

defense." He also wrote that that there can be no compromise on Israel's identity as a Jewish state. He has affirmed the U.S. commitment to Israel's security and Israel's right to defend itself against aggression. These are just a few examples, but by any objective measure, Senator Hagel is committed to the mutual interests of the United States and Israel.

Attacks suggesting that Senator Hagel is soft on Iran are also baseless. Through all my conversations with Senator Hagel, I have never once doubted his belief in the President's responsibility to build alliances and exhaust all available means to achieve our foreign policy goals through diplomacy. But he also believes that aggressive actions by us against a foreign government should be strategic. There is not a shred of evidence to support claims that he supports a nuclear Iran, or that he does not support the President's efforts—unilateral or multilateral—to bring Iran to the negotiating table over its nuclear program. He has reaffirmed that he believes in keeping all options on the table, including force if necessary, to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. Senator Hagel supports the sanctions against Iran already in place. He has affirmed the need to keep military action on the table. He supported the Iran Missile Proliferation Sanctions Act of 1997, the Iran Nonproliferation Act of 2000, and the Iran Freedom Support Act of 2006. Any assertion that Senator Hagel accepts Iran's nuclear program is false.

Then there are the bogus, inflammatory claims that Senator Hagel is soft on terrorism. Nothing could be further from the truth. He has not hesitated to call Hezbollah and Hamas what they are—terrorist organizations. He condemned Iran's support of Hezbollah and cosponsored the Senate resolution demanding that Hamas recognize Israel's right to exist. He also supported the Palestinian Anti-Terrorism Act of 2006, a multilateral effort to force Hamas to recognize Israel, renounce violence, disarm itself, and accept prior agreements with Israel.

I have traveled with Senator Hagel to different parts of the world, combat areas and areas of great security concern to the United States. I have sat in meetings with him as he spoke with our military and intelligence officials. Please excuse me if I am somewhat vague, since most of these meetings were of a highly classified nature, but I can say this: he asked tough questions and always kept the security interests of the United States foremost at hand with both U.S. security officials and also with the leaders of other countries. Senators who were with us of both parties commented to me afterward how impressed they were with the way Senator Hagel conducted these meetings.

In this time of talk of across the board budget cuts, some have suggested that Senator Hagel would recklessly weaken the defense budget.

Nothing in Chuck Hagel's record supports that. He resigned as Deputy Administrator of the Veterans Administration over what he considered to be inappropriate budget cuts.

He opposes cuts that would weaken our security. He vigorously opposes sequestration, which has been rightly compared to cutting with a meat cleaver. Like Secretary Panetta and Secretary Gates, Chuck Hagel believes the Pentagon has a role to play in deficit reduction but not at the expense of keeping our military the preeminent fighting force in the world. He says that reductions must be smart and strategic. I agree. I am confident that our men and women in uniform will have no stronger advocate and that our Nation will have a solid defender in Chuck Hagel.

Senator Hagel, who has seen combat from the perspective of an enlisted member of our Armed Forces, sees our military as the last resort, not the first resort in international relations. Those who have been in combat, from President Eisenhower on until today, have taken that same position. No matter what any detractor may say, his is sound policy.

Matters of war and peace are matters of life and death. Those who sit in boardrooms or in easy chairs and say: Let's commit our soldiers here and our soldiers there—they are not the ones going. By and large, it is not their family members risking their lives. We need a Secretary of Defense who knows what it is like to go and to face combat and to be wounded. Should we commit our troops when it is necessary for our defense? Of course. That is why we have troops. But let's recognize that such decisions come at great human cost.

Senator Hagel, a decorated veteran who still walks with the shrapnel from his wounds in Vietnam, understands that a decision to go to war is a decision to send our sons and daughters, husbands and wives, fathers and mothers into harm's way. It is his deep, visceral understanding of this fact, his record of experience, his patriotism, and his dedication to this Nation that qualify him to be the next Secretary of Defense.

We should have the vote and confirm this patriotic American hero. Let's not hide behind a filibuster. Let's have the courage to vote yes or vote no. Do not hide behind parliamentary tricks. Do not vote maybe. The American people elected us to vote yes or vote no. When you want to set up a filibuster rule on something, you are basically saying: Let's vote maybe. That is hardly a profile in courage and certainly not the kind of courage we would expect from a Secretary of Defense. So vote yes or vote no. But however you vote, let's do it without delay. I will vote yes.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Indiana.

Mr. COATS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

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

MANDATORY SPENDING

Mr. COATS. Mr. President, earlier this week I outlined four main topics that I hoped to hear the President discuss in his State of the Union Address. Today, I would like to talk in more detail about one of those items and perhaps the most challenging—restructuring Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security to preserve them for current and future generations.

In Washington, these three programs fall into the category of mandatory spending, meaning they are not contingent on annual congressional review or funding. Instead, they are based on formulas that have already been written into law, and therefore this spending occurs automatically, as if it is on autopilot. So, anyone who becomes eligible for the program based on the requirements in the law automatically qualifies for the benefits. We do not have the ability on a year-to-year basis to review or change this. We can only make structural changes and reforms to the program as necessary.

Today these items make up a majority of the government's annual budget. This is because when these programs were implemented they did not take into account the remarkable and wonderful increase in the lifespan of Americans, nor the impact of the post-World War II baby boom generation reaching the point of retirement age, which is now at the level of about 10,000 retirements each and every day of the year. That is putting an enormous strain on the overall budget and the amount in proportion to the budget that goes for funding these mandatory programs.

After World War II and after a long decade of depression, Americans saw a bright new future. They came home from the war. They began to start families. Millions upon millions of children were born in the post-war period up until the earlier 1960s. This is the so-called baby boom generation.

Initially, when they were born, certain industries came into play. If you were in the diaper business, suddenly you were in a boom business or cribs and strollers and then tricycles and bicycles. These children moved on to the age where they began to enter elementary school, and we built schools all over the country to accommodate this growth in our population working their way through the system. Then it was junior highs and then we needed to enlarge our high schools, and new colleges and universities sprung up across the land, too. Upon graduation, they found jobs, and it was time to start their own families—housing boomed.

Throughout the whole lifespan of this baby boom generation, there have been enormous economic changes to adapt to this massive amount of people working their way through life and becoming such an integral part of the American dream and American history.

We often talk now about this issue in cold hard facts because this generation

is reaching retirement age, moving into retirement and qualification, for Social Security and Medicare coverage in massive numbers—10,000 or more a day. But when we are talking about it in just cold hard facts and numbers, we tend to ignore the impact of these programs in a much more personal way on our American public.

Becoming eligible for the programs we are talking about means access to health care during a more difficult time of life. Perhaps you are no longer covered by your employer because you have made the decision to retire or reached retirement age. There are health care issues as we age that we wish did not happen, but they come on in ever-increasing intensity. It means grandparents having enough money to travel to see the kids and a new grandbaby. It means men and women who have worked hard all of their lives to provide for their families finally having the financial freedom to take some time off to retire.

Hoosiers and Americans all across this land have paid into the system all through their working years. They rely on these health and retirement security programs and their benefits. These are honest, hard-working men and women who have been told that if they made contributions through their paychecks to these programs, they would become eligible at a certain age for a certain standard of coverage. They expect to receive that. So, the challenge before us today is to make sure these benefits continue to be available to both current and future recipients. But, as we examine our Nation's current fiscal state, we all need to come to terms with the fact that these programs will not be available in their current form if we do not make some necessary changes.

The Heritage Foundation reports that mandatory spending has increased at almost six times faster than all other spending. In other words, spending on Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security is growing faster than all of our spending on defense, education, infrastructure, medical research, food and drug safety, homeland security, and I do not begin to have the time to list all of the various functions of spending that go toward reaching out and meeting the needs of this country.

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office reported this month that spending on these programs and interest on the debt will consume 91 percent of all Federal revenues 10 years from now. Imagine our budget as being a big pie. It is cut in certain slices in terms of how much money is spent on defense, how much money is spent on mandatory programs, and the amount of money that is spent on all of the other functions in which the Federal Government is engaged. That part of the pie which provides for the automatically entitled mandatory spending benefits is growing at a rate that is unsustainable.

It is ever shrinking the defense and nondiscretionary part—everything else

we spend money. We spend too much money on too many things so we are going to have to be very careful. I have talked about this many times of how we spend and allocate funds in the future.

Unless we address this runaway mandatory spending issue, we are not going to be able to have the funds to do even essential constitutionally mandated things, such as providing for our national security and making funds available for paving roads, health care research, education, or whatever else we feel is appropriate for our Federal Government to engage.

Furthermore, this mandatory spending has enormous impacts on our young people. In a recent New York Times column titled "Carpe Diem Nation," David Brooks wrote about two ways spending on health and retirement programs not only threatens our economic growth but hurts young people. It squeezes government investment programs that boost future growth. Second, the young will have to pay the money back. To cover current obligations, according to the International Monetary Fund, young people will have to pay 35 percent more taxes and receive 35 percent fewer benefits.

This is the plight that exists. These are the cold hard facts. We have to deal with this math. Understanding how we deal with this directly affects people's lives, directly affects the benefits they rely on for their retirement and for their health care.

The challenge before us is to understand, if we don't do something, this 35-percent higher taxes and 35-percent fewer benefits on our young is not only unacceptable, I think it is, in my opinion, immoral. Immoral for our generation, for this Congress, and our executive branch to leave our children and grandchildren in such a position without doing something about it. The challenge before us and the goal this body should be striving for is finding common ground—not how to eliminate these programs but about how to save these programs while ensuring we have adequate resources to finance the essential and necessary functions of the Federal Government. This starts with our constitutional obligation to provide for the Nation's security, the security of the American public, as well as providing for the general welfare.

Republicans and Democrats and conservatives and liberals recognize we need to restructure Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security if we are serious about putting this country on a sounder fiscal footing and if we are going to be able to keep these programs from becoming insolvent. Hopefully, there are Members on both sides of the political spectrum who agree we need to make the changes now in order to avoid more painful changes later.

We have been postponing this action and this needed legislative process for decades. It has always been too hot to handle. It is too politically damaging. It might put us in political jeopardy.

The President, in his State of the Union Address, said it is time we put the interests of our Nation ahead of our own personal political interests. I couldn't agree more. That is what we should always be doing. We have not done that when it comes to this critical issue, which has such an enormous impact on everything we do. It has such an enormous impact on people who have saved all their lives for the benefits they were promised when they retire or became a certain age or the young people in this country who are coming out of school, starting a family, getting a job, hoping to also participate in the American dream, owning a home, and raising a family. We have the freedom our country provides us in ways no other country ever has or perhaps ever will. We are so blessed to have been born in this country, to live in this country, and to have the freedom and the possibility of achieving our dreams.

All of those are in jeopardy if we don't address this situation. For decades now, we have known what is coming. We have seen a growth in our population of baby boomers moving through their entire lifecycle and are now reaching retirement age. We have postponed this over and over. We have come up with short-term solutions over and over and over and failed to come up with any long-term solutions over and over and over.

The time is now. We are at the point where if we don't do something now, the prediction of David Brooks is going to take place. Our young people are going to be saddled with ever-higher taxes to hold up a system that is going to only be able to deliver ever-lower benefits.

As we consider the right path to move forward, we need to acknowledge that any bipartisan congressional effort to reform and preserve these programs will be unsuccessful unless the President shows a willingness to get involved and engage fully in this effort. I believe he understands the magnitude of the issue because he has said: I refuse to leave our children with a debt they cannot repay.

We all want a government that lives within its means. We need to get our fiscal house in order now. We cannot kick this can down the road. We are at the end of the road, said the President of the United States in comments made when he was a Senator, comments made when he was a candidate for President, comments made when he was President during his first 4 years, and comments made subsequent to that, in his inaugural address, and in his recent State of the Union Address.

We need more than talk. We need engagement. We need an engagement of the President if we are going to make these difficult decisions to put our country on a better fiscal path and to save these programs for those who have put their hard-earned money and work into them and then not qualify for those benefits.

I would like to take this opportunity to remind the President of his repeated commitment to reduce our debt and deficit. I want to remind him of the many times he has spoken about the need to fix Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security.

Now, Mr. President, what I would like to say is this: We need more than your soaring rhetoric. We need more than the promises you made. We need your direct engagement if we are going to address this fiscal crisis and essentially do what I think all of us know we need to do.

We basically have two options: we may continue with the status quo and wait until the moment that a crisis hits and we may no longer send out the checks; we must raise taxes once again to cover a program that should have received needed reforms or at the point where the programs become solvent. Or, the alternative is that we can come together and commit to the American people that we will act and no longer avoid or delay the challenging and necessary task of fixing these programs to save them for future generations.

I stand ready. I trust my colleagues stand ready to address this issue now, and we are asking you to stand with us. Let's do what we all know we need to do to restore our Nation's fiscal health, to save these programs from insolvency, to grow our economy, and get Americans back to work. The time is now.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore, The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I am proud to stand here to support the nomination of Chuck Hagel as our next Secretary of Defense.

I believe he will be confirmed by this Chamber. I hope, on a bipartisan basis. He is, in fact, extraordinarily qualified for this position of unique trust and responsibility. That is the criterion we must apply. Is he qualified? We may have, probably each of us does have among us 100 Senators, someone whom we would make our first choice or a better choice or is the right person, in our view. That is not the question before us. It is whether he is qualified to be part of the President's team and to be held accountable for the policies the President sets.

Chuck Hagel is a decorated war veteran with two Purple Hearts. He is a highly successful businessman and entrepreneur and a real manager at a time when we need a manager in the Department of Defense.

He is a former colleague as a Member of this body, but he is also a former deputy head of the Veterans' Administration. He has given his life to public service and, most especially, to helping men and women in uniform while they serve this country in the military, and then when they come back to civilian life, helping them contribute and continue to give back to this Nation.

He is a Republican who has won the confidence of President Obama and

whom President Obama has chosen to be a member of his team.

We speak, as Members of the Senate, about giving the President a measure of deference, a prerogative in making the selection about who will serve on his team because it is the President who sets policy. The President will set our policy on the Middle East and on Israeli security. Chuck Hagel has said he is committed, unequivocally, clearly, unambiguously, to the security of Israel and to whatever weapons systems are necessary to provide Israel in maintaining and sustaining that security, the Iron Dome, David's Sling, and other measures this Nation has committed to its great ally in the Middle East. This is an ally that is necessary not only to stability there and hopefully to peace but also to our national interests. Chuck Hagel may have made comments in the past that seemed to vary somewhat from the President's policy, but it is the President who sets that policy and whom we will hold accountable for that policy.

Likewise, on Iran, Chuck Hagel has said he is in favor of preventing a nuclear-armed Iran, not containing it but preventing it. Whatever his past says, it is the President who sets that policy. Chuck Hagel has indicated he is completely in accord with it, in support of it, and will implement it. Again, it is the policy of the President to prevent a nuclear-armed Iran, and we must in this body give support and encouragement to the President in being strong and tough, setting even stronger and tougher sanctions, and using the military option, if necessary, to stop a nuclear-armed Iran.

Going from policy to what I think is perhaps the unique challenge of the next Secretary of Defense, which is to attract and retain the best and the brightest to our military—we talk all the time about people being our greatest asset in the military. We have weapons systems that defy the imagination, let alone comprehension.

At the end of the day, the people who run those weapons systems, the people who staff and work every day to keep America safe, are the ones who are our greatest asset. At a time when we are bringing troops back from Afghanistan when Secretary-to-be, hopefully, Hagel, has indicated we ought to do it even more quickly, our greatest challenge will be to prevent the hollowing out of our military as has occurred in the wake of past conflict.

That hollowing out is not only about hardware and weapons; it is about the people who command and the people who run those weapons. We need to ensure we keep those midlevel officers and enlisted members who are so important to the leadership of our military. Chuck Hagel's leadership and commitment will be critical to that task.

I have met with Chuck Hagel privately. I asked him tough questions about Iran and Israel. I am satisfied on those points that he will advise the President in accord with those policies.

But even more important, I am struck by his passion and the intensity of his commitment to our men and women in uniform. His caring about them is indicated in so many ways—spontaneously and strongly in his testimony as well as in his private conversation. He will make sure that sexual assault in the military—the epidemic and scourge of rape and assault against men and women who serve and sacrifice for this country—will be stopped; that there will be, in fact, zero tolerance not only in word but in deed, and his viewing, for example, of the documentary "Invisible War"—his understanding that this kind of misconduct is an outrage, never to be even complicitly condoned and to treat as a criminal offense the most extreme kind of predatory criminal activity is important to the future of our military and our men and women in uniform.

He is committed to making sure that women in combat—a policy of the President—is implemented forcefully and faithfully. He is committed to making sure the policy of repealing don't ask, don't tell is implemented zealously and vigorously. He is committed to making sure that our veterans—not only for our returning Iraq and Afghanistan veterans but also for the veterans of his own generation—our Vietnam veterans who had Post-Traumatic Stress at a time when it was undiagnosed and, in fact, unknown as a condition resulting from combat—have the benefit of policies and practices we are now implementing to deal with Post-Traumatic Stress and traumatic brain injuries.

He is also committed, equally importantly, to making sure the epidemic of suicide among our currently serving men and women in uniform and also our veterans is addressed forcefully. There are tragedies every day involving those suicides—families who lose loved ones and a country that loses a great public servant—and Chuck Hagel cares about those men and women. He will see a person in uniform not as simply an officer or an enlisted man but as someone who will soon be a veteran and become part of a continuum.

Chuck Hagel has served the VA as well as now in the Defense Department, and he will make sure the transition from active service to reservist service is seamless; that veterans are provided with the transition assistance they need for employment, education, and health care, and that our National Guard receives the respect and service it deserves.

I am convinced Senator Hagel's No. 1 priority will be taking care of our troops. He was a veteran's advocate with the USO, and he has won the respect and admiration of veterans groups. In addition, he has won the support of an extraordinary array of former Secretaries of Defense, ambassadors and diplomats, senior retired military leaders, and, in particular, two former Members of this body who appeared with him at his testimony, former Senators Warner and Nunn.

I believe Chuck Hagel is the right man for the fiscal challenges that will confront the Department of Defense. Putting aside sequester—which I dearly hope will not happen; Secretary Pannetta has said it would be irresponsible for the Congress to allow it to happen, and many of us agree it must be avoided—and the challenges in the next month or series of months, the long-term outlook for the Department of Defense is that it must do more with less, and Secretary Hagel, if he is confirmed, will have that management task. He is one of the people in this country who is almost uniquely qualified to carry it out, and I believe he will, with great distinction. He will take care of our men and women in uniform and strengthen our national defense. He will do what he thinks is right, even if it is not popular.

Finally, Chuck Hagel is, as everyone has said, a good and decent man. And I thank in particular Senator MCCAIN for his very compelling and telling comments during our consideration before the vote in the Armed Services Committee. He said, and I agree, that no one should impugn Chuck Hagel's character. He is a person of integrity and character, and I believe he will have the respect at all levels of our defense—the men and women who serve and sacrifice every day, the men and women who are essential to our national security—and I recommend him and urge my colleagues to support him.

I respectfully hope he will be confirmed quickly and that it will be done on a bipartisan basis so we will be united—as our Armed Services Committee in this body is almost always united—in favor of the President's choice for this uniquely important responsibility.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. BALDWIN). The Republican whip.

TIME TO GOVERN

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, I rise to mark another sad record for the Senate: 1,387 days since the Senate has passed a budget—1,387 days.

The last time I checked the 2012 election was over, and of course it has been over for more than 3 months now. Unfortunately, the President still seems to be very much in campaign mode, giving speeches all around the country. For the time being, what we need, rather than a President on a perpetual campaign, is for Democrats and Republicans to work together to try and solve some of our Nation's most pressing problems, and there is no more important issue than our national debt.

Unfortunately, the President, after extracting about \$600 billion in new taxes as a result of the fiscal cliff negotiations, is still coming back to the well, and he is calling for tens of billions of dollars in new spending. At a time when we ought to be talking about bending the cost curve down, trying to rein in wasteful Washington spending, the President wants to spend more, and he wants to raise taxes to do it.

Perhaps worst of all, we know the promises we made to our seniors for Medicare and Social Security are imperiled. Unless we act together to save and protect Social Security and Medicare, they are on a pathway to bankruptcy, and that is irresponsible and wrong.

I am tempted to describe President Obama's spending and tax ideas as small ball, but they are worse than that. They represent a conscious decision to neglect some of the most pressing issues that confront our country. One might even say it is a dereliction of duty in the battle to save America.

Last week, the Congressional Budget Office projected our gross national debt will increase from \$16 trillion in 2012 to \$26 trillion in 2023. Now that may seem like a long way off, but since President Obama has been President, the national debt has gone up by 55 percent—just in the last 4 years. If we project that forward to 2023, when some of these young men and women who are working here as pages will be looking at entering the workforce and looking at their futures, all they will see ahead of them is debt and a reduced standard of living. This is what lies ahead for all of us unless we embrace real spending cuts and unless we deal with the unfunded liabilities of Medicare and Social Security.

If President Obama has a secret strategy for getting our debt under control, we would all love to hear it. His last two budget proposals failed to receive a single vote in the Senate. The last 2 years his budget has actually been put to a vote, no Democrat voted for it and no Republican, because it simply didn't address the problems I have described. I hope this year is different. Unfortunately, the President has already missed the statutory deadline for submitting his own budget, which was February 4. I hope when he finally gets around to sending us his proposed budget it is a serious plan for long-term debt reduction. Based on experience, I can't say I am overly optimistic, but hope springs eternal.

I guess one of the things that worries me the most is that in the President's State of the Union message, which he so eloquently delivered a few nights ago, he didn't say one word about his 2014 budget—not one word. I would urge the President to take a long hard look at the new Congressional Budget Office report. I would urge him to launch serious bipartisan budget negotiations as soon as possible so we can avoid another last-minute cliffhanger and another 2 a.m. Senate vote.

Above all, I would urge the President to take a look at a balanced budget amendment to the U.S. Constitution that I have cosponsored along with all of my colleagues on this side of the aisle. That amendment would require the Federal Government to balance its budget each and every year.

Is that such a crazy idea? Well, no. That is what every family has to do. That is what every small business has

to do. And that is what 49 States are required to do under their laws. This amendment to the Constitution would be the 28th amendment to the Constitution, including the first 10, which are, of course, our Bill of Rights. It would require a congressional supermajority to raise taxes or to raise the debt ceiling.

As I said a moment ago, families across America have to balance their budgets. And, of course, along with a budget brings the discipline of deciding what our priorities are—the things we have to have and we can't live without, the things we want but we have to defer, and then the things that maybe we would like to have but simply can't afford. Well, this number right here, 1,387 days since the Senate passed a budget, is one reason why our debt continues to go up by leaps and bounds, and there is no plan in sight to bring it under control.

Here is the bottom line for President Obama: The 2012 election is over, and now it is time to govern. It is time to move beyond the campaign rhetoric, drop the gimmicks and work across the aisle with Republicans to do what is right for the country. We are ready, willing, and able to engage with the President and our Democratic colleagues to try to address these problems that confront our country. In fact, there is no good reason for any of us to be here unless we are willing to do that.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Delaware.

Mr. CARPER. Madam President, while the Senator from Texas is still on the floor, he knows I have a lot of respect and affection for him, and I am delighted to serve with him here and also to serve with him on the Finance Committee. I appreciate Senator SHAHEEN for letting me jump in for just a minute.

We agree on so much. We actually do. And not just the Senator and I but our colleagues here. And I think we fully recognize that although the deficit comes down from \$1.5 trillion to about \$850 billion or so, it is way too much. I think we also agree that one of the best ways to reduce the deficit is to strengthen and grow the economy.

I believe—and I think I heard the President say this the other night—there are three things we need to make sure we address.

One, we need to address—and the President said this—we need to address entitlement programs, not to savage old people or to savage poor people but to figure out how to get better health care results for less money to be able to preserve those programs for the long haul.

I think we will have an interesting proposal from Senator DURBIN later this year with respect to Social Security and putting it in a structured way, maybe a path forward on Social Security that makes it clear we are not trying to balance the budget on Social Security but actually do reforms that we