

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.

As I said last week, I believe the beginning of a second term actually presents a real opportunity to change course, to do the work so many have refused to do for the past 4 years. This is our chance. This is our chance to prove the pundits wrong and actually get something accomplished.

Let's be clear about something up front: Solving our debt problem isn't about austerity, it is about opportunity. It is not about austerity, it is about opportunity. It is about creating some space for businesses to grow and for our rising generation of Americans to feel as though they can look to the future with optimism rather than with dread. But that only comes after some hard work on the debt is done. Let's get to work.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Tennessee.

Mr. ALEXANDER. It seems lately that I come to the floor when the Republican leader is making especially reasonable, sensible proposals. I heard him say the same thing last week, and I agree with him.

I saw a number of my Democratic friends this weekend in different places, and I said: Look, the President has been elected. He deserves credit for that, and he now has a chance to define his legacy. He told us what that is in his inaugural address. Isn't this the right time to get out of the way this difficult problem of dealing with entitlements that every single one of us knows we have to do? Hasn't the House of Representatives actually given us an unexpected 3 or 4 months in which we can do it?

If President Obama wants, as I am sure he must, to begin to work on the other issues he talked about in his inaugural address—immigration, for example, and his other important issues—why would we not go to work right now, as the Republican leader says, and deal with the runaway, out-of-control entitlement spending that is going to bankrupt the program the seniors depend upon to pay their medical bills? We know that is going to happen. The Medicare trustees have said it is going to happen in 12 years, and we have all made speeches saying what we should do with it. Let's just do it. As the Republican leader says, this isn't about austerity.

The Australian Foreign Minister came to this country about a month ago, and in his first address—he is a great friend of America's. He said the United States of America is one budget agreement away—one budget agreement away—from reasserting its global preeminence. That is his view from Down Under. Looking at Asia, looking at China, looking at Japan, he wants us to succeed. He thinks that if we succeed, Australia succeeds. He wants us to get this done.

Average families want us to get this done. They don't know why we don't get it done. They understand we can't keep spending money we don't have.

We have had recommendations from the President's debt commission, from the Domenici-Rivlin group, and from the Ryan-Wyden proposal. We have had all of these different ideas. We know exactly what to do, and suddenly we have 3 months to do it. I urge the President to make a proposal, show us what to do. There are 40 or 50—there might be 60 or 70 of us here on both sides of the aisle ready to go the work and to do it now.

I congratulate the Republican leader for his reasonableness and his comments, and I hope he continues to offer this. I might say, without trying to embarrass him, that every time we have had a crisis we need to solve, it has been the Republican leader and the White House that have gotten it done. So why don't they try again? Why don't they try again? That is my wish.

I came here to talk about something else today, but I am glad I was here to hear that, and I congratulate the Republican leader.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Would the Senator yield?

Mr. ALEXANDER. I yield to the Senator.

Mr. MCCONNELL. As we have discussed before, and I think it is worth repeating, divided government is actually the best time to do difficult things. We have had four excellent examples in the last 25 years: Ronald Reagan and Tip O'Neill raised the age of Social Security, which saved that important program for another generation. Ronald Reagan and Tip O'Neill did the last comprehensive tax reform. Bill Clinton and the Republicans did welfare reform and actually balanced the budgets, believe it or not, in the late 1990s.

There is ample evidence that divided government is the best time to do really difficult things. When you join hands and do it, the American people understand that surely it must have been something we needed to do because these guys actually were able to agree on it.

I hope we won't miss another opportunity. Sometimes I think we are a little bit like the early Israeli Foreign Minister, Abba Eban, who said of the Palestinians that they "never miss an opportunity to miss an opportunity." It appears as if we have rarely missed an opportunity to miss an opportunity. Hopefully, we won't miss this one as well.

I thank my friend from Tennessee.

Mr. ALEXANDER. I thank the Senator from Kentucky.

As we spoke on the floor, another example is President Johnson and Everett Dirksen on civil rights. That would not have happened if the government hadn't been divided, and it wouldn't have been as easily accepted by the American people if it had not been divided.

If the Republicans and the Democrats—if this Democratic President and this mixture of Republicans and Democrats in Congress say to the American

people: We have a real fiscal cliff for you; all the programs you depend upon to pay your medical bills aren't going to have enough money to pay them, and we are going to have to make some changes to deal with that, people will accept that, especially if it comes from both of us.

As far as who is supposed to propose it, well, Senator CORKER and I have proposed it. We proposed what to do, but we are not President. We are not President. I don't know what the experience of the Governor of Virginia was, but if in Tennessee I had waited around for the legislature to come up with a road program, we would still be driving on dirt roads.

The President has to lay it out there and say: Let's do it this way. Then the legislators, all 535 of us, will say: No, Mr. President, we couldn't possibly do it that way. Let's do it a little bit differently, and we will come to a result. That is the way our system works. We have 3 months to do it, and I hope the Republican leader will continue to make his point.

RECESS APPOINTMENTS

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, last Friday a three-judge Federal appellate court made an important decision. It said that the President of the United States, President Obama, on January 4, 2012, made some recess appointments when the Senate wasn't in recess. In other words, they were constitutionally invalid.

The President made four appointments on January 4, 2012—three to the National Labor Relations Board and one to the consumer finance agency. He did it under his so-called recess appointment authority, which is defined in article II of the Constitution.

But the Court said: No, Mr. President. The Senate wasn't in recess. The only time you can make those appointments is between the annual sessions of Congress, and the Constitution also says that those vacancies to which you appoint have to happen during that recess.

The Chairman of the National Labor Relations Board made a remarkable response to the order of the Court. The order of the Court, by the way, vacated an important decision the Board made and said the two remaining NLRB members who are still on the Board are unconstitutionally there, so they vacated the order. Instead of recognizing the authority of the Court, the NLRB Chairman said, in effect: I am going to hang up a sign that says "Open for business. We have important work to do." And they are going to keep going despite the fact that the NLRB has made 219 decisions with these two unconstitutionally appointed members since the month of January 2012, all of which, I would say, are invalid because the members who voted on the decisions were unconstitutionally appointed.

I am here today to call for Sharon Block and Richard Griffin—the two