

with top researchers and institute directors at the National Institutes of Health.

Dr. Francis Collins, Director of the National Institutes of Health since 2009, recently said about Erik: “Erik Fatemi stands out in my mind as one of the most effective staff members I have worked with on Capitol Hill. Erik is the exemplar of an effective appropriations staffer: he has always mastered any of the issues he’s been involved in and he has always demonstrated the ‘passion for anonymity’ of a loyal staff member. An expert on NIH, Erik has always been tough, fair and compassionate. He always asked the tough questions and would not give up until he got straight answers—whether it was from the NIH or the broader biomedical research community. And in all of his dealings with NIH and me, he has always kept uppermost in his mind the millions of patients and their families who count on the treatments, cures, and preventive measures that publicly-funded biomedical research makes possible. Throughout his career, in his dedication to his boss, Tom Harkin, and in his commitment to patients and their families, Erik Fatemi has been a superb Appropriations staffer and a model public servant.”

As notable as Dr. Collins praise is, I long ago lost track of the number of times people have thanked me for things that Erik played a huge role in getting done. Let me mention a few of his many accomplishments.

One signal achievement of my time as chair of the Appropriations subcommittee was collaborating with Senator Arlen Specter to double funding for the National Institutes of Health over a 5-year period. Erik played a very significant role in making that possible in 2001, 2002, and 2003—and that is something that he can be very proud of.

In the late 2000s, I was chief Senate sponsor of the Stem Cell Enhancement Act, to remove the administration’s arbitrary restrictions on stem cell research and Erik was my lead staffer on the bill. With Erik’s invaluable assistance, we passed the Stem Cell Enhancement Act twice in Congress with large bipartisan majorities. Unfortunately, the bill was also vetoed twice by President Bush. And do you know what. That is about the only thing that can stop Erik Fatemi: A veto by the President of the United States. The good news, of course, is that we ultimately prevailed, with President Obama’s executive order in early 2009.

During and after the great recession, Erik took the lead in identifying and responding to the impact the downturn could have on our Nation’s education system. He illustrated for me and other Members of Congress the devastating impact educator layoffs would have on our children’s education and our Nation’s future. The historic Recovery Act and the later Education Jobs Act kept hundreds of thousands of teachers and other educators in our schools, and

Erik helped me shape the debate and passage of those critical laws.

Erik played a key role in the creation of the National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences at NIH, which is accelerating the pace of getting new cures and therapies to the patients who need them.

He also oversaw production of the 2012 report “Under Threat: Sequestration’s Impact on Nondefense Jobs and Services.” This was the first comprehensive State-by-State projections of the destructive impacts of sequestration on nondefense discretionary programs.

All of these accomplishments amply demonstrate Erik’s skills and talents as a top Senate staffer. But Erik is more than that. He is the quintessential humble public servant who works long hours on behalf of this institution and the people of the United States.

Let me cite just one aspect of that humble service. Over the years, Erik has spent countless hours explaining to thousands of constituents and advocates what was happening on Capitol Hill at any given moment. I can’t imagine how many times and to how many audiences he has patiently explained how the legislative process works, especially the arcane and sometimes bizarre workings of appropriations.

As a Senator, I have always appreciated that when Erik couldn’t tell my constituents the answer they wanted to hear—which, unfortunately is most of the time, especially these last few years—he would respond to every question and e-mail promptly and honestly. In dealings with Erik, people always know that he is listening and taking their concerns seriously.

Finally, I also want to express my appreciation to Erik’s family members, especially his wife Alisann and their beloved daughters, Caroline, Kathryn, and Anna Christina. They, too, have sacrificed as Erik has spent many late nights and weekends toiling in the Dirksen Building. It was not easy to experience those absences, but I hope you realize that Erik’s work has made a powerful difference for the American people.

Erik, I join with the entire Senate family in thanking you for your outstanding service. We wish you, Alisann, Caroline, Kathryn and Anna Christina much happiness in the years ahead.

CONTINUING APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, more and more interesting figures are coming in to my health committee from around the country with regard to what is happening around the Nation in terms of the health care marketplace, ObamaCare. The Republicans said it was going to be a failure and all that kind of stuff and how it was going to cost so much more money. I do not have it for every State. It is starting to come in. But I have it for some States and I want to give this body and people

watching some of the initial figures that have come in on the savings to families. For example, in Alabama, \$2,013 premiums for a family of four—median premium for month. This is just the average, take the median. In Alabama, for a family of four this year the premium was \$557.58 a month. We now know the marketplace premium, family of four making \$50,000 a year with the tax credits, their monthly premium will be \$112 a month, a savings of \$445.58 a month for a family of four making \$50,000 year in the State of Alabama.

In my State of Iowa, that median premium per month for a family of four this year was \$549.58. The marketplace premium for that family of four at \$50,000 with tax credits is now \$103 a month, for a savings of \$446.58 per month for that family of four.

I was looking at Oklahoma. Their median premium this year was \$684 a month. The marketplace premium for that family of four—again, \$50,000 a year—with their tax credits, believe it or not, is \$63 per month. They will go from \$684 to \$63 a month. Those families will have a savings of \$621 a month in the State of Oklahoma.

The median premium per month for a family of four in Texas this year is \$504.50. Their marketplace premium for a family of four making \$50,000 a year, after the tax credits, \$57 a month, for a savings of \$447.50 a month. It is an amazing savings.

Many of these people are getting insurance for the first time. Many of these people may have had a pre-existing condition or perhaps they worked in a job that did not give them health care coverage or perhaps they simply couldn’t afford \$500 a month in Texas, but now they can afford \$57 a month and get coverage for their family of four, and they will get a subsidy for buying that marketplace insurance.

Is this what the Republicans want to stop? Is this what they want so desperately to stop that they are willing to shut down government? They ought to talk to some of these families in Texas, Iowa, Alabama, Oklahoma, and Michigan.

The premium for a family of four in Michigan is \$381 a month this year. In the marketplace it will be \$80 a month.

Georgia’s premium for a family of four is \$448 a month this year and will go down to \$132 a month under the marketplace. That is what the Republicans want to stop? Well, I think we are seeing that what the Republicans really wanted to do was to keep the same old system we have where health insurance companies call the tune, you pay the price, and if you couldn’t afford it, tough luck, go to the emergency room. Now we are going to cover all Americans.

More and more information will come in, and as it comes in, I will take the floor to give more and more information about the call centers. Right now—in the last 2 days—over 7 million Americans have visited healthcare.gov

to get more information on what they can do to sign up. Again, the marketplace call center—these are calls, not the Web site—received over 295,000 calls since midnight on October 1. The wait time has been cut in half so now the wait time is only 2 minutes. The wait time is only 2 minutes if you call in to the call center.

Again, I want to repeat what I said yesterday—and I know the majority leader said it this morning—about the dangers of continuing this government shutdown. I quoted a Congressman from Iowa who said in Politico:

We passed the witching hour at midnight last night and the sky didn't fall and the roof didn't cave in.

Is that what has to happen? Does the sky have to fall and the roof have to cave in before we do something? I pointed it out yesterday, and I will point it out again today: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is closed down. Why is that important? Well, we are now in the flu season. More than 200,000 Americans are hospitalized due to the flu each year. In a mild year 3,000 people will die from the flu, and in a severe year that number could rise to 50,000.

The CDC monitors which strains are circulating around the country and which communities are being hit the hardest. They are the ones who look at how to contain it and keep it from spreading. They are not doing that now because they are shut down.

Food safety: Twelve days ago, 162 people in 10 States became ill with hepatitis A because of eating frozen berries. Right away the CDC got on the job, sent their epidemiologists out there, tracked it down, isolated it, recalled it, and found out it was pomegranate berries from Turkey. Well, 162 people got Hepatitis A, but nobody else did. CDC is not out there doing this now because they are shut down. That was just 12 days ago.

What if we have another outbreak of food poisoning? How fast will it spread? How many people have to get sick? Is that what this Congressman from Iowa is saying, that we have to have more people get sick? Is that what he means when he says the sky hasn't fallen or the roof hasn't caved in?

In August, cyclosporine infected 643 people from a salad mix. It started in my home State of Iowa. They immediately called the Centers for Disease Control. The CDC got on it right away and found that this salad mix was sent to 25 States. They recalled it all, traced it to salad that had come from Mexico, and they stopped it.

How many people have to get sick? Do we have to have a West Nile virus, hepatitis, e. coli, or a vast outbreak of the flu virus before they say: Well, that is enough, I guess we can start the government up again. It is totally irresponsible to say: Well, we can shut down the government because the sky hasn't fallen and the roof hasn't caved in.

Members of Congress are getting their paycheck. They are coming to

work every day. We are here and we are getting our pay. How about all of those government workers who work on our staffs, on our committees, and run the Senate? They are good, hard-working public servants, and they are out of work and not getting a paycheck.

I have staff people who don't make a lot of money. They have families, a mortgage, and maybe a car payment to make, but they don't have any money coming in. If they wanted to go to the credit union here to get a bridge loan to get them through the crisis, they can't because the credit union is shut down. Now where do they go? Do they get the money from their credit card? I say to the Congressman from Iowa that for these people the roof has caved in and the sky has fallen.

There are thousands of Head Start kids who will be sent home from Head Start this month and working parents will have to find something else for them. What are they going to do? For them the sky has fallen and the roof has caved in. Don't we care about them?

I mentioned Social Security too. Social Security will still take your claims and your application for a Social Security card, but that is it. You won't get it because the backlog is backing up. They will take it, but they won't process it.

I mentioned that 445,000 people call their Social Security office every day in this country. They will not get an answer now. There are 180,000 people who visit a Social Security office every day in this country, but they can't now because they are closed. They lost their Medicare card or Social Security card or they need a new Medicaid card.

There are 22,000 Americans who file for retirement benefits every day and 12,000 apply for disability benefits. They can still apply, but they are not going to get any help. For them the sky has fallen and the roof has caved in.

What is this Congressman saying, that the sky has to fall on him and the roof has to cave in on him before he will do something to help open the government? And to hear them talk about it—a representative said “this is about the happiest” she has been. This is a Congresswoman from Minnesota. “This is about the happiest I've seen members in a long time,” she said.

“We are very excited,” said Representative Michele Bachmann. “It's exactly what we wanted, and we got it.”

Shutting down the government is exactly what they wanted and they got it.

“It's wonderful,” said Representative John Abney Culberson of Texas, clapping his hands to emphasize his point. “We are 100 percent united.”

So this is where we are. The tea party group in the House is happy to shut down the government. It is the happiest they have been, they said. They want this discord, disunity, chaos, and confusion. The American people don't want that.

The American people don't want to turn their back on ObamaCare either because they see that now they are able to get coverage. Even if they have a preexisting condition, they can get a good rate for themselves and their families which they could not get before.

Now it is time to open the government again, put people back to work so we can meet our responsibilities to the American people.

I call upon Speaker BOEHNER to take the continuing resolution that is sitting over in the House now—it is a continuing resolution that will open the government. He says we wouldn't negotiate. We already negotiated because before that we had one level of spending in the bill, they had a lower level of spending, and we agreed with them. We took the lower level. We took the Republicans' level.

All he has to do is bring that to the House floor and it will pass in the next 10 to 30 minutes. It will pass, and then we can open the government so people can get back to work. The Centers for Disease Control can get their people back out in the field. The National Institutes of Health will open once again. Head Start kids will be able to stay in their Head Start Programs. The Women, Infants, and Children feeding program will be able to get the necessary nutritious food for poor kids and kids who are homeless.

All Speaker BOEHNER has to do to end this is to bring that bill on the floor. He doesn't even have to vote for it. Congressman BOEHNER doesn't have to vote for it. Just throw it out, and I will bet that enough moderate Republicans and Democrats will vote to pass it. I challenge him to bring it out. Let's see what happens. That is the way to end this debacle right now.

With that, I yield the floor, and note the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

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

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

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, I have been informed that I spoke incorrectly a few minutes ago when I said the credit union was closed. I guess one office is closed someplace, but another office is open and they will take calls. So I guess the office in the Hart Building is still open. I guess another office someplace else is closed. So I spoke incorrectly.

But I will continue to make this point: Isn't it a shame that our staffs, who work hard, have to go to a credit union to borrow money to get them through this period of time, to meet a mortgage payment or a car payment or whatever it is? We don't have to do that; we continue to get paid while we are here.

Again, in response to the remarks that, well, the sky hasn't fallen and the roof hasn't caved in, according to this Congressman from Iowa, for someone who now has to borrow money, even from a credit union—I belong to the credit union—for someone who has to borrow money from the credit union, it is just not right. This is simply not right and another reason why we have to call off this government shutdown, which, as I said, we could do in the next few minutes if Mr. BOEHNER would just put on the floor the continuing resolution he has over there and let his people vote on it.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Massachusetts.

Ms. WARREN. Mr. President, we are now 3 days into a completely unnecessary, completely avoidable Republican shutdown, and there is more talk than ever about the inability of our leaders to find common ground on central, economic, and fiscal issues of our time.

This government shutdown is throwing a major wrench into a fragile economic recovery. Nearly 1 million Federal employees are sitting at home for no reason, and other public servants are working but not earning a paycheck. Cancer patients are being turned away from clinical trials at the NIH. Veterans' benefits are at risk. Basic nutrition services for pregnant women and new moms will be disrupted. Small businesses won't be able to get Federal loan guarantees. And all this is happening on top of the idiotic sequester—drastic, across-the-board spending cuts that have crippled Meals On Wheels, Head Start, and investments in medical research.

We all know how we got here. For years now we have heard a small minority in this country rail against government. When I hear the latest tirades from some of the extremists in the House, I am struck by how vague these complaints are. From their rhetoric, one would think they believed that anytime we, the people, come together to improve our lives, the Nation is committing some terrible wrong. From their rhetoric, one would think they believe that the government that functions best is a government that doesn't function at all. So far, they haven't ended government, but they have achieved the next best thing—shutting the government down.

But behind all the slogans of the tea party and all the thinly veiled calls for anarchy in Washington, behind all that there is a reality. The American people don't want the extremist Republicans' bizarre vision of a future without government. They don't support it. Why? Because the American people know that without government, we would no longer be a great nation with a bright future. The American people know that government matters.

The anarchy gang is quick to malign government, but when was the last time anyone called for regulators to go easier on companies that put lead in

children's toys or for food inspectors to stop checking whether the meat in our grocery stores is crawling with deadly bacteria or for the FDA to ignore whether morning sickness drugs will cause horrible deformities in little babies? We never hear that—not from political leaders in Washington and not from the American people. In fact, whenever the anarchy gang makes headway in their efforts to damage our government, the opposite happens. After the sequester kicked in, Republicans immediately turned around and called on the technical funding for our national defense and to keep the air traffic controllers on the job.

Now that the House Republicans have shut down the government, holding the country hostage because of some imaginary health care bogeyman, Republicans almost immediately turned around and called on us to start reopening parts of our government. Why did they do this? Because the bogeyman "government" is like the bogeyman under the bed. It is not real. It doesn't exist.

What is real and what does exist are all the important work we as Americans have chosen to do together through our government. In our democracy, government is not some make-believe thing that has an independent will of its own. In our democracy, government is just how we describe what we, the people, have already decided to do together. It is not complicated. Our government has three basic functions: provide for the national defense; put in place rules of the road, such as speed limits, and bank regulations that are fair and transparent; and build that which none of us can build alone—roads, power grids, schools—that which gives everyone a chance to succeed.

We are a nation of innovators and entrepreneurs, growing small businesses and thriving big businesses. But our people succeed, our country succeeds because we have all come together to put public institutions and infrastructure together. We all decided to pass laws and put cops on the beat so that no one steals a purse on Main Street or a pension on Wall Street. We all decided to invest in public education so that businesses have skilled workers and a kid with an idea can create the next breakthrough company. We all decided to invest in basic science so there is a great pipeline of ideas to create our future. These achievements aren't magic. They didn't simply occur on their own or through dumb luck. In each instance we made a choice as a people to come together.

The Food and Drug Administration makes sure the white pills we take are antibiotics and not baking soda. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration oversees crash tests to make sure all new cars have effective brakes. The Consumer Product Safety Commission makes sure babies' car seats don't collapse in a crash and toasters don't explode. We don't know who they are, but there is no question

that there are Americans alive today, Americans who are healthier, Americans who are stronger, because of these and countless other government efforts—alive, healthier, stronger because of what we did together.

The anarchy gang in the House can dump on their make-believe version of government all they want, but when the real government fails to live up to the high expectations we have all set for it, politicians in both parties rush to outrage. Why? Because the American people know government can work and believe government should work.

Today—that is right, today—marks the fifth anniversary of President Bush signing the bank bailout into law. That financial crisis cost us upwards of \$14 trillion—that is trillion with a "t." That is \$120,000 for every American household—more than 2 years' worth of income for the average family. Billions of dollars in retirement savings have disappeared, millions of workers lost their jobs, and millions more families lost their homes.

In April 2011, after a 2-year bipartisan inquiry, the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations released a 635-page report that made it plain: Regulators could have and should have used their existing tools to prevent the crisis. Republicans and Democrats, a bipartisan group, found strong agreement that—we better believe it—government matters.

The attacks on government are abstract, but the consequences of this shutdown are real: less accountability for cheaters and rule-breakers, less opportunity for our children, cracks in the foundations that businesses need to succeed, and a tilted playing field that limits opportunities for all of our people.

We know that government doesn't always work. We know no institution is infallible. People make mistakes, ideas fail, and sometimes we get it wrong. But our response isn't to give up. Our response isn't to sit back and say: I told you so. We are not a nation of quitters. Our response, the American response, is to fix it, to make government work better.

Our democracy is an experiment, and it is always evolving. We constantly redesign and reimagine and improve on what we do together. But time and time again throughout our history we have reaffirmed the simple truth that government matters. Right now, right at this moment, if we look closely, we will see that we are reaffirming it once again. It is not an accident that the desire to shut down government is confined to one extremist faction of one political party of one Chamber of Congress of one branch of government. It is not an accident that this extremist faction must resort to absurd hostage tactics—threats to turn off the government, threats to default on our debt, threats to tank the economy—to force their views on everyone else. It is not an accident that this faction is doing everything in its power to make government appear dysfunctional.

In a democracy, these hostage tactics are the last resort for those who can't win their fights through elections, can't win their fights through Congress, can't win their fights for the Presidency, and can't win their fights in courts. But these threats are not working and they will never work because this is a democracy, and for more than 200 years our democracy has defeated extremists and rejected the idea that government does not matter.

So to those who have forced us to the brink, to those who rail against a make-believe government, to those who seem to rejoice in anarchy, to those who have salivated at the chance to shut down our government because their extremist views have left them disconnected from the experiences of the American people, it is time to hear a simple message:

You can do your best to make government look like it does not work when you stop it from working, you can do your best to make government look paralyzed when you paralyze it, you can do your best to make government look incompetent through your incompetence and through your ineffectiveness, but sooner or later the government will reopen because this is a democracy and this democracy has already rejected your views.

We have already chosen to work together because we all know we are stronger when we come together. And when this government reopens, when our markets are safe again, when our scientists can return to their research, when our small businesses can borrow, when our veterans can be respected for their service, when our flu shots resume and our Head Start programs get back to teaching our kids, we will have rejected your views once again.

We are not a country of anarchists. We are not a country of pessimists and ideologues whose motto is "I got mine. The rest of you are on your own." We are not a country that tolerates dangerous drugs, unsafe meat, dirty air, or toxic mortgages. We are not that nation, we have never been that nation, and we will never be that nation.

Today, a political minority in the House that condemns government and begged for this shutdown has had its day. But like all the reckless and extremist factions that have come before it, their day will pass and our democracy will return to the important work we have already chosen to do together.

I thank the Chair.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. HEITKAMP). The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. CORKER. Madam President, I did not really expect to come down here and speak. I was just checking on a judge vote, which I understand has

been postponed. But I do say this: It appears to me that the CR discussion and the debt ceiling discussion are going to be combined maybe into one effort, and I just want to say that I think that is a great opportunity for all of us. I was down here yesterday talking about the same.

Typically, when we have dealt with issues such as this, what we have tried to do together is figure out a way to strengthen our country through making those kinds of reforms that lessen the amount of deficits we are going to have in the future. That is typically what debates such as this have been about.

So I think the realization that people have right now—that we could well try to deal with the CR and the debt ceiling at the same time—could move us back into the kind of constructive conversation we have had for so long around mandatory spending reforms, figuring out a way to keep spending reductions where they are but build upon them, but do it in a way that is more sensible than what we have done in the past.

So, again, I was beginning to get worried. And I will stop in a minute. It looks as if the senior Senator—

Mr. MCCAIN. Madam President, will my friend from Tennessee yield for a question?

Mr. CORKER. I would be tremendously honored to take a question from the distinguished Senator.

Mr. MCCAIN. Has the Senator seen the polls of American public opinion about what we are doing here? Has the Senator had a chance to see that?

Mr. CORKER. I do not pay as much attention to polls possibly as I should. My understanding, in listening to the senior Senator from Arizona, is they are not particularly favorable.

Mr. MCCAIN. To all of us. To all of us.

Mr. CORKER. Yes. I did not mean to individuals.

Mr. MCCAIN. To both sides of the aisle. And they do not understand, isn't it true, why we have not been able to come to some conclusion?

As the Senator from Tennessee just said, we now are going to have this merged into the debt limit.

Mr. CORKER. Right.

Mr. MCCAIN. The Senator from Tennessee has an extensive background in finance. Isn't it true that the world markets would react in a very, very severe fashion if we allowed the debt limit to expire?

Mr. CORKER. I think everyone understands that is very problematic for markets. Actually, we are beginning to see some volatility now that we have not seen in the past.

I would like to respond, if I could, a little more fully to say that I think we have an opportunity—look, we have been in a place that I think people here know. We have known exactly where the discussions in the past were going to lead; that is, to this box canyon.

I think the fact that we have ended up in a place now where these two

things may merge—and I know the senior Senator from Arizona has been involved in multiple conversations about this—I think we have an opportunity now to begin talking again about those things that strengthen our Nation and looking at some reforms, not to do so in a chicken way, in a way where you have two cars heading at each other, but to use this like previous debt ceilings have been used where adults sit down, they look at the problems our Nation is facing, and we do some things that, candidly, in a bipartisan way, people have been trying to do for a long time.

I would like to mention one more time—I know I did this yesterday, and I know the senior Senator from Arizona and myself have spent a lot of time together on this issue—the President, in his budget in April, put forth some mandatory reforms. Many of those are pretty good. I would like to make them better, but they are a pretty good start. We have a few days—a week, 2 weeks—here where we could actually sit down maybe and cobble something together that would mean that while all this acrimony has existed for some time, we might get back on target and back to focusing on making our country stronger.

I know today we were in this incredible hearing on Iran, and I certainly appreciated the comments of the senior Senator from Arizona about our concerns there. One of the biggest issues we have around the world right now is just people look at us—as the Senator was alluding to a minute ago—as unable to deal with our fiscal issues.

So I look at what has happened. I know it can be viewed in whichever way you want to view it. I look at it as being a glass half full. We have an opportunity over the next short period of time to do some good policy, put some good policy in place, to pass a CR, to pass the debt ceiling, and again move our country ahead toward being stronger.

I am sorry to respond with such a long answer.

Mr. MCCAIN. May I ask just one more question of my friend from Tennessee.

We know that sooner or later the government will begin to function again—sooner or later.

Mr. CORKER. It will function again.

Mr. MCCAIN. Sooner or later we will address the debt ceiling because the United States is not going to renege on its debts.

Mr. CORKER. That is right.

Mr. MCCAIN. It is going to meet its obligations. So we know those are facts. We know that at some point there is going to have to be a resolution. It is not going to go on forever. Nothing does. So if it argues for a solution, shouldn't we ask all parties to sit down and start discussions that the Senator and I and others have had kind of on an ad hoc basis, sort of, with people here and there and then conversations here and there, to start laying the groundwork?

I also want to point out that I think it is important that the President of the United States, rather than saying "I will not negotiate with anybody under any circumstances," say "I am willing to sit down and negotiate. I am willing to join with all parties in trying to find a way through this."

We will sooner or later. The question is not whether we will solve these issues. The question really is—and I ask my friend from Tennessee—how much damage will be done before we solve it. Right now, there are people beginning to hurt all over America, and maybe it is not so bad right now, but it is going to get worse every single day that goes by. Frankly, I think we owe the American people more than that. Now, if somebody wants to blame me, fine. I will take the blame. If they want to blame the Senator from Tennessee, put the blame on him—on the President, on anybody. But shouldn't we remember what our duties are here?

Mr. CORKER. Absolutely. As a matter of fact, I am just looking down to see what the date is, but it seems to me that we have 2 weeks here, and to get to the Senator's comments, hopefully a week. In other words, the quicker we resolve these issues, the better it is for our Nation, the better it is for the world, because at the end of the day, let's face it, what we care about most is the well-being of our citizens back home. We know that uncertainty creates uncertainty in the economy. It affects people's jobs. I would agree.

Look, we are at that moment in time where we have all realized the CR and the debt ceiling are probably going to be linked together. They are linked together in essence, and, as the senior Senator from Arizona just mentioned, there is no question we are going to resolve those. So what we ought to do is sit down right now, the President of the United States, the appropriate leadership here in the House and Senate—and whether it is they or their proxies—but to sit down, and let's figure out if there are some reforms we can put in place to make our country stronger and to again get back on the right topic, which is our financial strength. I think we could do that.

The fact is that there are no new issues. Every single issue has been litigated. There is legislative language. They are scored. There is not a new issue for us to talk about relative to putting some good policy in place to move ahead.

The Senator from Arizona has been so involved in these issues. I just could not agree more. I know the junior Senator from Arizona is sitting in the back, and I know he has been incredibly responsible fiscally.

I think we have an opportunity. I think this body should take advantage of it. I think the President should come to the table, take advantage of it, the leadership of the House. Let's do something good for our country. Let's do it in an appropriate amount of time. Let's put this behind us and move on—move on as a nation.

Mr. McCAIN. I thank my friend.

Does the Senator yield the floor?

Mr. CORKER. I do.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. McCAIN. Madam President, I want to thank my friend from Tennessee, whose commitment to achieving solutions and resolution of this bitter environment in which we find ourselves is admirable. I am grateful for his participation and his leadership. I also thank my young, handsome colleague from Arizona, who also has had a many yearlong commitment to fiscal sanity and balance. I thank my colleagues.

SYRIA

Mr. McCAIN. Madam President, I come to the floor to talk for a short period of time about Syria, which is, although not dominating our conversation here—lead stories in both the Washington Post and the Wall Street Journal are deeply disturbing.

First, I would like to point out that on the front page of the Wall Street Journal today there is an article titled "Syrian Regime Chokes Off Food To Town That Was Gassed." I repeat: "Syrian Regime Chokes Off Food To Town That Was Gassed."

Government forces are tightening the noose around one of the suburbs gassed by chemical weapons in August, raising concerns of a fresh humanitarian crisis as residents forage for olives, grapevine leaves and other basic foods.

Pro-regime fighters—

That is Bashar al-Assad's killers—

have encircled about 12,000 people, mostly civilians but also including some rebel fighters, in the town of Moadhamiya, according to local and international aid workers, opposition activists and people interviewed on Monday in a government-controlled section of the town.

This is a town that is strategically important to both sides because the flow of humanitarian and military aid flows through this particular area for those who are fighting in Aleppo and in Damascus.

The story goes on:

"We won't allow them to be nourished in order to kill us," said a 24-year-old pro-regime paramilitary in the government-controlled section. . . . "Let them starve for a bit, surrender and then be put on trial."

These are the same people, apparently government forces, that are "cooperating" with us on chemical weapons, that are allowing inspectors to come in to gather the chemical weapons. So they have 12,000 people encircled, that they have already gassed, 1,400 of them, 400 children in the same town. So now they are going to starve them. Like the fighters said, "Let them starve for a bit, surrender and then be put on trial."

It is remarkable. An opposition activist inside the rebel-held side of the town who was reached by Skype said the situation is so dire now in the rebel-controlled area that people are subsisting on whatever they can forage

locally, including olives, grapevine leaves, fresh mint, and figs.

So here we have the latest result of our wonderful and much heralded agreement on chemical weapons. They killed, in this town, 1,400 people, 400 of them children, with gas. Now they are going to kill 12,000 more with conventional weapons: bombs, guns, tanks, knives. Brutality and torture has characterized their behavior for a long period of time.

It seems to me it is a little bizarre. It is a little bizarre that we are hailing this cooperation from Bashar Assad on chemical weapons, and meanwhile the slaughter goes on: 110,000 dead, 1 million children refugees, the surrounding countries being destabilized, and, of course, the refugee camps are terrible situations to which we have not given the assistance that we should.

I urge all of my colleagues, if they had the opportunity, to visit one of these refugee camps and hear the stories of the murder, the gang rapes, the torture that is the official doctrine of Bashar Assad, not random acts of violence. The defectors from Bashar Assad's military will tell you that is their training and indoctrination and instructions.

So the second article today is from the Washington Post. "CIA ramping up covert training program for moderate Syrian rebels."

The CIA is expanding a clandestine effort to train opposition fighters in Syria amid concern that moderate U.S.-backed militias are rapidly losing ground in the country's civil war.

But the CIA program is so miniscule that it is expected to produce only a few hundred trained fighters each month even after it is enlarged, a level that officials said will do little to bolster rebel forces that are being eclipsed by radical Islamists in the fight against the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

Here is the interesting part.

The CIA's mission, officials said, has been defined by the White Houses's desire to seek a political settlement, a scenario that relies on an eventual stalemate among the warring factions rather than a clear victor. As a result, officials said, limits on the agency's authorities enable it to provide enough support to help ensure that politically moderate, U.S.-supported militias don't lose but not enough for them to win.

Picture these young people who are fighting in Syria today. The official U.S. policy is that they will provide weapons but only enough so they cannot win. Those people are being slaughtered. They are being murdered. They are dying. Some 110,000 have died. I am not sure how many of them were actual fighters. The official U.S. policy, according to the Washington Post, is that they want them not to win.

It is hard to motivate people to fight for a cause that we are not willing to help them win.

The agency has trained fewer than 1,000 rebel fighters this year, current and former U.S. officials said. By contrast, U.S. intelligence analysts estimate that more than 20,000 have been trained to fight for government-backed militias by Assad's ally Iran