

about an al-Qaida-linked attack in Benghazi that cost the lives of four Americans, what else are they willing to prevaricate, mislead, and dissemble about? Can the public trust this administration and its government to provide accurate information about the war on terror or anything else?

Similarly, if IRS officials knew their agency was targeting certain political activity and failed then to hold anyone accountable, how can the American people ever trust the Internal Revenue Service or the Federal Government to be neutral and law abiding?

I heard the junior Senator from Virginia, Senator Kaine, on the radio as I came in this morning. I thought he asked a pretty good question. He said: What does it take to get fired in this town? What does it take to get fired in this administration for coverups and for misleading the American people?

If Secretary Sebelius is willing to strong-arm the very industry she regulates to fund the implementation of ObamaCare, can the American people trust her agency to be objective, evenhanded, and fair-minded as a regulator?

All this boils down to a very sad statistic that demonstrates that the public's confidence in the Federal Government—and particularly in Congress—is at an all-time low.

This is not the end of the story, and it should not be the end of the story. That ought to be the beginning of a bipartisan effort to get to the bottom of these abuses and also to restore ourselves to the constitutional framework our Founding Fathers envisioned when this great experiment of democracy was created more than 200 years ago. It wasn't a national government that dictated to the rest of the country how we should run our lives and what choices we should make; it was a Federal system of separated powers with checks and balances, with authority given to the Federal Government to do things that individuals and the States could not do by themselves, such as national defense. We have gotten far afield from the Framers' vision of how our country should operate or from the constitutional system they created and which we celebrate.

Now, more than ever, Washington needs credibility. If we don't have the public's trust, how in the world will we gain their confidence that we are going to address the many challenges our country faces? I am not pessimistic about our future, I am optimistic about our future, but it will take a change of attitude.

We will need a change of behavior so we can, in some sense, return to the Founders' philosophy on the framework and the structure in which our government operates. The Federal Government has said for too long: We know best; if you don't like it, it is because we have not given you enough information to convince you to like it. We take policies that are unpopular and merely shove them down the throat of the American people and think we are doing our job.

We know we have huge challenges which call on us to work together on a bipartisan basis to regain the public's confidence. I know we can do it. It is a matter of whether we have the political courage and the will to do it.

Here are some of those challenges: The longest period of high unemployment since the Great Depression. We have the largest percentage of the American workforce that simply has given up and quit looking for jobs because the economy is so weak.

The second challenge is a woefully unpopular health care law that even some of the architects of that law now say they see a train wreck occurring in its implementation.

We know our world continues to be dangerous, as Benghazi reminds us, and as we see from murderers, such as Bashar al-Assad in Syria, and people who threaten the innocent. There are people who have chemical weapons. There are people who are fighting for their very lives in places like Syria. Iran is on the pathway to develop a nuclear weapon which will completely disrupt the balance of power in the Middle East and create an arms race, while other countries seek their own nuclear weapons.

Let's not forget Iran was the primary state sponsor of international terrorism with its support for Hezbollah, among others. We have seen in North Africa and elsewhere the proliferation of al-Qaida affiliates and allies. We also need to fix our broken immigration system.

None of these individually are easy things to do. All of them are hard, but they are not impossible if we will try to work hard to regain the public's credibility. We simply need to do our work and respect the wisdom of the ages when it comes to concentration of power and its impact on individual liberty.

We have to be aware of temptations. When power is absolute, we need to see that power is corrupt and be aware of the abuse of that power when it comes to dealing with the American people.

Unfortunately, so far, the Obama administration has valued its agenda more than its credibility. Without regaining credibility, we will never regain the public's trust, and without that trust it will be much harder to solve America's biggest problems. That is the biggest single challenge to President Obama's second-term agenda and to our ability as Americans to show that this 200-plus-year experiment in self-government actually works.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as if in morning business.

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

THE BUDGET

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I am going to take a few minutes to talk

about why the events of the last 24 hours drive home how valuable it would be to have a House-Senate budget conference begin to meet and to deal with the extraordinary set of fiscal challenges our country has in front of us.

As the President of the Senate knows, a number of Senators on our side have been trying to get a budget conference with the House. It has been several months since the budget resolutions in the respective bodies, in effect, have been set in motion. I want to talk about what has happened in the last 24 hours because it again drives home how valuable it would be for the Senate and the House to move to a budget conference at this time.

Yesterday the Congressional Budget Office—of course, our official arbiter of official numbers and trends—made public a new report showing there has been a significant reduction in the budget deficit. In fact, their analysis shows there has been something like a 24-percent reduction from what was estimated a few months ago.

If we couple that new evidence from the Congressional Budget Office with the fact that consumers continue to spend—which is certainly encouraging—the housing market coming back, employers adding 165,000 jobs in April, all of this drives home that in the short term the economy is picking up and we are making real progress.

The point of a budget resolution, on the other hand, is to give us a chance to look long term and look at the next 10 years how Democrats and Republicans can come together, for example, on the long-term challenge of holding down health care costs. We have certainly seen progress in the last few months on that.

There is a debate about why health costs have been moderating of late. I happen to think it is because providers and others are beginning to see what is ahead, but we can have that debate. Certainly there is a lot more to do in terms of holding down health care costs for the long term, and that is what I wish to see the Senate and House go to in terms of the budget resolution.

For example—and I think I have talked about this with the President of the Senate before—chronic care is where most of the Medicare money goes. Chronic care is for people with challenges with heart disease, stroke, and diabetes. We have some ideas we believe could be bipartisan, and would be exactly the kind of thing the House and Senate should take up in a conference on the budget, which we have been seeking for some time.

I only come to the floor today by way of trying to lay out why the events of the last few days dramatize how useful it would be for the Senate and the House to start thinking about what the country cares about, which is our long-term trends.

In fact, this morning I was struck by the fact that some economic theorists

say the Congress has, over the last few months, had it backwards. We have been consumed with everything short term when, in fact, we ought to say: Look at some of those positive developments I just cited—including the Congressional Budget Office numbers here recently—that would indicate maybe a little bit less of the back and forth. That is certainly what voters see as unduly partisan. We need to give way to some thoughtful, long-term efforts in perhaps a 10-year window, which is what is reflected on the budget side.

Some of the leading Republicans and some of the archconservatives with respect to economic analysis are all saying the same thing: We ought to be talking about long-term trends. I, as well as my fellow Democratic colleagues, have said that is one of the reasons for a budget conference. Glenn Hubbard, for example, one of the most respected of the conservatives, talks continually about the long-term challenge and the dangers of waiting.

Well, on this side of the aisle, we are saying we don't want to wait anymore in terms of getting to a budget conference. We want to be in a position to tackle some of these major kinds of questions: pro-growth tax reform—tax reform that can, again, generate revenue, and we have some ideas we would like to raise in a budget conference that we think would be attractive to the other side.

So I hope colleagues who have had questions about whether there ought to be a budget conference now—an actual budget conference between the Senate and the House—will look at these matters anew, given these kinds of trends. I would point out, to tell my colleagues the truth, I am encouraged on this point. We have heard colleagues over the last few days on the other side of the aisle say they too think this is the time for an actual budget conference between the House and the Senate. They have called for it for a long time. We now have a chance to not just call for it but actually do it. If anything, the economic news I have cited suggests some of the focus on these short-term trends ought to give way to more emphasis on bipartisan concern for the long-term trends, which are, in particular, going to revolve around health care, especially Medicare, and taxes where we have an opportunity to look at bipartisan approaches for tax reform.

I commend particularly Senator BAUCUS and Senator HATCH, our leadership on the Finance Committee on which I serve, who have been talking with Senators in weekly sessions they have pulled together on particularly the tax reform issue.

So we couple the opportunity for the long term, looking at things such as chronic health care which is where most of the Medicare dollars go. I think there are some good opportunities for protecting the rights of seniors while having quality care, holding costs down—those are the things we

can look at in the longer term, which is what a budget resolution is all about.

So it has been 2 months since the House and Senate adopted their respective budget resolutions. I think, if anything, what we have learned in the last few days is yet more evidence of why Senators and House Members of good will who want to tackle the long-term economic challenge—which, if anything, becomes increasingly important day by day—ought to go to a budget conference and go forthwith to that effort in a bipartisan way.

Later on today I intend to propound a unanimous consent request to in fact go to that conference with the House on the budget, and I urge colleagues to join me—I know Senator COBURN is here, and I commend him because he has been one who has been interested in tackling long-term fiscal challenges. Long-term fiscal challenges, in a debate between the House and the Senate over the next 10 years and the future trends we are looking at, are going to be front and center. We can tackle those questions, particularly on health care and taxes, by going to a conference, as well as looking at the long term overall. We would also be, in my view, picking up on what economists and leaders in the private sector of both political parties are saying now, which is there should be a little bit less of a focus on short-term sparring about our economy and more of a focus on the long-term economic challenges, which is what a House-Senate budget conference, looking at 10 years ahead, could be all about.

With that, I yield the floor and I note 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. COBURN. 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.

WRDA AMENDMENTS

Mr. COBURN. Mr. President, we are still in morning business, and I will speak in morning business about two amendments I will call up when we leave morning business. One is amendment No. 815 on this bill, which is aimed at lessening State dependence on the Federal Government.

We have now, over the period of 50 years, helped with beach nourishment. In this bill is a section that extends from 50 to 65 years of government subsidization of beach nourishment. Really, if we look at the section, we see it is targeted toward a few States because they are running into the 50-year deadline. So all the amendment does is block it from going from 50 to 65 years.

The Clinton administration, the Bush administration, the Obama administration, the Obama fiscal commission, all

recommended eliminating the Federal subsidization of beach nourishment projects. So we have great bipartisan leadership on both sides of the aisle to bring this back, put back to the States what is truly a State responsibility.

What we are doing in this bill is furthering the dependence of States for beach nourishment projects on the Federal Government. So I will call up that amendment.

The next amendment is amendment No. 816. This committee has done a great job in setting up a review board that can eliminate authorized projects that no longer make sense, but they have limited what they can look at. They are not letting them look at the whole of water resources projects; therefore, they limit those projects. All we are saying with this amendment is we ought to reopen it.

One of the criticisms of this amendment is that a project may be in the midst of completion and the review board might say we should eliminate it. It doesn't mean we will eliminate it because in the wisdom of the committee, they gave the opportunity for Congress to disallow any of this.

So I think what the committee has done is a great step forward in getting rid of projects that are no longer apropos to whatever the needs are: But my question is, Why did they limit it to such a narrow package when, in fact, they want this outside input to help guide us on what we should do?

So at the appropriate time, when we are out of morning business, I will call up those amendments. I will not speak further on them; I will just call them up so we can move ahead with the bill.

I see the chairman of the committee is here. Good morning to her, and I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from California.

Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, for the benefit of all Senators, we are moving forward today. I thank all colleagues on both sides of the aisle. Senator VITTER and I have tried to allow all kinds of amendments.

Unfortunately, yesterday there was an objection to one contentious amendment, and Senator LANDRIEU was—she took one for the team and withdrew her amendment because she wanted to make sure this WRDA bill moves forward. I appreciate that. It is a very important issue about flood issues and it is complicated and I know how strongly she feels about it. I know she will be back. So we have a number of amendments, and we will be debating them for 1 minute on each side.

I wish to address my friend from Oklahoma. Let me tell my colleagues, we have been on opposite sides on his amendments. I don't like that very much. When we do work together we win big; when we don't, then it doesn't work out well for either of us. So I am sorry to say I will have to oppose the two amendments of my friend from Oklahoma, and I want to lay out for the record in a little more than a minute why.