

Mr. MENENDEZ. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent—it has been agreed to by the Republican side as well—that any time spent during debate time in a quorum call be equally charged against both sides.

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

Mr. MENENDEZ. With that, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MANCHIN). The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

PASSING A BUDGET

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, I rise to speak about taxes, debt, and spending. It is time for President Obama to show real leadership on the biggest threat America faces to our future prosperity. As my good friend the Republican leader has said: If we don't get a handle on spending and debt, not much else matters.

It has now been 1,371 days—almost 4 years—since Democrats, who control the Senate, have brought a budget to the floor and had a vote and passed the budget. Over that time, our national debt has grown by more than \$5.2 trillion. Our credit rating has been downgraded because of fears we may not be able to pay back our debt when it is ultimately due, and we have experienced the longest period of high unemployment since the Great Depression.

Since the end of the official recession in 2009, Americans' median household income has fallen by roughly \$2,500, while the cost of employer-provided family health insurance has increased by more than \$2,300—roughly a comparable amount. Not only has income fallen by \$2,500 but costs have gone up—thanks to ObamaCare—by \$2,300 for the average family.

Until recently, passing a budget was considered not optional. It was considered a basic responsibility under the law. In fact, the Budget Act requires that Congress pass a budget each year, but this law has been defied for almost 4 years in the Senate.

I realize the Democratic leader—the majority leader—has said he did not want to bring a budget to the floor because he did not want to put his Members through a series of politically tough votes.

We cannot get to this problem by dealing with tax increases. This seems to be the preferred method of dealing with our deficits and debt by raising taxes, which, of course, happened as a result of the fiscal cliff negotiations where taxes have gone up on Americans by roughly \$60 billion a year, which will amount to almost \$600 billion over the next 10 years. Nevertheless, the President's budgets continue to ask for more revenue, but the mes-

sage from this side of the aisle has been: The President has gotten his pound of flesh on taxes. Now it is time to deal with spending.

Unfortunately, we no longer have the luxury of delaying our toughest fiscal decisions. Our gross national debt is now larger than our entire economy, and we are now facing more than \$100 trillion in unfunded liabilities for things such as Medicare and Social Security. Those are promises we will not be able to keep unless we act now to put them on a fiscally sustainable path.

I am glad our House colleagues have passed the no budget, no pay bill. I think most Americans appreciate the fact that if Congress doesn't do its basic work such as passing a budget—something every family and every small business in America has to do—then it should not be paid.

That has already prompted Senate Democrats to say they are going to take up a budget this year. Senator MURRAY, chairman of the Budget Committee in the Senate, says she intends to mark up a budget. Senator REID and Senator SCHUMER have said they intend to see that a budget is passed by the Chamber. But they have also said they are going to attempt to extract more taxes from hard-working, middle-class taxpayers in order to double down on Washington's spending binge.

Our biggest fiscal problem is excessive spending, not insufficient taxation. We can't raise taxes high enough to close the trillion-dollar-plus annual deficits or to make up this \$16.5 trillion hole we have dug. If we don't reduce spending and save Social Security and Medicare, then we will eventually find ourselves in a debt crisis. When that happens is when our creditors—the people who lend us money, including the Chinese and other governments—demand more interest on our loans and, eventually, interest rates go up to historic norms, the debt spirals out of control, and we reach a crisis of monumental proportions: It strangles the economy; it destroys jobs; it destroys our standard of living.

Don't take my word for it. President Obama himself has acknowledged that no amount of tax increases could sustain Medicare in its current form. He has also said public officials who are concerned about preserving government assistance for the elderly and the vulnerable have an obligation—those are his words—have an obligation to reform our entitlement programs and ensure their long-term viability. In other words, the debt is not only the single greatest threat to our national security, as former Chief of Staff Mike Mullen has said, it is also a threat to our ability to provide a safety net to the most vulnerable in our country.

I know Democrats and Republicans alike in this body understand the problem. The President himself understands the problem. In December of 2010, his bipartisan fiscal commission known as Simpson-Bowles reported the

nature of the problem and a proposed beginning of a solution. Three of the most conservative Republican Members of the Senate agreed with that commission report. However, rather than embrace it, the President walked away from it, and he has not come back to the table.

We also have another bipartisan commission headed by Alice Rivlin, who was the Director of the Office of Management and Budget under Bill Clinton, and Senator Pete Domenici, longtime chair of the Senate Budget Committee—people who understand these matters better than just about anybody. So there are solid, bipartisan proposals on the table. Yet here we are, trillions of dollars later since the Obama administration began, with no solution in sight.

The President had the American people with their back against the wall with the expiring tax provisions on December 31 which led to the so-called fiscal cliff. If we hadn't acted, taxes would have gone up more than \$3 trillion on all Americans. There would have been an enormously negative impact on the economy and jobs. So we had to come up with some sort of stop-gap solution. But the President got his pound of flesh. He got his revenue: \$600 billion over 10 years.

Now is the time to return to what the President himself has called a balanced approach to deficit reduction. Unfortunately, the President has never even proposed a balanced approach, much less a balanced budget. I can only hope that with his final election campaign behind him and with the new term ahead of him, the President can begin to grapple with and join us as we deal with our long-term fiscal challenges.

I yield the floor and note the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I am here to speak first and very personally in support of the nomination of Senator KERRY to be our next Secretary of State. There is a time when the man and the moment come together in a profoundly historic way. Senator KERRY's nomination to be Secretary of State of the United States at such a time when his leadership can be pivotal in shaping America's role in the world, as a leader for human rights, as well as the use of its extraordinary strategic power for peace.

There is also a time when the woman and a moment come together and that has been so for Hillary Clinton, who has done such extraordinary work, incomparable in transforming America's role in world history. I believe that just as she has met the challenges in guiding American foreign policy and

leading the dedicated men and women of our Foreign Service, so will Senator KERRY rise to the difficult challenges ahead. Senator KERRY's whole life has prepared him for this job, and I have every confidence he will help keep America safe and secure and build our capacity and alliances in pursuit of democracy and a more peaceful world.

Last week, I met with Senator KERRY to share my experiences from a recent visit to the Middle East and Afghanistan and to urge him to immediately take up the issue of the unfolding humanitarian catastrophe occurring within Syria and across its borders in Turkey and Jordan. My experiences came from a trip I took with Senator MCCAIN and Senator WHITEHOUSE, and others of my colleagues who share my impression that drastic and dramatic humanitarian aid must be provided for those refugees.

I am pleased the President has announced an additional \$155 million for the Syrian people today. I believe we must also provide aid and assistance to the Syrian Opposition Council. It matters as much how we provide this aid as the total amount we provide. I am very encouraged by Senator KERRY's listening and hearing us, and I look forward to continuing our work with soon-to-be Secretary of State KERRY on this issue and many other vital security concerns.

IMMIGRATION REFORM

One of those concerns on which I also rise concerns and affects American immigration policy. We are truly at a moment when Secretary KERRY and the administration can transform this debate and national conversation with the leadership of Members of this body, including most prominently my colleagues Senator SCHUMER, Senator MCCAIN, and the other members of their bipartisan group who recently unveiled a bipartisan blueprint for comprehensive immigration reform.

One of the things I do as a Senator and did when I was attorney general of our State is to visit the citizenship and immigration ceremonies where people become new citizens of our Nation. It is one of the most moving and powerful of experiences I have seen in public life. The tears in the eyes of these new citizens and their families, in celebration and joy and pride of their becoming citizens of the United States and looking forward to contributing, giving back to this country, reaffirmed my faith not only in this Nation—in its strength and decency and generosity—but also in the men and women who want to come here because they see it as a beacon of freedom and democracy. That is the tradition and ethos that should guide us in seeking comprehensive immigration reform. We have a unique opportunity now—and I will work to fulfill it, to reform our broken immigration system as a member of the Judiciary Committee and most particularly its Immigration Subcommittee. I look forward to playing a leading role in achieving this group's

working blueprint for comprehensive reform.

Establishing a path to citizenship, securing our borders, making employers more accountable, ensuring that the DREAMers—young people brought to this country as infants and young children—can find a way to citizenship are all goals that are fulfilled by this blueprint.

We have an obligation, an opportunity that is compelling, absolutely historic, to change the discussion and debate, but also the outcome, and we should seize that opportunity, make sure this moment is fulfilled, I think, particularly for those DREAMers. For them, this moment and every moment is precious. They are young people who are in our schools, in our military, seeking a way to be citizens of the only country many of them know. They speak English. It is the only language most of them know. They have friends and a life here. It is the only life they have.

The administration, rightly and commendably, has provided an administrative route to temporary reprieve from the laws that would result in their deportation. But they need the certainty and security of a law that gives them a real path to citizenship, not at some point in the indefinite future but now.

The DREAM Act that Senator DURBIN has fought so hard and valiantly over so many years to achieve deserves passage now. I will continue to come to the floor with photographs of the DREAMers, as I have done week after week, to make sure their fate and future is on our minds.

Today, I also want to speak about another related immigration issue—the Immigration Innovation Act of 2013, known as the I-squared bill, which was introduced in the U.S. Senate today.

I am proud to be an original cosponsor of it. I know firsthand from talking to employers in the State of Connecticut, and all around not only our State but the country, how significant this measure could be to attracting and retaining people with the skills America needs to remain the greatest Nation in the history of the world.

I thank Senators KLOBUCHAR, HATCH, COONS, and RUBIO for their leadership on this issue. The I-squared bill has a very simple objective, which is to ensure that America's innovative companies are able to access high-skilled workers who would go back to their countries of origin when we need them here.

In some areas, such as computer science, the demand for workers greatly exceeds the labor pool available of U.S.-born workers. Senator HATCH described on the floor of the Senate how in this decade the American economy will create a demand for an estimated 120,000 computer science jobs requiring at least a bachelor's degree, but U.S. universities will generate only an estimated 40,000 graduates in that field.

So just to take that one example—just that one example—there is a gap

we need to fill to keep our companies competitive. I have heard about this issue from Connecticut employers big and small. There are jobs. They exist. We need the people who have the skills to fill them.

The I-squared bill seeks to fill that gap, most importantly, by allowing high-skilled workers, who are foreign born but often U.S. educated, to fill some of those jobs in high-need areas. The legislation makes sense because it makes it easier for U.S.-educated holders of advanced degrees in science, technology, engineering, and math to obtain green cards.

The bill also, importantly, generates new revenue through fees that visas and employment-based green cards will provide, and it directs funds to promote STEM education and worker retraining at the State level—STEM being science, technology, engineering, and math.

This measure is about American competitiveness. We ought to make a priority of STEM education for young people in our country who are born here and raised in the United States. But we must be open to creating jobs for American workers in the most innovative sectors of society and making it easier for those industries to thrive by attracting people from throughout the world to the United States as a beacon of opportunity, a land of unlimited potential accomplishment.

We are a nation of immigrants. We are great because of our diversity. We are strong because we have always attracted people who want freedom and the potential to do their best, accomplish the most, and realize the full extent of what they can achieve.

I again thank Senators KLOBUCHAR, HATCH, COONS, and RUBIO for their leadership. As a member of the Judiciary Committee, as well as the Immigration Subcommittee, I look forward to working with them on this important legislation in the months ahead.

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.

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Mr. President, I rise today to express my strong support for the nomination of JOHN KERRY to be our next Secretary of State.

As a friend and colleague for more than 20 years, I can think of no one who is more qualified and better prepared to be our Nation's chief diplomat.

He has the intelligence, judgment, compassion, determination, and above all, leadership experience to help the administration confront and find common sense solutions to the multitude of foreign policy challenges now before us.

His story is well known to those of us who have worked side by side with him for so many years.

The son of a distinguished foreign service officer, his understanding of the