

WYDEN, also wishes to provide separate and related comments.

In setting out what is to be taken as “major legislation,” the budget resolution specifies that legislation may be designated to be “major” if the Senator or House Member who is chairman or vice chairman of the Joint Committee on Taxation, or JCT, designates the legislation as such “for revenue legislation.” Of course, such language is entirely consistent with existing laws and practice, under which the responsibility and control over revenue estimates in the congressional budget process lies squarely with the chair and vice chair of the JCT.

The budget resolution also specifies that legislation may be designated to be “major” if the chair of the Committee on the Budget in the Senate or the House designates the legislation as such “for all direct spending and revenue legislation.” Of course, existing laws and practice assigns responsibility and control over spending estimates with the Budget Committees. However, the budget resolution includes “revenue legislation” as part of what the Budget Committee chairs may use for designating legislation as being “major.”

As I understand the intent of the language, when major legislation is to be considered, there can be cases in which the legislation may require estimates both from the JCT and from the Congressional Budget Office, or CBO. In such cases, there is nothing to prohibit use of longstanding practice in which the Budget Committees consult with the chair and vice chair of the JCT to ensure that any necessary revenue estimates are arrived at by the JCT, for use in scoring major legislation. To be clear, however, nothing in the budget resolution should be taken to mean that the chairs of the Budget Committees have authority to interfere with the responsibility and control over revenue estimates in any part of the congressional budget process which, as I identified earlier, lies squarely with the chair and vice chair of the JCT.

It is my understanding that the budget resolution does not direct or allow for any possibility of such interference, and my purpose in the remarks I am making today is to make that understanding clear. As I have mentioned, longstanding practice has been that if a need arises for the CBO to obtain information on major legislation from the JCT in terms of revenue estimates or effects of legislative proposals on marginal effective tax rates, Budget Committee members can ensure that those estimates and effects are obtained by consulting with the chair and vice chair of the JCT. This longstanding practice ensures smooth processing of the JCT’s workload, and prevents any direct control or intervention in JCT’s workload from other committees with other jurisdictions.

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I share the concern of my colleague, the Finance Committee chairman, and I sup-

port his interpretation of this provision. In accordance with longstanding historical practice, and because of important practical considerations, the chair and vice chair of the Joint Committee on Taxation should exercise principal control over the revenue estimating process, and section 3112 should not be interpreted to authorize the chairs of the Budget Committees to interfere with JCT’s responsibility for and control over revenue estimates in any part of the congressional budget process.

However, I must note that on the broader point of dynamic estimates, I am opposed, and I was therefore opposed to section 3112 being included in the budget resolution and conference agreement to start with. Dynamic estimates rely on shaky math and convenient assumptions that reward advocates of tax cuts while punishing advocates of long-term investments in people and our Nation’s infrastructure.

FAIR ELECTIONS NOW ACT

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, it was 8 years ago that I first introduced the Fair Elections Now Act. Former Senator Arlen Specter, our late colleague and former chairman of the Judiciary Committee, was my lead cosponsor. We introduced the bill because we believed that America needs a system that rewards candidates with the best ideas and principles—not just the person who is the most talented in raising special interest money.

I noted that day that our democracy was in trouble because special interests and big-donor money were choking the system and preventing us from facing up to the big challenges of our time. Little did I know that almost a decade later, this problem would have grown much worse.

Through a series of recent cases—including the infamous Citizens United decision—the Supreme Court has allowed wealthy, well-connected campaign donors and special interests to unleash a deluge of cash in an effort to sway Federal, State, and local elections across our Nation. When it comes to understanding the influence of wealthy donors and special interests on Federal elections, the numbers speak for themselves.

In the 2012 election cycle, candidates for both the House and Senate raised the majority of their funds from large donations of \$1,000 or more. Forty percent of all contributions to Senate candidates came from donors who maxed out at the \$2,500 contribution limit, representing just 0.02 percent of the American population.

We saw this trend continue during the recent midterm elections. The 100 biggest donors gave a combined \$323 million during the 2014 election cycle through official campaign contributions and donations to national party committees, PACs, Super PACs, and 527 organizations. In contrast to those 100 donors, an estimated 4.75 million

people gave a comparable amount of \$356 million through small-dollar donations of \$200 or less. Astonishing as these figures are, they don’t include the \$173 million spent in the 2014 election cycle by tax-exempt “dark money” groups that are not required to publicly disclose their donors.

Deep-pocketed special interests are aiming to control the agenda in Congress. It is time to fight back and fundamentally reform the way we finance congressional elections. We need a system that allows candidates to focus on constituents instead of fundraising—a system that encourages ordinary Americans to make their voice heard with small, affordable donations to the candidate of their choice.

That is why I am once again introducing the Fair Elections Now Act. While this bill cannot solve all of the problems facing our Nation’s campaign finance system, the Fair Elections Now Act will dramatically change the way campaigns are funded. This bill allows candidates to focus on the people they represent, regardless of whether those people have the wealth to attend a big money fundraiser or donate thousands of dollars.

I would like to thank Sens. BALDWIN, BOXER, BROWN, FRANKEN, GILLIBRAND, HEINRICH, KLOBUCHAR, LEAHY, MARKEY, McCASKILL, MENENDEZ, MERKLEY, MURPHY, SANDERS, SHAHEEN, UDALL, and WARREN for cosponsoring the Fair Elections Now Act and joining me in this effort to reform our campaign finance system.

The Fair Elections Now Act will help restore public confidence in congressional elections by providing qualified candidates for Congress with grants, matching funds, and vouchers from the Fair Elections Fund to replace campaign fundraising that largely relies on lobbyists, wealthy donors, corporations, and other special interests. In return, participating candidates would agree to limit their campaign spending to amounts raised from small-dollar donors plus the amounts provided from the Fair Elections Fund.

The Fair Elections system would have three stages for Senate candidates. First, candidates would need to prove their viability by raising a minimum number and amount of small-dollar qualifying contributions from in-state donors. Qualified candidates would then be required to limit the amount raised from each donor to \$150 per election.

In the primary, participants would receive a base grant that would vary in amount based on the population of the State that the candidate seeks to represent. Participants would also receive a 6 to 1 match for small-dollar donations up to a defined matching cap. After reaching that cap, the candidate could raise an unlimited amount of \$150 contributions, as well as contributions from small-donor People PACs.

In the general election, qualified candidates would receive an additional

grant, further small-dollar matching, and vouchers for purchasing television advertising. The candidate could continue to raise an unlimited amount of \$150 contributions, as well as contributions from small-donor People PACs.

Under the Fair Elections Now Act, candidates would have an incentive to seek small donations. And citizens would have an incentive to donate to the candidate of their choice, knowing that their small donation of \$150 would be converted to a \$900 donation through the 6 to 1 Fair Elections match.

Citizens would also be eligible for a modest, refundable tax credit. The Fair Elections Now Act establishes the “My Voice Tax Credit” to encourage individuals to make small donations to campaigns. Citizens could also make their voices heard by aggregating small contributions of \$150 or less into a type of small-donor political action committee, known as a “People PAC.” People PACs would then be permitted to make campaign contributions to qualified Fair Elections candidates. Coupled with the Fair Elections public financing system, People PACs would elevate the views and interests of a diverse spectrum of Americans, rather than those of the traditional, wealthy donor class.

Our country is facing major challenges. We need to continue to create more jobs and restore economic security for the middle class. We need to build and sustain our transportation infrastructure. We need to fix our broken immigration system. We need to ensure that the right to vote is protected and preserved.

But with high-powered, special interest lobbyists fighting every proposal to make our country stronger, it is incredibly difficult for members of Congress to make progress on behalf of their constituents. This bill would dramatically reduce the influence of these special interests and wealthy donors, because Fair Elections candidates would not need their money to run campaigns. As a result, the bill would enhance the voice of average Americans. Let me be clear: the overwhelming majority of people serving in American politics are good, honest people, and I believe that most members of Congress are guided by the best of intentions. But we are nonetheless stuck in a terrible, corrupting system.

A recent poll found bipartisan concerns about our current system. According to the poll, more than four out of five Americans say money plays too great a role in political campaigns. Two-thirds say that the wealthy have more of a chance to influence the electoral process than other Americans. The perception is that politicians are corrupted by big money interests . . . and whether that is true or not, that perception and the loss of trust that goes with it make it very difficult for Congress to solve tough issues.

This problem—the perception of pervasive corruption—is undermining our

democracy, and we must address it. Everyone is entitled to a seat at the table, but wealthy donors and big corporations shouldn’t be able to buy every seat.

The Fair Elections Now Act will reform our campaign finance system so that members of Congress can focus on implementing policies in the best interest of the people who elected them—not just the wealthy donors and special interests that bankrolled their success. I urge my colleagues and the American people to support this important legislation.

RECOGNIZING THE 90TH BIRTHDAY OF LESTER CROWN

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, today I recognize the 90th birthday of one of the outstanding business leaders of our time—Chicago businessman, Lester Crown.

Lester Crown was born on June 7, 1925, to Henry Crown, the son of Jewish immigrants from Lithuania, and his wife, Rebecca Kranz. Like many other Illinoisans, Lester came from a family of Lithuanian immigrants with humble beginnings who moved to America to pursue a better life for their children.

Lester’s father worked hard with his two brothers to build their family construction supplies company, the Material Service Corporation. As a young man, Lester worked with his father at the Material Service’s quarry over the summers to lend a hand. Through the hard work and dedication of the entire Crown family, the Material Service Corporation became one of the most successful companies in America. Several years later, that family business merged with General Dynamics Corporation to become America’s largest defense contractor.

From the start, Lester saw his father’s work and learned what it took to be a successful businessman. He used his experience to excel and quickly became the president of Marblehead Lime and Royal Crown (RC) Cola. After years of managing companies, Lester took over as chair of General Dynamics and as the head of the family investment firm.

One of Lester’s many talents has been his ability to recognize great potential. His eye for promising investments has led him to grace the Forbes 400 list every year since 1982. With a quick glance at his impressive list of investments we can easily see why—he is a major shareholder in Maytag, Hilton Hotels, Alltel, Aspen Skiing Company, New York’s Rockefeller Center, the New York Yankees, and Illinois’ very own Chicago Bulls.

But Lester is not just a successful businessman, he is also a dedicated philanthropist, husband, and father. He has channeled his successes to provide generous contributions to a wide array of local and national projects. His charitable footprint can be seen in landmarks such as the famous Crown Fountain in Millennium Park, the Lyric

Opera of Chicago, Stroger Hospital, and in universities across the Nation.

Lester and his wife Renee have been happily married for more than 60 years and have seven children. Renee serves as a founding member and former president of the Women’s Board of Northwestern University and a life director of the Multiple Sclerosis Society. She also serves on the board of the Boys and Girls Clubs of Chicago, the Field Museum, the Joffrey Ballet, and as an honorary chair of the Shoah Visual History Foundation.

Lester and Renee are an inspiration for many in their family who have become successful investors and philanthropists. Their son Jim is continuing the legacy started by Lester’s father nearly a century ago by now serving as the lead director of General Dynamics. Together, the Crown family works with roughly 600 groups a year and donates millions of dollars annually to support organizations that focus on education and community development.

In addition to the energy Lester has poured into his family and business life, he has been a pillar in the Jewish-American community in his support of Israel. Few can match his dedicated commitment to the survival and success of the nation of Israel.

While few share Lester’s long list of business achievements, even fewer share his level of leadership and generosity. It is with great pride that I ask my colleagues to join me in celebrating the 90th birthday of Lester Crown and to congratulate him on his legendary career and his many contributions to the city of Chicago, the Nation, and the world. I offer my best wishes as he continues to provide visionary leadership through his business endeavors and family philanthropy for years to come.

CONFIRMATION OF ERIC MILLER TO BE VERMONT’S U.S. ATTORNEY

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, last night, the Senate confirmed Eric Miller to be Vermont’s 37th U.S. attorney. I am confident that he will do an outstanding job as the top Federal law enforcement officer in the State. Before recommending Eric to the President, I consulted prosecutors, defense attorneys, judges, law enforcement officials, and civic leaders throughout Vermont. They were unanimous in their support for Eric. I was particularly impressed with his thoughtfulness, vision, and depth of experience. Eric Miller is one of Vermont’s leading trial attorneys. He is well regarded by State and local law enforcement and leaders in Vermont’s legal community.

Eric Miller has worked since 1999 in the Burlington office of the law firm Sheehey Furlong & Behm PC, serving as partner since 2002. He has litigated a range of complex issues in Federal civil and criminal cases, including trials and appeals. As an appointee to the Criminal Justice Act panel of the U.S. District Court for the District of Vermont,