

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Certainly I do not have any objection to that.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that I be allowed to speak for as much time as I may require after Senator REID does what he wants to do on the floor tonight, which would not interfere with the Senator from New Hampshire going ahead at this time.

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

Mr. ALEXANDER. I thank the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Hampshire.

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Thank you, Madam President and Senator ALEXANDER.

PASSING A BUDGET

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Madam President, I come to the floor this evening to talk about the importance of Congress doing its job and passing a budget. We need a budget that is going to provide certainty for our economy, that will eliminate reckless spending cuts, and that will foster job creation.

We hear this week that Senate Budget Committee Chair PATTY MURRAY and House Budget Committee Chair PAUL RYAN may be close to just such an agreement. I think that is very good news because we need a budget deal so we can put an end to the manufactured crises that have hurt too many families and businesses in New Hampshire and across this country.

I know I speak for so many of us here in the Senate when I say our primary focus really should be on continuing to put in place an environment that creates jobs, that lays a foundation for economic growth. And that is one of the things that getting a budget deal would help do.

We have recently seen some signs of progress in the economy. The jobs report on Friday was positive with over 200,000 private-sector jobs added in November, and we have now had 45 straight months of private-sector job growth. But we all know we are not out of the woods yet. We have a lot more work to do, and we need to build on the momentum that is there to get more people back to work.

When I travel around New Hampshire, my constituents tell me they are very frustrated with the gridlock in Washington, and what they want is for us to come together here in Congress, to agree on a budget, and to take action that supports economic growth.

Granite Staters are absolutely right. With a potential budget agreement, we have an opportunity to eliminate some of the uncertainty in our economy, to eliminate some of those harmful cuts that are part of sequestration—the automatic budget cuts—and to finally set some priorities that will help us create jobs.

Sadly, too much in the past few months has had the Congress moving from one manufactured crisis on the budget to another. It has cost the economy severely. It has hurt job creation.

As economist Mark Zandi recently noted: “As long as lawmakers stay deadlocked over the direction of the federal budget, the economic recovery will not gain momentum.”

So I am very hopeful we can reach a deal that will provide the Appropriations Committee with a roadmap for the rest of 2014 and 2015.

I have heard from a lot of small businesses in New Hampshire that one of the challenges they are currently facing post government shutdown—and certainly for so many small businesses and families, they were hurt by that government shutdown, which cost the economy about \$24 billion, and they are now looking at what the potential impact in the future will be from sequestration. Those spending cuts have halted Federal contracts, in many cases, for small businesses. They have caused uncertainty that is affecting job creation and hiring.

One of the New Hampshire business owners with whom I met recently said: “You hear about how CEOs are hesitant to hire—this is why”—this uncertainty around sequestration, around what we are going to do about a budget for the country.

These indiscriminate cuts from sequestration have not just hurt job creation. They have also affected programs that are critical to families in New Hampshire and across the country.

One of those programs I had a chance to visit last week is the Meals on Wheels Program. I helped deliver meals in Rockingham County. The Presiding Officer knows Rockingham County very well. It is just across the border from Massachusetts, which she represents. I had really ambivalent feelings about delivering those meals to seniors because on the one hand people were so appreciative and we got to help people who needed those hot meals, but on the other hand what I heard from those seniors was the effect that sequestration and spending cuts were having on the program. Those spending cuts have slashed \$81,000 from Rockingham Nutrition's Meals on Wheels budget. According to Debra Perou, the agency's executive director, Rockingham Nutrition is delivering 17,000 fewer meals as a result of those cuts. She told me it was a very tough day when they had to try to figure out who was going to get cut from getting those meals on wheels.

The seniors with whom I met in Salem told me they were frustrated that nothing was happening to eliminate those reckless spending cuts.

I met a former engineer from Raytheon, Larry Somes and his wife Lillian. Lillian not only has dementia developing, but she has macular degeneration. It has made it difficult for her to cook. Larry's pension from Raytheon does not go as far as it did 25 years ago when he retired. He said: “Congress isn't doing anything [to help].”

Well, Larry is not alone, sadly. In Salem, 25 percent of Meals on Wheels

recipients are older than 85. For these seniors—who are unable to cook for themselves—Meals on Wheels makes it possible for them to keep their housing and independence.

One of the things the seniors did this fall was to do a campaign where the program asked all of the seniors who received Meals on Wheels if they would write a message about how they felt about the program on a paper plate and send it to their elected officials so we would know what they are thinking. So I brought some of those messages, and they are short so they will not take much time to read. But I think it is important to read some of these messages so all of us have a chance to hear how our seniors are feeling.

This one is not signed, but it says:

Seniors need Meals on Wheels to keep them in their homes and healthy. Put yourself in their position. Do you like to eat? Do you want to be in your home?

Thank you Meals on Wheels. I am crippled and walk with a walker. I can't cook much anymore. I'm a diabetic so I have to eat, eat right. Thanks to everyone who cooks and delivers. God bless you.

Keep Meals on Wheels. The homebound people are in need and look forward to getting a healthy meal and seeing someone every day.

That is the other aspect that is so important about Meals on Wheels. It is not just about delivering that hot meal. It is about making sure someone is checking in on our older Americans who are living alone, who sometimes do not see people because they are housebound. These messages are telling about how important this program is.

As Maria and Bill say:

As this plate is empty, so will my wife's meals be. She has a serious medical problem and needs these meals. Think of this when you sit in your dining room tonight to have your meal. Thank you for your help keeping these meals coming.

Then from Denise, she says:

Please don't take my food away. I need it.

That says it all.

The work Rockingham Christian and Meals On Wheels does is critical for seniors in that part of New Hampshire. They are joined by nine other Meals On Wheels Programs around New Hampshire. They serve thousands of people throughout the State. Last year alone Meals On Wheels delivered more than 1.2 million meals to 11,596 people in New Hampshire. The services are critical not only for improving the lives of seniors but also for reducing health care spending. The yearly cost of Meals On Wheels for a single senior is equivalent to the cost of 9 days in a nursing home or 1 or 2 days in the hospital. This is not a program that is important to seniors because it keeps them healthy and keeps them in their homes; this is a program that is cost-effective because if we are not able to keep seniors in their homes with something to eat, they are going to wind up in nursing homes and they are going to wind up in hospitals.

Programs such as Meals On Wheels are not where we should be cutting. We

should focus on wasteful and duplicative programs, not those with a proven track record of success. That is why a budget agreement is so critical. This year the Senate Appropriations Committee passed a bill that provided full funding for Meals On Wheels, but without a budget agreement, we have not been able to restore cuts to this very vital program.

We all know sequestration was designed to never go into effect. It was designed to be so harmful and reckless that we in Congress would find a better, smarter way to reduce our deficit. But because of sequestration, too many families and small businesses in New Hampshire have felt firsthand the dramatic effects of us failing to do our job. With the potential budget agreement coming from Senator MURRAY and Congressman RYAN, we will have an opportunity to reduce these impacts, to finally get to work replacing the harmful cuts from sequestration with a responsible plan that will grow our economy and create jobs.

Finally, it is my hope that a budget agreement will also include an extension of unemployment benefits for the millions of Americans who lost their jobs through no fault of their own. In New Hampshire, our unemployment rate is lower than the national average and has been consistently throughout this recession, but that does not help if you are in a household where the breadwinners are unemployed. That household has a 100-percent unemployment rate. So despite the significant progress for our economy since the recession, the unemployment rate remains unacceptably high. For millions of Americans, finding a job remains very difficult in this market. Unemployment benefits remain a vital lifeline while they seek new work. So if we do nothing before the end of this year, about 1.3 million Americans will lose their extended unemployment benefits starting in January. Millions more will exhaust their benefits over the course of 2014. In New Hampshire, an estimated 8,500 individuals will be affected.

Failing to extend these benefits will not only hurt these families, but it will also affect our economic recovery because failing to extend unemployment for these Americans would result in 240,000 fewer jobs created in 2014. To put that into perspective, the recent jobs report showed that our economy gained 200,000 jobs in the month of November. Failing to extend unemployment benefits would be the equivalent of sacrificing an entire month of job creation.

At this fragile point in our economic recovery, we should not be letting this critical program expire for these Americans. I hope we can reach an agreement. I hope that agreement will begin to roll back those cuts from sequestration, will extend unemployment benefits for those families who really need them, and that we can get this done in a timely fashion so that the government continues to operate.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

EXECUTIVE SESSION

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUESTS—EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. REID. I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to executive session to consider the following nominations: Calendar Nos. 44, 144, 189, 303, 334, 356, 358, 359, 361, 362, 367, 371, 372, 378, 379, 380, 387, 388, 390, 391, 403, 404, 406, 407, 408, 409, 410, 412, 413, 414, 415, 416, 417, 418, 420, 422, 423, 424, 425, 426, 427, 428, 429, 430, 431, 432, 433, 438, 439, 440, 441, 442, 443, 444, 445, 446, 447, 448, 449, 450, 451, and 452; that the nominations be confirmed en bloc; the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid on the table, with no intervening action or debate; that no further motions be in order to any of the nominations; that any related statements be printed in the RECORD; that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action, and the Senate then resume legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Tennessee.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Reserving my right, and I will make my remarks on this matter after the majority leader has completed his business today, I would note that on the last day we were here, November 21, there were only 16 nominations on the Executive Calendar that had been there more than 3 weeks, only 8 more than 9 weeks, and the Republicans were ready to confirm more than 40 who had been there only a few weeks. The Democratic majority changed the rules of the Senate in a way that creates a Senate without rules. Until I understand better how a Senator is supposed to operate in a Senate without rules, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. REID. Madam President, I am not going to respond in any detail to my friend, and he is my friend. There is no way of explaining how the Republicans could arbitrarily refuse to nominate four of the most qualified people, frankly, because they turned down one woman twice for the DC Circuit. This is, some say, a court more important than the U.S. Supreme Court. The Republicans, without any question about their integrity, their education, their experience, said no. Why? Because they don't want President Obama to have these people in this important court. They want to keep the court with the

majority of Republicans. That is wrong. It is wrong, and there were many reasons we did what we did, but it was the right thing for the country and it is the right thing for democracy.

I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to consider the following nominations: Calendar Nos. 330, 347, 348, 349, 350, 382, 383, 384, 385, 386, 434, 435, 436, and 437; that the nominations be confirmed; the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table, with no intervening action or debate; that no further motions be in order to any of the nominations; that any statements related to the nominations be printed in the RECORD; that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action, and the Senate then resume legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Tennessee.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Reserving my right to object, again I will make my comments after the majority leader has completed his business, but all Senate Republicans wanted with the DC Circuit judges was to do what Democratic Senators insisted on doing in 2006, transferring judges from a court where they are not needed to courts where they are needed.

I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. REID. That explanation is as flat as a bottle of beer that has been open for 6 months.

NOMINATION OF CHAI RACHEL FELDBLUM TO BE A MEMBER OF THE EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY COMMISSION

Mr. REID. I move to proceed to consider Senate Calendar No. 378.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The bill clerk read the nomination of Chai Rachel Feldblum, of the District of Columbia, to be a member of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. REID. I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The bill clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Chai Rachel Feldblum, of the District of Columbia, to be a Member of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

Harry Reid, Sherrod Brown, Richard J. Durbin, Christopher Murphy, Robert Menendez, Christopher A. Coons, Angus S. King, Jr., Martin Heinrich, Amy Klobuchar, Dianne Feinstein, Tom Udall, Kirsten E. Gillibrand, Bernard