

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The minority leader is recognized.

PAST ATTEMPTS AT DEFICIT REDUCTION

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I wish to give those within the sound of my voice a very brief tutorial on how serious the Republicans are about balancing the budget.

I led a trip to South America. We had 10 or 12 Senators, equally divided between Democrats and Republicans. It was a wonderful trip. I chose purposely Kent Conrad, who was the No. 1 person on the Democratic side of the aisle at the time on numbers, and I also decided to see if Judd Gregg, who was the Republican's No. 1 person on numbers, could go. These two good men sat together that whole trip, hour after hour. They had their yellow tablets, and they were doing what they loved to do—play around with numbers.

When the trip ended, they had an idea. They were both experienced legislators. They had been here when we did something that hadn't been done before. We had military bases in America going back to World War I that should have been closed, but we couldn't do it because of the politics of the Senate. But we decided long ago to try something different. We appointed a commission, they would report back to the Senate and the House, and they would make a decision as to which bases should be closed—no filibuster, no tricky procedural rules; yes or no on what they recommended. We did two rounds of base closings and we closed scores of bases, saving the country billions of dollars.

Conrad and Judd decided to do the same thing with this deficit we have. They drafted legislation based on the base closing commission legislation, and they brought it before the Senate. It had a like number of Democrats and Republicans supporting this Conrad-Gregg legislation. We had seven Republican cosponsors. Even the Republican leader today, at that time didn't cosponsor it, but he said he liked it. He said publicly that he liked it. In fact, he said: "This proposal is our best hope for addressing the out-of-control spending and debt levels that are threatening our Nation's fiscal future."

What a tremendous idea. I was so happy to have had something to do with setting this program up.

But look at what happened. Seven of those Republicans who cosponsored the legislation voted against proceeding to it. We couldn't even get on the bill because the Republicans ran away from it. They ran away from doing something about the deficit. Why? Ask them. I have ideas, but that is the way it is. Even my friend, the now Republican leader, voted against it. It failed by 7 votes—7 votes of the Republicans who cosponsored it but who no longer voted for it.

So, based upon that, we were in a quandary. What should we do? So a number of us, Democrats and Republicans, asked President Obama if he could do something with a commission of his own. Now, it wouldn't be as good as what we had tried because that was pretty specific—to bring it back for an up-or-down vote.

So the President did what was the right thing to do. He found two stunningly good people who are good with money, good with numbers, including the former Senator from the State of Wyoming, who is such a great guy, Senator Simpson. He is just a fine man with a great sense of humor, and he knew his numbers. Senator Simpson teamed with Erskine Bowles, who had been the President's Chief of Staff. They set up the Bowles-Simpson Commission. It was terrific. It gave us some hope that maybe something could be done. They had long hearings. It was really good. The hearings included people from the private sector and from the House and the Senate—Democrats and Republicans.

Now, even before that, when the Conrad-Judd effort failed, we thought that we had some hope. Once again, the Republicans on the Bowles-Simpson Commission walked away from it. It really is unfortunate, but that is what happened. It was quite interesting. People who had been criticized over the years for being too liberal, big spenders—someone such as DICK DURBIN from Illinois—voted for the Bowles-Simpson Commission. It took a lot of courage for him to do that, but he did. But Republicans who we thought would have been for it voted against it, and it failed.

Then, Senator BIDEN, because of his close relationship having served in the Senate for 36 years, got with some Republicans, and they made a run at it. There were all kinds of press that they were making progress. What happened? The Republicans took a hike. They broke up the meeting, wouldn't go any further, and that ended that.

So then, we had one last attempt. I worked hard on this. Others worked hard on this. It passed. It passed the Congress. We set up a supercommittee: the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction. The committee had an equal number of Democrats and Republicans—six of each. What happened? The Republicans, once again, walked away from it.

So all of this happy talk I heard this morning and I am going to hear over this week and over the next couple of days about this great budget the Republicans have is an absolute farce. Pundits have written accordingly. Talk about a balanced budget—they have revenue coming in. One example—of course, Republicans want to repeal ObamaCare, but they want to use the revenue coming from ObamaCare for this fake budget of theirs.

Any time the Republicans are asked to close tax breaks for companies shipping jobs overseas—no—but they are

happy to cut Social Security, Medicare, and of course, never focus on middle class priorities. They use the words, but it is just a joke. They want a loophole for wealthy hedge fund managers. They want unlimited tax breaks for the oil and gas industry. In this budget, they have not asked millionaires and billionaires to pay one extra penny.

So all this talk about this great budget we have is an absolute farce. There are editorials all over the country. I read a number of them yesterday, what they say about this.

ANTIQUITIES ACT

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I know people are anxious to go to work on other things, but I want to talk about something called the Antiquities Act. It passed in 1906. President Theodore Roosevelt was the President at the time. Congress wanted to give him the authority to designate special lands and cultural resources as national monuments, and he did that. Since then, 16 Presidents—8 Democrats and 8 Republicans—have used this 1906 act to protect America's treasures.

For example, way back in 1922, President Harding used the Antiquities Act to protect the Lehman Caves. It is now a beautiful facility. I have been down there. They are certainly not the deepest or the biggest caves in the world, but they are unique and good, and we have enjoyed them in Nevada. That was the basis for the 1986 legislation I initiated to create a national park in Nevada. The only national park we have in Nevada is the result of the 1922 action of President Harding. That is why we have Great Basin National Park. It is a wonderful facility. It has a glacier, the oldest living things in the world, the bristlecone pines. It is a great park, and people from all over the world visit this wonderful facility. So Nevada's lone national park exists today because President Harding used the Antiquities Act to first designate the Lehman Caves.

Some Members of Congress—frankly, it is a minority—believe we should repeal or gut this bill. They advocate weakening the Presidential authority that in the past has protected the Grand Canyon and even the Statue of Liberty. Who in this body thinks America has suffered because Presidents in the past have protected the Petrified Forest in Arizona, the Craters of the Moon in Idaho, and Capitol Reef, Bryce Canyon, and Arches in Utah? I have been to all of them, and even though Utah is an extremely conservative State, I have not heard one single Member of Congress or governmental authority say they were a huge mistake. They draw millions of visitors to the State of Utah with the beautiful lands they have there. What about Muir Woods in California? It is just stunningly important, and it came about as a result of a President designating them a national treasure under the Antiquities Act.

Sixteen Presidents—eight of each party—have used this act to protect America's treasures.

I am proud of what President Obama has been able to accomplish through the work he has done under the Antiquities Act. He has moved where Congress has failed to act.

Caesar Chavez and the Chicano labor movement were honored by creating the Caesar Chavez National Monument in California.

He protected Fort Monroe in Virginia in recognition of its storied history in defense of our Nation and the struggle for freedom for African Americans. It is a beautiful facility.

We have in Honolulu the Honouliuli National Monument to remember the terrible internment of Japanese Americans during World War II.

Last month, President Obama protected by proclamation Pullman National Monument, which celebrates the history of the African-American labor movement in America.

As a westerner, I appreciate what he has done to protect America's beautiful landscapes, such as the Rio Grande Del Norte and the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monuments in New Mexico, the Browns Canyon National Monument in Colorado, and western landscapes in California, Washington, and Hawaii.

This is something which is so important to be done, so I am disappointed that I hear that on the budget bill there is going to be an effort made to cut the Antiquities Act. I hope not. I absolutely will do everything I can to protect this act. It has been in law since 1906 and has been used by 16 Presidents.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCURRENT RESOLUTION ON THE BUDGET, FISCAL YEAR 2016

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of S. Con. Res. 11, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A concurrent resolution (S. Con. Res. 11) setting forth the congressional budget for the United States Government for fiscal year 2016 and setting forth the appropriate budgetary levels for fiscal years 2017 through 2025.

Pending:

Cotton amendment No. 481, to establish a deficit-neutral fund relating to supporting Israel.

Enzi (for Kirk) amendment No. 545, to establish a deficit-neutral reserve fund relating to reimposing waived sanctions and imposing new sanctions against Iran for violations of the Joint Plan of Action or a comprehensive nuclear agreement.

Rounds/Inhofe amendment No. 412, to establish a deficit-neutral reserve fund to prevent the Environmental Protection Agency and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service from engaging in closed-door settle-

ment agreements that ignore impacted States and counties.

Rubio modified amendment No. 423, to increase new budget authority fiscal years 2016 and 2017 and modify outlays for fiscal years 2016 through 2022 for National Defense (budget function 050).

Daines amendment No. 388, to establish a deficit-neutral reserve fund relating to the designation of national monuments.

Daines amendment No. 389, to establish a deficit-neutral reserve fund relating to holding Members of the Senate and the House of Representatives accountable for failing to pass a balanced budget.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the time until 10:30 a.m. will be equally divided and controlled by the two managers or their designees.

The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, first of all, I wish to thank Chairman ENZI for his courtesy in allowing me to take a few minutes to discuss a bipartisan amendment I will be offering on this bill. It deals with what I think is going to be an enormous challenge this summer for the West, and that is dealing with this wildfire challenge and the prospect that we could literally have enormous fires—what could be virtually infernos—throughout the West this summer.

I make that judgment because recently when I was home, I got a briefing. For example, in Medford, OR, they told me it was the driest it had been for 25 years. In Medford, when you get an update on the fires—and, colleagues, it is worth noting that nobody used to have a fire briefing in March. That is just unheard of. We have fire briefings well into the summer. But fires are getting to be a year-round occurrence. I was there in March, and the fire experts said it is going to be very dry. When you look southward to California, all you see is dry, dry, dry.

The fact is that as it gets drier and as it gets hotter on the forest floor, should lightning strike, which is very common in rural America, all of a sudden you can have an inferno on your hands and one that really knows no boundaries and can affect private property owners, State lands, and Federal lands. We had an important hearing in the Energy and Natural Resources Committee the other day on the sportsmen's bill. It looked as if there were a lot of good ideas in the bipartisan bill, but it will be pretty hard to go hunting and fishing in the forests this summer if the forests are burning up.

So what a bipartisan group of us from the West want to do—and I particularly commend our colleague Senator CRAPO of Idaho. He and I have teamed up on this effort. We have a large bipartisan coalition of Senators who have joined us. We want to fix the broken system of fighting wildfire in America.

What happens today, colleagues, is that the accounts for prevention get short shrift. In effect, the work that needs to be done with the smaller trees and thinning out the underbrush

doesn't get the funding that is needed, so what happens is, as a result of the lack of prevention, you have these bigger fires and you have to put them out. The accounts for dealing with fire suppression are also short of money, so what happens at that point is the agencies borrow from the prevention fund to put the fire out, and the problem just gets worse and worse.

So what Senator CRAPO and I, with, as I have indicated, a large bipartisan coalition of Senators, are seeking to do is to end that kind of fire borrowing. What we are proposing is that the biggest fires—perhaps the 1 percent of the fires that really turn into infernos—you would fight those from the disaster fund because they are, in fact, disasters.

We have received an analysis from the budget officials indicating that this would really be a wash from a budgeting standpoint because, in effect, while you do spend a bit of money from the disaster fund putting out these infernos, you also generate some real savings from the prevention fund by not having as many fires in the first place.

What our bipartisan amendment will do is give the Departments of Agriculture and Interior the opportunity to access the disaster fund for that 1 percent of the fires that can really break a community apart. It seems to me that Americans across the country who live in communities where there are these fires deserve to know their homes and lives are not going to be threatened needlessly. That is what we will be able to prevent with this bipartisan amendment.

Freeing up the Forest Service funds that our proposal will do will ensure that the natural resources agencies have the resources they need to improve forest health and fund the very preventive work that is needed to reduce the size and severity of future fires.

We are going to be joined in this amendment. As I have indicated, Senator CRAPO and I base it on our bipartisan bill. Senators STABENOW and BALDWIN will be cosponsors, and I believe others will as well.

It is an important amendment and it is an urgent amendment because we need to have this in place quickly so as to give the natural resources agencies and our communities the tools they need this summer.

It is a real wake-up call when you get a fire briefing in March. That is an indication that we have a very, very difficult fire season coming up. This bipartisan amendment ensures that in a cost-effective way we give our natural resources agencies the tools they need to fight these infernos and protect our communities.

Once again, I thank the distinguished chairman of the committee, Senator ENZI, for giving me this time.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.