

consent resolution that several of us are putting together now. I would love for my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to simply allow the District of Columbia to use their own money—even if the Federal money doesn't come forward, to use their own money raised by their own taxpayers to keep their own government operating, because they are under a special provision to us and have been for many years. People argue whether that is right. That is not the point of this. Whether it is right is of no consequence. It is the law. If we can give them some relief, it would be very helpful to the thousands of people who need a signal from us that just because we can't get our budget straight, just because our budget is in deficit doesn't mean we can't honor the fact that the DC budget is in surplus, \$1 billion in the bank. It has been balanced for 18 years, and 75 percent of their budget comes from their own taxpayers. We should allow them to use their money to stay open.

I hope we avoid a shutdown. It doesn't look we are going to. It could be 1 day, it could be 2 days, it could be 3 weeks, it could be 4 months. Who knows how long it is going to be. I hope it doesn't happen, and I hope it is a very short period of time. But whatever it is, there is no reason in the world for the District of Columbia—as Mayor Gray said: We have balanced our budget for 18 consecutive years. We have well over \$1 billion in the bank. Yet we cannot spend our own money to provide our residents with services they have paid for unless we get permission from a Congress that can't even agree to pay its own bills.

If we can't agree how to pay our bills, I think it is unfortunate. We should. But this is a big city. It is an important city. It is the Capital of the Nation. They should be able to operate tomorrow morning.

I am hoping in the next hours we can find a way. All it takes is a unanimous consent. I know tensions are running high. We can be angry at each other or frustrated, but we should not be angry with the District. They have done nothing wrong. They have balanced their budget. They need to be able to operate. Many people all over the Nation depend on the District government. So let's not shut them down while we are shutting ourselves down.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. REID. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent there be a period of morning business for debate only until

12 midnight, with Senators permitted to speak until for up to 10 minutes each, and that at 12 midnight I be recognized.

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

Mr. REID. Madam President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

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

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

CONTINUING APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. REID. Madam President, this is a very serious time in the history of the country. It is hard to comprehend, with millions of people being affected tomorrow—in 65 minutes, actually—Republicans are still playing games.

As I indicated, speaking through the Chair to the senior Senator from Illinois a couple of hours ago, just take a couple of examples. We have 15,000 people a day who come to Lake Mead, spending huge amounts of money to help the economy. They come there to boat, to fish, to recreate. Tomorrow morning they can't go.

We have a beautiful recreational area just a short distance out of Las Vegas. When you fly into Las Vegas, you can see the beautiful red hills. It is called Red Rock. Over 1 million people a year come and visit. Not tomorrow. No. The Republicans are shutting down places like that all over America because they don't agree with government. Tomorrow will be a bad day for government and a day of celebration for the Republican-dominated House led by the tea party over there. We hear the next gambit of the House is to request a conference on the CR.

We like to resolve issues. In the Senate Chamber tonight is PATTY MURRAY, chairman of the Budget Committee. She worked so hard to pass a budget in this body. We worked until 5 in the morning to get it passed. We voted on over 100 amendments. We passed a budget. We passed a budget because it was the right thing to do and the Republicans said we should pass a budget—and we did. Senator MURRAY has for more than 6 months requested a conference on the budget 18 times.

So we like to resolve issues. But we will not go to conference with a gun to our head. The first thing the House has to do is pass a clean 6-week CR. They have that before them. They can do it right now. If they do that, then we will agree to work with Republicans on funding for the government for the remainder of the fiscal year.

I propose that the House pass our clean CR, and we will sit down and discuss funding for the balance of the year. That is it. This deal they are pulling out—they have a rule over there that says they want to go to conference on the CR. That closes the government. They want to close the gov-

ernment. This is all a subterfuge to satisfy the tea party-driven Republicans. This very strange agenda is so hurtful to the American people.

So I want everyone to hear what we just said. We will not go to conference until we get a clean CR. If the government closes, what benefit do we have from that? In 2 weeks the government is not only going to close down—we are going to lose the credit rating because they are talking now about not raising the debt ceiling.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New York.

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I sort of feel sorry for Speaker BOEHNER. He has this hard-right tea party group that is adamant about shutting the government down. Many of them talked about shutting the government down in their 2010 campaigns. There are clips where they go to the audience: We will shut the government down if we win back the House. And the audience of tea party faithful cheers.

Here we are. Speaker BOEHNER, who has not been able, not been strong enough, frankly, to stand up to the tea party, realizes he is in a real dilemma. They want to shut the government down and he knows that the American people do not want that. CNN came out with a poll today. What should we do, end ObamaCare or keep the government going? Sixty percent said, keep the government going. Only 30 percent—or 34 percent, I believe it was—said end ObamaCare. The closer we get to this fateful hour—and we are only an hour away from a government shutdown—the more people will understand what the Republicans have done.

There is only one answer, and that is for the House to pass the clean CR bill that we have sent them, that they have. They keep coming up with new diversions. They send us a message that says this. They send us a message that says that. Some of it is related to ObamaCare. Some of it is related to contraception. Now they say we want to go to conference. As the leader said, we want to resolve issues. We would like to get a nice omnibus for a whole year, for the remainder of the fiscal year. We realize we have to do that with both Houses. But not with a gun to everybody's head. Let's go to conference? While they shut down the government and hurt millions of innocent people? Speaker BOEHNER is not going to get away with this subterfuge, as he has not gotten away with the previous ones. People will see through it.

It is a way to take the focus off what they really are doing, shutting the government down and trying to get people to follow the diversion. This time it is let's go to conference. Again, there is nothing wrong with a conference, but not, absolutely not when they are shutting the government down in an hour. All the talking in conference will not help the Federal worker who is not getting a paycheck, the highway construction worker whose job uses Federal

funds to build that highway, the veteran who is waiting for a disability claim. A conference is not going to solve that. There is one way to solve it: Pass the clean CR and then have a conference that talks about the issues for the whole year. Resolving funding makes sense but only after they pass our clean CR bill.

Speaker BOEHNER, no more games. We are in the final hours. Pass the clean CR. Don't send us another one of these little gizmos that is simply meant to take attention off the fact that you do not have the courage to keep the government funded. Pass the clean CR and then we can talk about conference.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The assistant majority leader.

Mr. DURBIN. The statement made earlier by the majority leader is worthy of note. In less than an hour the government will close. That means agencies all across the United States will start notifying government employees: Go back home. Don't go to work. You may not be paid today. People who are reaching out to those agencies for services—SBA loans, student loans, advice on Social Security, veterans' benefits—they are going to find recordings instead of government workers there to help them. That is not good. It does not speak well for this great Nation that we have reached this point.

What we hear now from the House of Representatives is they want to talk some more. Now they want to sit down with the Senate to talk this over. But only after the government shuts down. That is the difference. They will only talk after the government shuts down. What the majority leader has said is a reasonable compromise. What he said is this: Pass the 6-week budget that we sent over to you, the CR, with no strings attached, no political gimmicks, so that the government continues functioning, so that America is open for business. Do that and during that time we will sit down and talk with you about future funding for the rest of the year.

Party to that conversation should be the chairman of the Senate Budget Committee, Senator MURRAY. She worked hard to pass a budget resolution. She tried 18 times on the floor to get to a conference committee with the House. Every time a tea party Senator got up and objected.

We are prepared to sit down again. Chairman MURRAY is prepared to sit down, as is the chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee, the Senator from Maryland. I have worked with her and for her in our effort to get the appropriations bills ready. The two of them, Senators MURRAY and MIKULSKI, can work together in the conference committee and really charter a way to finish this year in an orderly, thoughtful way.

But shutting down the government should not be the starting point. That

is an admission of defeat. Those of us who were sent here to Washington to lead should be ashamed if it reaches that point. What the majority leader has proposed I hope the Speaker of the House of Representatives will take note of. Don't send us the idea of a conference committee after the government shuts down. What the majority leader has said is after we have agreed to keep the government functioning for 6 weeks, then we can sit down and work out the difficult issues that face us.

We have now entertained three different proposals from the House when it comes to funding this government, two today, and we are about to get a third this day. Each one of them has a fatal flaw. It either involves defunding, delaying ObamaCare—to which the President and the Democrats in the Senate would never agree—or in this circumstance they are sending up the idea of a conference committee after the shutdown.

I think what Senator REID has offered now is reasonable, it is constructive, it gives us a chance to do our work. There are differences of opinion, for sure. But it is an orderly process that brings some respect back to Congress as an institution instead of the embarrassment of a shutdown of our important government. I hope the Speaker and staff are listening carefully. I hope they will accept this offer by the majority leader to move forward in a positive and constructive way, to keep the government open, to solve our problems in a bipartisan and constructive fashion.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, I find it extremely ironic that we are here right now hearing that the House of Representatives is going to shut down the government and then send us a bill saying they want to talk in a conference committee. Let's remember why we are here right now with the threat of a shutdown where thousands of families and communities are going to be hurt. We passed a budget in the Senate 6 months ago. The House of Representatives passed a budget in the House 6 months ago. The goal was to go together in conference, work out our disagreements, define the funding levels for the coming fiscal year so we would not be sitting tonight, minutes away from a shutdown.

The right thing to have done would have been to go to conference anytime in that last 6 months, as we asked for 18 times, but were told no by the same people who are now sitting on the other side of the aisle and saying: No, they want to shut government down.

Why do they want to do that? They want to create a crisis because they think they are going to get something. We know going to a conference means that we have to compromise. That is what a conference is. But we are not going to do it with a gun to our head that says we are shutting government

down. We are going to conference over a short little 6-week CR? We have to deal with the longer term budget. We have asked many times to go to conference on that. We stand ready to go to work on making compromises for our long-term fiscal crisis. But tonight the only question that should be before the House of Representatives and the Senate is keeping our government open without a gun to anyone's head.

The Speaker should pass a clean CR, send it to the President, and tell Americans that we are not going to disrupt their lives in this country for the next 6 weeks while we work out the bigger agreement. That is what we need to be doing.

I urge the Speaker to step away from the precipice and have the government stay open. Don't put everybody's lives and communities in this country at risk and allow us to get to work to solve our next year's fiscal crisis before it is on us again.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maryland.

Ms. MIKULSKI. Madam President, I chair the Senate Appropriations Committee. It is a great honor. I am the one that would go to conference. Hey, I'm ready. However, a motion to tell us to meet in conference without a continuing funding resolution to keep the government open is a hollow gesture and a cynical gesture and a manipulative gesture. To say "have a conference," that means, myself, my Republican vice chairman, other conferees that would be appointed, we would sit down with the House conferees. By the way, we talk all the time. We started something new under my leadership, with the concurrence of Senator SHELBY, talking with the House. Do we want to meet in a conference? You bet. But to meet in a conference without the continuing funding resolution included in it means that the government shuts down at midnight without a continuing funding resolution to a date certain.

You can tell us to meet all you want, but the government will shut down. My whole point is to agree with my colleagues here that the House should take up what the Senate sent them. The Senate sent, in a gesture of comity and so on, a simple continuing resolution. Keep the government funded until November 15. This would give us opportunities to have that conference. We accepted their funding level, planning to negotiate a higher level. We had been waiting and waiting for Senator MURRAY to be able to go to conference on the budget so that we could arrive at this.

People might say: Senator MIKULSKI, I'm confused. MURRAY is the budget. You are appropriations. Are they not the same thing?

No. Senator MURRAY is the Budget Committee. That is the full revenue. That is the full Federal budget. It includes discretionary spending. I am one part of that. It includes mandatory

spending. That is Social Security, Medicare, veterans benefits, other mandatory spending. It also includes revenue which means that your books ultimately balance and you have a balance in your economy.

The Budget Committee's job is to arrive at that, working with the House. They then give us, the appropriators, something called a 302(a). It is a section in the Budget Act. That Budget Committee tells us, the appropriators, the cap that we can spend. The appropriators are neither free spenders nor freeloaders. We get a cap, a 302(a).

I have 12 subcommittees. Those 12 subcommittees, we divide them up in terms of what we think are the important investments that the country should make; that is into the 12 committees. Then they work with their Republican members to arrive at the subcommittees, and we bring them to the floor.

I have not had a top line. I have not had my cap, because she cannot go to conference. Remember those conferences everybody likes to have? So, had Senator MURRAY gone to a conference we would have had that number. But in the absence of that, I did something really bold. I took the Senate for its word.

This spring when the Budget Committee passed their 302(a) allocation, it would have been \$1.058 trillion. That is how we Senate appropriators, we Democrats, marked up our 12 bills. Some might say that is a lot of money. It sure is a lot of money, and we did a good job with it. We had smart public investments and every one of my subcommittees had the inspector general at their hearings so we could identify duplicative, dated or dysfunctional programs.

We are ready to cut. We know how to cut. We are ready to go, and every one of my subcommittees is ready to go. Am I ready to go to conference? You bet. But to go to conference without that continuing funding resolution is, again, a hollow action that once again wastes time and wastes opportunity.

It is not just those in our country who watch C-SPAN. The world watches C-SPAN. The world is watching us. This is the United States of America. They are watching our parliamentary system, which was once the greatest in the world. We have gone from being the greatest deliberative body to the greatest delaying body, and we delay through hollow gestures back and forth.

I want to do everything I can—working on a bipartisan basis—to maintain the greatness of America, but in order to do that, the greatness of America needs to work tonight. We need to come to our senses, come to an agreement, come to closure, and keep the government open. I am happy to go to the conference, but I would like a date certain. My preference is November 16. Keep the government open. Keep us in not only our job but keep America working.

I yield the floor.

Mr. DURBIN. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, so ordered.

IRAQ SPECIAL IMMIGRATION VISA EXTENSION

Mr. REID. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to S. 1566, the Iraq special immigration visa extension.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 1566) to extend the period during which Iraqis who were employed by the United States Government in Iraq may be granted special immigrant status and to temporarily increase the fee or surcharge for processing machine-readable nonimmigrant visas.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to the bill.

IRAQ SPECIAL IMMIGRANT VISA PROGRAM

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Madam President, I rise today to discuss a small, but critical program that represents a test for this body and for this country: The Iraq Special Immigrant Visa program. It is a test of whether we stand behind our commitments abroad. It is a test of whether we help those who help us. And for others out there who might consider assisting the U.S., it is a test to see if we follow through on our promises. If we don't act now, the Iraq Special Immigrant Visa program will expire along with our obligation to thousands of Iraqis who risked their lives to help U.S. troops at war.

The latest version of the Iraq Special Immigrant Visa program was initiated by Congress in the fiscal year 2008 National Defense Authorization Act. It was originally designed to allow for certain foreign nationals in Iraq who served alongside U.S. forces to receive special visas to come live and work in the United States. The visa program was created to help secure a path out of harm's way for those Iraqis and their families that provided important skills to Americans, like translation services, and are now targeted because of their affiliation with us.

The Iraq visa program is currently set to expire today on September 30, 2013. Without action by the Congress to extend this program, thousands of Iraqi applicants, already under threat due to their faithful assistance and valuable service to the U.S. Government, will see consular work on their cases stopped and their dream of escaping the daily threat of violence will be suspended.

Even if we eventually decide to reauthorize the program at a later date, the

stoppage will result in delays of months or even years for these applicants as they completely restart an already long and overly arduous process. Many of these interpreters and assistants who risked their lives for Americans are now in hiding running from place to place to escape retribution attacks against them and their families, any delays could mean their lives.

Now, since I started working on this special immigrant visa issue, I have come across countless stories of bravery demonstrated by Iraqi interpreters who stand shoulder to shoulder fighting with our military men and women. My office has also heard directly from retired military officers who served alongside these Iraqis and are now fighting to get them out of Iraq to the safety of the United States. I would like to just briefly read a few excerpts from these tremendously inspiring stories:

From one retired Marine Corps captain:

I am a retired member of the U.S. Marine Corps, who served proudly in Iraq between 2004-2005. Among our tasks was conducting nightly kill and capture raids in Anbar Province . . . Our interpreter was our lifeline to the local population . . . He became an invaluable member of our team, and our close friend . . . Because of his nearly four years of service to U.S. forces in Iraq, he was left imperiled and at risk of death at the hands of Iraqi militia . . . We came to trust him and treat him as one of our own.

From a Marine Corps infantry officer who did two tours in Iraq:

I owe my life and the lives of my Marines to [my translator] . . . During high intensity combat operations throughout the second Battle of Fallujah, [he] constantly put his life in danger to protect Marines and civilians . . . Over the course of that deployment, [he] not only served heroically alongside Marines, but he also became a second father and a close friend.

From that same marine:

I have had the opportunity to meet many other Iraqi refugees. They represent the best of our Nation. They chose to put themselves in harm's way because they have always believed in what our country is supposed to stand for . . . They are eager to share in the American dream and to contribute in meaningful ways on the home front as they did overseas. They've earned that opportunity.

I could not agree more. But, unfortunately, thousands of Iraqis who have earned the chance to come to the United States might not make it, and simply because we failed to act. That is unacceptable.

Now, a number of Members on both sides of the aisle, including myself, have been working hard for the last 6 months to find a way to extend this critical program. Senators MCCAIN, LEAHY, GRAHAM, LEVIN, DURBIN, and others have been champions of this effort. We have extensions of this program in the comprehensive immigration bill, the current version of the National Defense Authorization Act, and in the annual State Department appropriations bill. Unfortunately, none of these will be signed into law by the deadline.