

well—perpetual high unemployment, an economy kind of in a death spiral that just kind of bumps along like ours, which is now bumping along at a 1.5-percent growth rate.

It is time to get serious about solving this problem. This “red” rises like a mountain over a relatively flat plain of green.

Now, I know there is almost an article of faith on the other side with some—maybe not all—that it is a revenue problem. Clearly, it is not a revenue problem. More to the point, tax revenue as a share of our gross domestic product is today about the same as it has been over the last four decades. Spending, on the other hand, averaged just 18.5 percent over that same period but today stands at about 23 percent of gross domestic product—one of the highest spending levels since World War II. It is about to get much worse, growing to nearly 40 percent of GDP in just a few decades—40 percent of GDP. There is simply no other way to solve this problem—no other way to solve the problem—than to get our spending under control.

A significant portion of the dramatic spending increase to come is the result of tens of millions of baby boomers reaching retirement age. We know this. Erskine Bowles, the Chairman of the Bowles-Simpson Commission, said it was the most predictable crisis in American history.

We are in a position to do something about this. We should. But that is only one part of the problem. It is the biggest part of the problem, but it is only one part of it. We need to shine a light into every corner of the budget, especially the dark corners that often evade real scrutiny. Programs that do not work should be scrapped, and when considering those that do, we still need to ask the question, Can it be done better, faster, more efficiently?

We need to root out waste, which will serve as the first real test of the Democrats’ seriousness in this debate. I mean, why is the Federal Government funding Chinese studies on pig manure—why—and research into the smoking habits of Jordanian college students and reality TV shows in India? Are our friends on the other side prepared to cut this kind of waste? Because if they are not, if they demand a 1-to-1 ratio between tax increases and pig manure cuts, then there is really no hope of ever putting our country back on the path to prosperity.

The Senate will soon begin consideration of H.R. 325. If it passes, we will have a few more months to come up with the kinds of spending reforms necessary to secure a longer extension of the debt ceiling. That extra time will give us a chance to break the Democrats’ other bad habit of leaving everything—literally everything—until the last minute. But we can only do it if we get to work now and return to what we call around here the regular order. Remember, regular order is how the Senate is supposed to function. Commit-

tees are supposed to be allowed to evaluate legislation. Amendments are supposed to be considered. The public is supposed to have a chance to scrutinize the proposals that are actually before us.

Look, I know that solving the debt challenge is not going to be easy. Putting our country on a sustainable fiscal and economic path is going to require both parties committing to serious spending reforms. But this is a challenge we must overcome. By doing the hard work today, we can avoid a European-style catastrophe tomorrow. By reforming the functions of government that no longer make sense in 2013, we can do more than just control spending, we can encourage private sector growth and job creation and finally get the economy back on its feet. And by ridding ourselves of this massive burden of debt, we can remove the greatest obstacle to recovery.

As I said yesterday, this is ultimately a conversation about growth and opportunity. It is not a conversation about austerity. It is one that Republicans are eager to have. For those who want to pretend our country does not have a spending problem, this is a pretense which is not borne out by the facts. Now is the time to face reality. We have known this for literally years. When are we going to face it? There is no better time than now.

We can take on this challenge together if both sides are ready to do the necessary work to reform spending, but we need to get started today—not next week, not in April—today.

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 for 2 hours, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with the majority controlling the first half.

The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Madam President, I am delighted to see the Presiding Officer in that seat. I ask unanimous consent to speak for up to 20 minutes.

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

#### ECONOMIC MELTDOWN

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Madam President, I actually came to speak on another subject, but I had the opportunity to hear the minority leader’s remarks as I was waiting to speak. I would point out in response that our friends on the other side love to char-

acterize the spending that has taken place in recent years as something that was the will and choice and desire of President Obama. What they fail to recall is that during that period, we actually had an economic meltdown. Most Americans remember that economic meltdown. States such as Rhode Island are still in the aftermath of that economic meltdown—an economic meltdown, by the way, that occurred at the end of the last Republican administration and was caused by those policies.

The economic meltdown was relatively global. We have very practical examples of countries that went the path of spending cuts that the Republicans recommend—recommended through the whole economic meltdown. Just take a tour of Europe and you will see where the austerity plan was followed, the results have been far worse: lower GDP growth, higher unemployment. We are actually struggling through better in America by understanding that when the economy is collapsing, if the Federal Government withdraws even more money from it, it just collapses faster and you postpone the period of growth and recovery.

This business us only having a spending problem—well, you can look at the revenues as adequate, but it depends what you are measuring it against. If you are measuring revenues against the times when we had a balanced budget, it has always averaged 20 percent. It averaged around 20 percent of GDP. We are at 16 percent right now. This is a huge gap. If we drop and try to balance the budget, which is what I think we would like to achieve at 16 percent, we are going back to the social conditions of the early 1950s, conditions where many seniors still lived in poverty. I know the party on the other side likes looking back, but I do not think they want to look back to that. I really do not think most Americans want to live in a country in which that is the case.

So, do we have a spending problem? Yes, of course, we do. But when revenues are at 16 percent of GDP and we have never balanced the budget in recent history at 16 percent of GDP—in recent history, it has always been with revenues around 20 percent of GDP.

When you have these unbelievable revenue giveaways to special interests—Big Oil getting these huge subsidies, hedge fund managers paying these favored low tax rates, tax rates lower than their chauffeurs and their doormen and their maids pay—the Tax Code is riddled with those kinds of special interest giveaways, and if we can bring some of that back into the equation, not only does that add revenue and move us better toward the goal of a balanced budget and a reduced deficit but, frankly, in most of those cases, it is the right thing to do all on its own. It is the fair thing to do all on its own.

Yes, there are things that are idiotic buried away in the Federal budget. I am not here to defend studies about pig manure or reality TV shows. But the

problem is that once you actually get into discussions on this subject with the other side, it is not long until their guns turn on Medicare, it is not long until their guns turn on Social Security. We have seen it before. They tried to privatize Social Security. They thought they had the power to do it, and the American people told them: Heck no. But that is where the discussion goes. It may start with reality TV shows and pig manure, but before you know it, they have their guns trained on Medicare and Social Security. We need to defend programs such as those on which families depend.

#### CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. So on the subject of what we leave to our children and grandchildren, let me turn to the point of my remarks, which is that it is time to wake up in this body to the reality of what we are doing to our climate. It is time to wake up.

Madam President, 2012 was the warmest year in the continental United States since records began being kept in 1895. It is not a unique single anomaly of a year. If you look at the first 12 years of this century, 2000 to 2012, they are all in the 14 warmest years on record. This is not just about future generations, it is not just about polar bears and sea turtles. These trends are being felt right now in real places by real people.

The recent draft of the Federal Government's National Climate Assessment shows, at a local level, why every one of us should care that carbon emissions are causing climate change.

Let's take a little tour. I will start in the Northeast, which includes my home State of Rhode Island. In this region, which is defined in the assessment as from West Virginia to Maine—that is not the Northeast we usually talk about, but that is the way it is defined in this report—annual temperatures have increased by almost 2 degrees Fahrenheit since records began. The entire range between high and low is only about 4.2 degrees, so an increase of 2 full degrees is a big deal in that scale.

If greenhouse gas emissions remain at current levels, the projection is another 4.5 degrees to 10 degrees Fahrenheit of warming by the end of the century. That will change all of our lives in very significant ways. Even if we do reduce emissions, the Northeast is still projected to experience an increase in the frequency, intensity, and duration of heat waves.

By as soon as 2050, Delaware, Maryland, and West Virginia could experience twice as many days per year—that is 15 more days in some places—with temperatures over 95 degrees Fahrenheit. In western New York and Massachusetts, where 95-degree days are rare, there may be an additional 5 days per year over that mark. In Rhode Island, a lot of people stay cool in the summer by opening the windows at

night, letting the cool night air fill the house, and then closing the drapes or the screens or the shades in the morning. That is not going to work any longer when persistent high nighttime temperatures allow no relief from the heat.

Without significant upgrades, our region's electric grid will not be able to sustain the power demand as more and more air-conditioning becomes necessary for people to be comfortable in the summertime. As we see more hot days, we also see more bad ozone days, which still keep people indoors in Rhode Island or even send them to the hospital, as pollution from Midwest coal plants settles in on us.

In addition to heat, precipitation in the Northeast increased almost one-half of an inch per decade over the last century. Extreme precipitation—very heavy rain or snow—has increased 74 percent between 1958 and 2010. That is the sharpest increase in the Nation.

On our shores—we are a very coastal State—due to a combination of warming and expanding oceans and other tectonic conditions, sea level has risen about 1 foot in the Northeast since 1900.

That is higher than the 8-inch global average sea-level rise. Sea-level rise is actually up 10 inches at the Newport tide gauge since our terrible hurricane of 1938. Because of extreme precipitation and sea-level rise, more and more populated areas are at risk of flooding.

Let's move to the Southeast where the draft assessment predicts more extreme heat with the number of 95-degree or hotter days in the region from Louisiana through central Florida expected to quadruple by mid-century. If you like it hot down there, you are a lucky person because you are going to get a lot more of it.

Southerners will likely see something much less appealing, which is more ground-level ozone, better known as smog, which poses serious health risks especially to children and the elderly. But the real story of the Southeast is one of disastrous weather. Between 1980 and 2011, the Southeast was struck by more billion-dollar disasters than any other part of the country. The region is particularly vulnerable to extreme weather, and sea-level rise makes things worse.

The RAND Corporation notes that 1,800 square miles of Louisiana have been lost to the sea since the 1930s. Entergy, a regional utility, predicts \$23 billion in losses by 2030, factoring just a 6-inch increase in sea level and a 3-percent increase in hurricane wind speed. Communities in the Southeast need to take real steps to become more resilient in the changing environment. North Carolina, for instance, is raising highway bridges out to the Outer Banks as seas rise and storms worsen.

In the Midwest, temperatures are increasing rapidly. From 1900 to 2010, average temperatures increased about 1 degree Fahrenheit, and the rate of warming tripled between 1980 and 2010.

Under the assessment's worst-case scenarios, temperatures across the Midwest are projected to rise 8.5 degrees Fahrenheit by the year 2100. If you are a farmer, that means everything will have changed.

Hotter temperatures are having a far-reaching impact on the Great Lakes. According to the Cleveland Plain Dealer, scientists at NOAA's Great Lakes Environmental Research Laboratory have found that the Great Lakes are taking in more heat from the air during the summer and storing it longer. The result: On average, ice on the Great Lakes is forming later in the winter and disappearing earlier. In fact, total ice cover has fallen 71 percent on the Great Lakes from 1973 to 2010.

That is not good for the lakes, the people, and species of this region. Ice cover protects the lakes from evaporation, and it protects the eggs of fall-spawning fish from winter weather. Coastal areas unprotected by shore ice are more susceptible to erosion. Less ice means less snowmobiling or ice fishing. As anyone in Cleveland or Buffalo can tell you, open water fuels the dread lake-effect snows that wallop leeward shores. All of this can be traced, in part, to climate change driven by greenhouse gases.

In the Great Plains, the most significant consequence of a changing climate will be changes in rainfall. This is already beginning to happen. Total rain is expected to increase in Wyoming, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Nebraska, while Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas are projected to get less. Farming and the energy sector, including oil and gas exploration, will feel increased pressure and competition for water supplies. Eighty percent of the population of the Great Plains depends on the High Plains aquifer for drinking water. Projected temperature increases, more frequent droughts, and higher rates of evaporation spell serious trouble for the region's water supply if water isn't managed better.

The availability of water, and even snow, will also affect the Southwest. People of the Southwest are acutely aware of how their history and their fate is tied to the availability of water. According to the draft assessment:

Over the past 50 years across most of the Southwest, there has been less late-winter precipitation falling as snow, earlier snow melt, and earlier arrival of most of the year's streamflow.

These changes can ripple through the economy and the health of the region.

In the western mountains, massive forests stand dead on the mountainsides, as warmer winters allow the killer bark beetle to swarm northward into higher latitudes and uphill into higher altitudes. Ominously, the draft assessment says that the combined impact of increasing wildfire, insect outbreaks, and diseases will cause:

Almost complete loss of subalpine forests . . . by the 2080s.