

do know that many of these babies are now starting their life in a much healthier situation because of this special expertise that is being provided, but these hospitals are telling me this is an increasing problem. Every hospital in America needs to have this expertise now to deal with a situation that is hard to imagine, a baby who is born drug-addicted.

I also toured a community alternative sentencing center in Claremont, OH, to see where a court is taking people who have been arrested for possession and instead of throwing them in jail is setting up an alternative program where they can get some of the treatment they need and get some of the life skills they need to get their life back on track. It is an intensive program that is working.

These are programs that are also supported by our legislation. Our legislation also deals with people who are in prison who have addiction problems, to be able to get them treatment, so when they get out of prison they don't fall back into a life of crime to support their addiction problem.

Most recently I was in Columbus, OH. I met with four women who were recovering addicts who had this addiction foisted upon them as part of human trafficking, sex trafficking. Their traffickers got them addicted to make them dependent. In one case, the woman told me she wasn't paid anything. She was just paid in terms of the drugs. Her trafficker kept her dependent because of that. These women were in a program where they had been given the opportunity to get into treatment, given the opportunity to be able to get their lives back together, but sadly a lot of people do not have that opportunity, not having access to treatment. Our legislation will be very important to do that.

The bill targets the very issues we know have to be addressed—keeping people away from these substances in the first place. Then, once they are addicted, if they become addicted, get them the treatment they need to begin to turn their lives around. For that longer term recovery, which we think is absolutely essential from the experience and the good science that is out there for successful programs, it is important that we have, in some cases, medication treatment as well that supports that.

It also says that we have to help our law enforcement more. I think that is one reason the Fraternal Order of Police, the national sheriffs' organizations, and others have supported this legislation with such wonderful statements, as I just talked about earlier, as we got today from the FOP.

This is an issue that will continue to be a serious problem in all of our communities unless we take these kinds of actions at the Federal level, the State level, and the local level. We have to work as a team with nonprofits, with people who are in the trenches dealing with this. If we do not, we will con-

tinue to see families torn apart. We will continue to see communities that are devastated, including by the crimes and other consequences of this, and we will continue to see Americans who are not able to fulfill their God-given abilities and destinies because of this drug addiction problem.

Today I am told that others who support this legislation would like to spend more money in addition to the \$80 million that this program provides every year going forward. This is a well-crafted, well-thought-out framework of how to spend that money more effectively to be able to address the problem. I am for spending more money. If there are people who would like to spend more money on this issue of opiate addiction, I am for that. I think it is enough of a crisis that we should be funding more funds on it.

I will say something else. Let's get this bill moving. Let's get this bill to the floor. Let's get this bill passed. Let's get the House to pass the companion legislation. Let's get it to the President's desk. This is an urgent problem. We cannot wait. If people are going to offer other ideas, including more funding and funding that is an emergency, rather than in a way that is paid for, that may make it more difficult to move this bill forward because some people in this Chamber will not support that.

We now have a consensus on this bill. Let's not play politics with this bill and stop this bill. Let's move this bill forward. Right now we have on the floor of the Senate an energy bill. It includes energy efficiency provisions I have worked on for years. Yet it is being stopped by other issues, important issues. Around here we too often refuse to move forward on legislation where there is a consensus, where we know it is the right thing to do, because other issues come up, and sometimes it is other issues that are very important issues but ones that end up stopping the legislation and not allowing us to make progress for the people we represent.

I do support more funding. I support funding in this legislation. Over and above that, I support additional funding. The President's budget has a request for additional funding. I talked about that today in a hearing we had. I told the Secretary of Health and Human Services I would support some of these programs that have additional funding. Let's be sure it is well-spent, as it is in this legislation. Let's be sure we are not throwing money at a problem. Let's make sure we are making a difference in the lives of the people we represent, and let's be sure it doesn't derail this effort to get this legislation passed.

We are on a track now. It is bipartisan. It is bicameral. It has the President's general support. He hasn't specifically said he will endorse this bill, but his representatives—including the Secretary of Health and Human Services—today were very supportive of the direction we are moving.

It was reported out of a committee today in a total bipartisan way. It was unanimous. Again, that doesn't happen often around here. Let's address this issue now. Let's not sit back and play politics. Let's take the politics out of this, as has been the case for the last few years.

SHELDON WHITEHOUSE has been my partner in this. SHELDON WHITEHOUSE and I don't agree on a lot of issues. He is more liberal. I am more conservative on some issues. We agree on this issue because we know the way it affects the communities we represent, the families we represent, and the people we represent. Let's move forward on this legislation. Let's get it to the floor. Let's get a vote. Let's start turning the tide. Let's start changing the dynamic on the ground where instead of us having this creeping problem of addiction and all of its horrible consequences that we begin to allow people to get their lives back together, to give them the opportunity to get their families back together, to be able to achieve the dreams they have for themselves and their families.

Mr. President, I yield back my time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, I compliment the distinguished Senator from Ohio on his remarks here today. He is one of the pillars of this Senate. He is one of the finest men I have served with in the whole time I have been in the U.S. Senate. He is on top of everything. His experiences outside of the Senate have been magnificent. Everybody, I think, has a very high opinion of him. Those who might express otherwise, deep down do. They know what a fine man he is. He is absolutely right on this issue. We need to do many things about it.

BALANCED BUDGET AMENDMENT

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, having said that, during the 2008 Presidential campaign, one of the candidates criticized the outgoing President for adding \$4 trillion to the national debt. He called that increase not only irresponsible but even "unpatriotic." Barack Obama was that candidate. He won the election and took office with the Government Accountability Office warning the long-term fiscal outlook is "unsustainable."

The national debt on inauguration day 2009 was \$10.6 trillion, and it stands at \$19 trillion today. The national debt for American households has risen from \$93,000 to nearly \$160,000 since President Obama took office.

If a \$4 trillion increase is irresponsible and unpatriotic, what words describe an increase that is more than twice as large? The national debt crisis has been around for a long time, but we have never been in a more serious, perilous situation than we are today. One way to grasp the magnitude of the national debt is to compare it to the size of the economy, or the gross domestic

product. In other words, we can compare what we owe to our ability to pay.

When President Obama took office, the national debt was 82 percent of GDP. It is now 105 percent of GDP today, by far the largest increase in American history during a President's first 7 years. Economists tell us that the national debt above 90 percent of GDP for a sustained period of time will lead to substantially slower economic growth and higher interest rates.

The United States is now in the longest period in history with a national debt above that toxic 90-percent level. Not surprisingly, since the recession ended in June 2009, the national debt has grown more than twice as fast, and GDP has grown less than half as fast as during the same period after previous recessions. Some economists prefer to evaluate the national debt as a percentage of tax revenue; that is, comparing what we owe to what we earn. The national debt has risen from approximately 350 percent of Federal revenue when President Obama took office to 600 percent of Federal revenue today. But even that does not tell the whole story.

During the last several years of skyrocketing national debt, the interest rate on that debt has been nearly zero. If interest rates had been at the historical average, annual interest costs would be more than twice what they are today and on their way to consuming more than half of all Federal revenue. And now interest rates are starting to creep up. The Concord Coalition and the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget both anticipate that over the next decade interest payments on the national debt alone will approach \$1 trillion per year. That is interest against the national debt. By any of these measures, the national debt crisis is not only serious, it is worse than ever and much worse than when this President took office.

The Congressional Budget Office has a new budget, an economic outlook that projects the national debt rising by nearly \$10 trillion over the next decade. Looking beyond the next decade, CBO says that under current law, the national debt will explode to more than 150 percent of GDP, the highest level in American history. CBO also says that interest on the national debt is one of the engines driving the debt even higher. A national debt of this magnitude undercuts the economic growth necessary to minimize borrowing to fund the government. Rising interest costs for such a monstrous debt add to the debt on which more interest must then be paid.

In this new report, CBO again outlined some of the serious negative consequences of this national debt for the budget and the Nation. In addition to substantially higher interest payments, these include lower productivity and wages, less flexibility by lawmakers to respond to fiscal challenges, and an increased likelihood of a fiscal crisis. In addition to those prob-

lems, former Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Michael Mullen and experts from the Heritage Foundation to the Brookings Institution warned that the national debt crisis is a serious threat to national security. It is no wonder that more than two-thirds of Americans say that their concern over the national debt is growing, and more than three-quarters of Americans say that the national debt should be among Congress's top three priorities.

The national debt was once a top priority. In fact, America's Founders were so determined to avoid debt that their commitment to fiscal balance was often called our unwritten fiscal constitution. President George Washington, for example, told Congress that the regular redemption of the public debt was the most urgent fiscal priority. That commitment is long gone. The Federal budget has been balanced in only a dozen of the last 80 years, and as I said earlier, we are in the longest period of American history with a debt above 90 percent of the GDP.

As its willpower failed, Congress has also tried to address the debt crisis by legislation. The first bill requiring a balanced budget was introduced in 1934, when the national debt was 40 percent of GDP, compared to today. Fifty years later, Congress enacted the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act. Since then, we have enacted multiple budget control acts and budget enforcement acts as the national debt climbed from 42 percent of GDP in 1985 to more than 100 percent of GDP today.

Good intentions will not balance the Nation's checkbook. Statutes that Congress can change or ignore will not keep our fiscal house in order. Neither willpower nor legislation will tackle this national debt crisis. Pretending otherwise is the fiscal equivalent of fiddling while Rome burns. In no other way, except by an amendment to the Constitution, can Congress be compelled to balance its budget in peacetime. Let me say that again. In no other way, except by an amendment to the Constitution, can Congress be compelled to balance its budget in peacetime. While I claim that as my firm conviction, I cannot claim authorship of those words. The Appropriations Committee expressed that principle in 1947 about a balanced budget amendment introduced by Senator Millard Tydings, a Democrat from Maryland. Everything that has happened since then has proved the truth of those words.

Year after year, decade after decade, we slide deeper in debt until today our economy is being suffocated. One definition of insanity is doing the same thing but expecting different results. If we keep doing what we have done, we will get more of what we have been getting. This would be a very different country, a freer and more productive country, if Congress had already proposed the only solution that exists—a constitutional amendment that requires fiscal responsibility. The first

balanced budget amendment was introduced in the House in 1936.

I introduced my first balanced budget amendment in June of 1979 during my first term in the U.S. Senate. Adjusted for inflation, the national debt then was \$2.6 trillion, or 32 percent of GDP. That share of GDP doubled by 1997, when the Senate came within one vote—one solitary vote—of passing a balanced budget amendment that I introduced. It rose to 95 percent when the Senate last voted on a balanced budget amendment in 2011 and is 105 percent of GDP today.

Since this crisis is already so grave and getting worse, and since the only way to tackle it is through the Constitution, we should propose a balanced budget amendment and let the American people decide to take this step. Congress, after all, cannot amend the Constitution. A requirement that Congress keep its fiscal house in order does not become part of the Constitution until it is approved by three-quarters of the States, or 38 States.

Article V of the Constitution also allows the States to apply for a convention to propose constitutional amendments. Concerned citizens have been working since the mid-1970s to reach the two-thirds threshold for calling such a convention to propose a balanced budget amendment. Since Congress has never called an article V convention, many questions remain unresolved, and theories remain untested regarding that method of proposing an amendment. I can assure my colleagues, however, that Congress's continued failure to propose a balanced budget amendment guarantees that our fellow citizens will continue working to force that course upon us.

I looked at dozens of polls conducted by major polling firms and national news organizations since I was first elected to the Senate. Three-quarters of Americans supported a balanced budget amendment in 1976, and three-quarters support it now. They believe even more strongly today what the Appropriations Committee said in 1947—that in no other way, except by a constitutional amendment, can Congress be compelled to balance its budget in peacetime. It will do no good to pretend that the national debt is not a fiscal Tsunami. It is. It will do no good to pretend that this ocean of debt is not already taking a serious toll on our country. It is. It will do no good to repeat the mantra that Congress can tackle the national debt crisis by itself. No one believes that anymore—not anyone. That emperor has no clothes. Perhaps some of my colleagues believe that all the polls over the last 40 years are wrong, that the American people are content watching the national debt swallow the economy.

Perhaps our fellow citizens are actually OK with slower economic growth, a rising threat to national security, the greater likelihood of a fiscal crisis, and an unsustainable path to fiscal disaster. If that is what the American

people actually believe, then they will decline to ratify a balanced budget amendment. So why not give it a chance?

Perhaps some of my colleagues believe that the Congressional Budget Office is wrong in its disturbing projections and dire warnings or that the Government Accountability Office is mistaken and the fiscal path we are on is sustainable after all or that the Concord Coalition and the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget are wrong about how national debt interest payments will continue to grow and add to the debt or that economists are wrong to warn about the impact of a sustained national debt of this magnitude. If my colleagues are convinced that everyone else is wrong and that our fiscal future is just fine and hunky-dory after all, then I still urge them to let the American decide. The Constitution belongs to the American people—not to the people here, although we are part of the American people.

President Obama once said that a \$4 trillion increase in the national debt is irresponsible and unpatriotic. This week he submitted a budget for fiscal year 2017 that reflects the same recycled misguided policies that have both added to the debt and have failed in Congress. On all of the budgets he submitted, there was only one vote for his budget. There was a bipartisan rejection in each case.

President Obama wants to expand a broken Medicaid system rather than reform it. He wants to impose higher taxes to prop up more government spending. He continues to turn a blind eye to the Nation's unsustainable entitlement programs that are propelling the national debt to unprecedented levels.

We all know the facts and the dangers about the national debt crisis. We all know that the American people are, if anything, more alarmed about this crisis than we are—certainly with the exception of myself. The only reason that Members of Congress have refused to give our fellow citizens a choice about adding a balanced budget amendment to the Constitution is that they know what that choice will be. I say with respect, but as strongly as I can, that this is not a legitimate basis for refusing to propose a balanced budget amendment. In our system of government, as Founder James Wilson once put it, the people are the masters of government. Only they have authority to set the rules for government. This choice must be theirs, not ours.

Here is the heart of the matter. First, the national debt crisis poses a significant and growing threat to the economic and national security of this country. In fact, we have never been in such an extended, perilous period than we are right now. Second, Congress has tried and failed to address this crisis by either willpower or legislation and will do so only if the Constitution requires it. Third, the decision of whether to use the Constitution to require fiscal

responsibility belongs to the American people, not to Congress. A balanced budget amendment would allow the American people to make that choice.

What are we afraid of? Are we afraid that we can't keep going on spending like this or that the American people might pass a balanced budget amendment to the Constitution? Yes, I think we are afraid of that, but we shouldn't be. We should be glad to have it in the Constitution itself. We could either take the responsibility we were elected for and propose a balanced budget amendment or the American people may do it for us.

The key to me is to pass a balanced budget constitutional amendment. I filed it, and it has a great number. It was filed right after we got into the Congress. It is an amendment that literally every one of us should support.

Let's get real about this national debt. Let's get real about helping our American people survive. Let's get real about having the greatest Nation on Earth continue to fight for liberty and freedom and independence and religious rights all over the world and all over this country. Let's get real about the future of our young people. Let's get real about being in the U.S. Senate and having an opportunity to form a real, solid approach to this, which would make all the difference in the world.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

AMBASSADOR NOMINATIONS

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, I am here today to speak about U.S. policy toward Iran.

I wish to mention first that we are continuing to work on the issue of State Department nominees. Of course, my focus has been on the Swedish and Norwegian Ambassadors from our country to those two countries. We have now gone for 867 days without a confirmed ambassador to Norway and 476 days since the President nominated an ambassador for Sweden.

I think we have made it very clear that nearly every Member in this Chamber does not have an issue with having a vote or even an issue with the qualifications of these nominees who went through the Foreign Relations Committee without objection. Senator COTTON himself said: I believe both nominees are qualified. We have significant interest in Scandinavia. My hope is that both nominees receive a vote in the Senate sooner rather than later.

As we know, Senator CRUZ has had various issues not related to the nomi-

nees or our two strong allies, Norway and Sweden. We are hoping we can find a way forward so that he lifts his hold and we can continue to move forward with the 11th and 12th biggest investors in the United States of America, those countries, Norway and Sweden, being able to have Ambassadors like the rest of Europe. Every other major Nation has an ambassador.

I wish to thank Senator MCCONNELL and Senator REID and Senator CORKER and Senator CARDIN for their work on this issue. I am hoping to get this done as soon as possible.

U.S. POLICY TOWARD IRAN

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, as I mentioned, I rise today to discuss U.S. policy toward Iran—an issue that is critical to our national security and the security of our allies. When we talk about our policy toward Iran, we must do so with our eyes wide open. The Iranian regime is one of the world's leading State sponsors of terrorism. It threatens Israel, it destabilizes the region, and it abuses human rights. That is why I have cosponsored the Iran Policy Oversight Act, a bill that allows Congress to move quickly to impose economic sanctions against Iran's terrorist activity. It expands military aid to Israel, and it ensures that agencies charged with monitoring Iran have the resources they need.

Preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon is one of the most important objectives of our national security policy. I have strongly advocated for and supported the economic sanctions that have brought Iran to the negotiating table over the last few years. Those sanctions resulted in a nuclear nonproliferation agreement between Iran and the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Russia, and China.

The Iran nuclear agreement, as we have talked about many times on this floor—including my own words—is an imperfect but necessary tool to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon. In order for the agreement to work, of course, we must remember that simply trusting Iran to do the right thing is not an option. We must be vigilant in our monitoring and in our verification.

In my view, our national security strategy must focus on three things. This is overall: Protecting our citizens, eliminating threats to our national security, and never losing sight of our core American values. It is through this lens that we must approach Iran.

First of all, we must do all we can to keep our own citizens safe. We can't be naive. We cannot trust in the Iranian regime—and the Iranian regime continues to prove that is the case. Iran repeatedly violated the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1929 by testing ballistic missiles, most recently on October 10 and November 21 of 2015. The very next month, in December of 2015, Iran conducted a live fire exercise using unguided rockets