

In the 1930s, when they put Social Security in, it was intended to be a last-resort insurance supplement, not a primary go-to retirement plan. The life expectancy at that time was about 59; this program started at 62. So the math was on their side. Today, life expectancy is in the 80s, and we have a retirement age of 67. So we know the math doesn't work. This cannot happen.

But the good news is there are five areas of work I believe that Congress and the administration need to begin to focus on—and now.

First, I believe our budget process is broken. I have been on the Budget Committee now for 3 years, and I know it doesn't work. It hasn't worked but four times in 44 years to fund the Federal Government. We are supposed to appropriate 12 bills a year; we have averaged 2.5 over the last 44 years.

Let me say that again. In any business, in any enterprise—a medical office, or it doesn't matter—if you were charged to do 12 items and you did 2.5, you would fix something. You would have to fix it, or you would be out of business.

We have used continuing resolutions over 180 times. Actually, Congress has shut the Federal Government down, has not funded the government, 20 times in that 44-year history—20 times. I had no idea that was the case, and I bet most Americans don't either. That is unconscionable.

We don't even deal with every dollar we spend in the budget. We deal only with 25 percent of what we spend. That is the discretionary. That is what we did on the budget here. This is never covered in the budget by law. We don't talk about it. We can no longer do this.

The first thing you have to do is fix the budget process. Second of all, I believe you have to get after redundant agencies and extraneous expenses of the Federal Government. The GAO, the General Accountability Office, thinks we have somewhere around \$700 billion or \$800 billion of wasted spending every year in a \$4 trillion budget. That is about 20 percent. I believe that.

The third thing you have to do is grow the economy. Last year, President Trump said job one is growing the economy. We focused on regulations, energy, and taxes. The economy started growing. In the last 12 months, we have had 3 percent GDP growth. That is 120 basis points above the 1.8 percent we enjoyed for 8 years—the lowest economic performance in our U.S. history.

We believe, with future work on these things, that the economy will continue to grow. We need to work on immigration, trade, and infrastructure to continue this work.

The good news is that the biggest item—the fourth item we need to work on is that we can solve these items; that is, we have to save Social Security and Medicare. When I say “save,” I mean we have to plan for the time and fix it now before the trust fund goes to zero. When the trust fund goes to zero, there is no way benefits can be paid in

full. If we don't do that today, there will be a crisis of a magnitude that I don't want to even imagine if we let this get to that point. That is the fourth one.

The fifth area of work is, we have to get at the spiraling driver of our healthcare costs, not the insurance that we have been fussing about for the last 8 years. We now really need to make a serious, concerted attempt in America to get after the drivers of healthcare costs.

Those are the five areas. I am convinced that when faced with a crisis, Americans are always the best in history at dealing with a crisis. We are not always the first to recognize we are in one.

My role tonight, as it has been for the last 3 years, is to call this crisis out. The CBO has all the numbers. Whether you believe them or not, they are correct. I would argue with their revenue numbers a little bit. Some might argue with their expense numbers. Bottom line, no matter what, you know that with a \$21 trillion debt, the interest expense is going to grow to almost \$1 trillion over the next 10 years.

If we don't do something within this planning period of 10 years, the CBO says that our interest expense alone will go to \$1 trillion. There is no way this can happen.

We have to change the broken system. I think there has been no other time—I think the realization is getting there. The CBO has given us the numbers. The GAO has given us the opportunities and measured some of those opportunities.

I think the political will in this country is now such that they realize we have a debt crisis, and they have more courage, I think, to face it than elected officials do. What drives this town is the next cycle. In the House, it is 2 years; in the Senate, it is 6 years: Oh, my goodness, we can't do anything to hurt that next cycle. We have to have more on our side than they have on their side.

It is time to put that behind us. This cannot be solved with a partisan solution. My good friend from Rhode Island, Senator WHITEHOUSE, and I have cosponsored a bill that goes after and deals with parts of the solution for the budget problem. There is a select committee right now that was formed by the leadership—Democratic and Republican, House and Senate. There are 16 members. I am privileged to be on it. I believe there are things we can do in that select committee to fix our budget process that would help us deal with the additional things we are adding to this debt crisis.

Make no mistake, that will not solve this debt crisis. You will not solve the debt crisis by fixing the budget process alone, but you will not solve the debt crisis unless and until you do fix the budget process. The same thing applies to growing the economy. The same thing is involved with the other items we can look at in terms of redundant

agencies and the healthcare costs in this country.

America has come too far to fail now. We owe it to our kids, our grandkids, and the kids and grandkids of our kids and grandkids to deal with this right now.

I met with Chairman Greenspan last year. I had the privilege to sit with him and talk about this very issue. He reminded me that in 1983, they had a solution. If we had done it in 1983, it wouldn't have been nearly as onerous as it is going to be when we try to fix this.

Again, in the late nineties, Newt Gingrich and Bill Clinton together—two different parties—had an agreement. They got very close to signing it, but then it fell apart because of the political nonsense in this town.

I believe the time has come right now for both sides to put our differences aside, live with an 80-percent solution and deal with this problem right now. If we don't, we will not be able to hand this to our kids. That is the last thing I want to close with. People say: Well, we are leaving our kids and grandkids a problem.

Yes, we are. Look, in this planning period, the next 10 years, when interest rates are higher than what we are spending on national defense, that crisis is right here. It is now. We are going to see it in the next decade, in my opinion. It will make 2008 and 2009 pale in comparison.

I have never seen a time when a crisis would pull us together any more ardently than this one would be right now. The question is, will we recognize that we are in a moment of crisis?

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate resume legislative session for a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

SYRIA

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, the magnitude of atrocities and devastation in Syria caused by ISIS and the Assad regime, with support from Russia and Iran, is appalling. When this calamity began in 2011, I doubt anyone predicted it would come to this: hundreds of

thousands of people killed; half the population of the country displaced, many living as refugees in neighboring countries; whole cities reduced to rubble riddled with landmines and booby-traps.

For years, I, like others here, have called for a comprehensive U.S. strategy for responding to the Syrian crisis that is grounded in cooperation with the international community, to be presented to Congress. I have also supported hundreds of millions of dollars in humanitarian aid to desperate Syrian civilians. We must at least do what is within our power to address the needs of those affected while efforts are made to bring the violence to an end.

I have also defended Congress's sole authority to declare war, which should always be based on a clear strategy. I opposed the Obama administration's proposal for the authorization for the use of force in Syria in 2013 because it was overly broad and would have ceded to the White House power reserved to Congress under the Constitution. I have also opposed the manner in which President Trump has twice launched attacks against Syria without approval from Congress.

While I recognize and appreciate the considerable precautions that were taken in the early hours of April 15 by the U.S. military to prevent civilian casualties and avoid targeting Russian assets in Syria, whenever military operations are conducted the outcome is never certain. Things can go terribly wrong. In this instance, instead of demolishing two or three Syrian chemical weapons facilities, we could have triggered a shooting war with Russia, and Israel and Iran might have quickly followed suit. What began as a missile attack lasting a few minutes could have ignited a regional war. That is a risk that Congress must be given the opportunity to weigh.

The use of chemical weapons is a crime against humanity and a violation of international law that cannot be tolerated, but it is also a fact that conventional attacks by the Assad regime have caused far more deaths of innocent men, women, and children. The Assad regime has been slaughtering its own people for more than 7 years by dropping barrel bombs, laying siege to cities to prevent access to food, water, and medicine, and using poison gas. While we all want to act decisively in the face of such atrocities, the United States cannot solve this crisis using Tomahawk missiles. All such attacks can do, it appears, is degrade, most likely only temporarily, Assad's ability to use chemical weapons. This was demonstrated in the aftermath of President Trump's first military response to Assad's use of chemical weapons in April 2017. It was conducted with great fanfare, without congressional authorization, and it failed to prevent future attacks. President Trump has now launched a second attack without the approval of Congress, and he has proclaimed "mission accomplished."

Why didn't the President seek Congress's approval? And what is the mission? How would we have responded if the attacks had triggered an escalation of violence, potentially spinning out of control? Those critical questions need answers.

Perhaps the most fundamental question for this administration is what does President Trump seek to achieve in Syria? Is it limited to defeating ISIS and punishing Assad for using chemical weapons? Are we willing to accept Russia and Iran determining Syria's future? If not, what is the strategy for ending the war, if Russia continues to block diplomatic efforts in the U.N. Security Council? How does the White House explain cutting aid for refugees overseas, withdrawing the United States from the Global Compact on Migration, limiting the resettlement of Syrian refugees here to only 11 people so far in 2018, compared to 790 last year during the same period, and suspending \$200 million in U.S. aid for civilians in Syria? Those funds are intended to help improve the livelihoods of Syrians impacted by the war, including to provide access to basic services.

Does the White House believe that it is in the national interest to conduct attacks against Syria, at the risk of triggering a wider war and after failing to produce the intended results in the past, but that it is not in our national interest to provide aid to Syrian civilians in areas controlled by our partners?

I am also concerned about what these attacks against Syria may reveal about President Trump's willingness to direct a military attack elsewhere without obtaining the consent of Congress, for example, against North Korea or Iran.

The conflict in Syria obviously has no easy solution, and it is apparent that it has no military solution. It is the President's job to explain what our strategy is, including how we can overcome Russia's intransigence at the United Nations amidst mounting concerns that we will abandon the Syrian people, before he fires off another volley of missiles that do not get us any closer to a solution and which may have the opposite effect.

TRIBUTE TO DAVID MOATS

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, in this week when new Pulitzer Prizes were awarded to outstanding reporters and courageous news organizations, I want to take a moment, on behalf of all Vermonters, to recognize and thank an earlier Pulitzer Prize winning journalist, Vermont's own David Moats. Until earlier this year, David has been the editorial page editor and the editorial page voice of the Rutland Herald.

David Moats is a Green Mountain treasure. John Walters of the newspaper *Seven Days* called David "a beacon of quality" in Vermont journalism. He represents and gave voice to ideals,

the aspirations, and the decency that characterize Vermont's vibrant, outward-looking, and engaged citizens.

On July 1, 2000, our brave, small State again stepped up to tackle a difficult and momentous issue. That is when Vermont became the first State to offer to same-sex couples the same legal rights and responsibilities of traditional marriage. Vermont's law was written, debated, and approved by the Vermont Legislature.

David Moats documented and illuminated the debate that led to that breakthrough. He won a Pulitzer Prize for his series of 20 editorials that were published throughout that difficult and groundbreaking debate.

The Pulitzer Committee honored David Moats, in their words, "For his even-handed and influential series of editorials commenting on the divisive issues arising from civil unions for same-sex couples."

In 2004, he wrote a book about this debate, "Civil Wars: A Battle For Gay Marriage." Ted Widmer, writing in the *New York Times Book Review*, said this in his review: "Near the end of 'Mr. Deeds Goes to Town,' the Vermonter played by Gary Cooper dishes out a series of homespun metaphors for how government is supposed to treat people, from helping to push a car up a hill to saving a swimmer who's drowning. Obviously, life isn't quite that simple. This will take time. But in the long run, the question will be answered in the vast middle where most Americans live, and where they privately decide what is right and wrong."

David Moats served as editorial page editor of the *Rutland Herald* since 1992. Previously, he had worked as the newspaper's wire editor, State editor, assistant managing editor, and city editor. Earlier in life, he served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Afghanistan.

He is also the author of 11 plays, has made his home in Middlebury, VT, and is the father of three children, Jared, Thatcher, and Nina Moats.

David, we thank you, and we wish you and your family all the best as you write your next chapter.

I ask unanimous consent that these excerpts from an editorial titled, "Legacy," in the *Rutland Herald* last month, be printed in the *RECORD*.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the *RECORD*, as follows:

[From "Legacy," an editorial in *The Rutland Herald*, March 3, 2018]

A consistently reasoned voice is difficult to find. It's challenging to hear in these polarizing times, and it's even harder to find it on the everyday occasion of an editorial page. The distillation of issues into comprehensible, authentic points is a skill few writers can pull off, certainly not with any regularity.

We all know a man who has come to make the blend of opinion and language an art form.

Vermont has been blessed for decades by David Moats' compassionate approach to measured debate and thoughtful provocation. In this very space, David has wrestled to submission some of the most gut-