Federal spending is obvious—because it is the real driver of our deficits and our debt. Spending is the reason we are up against the \$16.4 trillion debt limit. Spending was the reason Congress and President Obama raised the debt ceiling by \$2.1 trillion just a year and a half ago.

In 2006 the junior Senator from Illinois, Mr. Obama, came to the floor and made a very passionate and thoughtful statement here on the Senate floor in opposition to raising the debt limit. Many of the reasons he gave then are relevant today. In fact, they are even more appropriate because the debt is much higher and we have a fiscal mess.

It is instructive for my colleagues to hear the words straight from then-Senator Obama. He delivered these remarks on March 16, 2006. At that time, the Senate was debating raising the debt limit by \$781 billion to a new limit then that seems very small today—about half of what it is today—raising the limit in 2006 to \$8.9 trillion. So I thought it would be worth—for the President's benefit as well as our benefit—going over what then-Senator, now-President Obama had to say, so I am going to quote partially from his speech. This is from the 2006 debt ceiling debate:

The fact that we are here today to debate raising America's debt limit is a sign of leadership failure. It is a sign that the U.S. Government can't pay its own bills. It is a sign that we now depend on ongoing financial assistance from foreign countries to finance our Government's reckless fiscal policies.

He goes on to say:

Over the past 5 years, our federal debt has increased by \$3.5 trillion to \$8.6 trillion. That is "trillion" with a T. That is money that we have borrowed from the Social Security trust fund, borrowed from China and Japan, borrowed from American taxpayers. And over the next 5 years, between now and 2011, the President's budget will increase the debt by almost \$3.5 trillion.

Numbers that large are sometimes hard to understand. Some people may wonder why they matter. Here is why: This year, the Federal Government will spend \$220 billion on interest. That is more money to pay interest on our national debt than we will spend on Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program. That is more money to pay interest on our debt this year than we will spend on education, homeland security, transportation, veterans benefits combined.

It is more money in one year than we are likely to spend to rebuild the devastated gulf coast in a way that honors the best of America. And the cost of our debt is one of the fastest growing expenses in the Federal budget.

Senator Obama went on to say:

This rising debt is a hidden domestic enemy, robbing our cities and States of critical investment in infrastructure like bridges, ports, levees; robbing our families and our children of critical investments in education, health care reform; robbing our seniors of the retirement and health security they have counted on.

Every dollar we pay in interest is a dollar that is not going to investment in America's priorities. Instead, interest payments are a significant tax on all Americans—a debt tax

that Washington doesn't want to talk about. If Washington were serious about honest tax relief in this country, we would see an effort to reduce our national debt by returning to responsible fiscal policies.

So what he said in 2006 is still very much true today, only we are in a worse situation. We are in a situation where he is now President of the United States, and through his leadership, something can be done about it.

I wish to continue to quote him by saying—this is what he said in 2006:

Our debt also matters internationally. My friend, the ranking member of the Senate Budget Committee, likes to remind us that it took 42 Presidents 224 years to run up only \$1 trillion of foreign-held debt. This administration did more than that in just 5 years.

The administration he refers to was the Bush administration at that time, and he was legitimately finding fault with that.

Now, there is nothing wrong with borrowing from foreign countries. But we must remember that the more we depend on foreign nations to lend us money, the more our economic security is tied to the whims of foreign leaders whose interests might not be aligned with ours.

Increasing America's debt weakens us domestically and internationally. Leadership means that "the buck stops here". Instead, Washington is shifting the burden of bad choices today onto the backs of our children and grandchildren.

America has a debt problem and a failure of leadership. Americans deserve better.

That is what Senator Obama said in 2006. That pretty much applies today as well. For these reasons, Senator Obama announced his position to oppose the effort to increase America's debt limit in 2006.

The national debt today is nearly double what it was in 2006 when President Obama called it a sign of leadership failure and a hidden domestic enemy. During President Obama's first 4 years, we added \$6 trillion to the national debt—more than was added under President Bush's entire 8 years. Yet, under President Obama's recent budgets, he'd add another \$10 trillion to the debt over the next 10 years. That is his plan, to add another \$10 trillion. Perhaps that is why, when given a chance, not a single Democrat in the Congress voted in favor of President Obama's budgets.

When President Obama announced his vote against that debt limit increase in 2006, if we had a debt problem then and a failure of leadership in 2006, what do we have today?

Surely President Obama, after 4 years of trillion-dollar deficits each year, believes that now is the time to reduce our debt by returning to responsible fiscal policies, as he stated as a Senator. At more than \$16 trillion, President Obama must know that our national and economic security are undermined by our dependence on foreign countries to lend us money.

In the summer of 2008, while on the campaign trail, Senator Obama made this statement when answering a question about deficits and debt. This will be the last quote I give. This is not

from the floor of the Senate, this is from the campaign trail. He was asked about deficits and debt.

The problem is, is that the way Bush has done it over the last eight years is to take out a credit card from the Bank of China in the name of our children, driving up our national debt from \$5 trillion for the first 42 presidents—number 43 added \$4 trillion by his lonesome, so that we now have over \$9 trillion of debt that we are going to have to pay back—\$30,000 for every man, woman and child. That's irresponsible. It's unpatriotic.

Remember, he made these statements when annual deficits were a couple hundred billion dollars per year rather than the \$1 trillion-plus deficits of each of the past 4 years. He made these statements when our national debt was \$8 to \$9 trillion rather than today's \$16 trillion. That is close to \$50,000 for every man, woman, and child, not the \$30,000 it was when he spoke to us in 2008.

So it is time for the President to acknowledge what he realized in 2006—that we have a spending problem—when he voted against increasing the debt limit.

Earlier this month the President got his campaign wish to raise taxes on the so-called wealthy, even though it will do next to nothing to reduce deficits. But that is done. Now it is time to focus on the real driver of our deficits and debt: runaway Federal spending.

I look forward to working with my colleagues and hopefully with President Obama over the next few months to finally take action to get our fiscal house in order. Leadership means the buck stops with him. It is time to stop shifting the burden of bad choices today onto the backs of our children and grandchildren. It is what Americans deserve, and with Presidential leadership, it can be accomplished.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader is recognized.

SOLVING THE DEBT PROBLEM

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, there are many complex issues facing Congress at the moment, many of which have vexed us literally for years. But one issue that demands our immediate attention is the national debt because if we do not do something now to rein in our Nation's out-of-control debt, we may never be able to put America back on a sustainable fiscal and economic path. If that happens, then many of the other issues we face will be largely irrelevant.

We need to give this issue everything we have, and we need to start right now. We need to devote the same kind of energy to this issue that we devoted to other great national threats in the past. That means serious bipartisan negotiation, careful committee consider-

ation, and, yes, tough decisions on the kinds of votes that reflect that. This work will take time. That is why I have been urging Senate Democrats to set the legislative gears into motion right away.

Last week the House passed a bill that would give us 3 months to work out an effective solution to the debt crisis we face. On Wednesday we will take it up here in the Senate. If the House bill passes here and is signed into law, the Finance Committee should immediately—immediately—begin laying the foundation for a solution. Negotiations should begin, hearings should be scheduled, and legislation should actually be marked up.

Three months, as you know, is not very much time in Congress, especially considering the fiscal deadlines we have to address in the coming weeks. Let's use this additional time to develop a plan, a serious, effective, bipartisan plan that can put the debt on a downward trajectory. Let's put together a proposal that gives new confidence to the American people in our ability to work together, with an eye toward improving their lives and their prospects rather than our own. That gives new confidence to the markets and to the ratings agencies that have warned us against doing anything that doesn't address our long-term problem, which is, of course, Washington spending.

I know a number of Democrats view this exercise as little more than an opportunity to raise taxes. What I am saying is that they need to put their preoccupation with taxes aside and focus on the root problem. Raising taxes is something you do when you lack the will or the courage to reform a government that has become entirely too expensive.

It is time to make some tough decisions for a change, and we will only do it if we get started right now, in a bipartisan fashion, through the regular order. I know my constituents are tired of seeing us career from one crisis to another around here. Regular order is how we will avoid that. Let's avoid the eleventh-hour deals, and that means getting started right now on a legislative plan that can actually pass.

Some pundits claim that Washington is simply incapable of ever solving a challenge as big as this one. They say that our democratic institutions are broken, that divided government precludes us from passing things that matter to the future of our country. I say the opposite is true. History shows that divided government offers actually the best opportunity to finally surmount this challenge.

The President came to office in his first term with a promise to unify our country, to work with Democrats and Republicans to take on America's greatest challenges. Unfortunately, his rhetoric was just that. Four years later, polls show we are more divided as a nation than we were when the President first took office.