

such as Social Security, such as Medicare, such as Medicaid. These are programs which are critically important to millions of Americans.

I am sorry we are facing this show-down. But I hope what will happen in the Senate is this: I hope the Senate does not go under cruise control following what we have seen from the House Republican caucus, this notion of doomsday scenarios and high noon scenarios and shutting down the government, shutting down the economy. I hope there will be reasonable, conservative Republicans who will stand and say that is unacceptable. We are going to sit down in good faith, bargain with the Democrats in the Senate, to resolve whatever differences we can but not to damage our government or our economy at this important moment in our history. That kind of courage will be rewarded. It may not be popular with some of the talking heads or screaming heads in these shows on television, but the American people are looking for that kind of leadership on both sides of the aisle.

They do not accept the notion that shutting down the government and shutting down the economy is the best way to solve our political problems. The approval rating of Congress now is about 11 percent. I am surprised many days that it is even that high. I did not know we had so many relatives and people on the payroll—11 percent. We can do better if we face our problems and challenges honestly and deal with them in a way that does not hurt innocent people and families across America.

I yield the floor.

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

[From the Wall Street Journal,  
Sept. 19, 2013]

KARL ROVE: THE GOP'S SELF-DEFEATING  
'DEFUNDING' STRATEGY

In 2010, Republicans took the House of Representatives by gaining 63 seats. They also picked up six U.S. senators and 675 state legislators, giving them control of more legislative chambers than any time since 1928. The GOP also won 25 of 40 gubernatorial races in 2009 and 2010.

These epic gains happened primarily because independents voted Republican. In 2010, 56% of independents voted for GOP congressional candidates, up from 43% in 2008 and 39% in 2006.

Today, independents look more like Republicans than Democrats, especially when it comes to health care. In a new Crossroads GPS health-care policy survey conducted in 10 states likely to have competitive Senate races and in House districts that lean Republican or are swing seats, 60% of independents oppose President Obama's Affordable Care Act. If this holds through 2014, then Republicans should receive another big boost in the midterms.

There is, however, one issue on which independents disagree with Republicans: using the threat of a government shutdown to defund ObamaCare. By 58% to 30% in the GPS poll, they oppose defunding ObamaCare if that risks even a temporary shutdown.

This may be because it is (understandably) hard to see the endgame of the defund strat-

egy. House Republicans could pass a bill that funds the government while killing all ObamaCare spending. But the Democratic Senate could just amend the measure to restore funding and send it back to the House. What then? Even the defund strategy's authors say they don't want a government shutdown. But their approach means we'll get one.

After all, avoiding a shutdown would require, first, at least five Senate Democrats voting to defund ObamaCare. But not a single Senate Democrat says he'll do that, and there is no prospect of winning one over.

Second, assuming enough Senate Democrats materialize to defund ObamaCare, the measure faces a presidential veto. Republicans would need 54 House Democrats and 21 Senate Democrats to vote to override the president's veto. No sentient being believes that will happen.

So what would the public reaction be to a shutdown? Some observers point to the 1995 shutdown, saying the GOP didn't suffer much in the 1996 election. They are partially correct: Republicans did pick up two Senate seats in 1996. But the GOP also lost three House seats, seven of the 11 gubernatorial races that year, a net of 53 state legislative seats and the White House.

A shutdown now would have much worse fallout than the one in 1995. Back then, seven of the government's 13 appropriations bills had been signed into law, including the two that funded the military. So most of the government was untouched by the shutdown. Many of the unfunded agencies kept operating at a reduced level for the shutdown's three weeks by using funds from past fiscal years.

But this time, no appropriations bills have been signed into law, so no discretionary spending is in place for any part of the federal government. Washington won't be able to pay military families or any other federal employee. While conscientious FBI and Border Patrol agents, prison guards, air-traffic controllers and other federal employees may keep showing up for work, they won't get paychecks, just IOUs.

The only agencies allowed to operate with unsalaried employees will be those that meet one or more of the following legal tests: They must be responding to "imminent" emergencies involving the safety of human life or the protection of property, be funded by mandatory spending (such as Social Security), have funds from prior fiscal years that have already been obligated, or rely on the constitutional power of the president. Figuring out which agencies meet these tests will be tough, but much of the federal government will lack legal authority to function.

But won't voters be swayed by the arguments for defunding? The GPS poll tested the key arguments put forward by advocates of defunding and Mr. Obama's response. Independents went with Mr. Obama's counter-punch 57% to 35%. Voters in Senate battleground states sided with him 59% to 33%. In lean-Republican congressional districts and in swing congressional districts, Mr. Obama won by 56% to 39% and 58% to 33%, respectively. On the other hand, independents support by 51% to 42% delaying ObamaCare's mandate that individuals buy coverage or pay a fine.

The desire to strike at ObamaCare is praiseworthy. But any strategy to repeal, delay or replace the law must have a credible chance of succeeding or affecting broad public opinion positively.

The defunding strategy doesn't. Going down that road would strengthen the president while alienating independents. It is an ill-conceived tactic, and Republicans should reject it.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia.

## NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION MONTH

Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, September is National Suicide Prevention Month. I think as a member of the Veterans' Committee, as an American, as a Member of the Senate, it is important for us to pause for a minute and recognize some alarming facts about suicide in America among our veterans.

On average, every day, 365 days a year, 22 veterans who have served America take their own life in suicide. That is 8,000 veterans a year, an alarming number that is growing. It is important for us to recognize the need to see to it our veterans have access to those things that can help to prevent suicide and make sure it is minimized and happens as little as possible.

Recent surveys by VSOs—the veterans service organizations—have demonstrated that an alarming number of veterans in America out of our 22 million have actually considered suicide. An even more alarming number actually knows someone who attempted to take their life or, in fact, was successful.

We know there are reasons that reach out and help us, and we know there are reasons that are hurting us. One that is hurting us right now is long lines for veterans in need of mental health. Mental health needs are an emergency. They are time-sensitive. We need to improve our wait times so they are not as long at our VA hospitals.

There is a nationwide shortage, both public and private, of mental health providers. We need to work to improve the number of providers for our entire country. Scarce appointment times for veterans because of their work or family obligations and scarce appointment times because of overworked VA hospitals make it sometimes difficult and protracted for a veteran to receive services.

Most important to me are the gaps in the continuum of service and treatment for a veteran under mental stress and depression. I wish to focus on that for a moment.

Recently I held a VA field hearing in Atlanta, GA, because of the tragedy that took place at the Atlanta VA. We had two suicides of veterans under the care of the hospital and one overdose of drugs while someone was in the hospital and under the care of the hospital.

Those brought about an inspector general's report that made a plethora of recommendations to the Veterans' Administration in Atlanta but also nationwide on things the VA needed to do to address those problems. To the credit of Director Petzel, who is head of all VA medical care, and Eric Shinseki, the Secretary of the Veterans' Administration, the VA has begun taking initiatives to do so. We have to make sure

they accelerate those initiatives and provide the care that is necessary so that wherever possible we eliminate the wait times and the lack of continuum of care.

In a recent survey by the inspector general, they found that 20 percent of veterans—one in five—who were referred to a private mental health provider never received an appointment. That is one in every five veterans who have come in and admitted they have a problem. They may be at risk for taking their own life. They may be depressed. That is unsatisfactory.

One of the focuses we made in our hearing was bringing about better coordination by the VA in terms of accessing community resources in mental health to see to it that we raised the number of providers offering mental health services to our veterans. As I said earlier in my remarks, suicide is preventable. It is not preventable, however, if there is no access to therapy, no access to consultation, and no access for our veterans when they need it the most.

Let me brag a little bit about the VA and some of what they have done in recent years that was helped and give you some amazing statistics.

In 2007 the Veterans Crisis Line was conceived where veterans in trouble could call in and receive counseling. More than 814,000 calls have been received by the Veterans Crisis Line since it opened, and 28,000 interventions have saved the lives of veterans. There are 28,000 veterans who are alive today because of the crisis line.

In 2009 the VA added an anonymous online chat service where a veteran could have a nonthreatening way of communicating and seeking therapy anonymously. There have been 94,000 calls since its inception.

Most impressive to me is that in 2011 the Veterans Crisis Line added texting as a way to expand its accessibility to veterans.

If you are a veteran in crisis, we need to make sure, as Senators and members of the Veterans' Committee, that you have the access you need to therapy and counseling when you need it. We all know that the tragedy of suicide is terrible for a family and a horrible loss of a life that was sacrificed on behalf of the United States of America. We owe it to ourselves to see that the Veterans' Administration continues to improve access to mental health services, continues to reduce their wait times and long lines, and continues to cooperate and reach out to the community to bring in private providers on a referral basis so that veterans in need of care receive a referral and an appointment quickly.

My last point is that it is important that the VA follow that veteran to see to it they keep that appointment. In the cases of the suicides in the Atlanta VA, the failure to keep an appointment or the failure to have a continuum of care in the following of that veteran substantially created and contributed to the loss of life.

While we have had tragedies at the Atlanta VA, things are improving. While we have had tragedies and suicides across the country, we are finally focusing on veteran suicide.

Lastly, we need to focus on the fact that there are many contributing factors to suicide. Many people will think it is someone returning from Operation Iraqi Freedom or Operation Enduring Freedom. In some cases, that is true, but more often than not veterans over 50 are the victims of suicide. In fact, of the ones in Atlanta, they were Vietnam-era veterans.

It is important we understand that it is every veteran who is at risk, that it is every veteran who needs access to treatment. We need to understand that we owe our veterans a big debt. It is most important to see to it that they don't lose their lives out of despair and depression, that their lives are saved because our VA cares enough to see to it that they have the continuum of care and the access to help they so vitally need.

To the VA Administration, thanks for the improvements you are making. To every Member of the Senate, let's continue to support the Veterans' Administration with the funding necessary to deal with the more than 1 million new veterans returning home from the wars in the Middle East over the last decade.

I yield back the remainder of my time, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. 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.

#### FISCAL DISCIPLINE

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, earlier this week the Congressional Budget Office released its latest long-term outlook. Of course, the CBO, as it is known around here, is the authoritative guide to all things involving the finances and the fiscal picture for the Federal Government. That long-term outlook offered us a sobering reminder the Federal Government cannot defy the laws of fiscal gravity forever. In other words, as every American knows—every working family knows—your output can't exceed your input forever. In other words, you can't spend more money than you have coming in. Unless you are the Federal Government, of course. But sooner or later we will have to reverse the trend of debt accumulation before it destroys our economy, because our current path is simply unsustainable.

The crazy thing about it is that everybody in Washington, particularly the Congress, knows that. Yet it seems as though they are in a state of denial about what could very well happen to our country and to our future if we

don't act. As I said, it is a very sobering message, and it is also very different from the message President Obama has been delivering lately. He likes to talk about America's short-term budget deficit falling. To remind everybody, there is the debt and there is the deficit. The deficit we measure on an annual basis. Debt is the cumulative shortfall between what comes in the front door and what goes out the back door. That debt is now about \$17 trillion.

For these young people down here, that means they each owe about \$52,000 because my generation and other adults have not been responsible, and we have shoved off onto the next generation the responsibilities we ought to be meeting ourselves. So here is the reality. Any short-term deficit reduction will be meaningless unless we adopt longer term reforms. That means where the Federal Government spends most of its money, which is in mandatory spending—the spending that keeps Social Security and Medicare, among other programs, going. We need to also bend the spending curve down so that we are spending less money as well.

The Congressional Budget Office estimates, when we factor in the likely impact of rising debt levels, the publicly held debt is on course to reach 108 percent of our gross domestic product in 2038. The gross domestic product is basically another way of saying the size of our entire economy. So 108 percent of the size of our entire economy is their projection, and that is before we include money the Federal Government effectively owes itself.

I realize 2038 sounds like a long time from now. I remember as a kid I thought the year 2000 was going to be a long way away, but we now see that only in our rearview mirror. But by 2038, under current law, our net interest payments, as a share of our economy, will be 2½ times greater than the 40-year average.

Let me boil that down a little bit. When we borrow money—because we are spending money we don't actually have—that adds to our annual deficit. But it also, over time, adds to our national debt. We have to get somebody to buy that debt so we can continue to spend money we don't have, so that we can continue to spend borrowed money. We have to pay interest to our creditors. In other words, they are going to expect a rate of return, as anybody would, when they loan somebody money. When China loans us money, it is not cost free. When they buy a huge portion of our national debt, it is not cost free.

Over time we will see interest rates—which are really at historic lows now because of the aggressive action of the Federal Reserve keeping those interest rates low—go back up to historic norms, and then we are going to see that a larger and larger share of what the Federal Government spends is merely to pay China and our other creditors who buy our debt, unless we