

complete action on the bill. If no agreement is reached, there will be a cloture vote at noon today.

THE BUDGET

Mr. REID. Madam President, on Thursday Speaker BOEHNER said a remarkable thing. He said: We can't cut our way to prosperity. It was good to hear him speaking candidly, for that is what Democrats have been saying for years—we cannot cut our way to prosperity. It is important that we have done some cutting. That is very important. And we are proud of the work we have done. To this point, we have cut more than \$2½ trillion.

But it will take more than meat-ax budget cuts to keep our economy on the path to full recovery. To protect our economic growth, it will take a balanced approach, one that couples smart spending cuts with investments in our future and some new revenue from closing these wasteful loopholes I have spoken about to members of the Finance Committee in my caucus on many occasions. Nothing could be further from that balanced policy than the so-called sequester. As long as the sequester's harmful across-the-board cuts remain in effect, our economy is in jeopardy. And as long as Republicans refuse to go to conference on the budget and work out our differences, the sequester will remain in effect.

It has now been 52 days since the Senate passed its budget. Why are Republicans standing in the way? We have talked about that for weeks. We need to move forward and pass a budget that encourages economic expansion by investing in what makes America strong while cutting the deficit.

After years—years—of calling for regular order, after years of demanding the Senate pass a budget, I expected Republicans to embrace this process, but I couldn't have been more wrong. Republicans have objected to a conference half a dozen times and counting. It is obvious they are delaying for one nakedly partisan reason: They hope to delay compromise long enough to create another manufactured crisis, as the Nation once again approaches the debt limit.

The debt ceiling is something we used to just move past. The elephant never forgets, but Republicans obviously don't follow their mascot—the elephant—as they have a very short memory. Elephants don't, but the Republican Party does. They should remember the political pain they inflicted upon themselves—the Republicans—and our country over the last 2 years, in part by driving the country from one manufactured crisis to the next.

It is astonishing that Republicans would once again—as they did in the House last week—pass a bill to hold the full faith and credit of the U.S. Government hostage, if only because it is so bad for their political brand. But it is also bad for our country. The last time

Republicans drove us to the brink of default, it cost the United States its pristine credit rating, and it cost the economy billions of dollars.

When I talk about Republicans, I am not speaking about Republicans generically—that is, Republicans around the country—because many Republicans, if not most, agree these manufactured crises are a waste of time and not good for our country. I am talking about and directing my attention to the Republicans in the Congress because they do not, obviously, agree with the Republicans around the country.

I hope my Republican colleagues will not take their partisan ploy as far as they did in the past. It is time to embrace regular order. It is time to get away from last-minute negotiations and short-term fixes. It is time to engage in a responsible budget process. The budget process is the only way to work through our differences without bringing the country to the verge of another artificial crisis.

Americans are tired of bitter battles over whether the Federal Government should pay the bills it has incurred. That is what we have done. We have incurred these bills, and we have to pay them. We have made purchases on credit. Americans know, as Democrats do, that Congress won't set sound fiscal policy during last-minute negotiations and Congress won't set sound fiscal policy through extortion or hostage-taking.

The Secretary of Defense is going to announce later today that 800,000 civilian employees at the Defense Department are going to get furloughs. The decision is how long it is going to be. He hopes he can make it 11 days, but probably it will be 2 weeks. That may not sound like much, but for somebody who is on a budget, a personal budget, depending on their wages, to suddenly hear that during the time until September 1 they are going to be furloughed, that they are not going to get paid for 14 days, that is a significant amount of money and can wreak havoc with their personal budget.

What this sequestration is doing is setting bad fiscal policy. It can't happen. We have to compromise. We won't set sound fiscal policy without sitting down and finding common ground between the Republican priorities and the Democratic priorities in this Congress. Passing the budget would clarify each side's values. We did that. We had a vote-athon here determining what Republicans wanted to do and what Democrats wanted to do. We finished at 5 o'clock in the morning. We thought that was a good step toward compromise, but we were wrong.

Republicans will not move forward. We have waited 52 days. The next step is to name conferees, and that will only be a first step. After conferees are named, we have to make sure they meet and work things out. Right now, Republicans are the only party standing in the way of progress in getting rid of this sequestration. If my Repub-

lican colleagues are serious about reducing the deficit and charting a course for economic growth, they should stop waiting around for another crisis and start working with Democrats today.

Finally, again, it has been 52 days since the Senate passed this bill. We need Republicans to follow regular order and move to a conference.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

IRS ACTIVITIES

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, over the past few days we have heard many in the media talk about how this has been a "rough week" for the administration. That is because it has been a worse week for the First Amendment.

On Friday we learned that—just as we had been told by our constituents—the IRS deliberately targeted conservative groups across the country in the midst of a heated national election. Over the weekend we learned that the extent of it was even broader—even broader—than we originally thought. Then this morning we all learned the targeting wasn't limited to an IRS office out of Cincinnati, as the administration suggested last week, but that it reached all the way to the IRS headquarters right here in Washington.

What we don't know at this point is whether it jumped the fence from the IRS to the White House. But we do know this: We can't count on the administration to be forthcoming about the details of this scandal because so far they have been anything but. So this morning I am calling on the President to make available completely and without restriction everyone—everyone—who can answer the questions we have as to what has been going on at the IRS, who knew about it, and how high it went—no stonewalling, no more incomplete answers, no more misleading responses, no holding back witnesses no matter how senior their current or former positions. We need full transparency and we need full cooperation.

The American people deserve answers. The answers the IRS has now owned up to and that were uncovered by their own inspector general are an outrage—an absolute outrage. We now know the IRS targeted groups for using such terminology as—get this—"we the people" and for educating folks about the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

I mean, you can't make this stuff up. What is also clear is that government officials repeatedly failed to own up to what they knew was going on—when it turns out they'd known about it since at least the middle of 2011.

So the IRS knew what was happening—yet they continued to give us

assurances that they were applying the tax rules in a fair and impartial way.

Despite repeated assurances from the Obama administration that it was not targeting its political enemies through the IRS during the last election cycle, we have now learned that the IRS was in fact singling out conservative groups—groups who dared to speak up and express their First Amendment rights.

Let's recap what happened.

Last March, after receiving multiple claims of unusual harassment by the IRS from constituents who wanted to form tax-exempt political organizations, I and several of my colleagues sent a letter to then-IRS Commissioner Shulman questioning selective enforcement on tax exempt organizations.

Now, we learn, according to the IRS' own Inspector General, that the IRS was well aware that this selective treatment was happening at the time our letter was sent, and in fact had already acted to correct what they later called "inappropriate" behavior.

But there was no mention of that in the IRS initial response.

Nor was there any mention of this behavior, which was by that time well-known within the agency, in a second letter sent back to us in September 2012.

We had to wait several more months—to wait for a special investigator's report that Republicans demanded—in order to find out the truth of what was actually happening at the IRS.

In the coming days we'll learn more, and we'll start getting answers to questions like: Was the IRS deliberately misleading Republican Senators, or was it betraying profound incompetence? But, as I said, the fact is, none of this would have come out if we'd relied on the administration's own word and Republicans had not demanded the truth.

Clearly, we've only started to scratch the surface of this scandal.

The American people are looking for answers, and I am determined to help them get to the bottom of this.

Last June, I gave a very public speech in which I called out the Obama administration for serial abuses of government power in going after its political enemies in the middle of a heated national election. The left scoffed at the suggestion. The Washington Post said my speech was full of "red herrings." The New York Times called my argument "bogus". Robert Reich called it "bonkers."

Well, you know what we learned last week: these abuses were even more widespread than we knew.

So it is good to see even some of my Democrat colleagues now criticizing the IRS for such blatant and thuggish abuse of power. It is preferable to the silence—or, worse, encouragement—they have demonstrated in the past.

The Chairman of the Finance Committee was correct in referring to the IRS' actions as an "outrageous abuse

of power and a breach of the public's trust." He's vowed to "get to the bottom" of what happened, and he's promised that his committee will hold hearings on all this. Those hearings should be tough, and they should aim to bring the truth to light. But our Democrat friends should also acknowledge their role in inculcating this culture of intimidation, due to repeated calls for increased IRS scrutiny of groups like the very ones that were targeted.

We owe it to all Americans to get to the bottom of this scandal, hold those responsible accountable, and put the proper safeguards in place for moving forward. Because, as the President was correct in noting yesterday, one day a Republican will inhabit the Oval Office. And when he or she does, the left will want to know that they will not be harassed for having the audacity to disagree. That an agency like the IRS will return to its proper role as a completely non-partisan and apolitical institution—not a tool for an administration of one stripe to bully and intimidate those who adhere to another.

But in order for Congress to effectively perform the oversight it needs to do, the administration will have to make everyone who can answer these questions available expeditiously.

We have even more questions today than we did last year, and we are not going to accept more half-baked responses. We want the full truth this time. And we intend to get it. I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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 11 a.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with the time equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees, with the majority controlling the first half.

The Senator from California is recognized.

WATER RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT ACT

Mrs. BOXER. Madam President, pretty soon we are going to go back to the Water Resources Development Act, otherwise known as the WRDA bill. I will comment on that soon. We are making terrific progress. I hope Senators who may hear my voice would understand we would prefer to deal with a number of amendments rather than vote cloture. We have been working with almost—I can't tell you—20 different Senators to try to accommodate them, to either take their amendments, if they are noncontroversial, by

voice or to make sure we can vote on their amendments or have side-by-sides.

The bottom line is it is time now—it is past time—that Senators decide if they want to move this bill forward in an open way with regular order or if they want to avoid these very important amendments that we could vote on and go straight to cloture. I hope we can continue to work through the morning.

THE IRS

Mrs. BOXER. Madam President, there is no room for politics at the IRS. Senator MCCONNELL is right. Senator REID is right. They have both addressed it. The issue is the IRS has to be completely neutral in politics, but they do have to go after organizations and individuals who are not abiding by the rules, whether they are right, left, center or no ideology at all.

I remember during the Bush years we saw the IRS targeting liberal churches. It was awful. They were harassing them and forcing them to show that they were nonprofits. Now we see the IRS has been targeting tea party groups. Whether they are targeting right or left, that is wrong, and anyone doing it, frankly, needs to get another job because that is against the law. We cannot have politically motivated audits or harassing people, whatever their politics may be.

Here is what we do need. We do need a fair IRS that definitely looks at whether organizations, be they left or right, are truly deserving of tax-exempt status—that is important—but not targeting one group or another. We also know the targeting of the tea party groups took place while a Bush appointee was the head of the IRS, probably—perhaps was quite unaware.

The bottom line is people at the top have to be held accountable. I agree with that. He should have known what was going on. But there is no room for this. I do believe there has to be serious action taken at the personnel level; otherwise, people will just go ho-hum.

No, not ho-hum; you cannot use a position to harass people because of their politics, regardless of where their politics may lie.

BENGHAZI

Mrs. BOXER. Madam President, I wish to be heard on the issue of Benghazi. I wrote an op-ed piece on this because I absolutely cannot believe what is happening with our Republican friends on this issue.

As a senior member of the Foreign Relations Committee, I can say I sat through the entire testimony of then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. Not only did she sit for hours, not only was she straight from the heart and straight from the shoulder, she took full responsibility for what went on, and she ordered an independent investigation which was launched by Admiral Mullen and Ambassador Pickering.