

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—
S. 1590

Mr. ALEXANDER. Madam President, before the Internet, RCA knew how many records Elvis was selling every day. Before the Internet, Ford knew how many cars they were selling every day. Before the Internet, McDonald's could tell you how many hamburgers it sold each day. Yet the Obama administration cannot tell us how many Americans have tried to sign up for ObamaCare. They can't tell us how many people have tried to sign up for ObamaCare. They haven't told us what level of insurance they bought or in what ZIP Code they live. Not only can they not tell us, they have done their best to keep us from finding out.

With WikiLeaks and Edward Snowden spilling our beans every day, what's happening on the ObamaCare exchanges is the only secret left in Washington. The National Security Agency should learn some lessons from Secretary Sebelius.

We shouldn't have to rely on anonymous sources to get basic information about what's happening with the ObamaCare exchanges.

Yesterday I introduced legislation to require the administration to tell Congress and the American people how many people have tried to sign up, how many did sign up, what level of insurance did they buy, in what ZIP Code do they live, and what the administration is doing to fix the problems. This isn't complicated information. In the Internet age, the administration ought to be able to provide this information every day. They should be able to provide it really every minute. We shouldn't have to pass a law to find these things out.

So I hope every Senator will support my legislation. It is a six-page bill. It has been available to the public now for 24 hours. It is easy to read. The stakes are high for every American.

So I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions be discharged from further consideration of S. 1590, a bill to require transparency in the operation of the American health benefit exchanges, and that the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration. I further ask unanimous consent that the bill be read a third time and passed, and the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. HARKIN. Madam President, reserving the right to object, my good friend from Tennessee has raised just another effort to divert resources from the implementation of the Affordable Care Act which we can then use to fix the very problems he has mentioned. I will point out that we report jobs data on a monthly basis, and this is going to be a different standard. I might also point out that in Medicare Part D, we release those data on a monthly basis.

I agree with my friend that there should be accountability for the mistakes that have happened and the im-

plementation of the law going forward. In fact, right now, the Department is giving us daily updates on their progress in fixing the Web site.

So, again, let's get on with business. I think enough focus has been placed on the mistakes. Hearings are ongoing. There will be hearings in the Senate also. Let's get the problems fixed and move ahead on enrollment without diverting resources.

I thought about my friend's proposal, and I thought maybe we should amend it to say we will put in more money and get more people. I don't think my friend would want to do that, either, so we can take care of it.

So the people there need to get the problem fixed, and let's move ahead aggressively to get people enrolled in what is going to be a positive change for health care in America.

On that basis, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Tennessee.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Madam President, I thank my friend, the Senator from Iowa. I'm disappointed—this administration described itself as the most transparent in history. All we have asked for is how many people are signing up, how did they do, where do they live, and what level of insurance do they have. We ought to know that. Taxpayers ought to know it. So we'll keep trying other ways to get the information the American people deserve to have.

I thank the President, yield the floor, and note the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

FINDING A BUDGET SOLUTION

Mr. LEAHY. Madam President, I read with great interest the recent opinion piece on congressional budget negotiations written by my good friend Kent Conrad, our former colleague here in the Senate and distinguished chair of the Budget Committee.

I have been fortunate to serve in this Chamber for the past 38 years with principled leaders like Kent Conrad. I was elected to the Senate in 1974, the same year the Congressional Budget Act passed into law, and I have served here with all of the Budget Committee chairs—from Edmund Muskie to PATTY MURRAY.

I think Kent Conrad is right that at this critical juncture we need to have a grown-up discussion about our Nation's finances—both about the debts we incur and the ways in which we pay for them. We have all heard a lot of talk in the last few years about getting our fiscal house in order. It makes for a great campaign slogan. But I am afraid

that too many are not following through on their responsibility to govern.

After jumping from one manufactured crisis to another for the past few years, which has hurt the U.S. economy and America's standing in the world, it is time for reason and sanity to return to the Senate—on the budget process, on nominations, and on a whole host of other issues. Returning to regular order on the budget conference—and letting conference members from the House and the Senate work out a final agreement free from rigid ideological positions—would be a good first step to bringing some comity and order back to this body so we can serve the American people.

I remain ready to work with people on both sides of the aisle in the hopes that we can find a workable budget solution in the coming weeks, and I suggest that everyone heed the calls for bipartisanship and compromise made by Senator Conrad.

With that, I ask unanimous consent that Kent Conrad's full opinion piece from the October 24, 2013, Washington Post be printed in the RECORD.

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

[From the Washington Post, Oct. 24, 2013]

OPINION: A FAIR TRADE FOR ENTITLEMENT
REFORM INCLUDES INCREASED REVENUE
(By Senator Kent Conrad)

Kent Conrad, a Democrat, represented North Dakota in the Senate from 1987 to 2013.

The Post's Oct. 20 editorial on the budget challenge ["A fiscal quid pro quo"] made important points but was way off-base on the issue of revenue. It suggested that a fair trade would be reductions to the "sequester" budget cuts in exchange for reforms to Medicare and Social Security and said that Democrats should not insist on additional revenue because that's a non-starter with many Republicans. Democrats would make a serious mistake by following that advice.

Our country needs more revenue to help us get back on track. Citing Congressional Budget Office calculations, The Post said that "federal revenue as a share of [gross domestic product (GDP)] will hit 18.5 percent by 2023, near the upper-end of the postwar range." That's true, but the last five times our country had a balanced budget, revenue averaged 20 percent of GDP. The Bowles-Simpson plan, which The Post strongly endorsed, achieved revenue of 20.6 percent of GDP—not by raising tax rates but by broadening the tax base and lowering tax rates.

Tax reform should be part of any budget deal. Tax reform is necessary to unlock the full potential of our economy. The current tax system is not fair and damages U.S. competitiveness. A five-story building in the Cayman Islands claims to be home to more than 18,000 companies. Is it the most efficient building in the world? No! That and other tax scams cost our country more than \$100 billion each year, the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations has found.

If we don't fix the revenue side of the equation at the same time as we repair Social Security and Medicare, it will never happen. To suggest, as The Post does, that Democrats should trade adjustments to the sequester for reforms to these programs assumes that the sequester affects only Democratic priorities. More than half of the \$1.2 trillion in sequester cuts are to defense, long a Republican priority.

A fair trade would be modest additions to revenue as part of a balanced plan. A revenue increase of \$300 billion to \$400 billion over 10 years would amount to only 1 percent of the \$37 trillion the federal government is expected to collect over that time. We can't do 1 percent? Of course we can. And by reforming the tax code, we could do it without raising tax rates on a single American.

A similar \$300 billion to \$400 billion in savings out of Medicare and Medicaid would amount to about 3 percent of the \$11 trillion the federal government is expected to spend on health care over that time. We can't do 3 percent? Of course we can. And we must: Health spending is the fastest-growing part of the federal budget, projected to increase from 1 percent of GDP in 1971 to more than 12 percent of GDP in 2050. And the trustees of the Medicare system say it will be insolvent by 2026.

The Post was correct that adoption of a "chained CPI," or consumer price index, system of measuring inflation should be part of any agreement. Most economists say that chained CPI, which accounts for behavioral changes people make when faced with increasing prices, is a more accurate way of measuring inflation. Going to chained CPI would raise revenue because our tax system is indexed for inflation, and it would cut spending because many programs, including Social Security, are indexed for inflation.

Federal spending has been cut by \$900 billion in the Budget Control Act, by \$1.2 trillion in the sequester and by more than \$500 billion in the 2010 continuing resolution. That is spending cuts of \$2.6 trillion, while only \$600 billion in revenue has been added. That is hardly balanced.

To suggest that Democrats should give up on revenue because it's a non-starter with many Republicans is like telling Republicans they should give up on entitlement reform because it is a non-starter with many Democrats. The truth is, both sides need to give a little ground on their must-haves for real progress to be made.

A mini-"grand bargain" would require all of these elements: changes to Social Security and Medicare to ensure their solvency for future generations; a modest increase in revenue so all parts of society participate in getting our country back on track; and changes to the sequester cuts that force nearly all of the deficit savings on less than 30 percent of the budget.

We can do this, but everyone must be prepared to give a little so that our nation can gain a lot.

TRIBUTE TO DR. ASHTON CARTER

Mr. MCCAIN. Madam President, after 4½ years at top posts in the Pentagon, Dr. Ashton Carter announced last week that in December he will be stepping down as Deputy Secretary of Defense. On this occasion, I want to recognize Ash's many years of distinguished public service—as a scholar, a professional, and a national leader. In so doing, I also thank him for his outstanding leadership of the 2.2 million uniformed and civilian members of the Department of Defense and his unwavering support of their most important mission.

Much can be said of Ash's scholarship. He graduated at the top of his class with honors from Yale University, earning degrees in medieval history and physics. His academic achievement also earned Ash a Rhodes

scholarship, which sent him to Oxford University, where he received a doctorate in theoretical physics.

Much can also be said of Ash's dedication to public service. Before assuming his current position as Deputy Secretary of Defense, Ash ably served as the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics and earlier under President Clinton as the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Policy. Throughout his tenure at the Pentagon, Ash received several Defense Distinguished Service Medals—the Defense Department's highest civilian award—as well as the Defense Intelligence Medal. Ash has also helped to promote the Nation's defense from outside the walls of the Pentagon through his service on the boards and committees of several defense, international security and counterterrorism organizations, as well as at some of the world's finest academic institutions.

In my view, what is just as important as what Ash has done is how he has done it. With regard to the Department's procurement practices, Ash articulated a cogent strategy to improve the Department's buying power and empowered good, talented people throughout the acquisition workforce who have long been concerned about government inefficiency to implement that strategy effectively. Indeed, it could be said that Ash's most significant legacy as the Pentagon's chief weapon's purchaser is that he has helped to force the Department to be as skilled in buying products and services as industry is in selling them. This achievement is perhaps best exemplified, for example, in the restructuring of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter program; the successful award of a contract for an aerial refueling tanker; and making tough decisions on some very large, chronically poor-performing weapon procurement programs.

Finally, as Deputy Secretary of Defense, Ash has distinguished himself through his professionalism. Indeed, his commitment, skill, judgment, and temperament are reminiscent of those of some of the Pentagon's finest leaders. There can be no doubt that on many issues relating to defense and national security, Ash and I have had our differences. Some have been profound. But Ash has always conducted himself in a manner that appreciated the valid concerns underlying opposing views, while also mindful of the constitutional responsibilities of the elected officials who hold them. As a result, my working relationship with Ash has always been respectful, candid, clear, and productive. More importantly, it has been conducive to Congress and the Executive working together to address some of the biggest challenges to our national defense.

With this in mind, I join many in thanking Ash for his service and wishing him and his wife Stephanie fair winds and following seas. While Ash

will move on from the Department in December, knowing his insatiable intellectual curiosity and his continuing desire to contribute, I suspect he will never be too far away.

NOMINATION OF MR. THOMAS E. WHEELER

Mr. ROCKEFELLER. Madam President, I rise today in support of the nomination of Tom Wheeler to be Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission.

No one can question that Mr. Wheeler is a supremely qualified nominee to lead the FCC. He brings to the job a long and distinguished career in the communications industry. He was a pioneer in the cable and wireless industries, having been instrumental in the growth of both these critical communications sectors. As an entrepreneur, he built businesses and created jobs.

This collective experience provides Mr. Wheeler with a unique insight into the challenges facing the Nation's communications regulator. And it affords him the experience to lead an agency that has the most challenging and complicated set of issues pending before it since the Commission implemented the 1996 Telecommunications Act. I do not say this lightly. The decisions the FCC will make over the next few years will shape the future of the Nation's telephone network, public safety, the wireless industry, broadcasting, the Internet, and consumer protection for decades to come.

The Commission has before it a number of key proceedings to implement my Public Safety Spectrum legislation that became law last year. Not only will the agency implement a new tool for identifying spectrum through voluntary incentive auctions, the revenues from those auctions will provide critical support for deployment of the long-overdue nationwide interoperable wireless broadband network for first responders.

Aside from that work, the Commission is examining the future of the Nation's voice telephone network, and what the transition of that network can mean to longstanding, fundamental tenets of communications policy like universal service, competition, public safety and consumer protection.

The FCC continues to look at the future of media policy in an era when online video distribution looks to disrupt traditional business models and bring more consumer choice to the video industry. The FCC will need to conclude its work on the E-Rate program and update it to meet the next-generation connectivity needs of our schools and libraries. And finally, the FCC will have to implement a decision from the courts on the FCC's net neutrality rules and potentially on the Commission's underlying authority to protect consumers in the broadband age.

I have absolute confidence in Mr. Wheeler's ability to guide the agency through its consideration of these far-