

Grassley	Landrieu	Rubio
Hagan	Lee	Scott
Harkin	Manchin	Sessions
Hatch	McCain	Shaheen
Heinrich	McCaskill	Shelby
Heitkamp	McConnell	Stabenow
Heller	Mikulski	Tester
Hoeven	Moran	Thune
Isakson	Nelson	Toomey
Johanns	Paul	Udall (CO)
Johnson (SD)	Portman	Vitter
Johnson (WI)	Pryor	Warner
Kaine	Risch	Wicker
Kirk	Roberts	
Klobuchar	Rockefeller	

## NOT VOTING—

Coburn	Murkowski
Inhofe	Whitehouse

The amendment (No. 931) was rejected.

Mr. REID. I move to reconsider the vote and move to lay that motion on the table.

The motion to lay on the table was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

## MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the time until 5:30 p.m. be for a period of morning business, with Senators allowed to speak for up to 10 minutes each during that time, and that at 5:30 p.m. Senator STABENOW be recognized.

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

The Senator from Washington.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—  
H. CON. RES. 25

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, it has now been 59 days since the Senate and the House passed our budget resolutions. The American people are now expecting us to get together and do everything possible to bridge the partisan divide and come to a bipartisan deal. On this side the Senate Democrats are ready to get to work. Unfortunately, despite their focus over the past 2 years on the need to return to regular order, Republicans have been refusing to allow us to move to a bipartisan budget conference.

Many Republicans, including the ranking member on the Budget Committee, Senator SESSIONS, had been very clear up until recently that after the Senate engages in an open and fair budget markup process—and these are his words—“the work of conferencing must begin.”

Minority Leader MCCONNELL said in January that if the Senate budget is different from the House budget, then “send it off to conference. That’s how things used to work around here. We used to call it legislating.” I could not agree more with Minority Leader MCCONNELL’s words from back in January. Over the past few weeks we have tried to move to conference eight times, and each time Senate Republicans have stood and said no.

They have managed to stall for weeks now, but their excuses for not

wanting to move to conference are changing. At first Republicans told us that we needed “a framework” before they would allow us to move to conference, although they never explained what that meant. And, frankly, a budget is a framework. Then the story changed, and they told us they would only let us move to conference if we made certain guarantees about the outcome. Then last week the story changed again, and Senate Republicans claimed that despite the fact that we engaged in a fair and open budget process in the Senate less than 2 months ago, they think we need a do-over, with another 50 hours of debate on top of the 50 hours we have already done and another round of unlimited amendments on top of the unlimited amendments that were moved already.

This is absurd. First of all, to claim that regular order involves a second full Senate budget debate is simply not true. The Senate has never been forced to go through a full debate and open amendment process twice just to get to conference—not one case. Completely unprecedented. In fact, every single time since 1994 that the Senate moved to conference, it was done by unanimous consent, with bipartisan support, which is the way it ought to be done.

Second of all, the Senate engaged in a full and open debate in which any Member could offer any budget amendment they wanted to. We did that a few months ago. I know all of my colleagues remember this. I certainly remember this.

I would be happy to quote some of what was said about the process if any reminders are needed because as that debate came to a close in the wee hours of the morning, Minority Leader MCCONNELL said the Senate had just engaged in “an open and complete and full debate.” He continued and said, “I know everyone is exhausted, and people may not feel it at the moment, but this is one of the Senate’s finest days in recent years, and I commend everyone who has participated in this extraordinary debate.”

My ranking member, Senator SESSIONS, said the Budget Committee markup was “an open process” where “everybody had the ability to offer amendments.”

Senator SESSIONS said on the floor, as debate was wrapping up, he was thankful that the Republicans had “free ability to speak and debate” and for “helping us move a lot of amendments fairly and equitably tonight.”

There is no question the Senate engaged in a fair and open and lengthy debate about the budget before we passed it. There is absolutely no good reason to ask that we do this all over unless the intention is to simply stall the process and push us closer to a crisis.

Instead of scrambling to find new excuses for their budget conference flipflops, I hope Senate Republicans realize their opposition to bipartisan negotiations is not sustainable and will

not allow us to get to the table and move on this matter.

I know there are Members who do not agree with the budget that was passed. They will have another opportunity to fight for changes in a bipartisan conference, which is how we do this. That is the responsible and appropriate path forward, and I hope the Senate Republican leaders decide to move back to the position they maintained just a few months ago. I know a number of our colleagues on the Republican side have said to me privately and in public that they believe we should move to conference. I hope we can do that. The challenges before our country in terms of our debt and deficit and the investments that need to be made and the certainty that Americans are looking to us for cannot be completed until we go to conference and work out our differences and come back and move this forward.

I hope this time when I ask for unanimous consent to go to conference Senate Republicans will join with us so the American people can see an open conference move to a debate and solve this very challenging problem we have in front of us.

I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the 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; that H. Con. Res. 25, as amended, be agreed to; the motion to reconsider be 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 that the chair be authorized to appoint conferees on the part of the Senate, all with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. WARREN). Is there objection?

The Senator from Kentucky.

Mr. PAUL. Reserving the right to object, it has now been 59 days that the opposition has been trying to orchestrate a backroom deal to raise the debt ceiling. Raising the debt ceiling is an incredibly important debate and shouldn’t be done in the back room by a few people. It shouldn’t be done through parliamentary trickery or chicanery. It should be done out in the full and open and under the ordinary rules of the Senate.

We are now borrowing \$40,000 every second, \$4 billion a day. We must borrow from China to run the ordinary functions of our government. In fact, it is worse. We borrow from China to send money to China. We borrow money from China to send money to Pakistan. We build bridges in Pakistan with money borrowed from China. It can’t go on. No American family can continue to spend money endlessly that they don’t have.

All we are asking is for a common-sense resolution that says we can’t keep borrowing.

What I ask is unanimous consent that the Senator modify her request so

that it not be in order for the Senate to consider a conference report that includes reconciliation instructions to raise the debt limit. I ask that as a unanimous consent request.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. MCCAIN. I will reserve the right to object to the modification, and I will object in just a moment.

I would like to point out to my colleagues on this side of the aisle that for 4 years—for 4 years—we complained about the fact that the majority leader, whom I see on the floor, refused to bring a budget to the floor of the Senate. Then, in what most of us believe was a proud moment—I thought it was a pretty tiring experience at my age, voting all night—we approved or disapproved of 70 meaningless amendments.

The fact is, we did a budget. All of us patted ourselves on the back, and we were so proud that we did the budget. By golly, now we will move with the House of Representatives and we will have a budget and, hopefully, at least begin negotiations with the House of Representatives, in which the majority is Republicans—not Democrats, Republicans. We would decide we were going to do that. Now we are going to, according to the objection and the unanimous consent that was just asked for, in an unprecedented way, put restrictions on the conferees.

The way we usually do it is what I am about to do; that is, we instruct the conferees. We don't require the conferees because that is why we appoint conferees, and that is why we approve or disapprove of the result of that conference. That is how our laws are made, and that is how our budgets are made.

What do we keep doing? What do we on my side of the aisle keep doing? We don't want a budget unless we put requirements on the conferees that are absolutely out of line and unprecedented.

All I say to my colleagues is, can't we, after all those hours—I forget what hour in the morning it was—after all those votes, after all that debate and all that discussion, we came up with a budget and now we will not go to conference, why is that?

I will object to the modification the Senator from Kentucky just asked for in a moment, but I would first ask consent that the original request by the Senator from Washington include two motions: to instruct the conferees, one related to the debt limit, and one related to taxes. That is the way we should do business in the Senate. It is instructions to the conferees.

The Senator from Washington may not like those instructions, but the fact is that is the way we do business, not require the conferees to take certain measures. If my colleagues on this side of the aisle think we are helping our cause as fiscal conservatives by blocking going to a conference on the budget—which every family in America has to be on because of certain require-

ments they demand—then we are not helping ourselves with the American people at all.

I will object to the modification proposed by the Senator from Kentucky.

I would first ask consent that the original request by the Senator from Washington include two motions to instruct the conferees: one related to the debt limit and one related to taxes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection to the request for further modification?

The Senator from Kentucky.

Mr. PAUL. Reserving the right to object, we are talking about two different issues. We have passed budgets year in and year out. We continue to pass budgets. Of course, the budgets on our side don't raise taxes; the budgets on the other side raise taxes by \$1 trillion. There are parliamentary rules for how we address separate issues such as the debt ceiling.

What we are concerned about, and all we are asking the opposition to do—including opposition within both parties to do—is that the debt ceiling vote be a separate vote and that it not be stuck in the dead of night in a conference committee with very few people, selected by very few people. We have a big party on our side that can include people with many different opinions, some who are very concerned about the debt ceiling and the direction of our country and some who are concerned very much about the debt, so much so that our resilience will not flag. We will maintain the position that throwing our country into further debt is wrong for the country. I think most Americans can understand that.

We are \$16 trillion in debt. We are passing this debt on to our children. It is inexcusable. Somebody must make a stand. Several of us are making a stand—not against a budget but in saying we cannot keep raising the debt ceiling; we cannot keep adding debt to our country. This burden is going to be passed on to our kids and grandkids. We are making a stand, and so I object to a modification.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard. Is there objection to the original request?

Mr. PAUL. I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Maine.

Ms. COLLINS. Madam President, I just want to associate myself with the comments of the Senator from Arizona. It is accurate that no one on our side of the aisle supported the final budget.

The fact is, for the first time in years, a budget was brought to the Senate floor. Senator MURRAY presided over a very open process with debate and with plenty of opportunity for amendments to be offered. There is simply no reason the very reasonable approach suggested by Senator MCCAIN that would allow us to go to conference should not be adopted.

We have called repeatedly for a return to regular order in this body. Reg-

ular order is going to conference. Both the House and the Senate have passed budget resolutions, and it is important that there be a conference committee to work out the differences, which are considerable, so that we will have a framework with binding allocations for the Appropriations Committees.

Mr. MCCAIN. Will the Senator yield for a question, just one question?

Ms. COLLINS. I yield to the Senator.

Mr. MCCAIN. Isn't it true that the people with whom the conference would be held on the other side of the Capitol happen to be a majority of our party? So we don't trust the majority party on the other side of the aisle to come to conference and not hold to the fiscal discipline we want to see happen; isn't that a little bit bizarre?

Ms. COLLINS. It certainly is ironic at the least. It is an opportunity for the Republican House to argue for its budget.

I voted against the final version of the Senate budget, but I think we should go to conference and try to work out an agreement. The instructions suggested by the Senator from Arizona are entirely reasonable.

Let's get on with the process. Let's do what the American people expect us to do; that is, to negotiate a conference report that then would be brought back to both Houses for consideration. That is what I urge my colleagues to do.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

Mr. REID. I, of course, admire—and have for many years now—the chairman of the Budget Committee. She is a renowned Senator. She is very good at what she does. We are very proud of her.

We have just heard something that is unusual. We heard my friend from Arizona—the Senator and I came together to Congress some 30-odd years ago—and another outstanding Senator, Ms. COLLINS from Maine, come up with a novel idea. It is kind of old-fashioned, but it is called regular order.

What they are saying we should do is go to conference. We have had in years past many motions to instruct. That is the way we used to do things around here. To get off-base on a debt ceiling matter has nothing to do with what we are doing. Let's go to conference. I don't know if when we go to conference we will get anything out of it, but we are sure going to try.

That is what this is all about. I can't imagine why after 2 months—after 2 months—we can't go to conference and work something out.

The Republican leader has told me for a couple of years: Why don't we do our appropriations bills? We have the former chair of the Appropriations Committee, who is now the ranking member on the Agriculture Committee, he knows as much as anyone here about financial matters. He is a man who is a humble man, doesn't talk a lot—and I don't want to speak for him—but I think everyone here wants this institution to continue, wants us to do regular order.

I have heard this hue and cry for quite some time on the other side. I admire and appreciate very much the Senator from Arizona instigating old-fashioned regular order, which we need to do in this body a lot.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CRUZ. Reserving the right to object.

Mr. REID. There is nothing to object to.

Mr. CRUZ. The issue before this body is not a budget. The issue before this body is not going to conference. The issue before this body is one thing in particular: It is the debt ceiling and whether the Senate will be able to raise the debt ceiling using a procedural back door that would allow only 51 votes.

My friend from Nevada, my friend from Washington State, both of them could go to conference on the budget right now today if they would simply agree this budget would not be used as a back door to use a procedural trick to raise the debt limit—not on 60 votes but on 50 votes.

I commend their candor, because neither one of them is willing to make that representation, and that is commendable. But I would point out that nothing in the budget we debated raised the debt ceiling. I would suggest the American people are not interested in procedural games. I think they are tired of games by the Democrats and tired of games by the Republicans. What they are interested in is leadership in this body to address the enormous fiscal and economic challenges facing this country.

Our national debt is nearly \$17 trillion. It is larger than the size of our entire economy. In the last 4 years our economy has grown 0.9 percent a year, with 23 million people struggling to find jobs. This body should be debating every day how we get the economy moving, how we get people back to work, how we stop our unsustainable debt. Instead of doing that, 2 weeks ago we spent a week voting to add \$23 billion in new taxes to small retailers online, creating an Internet sales tax—going backwards, killing economic growth and killing jobs.

This issue is very simple: Will the Senate allow a procedural back door to raise the debt ceiling and doing so while not fixing any of the problems?

My friends on the Democratic side of the aisle believe we should raise the debt ceiling with no conditions, with no changes, with no spending reforms, with no pro-growth reforms, with nothing to stop this unsustainable spending. The President likewise has said: Raise the debt ceiling with no conditions. That is why, I would submit, the majority leader is not willing to agree: No, this budget conference report will not be used to raise the debt ceiling, because it is precisely the hope to do so. This body may well vote to raise the debt ceiling. But if this body votes to raise the debt ceiling, we should do

so after a fair and open debate, where the issue is considered and where the threshold is the traditional 60-vote threshold and we can address what I think is imperative—that we fix the problem.

When I travel across the State of Texas, men and women stop me all the time and say: Enough of the games. Go up there, roll up your sleeves, work with each other and fix the problem. Getting a new credit card—jacking up the debt ceiling—with no spending reforms, no structural reforms, no pro-growth reforms is a mistake and it is the wrong path.

Mr. PAUL. Will the Senator yield for a question?

Mrs. BOXER. Will the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. CRUZ. I will be happy to yield.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from California.

Mrs. BOXER. Here is the problem. The people in my State are saying the same thing: Roll up your sleeves and attack the problems. Because, guess what, I remember when this budget was balanced, when Bill Clinton was President. It took literally a few months before George W. Bush gave a tax break and put it on the credit card, two wars on the credit card, and the debt was off and running.

But put that aside, we are where we are. Does my friend not think if we could get into a conference—and I know a lot of us here have been in tough conferences—that is where we would roll up our sleeves? I say PATTY MURRAY and PAUL RYAN are ready to roll up their sleeves and get to work. Why would my friend want to give instructions—of course, I would love to give instructions. I would like to give instructions the richest of Americans pay the same effective tax rate as their secretaries. I would love to do that. I would love to order that, but I wouldn't do that.

Let PATTY MURRAY and PAUL RYAN and the respective committees get in there, in an open process, and come back. Doesn't my friend understand what he is calling for, when he says roll up your sleeves and get to work, is exactly what Senators MURRAY, MCCAIN, COLLINS, and lots of us want to do, those of us who believe we need to use regular order? Can my friend comment on that?

Mr. CRUZ. I thank my friend from California for that question. She may well be right, that one of the reasons spending is out of control is that we no longer have Bill Clinton as President and a Republican Congress. Instead we have President Obama who has expanded spending more than any other President in modern times.

Mrs. BOXER. The Senator skipped over George W. Bush, who caused the deficits. But let's not argue that.

Mr. CRUZ. I thank my friend from California, but I have been quite vocal that both Democrats and Republicans have contributed to getting us in this mess, and we need leadership from both parties to turn it around.

I would note in the question the Senator from California raised, she did not say one word about not raising the debt ceiling using 51 votes. And everything else about this debate is all smoke. It is all about one thing, which is do we give an unlimited credit card to the Federal Government to raise the debt ceiling \$1 trillion, \$2 trillion, \$5 trillion, \$10 trillion.

If the result of reconciliation was raising the debt ceiling \$10 trillion, it would come back—

Mr. PAUL. Will the Senator yield for a question?

Mrs. BOXER. Will the Senator yield for one more question? Then I will yield the floor.

Mr. CRUZ. I am happy to yield as soon as I finish this point. I will be happy to yield after that.

Mrs. BOXER. I thank my friend.

Mr. CRUZ. If we went to a conference committee and it came back on reconciliation to raise the debt ceiling by \$10 trillion, then under reconciliation rules, 51 Senators—only the Democrats—could vote to do so, and the Republicans would be utterly silenced from participating in anything there. It may well be—

Mrs. MURRAY. Will the Senator yield for a question? Does the Senator expect the House of Representatives, a Republican majority in the House of Representatives, would not participate in that vote?

Mr. CRUZ. What I expect is that each of us is obliged to carry out our responsibility to defend the interests of our States. I have 26 million Texans who I am not willing to go to and say, if they ask me: Why did you go along with the procedural game to raise the debt ceiling, to allow Republicans in the Senate to be shut out, to give up any ability to force pro-growth reforms, to get jobs back, to get the economy back, to get people working, why did you give up—

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, will the Senator yield for a question?

Does the Senator expect he would not have a vote at the end of a day after a conference comes back from the House of Representatives?

Mr. CRUZ. We may well have a vote, but if we had a vote—

Mrs. MURRAY. And isn't that a democratic process?

Mr. CRUZ. The vote would be a 51-vote threshold, which would mean—and my friends on the Democratic side of the aisle have been very explicit that in their collective judgment the debt ceiling should be raised with no conditions. Given that—

Mrs. MURRAY. Can the Senator answer my question? Does the Senator from Texas understand the House of Representatives also would have to pass this? They are a Republican majority.

And, by the way, we are not talking about whether we should pay the bills this country is already obliged to pay. We are talking about putting a budget framework forward for the next 10

years. We had a terrific debate about that and the Senator from Texas participated in that and offered amendments. He had an opportunity to do that.

The House of Representatives did the exact same thing. At the end of the day, the way a legislative democratic process works is the two bodies come together and it will have to pass whatever our conference agrees to with a majority of Republicans in the House and a majority in the Senate with Democrats. That is going to be where the Senator from Texas will have an opportunity to say yes or no to a conference.

So I don't understand the Senator saying he would not participate. He has a vote. That is how the Senate works.

Mr. CRUZ. I appreciate the efforts of my friend from Washington to defend the prerogative of the Republican House. What I would suggest is that each of us has a responsibility to our States.

Mrs. MURRAY. With your vote.

Mr. CRUZ. With our vote, but also to defend the ability to have our vote matter, to have it make a difference. Because if this procedural trick is allowed to go forward, what it would mean—this fight right now is the fight over the debt ceiling. Because what it would mean, if we go to a conference committee, as sure as night follows day, we would find ourselves in a month or two with a debt ceiling increase coming back and the Democrats in this body voting to raise the debt ceiling with no conditions whatsoever, which is what the President has asked for.

Mrs. BOXER. Will the Senator yield for a question? And I thank him so much.

Listen, let's cut through what is happening and tell me where I am wrong, and I would respect the Senator's answer. The Senator represents a lot of folks, I represent 38 million, so we are two big States and we owe a lot to our people. That is for sure. What is happening here today is very clear. The Republicans, except for Senator McCAIN and Senator COLLINS, who were here, are stopping us—this Nation—from having a budget, and they are saying their reason is that something might happen in the conference. Well, that is not the way we work in a democracy. Anything can happen at any moment.

Let's get into that conference. PAUL RYAN has a budget that I think is apocalyptic and that the Senator from Texas may well support. PATTY MURRAY has a budget that the Senator probably thinks is apocalyptic. They want to get into that conference and they want to work together. That is called democracy.

I will close with this and ask my friend to respond. Ronald Reagan supported raising the debt ceiling about 18 times. He put out a number of statements that were totally counter to my friend's. Ronald Reagan said—and I am

paraphrasing, and I will get the exact quote and put it in the RECORD, as I have done in the past—even thinking about defaulting on the government's bills is enough to send shock waves through the country.

The last time the Republicans played that game it cost us \$19 billion. We cannot afford that. My friends say they are conservatives, but they are leading us down that road. I beg them to think about what they are doing. I beg them to have faith and trust in this democracy. I beg them to let the people who are very responsible in the House and in the Senate, who are on different wavelengths when it comes to this budget, get to work. And to quote my friend, let them get to the place where they can roll up their sleeves and get the job done.

I think by my friend's continuing presence to stop us from having a budget, he is doing a great disservice not only to this country but to his party.

That is it for me.

Mr. PAUL. Will the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. CRUZ. I will be glad to yield.

Mr. PAUL. This is a debate, and it is a good debate, because it is a debate about the debt ceiling. I am actually in favor of allowing the debt ceiling to go up under certain conditions where we reform things. I think it is unconscionable not to do anything, to simply say: Here is a blank check, keep doing what you have been doing.

We are running the country into the ground. We are borrowing \$40,000 a second. Should we not talk about reform in the process? Many of us supported last time around raising the debt ceiling in exchange for a balanced budget amendment. Seventy-five to 80 percent of the public thinks we should balance our budget. They have to, why shouldn't we?

I would ask the Senator: Is he not hearing from his people at home that the debt ceiling should not be done in secret, that it should be done, and if it is going to be done, it should be attached to significant budgetary reform?

Mr. CRUZ. I thank my friend from Kentucky, and that is exactly what I am hearing from men and women throughout Texas.

I would note for the Senator from California and the Senator from Washington that I respect the sincerity of their beliefs, that they genuinely believe the Democratic budget passed by this body is the proper course for this country; that the proper course is to raise taxes yet another \$1 trillion on top of the \$1.7 trillion that taxes have already increased. They genuinely believe the proper course is never to balance the budget and allow massive deficits to extend into perpetuity.

I respect the sincerity of their views, but at the same time I believe those views are inconsistent with the best interests of this country; that the best interests of this country are to restore economic growth, are to get back to

historic levels of growth that allow small businesses to thrive and, in particular, allow the most vulnerable among us to work and to achieve the American dream.

In the last 4 years, under President Obama, we have had 4 consecutive years of less than 1 percent average growth in the economy. I refer to this period as the "great stagnation." The people who have been hurt the most during the great stagnation have been young people, have been Hispanics, African Americans, and single moms. Right now, if we look at unemployment, unemployment for those without a high school degree is over 11 percent, for Hispanics it is nearly 10 percent, for African Americans it is nearly 14 percent, and for young people it is over 25 percent.

When this country has massive spending, massive debt, massive regulation, and massive taxes, the result is that small businesses are strangled and die, and the people who lose their jobs are the single moms who are struggling to provide for their kids at home, like so many moms now seeing their hours forcibly reduced to 29 hours a week because of the burdens of ObamaCare. I believe we have an obligation to the American people to focus every day on turning the economy around, on getting jobs back, and stopping our unsustainable debt.

My friend from California made reference to the prospect of a default. I absolutely agree the United States should never, ever, ever default on its debt, and that is the reason why I strongly support the legislation introduced by the Senator from Pennsylvania, PAT TOOMEY, the Default Prevention Act, which says: In the event the debt ceiling is not raised, the United States will always pay its debts, pay the interest on its debts, so we never default.

I would note my friends on the other side of the aisle right now could join together in taking default off the table entirely.

(Several Senators addressed the Chair.)

Mrs. MURRAY. I ask the Senator to yield for one final question. I know they want to keep talking.

Mr. CRUZ. I am happy to yield to the Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. The irony of this is really astounding. By objecting to us going to conference, the Senate Republicans who are objecting are actually putting us right in the position of being in the place where the debt ceiling, by virtue of timing, will have to—may be part of the budget conference because the House of Representatives wants to appoint conferees and have a budget done fairly quickly once they appoint conferees because they have told us they do not want to go through a series of votes as we all did. I think it is 20 days. If my colleagues object to going to conference at this point—

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Now 5:30 having arrived—

Mrs. MURRAY. I ask for 1 additional minute.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mrs. MURRAY. By objecting to going to conference right now, what Senate Republicans who are objecting are doing is pushing us to a place where the debt limit, by virtue of timing, may be a part of the discussion. I ask the Senators to think about what they are doing by their objection, in forcing us into that position, and suggest that by allowing us to go to conference—we will have a better chance of not—

#### AGRICULTURE REFORM, FOOD, AND JOBS ACT OF 2013—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The hour of 5:30 having arrived, the Chair recognizes the Senator from Michigan.

AMENDMENT NO. 998

Ms. STABENOW. I call for regular order.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. S. 954 is the pending business.

Ms. STABENOW. On behalf of Senator LEAHY, I call up amendment No. 998.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Michigan [Ms. STABENOW], for Mr. LEAHY, proposes an amendment numbered 998.

Ms. STABENOW. I ask unanimous consent that reading of the amendment be dispensed with.

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

(The text of the amendment is printed in today's RECORD under "Text of Amendments.")

Ms. STABENOW. Madam President, we have made great progress today. I thank colleagues for their work today bringing forth amendments. We will continue to work with Members as we go forward tomorrow, putting together a number of votes to bring before the body. We are working hard to do everything possible to complete this legislation by the end of the week. I think we are on a good track.

I announce on behalf of the two leaders that there will be no more votes this evening.

#### MORNING BUSINESS

Ms. STABENOW. I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to a period of morning business until 6:30, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

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

The Senator from Louisiana.

#### TRAGEDY IN OKLAHOMA

Ms. LANDRIEU. Madam President, I really appreciate the hard work of the Senators from Michigan and Mississippi, moving a farm bill through

the Senate. It is one of the most important bills we will take up this year. Action on this bill is long overdue. I am very hopeful we can continue to make progress and produce a bill that is excellent for every region of our country. Of course, representing the South, we always like to have special attention given to our agricultural needs. The Senator from Michigan certainly has been attuned to the farmers in rural communities in Louisiana. We appreciate her leadership.

I come to the floor today, though, just for a few moments to speak about the tragedy unfolding in Oklahoma, in Moore, OK, a city that was devastated—portions of the city in the suburban areas—by a horrible tornado, one of the largest to hit our Nation in quite some time. While I do not know all of the details, I understand that it was a very high level tornado that stayed on the ground for almost 40 minutes. This was miles wide and created a terrible path of destruction. There are, of course, adults and children who lost their lives. Recovery and rescue is still underway as I speak. I am certain that the delegations—both the Senate and House Members from Oklahoma—are doing everything they can, working with the Governor and local officials, to provide as much support as they will need.

I come to the floor as the chair of the Subcommittee on Homeland Security and I come to the floor as a Senator who unfortunately has had a lot of experience in disasters to say how proud I am that there is about \$11 billion available, without the requirement or necessity of an offset, for the people of Oklahoma. This was a battle that was fought over a year ago, led by Senator HARRY REID and me and others. This arrangement was made in the Budget Control Act so that there would be a significant pot of money set aside in the event that disasters such as this happened, whether it was a tornado or an earthquake or a fire or a flood. It has happened again.

We don't know exactly when these disasters are going to happen. We don't know the exact nature of them. But we most certainly know from past experience and everything that our science tells us about the changes in the atmosphere that they are going to happen and that they are likely going to get worse. That is why I have been very focused on this issue.

I am proud of this Senate, Republicans and Democrats, but I am very proud of the support of the Democratic leaders on this bill to say now is not the time—not this afternoon, not tomorrow morning, not Friday, not Monday—to be debating offsets for victims of the Oklahoma tornado. After a disaster, our citizens do not need or want a debate on funding. What they want is help, and they are going to get it from the committee I chair.

Our people suffered so much in Katrina, Rita, and Gustav. I have watched the east coast have to recover

from Irene and from Sandy. I have seen horrible tornadoes in Missouri. The last thing people want when they are digging their loved ones out of rubble and preparing, unfortunately, for funerals that are going to have to occur after what happened—the last thing they want to see Congress do is debate about how and when we are going to pay for this disaster. We are going to send them the money they need to recover.

I want to say this to Senator COBURN, my good friend who is not on the floor—I do respect his consistency on this issue. Even when a tornado hit his State, he is still calling for offsets. He has been consistent, but in my view he has been consistently wrong. There will be no offsets. There is no need for offsets. I will not support offsets. The majority of Democrats, if not the entire Democratic caucus, will not support offsets for Americans in need in disasters. What we are going to do is support appropriate help and sufficient help for them.

Let me say for the record that because of the Sandy supplemental—which I also fought for with my colleagues from the Northeast—we were able to put some reforms in that bill. It was not just "send the money and do what you will with it." We sent money to the Northeast. We also sent them new tools in a bigger, stronger toolbox to help them with a better recovery.

We have a lot more to do in the Northeast. That is a subject for another day. I realize they are in lots of difficulty. But we did send some new tools that will help, even with Oklahoma.

First, we sent them the ability to quickly establish mutually agreed upon estimates for project costs. That has been a real problem with recovery in the past, with local governments arguing one thing, the Feds offering something else. We now have a better, quicker process to agree on what the project costs to get it built more quickly. The project cost will be validated by an independent panel of experts protecting the taxpayer, which is important. Applicants are now allowed to consolidate projects in a common-sense way to build back smarter, reducing future recovery costs.

Most important for this disaster—we fought hard for this in Sandy—finally, there are some provisions in the recovery bill that will allow children to be the center of attention. Sadly, we have lost some children in this disaster. Sadly, many children were injured and probably thousands of children have been traumatized. But because of the new bill we passed under Sandy, there are some provisions to help.

In addition, families can receive daycare now through their supplemental, so the parents who are going to have to figure out a way to get back to work and rebuild their businesses and their communities and their houses can have some additional Federal childcare, which will help.