

invest in mitigation projects by providing low-interest loans and a new banking design to attract private investment into these projects.

There are also new authorities that will allow the Army Corps to expedite and prioritize hurricane protection studies and project recommendations. I thank my colleagues, led by Senator BOXER, of the EPW Committee for working with us to draft some of this language.

These new policies are very important for New York and the States affected by Sandy. I urge our colleagues in the House to work with us to include these items in the WRDA conference.

We need to use the tragedy of Sandy to learn how to make our cities and towns stronger for the next storm. We know it is coming. We have to work at the local level in terms of mitigation. We have to work at the macro level to reduce the amount of carbon that has poured into our atmosphere that will just devastate the planet if we continue to sit on our hands.

I will close my remarks by borrowing a simple refrain from my friend from Rhode Island. As his poster says, it is time to wake up. Superstorm Sandy was New York's wake-up call. Let's honor the thousands of victims of that event by investing in our future.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, before I depart the floor, and while Senator SCHUMER and Senator BLUMENTHAL are still here, I wish to add a point that is a personal observation of mine as a Senator; that is, first the Senator from New York is widely and properly regarded as one of the more formidable presences in the Senate. Having witnessed the difficulties that Senator BLUMENTHAL discussed at getting the Sandy disaster relief out and done, I will say we learned Senator SCHUMER has an even higher gear when it comes to the urgent needs of his home State and of his coast. When his New York City lies battered and drowned by storm, the work that he did to make sure a reluctant House passed this relief for us was an exercise in legislative craftsmanship and personal vigor that many of us will long remember.

Of course, I have seen Senator BLUMENTHAL fighting for his people in Connecticut, both after Hurricane Sandy and, of course, after the terrible tragedy that Connecticut experienced when a crazed gunman went into an elementary school and began to murder its children. So Senator BLUMENTHAL, in responding to those cares, concerns, and crises of his home State of Connecticut, has been truly exemplary. It has been a privilege for me as a Senator to see these two Senators in action in their causes I just mentioned.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, will the Senator yield?

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. I yield the floor.

Mr. SCHUMER. I am sure Senator BLUMENTHAL joins me. I wish to say to

my dear friend from Rhode Island—and he truly is a dear friend—that his generosity of word and spirit is only equaled by his intelligence, his diligence, and his foresightedness, not only on this issue but on so many other issues on which we are working. In fact, we are going to make a call in a few minutes—he and I and a few of our colleagues and I think Senator BLUMENTHAL as well—to talk about another of his issues. He is just such an intelligent thinker, and he is thinking ahead of the curve on climate change. But delivery system reform in health care is another issue on which the Senator from Rhode Island has taken leadership.

So I thank him for his kind words and just say “right back at you, baby.” I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I thank both of my colleagues. I am not sure I can match their eloquence in describing their gifts and their contributions on this issue and so many others, but I hope they and others will join me in meeting with the present Sandy task force in seeking to remedy or correct perhaps some of the logjams and redtape and deficiencies in process that led the people of our States to wait for so long before they saw relief in practical terms.

I thank them for their eloquence today and for their truly formidable contribution on the issue of climate change and global warming and to thank them also for the very powerful contributions they have made on the response to Superstorm Sandy that affected so many people in Connecticut.

I thank the Chair. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

BUDGET CONFERENCE

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, I rise to talk about an opportunity—actually something good that this body could do for the American people and for our economy and for the taxpayers. Tomorrow, the Senate budget conference that was established as part of this recent agreement that was made over reopening the government and extending the debt limit will meet. This will be the first public meeting of the group. We have had some other meetings, including the one I just had with some of the Members of that group, but this is the first opportunity for us to meet as House Members and Senate Members, Republicans and Democrats, in this budget conference, and it could not come soon enough.

The opportunity we have with this group is that in the wake of what happened at the beginning of this month—which was, again, a government shutdown and then a debt limit debate and then pushing right up against the debt limit—the opportunity we have now is to finally deal with this issue of government shutdowns and to deal with the underlying problem of overspending that forces us to extend the debt limit time and time again.

So let's start with government shutdowns.

The agreement opened the government for 3 months. That is right. In January, we once again come to this cliff where the government shuts down unless we act. So Merry Christmas and Happy New Year everybody. In January we hit this again.

It does not have to be that way. Earlier this year I introduced, with Senator TESTER from Montana, bipartisan legislation that would have prevented the last shutdown and would prevent all shutdowns in the future. It is called, appropriately, the End Government Shutdowns Act. It is pretty simple, and it addresses several critical issues we saw firsthand during this last shutdown.

It would end the chaos we saw on Federal services and citizens who depend on them. It would give government agencies the predictability they need to plan their budgets based on these appropriations levels. It would add certainty to the economy, and more certainty in the economy is certainly needed right now as we try to bring back the jobs. It would also take away the pressure for these haphazard, last-minute budget deals, which inevitably have stuck in them little provisions that nobody finds out about because they are all done at the last minute to avoid a government shutdown.

Here is how this would work: When we do not have spending bills agreed to by the time the fiscal year comes to an end—and that would be October 1—then the spending continues just as it was the previous year. So it is the same level of spending, except that automatically it would begin to reduce spending after 120 days and 90 days. So Congress would have 120 days to come together and figure out a budget. That is the carrot. The stick is that after 120 days the spending would be ratcheted down 1 percent and then again every 90 days another 1 percent.

I think it has become painfully obvious that Congress needs encouragement to get its work done, and this certainly would be encouragement. By the same token, we would not have these government shutdowns. That gradual decline in spending, by the way, would treat all spending equally. So all discretionary spending would be treated the same way—no exceptions for liberal spending priorities or conservative spending priorities. It would be the same for everybody. Both sides of Congress would feel the pain, and both sides then might be more willing to actually get the work done.

Is this the ideal solution to end government shutdowns? No, it is not. The ideal solution is that Congress actually does its work, which is our constitutional duty—the power of the purse—and that is to sit down and have these appropriations bills pass. That requires oversight of the agencies and departments which are badly in need of it. It then requires prioritizing spending in

12 different areas. That is how it should work. This legislation, the End Government Shutdowns Act, would actually encourage that to work, again, because it would establish this situation where, instead of doing a last-minute deal where you can kind of throw in these provisions that Appropriations Committee members might want, you actually have to go through the process; otherwise, it just continues the spending from the previous year and then ratchets it down over time.

Sadly, Congress has shown it is pretty much incapable of doing appropriations bills without some sort of pressure. The Congress has not completed all regular appropriations bills by the October 1 deadline since 1997. Here in the Senate, actually, over the past 4 years, during the current administration, the Obama administration, and under Democratic control here for the last 4 years, we have passed all of one appropriations bill on time. So that is 1 out of 48 that has been done on time. It was a MILCON bill in about 2011, as I recall.

Congress does better with a deadline. Again, we see this with the debt limit and with what we just went through these last few weeks. We can do better. This legislation would keep the impetus for Congress to act without including the threat of another costly and destructive shutdown. I think it is a good idea. It is one that is already bipartisan. It should be adopted by both sides. We had a vote on it earlier this year. It got nearly half of this Chamber. I hope others will take a look at it. I think particularly with what we have just gone through, it is something our constituents would think would make a lot of sense. I hope it gets the support it deserves in this body.

Of course, in addition to dealing with government shutdowns in this budget conference that we are meeting on this week, we also have a chance to address the debt limit—which is going to come up soon also because February 7 is the date that was chosen there. Now some say, well, the Treasury Department can use extraordinary measures to shift that beyond February 7. I suppose they could. But instead, why not deal with the underlying problem—why we need to extend the debt limit—which is the overspending.

It is as though you have maxed out on the credit card. It is a lot like that. We can spend only at a certain level in Congress, and then we have to have statutory authority to go beyond that limit. When you max out on the credit card, you do not just go to the bank and say: I would like to extend it. You have to deal with the underlying problem; otherwise, you cannot keep your credit card and you cannot keep your credit.

So dealing with the debt limit is the other part that I think gives us an opportunity. Over the past 2 weeks I know the administration has said repeatedly: Even though we would not negotiate on the debt ceiling before,

even though the President refused to talk to Congress about it—which was unprecedented, by the way; no President in history has ever said that—but he said over the last couple weeks: If you all extend the debt limit and if you reopen government, then I will talk. So now is the time to talk, and the President should talk. I have worked for two Presidents: President Bush 41 and President Bush 43. They did talk to Congress about debt limits. Why? Because it is a tough vote, because our constituents get it, because it is akin to maxing out on the credit card and they want to know we are not just going to extend it again without doing something about the underlying problem. So this budget conference gives us the opportunity to do that, and I hope the administration will engage with us.

It has been 4 years since we have had a budget conference. Think about that. The debt has gone up \$5.9 trillion since we had the last budget conference around here. Almost \$6 trillion later we are sitting down again, and things are only going to get worse if we do not do something to deal with the underlying problem.

The two-thirds of the budget that is on autopilot—the mandatory spending—obviously is where not just the biggest part of the budget is but the fastest growing part of the budget. It includes vital programs to our seniors, for those in poverty—Medicaid, Medicare, Social Security—vital but unsustainable. These programs cannot be sustained in their current form. By the way, that is not me saying it. That comes from data from the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office. The President himself has talked about this. By the way, the Congressional Budget Office says that Social Security and health care entitlements alone are 100 percent of the long-term increase in deficits. Revenues are starting to pick up. The discretionary spending is now being capped. The issue is this part that is on autopilot. By the way, it is 66 percent of spending now. It is 77 percent of spending in 10 years. The health care entitlements alone are going to increase 100 percent over the next 10 years based on what the Congressional Budget Office has told us.

I have heard rumblings in the press that this upcoming budget conference is just going to kick the can further down the road; in other words, we are not going to deal with the issue. We are going to say let's just extend the debt limit a little bit further and push off the issue.

I think it is time for the can to kick back. If the can kicks back, that means we will actually tackle some of these tough problems. After all, that is why the American people hired us. That is why they sent us here. If we are not going to do it now, I do not know when we are going to do it. I think divided government is actually an opportunity to do it.

It is time for leadership in the Senate and the House, and certainly from the

President. It is time to come to the table. As I said earlier, the President has indicated he now is willing to do it. Do so in good faith and try to put our country on a stable fiscal path. If we do nothing, by the way, if we allow these annual deficits to continue, they will more than quadruple. Annual deficits will more than quadruple to \$3.4 trillion within three decades. That is based on the Congressional Budget Office.

We already have a debt that is about \$140,000 per household in America. We are talking about annual deficits quadrupling. If we let mandatory spending reach that point where it becomes 100 percent of the deficit—which is what they project—if we allow our national debt to reach two and a half times the entire size of our economy—it is about the size of our economy now, and it would go up to two and a half times the size of our economy—it will be the next generation that will pay, and pay dearly, and our legacy will be one of bankruptcy, skyrocketing interest rates, skyrocketing unemployment rates, and the collapse of these vital programs we talked about earlier: Medicaid, Medicare, and Social Security.

Again, this is not ideology; this is math. It is fact, and it is fact that has been reiterated by the Congressional Budget Office, the trustees of Social Security, the trustees of Medicare, their trust funds time and time again.

This is our opportunity to begin to do something about it—at least take the first steps—both in terms of ending government shutdowns, as I talked about, but also dealing with this underlying problem that everybody acknowledges and that has to be dealt with if we are not going to have for future generations these issues of bankruptcy, higher interest rates, lower value of the dollar, higher unemployment.

The single greatest act of bipartisanism in this Congress over the past few decades has been overpromising and overspending. We created this mess together, and we can only get out of it working together. I have suggested where we can start: \$600 billion in the President's own budget. In his own budget he has \$600 billion-plus in savings on mandatory spending over the next decade. But whatever we do, I think we can call agree that we are tired of the gridlock, we are tired of the stalemates, we are tired of getting nothing done.

It is time to make some progress, and this is an opportunity to do it. These past few weeks have been trying. They have been tough on the American people, as they have looked at us and said: Wow. Are these guys going to figure it out? And we just kicked the can down the road. But we also set up this process and this structure. Let's take advantage of it. Let's use this opportunity to do something important for the future of our country and for the good of the people we represent. Let's seize it.

I yield back my time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Delaware.

DEFICIT REDUCTION

Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, I say to the Presiding Officer, former Governor MANCHIN, I wish to follow on the comments we just heard from Senator PORTMAN, who, as he said, served in two administrations—in one of them as OMB Director, in the other as Trade Representative. Before that he had a distinguished career in the House of Representatives. He is someone I am fortunate to serve with on the Finance Committee. I have a lot of respect for his intellect and for his intellectual honesty.

Before I talk about the real reason I came to the floor, I feel compelled to say something. As former Governors, the Presiding Officer and I have made tough decisions on spending, we have made tough decisions on revenues, and they are not always well received by people. They are not always well received by people in our own party.

I like to say there are three or four things we need to do on this issue to make sure our deficits continue to head in the right direction. I do not worship at the altar of a balanced budget every single year. But what I do believe is that when the economy is strengthened and growing stronger, we ought to be having the deficit heading down, and when we are in a war or when we are in an economic doldrum, then I think it is appropriate to, in some cases, deficit spend.

Four things we need to do if we are serious about deficit reduction: No. 1, we need, in the President's words, entitlement reform that saves money, saves these programs for our children and our grandchildren, and does not savage old people or poor people. That is No. 1.

No. 2, we need, in my view, tax reform that brings down the top corporate rates—something more closely aligned with every other developed nation in the world. At the same time we are doing that, we need to generate some revenues for deficit reduction to match what we are doing on the spending side.

If you think about it, the Senator from Ohio knows and the Senator from West Virginia knows about tax expenditures: Tax breaks, tax credits, tax deductions, tax loopholes, tax gaps, add up over the next 10 years anywhere from \$12 trillion to \$15 trillion. We are going to spend more money out of the Treasury for tax expenditures than we are going to spend on all of our appropriations bills combined. If we could somehow capture 5 percent of \$12 trillion over the next 10 years for deficit reduction, that is \$600 billion. If we can match that in a Bowles-Simpson number, such as \$2 of deficit reduction on the expenditure side and \$1 on the revenue side, we could do about another \$2 trillion on deficit reduction on top of what we have already done. Is that a grand compromise that I want and I think the Senator from Ohio wants, I

know the Senator from West Virginia wants?

It is not a grand compromise, but I would call it a baby grand. A baby grand is certainly better than kicking that can down the road. The last time we kicked the can down the road at the beginning of this year, I remember saying on this floor: We kicked a rather large can down the road not very far. I am tired of doing that. I do not want us to do that.

We have maybe our last best chance here in this budget conference in order to do the kinds of things I talked about. Democrats do not want to give on entitlements. I am willing to do that. But I am only willing to do that if Republicans will give on tax reform that generates some revenues.

I mentioned there are three things to do. The third thing is to look in every nook and cranny of the Federal Government—everything we do. The Senator from Ohio is a member of the Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee. He knows that we focus—we have large, broad investigative powers, oversight powers, authority over the whole Federal Government. There are all kinds of ways to save money, all kinds of ways to save money in this government of ours, just as there are all kinds in big corporations, big businesses. What we need to do is, in everything we do, look at that and say: How do we get a better result for less money in everything we do?

I do not know if my friends from Ohio and West Virginia hear this from their constituents, but I hear from Delaware constituents and folks outside of my State these words: I do not mind paying more taxes, I just do not want you to waste my money or I do not want to pay more taxes, but if I do, I do not want you to waste my money. I do not want to waste your money or mine.

The fourth thing we need to do to be serious about moving the economy and getting out of this kind of rut we are in right now is to be able to make sure we have some money around that we can invest in the things we know will strengthen our economy. Foremost among those is a strong workforce, capable workforce. The second thing is infrastructure, broadly defined, not just transportation: roads, highways, bridges; not just ports, not just airports, not just railroads, but broadband, all kinds of infrastructure-related items.

The third thing is R&D, research and development that will lead to technologies that can be commercialized, turned into products, goods, and services we can sell all over the world.

The fourth thing we need to do is to do an even better job—and Senator PORTMAN was the leader as our trade ambassador. He knows what it is all about in terms of knocking down trade barriers. But while we do entitlement reform, we do tax reform, while we look in every nook and cranny of the Federal Government, investing in the

three areas I mentioned, we have got to make sure when we develop these new products and services that we can sell them around the world without impediment, we can knock down trade barriers. The Senator has done a lot of work in that regard as well.

As the Senator leaves the floor, I will say there are many things for us to work on. I hope we will.

ARCHULETA NOMINATION

That is not why I came to the floor, but I thank the Senator for letting me join in that colloquy with the Senator from Ohio. The reason I came to the floor is to say a word on behalf of the President's nominee to be our next Director of the Office of Personnel Management. We have not had a confirmed OPM Director for the last half year. If you look across the Federal Government, the executive branch of the Federal Government, it reminds me a lot of what I call Swiss cheese, executive branch Swiss cheese.

We start with the Department of Homeland Security. We do not have a confirmed Secretary. We have one nominated, just nominated, just starting to go through the vetting process in the Senate. We have not had one for a month. The Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security—we do not have a confirmed Deputy Secretary. We have had “acting” for a number of weeks now, months. While the people who are in the acting capacity are very good people, very able people, it is not the same as having a confirmed Secretary of Homeland Security or confirmed Deputy Secretary.

There are any number of other positions in Homeland Security. As chair of Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee, I probably focus more on that than on the OMB, Office of Management and Budget, trying to make sure that Sylvia Burwell from Hinton, WV—the Presiding Officer knows her well. As a guy who grew up in West Virginia a little bit, born there, spent some time in Hinton, I have a huge respect for her. We worked very hard to get her management team, her senior leadership team confirmed. They are confirmed. She has a great team. We need to make sure that in our other departments we have from the top to way down the ranks strong people in confirmed positions.

OPM, Office of Personnel Management. The President nominated a woman I had never heard of earlier this year. He nominated a woman named Katherine Archuleta. Katherine Archuleta—I never met her, never heard of her. The first thing I learned about her is she has been the political director in the President's reelection campaign. She must have done a pretty good job if the results were to be examined. Maybe some people are troubled by that. If we stopped there, that does not define who she is or what she has done.

If somebody looked at my resume while I have been a Senator, if they think that is all I have ever done in my