

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.

We do something important in this bill. We create a new infrastructure deauthorization commission to review the backlog of corps projects and develop a list of projects that will be deauthorized unless Congress passes a joint resolution opposing the commission's recommendation. It is kind of like the Base Closure Commission, where the Base Closure Commission comes forward and says these are the bases that will be closed.

It is a very cumbersome process to overturn the commission. We did that on purpose because we know politics plays a part in a lot of these things, and we want the commission to have power. I am sure my friend, the Senator from Oklahoma, is grateful we have set up this commission because what he is trying to do is cut out even more projects.

I just want to make the case that when we did this in the committee, we developed a careful balance and we give the infrastructure deauthorization committee a lot of authority. But this amendment removes the bill's limitations on what projects can be deauthorized. So this is in our bill. This is what we say to the commission. We give guidance to the commission. We say: These are the projects that can be deauthorized; in other words, stopped, because I share the view of my friend from Oklahoma. We don't want to keep projects going that are doomed and not going anywhere. It is a waste of taxpayer dollars and, frankly, it makes it very confusing for people back home because they don't understand why a project started in 1996 is still alive.

What we do is projects authorized or reauthorized after the enactment of the Water Resources Development Act of 1996, projects currently undergoing review by the corps, projects that have received appropriations in the last 10 years, projects that are more than 50 percent complete, and projects that have a viable, non-Federal sponsor would not be deauthorized. They would not be deauthorized.

So let me say it again. Projects that would not be deauthorized are projects authorized after 1996, projects currently undergoing review by the corps, projects that received appropriations in the last 10 years, projects that are more than 50 percent complete, projects that have a viable and non-Federal sponsor. So we do give guidance to the commission. We say other than that, go for it and deauthorize.

The provision Senator COBURN wants to strike was included to focus the attention of the commission on the older, truly inactive projects. That is what we are about. The Coburn amendment would give unlimited discretion to the commission to deauthorize a project even if it is in the middle of construction or it has an active non-Federal sponsor. Imagine we have a city or a county or even a private sector participant who is involved, and all of a sudden everything they have done is for naught.

I think what the amendment does is create havoc. I know my friend has the best of intentions. His point that we can overturn the commission is a valid point, but let's be clear. How many bills actually become a law around here these days? It is hard to even pass a resolution saying Happy Mother's Day. So we have a hard time. So to say the Congress could actually overturn the commission—we have never done it in the Base Closure Commission, and we wouldn't do it here.

States and local communities have invested millions of dollars in local cost-shares from project feasibility studies. It isn't fair to these communities that have committed significant resources to deauthorize a project that remained active and is moving forward.

So, in essence, this amendment would disrupt the new deauthorization process created in WRDA 2013, and I urge my colleagues to oppose that amendment.

Now I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD a letter from the National Construction Alliance. It reads: "The National Construction Alliance strongly opposes the Coburn amendment."

It says: "Communities . . . cannot afford to have the rug pulled out from beneath them."

I think it is important to note that they don't in any way chastise the committee for our work.

We also have opposition from the Road Builders.

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

NATIONAL CONSTRUCTION ALLIANCE II,
May 15, 2013.

Hon. HARRY REID,
Majority Leader, U.S. Senate, Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, DC

DEAR MAJORITY LEADER REID: The National Construction Alliance II (NCA II) strongly opposes the Coburn Amendment #816 to the Water Resources Development Act of 2013, S. 601.

The NCA II—a partnership between two of the nation's leading construction unions, the International Union of Operating Engineers and the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America—appreciates the hard work of the Environment and Public Works Committee to establish the Infrastructure Deauthorization Commission contained in S. 601. Senator Coburn's amendment threatens the bipartisan, thoughtful process and criteria for reviewing the backlog of projects in the underlying bill.

Communities (non-federal entities) simply cannot afford to have the rug pulled out from underneath them when partnering with the Army Corps of Engineers on critical port, harbor or waterway projects. If the commission has broad authority to shut down projects, as envisioned by the Coburn Amendment, that is precisely what could occur.

The bipartisan EPW Committee-reported WRDA bill established criteria to guide the Commission's work and ensure that it focused on inactive and obsolete projects. The Coburn amendment would undermine this careful balance, eliminating important criteria for decommissioning projects and giving the unelected Infrastructure Deauthorization Commission simply too much power

over the process of shutting down projects, with too little Congressional guidance.

Please oppose the Coburn Amendment #816 to the Water Resources Development Act of 2013. The amendment needlessly threatens the bipartisan agreement forged in the Environment and Public Works Committee on the issue of decommissioning of projects.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

RAYMOND J. POUPORE,
Executive Vice President.

Mrs. BOXER. In my concluding moments, we also will have a Coburn amendment on striking section 2030 on the beach nourishment extension. I think it is very important that this be defeated because many of these existing projects provide critical storm damage protection for coastal communities which require periodic nourishment to maintain this protection. There are dozens of important shoreline protection projects around the country that it benefits that exceed the costs.

Hurricane Sandy demonstrated that Federal shoreline protection projects fared better against the storm surge than other areas impacted by the storm. We have seen this. Where there was beach nourishment, they had a lot less damage and people were spared.

So in our work on WRDA, the EPW Committee held hearings on the corps' flood and storm damage reduction projects. We received testimony from local communities such as Ocean City, MD, which highlighted the hundreds of millions of dollars in damages avoided by these projects.

Section 2030 in WRDA 2013 does not provide a blanket extension of all beach nourishment and shore protections. The section simply allows the corps to study projects and to make a recommendation to Congress. I don't know why we would want to stop this since we know, after Hurricane Sandy, some of these projects have cost-benefit for the people—for the taxpayers.

Before receiving an extension, a project has to go through a feasibility analysis to demonstrate that the project is in the national interest, it has to have a positive cost-benefit ratio, is technically feasible, and is environmentally acceptable.

The provision Senator COBURN is attempting to strike doesn't guarantee an extension, it just tells the corps to study the issue and come back with a recommendation.

I honestly believe blocking Federal investment in these projects will harm coastal communities, so I urge my colleagues to oppose this Coburn amendment. I know I speak for many, including Senator LAUTENBERG, who actually brought this issue to my attention years ago.

I yield the floor and note that the time has come to debate the Coburn amendment, 1 minute each side.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.