

violence and work toward a peaceful political solution.

Let me also note an overarching theme noted on this trip, one I mentioned before on the Senate floor, the role of China. Everywhere we went we heard time and again how China is everywhere, often at the exclusion of American businesses, investment, and influence. This pattern costs us not only lost jobs but lost diplomatic and security engagement.

That is why, last year, Senator BOOZMAN and I introduced a bill to create a coordinated U.S. strategy to boost U.S. exports to Africa and in turn foster American jobs. This bipartisan bill cleared the Foreign Relations, Banking and Finance Committees only to be held up at the last minute at the end of the year by Senator TOOMEY of Pennsylvania. To his credit, he didn't do it in a secret manner; he came to the floor and objected.

Although I disagreed with him, I respected him for the fact that he stated his point of view. I would like to sit down with him again and any others who are skeptics about this legislation and let them know what I saw on this trip. Delaying the passing of this legislation costs us more than lost influence on the continent and jobs here at home.

It is going to be a squandered opportunity. Think about this. In the last 10 years, the six fastest growing economies in the world were in Africa. In the next 10 years, 8 of the top 10 will be in Africa. Where are we? We are playing a distant second fiddle to China.

What does that mean for the future? It isn't very encouraging. It is time for us to step forward and show real American leadership in this area. I appeal to those who have opposed this Africa trade bill, which Senator BOOZMAN and I have sponsored, to take a second look and reconsider their position.

It was an honor to visit our dedicated diplomatic, development, and military personnel. It was a reminder of the importance of indispensable contributions to U.S. policy they still play around the world in improving lives and ensuring security. These investments abroad are not only symbols of American generosity and values, they make the world safer for everyone. We should keep this in mind when we consider America's foreign assistance budget, one that includes maintaining all our embassies around the world, is just over 1 percent of the total U.S. budget.

I yield the floor.

I ask unanimous consent any remaining time between now and 4:30 be equally divided and that time which is in quorum calls be equally divided between those supporting and opposing the vote at 4:30.

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

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

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

SYRIA

Mr. CARDIN. Madam President, I have the honor of being the chair of the U.S. Helsinki Commission representing this body. This is a commission which was established in 1975 in order to implement the U.S. responsibilities in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Its membership includes all the countries of Europe, as well as the former Republics of the Soviet Union, Canada, and the United States.

The main principles of Helsinki are we are interested in each other's security. In order to have a secure nation, you need to have a nation that respects the human rights of its citizens, which provides economic opportunity for its citizens, as well as the defense of their borders. We also have partners for cooperation, particularly in the Mediterranean area, that used the Helsinki principles in order to try to advance security in their region.

During this past recess, I took the opportunity to visit that region on behalf of the U.S. Helsinki Commission. I was joined by several of our colleagues looking at the current security issues. Our first visit was to Israel, and our main focus, quite frankly, was on Syria—what is happening today in Syria.

In Israel, we had a chance to meet with the Israeli officials, and it was interesting as to how many brought up the concerns about Syria. They were concerned about Syria's impact on Israel's neighbors and what was going to happen as far as security in that region.

While we were there, there was an episode on the Syrian-Israeli border, and the Israelis provided health care to those who were injured, providing humanitarian assistance. We thank the Israelis for providing that humanitarian assistance.

It was interesting that the Israeli officials pointed out the concern about the refugees who are leaving Syria going into neighboring countries. We know the vast numbers. There are almost 1 million Syrians who have left Syria for other countries because of the humanitarian concerns. About one-quarter of a million have gone to Jordan, about 280,000 are in Lebanon, about 281,000 in Turkey, another 90,000 in Iraq, and 16,000 in Egypt.

Israel is concerned about the security of its neighbors and concerned about how Jordan is dealing with the problems of the Syrian refugees, how Lebanon is handling them. We note the concerns about Hezbollah operations in Lebanon and how that is being handled with the Syrian refugee issue.

We had a chance to travel to Turkey when we left Israel. We met first with the Turkish officials in Ankara, and we received their account as to what was happening in Syria and what Turkey was doing about it. We then had a chance to visit the border area between Turkey and Syria.

We visited a refugee camp named Kilis, where there has been about 18,000

Syrian refugees. We also had a chance to meet with the opposition leaders who were in that camp, as well as later when we were in Istanbul meeting with the opposition leaders from Syria.

I mention that all because the humanitarian crisis is continuing in the country of Syria. The Assad regime is turning on its own people. Over 70,000 have been killed since the Arab Spring started in Syria. While we were there, the Assad regime used scud missiles against its own people, again killing Syrians and killing a lot of innocent people in the process. This is a humanitarian disaster.

I wish to mention one bright spot, if I might. We had a chance to visit the camps, I said, in Kilis, on the border of Syria and Turkey, in Turkey. We had a chance to see firsthand how the Syrian refugees are being handled by the Turkish Government. I want to tell you, they are doing a superb job. I think it is a model way to handle a situation such as this. They have an open border.

The border area at that point is controlled by the Syrian freedom fighters. They control that area. The Turks allowed the Syrians to come in and find a safe haven. The Turkish Government has built housing for the refugees in the camp. We had a chance to see their children in schools. They are attending schools. They are getting proper food and proper medical attention. They have the opportunity to travel where they want in Turkey, freedom of movement. They have the opportunity to go back to Syria if they want to go back to Syria. The Turkish authorities are providing them with a safe haven and adequate help. They are doing this primarily with their own resources.

There is one other thing we observed when we were in this camp on the border. We had a chance to meet with the elected representatives of the refugees in Kilis. They actually had an election. They don't have that opportunity in Syria. They are learning how to cast their votes. They are learning what democracy is about. They are learning what representation is about. We had a chance to talk to these representatives about the circumstances in Syria and what we could do to help.

First, I want to point out there is still a tremendous need for the international community to contribute to the humanitarian needs of those who are affected in Syria. There are approximately 4 million Syrians in need of humanitarian assistance. There are 2½ million internally displaced people within Syria. The United States has taken the lead as far as humanitarian aid, having provided \$384 million. Other countries have stepped up but, quite frankly, more needs to be done.

In talking with the opposition leaders—and we had a chance to talk to them in depth when we were in Istanbul—they expressed to us a sense of frustration that there hasn't been a better, more unified international response to the actions of the Assad regime—to what the Assad regime has

done to its own people—and to get Assad out of Syria. Quite frankly, they understand—or, as we explained—some countries might be willing to provide a certain type of help; other countries may not. The United States has provided nonlethal help, other countries are providing weapons, still other countries training. But we need to coordinate that. The absence of coordination provides a void in which extreme elements are more likely to get into the opposition, and that is something we all want to make sure doesn't happen.

The message I took back from those meetings is that the United States needs to be in the lead in coordinating the efforts of the opposition. We made it clear, and I think the international community has made it clear, that Assad must go, and he should go to The Hague and be held accountable for his war crimes. He has no legitimacy to remain in power in Syria. That has been made clear and we underscored that point again. We also underscored the point there is no justification for any country—any country—providing assistance to the Assad regime on the military side. As we know, Russia and Iran have provided help. That is wrong. That is only adding to the problems and giving strength to a person who has turned on his own people. But then we also need to coordinate our attentions so we can provide the help they need and the confidence they are looking for so they will have the necessary training not only to reclaim their country but then to rule their country in a democratic way that respects the rights of all of its citizens.

As the Chair of the Helsinki Commission, I pointed that out to the Syrian opposition, that we want to provide the help so they can rule their country one day—we hope sooner rather than later—in a way that respects the rights of all of its citizens and provides economic opportunity for its citizens, for that is the only way they will have a nation that respects the security of its country.

That was the message we delivered, and I hope the United States will join other countries in a more concerted effort to get Assad out of Syria. As I said, I think he should be at The Hague and held accountable for his war crimes and held accountable for not allowing the people of Syria to have a democratic regime.

With that, Madam President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia.

TENTH ANNIVERSARY OF PEPFAR

Mr. ISAKSON. Madam President, I rise today, in this year of 2013, on the tenth anniversary of the State of the Union Address given by President George W. Bush when he introduced a program known as PEPFAR—the President's Emergency Program for AIDS Relief—a program that has had remarkable success in the last decade.

A lot of that success has taken place on the continent of Africa, where I just

returned from my seventh trip in the last decade. This was a trip where remarkable things were observed happening all over the continent in terms of AIDS infection being reduced, mother-to-child transmission being in fact eliminated in many cases, and seeing that the biggest challenge today for those who fall victim to AIDS is not that they will die soon but that they will have the continuum of care necessary to see to it they live a normal lifestyle with the antiretrovirals provided by PEPFAR.

It is important that the American taxpayers, the American people, those of us in Congress recognize what has been achieved in the last decade, for our taxpayers have invested billions of dollars on the continent of Africa to begin the process of trying to eliminate AIDS. We cannot yet declare victory, but we can declare great victories in battles along the way, and we are making more and more of them along the way. Males are getting tested, females are getting tested, as they should, and mothers are getting the care they need with antiretrovirals during their pregnancies to prevent the transmission to their babies, and we are seeing a continuation of the progress of the great program started 10 years ago by this Congress, by President Bush, and by the American people.

We are beginning to send the message, and we need to let the African countries know, that we will be scaling down our investment and raising their participation at the government level. It is important to see to it that PEPFAR remains a viable program. In our visit of the past 7, 8, now 9 days, I guess it was, we visited the Congo, we visited Mali, Senegal, Morocco, and we visited South Africa. In each and every country they are beginning the process of having more and more of their health professionals taking more and more of the responsibility of caring for people, testing people, and distributing the antiretrovirals, which lessens the pressure on the budget of the United States of America. But I think it is important to recognize that a disease we feared was going to take much of the population of that continent—and ours, for that matter—10 years ago is now a disease that is being managed and being reduced, and over time, we hope, we will have a generation free of HIV/AIDS not only in America but around the world.

There is a troubling event happening on the continent of Africa and in Asia, and that is there are those who are taking the volunteers who come from our country and other organizations and actually stopping them from giving inoculations and vaccinations to the people. Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Nigeria are the last three countries on Earth where polio still exists. A few weeks ago, in the Congo, in Nigeria, nine workers were killed trying to give vaccinations to children in Nigeria because Islamic leaders in those countries had tried to tell them that in

order to reduce the Arab population American donations of polio vaccine would in fact cause them to be impotent when they grew up. That is the farthest thing from the truth, but it is a wives' tale being told to eliminate or keep vaccinations from getting to the people who need them. In the country of Pakistan, since December 12, there have been five attacks on workers distributing vaccines trying to eliminate polio in Pakistan.

So as we celebrate the victories in terms of HIV/AIDS, polio, malaria, and other diseases, we have to also recognize there is still ignorance in some parts of the world that is prohibiting people who will ultimately get sick and die from getting the vaccines necessary to keep from contracting these difficult diseases. So I come to the floor today to recognize the great achievement of the American people in the war against AIDS on the continent of Africa, and the creation of PEPFAR by George W. Bush, but also to send out a warning to those trying to prohibit the vaccinations and the antiretrovirals from getting to the people who need them in Nigeria, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. Because one day we want a generation free of HIV/AIDS and disease not just on the continent of North America or the continent of Africa but around the world.

It is a tribute to the American medical community, the researchers and developers, the American people, and this Congress that the war on AIDS is still being engaged, and we are declaring victory after victory on the battlefield. One day we hope we will have a generation free of AIDS not just in America but around the world.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Ms. MIKULSKI. Madam President, what is the pending business before the Senate?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate is considering the Hagel nomination.

Ms. MIKULSKI. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I may speak as if in morning business for approximately 10 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. (Mr. MANCHIN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Maryland.

SEQUESTRATION

Ms. MIKULSKI. Mr. President, I was so excited when I came in because I have a new desk in the Senate. With seniority, I have now moved to the row where giants in our institution once stood. This is the particular seat which just a few weeks ago was held by John Kerry.

Although my desk location is new, I come to the floor with what seems to be a persistent pattern in the Senate and in the Congress, which is that when faced with big problems that affect the fate of the Nation, let's delay, let's blame, and let's not get to the work the American people elected us to do.

I rise today to speak about sequester—something that was never, ever meant to happen. It came out of the dark days of the debt ceiling debacle in the summer of 2011 when we were facing a downgrade of the U.S. economy and a dysfunction of the Congress. In order to get us to the table, we came up with an agreement to have a supercommittee that would meet on both sides of the dome to come up with how we could begin to solve the serious fiscal issues facing the United States of America.

There was an insistence, yes, by one side of the aisle that we have a trigger. And, yes, the President looked back on history.

What we have now is a situation where we said what we would propose as a trigger if we didn't get our act together, which we have not. We would put into place something so serious, so Draconian, so unthinkable, so unworkable that we would solve the problems through regular order and find that sensible center Colin Powell has so often talked about. Well, the supercommittee collapsed—not because there weren't the great efforts of people such as Senators MURRAY and DURBIN and Members over at the House, such as Maryland's very own CHRIS VAN HOLLEN.

Then we were faced with New Year's Eve. We had put it off to New Year's Eve and after the election, and here we were—while people were wearing funny hats all over America, we were doing funny things. And what did we do again? We put off sequester for 2 months—again not solving the problem.

Well, now we have a rendezvous. On March 1, sequester will happen.

I am opposed to sequester. I think it is bad policy for our country. It will hurt our economy. It will exacerbate the fragile job situation we have. It will affect not only government employees but those who work in private sector jobs because of the Federal Government.

I support what was originally intended: a balanced approach that would look at increased revenues—particularly plugging up tax loopholes, particularly getting rid of tax-break earmarks—along with strategic cuts in spending and a review of mandatory spending to see how else we could get more value for our dollar.

I am going to speak tomorrow about the impact on science, technology, innovation, and jobs. Today I want to speak about my own beloved State of Maryland and the people who work there.

Maryland is home not only to the Super Bowl champions but to Nobel

Prize winners and also people who work every day to help create the jobs today and the jobs tomorrow.

I have the honor of representing 130,000 Federal employees.

They say: Wow, how many of them can we get rid of?

Well, why would we want to get rid of the people who work at the Social Security Administration? These are the people who calculate the eligibility for the benefits in regular Social Security and in disability.

Why would we want to get rid of anybody who works for the Food and Drug Administration, people who every day are analyzing clinical trials to see if they can be moved to pharmaceutical or biotech or medical device production, ensuring that when they come out into clinical practice, they are safe, they have efficacy, they can be taken by the American people, and we can export them around the world? Why would we want to get rid of anybody at FDA who is helping make sure our drug supply is safe?

How about the food inspectors? Right now, one of the turbo engines of my Eastern Shore economy is seafood production and poultry production. You can't have poultry production unless you have food inspectors. When we start laying off or furloughing food inspectors, it is going to affect those private sector jobs. If you don't have an inspector, you are not going to be able to have those companies working with the same level of production.

Hundreds of thousands more work because of the Federal Government, iconic contractors, particularly in defense and also at NASA Goddard, which is our space science center. Yes, there are 3,000 civil servants, but there are also thousands of contractors. And what are they facing? Layoffs, furloughs, pay cuts, and lousy morale. What are they worried about? Their future. And they wonder whether they should give us another future. Make no mistake; we are not only going to hurt our economy, but there is an anti-incumbent fever developing around the country.

Now, as we look at solving the problems, there are those who want to protect lavish tax breaks or tax earmarks for a few. I want to stand up here for the many, not only the people who are multimillionaires or billionaires who can take a tax deduction on their corporate jets. I am for the people who are working every day right now to find a cure for Alzheimer's, to find a cure for autism, to find a cure for AIDS, to find help a cure for the arthritic, and most recently not only what is done by government but even what is done in private institutions. Within the last few weeks at Johns Hopkins University, under Federal help from the Veterans' Administration, on an American war veteran from Iraq who had lost both arms, Hopkins was able to perform surgery that did the first successful arm transplant. Doesn't that bring tears? That happened because of the genius of

the Hopkins personnel, with financial help from the VA to do the kind of research to make sure that not only the surgery was a success but also that the autoimmune suppression was also.

This is what the American people want us to do to not only help that veteran, but what we learn through the VA will also then move into civilian clinical practice.

We have to come up with a solution where government is doing the job to help the American people with compelling human needs or America is doing the job that enables other people to keep their jobs or protect their livelihoods—for example, weather. People watch the Weather Channel and say: Isn't that Cantore great? I love Cantore. We even tweet each other from time to time. But Jim Cantore and the Weather Channel get a lot of their information from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. That is the agency in Maryland that runs the weather forecast for all of America, predicting hurricanes, tornadoes, and it also ties up with the global weather prediction system that protects our ships at sea—civilian, cargo, military—as well as whether airlines can fly or not.

When we look at our legislation we have to know that there are real consequences to those employees. The numbers sound like a lot, but their contribution to saving lives and saving livelihoods is enormous.

Then we look at compelling human need. Do the American people really want to protect people not paying taxes on their second million over Head Start? If the sequester goes into effect, we are going to have a terrible effect on special education. Special education teachers would be affected, and it would be an across-the-board cut in education. The same with title I. Maryland would lose over \$14 million.

Federal law enforcement is something I know you are very keenly interested in, Mr. President. If the sequester goes into effect, it is going to affect over 1,000 Federal agents—at the FBI, at the Drug Enforcement Agency, at the Marshals Service. We don't know much about our Marshals Service. They are so quiet and efficient. Do you know what they do? They protect our judges at the Federal courthouses. You remember some got shot or wounded. It also serves warrants for runaway fugitives, and it also enforces the law on sexual predators in our country. Do we really want to furlough these men and women? I don't think so.

Then there is the FBI. The FBI is crucial not only in mortgage fraud, financial fraud, but now the world of cyber. Do you know, last year in America there were 300 bank robberies? That is a terrible number if you are one of those banks. But there were thousands of attacks by cyber on our American financial institutions, of which the FBI was prime time. Do we really want to lay them off? No, I don't think so.

There is another issue of safety, and that goes to aviation safety. I am deeply concerned about the cut in air traffic control with furloughs, layoffs, or asking even fewer to work longer hours. We cannot have it.

When we think about law enforcement, it also cuts Border Patrol. I am for comprehensive immigration reform, but I am also for protecting American borders. We now have 57,000 border control agents, a surprising number. If the sequester goes in, we could be forced to lay off or furlough 5,000 of them. Do you know what a furlough is? It says to someone who is going to be out there in the desert facing those who engage in the illegal traffic of people, guns, or drugs: While you are out there in that hot Sun, you are in harm's way, putting your life in danger, we are going to ask you only to work 4 days a week, and we are going to furlough you one-fifth of the time. To that border control agent being furloughed, that is a 20-percent cut.

I will say this: If the Federal employees are going to take a 20-percent cut and be furloughed, we should take a 20-percent cut. I think I should be treated like my Social Security employees, like my NIH employees working for cures, like FDA, the food inspectors, the people inspecting cargo coming into the Port of Baltimore or looking for illegal cargo coming into our airports. If they take a hit we should take a hit, and I look forward to moving on that legislation.

I hope we do not get to that point—not for me to protect my pay, but to protect their future; to say, America, we believe in what you are doing, and we want to protect you so you can do your job for America instead of protecting all these breaks for billionaires.

People can say: Didn't we do the tax break thing New Year's Eve with BIDEN and MCCONNELL? Yes. It was a non-payment, but there are lots and lots of very juicy loopholes or tax breaks—tax breaks for sending jobs overseas, tax breaks for reductions on corporate jets.

Do we need those? Those are really earmarks. A tax earmark goes to people in a particular class, and it lasts indefinitely. While we are waiting for comprehensive tax reform, let's go after some of these and come up with a balanced approach for revenue.

Mr. President, I know you were a Governor so you know about bond ratings. In my State of Maryland and my large counties, they are going to be affected by sequester because as the Federal Government goes, Moody's rates our bond rating. Maryland could lose millions of dollars and have to pay high interest rates on bonds.

This is going to have a terrible impact, particularly in the area of school construction. It will cost hundreds if not thousands of jobs in not building schools we need or roads that need repair or water systems that need to be upgraded.

People say: Oh, well, that is government. That is the way it is. Mr. Presi-

dent, I want you to realize if in fact people begin to lose their jobs or get furloughed and lose a big part of their income, they are not going to be spending money in the local economy, the real economy. It also means they will not be giving to their charitable organizations. It is regrettable, but if you have less money to spend and you save it somewhere for your family, you are not going to be giving to the United Way, to that great Federal campaign.

The lab assistant at NIH who is facing losing her job is not going to give to her favorite charity. The customs official at Thurgood Marshall Airport is not going to have the same disposable income to make sure they give again to the United Way.

We have to stop sequester. Thursday I will be joining with my colleagues, my Democratic colleagues. We have a plan. Our plan is simple and straightforward: We come up with \$86 billion. Half of that is in revenue. What does that mean? It means we come up with money for the Buffett rule. It was argued by Warren Buffett when he said he should pay the same rate of taxes as his secretary.

What that means is that on his second million—not his first; we believe in entrepreneurship, the job creators, et cetera. But on his second million he will pay the same rate as somebody who makes \$55,000 a year.

The other is we want to close a loophole sending jobs overseas. For too long we have rewarded exporting jobs while we should have a Tax Code that rewards export of products, whether it is that great pharmaceutical industry or art, protecting intellectual property, and so on.

We have come up with that, and then we have a cut in the farm subsidy program where we will no longer pay people not to plant. That will be about \$27 billion. Then, yes, we do cut defense, but that doesn't trigger until 2015 when our troops are home from Afghanistan. We never want to, through our budget problems, put our troops into harm's way.

I wanted to share what is going to happen. In my State we represent many great Federal iconic agencies that moved to Maryland in the early 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s when real estate was so high in Washington, DC. I am so proud of them. They win the Nobel prizes. They help us win the markets.

They are coming up with the new jobs, the new ideas for the new jobs for tomorrow. They are out there—for example, the Coast Guard—making sure the Chesapeake Bay is safe or they are dealing with our customs. Money is going to the University of Maryland, to Johns Hopkins, to not only help our veterans get new arms but to get a new life. Isn't that what the people want?

We can be more frugal. We have to be sensible, but let's not do sequester. It is bad money management, and we can do better. What we cannot do is continue to delay and put the entire burden on discretionary spending. Let's

stand up, let's be counted, let's have a vote on Thursday. I do hope the Democratic alternative prevails.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from California.

Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, following my remarks I ask unanimous consent that the Senator from Arkansas, Mr. PRYOR, be recognized.

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

Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, before Senator MIKULSKI, the chair of the Appropriations Committee, leaves the floor, I want to thank her for her very hard work along with several colleagues putting together a plan that is a commonsense plan to avoid this sequester, these automatic, senseless spending cuts. It was not easy to do, but I think they figured out a way to pay for it, as she described, called the Buffett rule, which basically says to a multimillionaire: We think it is only fair that you pay the same effective tax rate as your secretary.

If you were to ask anyone on the street, any party—Republican, Democratic—if they think that is the right way to go, I am convinced 90 percent of the people would say: Of course. I thank her. I know Senator Inouye is looking down and smiling because his successor, Senator MIKULSKI, is doing such a great job already.

I rise as a Senator from California. Senator FEINSTEIN and I represent 38 million people. Anything that happens around here comes down very hard on our State—or if it is a good thing, it is very good for our State. What we are facing is not a good thing, the sequester. It is a self-inflicted wound that will harm our economy.

I have to say, when I listened to Speaker BOEHNER over there—he is refusing to do anything about it. He says, and I will not quote him because it would be language not acceptable, but he basically said in the press, and it is written there—I urge everyone to see it—that the Senators ought to get off their “blank” and get to work and get something done.

I am proud to say we have an alternative to the sequester. Senator MIKULSKI laid it out. I believe we have a majority vote in this Senate for that plan.

I hope our colleagues will not filibuster. Let's have that up-or-down vote because when you are looking at job losses into the hundreds of thousands—and that is certainly true in my State and the country as a whole—no one should filibuster a plan that would stave off that pain.

How did we get to this place? In 2011 the Republicans decided to hold our country hostage over raising the debt ceiling. We know if we do not pay our bills—which is what the debt ceiling is about—this country is going to face default, and our credit rating is going to be lowered. Even though we finally resolved this thing at the eleventh hour, we still caused the downgrade the time

before. This time we averted another downgrade, but it is very important that we remember why we got to this place of facing this sequester. The Republicans played games with the debt ceiling again.

Even though under Ronald Reagan, their hero—and, by the way, I think even Ronald Reagan would have a hard time getting into the Republican Party these days because Ronald Reagan said you should never play games with the debt; even talking about the debt is a problem. We raised the debt when Ronald Reagan was President; 18 times we raised the debt ceiling. But all of a sudden, when there is a Democratic President, they are playing games. That is wrong. Obviously, we didn't want to see another downgrade. We had already seen a delay the last time, which cost us \$1.3 billion, in borrowing costs alone.

In order to avert this, on August 2, 2011, we enacted the Budget Control Act. When it became law, we were within hours of defaulting on our debts. The Budget Control Act allowed us to raise the debt ceiling, but on the condition that a "supercommittee" find \$1.2 trillion in cuts or force a trigger of across-the-board cuts known as sequestration.

Straight from my heart, I say this: No one thought the sequester would go forward. Everyone thought the pain to the economy would be so great that everybody would sit down and resolve it. But here is what is going on right now. Democrats say the way to resolve it and avert the sequester is to have dollar-for-dollar spending cuts and increases in revenues. Republicans say 100-percent spending cuts and they would prefer to do no defense cuts and have it all come out of education, transportation, medical research, law enforcement, the environment. That is what their plan was last year. So let's face it. No one thought we would get to this point, but we are at this point.

What is the choice? I think it is pretty clear what the choice is. It is the Democratic plan, which is a growing economy, versus the Republican plan, which is a sequester, which is a slowing economy. When I say that, I mean it.

Mark Zandi, who is one of the leading economists in the country, said if sequestration goes forward, it would cut a half of a point off our economic growth. What does that mean? It means jobs lost. I have to say, when I look at my State, this is not a pretty picture.

The Los Angeles Times, in an article by Ricardo Lopez and Richard Simon today, says: "California braces for impending cuts from Federal sequestration." I ask unanimous consent this article be printed in the RECORD.

[From the Los Angeles Times, Feb. 25, 2013]

CALIFORNIA BRACES FOR IMPENDING CUTS
FROM FEDERAL SEQUESTRATION

(By Ricardo Lopez and Richard Simon)

California's defense industry is bracing for a \$3.2-billion hit with the federal budget cuts that are expected to take effect Friday.

But myriad other federally funded programs also are threatened, and the combined effect is expected to slow the momentum that California's economy has been building over the last year.

As the state braces for pain from so-called sequestration, there are warnings of long delays at airport security checkpoints, potential slowdowns in cargo movement at harbors and cutbacks to programs, including meals for seniors and projects to combat neighborhood blight.

Despite the grim scenarios from local and state officials, economists say the cuts' overall blow to the economy would be modest, felt more acutely in regions such as defense-heavy San Diego and by Californians dependent on federal programs, such as college students who rely on work-study jobs to pay for school.

Critics say the cuts come at an inopportune time because the economic recovery in the U.S. and California is still weak.

"We need stimulus, not premature austerity," Gov. Jerry Brown said during a break at the National Governors Assn. meeting in Washington.

Rep. John Campbell (R-Irvine) contends that critics of the cuts are exaggerating the effects.

"If we can't do this, what can we do" to reduce Washington's red ink, he asked. "We ought to be panicked about the day when people won't buy our debt anymore because we borrowed too much."

If automatic spending cuts occur as planned, the growth in the country's gross domestic product is likely to slow by 0.4 percentage points this year, from about 2% to 1.6%, economists said.

California's GDP would see a similar slowdown. The state stands to lose as much as \$10 billion in federal funding this year, according to Stephen Levy, director of the Center for Continuing Study of the California Economy in Palo Alto.

Levy said the more than \$1 trillion in cuts planned over the next decade include "items in the federal budget that invest for the future," such as support for research and clean energy, that particularly affect California because of its "innovation economy."

The ripple effects the cuts might have on business and consumer confidence—which would further dampen economic activity—remain to be seen, said Jason Sisney, a deputy at the state's nonpartisan Legislative Analyst's Office.

"We're at a point where gains in housing and construction markets have begun to take hold," Sisney said. "A slowdown from sequestration would come at just the moment that the economy was beginning to right itself."

Jerry Nickelsburg, a UCLA economist who writes a quarterly economic forecast on the Golden State, said the state's recent economic gains would provide a buffer against sequestration.

"California can absorb it," Nickelsburg said. "Will it slow economic growth? The answer is yes. Will it result in negative economic growth? I think the answer is no."

Los Angeles officials project that the city would lose more than \$100 million at a time when they're struggling to close a hole in the city's budget.

Douglas Guthrie, chief executive of the Los Angeles city housing authority, said Monday that rent subsidies to as many as 15,000 low-income families would be cut an average \$200 a month, forcing many families to search for less expensive housing. His agency also might face as many as 80 layoffs in an already reduced workforce.

But Guthrie said in a letter to the Los Angeles City Council that the housing authority must plan for the "painful consequences"

of the federal budget cuts and is preparing to send warning notices to participants in the housing assistance program "as soon as we see that the cuts are made and there are no immediate prospects to resolve the budget crisis."

At Yosemite National Park, snow plowing of a key route over the Sierra would be delayed, ranger-led programs are likely to be reduced and the park would face "less frequent trash pickup, loss of campground staff, and reduced focus on food storage violations, all of which contribute to visitor safety concerns and increased bear mortality rates," according to the National Park Service.

Some programs, such as Social Security, would be spared from the \$85 billion in cuts nationwide due to kick in Friday. But defense programs are expected to be cut by about 13% for the remainder of the fiscal year and domestic spending by about 9%, according to the White House budget office.

The Obama administration sought Monday to highlight the effects close to home in an effort to step up the pressure on Congress to replace across-the-board cuts with more targeted reductions and new tax revenue collected from taxpayers earning more than \$1 million a year.

The Los Angeles Unified School District is bracing for a loss of \$37 million a year in federal funding. Supt. John Deasy said Monday that he is sending a letter to the California congressional delegation warning about the "potential very grave impact" of the cuts on Los Angeles schools.

Rachelle Pastor Arizmendi, director of early childhood education at the Pacific Asian Consortium for Employment in Los Angeles, said she anticipated that the cuts would cost her agency \$980,000 in federal Head Start funding. That would force PACE to eliminate preschool for about 120 children ages 3 to 5.

"It's not just a number," she said. "This is closing down classrooms. This is putting our children behind when they're going to kindergarten."

The nonprofit serves about 2,000 children, providing most of them two meals a day in addition to preschool education. The cuts would mean PACE would have to lay off four of its 20 teachers, forcing the closure of eight Head Start classrooms, Arizmendi said.

Mrs. BOXER. Our Governor makes the point—he has a way of getting to the point: "We need stimulus, not premature austerity," said Gov. Jerry Brown.

The Republicans have become the austerity party and the Democrats have become the jobs party. I think people want jobs. There are still too many long-term unemployed. We have a stubbornly high unemployment rate. There is no question about it.

Jerry Nickelsburg, a UCLA economist who writes a quarterly economic forecast on the Golden State—my State—said: The State's recent economic gains would provide a buffer against sequestration, but would it slow economic growth? Yes. Why would we do something like this, a self-inflicted wound, when there is an easy way to get out of it, which is to put into place a rule that says on a person's second million dollars, once they get to that point, they are going to pay an effective tax rate equal to their secretary? Give me a break. This is the greatest country on Earth, and the people I know who live in California, for the most part, in the wealthy brackets

are very happy to pay their fair share. They want to pay their fair share. They want to give back. They love this country. It gave them everything. A lot of them started with nothing.

So we have the two plans. The Democratic plan was outlined by Senator MIKULSKI and we are going to vote on it on Thursday. I pray to God it is not filibustered and a majority will rule and we will get it done. It will create a growing economy because it is a balanced plan with half cuts, half revenues.

Then there is a Republican plan which we don't know yet, but the one they passed in the House doubled down on the cuts to education, the environment, transportation, and left defense alone. That is not fair, and that is a sure way we are going to lose hundreds of thousands of jobs.

I wish to share a picture with my colleagues. I don't know if people can see this, but it is on the front page of the Washington Post and it is a picture of a shipyard worker. The look on his face I can only describe as frightened. As a matter of fact, when I saw the photo, without seeing what the story was about, I thought, This man is expecting some terrible gloom and doom to occur. And, yes, it is his fear that he will be laid off. He said his wife is pregnant and he doesn't have a second source of income in the family and he is desperate.

We just went through that. Why would we ever do it again? And people say to me, What is going to happen? How will I feel it back home? Will I have a longer wait at the airport? Yes, you might. Will I go to the National Park Service and it may be closed down? Yes. Will job training centers, some of them, shut down? Yes. There is a list of what will happen.

I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD a list of the consequences of the sequester cuts nationwide.

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

THE CONSEQUENCES OF SEQUESTER CUTS
TO EDUCATION

70,000 Children From Head Start
10,000 Teacher Jobs
7,200 Special Education Teachers
2,700 Schools From Receiving Title 1 Funds, Cutting Support for 1.2 Million Students

TO PUBLIC HEALTH

424,000 HIV Tests Conducted by CDC
25,000 Breast and Cervical Cancer Screenings
804,000 Outpatient Visits to Indian Health Service Hospitals and Clinics
2,100 Food Inspections
4 Million Meals Served to Seniors Through Programs Like Meals on Wheels
600,000 Women and Children From Receiving Nutrition Assistance
1,000 NSF Grants—Impacting 12,000 Scientists and Students
\$902 Million From SBA Loan Guarantees for Small Businesses

TO SECURITY AND SAFETY

1,000 FBI Agents and Other Law Enforcement Personnel

1,000 Criminal Cases From Being Prosecuted by U.S. Attorneys

Mrs. BOXER. We are looking at 70,000 children not being able to go to Head Start. We are looking at 10,000 teacher jobs. We are looking at 7,200 special ed teachers—we know those special ed teachers; they are angels from heaven who work with kids who can't even sometimes manage to get dressed in the morning by themselves.

Then: 2,700 schools won't receive title I funds, cutting support for 1.2 million children who need help learning to read. Tell me, does this make sense, when all we have to do is ask someone earning a second million dollars to pay the same effective rate as a secretary? I don't get it.

How about 424,000 HIV tests conducted by the CDC won't happen, so someone is going to sneak through and give HIV to someone else? Really, that is not a smart thing. Twenty-five thousand breast and cervical cancer screenings will not take place, and some poor woman who might have had a chance to catch breast cancer at an early stage is thrown overboard. Eight hundred thousand outpatient visits to Indian hospitals and clinics. Food inspections. Just the time to cut back on food inspections. How about 4 million meals will be cut that would have been served to seniors through programs such as Meals-on-Wheels. Four million seniors won't get that. And what if they don't have a loving child to take care of them or what if they don't have a neighbor to take care of them? Six hundred thousand women and children won't receive nutrition assistance, and we have a lot of hungry people in this great country of ours; scientific grants to find cures for the diseases that plague our families, whether they are rich or poor or anywhere in the middle, to find the cures for Alzheimer's, to find the cures for diabetes. Small businesses that do so well when they get that little seed money—\$902 million cut from there.

Then: 1,000 FBI agents and other law enforcement personnel, and that is because we are just so safe in our communities. I have gone around my State and not one person ever came up to me and said, I want less enforcement in my neighborhood. It is just too much. It is too safe. Not one person ever told me, oh, don't bother checking my air or my water quality; I am just fine.

So if we take these cuts and we apply them to our States, we will find out what happens and it is not a pretty picture. Los Angeles alone could lose as much as \$115 million in Federal grants, just in the first 6 months of 2013. Community development, public safety, I have been through it.

We don't have to inflict this pain on the American people. Everything I said relates to jobs. All of those cuts, what do they mean? Real people who do real things in the community such as law enforcement, teaching our kids, et cetera, will lose their jobs, not to mention people in the Defense Department

who are making sure we are always safe and ready. That is why we see the look on his face, because he is potentially one of those people.

In closing, I want to thank those who have put together a package for us, and I have a plea to my Republican friends: Do not filibuster this. Too many lives are at stake. Too many jobs are at stake. Put your plan forward, get a vote on it if you have a plan or if your plan is to let sequester go through, let's see that vote again, and let us have our vote on our plan to avoid this pain and suffering people are going to feel.

I actually have one more point to make and then I will turn to my friend from Arkansas. We hear a lot of posturing from my Republican friends about how the Democrats are such big spenders and all they want to do is spend and tax and tax and spend. What party led the way to the first balanced budget in almost 30 years? I will give my colleagues a clue: It was not the Republican Party. It was the Democratic Party. When Bill Clinton was President, we not only balanced the budget but we left George W. Bush a surplus of \$281 billion.

By the way, I happened to be here when we voted on the budget plan and we did not have one vote to spare. We did it ourselves.

What did George W. Bush do with this huge surplus? He squandered it. He put two wars on the credit card, never paid for them; gave tax breaks to people who didn't need them, and handed President Obama a \$1.2 trillion deficit, which is now projected to be \$850 billion for 2013. It is going in the right direction under a Democratic President. We want to get that down and we can get that down, and we can work together to get that down, but we do not have to do this sequester. History has shown us the balanced approach we used when Bill Clinton was President of smart investments in things that help our people such as job training and education and lifting up our children, and making sure they don't go hungry—those kinds of investments pay off in a society.

We have 23 million jobs. Under George W. Bush, we lost jobs: George W. Bush, we lost jobs. And this President, our President who just got re-elected, is following the model of Bill Clinton: a balanced approach to deficit reduction, investments in things we need, cutting things we don't need, and working together.

I say if we don't learn from history, we are doomed to repeat it. We are coming out of the greatest recession since the Great Depression, and we cannot afford to have this sequester. We need to avert it, come together with a balanced plan of cuts and revenues, not just the cuts-only approach, the austerity approach of the Republicans.

I hope they don't filibuster our approach and let us have an up-or-down vote and pass this with a majority.

I thank my colleagues very much, and I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arkansas.

Mr. PRYOR. Mr. President, I thank my Senate colleague from California for her remarks and also want to finish one point she was making there at the end. But before I do, Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the final 20 minutes prior to the vote be equally divided and controlled between Senators LEVIN and INHOFE.

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

Mr. PRYOR. I want to thank Senator BOXER for her comments on balancing the budget. One of the things we need to understand is that we can do this. It was not that long ago when President Clinton was elected and he focused on balancing the budget. He made it a priority of his administration. He made it a Democratic priority for the Democratic Party. They passed the Balanced Budget Act of 1993. It passed without one Republican vote in this Chamber and without one Republican vote in the House Chamber. But nonetheless it did pass. It probably caused some people some elections a couple years later, but nonetheless it was the right thing to do. It got us on the course to fiscal stability. It took 4 years, but we did balance the budget.

But there is one thing we also need to mention as we talk about that. One advantage Bill Clinton had that we have not had in the last few years is a robust, vibrant, and growing economy. He had the longest economic expansion in U.S. history. That did not happen by accident. That took a lot of work. It took a lot of bipartisan effort here in the U.S. Senate, there in the U.S. House of Representatives, and down at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. It had Governors working together. It had all of us working together to try to make sure we got the economy back on track because if the economy is growing, the revenues improve, and also your safety net programs are not hit nearly as hard.

So one of the things we need to focus on as a Congress—certainly as a Senate—is we need to focus on growing the U.S. economy. That brings me to my discussion today about sequestration.

When we look at the analysis on what sequestration could do to the U.S. economy, there could be 750,000 jobs lost in this economy. That is a .6 percent shrinkage of the economy by the end of this year. We are not talking about somewhere way down the road, out in the outyears. We are talking about at the end of this year it will have a negative impact on the U.S. economy. That is going to continue to hurt our debt and deficit problem. We need to do all we can to avoid this and to grow the U.S. economy. We need a growing U.S. economy. There should not be government policies that are shrinking the economy. We should be growing the economy.

I wish to say, if you look at the numbers for government employees—and I

think a lot of the news media has focused on government employees. There has been a lot of discussion in the press conferences and there is all the blame game that has been going on, and I want to talk about that in a few moments. But if you look at the numbers in the public sector—the Federal employees who will either be laid off or furloughed or for whatever reason will not be able to function—those are big numbers. But that only tells part of the story. In fact, that only tells a small part of the story because this sequester is going to harm the private sector much more than it harms the public sector.

This is something we should understand, that the American people should understand. I would hope the American people would insist we work together to get something done here in the next few days if possible, certainly in the next few weeks to avoid this sequester.

In my State of Arkansas, there are 91 poultry and meat processing facilities that will have to close their doors at least at some point because they do not have meat inspectors and food inspectors on site. That is 91 facilities. That is a lot of employees. We have employees at 52 Arkansas FSA offices. These are Department of Ag offices that are out around the counties to help people in the farming industry, to give them some government resources, advice, et cetera. Fifty-two of those offices are not going to close their doors, but they are going to have to furlough their employees. There is no doubt they will be at partial strength instead of full strength at a very critical time for farmers all over the State of Arkansas.

Also, we have an FDA facility there, the National Center for Toxicological Research, and it is going to be cut by an estimated \$3 million. Well, that facility is a nice little economic engine for that part of the State. That means when they cut it, it is going to have a negative ripple effect, an adverse ripple effect in that part of our State's economy.

I know in this Chamber and in this town there is a lot of discussion about making the government small and how we should cut the government and how the government should be lean and all that. Do you know what. A lot of that I do not disagree with. But I do think it is important for all of us, as responsible policymakers, to understand the reality that whether we like it or not—and many of us have philosophical disagreements on this; and I am not trying to get into that, but whether we like it or not, our government is very intertwined in the U.S. economy, our government is a critical part of the U.S. economy.

So you take something like the food industry—and I am chairman of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture—if you take something as basic as agriculture—something that may not be very sexy, that does not get a lot of headlines, that people do not think a lot about because we take it

for granted in this country that we are going to have a good, healthy, robust food supply, but that does not have to be the case. It certainly is not the case in most countries around the world. We are very spoiled. We are very fortunate in this country to have that. But the agricultural sector cannot function without the government.

Again, we have a safe food supply. We need inspectors out there to make sure that meat and other foods that are being processed get that USDA seal of approval—grade A, whatever it is. That means something. If we cannot know our food is safe, then we have diminished what it means to live in this country. We do not want to get into that. Let's avoid that. This is avoidable.

I know a lot of Arkansans, when I talk to them, say: Can't you all do something? Can't you work together? The answer is yes, we can work together. It is just a matter of political will. We have to make up our minds that is what we are going to do, that we are going to work together.

In 2011, we passed the Budget Control Act. Here again, I think the news media has not covered this a lot, has not explained this very well to most Americans. But one of the things the Budget Control Act of 2011 did, among other things, is it set spending caps for the Federal Government. So as back in the 1980s, when people worried about \$180 billion deficits—now we have much larger deficits than that, but back then in the 1980s, we put on the Gramm-Rudman spending caps and things such as that—Gramm-Rudman-Hollings—and there were other efforts over the years.

Well, that is what we have done with the Budget Control Act. We have spending caps for the next 10 years—now it is for the next 9 years when it comes to Federal spending. I think people do not always appreciate that because what they hear out of Washington—instead of people explaining what is going on and trying to help the American people understand what they get from Washington—is blame, blame, blame. I cannot count the number of press conferences we have had where one side has come out to blame the other side. I know some of the House Members just came out and blamed the Senate. Democrats are blaming Republicans. Republicans are blaming the President. The President is blaming the Congress. It goes on and on and on. It never stops. It is a dead-end street.

The truth is we voted for sequester. I do not care who came up with the idea, we voted for it. As we have talked about many times on this floor, the reason we put sequester in in the first place was because it was such a bad idea; it will be so hard to do; it does not make a lot of sense. But, nonetheless, it was to try to force our folks to get to a budget deal. It did not happen. But I think the important thing is, all Americans need to know everybody in Washington owns this. You can blame all you want. You can have as many

press conferences as you want, but everybody in Washington owns this. We need to own up to our responsibility as Congressmen and Senators and as the President and do what we can to not hurt this country.

Let me talk for a few more moments because I see one of my colleagues has arrived here. Let me say the sequestration, again, was an idea that was put together because they wanted it to be so painful that we would never get here. These are arbitrary cuts. You do not take into account the efficiency of programs, the effectiveness of programs. You do not take into account the merits of programs. You just cut across the board.

I think we probably will do some more cuts. We probably should do some more cuts. I think if you look at the Simpson-Bowles blueprint—that proposal a lot of us have talked about over the last couple years—they would probably look at that and look at the numbers and say we still need to do some cutting. But we also need some revenue. We still need to do that. But our cuts should be smart and they should be deliberate and they should increase the bang that the taxpayer gets for their buck. That is not what sequestration does. It does not achieve any of those goals.

One thing about the Department of Agriculture—here again, people need to understand this; we talk about this here in our committee rooms and whatnot, but I think a lot of times the message does not get out—agriculture funding has already been cut by 15 percent. There has already been a 15-percent cut to agriculture, starting in 2010 to today: 15 percent. I think it is unwise for us to cut an industry which is one of the core strengths of the U.S. economy.

If we look at the U.S. economy, there are a lot of things we do well. But there is no doubt at all we do agriculture better than anyone else in the world. There is not even a close second place. You innovate when it comes to agriculture. This is where you maximize crops. The United States of America is the gold standard for agricultural productivity and new technology and innovation and all these great things to make this country the breadbasket that it is. So why in the world are we going to cut, cut, cut agriculture? It does not make any sense.

Of course, rural America is struggling disproportionately. With the recession and all that has hit rural America, it is tough out there. Let me tell you, I come from a very rural State. It is tough. These cuts are going to harm rural America much more than they will harm urban America and suburban America. It is a fact of life. Again, that is another reason why we need to avoid this.

So in closing—I know I have one of my colleagues here who wishes to speak—let me get back to the meat inspectors. The Department of Agriculture says they may have to be fur-

loughed for up to 15 days. That means you are going to have to temporarily close—maybe for a day at a time—6,000 processing plants nationwide. There are over 90 of those in Arkansas. Just in my State, that is going to have an impact on not those few government jobs, it is going to have an impact on 40,000 jobs in the private sector—40,000 jobs in the private sector—because of this.

It also is going to disrupt the efficiencies we have in the protein markets in this country. What that means is, prices are going to go up, people are going to pay more for their meat products at the grocery store and at the restaurant. This is not going to be a win for anybody. And I think you are going to see about \$400 million in industry wages that could be lost as a result. That is not going to help the U.S. economy.

Then you expand what the U.S. Department of Agriculture does beyond row crop and livestock-type agriculture. They do a lot in the area of clean water, fire and rescue vehicles in rural communities. They do community building in rural America—things such as hospitals, school construction. They do rental assistance programs, and a lot of these are for the poorest of the poor out there around our country. Again, it is going to disproportionately hurt these people who can least afford it.

I mentioned the U.S. Department of Agriculture, but also at the FDA, it seems to me almost every one of their employees around the country could be subject to these furloughs and these cuts and will be adversely affected.

Do we want to interrupt the gold standard we have with food and drugs in this country through the FDA? I would say no.

I think it is time for us to come together, to work together, to find a solution. I think one of the bits of good news we see in Washington is there is nothing wrong here that we cannot fix with some political will. I think that is what this is all about. It is a little bit of a test of wills right now, but I think there is no doubt we can fix this with some political will.

Mr. President, with that, I will yield the floor.

I see my colleague from Vermont is in the Chamber.

Thank you, Mr. President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. SANDERS. I thank my colleague from Arkansas for yielding.

When we talk about sequestration, when we talk about deficit reduction, it is important to put that discussion in a broader context. The broader context needs to be, No. 1, what is the fairest way to move toward deficit reduction and what is the best approach in terms of economic policy making our country strong and creating jobs.

I fear very much the debate we are currently having has very little to do with financial issues. I believe it has a

lot to do with ideology. It is all about economic winners and losers in our country. It is all about the power of big money. It is all about the soul of what America is supposed to be.

You may have noticed there was a poll done. I can't remember who did it, but it was consistent with all the other polls I have seen. They asked the American people: Are you concerned about deficit reduction? Do you think we should cut Social Security and Medicare? Overwhelmingly, Democrats said no, Republicans said no.

Yet here in the Congress, surrounded by lobbyists and campaign contributors who are very wealthy, that is where we are heading. We are heading toward a so-called chained CPI, which very few people outside the beltway understand. This will mean cuts, significant cuts in Social Security and in benefits for disabled veterans.

The American people say we think the wealthiest people in this country should help us with deficit reduction, protect the safety net.

In Congress, there is a fierce attack by the Republicans and some Democrats on the safety net. To a large degree, we are allowing large corporations, that are enjoying very low effective tax rates, to get away with what they are doing.

When we talk about who should help us with deficit reduction, we need to look at what is going on economically in the United States of America. We don't discuss this issue enough. We need more people coming down to the floor to talk about it. We have the most unequal distribution of wealth and income of any major country on Earth, and the gap between the very wealthy and everyone else is growing wider.

Today, the wealthiest 400 individuals in this country own more wealth than the bottom half of American people, 150 million people. You have 150 million here, you have 400 over there. Who do you think should pick up the burden of deficit reduction?

Should we go after children who are having a hard time getting the nutrition they need or seniors who can't afford prescription drugs? Yes, we could do that.

Is that a moral thing to do? No. Is that good economics? No.

Today, one family, the Walton family of Walmart, is probably the most major welfare beneficiary in America. So many of their low-paid employees are on Medicaid, food stamps or other Federal programs. This one family owns more wealth than the bottom 40 percent of the American people.

Do you know what we did a couple months ago? We gave the Walton family a tax break by expanding the estate tax.

Today, the top 1 percent owns 38 percent of all financial wealth—1 percent owns 38 percent. The bottom 60 percent owns less than 3 percent of all wealth.

What do we think? Do we want to go after the bottom 60 percent, families

who are making \$25,000, \$30,000 a year, falling further and further behind? Do we want to take away the educational opportunities and the nutrition their kids can get? Yes, we may do it that way. Maybe it makes more sense to go after the top 1 percent who are doing phenomenally well.

Do you know what. The vast majority of Americans agree with that, but this Congress does not reflect the interests of the vast majority of the American people. It is not the American people who are funding the campaigns for Members of the Senate and the House. It is not the average American who has well-paid lobbyists all over this place.

As Warren Buffett has pointed out, the 400 richest Americans are now worth a record-breaking \$1.7 trillion, more than 5 times what they were worth two decades ago.

While the wealthiest people are becoming even richer, the Federal Reserve reported last year that median net worth for middle-class families dropped by nearly 40 percent from 2007 to 2010, dropped by 40 percent. That is the equivalent of wiping out 18 years of savings for the average middle-class family.

Whom do we go after? Do we think it makes any economic or moral sense to go after a middle class which is disappearing or maybe do we ask the wealthiest people in this country—who are doing phenomenally well—to help us with deficit reduction?

As bad as wealth inequality is, the distribution of income, what people make every year is even worse. It is an amazing statistic, and I hope everybody pays attention to this.

The last study on the subject of income distribution showed that from 2009 to 2011, the last study we have, 100 percent of all new income went to the top 1 percent, while the bottom 99 percent actually saw a loss in their income. In a sense it doesn't matter, given that incredible imbalance in income, what kind of economic growth we have. All the gains are going to go to the top 1 percent.

I have some friends over in the House, our Republican friends, who are saying: No, no, no. We can't ask these people to help us more with deficit reduction. I think that is very wrong.

When we are talking about how to reduce the deficit—and we all want to do that—we need to understand we can't get blood out of a stone. We can't ask people who are earning less and in many cases working longer hours. We can't ask the 14 percent of Americans who are unemployed. If we add people who have given up looking for work and people who are working part-time, we cannot get blood out of a stone. As Willy Sutton the bank robber reminded us, you go where the money is. In this case, all the money and all the income gains are with the top 1 percent.

The other point that needs to be made is we need to ask the question of how we reached the place we are right

now. No. 1, we need to ask who is best able to help us with deficit reduction. It is surely not the struggling middle class. It is surely not the disabled veterans and their families. It is surely not elderly people who can't afford prescription drugs. It is surely not kids who don't have enough to eat.

The second question we need to ask is how did we get to where we are today. Did this deficit just arrive yesterday?

I think we all remember that in the last year of the Clinton administration this country had a \$236 billion surplus, a surplus. The economists were projecting that the surplus would expand, expand, and expand.

What happened from the year 2000 to 2013 so that we went from a very significant surplus to a very serious deficit? That needs to be understood when we talk about sequestration and deficit reduction. The answer is, as everybody knows, we went to war in Iraq and Afghanistan. A strange thing happened. We forgot to pay for those two wars. When we go into two wars and we are taking care of all those veterans who have been hurt, that adds up to something like \$3 trillion by the time we take care of the last veteran, as we must.

During the Bush administration, we gave huge tax breaks to the wealthiest people in this country, didn't offset it. That adds up. We passed the Medicare Part D prescription drug program, didn't pay for that. That adds up.

Most important, because of the greed, recklessness, and illegal behavior on Wall Street, we were plunged into a major recession, high unemployment, businesses going under, less tax revenue coming into the Federal coffers.

I know my Republican friends say cut, cut, cut, cut benefits for disabled vets, cut Social Security, cut Medicaid, cut nutrition, cut Head Start. We could do it that way, but we should also understand that at 15.8 percent as compared to GDP, the percentage of GDP, our revenue is almost the lowest it has been in 60 years.

Yes, in the middle of a recession we are spending a lot of money making sure people don't go hungry, making sure people who lost their jobs have unemployment benefits, making sure people have affordable housing. It is true. What is also true is that at 15.8 percent, as a percentage of GDP, our revenue is less, almost less than it has been in 60 years.

Today, not only are we seeing a growing gap between the very wealthy and everybody else, it is important to take a look at large corporations. When we do, we find that corporate profits are at an alltime high, while corporate income tax revenue as a percentage of GDP is near a record low. Profits are soaring, and the effective tax rate is near a record low.

In 2011, corporate revenue as a percentage of GDP was just 1.2 percent lower than any other major country in

the OECD, including Great Britain, Germany, France, Japan, Canada, et cetera. Corporate revenue as a percentage of GDP is 1.2 percent lower than any other major country in the OECD. In 2011, corporations paid 12 percent of their profits in taxes, the lowest since 1972.

We have a choice. Do we go after the elderly? Do we go after the sick? Do we go after the children? Do we go after the poor or maybe do we say that when corporate profits are at a record level and their effective tax rate is the lowest since 1972, maybe we say to corporate America, hey, help us with deficit reduction.

The last figures we have seen on this issue is that in 2005, one out of four major corporations paid no income tax at all while they collected over \$1 trillion of revenue over that 1-year period.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator's time has expired.

Mr. SANDERS. Let me conclude by simply saying we are losing \$100 billion a year from tax havens in the Cayman Islands and elsewhere. There are ways to do deficit reduction without hurting the most vulnerable people in this society.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

Mr. LEVIN. Before Senator SANDERS leaves, let me commend him. I didn't hear all his remarks, but I know the subject of his address, his remarks, was the fact corporations now contribute about 10 percent of the total revenue which comes into Uncle Sam. Years ago, it was about 50 percent, and then gradually it has come down to about where it is now.

The reason for that, mainly, is that there are a whole bunch of gimmicks and loopholes which have been inserted into our tax laws which need to be closed. If they can be closed, we would be able to avoid sequestration. That is how big the loopholes are.

I am not talking about deductions, which most people would say serve a useful purpose. Whether people agree with that purpose, at least deductions, as we generally understand deductions, serve some kind of a productive purpose. For instance, corporations get accelerated depreciation when they buy equipment. That serves a very important purpose. It gives an incentive to buy equipment.

Even the oil and gas credit, which I don't support, nonetheless, the purpose of it is to give an incentive to explore and drill for oil and gas. Whether one agrees with that purpose, at least it is a purpose. When it comes to these loopholes and gimmicks which are used to shift revenues to tax havens, there is no useful purpose. The only purpose is taxable. Those are the loopholes which we can close, and those are the loopholes which it seems to me there ought to be broad bipartisan support to close. If we can close them, we can avoid sequestration. Again, that is how big these loopholes are.

I very much appreciate the reference by the Senator from Vermont to our Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations and the work we have been doing, and I very much appreciate the energy he brings to this effort. It ought to be bipartisan. Again, these kinds of loopholes are not what most people consider to be legitimate deductions but are a kind of tax-avoidance scheme that should not be in the law even if we had no deficit. I guess one of the critical differences between these kinds of tax-avoidance gimmicks and the ordinary deductions corporations take is the fact that the use of these and the abuse of these should be eliminated on a bipartisan basis.

So I would like to thank my friend. I wish I had caught the early part of his remarks, but that was not to be.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I rise today to discuss the President's nomination of former Senator Chuck Hagel to be Secretary of Defense.

I know Senator Chuck Hagel well from having served with him for many years in the Senate. We were sworn in as Senators on the same day and traveled to Iraq together in 2003 as part of the first Senate delegation there after the war began.

Senator Hagel's courageous military service deserves our praise and gratitude, and I know he cares deeply about our servicemembers. His experience as a soldier during the war in Vietnam is significant as the Senate considers his nomination to be Secretary of Defense, but, of course, it is but one factor that we must weigh in our consideration of him for this critical Cabinet post. Senator Hagel and I spent 90 minutes in my office discussing a wide range of issues, which I appreciated, and I reviewed carefully the lengthy Senate Armed Services Committee hearing on his nomination.

The next Secretary of Defense will be responsible for managing a massive bureaucracy, the defense budget, threats emanating from Iran, North Korea, and Islamist extremism, the withdrawal of United States combat forces from Afghanistan, and an increasingly provocative Chinese military as well as personnel issues affecting those serving in uniform.

With regard to our servicemembers, I am confident that Senator Hagel would devote the necessary attention to address the horrendous rate of sexual assault in the military and would work to reduce the unacceptable, record high number of suicides among our troops.

As the coauthor with former Senator Joe Lieberman of the law that repealed the military's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy that barred openly gay people from serving in the military, I am now satisfied that Senator Hagel is committed to implementing this law fully.

We also discussed the specter of sequestration, which would lead to irresponsible cuts that would cripple our readiness and capability to project power on land, air, and sea. Senator Hagel reiterated Secretary Leon Panet-

ta's position that such meat-ax cuts would be disastrous and catastrophic to our national security and economy.

In addition, I understand Senator Hagel's overall philosophy on the need to exercise caution before deploying military forces. Such restraint, at times, can provide a valuable voice of caution to temper the impulse to exercise America's significant military edge.

Nevertheless, several critical issues loom large as I contemplate the threats facing our national security and consider Senator Hagel's nomination. These issues include the proliferation of terrorism, the threat of a nuclear-armed Iran and the reality of a nuclear-armed North Korea, an increasingly dangerous and unstable Middle East that threatens our national interests and our ally Israel, and the possibility of deep and indiscriminate cuts in the defense budget that would undermine America's strength and security.

While Osama bin Laden is dead and al-Qaida has suffered significant losses in Afghanistan and Pakistan, violent Islamist extremism has metastasized to other regions around the world, particularly to the countries in North Africa. The terrorist attack in Benghazi left four Americans dead, including Ambassador Chris Stevens, and an attack killed three Americans at an Algerian gas facility. AQAP's top bombmaker is still at large, and Hezbollah and Hamas continue to rearm in Lebanon and Gaza. Hundreds of rockets have been fired from Gaza into Israel, the vast majority fortunately stopped by the highly effective Iron Dome.

Senator Hagel's views on these critical threats are unsettling to me. For example, with regard to Hezbollah, Senator Hagel was unwilling to ask the European Union to designate Hezbollah as a terrorist organization in 2006. While 88 other Senators, including then-Senators Obama and Clinton, supported this reasonable request, Senator Hagel did not. Hezbollah has the blood of more Americans on its hands than any other terrorist organization besides al-Qaida, yet Senator Hagel refused to urge the EU to call Hezbollah what it is—a terrorist organization.

Senator Hagel has explained to me that he had a principle of not sending correspondence to foreign leaders because he believes the President, not Congress, conducts foreign policy. Indeed, in January 2009, former Senator Hagel did sign an ill-advised letter counseling Barack Obama to spearhead direct, unconditional talks with Hamas—a position that President Obama wisely chose to disregard.

Senator Hagel's general principle of abstaining from sending letters to foreign leaders on policy matters did not, however, preclude him from signing a 2007 letter to the Prime Minister of Vietnam to encourage efforts to bring the Peace Corps to that country. If expanding the Peace Corps' presence warrants an exception to Senator Hagel's

policy of not sending letters to foreign leaders, I cannot fathom why a matter as grave and as clear as a request to the EU to name Hezbollah a terrorist group would not warrant a similar exception.

When it comes to the prospect of a nuclear-armed Iran, the American people have been told for several years that Iran is 18 to 24 months away from having the capability to build a nuclear weapon. I fear that we are truly within that time window as I speak today. A nuclear-armed Iran would have grave consequences for the United States and would pose an existential threat to the State of Israel. The prospect of a nuclear-armed Iran could also fuel the most significant proliferation of nuclear weapons in the Middle East since the dawn of the nuclear age. Thus, Senator Hagel's votes, statements, and views on this grave threat matter a great deal.

What concerns me as much as his repeated reluctance previously to leave all options on the table is his past hesitancy to exercise all of the non-military options, such as unilateral sanctions, that are the primary peaceful means of inducing Iran to cease its nuclear weapons program and allow for International Atomic Energy Agency inspections.

Senator Hagel supports multi-lateral sanctions contending that they work better and has opposed unilateral sanctions. Certainly, in an ideal world, multi-lateral sanctions can be more effective, and I welcome other countries that wish to join the United States in adopting sanctions. But the United States' imposition of sanctions—even if we were to act virtually alone—not only helps to disrupt Iran's nuclear program but also demonstrates moral leadership.

In the last Congress, I introduced legislation to make shipping classification societies choose between doing business with Iran or with the United States Coast Guard. It was a unilateral effort. I did not have the authority to make this change at the U.N. Initially, these organizations thought it would be business as usual. As the bill moved through Congress and now that the bill is law, none of them continues to work with Iran. That's just one example of an effective unilateral action.

Particularly concerning to me is a press report that Senator Hagel thwarted an effort in 2008 to pass sanctions against Iran that was supported by more than 70 Senators. The Department of Defense contends that Senator Hagel joined other Republican Senators in holding the Iran Sanctions bill due to concerns they and the Bush administration had on how to impose the most effective sanctions on Iran. According to the Department, his disagreement was not with the objectives of the bill, but was a vote based on its effectiveness at that time.

I am not, however, aware of any other Republican Senator blocking that bill. Furthermore, it does not

matter who else may have been involved because no one but Senator Hagel is the President's nominee to be the Secretary of Defense.

We are at a moment in history when there can be no reservation, hesitancy, or opposition to enact any and all sanctions that could change Iran's calculus regarding its pursuit of nuclear weapons.

We are seeing a major transformation in the Middle East. The United States' interests in this region are vital: trade through the Suez Canal, the availability of energy resources, the security of Israel, the prevention of Iran developing a nuclear weapon, and the future of Syria which has the potential to destabilize the region.

Will we be resolute and stand by our friends and allies, even during this tumultuous time? In our partnership with Israel, there is an opportunity for the United States to demonstrate that we stand by our allies even when the neighborhood looks more dangerous than it has in decades.

Unfortunately, I am concerned that Senator Hagel's nomination would send the wrong message at the wrong time to our allies and adversaries around the world about the resolve of the United States. It is telling and disturbing that when I asked Senator Hagel what he believed were the greatest threats facing our country, he identified the resource shortage that could result from the addition of two billion more people during the next couple decades as near the top of his list. While there no doubt will be tremendous challenges associated with this development, his response concerned me when I consider all of the enormous near-term threats facing our country.

In my judgment, Islamist terrorism, a nuclear-armed North Korea and potentially a nuclear-armed Iran, an unstable and chaotic Middle East, cyber attacks, Chinese provocations, and budget constraints will likely consume the attention of our country's national security leaders during the next 4 years. I believe a vote in favor of Senator Hagel would send the wrong signal to our military, the American people, and to the world about America's resolve regarding the most important national security challenges of our era.

I am unable to support Senator Hagel to be the next Secretary of Defense because I do not believe his past positions, votes, and statements match the challenges of our time, and his presentations at his hearing did nothing to ease my doubts. I regret having to reach that conclusion given our personal relationship and my admiration for Senator Hagel's military service. But I have concluded that he is not well-suited for the tremendous challenges our country faces during this dangerous era in our history.

As I announce my decision to cast my vote in opposition to Senator Hagel's nomination, let me address one final question: Should this nomination,

which causes me such great concern, be filibustered? As a general rule, I believe a President has the right to choose the members of his Cabinet, and only in extraordinary circumstances should such a nomination be filibustered. I oppose Senator Hagel's nomination, but I cannot join in a filibuster to block each Senator's right to vote for or against him.

I wish that President Obama had made a different choice for this critical position, but he is entitled to have this nominee receive a direct vote on the Senate floor. And I, for one, will vote against the nomination of Chuck Hagel to be Secretary of Defense.

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, I support the confirmation of our former colleague and my friend, Chuck Hagel, to serve as Secretary of Defense.

Providing advice and consent on a nomination for the President's Cabinet is one of the Senate's most significant constitutional responsibilities, particularly in the case of the Secretary of Defense. It is a very serious responsibility because no duty is more important than preserving the safety and security of our Nation and its people.

I believe this nominee has the knowledge and ability to carry out the duties of this important office. Chuck Hagel feels strongly that the United States should be the most capable military power in the world. He also believes the United States must continue to be committed to Israel's security and its ability to defend its borders.

At a time when our adversaries continue to increase their arsenals of rockets and missiles and to develop medium- and long-range ballistic missiles that threaten our security, the security of our deployed forces, and the security of our friends and allies, it is imperative that we continue to develop, field, and maintain a robust missile defense capability. I know Senator Hagel is supportive of these efforts, and I will be pleased to join with him in further advancing these priorities.

Senator Hagel is a decorated Vietnam veteran, a successful entrepreneur, Deputy Administrator of the Veterans' Administration, President and CEO of the USO, and a two-term United States Senator. Throughout his distinguished career in public service, Senator Hagel has proven himself to be a fair, intelligent and courageous leader of good character and integrity.

I am confident that Senator Hagel will serve with distinction as Secretary of Defense.

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Mr. President, I rise today to express my support for the nomination of former Senator Chuck Hagel to be our next Secretary of Defense. He is eminently qualified for the position and possesses an exemplary record of service to this country. I strongly believe that a President is entitled to his cabinet selections unless there is something in an individual's record or background that is disqualifying. And there is nothing in Senator Hagel's background that is disquali-

fyng. He is a veteran, he has been a successful CEO, and he has served at highest levels of the legislative and executive branches.

I served with Senator Hagel during his two terms in the U.S. Senate—including his service on the Senate Intelligence Committee from 2003–2008. I found him to be a knowledgeable and independent voice with a strong grasp of the pressing national security issues facing our country. Those of us who served with him know Senator Hagel's story well. His career began as a sergeant in the U.S. Army in Vietnam where he served with distinction and earned two Purple Hearts. Indeed, as an enlisted man, he has seen the true costs of war. He understands that the use of military force should always be a last resort and should only be undertaken with a clear strategy, clear mission and the resources to get the job done. He understands that we have a solemn obligation to take care of our returning veterans and the families and loved ones of those who gave the ultimate sacrifice. As we emerge from over 10 years of war in Iraq and Afghanistan that is the kind of leadership we need at the Department of Defense and, more importantly, that is the kind of leadership the men and women in uniform deserve. They will take pride in the fact that Senator Hagel will be the first enlisted man and the first Vietnam veteran to head the Department.

Chuck also served as President and Chief Executive Officer of the USO and as the Deputy Administrator of the Veterans Administration during the Reagan administration, where he fought to ensure that our veterans received the benefits they earned, including assistance for those suffering from Agent Orange. He then went on to the private sector where he co-founded VANGUARD Cellular Systems, a leading cellular carrier in the U.S. Most recently, he co-chaired the President's Intelligence Advisory Board.

Now, it is no secret that Senator Hagel has his critics, but let us take a closer look at who has endorsed his nomination.

A bi-partisan group of 13 former Secretaries of State, Secretaries of Defense, and National Security Advisors from the Reagan, George H.W. Bush, Clinton, and George W. Bush administrations sent a letter to the Senate expressing their support for Senator Hagel to be the next Secretary of Defense arguing that he is "uniquely qualified to meet the challenges facing the Department of Defense and our men and women in uniform." They continued:

Our extensive experience working with Senator Hagel over the years has left us confident that he has the necessary background to succeed in the job of leading the largest federal agency.

He has also received endorsements from 11 senior retired military leaders, over fifty Ambassadors and statesmen, and numerous veterans' organizations.

A group of ten former U.S. Ambassadors—including four former Ambassadors to Israel—argued that:

We can think of few more qualified, more non-partisan, more courageous or better equipped to head the Department of Defense at this critical moment in strengthening America's role in the world.

The group of retired Generals and Admirals from the Army, Air Force, Marines, and Navy—including General Anthony Zinni, General Brent Scowcroft, and Admiral William Fallon—went even further. In an open letter, they argued that Senator Hagel “would be a strong leader” as the next Pentagon chief and that he’s “eminently qualified for the job.” But, more importantly, they believe that he understands the challenges that our warfighters face and is the person who can best lead the Pentagon.

And, even with all the accusations about Senator Hagel's views on Israel, Israeli Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon said that “[Senator Hagel] certainly regards Israel as a true and natural U.S. ally.”

Clearly, those of us here in the Senate who support Senator Hagel's nomination are not alone in believing he will make a fine Secretary of Defense and will serve our nation, once again, with distinction.

Make no mistake, difficult challenges lie ahead. We are transitioning out of Afghanistan, but its future remains uncertain, and the threat of global terror endures, particularly in North Africa. We are on the verge of seeing massive cuts to the Pentagon's budget due to sequestration, which will negatively impact readiness and the defense industrial base. The nuclear programs of Iran and North Korea move forward, and new tests and provocations continue, including in areas such as cybersecurity.

In my view, Senator Hagel has the insight, experience, and know-how to take on this daunting agenda and help protect American lives and U.S. national security interests. I look forward to supporting his nomination as the next Secretary of Defense, and I urge my colleagues to do the same.

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, is the remainder of the time reserved for the Hagel nomination or is it just open?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. It is. There is 20 minutes, with 10 minutes on each side.

Mr. LEVIN. And the vote is to take place at 4:30?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Yes.

Mr. LEVIN. And the time is evenly divided?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. I think it is safe to say that is accurate.

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, 5 weeks ago Senator Hagel was warmly introduced at his nomination hearing by two former chairmen of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Senator Sam Nunn and Senator John Warner, who represent the best bipartisan tradition of the Senate and our committee. As a matter of fact, the Pre-

siding Officer, Senator MANCHIN, was present at the time when that presentation was made by Senators Nunn and Warner, and he was a witness to how powerful their testimony in support of Senator Hagel was.

Senator Nunn told the committee:

I believe that our Nation is fortunate to have a nominee for Secretary of Defense with the character, the experience, the courage, and the leadership that Chuck Hagel would bring to this position.

He said:

There are many essential characteristics and values that a Secretary of Defense should possess in our dangerous and challenging world.

And he named a few of them, including someone who sets aside fixed ideology and biases to evaluate all options and then provides his or her candid judgment to the President and to the Congress. He also named this characteristic: someone who pays attention to people with the best ideas regardless of their party affiliation.

And then Senator Warner said:

Folks, there is an old saying in the combat Army infantry and Marine Corps. “Certain men are asked to take the point,” which means to get out and lead in the face of the enemy. Chuck Hagel did that as a sergeant in Vietnam. If confirmed, Chuck Hagel will do it again, this time not before a platoon, but before every man and woman and their families in the Armed Services.

Facing Senator Hagel, he said this:

You will lead them. And they will know in their hearts we have one of our own.

Earlier today the Senate acted in a bipartisan fashion in voting to end the filibuster of this nomination by a very substantial vote.

If confirmed, Senator Hagel would be the first former enlisted man and the first veteran of the Vietnam war to serve as Secretary of Defense. This background gives Senator Hagel an invaluable perspective not only with respect to the difficult decisions and recommendations a Secretary of Defense must make regarding the use of force and the commitment of U.S. troops overseas but also with respect to the day-to-day decisions a Secretary must make to ensure that our men and women in uniform and their families receive the support and assistance they need and deserve.

Our country faces major challenges. Abroad, we face challenges from Afghanistan, where the Department of Defense faces key decisions about the pace of the drawdown between now and the end of 2014, decisions about the size and the composition of a residual force, and decisions about the terms and conditions for our ongoing presence in Afghanistan after 2014.

Elsewhere overseas, we face the ongoing threat of Iran's nuclear weapons program, the destruction and instability caused by Syria's civil war, and the outgrowth of al-Qaida affiliates in ungoverned regions, including Yemen, Somalia, and north Africa.

We also face extremely difficult issues here at home. We have been

warned that sequestration and a year-long continuing resolution risk creating a hollow force and could confront our military leaders with the untenable choice between sending troops into harm's way without adequate training and equipment or being unable to take on certain missions at all. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has described the impact of this budget crisis on the Department of Defense as a 10 on a scale of 1 to 10.

Now as much as anytime in the recent past, our men and women in uniform need a Secretary of Defense to guide them through difficult situations around the world and to defend their interests here at home. The President needs a Secretary of Defense in whom he has trust, who will give him unvarnished advice, a person of integrity and one who has a personal understanding of the consequences of decisions relative to the use of military force.

It is time to end the uncertainty relative to the leadership at the Pentagon. The time has come to now confirm Chuck Hagel as our next Secretary of Defense, and I hope the Senate will, on a bipartisan basis, soon do exactly that.

Mr. President, I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

Mr. LEVIN. 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. LEVIN. Mr. President, I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The question is, Shall the Senate advise and consent to the nomination of Charles Timothy Hagel, of Nebraska, to be Secretary of Defense.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. WARREN). Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from New Jersey (Mr. LAUTENBERG) is necessarily absent.

The result was announced—yeas 58, nays 41, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 24 Ex.]

YEAS—58

| | | |
|------------|--------------|-----------|
| Baldwin | Donnelly | Klobuchar |
| Baucus | Durbin | Landrieu |
| Begich | Feinstein | Leahy |
| Bennet | Franken | Levin |
| Blumenthal | Gillibrand | Manchin |
| Boxer | Hagan | McCaskill |
| Brown | Harkin | Menendez |
| Cantwell | Heinrich | Merkley |
| Cardin | Heitkamp | Mikulski |
| Carper | Hirono | Murphy |
| Casey | Johanns | Murray |
| Cochran | Johnson (SD) | Nelson |
| Coons | Kaine | Paul |
| Cowan | King | Pryor |

| | | |
|-------------|------------|------------|
| Reed | Shaheen | Warner |
| Reid | Shelby | Warren |
| Rockefeller | Stabenow | Whitehouse |
| Sanders | Tester | Wyden |
| Schatz | Udall (CO) | |
| Schumer | Udall (NM) | |

NAYS—41

| | | |
|-----------|--------------|-----------|
| Alexander | Enzi | McConnell |
| Ayotte | Fischer | Moran |
| Barrasso | Flake | Murkowski |
| Blunt | Graham | Portman |
| Boozman | Grassley | Risch |
| Burr | Hatch | Roberts |
| Chambliss | Heller | Rubio |
| Coats | Hoeven | Scott |
| Coburn | Inhofe | Sessions |
| Collins | Isakson | Thune |
| Corker | Johnson (WI) | Toomey |
| Cornyn | Kirk | Vitter |
| Crapo | Lee | Wicker |
| Cruz | McCain | |

NOT VOTING—1

Lautenberg

The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the motion to reconsider is considered made and laid upon the table.

The President shall be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate will resume legislative session.

The Senator from Washington.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

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

The Senator from Washington.

SEQUESTRATION

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, one of my colleagues recently said something that, after a week at home with my constituents, I am sure we are all feeling. Referring to the across-the-board cuts from sequestration that are just days from going into effect, he said: "When it's in your State or your backyard, it's devastating." I think that is exactly right. They would be devastating for our families, our national defense, and our economy.

But these cuts can be avoided if Congress comes together on a balanced replacement. We should replace the sequestration in a balanced way, and then we should move forward on a fair, comprehensive budget deal that provides certainty for our families and businesses.

I know my constituents in Washington State want to see a deal because if we are unable to find a fair replacement for sequestration, everything, from our military bases to our schools, is going to be affected. Twenty-nine thousand local civilian defense employees could be furloughed. Thousands of Washington students could lose access to Head Start services and basic edu-

cation resources. One thousand workers cleaning up dangerous nuclear material at the Hanford nuclear site could be furloughed for weeks. And Washington State's military bases could face hundreds of millions in cuts to crucial areas such as new aircraft acquisition, research and development, flying hours, and ship operations.

We are days away from allowing these kinds of impacts to begin in every one of our home States. We never should have reached this point, but there is no denying that we have. We are days away from sequestration because my Republican colleagues continue to insist that while it is fine to cut programs that families and communities depend on, the wealthiest Americans shouldn't have to make any further contributions to deficit reduction.

The last few years have been very difficult ones for bipartisanship, but I truly believe all of us know there is a smarter way to reduce our debt and deficit. We can do better than throwing up our hands and permitting these across-the-board cuts to go into effect. And we know the American people deserve better.

That is exactly why Democrats have put forward a credible, responsible plan to replace sequestration. Our legislation builds on the precedent set in the yearend deal, and it is in line with the balanced approach the American people favor. It would replace half of the first year of sequestration with responsible spending cuts and half of it with revenue from those who can afford it the most. Our bill calls on the wealthiest Americans to pay at least the same marginal tax rate on their income as our middle-income families pay, and it would eliminate needless tax breaks for oil and gas companies and companies shipping jobs overseas. At the same time, our replacement package would make responsible cuts. Our bill would eliminate direct payments to farmers which have been paid out even during good times and for crops farmers weren't even growing. As the draw-down from Afghanistan is completed, our bill will make adjustments to our military that are in line with a strong 21st-century strategy.

Our legislation meets the Republicans halfway. It will protect families and communities we represent from slower economic growth, fewer jobs, and weakened national defense. It would allow us to move past sequestration toward working on a fair, comprehensive budget deal that provides certainty for American businesses and families.

My Republican colleagues will say that the yearend deal closed the door on using revenue to bring down the deficit. They will say that all we need is spending cuts. That is not how the American people see it. More than a month after the yearend deal, 76 percent of Americans and 56 percent of Republicans favored a combination of spending cuts and revenue increases to

reduce our deficit. House Republicans have put forward a plan that does the exact opposite. They passed a bill—last Congress, I might add—that would replace only the automatic defense cuts. It would force struggling, hard-working families and seniors to bear the burden of deficit reduction. Their bill didn't even include a penny of new revenue, and it is unclear if it would even be able to pass the House this Congress if they brought it up for a vote.

What the House Republicans offered, in other words, was more of the same extreme and partisan approach that has led American families and our economy from one crisis to another crisis to another. It is what we saw actually when Republicans held up funding for the Federal Aviation Administration, stalling airport construction projects and putting tens of thousands of workers' jobs at risk. It is what we saw during the debt ceiling debate when tea party Republicans held our economy hostage, fighting for fiscal policies that economists across the spectrum said were hugely irresponsible. It is what we saw less than 2 months ago when Republicans waited until the very last minute to protect 98 percent of Americans from income tax hikes.

This strategy, which puts a wrong-headed ideology above American families and our economy, just doesn't work. And Republicans' latest strategy—to just let sequester happen—is even worse. In fact, as tea party Republicans in the House cheer on the sequester, here is what is being produced by companies in States all across the country. This is called a "warn notice," but that is just Washington-talk for what it really is. It is a layoff notice or a furlough notice. If Republicans choose to block a balanced approach to replace the sequester, this is what is going to begin arriving in a matter of days at the doorsteps of workers in our country. This piece of paper, which looks like this, is going to spell serious economic setbacks for our families, for their ability to send their kids to college, and for the economy of their communities. This will be the consequence of Republicans' complete unwillingness today to compromise.

I think we can all agree our workers should not have to worry about political posturing, putting their jobs at risk. Businesses should not have to think about elected officials holding the economy hostage to advance extreme ideology. And families should not have to wonder one month what their paychecks will look like the next month, just because of a debate here in Washington, DC.

So I wish to ask my Republican colleagues to seriously—seriously—consider our proposal. Replacing the sequester with evenly divided spending cuts and revenues—a balanced approach that Americans support—would put us on a path to end this pattern of governing by crisis for all our constituents. That will allow us to get to work