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

NAYS—41

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|-----------|--------------|-----------|
| 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 drawdown 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

on a long-term budget agreement that is fair to the middle class, that gets our debt and deficit under control, and reflects the values and priorities of the American people.

The American people want a balanced deal. They want us to manage our finances. They want us to put together a budget and move forward. We want to do that. We want to get out of this "crisis by crisis." The program we are offering to replace the sequester for this year will allow us to get back to that process and begin to manage our country in a better way.

So I hope our Republican colleagues join us in this and help us move to a place where we can assure the American public that we do care about their future and their finances and the fragile economy we are now facing.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

TRIBUTE TO RAMONA LESSEN

Mr. CORKER. Madam President, I came to the U.S. Senate in 2006, and I was the only new Republican elected to the Senate that year. Many people considered that a great accomplishment. But my greatest accomplishment of 2006 was convincing Ramona Lessen—who is sitting with us today—to put off retirement for a few more years and stay on as my scheduler and executive assistant. And after 6 years in Washington, I know without a doubt that the biggest success of my first term is that Ramona did not fire me—until now.

Ramona is retiring this week after 34 years. I am told that she violated child labor laws by starting work when she was 5 years old.

Ramona came to the Senate in 1979 to work for Senator Larry Pressler from her native South Dakota. She worked for Senator Pressler for 16 years, plus 2 more when he was in the House.

When Ramona began working in the Senate in 1979, Jimmy Carter was President, Robert Byrd was the majority leader, and Howard Baker was the Republican leader. And probably most relevant to Ramona, ESPN started broadcasting. Post-It notes were invented, and one of the most popular songs was Gloria Gaynor's "I Will Survive." She has not only survived but thrived in the U.S. Senate for more than three decades.

In 1994, she took another new Tennessee Senator named Bill Frist under her wing. She worked for Senator Frist for 12 years. And then, in 2006, I convinced her to work in our office for just 1 year. That year has turned into 6.

In that time, Ramona has learned a lot about me, but I have learned a whole lot about her. I have learned that Ramona loves music. In fact, her first job was as a high school band director. She is a great piano player. She has played the piano in my home and at staff gatherings. She plays for her

church. Ramona loves country music, and I think that is a big reason she has adopted Tennessee as her second home State.

I have learned that it is not too hard to know where you stand with Ramona. Occasionally, I will make a request or a suggestion, and Ramona responds with a certain expression—it is a polite term for a look of disapproval. I know exactly where I stand and sometimes—candidly, often—I recalibrate my position or request.

I have learned that Ramona is a huge sports fan. If the Masters or the U.S. Open is on, I am not going to interrupt her. She also loves football, and that is appropriate because I have also learned that she is a master of the audible.

In 2008, I was heavily involved in an effort to bring Volkswagen's U.S. production facility to Chattanooga. Just before one of the final meetings in Tennessee, a plane full of decisionmakers was stuck on the tarmac in Germany without clearance to land in the United States—some kind of paperwork issue. Anybody who has been involved in a major recruitment effort knows that in something like this, even a small glitch can be a major setback. The Volkswagen folks called me. I talked with Ramona. I am not entirely sure what she did, but I know it was all totally legal and aboveboard. At one point, she was sitting there jockeying several phone calls on the switchboard and literally talking the plane off the runway in Germany. What I do know for sure is that the Volkswagen executives landed in the United States highly impressed with Ramona Lessen. And shortly thereafter they chose Chattanooga for their U.S. production facility.

That was a home run, no doubt. But I think Ramona's greatest contribution is her ability to make a staff a family and an office a home. Ramona makes sure we are celebrating each other—babies being born, people getting married, and life in general. At Christmas-time, she makes sure the office is decorated and filled with Christmas music. Her favorite moments in the office are when someone brings in a baby or a child. That child learns quickly, as we all do, that Ramona keeps a basket of candy on her desk. And there is a good chance that child's picture is on Ramona's cherished bulletin board. Her loud, infectious laugh is a staple at staff gatherings. It will be sorely missed.

There is a memorable scene in the movie "The Queen" where Queen Elizabeth tells Prime Minister Tony Blair: "You are my tenth Prime Minister, Mr. Blair." I am proud to have been Ramona Lessen's third Senator. Senators come and go, but for 34 years Ramona Lessen has been a constant in the Senate. The Senate is better for it. Our country and Tennessee are better for it. I know Senator Pressler and Senator Frist are better for it. Our staffs are better for it. And I am better for it.

Ramona, I thank you for taking pity on a new Senator and for showing me

the ropes over the past 6 years. I thank you for your friendship. I wish you and Joe the very best in the years to come. I know when the time comes, Tennessee, your second home State, will welcome you to retirement with open arms.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Mr. BROWN. Throughout this month, students across my State, across Ohio, are reciting speeches by Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., to commemorate Black History Month.

Dr. Carter Woodson started what was originally called Negro History Week in February between the birthdays of President Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass. Dr. Woodson initiated the weeklong tribute to incorporate the legacies, images, and historical contributions of African Americans into the greater American story.

Today, people throughout the United States celebrate African-American History Month to ensure all American stories are recognized. Ohio has been the scene for which many of these chapters were written.

In Mount Pleasant, OH, the first antislavery gazette newspaper in the United States, the Philanthropist, was published in 1817. The Ohio Anti-Slavery Society was founded in Zanesville in 1835. My home State has played a rich role in American history, as have so many Ohioans.

Every new U.S. passport includes the words of a formerly enslaved Oberlin College graduate Dr. Anna Julia Cooper. If you have a passport, you will see her words:

The cause of freedom is not the cause of a race or a sect, a party or a class—it is the cause of humankind, the very birthright of humanity.

In Yellow Springs, OH, a young music student at Antioch College, Coretta Scott, would later work alongside her husband, Dr. Martin Luther King, for social and economic justice in our country.

Former Wilberforce University student Bayard Rustin was the lead strategist of the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.

The only living American with a Nobel Prize in Literature, Toni Morrison, was born and raised in Lorain, OH. Akronite Rita Dove served as the Poet Laureate of the United States.

Today, in classrooms and communities across the State—and across the Nation—the next generation of Ohioans is starting to make its mark on American history.