

Americans support raising the minimum wage.

I see Senator LEAHY from Vermont has come to the floor. Remember when we used to have a colleague back there in the back row who would stand up and bellow about the minimum wage? His name was Ted Kennedy from Massachusetts. He didn't let a month go by or 2 months go by without reminding us that a lot of people were struggling to get by in this country and we sit here in Washington ignoring it, and that is why he would push for an increase in the minimum wage.

We are told that \$15 an hour is exorbitant by some and that it is going to hurt the economy. The truth is just the opposite. Raising the Federal minimum wage gradually to \$15 an hour will strengthen the American economy because minimum wage workers are most likely to spend the money they get on the necessities of life as soon as they get it—food, clothing, housing.

Last week, one of our Republican colleagues gave a speech and said that he worked for \$6 an hour when he was a kid and he is opposed to the \$15-an-hour minimum wage. Well, if you took that six bucks an hour and just matched it with inflation, it would be up over \$15 an hour today. Reminiscing about the "good old days" of \$6 an hour is only done by people who don't have to live on \$6 an hour.

Contrary to popular misconceptions, most minimum wage workers are not teenagers. According to the Economic Policy Institute, 59 percent of workers who would benefit from the Federal minimum wage are women—women. They are taking a beating in this pandemic. They stay at home to watch the kids who can't go to school, trying to deal with daycare that has closed down, losing their own jobs—that is the reality.

Many mothers—two-thirds of them are the sole or primary breadwinners in their family and count on the minimum wage. Nearly one in four workers who would receive a raise under the \$15 Federal minimum wage is a Black or Latina woman.

During this pandemic, America has relied on minimum wage workers to do the hard work and dangerous work in the pandemic. Do you want to know the real pandemic heroes? Do you want to reduce poverty and raise opportunity in America? Pay workers a living wage. Allow workers to share the economic prosperity they are creating with their dedication and labor.

At this moment, we may not have a path, but I hope we can find one. It is time for us to raise the minimum wage, to give the American workers the real wage they need to survive, and to show that we really do value the dignity of work.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. LEAHY. Madam President, I want to associate myself with the words of the distinguished deputy lead-

er. Nobody has said it better. Nobody could. But in the meantime, we have to get up and vote.

Madam President, I am going to put in a quorum call for just a minute, and then I will take it off.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. DUCKWORTH). Without objection, it is so ordered.

IMPEACHMENT

Mr. LEAHY. Madam President, earlier this month, actually for the first time in—earlier last month, I should say, in February, for the first time in our Nation's history, the Senate convened as a Court of Impeachment to try a former President for a high crime and misdemeanor.

For 5 days, every Member of the Senate was here to hear presentations and arguments from an extraordinarily intelligent group of Congressmen and Congresswomen representing the House of Representatives. We also heard from counsel for former President Donald Trump. After listening to the compelling evidence presented by the House managers, I voted to convict President Trump for inciting the Capitol riots on January 6, and I will have a lot more to say about my vote to convict the former President in a later statement.

Today, though, I am going to speak about the unique role I had in this historic trial as its Presiding Officer. It is unique in the history of the Senate, and I thought for my fellow Senators and, also, for historical purposes I would like you all to know some of my feelings.

Now, I understand why some of my Republican friends were skeptical of a Democratic Senator presiding over the trial of a Republican former President. I noted the Constitution does not contemplate that the Chief Justice would preside over the impeachment trial of a former President, but I also note the impeachment process, no matter who presides, is inherently and often intensely divisive. Presidential impeachments have historically been partisan. Having a member of one particular party in the Chair presiding over the trial could understandably give some pause.

Now, as my fellow Senators know, I did not ask, I did not seek to preside over this trial, but I am occupying the constitutional office of the President pro tempore, and because I am, it was incumbent upon me to do so. A Court of Impeachment is not a civil or a criminal court; it is a constitutional court. And the President pro tempore, as a constitutional officer, has historically presided over impeachment trials of non-Presidents. As President Trump's term had expired before the trial began, the responsibility to pre-

side over this historic trial fell to me, as it would have anybody who would have been President pro tempore. I just happened to be.

I was not going to shirk my duty. My staff and I spent hundreds of hours poring over the constitutional background of these trials. I read transcripts. I read everything. And what I found is, throughout our Nation's history, each President pro tempore has almost without exception belonged to a political party, and each has no doubt had their own personal and political views on the matters before the Senate. But when presiding over the Senate, as I go back through history, I see Presidents pro tempore have historically served as a neutral arbiter, issuing rulings where appropriate and preserving order. I consider holding the Office of the President pro tempore and the responsibilities that come with it as one of the highest honors but also one of the most serious responsibilities of my career here in the Senate.

When presiding over an impeachment trial, the President pro tempore takes an additional—not just his regular role but an additional one to do impartial justice according to the Constitution and the laws. This is an oath that I take extraordinarily seriously.

In fact, to demonstrate my commitment to preside over the trial with fairness and transparency, before the trial I wrote a letter to every single Senator and the parties to the trial. In it I made clear my intention and my solemn obligation was to conduct the trial with fairness to all. I committed to adhering to the Constitution and to applicable Senate rules, precedents, and governing resolutions.

I committed to consulting with the Senate's esteemed and nonpartisan Parliamentarian, Elizabeth MacDonough, and I committed to being guided by Senate precedent should a motion or an objection or a request or an application be put before me. I reiterated that any decision I made—any decision I made—from the Chair would be subject to the review of the full Senate—every Democratic Senator, every Republican Senator, every Independent Senator. And I stated I would put any matter before the entire Senate in the first instance where appropriate in light of the precedents and practices of the Senate, giving all Senators an equal say in resolving the issue at the outset. I also informed all Senators, though, that I would enforce the Senate rules, and I would enforce the precedent governing decorum and do what I could to ensure the trial reflected the best traditions of the Senate.

Now, with the trial behind us, I believe I made good on those commitments. My job wasn't to shape the trial or to direct or slant it in any particular way but to make sure the rules were followed, the proceedings were fair to all parties, consistent with the will of the whole Senate, and I believe it was.

I did my best. I followed the advice of the Parliamentarian and enforced our rules and precedents. Where objections were raised, they were ultimately resolved without a vote challenging the rulings I made from the Chair.

While I never faced this situation, before the start of the trial I had decided—and I had informed the Parliamentarian of my decision—that should a ruling of mine be appealed, I would abstain from voting as a Senator on the question of whether to sustain my own ruling. Now, I know from the Constitution and the practices and the rules of the Senate, the Presiding Officer is fully empowered to do so—to vote—and it happens routinely during legislative sessions. But in going back through all the hundreds of pages—the thousands of pages—I could not find a historical precedent for Presiding Officers doing so during impeachment trials, and I was determined to strictly adhere to precedent, even if it limited my authority as a Senator in this instance.

Now I would note that, on two occasions during the trial, I felt it was necessary to remind counsel—and I did, as did Chief Justice Roberts during President Trump's first trial—to refrain from using language that was not conducive to civil discourse. On the final day of the trial, when it got a little bit heated, I was prepared to do so in stronger terms, if needed. Yet, during closing arguments, I believe neither side gave me reason to do so.

Now, like those who presided over the three prior Presidential impeachment trials in our history, I understood each of my decisions was important historically and would become important precedents to guide those who preside over trials in the future, just as I had read and studied the precedents of past trials.

Since the conclusion of the trial, both Republican and Democratic Senators have thanked me for being fair, and I appreciate that greatly. I may have had a prominent role for this historic trial, but I was committed to not shaping it in any way. I just wanted to give voice to our institution's precedents and rules and to otherwise let the Senate determine the trial's structure and direction, to let each side present its case, and let the chips fall where they may, but let the Senate do its job.

I have now had the opportunity to sit as a judge and juror in numerous impeachment trials, including three trials of Presidents. All were historic moments for the Senate and this country.

I hold no illusion that the Senate was at its best for every moment of every trial, but each has nonetheless increased my respect for our system of government and our Constitution.

I was proud to uphold my oath as a Senator and as a Presiding Officer, my oath to do impartial justice according to our Constitution and the laws during last month's trial. There are some things I consider far more important

than allegiance to any person or political party, and my commitment to the Constitution and this great institution of the Senate are listed high among them.

I have felt from the first day I came here that the Senate can be and should be the conscience of the Nation. I wanted to help make sure that conscience was upheld, and I appreciate the fact that my colleagues elected me President pro tempore and gave me this opportunity.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

BUDGET EARMARKS

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, the Appropriations Committee is reportedly preparing to announce the return of earmarks. That is a process that, around here, we know. People back home might not know, so let me explain that the process of earmarks inserts individual projects designated for specific interests into a bill, most often an appropriations bill. When I say "individual projects," it means Senators doing it for probably their district or their State.

Earmarks are a practice that has become a symbol to the American people of the waste and out-of-control spending in Washington. I am strongly against the return of earmarks.

The earmark moratorium was implemented as a direct result of the events leading up to the election of 2010, and there was clearly a mandate coming from that 2010 election to do away with earmarks. So people sometimes think, through the elections or through contacting Congress, they don't have an impact. In this case, it had a very dramatic impact that has lasted at least until now, and hopefully it will last longer.

The American people spoke because they were worried at that time about the country's growing Federal deficit and ballooning public debt—something we aren't as concerned about now as we were then and we ought to be concerned about more so now because the debt has more than doubled during that period of time.

At that time, back in 2010, the debt was estimated to be 62 percent of gross domestic product.

In 2009, President Obama and congressional Democrats passed a \$787 billion stimulus bill that was filled with wasteful spending, special projects, and unauthorized programs that completely violated the rules of the road for responsible governance.

In September 2010—so at the time of the election I am talking about—in a Rasmussen poll, 61 percent of U.S. voters said cutting government spending and deficits would do more to create

jobs than President Obama's proposed \$50 billion infrastructure program. It was pretty evident, then, from people's opinion at that time, that the election of 2010 sent a clear message that the American people wanted Congress to stop wasteful spending. So it didn't take long for President Obama to get the message. He had a weekly address on November 13, 2010, calling upon Congress to stop earmarks. He said: "Given the deficits that have mounted over the past decade, we can't afford to make these investments"—in things like infrastructure, education, research, and development—"unless we are willing to cut what we don't need."

Now, I am going to give you a further Obama quote, and it is a fairly long one, but it is coming from a Democratic President.

I agree with those Republican and Democratic members of Congress who've recently said that in these challenging days, we can't afford what are called earmarks. Those are items inserted into spending bills by members of Congress without adequate review.

Now, some of these earmarks support worthy projects in our local communities. But many others do not. We cannot afford Bridges to Nowhere like the one that was planned a few years back in Alaska. Earmarks like these represent a relatively small portion of overall federal spending. But when it comes to signaling our commitment to fiscal responsibility, addressing them would have an important impact.

We have a chance to not only shine a light on a bad Washington habit that wastes billions of taxpayer dollars, but take a step towards restoring public trust. We have a chance to advance the interests not of Republicans or Democrats, but of the American people; to put our country on a path of fiscal discipline and responsibility that will lead to a brighter economic future for all. And that's a future I hope that we can reach across party lines to build together.

Remember, President Obama said in 2010 that earmarks are bad. Unlike 2020—today we are in even more dismal fiscal shape with even larger Federal deficits and a ballooning Federal debt. According to the Congressional Budget Office, the Federal debt held by the public stood at 100 percent of GDP at the end of fiscal year 2020 and is projected to reach 102 percent of GDP at the end of 2021.

In other words, even though we have the largest economy in the world, we owe more than the entire U.S. economy is producing in a year. If we stay on this course, CBO projects that by 2031, debt will equal 107 percent of GDP, the highest in the Nation's history.

America cannot afford to go back to including earmarks in some ill-conceived effort to grease the wheels to pass legislation only because it includes the pet projects of Members of Congress.

While a small part of the budget—and I would have to admit, earmarks are a small part of the budget—earmarks can cause Members of Congress to focus on projects for their districts or States instead of holding government accountable and being fiscally responsible.

Congress should follow regular order by authorizing funding for programs