

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from New Jersey (Mr. LAUTENBERG) is necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 67, nays 32, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 116 Leg.]

YEAS—67

Ayotte	Hagan	Murray
Baldwin	Harkin	Nelson
Baucus	Heinrich	Pryor
Begich	Heitkamp	Reed
Bennet	Hirono	Reid
Blumenthal	Isakson	Rockefeller
Boxer	Johanns	Sanders
Brown	Johnson (SD)	Schatz
Cantwell	Kaine	Schumer
Cardin	King	Sessions
Carper	Kirk	Shaheen
Casey	Klobuchar	Shelby
Chambliss	Landrieu	Stabenow
Cochran	Leahy	Tester
Collins	Levin	Udall (CO)
Coons	Manchin	Udall (NM)
Cowan	McCain	Warner
Donnelly	McCaskill	Warren
Durbin	Menendez	Whitehouse
Feinstein	Merkley	Wicker
Franken	Mikulski	Wyden
Gillibrand	Murkowski	
Graham	Murphy	

NAYS—32

Alexander	Enzi	Moran
Barrasso	Fischer	Paul
Blunt	Flake	Portman
Boozman	Grassley	Risch
Burr	Hatch	Roberts
Coats	Heller	Rubio
Coburn	Hoeben	Scott
Corker	Inhofe	Thune
Cornyn	Johnson (WI)	Toomey
Crapo	Lee	Vitter
Cruz	McConnell	

NOT VOTING—1

Lautenberg

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The 60-vote threshold having been achieved, the amendment is agreed to.

Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, I move to reconsider the vote and I move to lay that motion on the table.

The motion to lay on the table was agreed to.

CHANGE OF VOTE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, on rollcall vote 116, I voted “yea.” It was my intention to vote “nay.” Therefore, I ask unanimous consent that I be permitted to change my vote since it will not affect the outcome.

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

(The foregoing tally has been changed to reflect the above order.)

Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, I have a unanimous consent request. I will make it in a minute.

We are making good progress. We have three amendments in order now: the Blunt amendment No. 800, Pryor amendment 806, and Inhofe amendment No. 835. I ask they be the following amendments in that order to be considered; further, that no second-degree amendments be in order to these amendments prior to votes in relation to the amendments. That is my request.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, we are well on our way to getting this bill done, I hope. The Whitehouse amendment was one that was overwhelmingly supported. I hope that will set the tone for this particular bill; that we will come forward together; that we will not have contentious issues that divide us and divide the American people on a bill that is so motherhood and apple pie as this one is, which is to make sure our ports are dredged, that our flood control projects are done, that our environmental restoration of wetlands is done. It is a very simple, straightforward bill.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

I further ask unanimous consent that immediately following my remarks here Senator WHITEHOUSE be recognized for up to 5 minutes to thank the Senate for this vote—I know he has worked exceedingly hard on this—and then there be a period of morning business for up to 30 minutes, with each Senator allowed to speak for up to 10 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Under the previous order, amendment No. 799, as amended, is agreed to and is considered original text for the purposes of further amendment.

The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I appreciate the chairman's leadership and her offer of 5 minutes of time. I will not need anything near that. I want to take this moment to extend to all of my colleagues a very heartfelt thank you for that last vote.

I yield the floor.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate is in a period of morning business.

The Senator from Virginia.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST— H. CON. RES. 25

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I rise to make a few remarks and to make a motion. Everyone in this body knows one of the issues, the issue I believe is most holding back our economic recovery and most holding back our ability to sort through so many issues our country faces, is the issue of our debt and deficit. We are like \$17 trillion in debt. The debt goes up over \$4 billion every night when we go to sleep. This problem is structural in nature. Time alone will not solve this issue.

In the last 4 years, my time in the Senate, there has been no issue on which I have spent more time, spent more effort trying to reach out. I understand many of my colleagues actually try to avoid me in the hallways now because they fear they are going to get a Mark Warner harangue on the debt and deficit.

I also know the only way we are going to get this issue resolved is if both sides are willing to meet each other in the middle. This is a problem that cannot be solved by continuing to cut back on discretionary spending. It will require, yes, more revenues, and it will require entitlement reform. Those are issues where, unfortunately, in many ways our parties have not found agreement.

We have all agreed as well at least that, while we do not have to solve this problem overnight, we need at least \$4 trillion in debt reduction over the next 10 years. The good thing is, while we have been lurching from budget crisis to budget crisis, we have gotten halfway to our goal. The good news as well is that this year both the Senate and the House adopted budget resolutions. As I said on the floor in March, I believe the Senate budget was a solid first chapter toward producing a balanced fiscal plan for our country. My vote for the Senate budget—and it was not a budget on which I would agree with every component part—was a vote for progress, a vote for regular order, regular order that so many of my distinguished colleagues who served here much longer than I say is the glue that holds this institution together.

It has now been 46 days since the Senate passed its budget. Unfortunately, there are certain colleagues on the other side of the aisle who seem to block our ability to go to conference. In a few minutes—just 2 minutes—I will ask my colleagues to agree to authorize the Chair to name a conference to the Budget Committee. Unfortunately, I expect that request to be objected to. I find that extremely disappointing. I can only speak at this point for folks from Virginia, but no single other issue is as overriding, as I travel across Virginia and I imagine for most of my colleagues as they travel across their States. At the end of the day, Americans, Virginians, want us to work together and get this issue solved.

We have seen, over the last 2½ years, as we have lurched from manufactured budget crisis to budget crisis, the effects on the stock market, on job creation, and our overall recovery. We have a chance to put this behind us. We need to find the kind of common ground between the House budget proposal and the Senate budget proposal on which so many have called upon us to work.

Again, I am going to make this motion in a moment. I want to add one last point. I appreciate some of the calls we have had from colleagues on the Republican side over the last couple of years for the Senate to pass a budget. I believed we needed to pass that budget. Mr. President, 46 days ago, after 100 amendments and a session that went until 5 o'clock in the morning, we passed such a document. I think it is time now that we allow the Senate to announce its conferees to meet with the House, to get a budget

resolved for the United States of America so we have a framework to make sure we get this issue of debt and deficit behind us; that we allow the economy to recover in a way that it needs.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to consideration of Calendar No. 33, H. Con. Res. 25; that the amendment which is at the desk, the text of S. Con. Res. 8, the budget resolution passed by the Senate, be inserted in lieu thereof, and H. Con. Res. 25, as amended, be agreed to, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table; that the Senate insist on its amendment, request a conference with the House on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses; and the Chair be authorized to appoint conferees on the part of the Senate, all with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. McCONNELL. Reserving the right to object, I ask the Senator to modify his request so it not be in order for the Senate to consider a conference report that includes tax increases or reconciliation instructions to increase taxes or raise the debt limit.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, I point out what the Senator requests is for us to redo the budget debate where those amendments were considered and defeated in the Senate, and it is now up to us to go to conference to work out our differences with the House. There is no need to go back through another 50 hours of debate and 100-plus amendments to be considered. This body needs to go to work. We have been told time and time again we need a budget, we need a solution. We do not need to manage by crisis. There is no need to relitigate the budget on this side. We need to go to conference and litigate our differences with the House Republicans.

I object to the Senator's request and urge we move to conference and allow the request of the Senator from Virginia, Senator WARNER, to go forward.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection to the request of the Senator from Virginia?

Mr. McCONNELL. I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Virginia.

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, while it is not unexpected, I am disappointed. The nub of this issue, as commentators from left to right, Democrat and Republican, pointed out, is if we are going to avoid the path we are on, the path of sequestration, which was set up to be literally the worst possible option—which right now is seeing cuts made in the most unsophisticated, unplanned, and inefficient way possible, plans that, if we continue on the path we are on, would so dramatically cut back this country's investments in education, infrastructure, research and de-

velopment, that I don't believe, as a former business person, that America will be able to compete with the kind of economic growth we need to maintain our economy.

If we are going to avoid those kinds of Draconian cuts, if we are going to have a rational business plan for our country, I think most of us, or at least an overwhelming majority of the Senate, would recognize we have to generate both some additional revenues and—while there may be some on my side who disagree—we have to find ways to reform entitlement programs to make sure Medicare and Social Security are going to be there 30 years from now.

The only way to get that done is to take the House product, which focuses particularly on entitlement reform, combine it with the Senate product that makes reasonable increases in revenues and starts us on a path on changes in some of our entitlement programs but also puts in place a more reasonable and balanced approach on cuts. The only way we are going to get to that finish line, particularly for those who have advocated for regular order, is to have a conference.

It is with great distress that we heard opposition raised to regular order, an appeal for regular order, an appeal that was made consistently for the past 2½ years. I don't understand why my colleagues on the other side will not take yes for an answer. They asked for us to pass a budget. We passed that budget. I think it is a good first step in the process and I hope in the coming days there will be a change of heart, that the regular order will be allowed to proceed, conferees will be named for both the House and Senate, and that we can reach agreement on this issue that I think is important, not only to the future of our economy but quite honestly now has taken on the metaphor for whether institutions can actually function in the 21st century.

I see my good friend, the Senator from Virginia, who may want to add some comments to this discussion.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Virginia.

Mr. KAINE. Mr. President, I rise in support of the motion of Senator WARNER and his argument for budget compromise and a budget conference that would enable us to find that compromise for the Nation. During my campaign for the Senate I heard this over and over. Every time I would turn on the TV it seemed there would be someone, even a colleague from this body, arguing that the Senate had not passed a budget in 2 years or 3 years or 4 years. That was a point that was repeated over and over. Then, coming into this body, often sitting there in the presider's chair, I have heard that speech delivered from the floor of this body in January and February, often with charts demonstrating the number of days it had been since the Senate passed a budget.

We know as part of the debt ceiling deal a bill was passed, signed by the President so, arguably, even the claim of no Senate budget was inaccurate. But taking that claim at its word, that the Senate had not passed a budget in 4 years, you would think that, having passed a budget, everyone would be excited and would be willing now to move forward to try to find a compromise for the good of the Nation.

Instead, what we have is an abuse of a Senate rule, an individual Senator standing up—even though they had a chance to vote against a budget and to vote on 100 amendments about a budget—they are utilizing and abusing a prerogative to block a budget conference.

For those listening to this who do not understand what a conference is, it is exactly what it sounds like. We passed a budget. The House passed a budget. The next step in normal business would be for the two budgets to be put in a conference and House and Senate Members to sit down and, God forbid, listen to one another and dialog and hopefully find compromise.

That is all we are asking to do, to have a process of listening and compromise. Yet individual Senators are objecting, blocking even the opportunity to have this discussion. In the 4 months I have been in this body we have had two major budgetary issues and I think it is important to point them both out. The first was the issue surrounding the sequester, a designed regimen of nonstrategic, stupid, across-the-board budget cuts that were never supposed to go into place. In late February this body developed a plan that was able to attain more than 50 votes, to turn off the sequester, to avoid the harm to the economy and other key aspects of the military, and to do it and find first year savings. That proposal was able to get more than 50 votes in this body. It had sufficient votes to pass. But the minority chose to invoke the paper filibuster process to block it from passing. They were not required to. Fifty votes is normally enough for something to pass. We could have avoided the filibuster altogether. We could have avoided the sequester altogether and the harmful cuts. Yet the other side decided: We are going to invoke the filibuster to block it from happening. That was the first instance of an abuse of the Senate rules to proceed with normal budgetary order.

Now we are in the second such instance. On March 23, this body passed a budget in accord with normal Senate order, and as we have seen over the past few days, the very group of people who criticize the Senate for not wanting to pass a budget have done everything they can and pulled out every procedural mechanism they can come up with to block the us from coming up with a budget. This is an abuse of rules, and it is directly contrary to the Members' claims—now for years—that they wanted to pass a budget. This is not just a matter of budget nor is it a

matter of numbers on a page. This is hurting our economy.

Everyone in this Chamber will remember that when the American credit rating was downgraded in the summer of 2011—in the aftermath of the discussion about the debt ceiling limitation—the reason cited for the downgrade was not that the mechanics of the deal were bad; instead, our credit was downgraded because of the perception that legislators were engaging in foolish behavior and threatening to repudiate American debt instead of focusing upon their jobs and trying to do the right thing for the economy.

It was legislative gimmickry, not the details of the deal, that caused us to have a bond rating downgrade for the first time in the history of the United States. It hurts the economy when we elevate legislative gimmickry above doing the Nation's business, especially on matters such as the budget.

There are some signs of economic progress these days. The unemployment rate is moving down, the stock market is moving up, the deficit projections going forward are moving down, but we know we have a long way to go. There is more work to be done, and finding a budget deal that addresses the components which Senator WARNER mentioned is one of the factors that can create confidence to additionally accelerate the economy.

A budget deal will provide an additional acceleration to the economy. I have to ask the question: Is that what people are truly worried about? Are they worried about doing the budget deal that will accelerate the economy because it might not work to their particular political advantage? That is the concern I have; otherwise, why wouldn't they be true to the cause they have had for the past few years to actually have a conference and find a deal?

This is not only hurting the economy, this is hurting defense. The hearing I had earlier with Senator KING was the hearing of the Seapower Subcommittee of Armed Services. In that hearing we talked about the effect on the Nation's security and on our defense that is being visited upon us as we are going through budgetary challenges, including the sequester.

We talked about the effect of the sequester on what the witnesses called the platform, the shipbuilding, and the assets we need to keep us safe in a challenging world. We talked about these budget crises and how they hurt our planning. Because instead of planning in a forward-looking way, we are tying up all of our planning time to meet one self-imposed crisis after the next. We talked about the effect on readiness. Because of the sequester, one-third of the air combat command units in this country are standing down at a time when we may well need them today or tomorrow.

Finally, and most important, we talked about the effect of this budgetary uncertainty on our people, whether it is civilians being fur-

loughed, whether it is private sector ship repairers getting warning notices because the ship repairing accounts cannot be done consistent with the sequester. This also affects people who are trying to make a decision about whether they want to make the military a career, and they look at Congress's unwillingness to provide budgetary certainty so they may decide maybe it is not the best thing to do right now.

Whether it is our platform, whether it is our readiness, whether it is our planning or whether it is our people, this sequester and these budgetary challenges and crises are hurting our ability to defend our Nation at the very time when the world is not getting simpler or safer but it is getting more challenging.

Many of my colleagues came from a joint session this morning with the President of South Korea, who is visiting at a time of incredible concern because of Northern Korea's nuclear ambitions that will call upon us, the United States—just as with so many other challenges around the world—to have a well-planned and well-financed defense of the Nation.

I join Senator WARNER in expressing disappointment. We passed this budget. We passed it 46 days ago. We were here until 5 in the morning. We voted on 100 amendments. Everyone had a chance to have their say and have their vote. Guess what. After our conference, they will have a chance to have their say and vote again. They will have a chance to express their opinions.

I urge my colleagues to rethink their position and allow this budget to move into conference so we can do the business of the United States of America.

I thank the Presiding Officer and yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. COONS). The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I wish to thank my budget colleagues who are here with me today. They have spent many hours putting together a budget and coming to the floor with all of the Senate to work on over 100 amendments way into the middle of the night in order to get a budget passed. We are all here ready because we came to the Senate—to this Congress—to solve problems. We decided, as a committee and as a Democratic caucus, it is very important we move forward on a budget.

We want to solve this problem so we can get back to regular order so our country—businesses, communities, and everyone—knows where our priorities are and what path we are on so we can bring some certainty to this country again.

It is so disappointing to me that four times now the Republicans have objected to us now taking the necessary next step, which is to work together with our House colleagues, find a compromise, and move forward. We are working for certainty. It is disappointing to me that those on the

other side of the aisle—and we all remember they spent month after month and had chart after chart on the floor telling us we had not passed a budget, we need to go to regular order—are now saying: No. No regular order, no budget, no process, no certainty, no conclusion to this very important problem on which we have all come together to work. This is disturbing for a number of reasons, and my colleagues have talked about it.

We have constituents at home—whether it is a business, a school, delivering Meals On Wheels, planning their military operations for the next year, as well as the agricultural industry—wondering what their plan is for the future. What they are being told—now for the fourth time in a row—by the Republicans in the Senate is: We are not going to give you any certainty. We like to live with uncertainty.

There is no doubt that moving to conference is not going to be easy; solving this problem is not going to be easy. I want our colleagues to know what I have consistently heard from the Democratic side is that we understand the word “compromise.” We know that in order to solve this huge problem, we have to come to the table and compromise and listen to the other side.

We cannot do this in the dead of night. We cannot do it with a couple of people sitting in a room. That has been done before, and it doesn't work. We need to have regular order, and we need to have this process out in the open. We need to have the American people hear what the different sides say, and then we are all going to have to take some tough votes.

I can assure the American people that on this side we understand what it means to take tough votes and we understand the word “compromise” and the need to get our country back on track.

As the Senator from Virginia said, we need to show the country that democracy can work. We are willing to take that step to make it work, and I urge our Republican colleagues to step forward and allow us to make that move. Do not object to us trying to solve problems because that is what is happening.

I urge our Republican colleagues—and the House as well—to move to conference so we can have a debate and discussion on this deeply urgent matter for our country.

I thank the Presiding Officer and yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, first, I wish to thank the chair of our Budget Committee for doing such a terrific job in bringing us all together. I wish to thank my colleagues on the committee. We worked very hard together in order to be able to put together a balanced budget that reflects the values of the American people. It is fair

and balanced in values as well as in numbers, and we did that 46 days ago.

So we passed that 46 days ago after hearing for over 3 years about how the Senate had not passed a budget. By the way, we did pass a law—this is a caveat—called the Budget Control Act which actually had done the same thing as a budget. Those of us who were on the ballot this last time heard that over and over from our opponents.

So I am stunned that we would now be 46 days—and counting—into a situation where we have been trying to take the budget we passed by a majority vote—by the way, this passed on a majority vote. Each one of us ran for election, and we can win by one vote, and that is the majority. Decisions are made by a majority vote.

We went through 110 amendments. We were here all hours of the night. There were a lot of tired faces by the time we got done, but we got it done, and we made the commitment we were going to get a budget done.

The House did a budget—a very different budget, no question about it. There is no question we have a very different vision of the country. The budget in the House eliminates Medicare as an insurance plan. That is certainly not something I or the majority here would support. We rejected that approach, but that was in their budget. They have a right to put forward their vision for how things should be done.

There were many differences in values and perspectives, and that is what the Democratic process is all about. So we passed a budget by a majority and they passed a budget by a majority. The next step is to negotiate and come up with a final budget. That is the next step, and that is how the process works. We have different views, different perspectives, and then we sit down in something called a conference committee.

We cannot get to that next step. We have had 46 days of trying to get to a point to get it done by working with the House, and all we get is objection after objection after objection. I appreciate that colleagues on the other side of the aisle who have voted for similar budgets to the Ryan Republican budget would have preferred if we would have eliminated Medicare. We didn't do that, and we are not going to do that.

The majority here said we are putting forward a budget that is going to move the country forward and address the deficit and reflect the values around education and innovation and outbuilding the competition in a global economy. We are putting forward our vision. The House has their vision, which cuts innovation and cuts education and does not allow us to build.

We have very different visions. The Democracy we have says: We take both of those visions and then we sit down and try to figure something out. That is the next step.

We are not interested in just being on the floor and counting the days, although we will be on the floor and

counting the days. That is not how we want to spend our time. We would rather spend our time listening to our colleagues in a respectful way about very different visions and very different values so we can find a way—if we can—to come together. We need to come together so we can tackle the last part of deficit reduction.

We have gone about \$2.5 trillion toward the \$4 trillion that everyone says we need to do to begin to turn the corner as it relates to the economy and the deficit. In order to get the rest of it, we need to sit down in a room together and figure it out.

We are going to continue to come to the floor and ask for an agreement. Unfortunately, if there is an objection, we have to go through the whole process of trying to get it done. We are going to keep pushing and pushing until we can get a budget done.

Why is this so important? It is very important because in our bill we stop what everyone feels is a very crazy approach to the final step in deficit reduction, which is to have across-the-board—regardless of value, importance or impact—cuts in the investments and in the discretionary budget of our country.

We know there needs to be spending reductions. We have voted for them. We have already put in place about \$2.5 trillion in deficit reduction, and right now about 70 percent of that has been in spending reductions.

The concern that I have and that others in the majority have is that most of those have fallen right in the laps of the middle class, our children, the future through innovation, and seniors. We have said in our budget: No more. No more. We have to look at an approach that is balanced and that says to those who are the wealthiest in our country, who are the most blessed economically: You have to be a part of the solution in a significant way.

We want to look at spending under the Tax Code. How many times do we talk about special deals in the Tax Code, things that don't make sense in terms of spending, special deals that support jobs going overseas rather than keeping them here at home. There is spending in the Tax Code that needs to be addressed so it is more fair for American businesses, for small businesses, for families, for the future of the country. Our budget does that by saying we are going to tackle spending in the Tax Code, we are going to tackle the question of fairness in the code and asking those who are the wealthiest among us to contribute a little bit more to be able to help pay down this deficit, not just cutting Meals On Wheels or Head Start or cancer research, which is what is happening right now.

So the intensity we feel about getting this budget done is to be able to stop the things happening now that are very harmful. We saw the lines at the airports. We don't as readily see the lines of people who can no longer par-

ticipate, such as people I know, in cancer research efforts that may save lives. We know there is incredibly important research going on in science, in medicine, in agriculture, including food safety and pest and disease control and every area of research where our country, the United States of America, has led the world. And that doesn't show up in lines at the airport, but it does show up in the future of our country. It does show up in the lives of someone who has Alzheimer's or Parkinson's disease or breast cancer or other diseases where we are this close to cures, where there is treatment going on that can save lives—is saving lives—and it is stopping.

We don't see the seniors who get Meals On Wheels lining up. They are getting one meal a day right now—one meal a day that allows them a little bit of a visit from a volunteer and one meal a day to eat through Meals On Wheels. Now, because of these irrational cuts, we are told there are waiting lists for one meal a day. How do we have a waiting list for one meal a day? I don't get that.

So we are saying we want to fix the airports; we appreciate that. We want to fix the one meal a day going to somebody's grandma who can't figure out what is going on in terms of the priorities of this country. The children who are getting a head start to be successful in school—how many times do we all say: Education, the most important thing; children, the most important thing. But because they don't directly have a voice here, as do a lot of other special interest groups, who gets cut first? Our budget values children and families, opportunity, innovation, fairness, and the ability to grow this economy, to create jobs so everyone has the dignity of work.

We want to get to conference committee. We want to get about the business of negotiating a final budget because we do not accept what is happening right now without a budget. Tackle the deficit, yes. Do it in a way that works for growth in America and jobs, do it in a way that supports families, that lifts our children, that respects our elders, yes. That is the budget we voted for in the Senate and the budget we want to see come to completion in this process. We can't get there unless we can negotiate, and that is what this whole discussion is about.

It has been 46 days since we passed a budget. We are ready to go. We are more than ready to go. Let's sit down in a room and work it out. We know it is a negotiation. We know we have to have give-and-take. But we are blocked right now from even getting in the room, and that is wrong. We are going to keep coming every day, and we are going to keep counting the days until our colleagues on the other side of the aisle decide they are willing to get in the room and get a budget done that works for the growth and the families of our country.

Thank you, Mr. President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

Mr. KING. Mr. President, this discussion, this debate isn't about budgets. It is not about deficits. It is about governing. That is the fundamental question that is before this body. It is about governing.

I rise surprised and disappointed. I expected to come here and debate issues. Instead, we are debating debating. We are having to argue and debate about the very act of getting to talk about these issues. And the problem with the economy of this country right now, to my mind, is very largely attributable to the uncertainty about whether the government in Washington is competent. It is the uncertainty that is killing us.

A reporter asked me this last week in Maine: What do you think you can do in Washington to help us create jobs?

My immediate answer was that the most important thing we can do is pass a budget in a kind of rational process, in the normal way it has been done for 200 years, and show the country we can govern. What is in the budget is less important than whether we can do it at all. That is why I am so surprised and disappointed to have come to this impasse where we can't even get to the point of negotiating with the majority about the budget in the other body. It makes me wonder if the Members on the opposite side of the aisle in the Senate lack so much confidence in their colleagues in the House that they don't think they can hold the line on whatever issues they believe are important.

These two budgets are very different, but I think there are items of value in both, and I can see the outlines of a compromise. We need deficit reduction. We need to clean up the Tax Code. We need a tax rate reduction as part of cleaning up the Tax Code. We need to make investments in the future of this country. But the idea that we can't even get to talk—I, frankly, am perplexed. I don't understand what the strategy is because when I was running last year and when I was in Maine just last week, the single question I got more than anything else was, why in the heck can't you people do something down there—only they stated it a little less elegantly than I just did. Why can't you get anything done?

The question that was raised in the hearing this morning was from people in the street: We are having a hard time understanding what is happening and why.

Well, I am a U.S. Senator, and I am having a hard time understanding what is happening and why.

Budgeting is one of the most fundamental obligations of government. I was a Governor. I know about putting budgets together. I know about making choices. It is not easy. It is not going to be easy to make the choices required for this budget. It is going to be very difficult, but that is what we were sent here to do. That is our job. That is our

obligation to the American people. I believe there are areas of consensus and there are some areas in the House budget that I think are ideas worth considering.

The American people simply want us to act. Sure, everybody in this body has different views, and they are partisan views, but as somebody who was sent down here explicitly to try to make the place work—I think that was why I was elected as an Independent, because people are so frustrated with this warfare that they don't understand and that doesn't contribute to the welfare of the country.

So I hope, from the point of view of someone who sees values on both sides and believes that the only way we are going to solve these problems is by discussion and, yes, by compromise, that is what we move forward toward. That is what we have to do in order to regain the confidence of the American people.

We have a long way to go, but I believe that if we can move in a regular, orderly way to go to conference, which is what my civics book always told me we are supposed to do next—the House passes a bill, the Senate passes a bill, they have differences, they go to conference, they resolve the differences, both Houses then vote, and it goes to the President. That is the way the system was designed. If we could do that, almost regardless of what the content of the budget is, that in itself would electrify the country. It would be so remarkable, and people would say: Oh, now they are finally doing something.

So I hope my colleagues on the other side will decide to engage, to allow the conference to go forward with Members of both parties who go over to the House and sit down and try to work something out. We all know what the issues are. We all know what the amounts are. We all know what the dollars are.

I believe that people who enter a room in good faith could solve this in about an afternoon if they left their ideological blinders at the door. I believe there are solutions to be had, and we have a responsibility to find them. But today we can't even begin to talk about it, and that is what is so puzzling to the American people. That is what is puzzling to me. I don't understand what is wrong with debating, what is wrong with working on the problem. And to just say: Oh, well, we can't do it; the sequester is going to be with us, and it is going to be with us for another couple of years—I think that doesn't meet our fundamental responsibility as people who came here to govern.

We all know there was something passed last year about no budget, no pay. Well, unfortunately, it only said that if you pass a budget in the House, they get it, and if you pass a budget—well, we have done that. It should have been no budget that finally gets done, no pay, because now we are just stuck at an impasse.

I don't know what the outcome of the negotiations would be. I am not sure I would like them. But I believe the real task before us today is not budgets and deficits. The question before us is, Is this experiment in democracy that is an aberration in world history, is it still working? Are we able to make this idea work in the 21st century and meet the challenges of this country? It seems to me the only way to begin that process is to talk and debate and argue and work through the process the Framers gave us in order to solve the problems of the country.

I hope that before long we will reach a point where all of us can agree in this body that it is time to go to work on trying to bring a budget back to both Houses that we can all support and move this country forward. The act of at least coming up with a solution—not a perfect solution but a solution—would be the most important gift we could provide today to the people of this country.

Thank you, Mr. President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican whip.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, a few weeks ago the chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, Senator BAUCUS of Montana, warned that the President's premier domestic legislative accomplishment—ObamaCare—was turning into a huge train wreck. Now, that is pretty remarkable for a number of reasons, one of which is that Senator BAUCUS was one of the principal authors of ObamaCare. So his comments cannot be dismissed as simply partisan rhetoric or politics as usual.

A few days after he made those comments, another important contributor to ObamaCare, Dr. Zeke Emanuel, brother of Rahm Emanuel, the President's former Chief of Staff, acknowledged that the massive uncertainty generated by the health care law is already causing insurance premiums to go up. Here is the scary part: ObamaCare hasn't actually been fully implemented and won't be until next year, 2014. So when it does take effect in 2014, we can expect insurance premiums to continue to rise, particularly for young people who are being asked once again to subsidize their elders, this time in the context of health care premiums.

So much for the President's promise that the average family of four would see a reduction in their insurance premiums under his premier health care law by \$2,500. That is right. If people remember, the President said: If you like what you have, you can keep it, which is proving not to be true as employers are going to be shedding the employer-provided coverage and dropping their employees into the exchange. He also said the average family of four would see a reduction in their health care costs of \$2,500. Neither one of these is proving to be true.

It gets worse from there. According to a new study, there is a new tax that

was created by ObamaCare on insurance premiums. So we have to pay a tax on our insurance premiums too, which will reduce private sector employment anywhere from 146,000 jobs to 262,000 jobs by the year 2022. And, of course, the majority of those jobs will be in small businesses. It is not surprising, since small businesses are actually the engine of job creation in America, that they will be disproportionately hit.

To make matters worse, ObamaCare's looming employer regulations are already prompting businesses to lay off workers, to reduce their working hours, and transform many full-time jobs into part-time jobs just so they can avoid the penalties and the sanctions in ObamaCare for employers.

Last month alone the number of Americans doing part-time work "because their hours had been cut back or because they were unable to find a full-time job" increased by 278,000—more than a quarter million Americans. Indeed, the total number of involuntary part-time workers was higher in April 2013 than it was in April 2012, just a year before.

So the message for President Obama could not be any more obvious: His signature domestic legislative initiative is driving up health care costs, destroying jobs, and damaging our economic recovery. That is why it is so important we repeal this law, which I will grant the President his best intentions but in practice has shown to be the opposite of what he promised in so many different instances.

But the consequences on long-term unemployment are what most people will feel; and that is the story of a very human tragedy for many people, some of whom have just simply given up looking for work. In fact, the Bureau of Labor Statistics has something called the labor participation rate. You can search it on the Internet. Look under "labor participation rate." It will reveal that the percentage of Americans actually in the workforce and looking for work is at a 30-year low.

What that means is some people have simply given up. We all know the longer you are out of work, the harder it is to find a job because your skills have gotten rusty. Others may, in fact, be more qualified to get a job opening if one presents itself.

I cannot imagine the pain and frustration felt by millions of Americans who have been jobless for more than half a year. That is a long time. Unfortunately, the President does not seem to have an answer to this unemployment crisis—and that is exactly what it is—other than more taxes, after he got \$620 billion in January as a result of the fiscal cliff negotiations, the expiration of temporary tax provisions. The President seems to believe more spending—even after his failed stimulus of a \$1 trillion, which ratcheted up the debt even more—and more regulations is the answer to the unemployment crisis: more taxes, more spending, more regulations.

Since the President has taken office, he has raised taxes by \$1.7 trillion already. That includes the \$620 billion I just mentioned—but \$1.7 trillion. His policies have increased our national debt by \$6.2 trillion. He has added another \$518 billion worth of costly new regulations on the very people we are depending on to create the jobs and provide employment opportunities. The consequence is the longest period of high unemployment since the Great Depression.

Now for some good news: Tomorrow the President is traveling to Texas, to the city of Austin where my family and I live. According to *Forbes* magazine, Austin is one of America's 10 Best Cities for Good Jobs. In fact, half of the top 10 Best Cities for Good Jobs in America include Dallas, Fort Worth, Houston, and San Antonio. So, yes, I am bragging. But we must be doing something right, and I hope the President goes with an open mind to try to learn what is the cause of the Texas miracle when it comes to job creation and economic growth.

Let me just point out that for 8 consecutive years Texas has been ranked as the best State for business by *Chief Executive* magazine. That explains why between 2002 and 2011 Texas accounted for almost one-third of all private sector job growth in America—one-third—many of these in high-paying industries. I know we like the claim about being big, but we are only 8 percent of the population, and we accounted for one-third of all of the U.S. private sector job growth between 2002 and 2011.

Now, there is not a secret sauce or a secret formula. It is pretty clear why we have enjoyed that sort of job growth in America, and it is something I think the rest of the country could learn. It is low taxes on the very people we are depending upon to create jobs; it is limited government; it is the belief in the free enterprise system as the best pathway to achieve the American dream; and it is sensible regulations.

We also believe in taking advantage of the abundant natural resources we have in our State and using those resources to expand the domestic energy supply, to bring down costs for consumers, and to create jobs in the process.

I was recently in the Permian Basin—that is the Midland-Odessa region, as the Presiding Officer knows. This is an area that since 1920 has been one of the most prolific energy-producing regions of our State and the country. But because of new drilling technology—horizontal drilling and fracking—it is anticipated that from this point forward that region will produce as much as it has since 1920. That is amazing. That is something we ought to be very excited about, and it has created a lot of jobs.

The nominal unemployment rate in the Permian Basin is about 3.2 percent. But employers will tell you they are hiring everybody they can get their hands on. Some of these folks have had

problems in the past that might otherwise disqualify them for work, but as one employer told me: There is nothing like a job to provide an opportunity for people to rehabilitate themselves and get themselves on the right track.

Well, President Obama's policies, in contrast to what we are seeing in Texas, seem to send the message that only Washington knows how to revive our economy, and by raising taxes and spending more money we do not have to boot. In other words, with all due respect to my colleagues from the west coast, he favors the California model. Unfortunately, that model has not worked too well for even our friends in California, and it will not work well for the rest of America either.

By comparison, in that laboratory of democracy known as the State of Texas, our State has become a powerhouse for job creation, and it would go a long way to restoring the fiscal and economic health of the United States. Yes it would help those people who have been unemployed for 6 months or more, or even a shorter period of time, find work that will help them regain their sense of dignity and productivity and allow them to provide for their families, which is a goal I know we all share.

NOMINATION OF THOMAS PEREZ

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, on another matter—but it is an important matter—I want to share a few words and a few observations about the President's nominee to be the Secretary of the Department of Labor, who is currently serving in the Justice Department. I am talking about Assistant Attorney General Thomas Perez.

Of course, we know the Department of Labor plays a very significant role in our economic policy and even U.S. immigration policy, which is a very controversial topic that we are just getting to take up tomorrow in the Senate Judiciary Committee, of which I am a member.

During his tenure at the Justice Department, Mr. Perez has been in charge of the Civil Rights Division, which includes the Voting Section—obviously, a very important responsibility, but one that ought to eschew politics. Unfortunately, under his watch as head of the Civil Rights Division and Voting Section, that section has compiled a disturbing record of political discrimination and selective enforcement of our laws—something antithetical to what we consider to be one of the best things we have going for us in America, which is the rule of law: that all of us, no matter who we are, are subject to the same rules and play by those rules.

You do not have to take my word for it—how the Voting Section and the Civil Rights Division have gotten dangerously off track under Mr. Perez's leadership. The Department of Justice inspector general published a 258-page report that said the Voting Section

under Mr. Perez's leadership had become so politicized and so unprofessional that at times it became simply dysfunctional, it could not function properly.

This 258-page report by the Department of Justice inspector general cited "deep ideological polarization," which began under his predecessors and which has continued under Mr. Perez's leadership. The inspector general said this polarization "has at times been a significant impediment to the operation of the Section and has exacerbated the potential appearance of politicized decision-making."

This is at the Department of Justice. So instead of upholding and enforcing all laws equally, the Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division—the Voting Section—under Mr. Perez, has launched politically motivated campaigns against commonsense constitutional laws, such as the voter ID laws adopted by the States of Texas and South Carolina.

In addition, he delivered misleading testimony to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights back in 2010. The inspector general said Mr. Perez's testimony about a prominent voting rights case "did not reflect the entire story regarding the involvement of political appointees." So when you are not telling the whole truth, you are not telling the truth.

Before joining the Department of Justice—and this is part of his unfortunate track record—he served as a local official in Montgomery County, MD. During those years, he consistently opposed the proper enforcement of our immigration laws. In fact, Mr. Perez testified against enforcement measures that were being considered by the Maryland State Legislature.

I would ask my colleagues, because we have an important function to play under our constitutional system, one of advice and consent—that is the confirmation process for Presidential nominees—is this really the type of person we want running the Department of Labor, especially at a time when Congress is contemplating passage of important immigration reform laws?

Given his record, I am concerned Mr. Perez does not have the temperament or the competence we need in our Secretary of the Department of Labor. I fear that, just like he has at the Department of Justice, he would invariably politicize the Department of Labor and impose ideological litmus tests. For all these reasons, and more, I will oppose his nomination.

Mr. President, I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. HARKIN. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BROWN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

NOMINATION OF THOMAS PEREZ

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, I come to the floor today to express my deep disappointment that once again Republican obstructionism and procedural tricks are preventing this body from carrying out its constitutional duty and responsibility, its obligation to consider important Presidential nominations.

This time the target is Mr. Tom Perez, the President's extremely qualified nominee to be Secretary of Labor.

The HELP Committee, which I chair, was scheduled to vote on his nomination at 4 o'clock this afternoon. Obviously, we are not doing that. An anonymous Republican has invoked an obscure procedural rule to prevent our committee from meeting at that scheduled time. This pointless obstructionism is extremely disturbing.

I would like to point out that we had previously been scheduled to vote on his nomination in my committee 2 weeks ago. In an effort to bend over backwards and to be accommodating to our colleagues who requested more time to consider documents related to the nomination, I deferred it for 2 weeks as sort of senatorial courtesy.

This time there is no allegation that they have had insufficient time for consideration, just delay for delay's sake on the nomination. Tom Perez has been before our committee since March. We have had our hearing, during which Mr. Perez fully answered all questions posed to him. I cut off no one. I allowed anyone to ask whatever questions they wanted.

Mr. Perez has met with any interested Senator personally and answered over 200 written questions for the record. It is an understatement to say his nomination has been thoroughly vetted. This continuing delay is unconscionable and only hurts the American workers and businesses that rely on the Department of Labor each and every day.

As our country continues to move down the road to economic recovery, the work of the Department of Labor is becoming even more vital to the lives of our working families. Whether it is making sure workers get paid the wages they deserve, helping returning veterans reenter the workforce, protecting our seniors' retirement nest eggs, ensuring that a new mother can care for her baby without losing her job, the Department of Labor helps families build the cornerstones of a middle-class life.

Now more than ever we need strong leadership at the Department to help strengthen our fragile recovery and build a stronger and revitalized American middle class. That is why this nomination is so important.

There has been a lot of public discussion about Mr. Perez but remarkably little of it has focused on what should

be the central question before our committee today: Will Tom Perez be a good Secretary of Labor. The answer is unequivocally yes. Without question, he has the knowledge and experience needed to guide this critically important agency.

Through his professional experiences, and especially his work as Secretary of the Maryland Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation, he has developed strong policy expertise about the many important issues for American workers and businesses that come before the Department of Labor every day. He spearheaded major initiatives on potentially controversial issues, such as unemployment insurance reform and worker misclassification, while finding common ground between workers and businesses to build sensible, commonsense solutions.

He also clearly has the management skills to run a large Federal agency effectively. He was also an effective manager and a responsible steward of public resources, undertaking significant administrative and organizational reforms that made the Maryland DLR more efficient and more effective.

His outstanding work in Maryland has won him the support of the business community and worker advocates alike. To quote from the endorsement letter of the Maryland Chamber of Commerce:

Mr. Perez proved himself to be a pragmatic public official who was willing to bring differing voices together. The Maryland Chamber had the opportunity to work with Mr. Perez on an array of issues of importance to employers in Maryland, from unemployment and workforce development to the housing and foreclosure crisis. Despite differences of opinion, Mr. Perez was always willing to allow all parties to be heard, and we found him to be fair and collaborative. I believe that our experiences with him here in Maryland bode well for the nation. That is a pretty strong endorsement by a chamber of commerce for a nominee whom the minority leader today on the floor characterized as a "crusading ideologue . . . willing to do or say anything to achieve his ideological ends." That is how he was characterized by the Republican leader today, but the Maryland Chamber of Commerce didn't seem to think so. So that grossly unfair characterization by the Republican leader is manifestly inconsistent with the experiences of the Republican leaders and businesses that have actually worked with Tom Perez.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD letters from businesses and Republican leaders demonstrating the strong bipartisan support for Mr. Perez's nomination. These people clearly disagree with the Republican leader's assessment of Mr. Perez's qualifications and character.

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

MARCH 19, 2013.

JOINT STATEMENT FROM STATE ATTORNEYS GENERAL IN SUPPORT OF NOMINATION OF TOM PEREZ AS SECRETARY OF U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

"Tom Perez is a brilliant lawyer and leader, who listens thoughtfully to all sides and