

RECORD; that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action and the Senate then resume legislative session; further, that there be 2 minutes for debate equally divided in the usual manner prior to each vote and all votes after the first be 10 minutes in length.

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

Mr. NELSON. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business for 5 minutes.

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

VOTER SUPPRESSION

Mr. NELSON. Madam President, with what we went through in the State of Florida in the attempts to suppress voters, you would think that with the experience of people having stood in line in order to vote for 5 to 7 hours, it would have put this issue to rest. But they are back at it again, this time in a very subtle way.

The Governor's office, through his appointed secretary of state, who is the chief elections officer, has now interpreted a statute that in a municipal election students at the University of Florida cannot early vote on campus at their student center prior to the election. The interpretation was made that it is an educational facility and does not qualify, according to the statute, on a technical reason: that it is not a government-owned conference facility, when, indeed, it is owned by the State of Florida through the university, and it is a conference facility for many conferences for outside groups as well as student groups.

No, what it is is an attempt, in the runup to the November election, to try to make it more difficult and less convenient for students to vote.

As it turns out, in this particular municipal election coming up shortly, students would have to go across town to some other location some 3 miles away, and, of course, as busy as students are, that is going to discourage them.

If they end up doing this for this special election in March, a municipal election, they are, of course, going to try to do it for the November election when we have a statewide election for the Governor and the cabinet. Why? Well, an attempt to suppress student voters who may not be voting for the people in power who are trying to suppress their votes.

It is all the more of interest because on the ballot there will be a proposed constitutional amendment to change the State constitution to allow, by doctors, the prescription of medical marijuana, which is something that has generated interest in all sectors of society but particularly among students—another reason they want to come out to vote.

The whole idea of early voting is to try to make it more convenient for people to be able to vote, that they

might not be able to vote because of a babysitter problem or a work problem on election day. But early voting, as we saw in the experience of the 2012 election—the days were shortened from 14 to 8. They cut out the Sunday before the Tuesday election. Professor Dan Smith, in doing a study at the University of Florida, found that those who availed themselves of Sunday voting were primarily Hispanics and African Americans. Indeed, attempts were made to limit the number of early voting locations within a county, and then, of those early vote locations, having a facility that was small so that you could not get in a lot of voting machines. This was another way—very subtle—of trying to suppress the vote.

So the people of Florida, naturally, were outraged, particularly when they heard stories of the 101-year-old lady who had to stay 3½ hours in order to cast her vote and the others who stayed 5 and 7 hours. They were not going to have their vote taken away from them. They stood in line. So the people were outraged.

There was an attempt to pass a new law. I will close with this. With this new law now as being interpreted, the very same suppression efforts are occurring again. We are simply not going to let this happen even if we have to call in the Justice Department.

MILITARY RETIREMENT COLA

Mr. WARNER. Madam President, while I will cast my vote this afternoon for the legislation which would replace the cost of living adjustment, COLA, reduction for military retirees, I disagree strongly with the provision to extend the arbitrary sequester cuts included with this legislation.

It is frustrating to me that Congress will fix one provision which unfairly singled out one group by singling out another.

I am pleased that we can fix the COLA adjustment that would have affected the men and women who serve in the military prior to it taking effect. However, I would have preferred that we find a responsible way to offset the cost by identifying savings elsewhere.

I joined Senator SHAHEEN and Senator KAINE in December in introducing legislation that identified a way to pay for this fix: our proposal would close a loophole that some companies use to avoid paying U.S. taxes. Our approach would generate \$6.6 billion over 10 years to pay for the cost of un-doing the proposed cut in military pensions.

The extension of the sequester on mandatory spending for another year, which primarily hits Medicare providers such as hospitals with a two-percent across-the-board cut in payments, is a blunt and arbitrary way to find savings in Federal health care programs. It does not reward health care value, or support health care quality, nor differentiate among different geographic areas.

The across-the-board cut does nothing to reform the real long-term fiscal

challenges facing our entitlement programs. Instead, it just compounds on the multitude of other cuts that hospitals and other providers are facing, creating a situation where access to care potentially will be threatened.

The vote before the Senate this afternoon shows yet again how we need to have a broader conversation on how to get a better handle on our long-term fiscal challenges. By ignoring that larger conversation, we instead are reduced to playing a game of Whac-A-Mole.

The provision which singled out military servicemembers and veterans was included in a bipartisan package which was the least we could do to ensure that we didn't repeat the stupidity of last fall's government shutdown. The overall package, the Bipartisan Budget Act, which I supported, did not touch the major levers available to fix our balance sheet. By common agreement, revenue and entitlement reforms were not part of the discussion.

This package fixed the arbitrary sequester cuts—though only on the discretionary side, and only for 2 years.

For the last 3 years, Congress—and both chambers, and both parties, bear some responsibility for this—have repeatedly taken the path of least resistance. All of us recognize that we have an enormous fiscal challenge, but there's not the collective will to make the hard decisions which will put us on a path of solvency.

Instead, we punt and we play on the margins. We continually make deep cuts in the type of programs that power economic growth—programs that train our workforce, educate our children, and support those who serve and protect our nation. We choose to put off the broader discussion about reforms which would be easier now—easier because they create a glide path toward enactment—allowing individuals, families, businesses and our state and local government partners to make responsible plans for future changes. We have avoided a conversation about our complex, bloated tax code, which promotes inefficiency and too often inhibits economic growth. By putting off the hard choices, we allow these fiscal challenges to get worse. The choices do not get any easier.

Decisions like the vote before us today are incredibly frustrating. These decisions ask us to support the repeal of a provision, which hurt one specific group, by replacing it with another provision which just places the burden on a separate group. I believe that we can do better for our military personnel, for our Medicare providers, the patients who rely on them, and for our country overall. While I will cast my vote for this bill, I remain committed to finding a way to reverse the sequester cuts we have just extended through 2024.

• Mr. COBURN. Madam President, regardless of which side one falls on the Ryan-Murray budget deal reduction in the annual COLA increase for working

age military retirees, the sad fact is with the passage of this legislation we are breaking our previous promise to taxpayers to reduce the deficit. Instead of coming up with a real offset for a mere \$6.2 billion in spending, the Senate has chosen to resort to budgetary gimmicks to disguise the true cost of our politically expedient decisions, and has yet again punted the hard decisions that must be made to future generations.

By offsetting real and immediate spending with a promise of future spending reductions with the extension of sequestration cuts to Medicare through 2024, beyond the 10-year budget window, the savings from this budget trick will not materialize and taxpayers will not be made whole. By passing this legislation, we are sending a signal that this body does not have the fortitude to lead as our constituents have chosen us to do—to take on the sacred cows like military compensation that must be part of the national conversation about our spending and reform.

As we prepare to pass this legislation, every Member of this body would do well to consider these words by former Joint Chiefs Chairman Admiral Mike Mullen: “The most significant threat to our national security is our debt.” We best honor the sacrifice of our military veterans and realize a more safe and secure future by keeping our promise to reduce the national debt. By refusing to come up with a real offset to pay for the repeal of the COLA cut, the Senate is undermining our veterans, our country, and our future.●

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

DEFICIT REDUCTION

Mr. FLAKE. Madam President, I rise today to talk for a short period of time about the magnitude of our budget, debt, and deficit. Against the backdrop of a debt ceiling increase, Members of both parties are going to today, likely, repeal one of the deficit reduction measures included in the bipartisan budget agreement that was approved less than 2 months ago. How do we convey to the Nation the seriousness about solving the debt crisis when at the first sign of political pressure we repeal one of the deficit reduction measures?

As we all know, the Ryan-Murray budget deal included modest reductions in some spending programs over the next 10 years in order to increase discretionary spending caps in fiscal years 2014 and 2015. I voted against this agreement because I thought the spending cuts did not go far enough. I do not think we are treating our debt and deficit seriously enough.

Second, I have been down that road of trading spending increases today for spending cuts later many times. It does not work. We have seen that play be-

fore. We know how it ends. Year after year Members of Congress simply refuse to stick to the budget discipline we said we would stick to. Exhibit 1 is before us today. The Congress is about to undo—in fact, repeal—one of those provisions, as I mentioned.

It is important to note that the cost-of-living adjustment that will be repealed—or the reform that will be repealed was a cost-of-living adjustment—a COLA—for military retirees resulting in less than a 1-percent reduction for working-age military retirees. That is 1 percent. It stopped far short of the elimination of COLA requirements for retirees under the age of 62 that the Simpson-Bowles Commission recommended.

Certainly our veterans deserve the utmost respect and generous retirement pay. However, it has been reported that regardless of age, members of our armed services could easily, in some instances, receive retirement and health benefits for 40 years or more.

Some of my colleagues have suggested that failing to support measures to repeal the COLA reduction is tantamount to turning our backs on veterans. This is untrue. This is a mischaracterization of the issue at hand. I think we all know that. The U.S. military is at a crossroads. Fast-growing retirement pay and health benefits are threatening to displace investments in the readiness of our Armed Forces.

I encourage my colleagues to take a hard look at the fiscal mess we face before we vote to roll back one of the few deficit reduction measures the President and Congress have agreed to. Our fiscal situation is serious. We cannot ignore that forever.

This problem will continue to get worse. Yes, we ought to be reforming entitlement programs so they will be around for future beneficiaries, veterans and others, but for goodness' sake, when deficit reduction measures get signed into law, surely at some point we need to stand by them.

I yield the floor and 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. REID. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

TEMPORARY DEBT LIMIT EXTENSION ACT

Mr. REID. I ask the Chair to lay before the Senate a message from the House with respect to S. 540.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Chair lays before the Senate a message from the House which the clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

S. 540

Resolved, That the bill from the Senate (S. 540) entitled “An Act to designate the air

route traffic control center located in Nashua, New Hampshire, as the ‘Patricia Clark Boston Air Route Traffic Control Center’.”, do pass with the following amendment:

Strike out all after the enacting clause and insert:

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Temporary Debt Limit Extension Act”.

SEC. 2. TEMPORARY EXTENSION OF PUBLIC DEBT LIMIT.

(a) *IN GENERAL.*—Section 3101(b) of title 31, United States Code, shall not apply for the period beginning on the date of the enactment of this Act and ending on March 15, 2015.

(b) *SPECIAL RULE RELATING TO OBLIGATIONS ISSUED DURING EXTENSION PERIOD.*—Effective March 16, 2015, the limitation in effect under section 3101(b) of title 31, United States Code, shall be increased to the extent that—

(1) the face amount of obligations issued under chapter 31 of such title and the face amount of obligations whose principal and interest are guaranteed by the United States Government (except guaranteed obligations held by the Secretary of the Treasury) outstanding on March 16, 2015, exceeds

(2) the face amount of such obligations outstanding on the date of the enactment of this Act.

SEC. 3. RESTORING CONGRESSIONAL AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONAL DEBT.

(a) *EXTENSION LIMITED TO NECESSARY OBLIGATIONS.*—An obligation shall not be taken into account under section 2(b)(1) unless the issuance of such obligation was necessary to fund a commitment incurred pursuant to law by the Federal Government that required payment before March 16, 2015.

(b) *PROHIBITION ON CREATION OF CASH RESERVE DURING EXTENSION PERIOD.*—The Secretary of the Treasury shall not issue obligations during the period specified in section 2(a) for the purpose of increasing the cash balance above normal operating balances in anticipation of the expiration of such period.

Mr. REID. I move to concur in the House amendment, and I have a cloture motion at the desk.

CLOTURE MOTION

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

The assistant legislative 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 motion to concur in the House amendment to S. 540.

Harry Reid, Robert Menendez, Benjamin L. Cardin, Tom Harkin, Amy Klobuchar, Christopher Murphy, Patty Murray, Jon Tester, Richard J. Durbin, Barbara Boxer, Angus S. King, Jr., Claire McCaskill, Richard Blumenthal, Sheldon Whitehouse, Jack Reed, Debbie Stabenow, Elizabeth Warren.

Mr. REID. I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum required under rule XXII be waived.

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

CLOTURE MOTION

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

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the