

This secrecy on millions of records, this trolling through millions of records is un-American. It is unconstitutional. They have modified the Constitution through statutory law. We have given up our rights. It should be two-thirds of this body voting to change the Constitution and three-fourths of the States. We did it by 50 percent with one bill. The bill was hot when it came here. There was one copy of it. No one read it.

I came from the tea party, and I said: We must read the bills. I propose that we wait 1 day for every 20 pages so we are ensured they are reading the bills. The PATRIOT Act was hundreds of pages long and nobody read it. Not one person read it because it wasn't even hardly printed. There were penciled edits in the margin, and it was passed because we were afraid.

But we can't be so afraid that we give up our liberties. I think it is more important than that. I think it is a sad day today in America that we are afraid to debate this. The great constitutional questions such as this, or great constitutional questions such as whether we can go to war with just the word of the President, these great constitutional questions are not being debated because we are so fearful of debate.

I urge the Senate to reconsider. I urge the Senate to consider debating the PATRIOT Act, to consider amendments, and to consider the Constitution.

Thank you. I yield the floor.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MERKLEY). Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to a period of morning business with debate only until 5 p.m., with the time equally divided between the two leaders or their designees.

THE BUDGET

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, the budget circumstance we confront as a nation is clear. We are on a completely unsustainable course. The occupant of the chair knows this well as a very valued member of the Budget Committee. We are currently borrowing 40 cents of every dollar we spend. That, obviously, cannot continue.

The other side has criticized those of us on our side for not going to a budget markup. The reason we have not is this is not a typical year in which the Republicans put up a budget resolution in the body they control and we put up a budget resolution and we go to conference committee to work out the differences. Something very different is occurring this year. There is a leadership negotiation with the highest leaders of the Republican Party in the House and the Senate, the highest leaders of the Democratic Party in the House and the Senate, meeting with the Vice President of the United

States, on a plan to put in place a 10-year effort or perhaps a 5-year plan to deal with the deficits and debt.

In fact, the Republican leader has made this observation:

[T]he discussions that can lead to a result between now and August are the talks being led by Vice President Biden. . . . That's a process that could lead to a result, a measurable result, in the short term. And in that meeting is the only Democrat who can sign a bill into law; in fact, the only American out of 307 million of us who can sign a bill into law. He is in those discussions. That will lead to a result.

It makes no sense for us to go to a budget markup at this moment that would simply be a partisan markup when bipartisan efforts are underway.

Last year, for 8 months, I participated in the President's fiscal commission—10 Democrats, 8 Republicans. At the end of that emerged the only bipartisan plan that has come from anywhere so far. Five Democrats supported it; five Republicans supported it; one Independent. Mr. President, 11 of the 18 commissioners voted for that plan to get our deficits and debt under control. We have underway this new effort, a leadership effort, with the President represented at the table. We ought to give that a chance before we pass a budget resolution that may be required to implement any plan they can come up with.

The hard reality of what we confront is simply this: This chart shows the spending and revenues of the United States going back to 1950—more than 60 years of the revenue and expenditure history of the United States. The red line is the spending line. The green line is the revenue line. What jumps out at you is that spending as a share of our national income is the highest it has been in 60 years. On the other hand, revenue is the lowest it has been in 60 years as a share of national income. So that is the reason we have record deficits.

I hear all the time the other side of the aisle: It is a spending problem. When you have a deficit, that is the result of the difference between revenue and spending. We have a spending problem, yes, indeed—the highest spending as a share of national income in 60 years. We also have a revenue problem—the lowest revenue we have had as a share of national income in 60 years.

So now the House has sent us a plan, the Republican budget plan, and the first thing they do is cut the revenue some more. Revenue is the lowest it has been in 60 years, and the first thing they do to address the deficit is to cut the revenue some more. In fact, they cut, over the next 10 years, more than \$4 trillion in revenue. For those who are the wealthiest among us, they give them an additional \$1 trillion in tax reductions. By extending the top rate cuts, by extending a \$5 million estate tax exemption, by cutting the top rate down to 25 percent from the 35 percent it is today, they are giving massive new tax cuts to the wealthiest among us.

Their average revenue during the 10 years of their plan is 18.3 percent. You can see from this chart, the last five times the budget has been balanced, revenues have been around 20 percent: 19.7 percent, 19.9 percent, 19.8 percent, 20.6 percent, and 19.5 percent. The revenue plan they have would have never balanced the budget in the last 30 years.

If we look at what has happened on the revenue side of the equation, here is what has happened to the effective tax rate for the 400 wealthiest taxpayers in the United States. Since 1995, when the effective tax rate on the wealthiest 400 was about 30 percent, that effective rate declined to 16.6 percent in 2007.

Warren Buffett has said that his executive assistant pays a higher tax rate than he does. Well, how can that be? The reason that happens is because Mr. Buffett has most of his income from dividends and capital gains, taxed at a rate of 15 percent. His executive assistant is probably taxed at a rate somewhere in the 20, 25-percent range.

We have a circumstance in which we have the lowest revenue in 60 years, and the House Republicans have sent us a budget that says: Let's cut it some more. Let's cut it another \$4 trillion, and let's give \$1 trillion of that to the wealthiest among us.

If you look at what our friends are proposing, when we have the largest deficits since World War II, they are proposing to give those who earn over \$1 million a year a tax cut, on average, in 2013, of almost \$200,000. For those earning over \$10 million, they would give them, on average, a tax cut of \$1,450,000—this at a time when we have record deficits. What sense does this make? It makes no sense.

What are they doing to offset these massive new tax cuts for the wealthiest among us? They have decided the answer is to shred the social safety net that has been created in this country over the last 60 years. They have decided to shred Medicare—shred it. They have decided to shred program after program so they can give more tax cuts to those who are the wealthiest among us.

Here is what a top former President Reagan adviser said when he looked at the House budget proposal. Remember, this is not a Democrat. This is a top former Reagan economic adviser. This is what he said. His name is Bruce Bartlett. He said in his blog about the proposal from the House Republicans on the budget:

Distributionally, the Ryan plan is a monstrosity. The rich would receive huge tax cuts while the social safety net would be shredded to pay for them. Even as an opening bid to begin budget negotiations with the Democrats, the Ryan plan cannot be taken seriously. It is less of a wish list than a fairy tale utterly disconnected from the real world, backed up by make-believe numbers and unreasonable assumptions. Ryan's plan isn't even an act of courage; it's just pandering to the Tea Party. A real act of courage would have been for him to admit, as all

serious budget analysts know, that revenues will have to rise well above 19 percent of GDP to stabilize the debt.

Let's go back to that chart that makes the point that Mr. BARTLETT is making: that the five times the budget has been balanced around here in the last 30 years, the last 40 years—1969, 1998, 1999, 2000, and 2001—by the way, those last four all during the Clinton administration—you can see what the revenue has been: nearly 20 percent of GDP in every one of those years. Revenue today is 14.5 percent of GDP. It is no wonder we have a problem with deficits. You combine the high spending we have now with the low revenue, and you have record deficits.

Our friends on the other side have decided the first thing you do when you have record deficits and the lowest revenue in 60 years is to go out and give more tax breaks to the wealthiest among us.

Here, as shown on this chart, is what they do to health care in the United States. No. 1, end Medicare as we know it. Replace it with a voucher system. They would reopen the prescription drug doughnut hole that means seniors have to pay more of their prescription drug costs. They would block grant Medicaid that ends the countercyclical nature of the program. They would defund health reform, increasing the number of uninsured by 34 million people. Mr. President, 34 million more Americans would not have health insurance if the plan that is before us would pass.

When I say they are ending Medicare as we know it, here is why I say that. Right now, in traditional Medicare, the individual pays about 25 percent of the cost. The rest is paid by Medicare. But look what the House Republican plan would do. It would dramatically increase the health care spending by seniors. Instead of paying 25 percent of the bill, seniors would be expected to pay 68 percent of their health care costs.

That is what the Republican plan is about: very generous additional tax breaks to the wealthiest among us. For those earning more than \$10 million a year, they would give, on average, a \$1,450,000 tax reduction. To make up for it, they would say to seniors: Instead of paying 25 percent of your health care costs under Medicare, you pay 68 percent. What would that mean in dollar terms? Seniors would go from paying \$6,150 a year to \$12,500 a year.

That is the Republican plan that is before us. That is the budget plan we are going to vote on later this evening. Anybody who cannot see that is a shredding of Medicare, that is a shredding of the social safety net, just is not looking very closely.

The former Republican Speaker called the House Republican Medicare proposal "right-wing social engineering." Those are not my words. Those are his words. Here is the interview. On "Meet The Press," on May 15, Mr. Gregory, the host, asked this:

Do you think that Republicans ought to buck the public opposition and really move

forward to completely change Medicare, turn it into a voucher program . . . ?

Mr. Gingrich's answer:

I don't think right-wing social engineering is any more desirable than left-wing social engineering. I don't think imposing radical change from the right or the left is a very good way for a free society to operate.

This budget that is before us is not just radical with respect to what it does to Medicare, what it does to the revenue of the United States. You look at every part of this budget, there are no savings in defense after we have had this massive defense buildup. From 1997 to 2011, you can see spending on defense has gone from \$254 billion a year to \$688 billion a year. Even the House Budget Committee chairman, Mr. RYAN, who is the architect of this plan, has said:

There are a lot of savings you can get in defense. There's a lot of waste over there, for sure.

That is what he said about defense spending. Here is what he did about it. He increases it dramatically, from \$529 billion—this is just the underlying defense budget; this does not count the war funding—he increases the regular defense budget from \$529 billion, in 2011, to \$667 billion by 2021.

He did not cut one thin dime. After saying there is lots of waste there, lots of places for savings, after the Secretary of Defense himself has said they have to restrain spending, after the Secretary of Defense himself has proposed \$178 billion of savings, the budget before us does not save one dime out of defense. Instead, it increases it dramatically from \$529 billion to \$667 billion, and that does not count war funding. War funding would be on top of it.

This budget before us, the Republican budget from the House, also takes some of the fundamentals of making our country strong and cuts them dramatically.

Education is No. 1. I was raised by my grandparents. My grandmother was a schoolteacher. She used to say: In our household, No. 1 is education, No. 2 is education, and No. 3 is education. We got the message.

Let me read what two of the country's foremost economists have said about the importance of education to the U.S. economy: an educated population is a key source of economic growth. Broad access to education was, by and large, a major factor in the U.S. economic dominance in the 20th century and in the creation of a broad middle class. Indeed, the American dream of upward mobility, both within and across generations, has been tied to access to education.

What does the budget that has come over from the Republican house do? It cuts education 15 percent, from \$91 billion to \$77 billion, from 2011 to 2012. Education, obviously, is not the only important pillar to our economy. Another important pillar is the infrastructure of the country; our roads, bridges, highways, airports. These are the things that support a vibrant and strong U.S. economy.

Here is the engineers' report card on America's infrastructure. Aviation, a D; bridges, a C; rail, a C-minus; roads, D-minus; transit, a D; the infrastructure grade point average, a D.

What do our colleagues propose in the budget that is before us? They propose cutting it 30 percent. Can you imagine what it is going to be like to try to get around this country if you go out and cut transportation 30 percent? Anybody who has driven on any of the roads across America, certainly the roads in any of the major cities, anybody who has gone through any of the airports, anybody who has gone on a rail system in this country, you think we are going to be better off if we cut the funding 30 percent? That is exactly what the Republican budget that is before us proposes.

We also know one of the near-term threats to the economy is what is happening to the price of gasoline. Since December of 2008, gasoline has gone from \$1.81 a gallon to \$3.85 on May 23—up \$2 a gallon.

Every economist has said this is hurting the economic recovery in this country. What do our colleagues in the House send us as a budget for energy, things that can be done to reduce our dependence on foreign energy? They cut it 57 percent—57 percent cut in the strategies designed to reduce our dependence on foreign energy—cut it 57 percent.

It does not add up. It does not make sense. It is not in the mainstream of thinking. This is a budget that if we poll the constituent elements, the American people, they reject it out of hand. They do not believe Medicare should be shredded. They do not believe that those who are the most fortunate among us ought to be given more tax reductions at this time.

With record deficits and a debt growing out of control, the first to be done is not to say to those earning over \$1 million a year: You get a \$200,000 tax cut; to those earning over \$10 million a year: You get a tax reduction of \$1,450,000 and then to turn around and slash much of what helps middle-class families in this country, whether it is education or infrastructure or transportation. That is the budget that is before us from our colleagues on the other side of the aisle.

We have other budget plans, the Paul budget plan, the Toomey budget plan. I will comment on those later. But I very much hope colleagues are listening, that they pay close attention to this debate, that they have a chance to evaluate what should be the position of this Chamber when we vote later this evening.

I believe this is a defining vote for this Chamber. Are we going to approve a budget that is truly radical in its scope and dimension, that fundamentally ends Medicare as we know it, and at the same time gives massive new tax cuts to the wealthiest among us? At a time when we are having the lowest revenue in 60 years, that cutting the

revenue of the United States by over \$1 trillion to give additional tax reductions to those who have already enjoyed dramatic tax reductions—I pointed out early in my presentation, the effective tax rate on those who are the wealthiest among us has declined dramatically during the recent years.

This proposal from the House of Representatives says: We will do even more to reduce the tax load on those who are the wealthiest among us. I do not think it adds up. Let me say to those who think: Well, at least the Ryan budget—the Republican budget—will reduce our deficits and get our debt back on track, we will solve that problem. Let me leave you with one number. The Republican budget from the House of Representatives that we will vote on later today increases the gross debt of the United States by \$8 trillion.

So anybody who thinks that shredding Medicare and giving these giant tax breaks to the wealthiest among us is going to solve the problem, that it is going to stop the explosion of debt is wrong. In the budget before us, the Republican budget from the House of Representatives, the gross debt of the United States in the next 10 years is increased by \$8 trillion.

For those who think the debt is already too high, you want to vote for a plan that is going to increase the debt, the gross debt of the United States another \$8 trillion? That is the Republican plan from the House of Representatives. That is the budget that is before us. That is the budget we are going to vote on later this evening.

I ask unanimous consent that following my remarks, Senator MERKLEY be recognized for up to 5 minutes and then Senator SANDERS be recognized for up to 5 minutes as well.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SANDERS). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. CONRAD. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. MERKLEY. The American middle class is hurting. Workers are unemployed. Families are losing their homes. Parents are worried, for good reason, that their children will not have the same opportunity they had.

American people have sent us to do a simple agenda of creating jobs. They want a plan that will put our economy back on track and build a foundation for our working families to succeed.

The Republicans have produced a plan, a plan that is in consideration before us today. But is it a plan that responds to the pleas of the American people to create jobs and to help those Americans who are out of work and to put this economy back on track? The short answer is, unfortunately, it is not.

Perhaps it is a plan to invest in education. But then we look at the details and realize it savages the investment in education. Here we are as the first generation of American adults whose children are getting less education

than we got, primarily because the cost of tuition is outpacing the average wages that working families earn. That is unacceptable.

Perhaps the Republican budget decides to invest in infrastructure. I just came back from China with the majority leader and a delegation of 10 Senators and here is what we learned. China is investing 10 to 12 percent of its GDP in infrastructure. Europe is investing 5 percent. America is investing 2 percent. We are barely able to repair the infrastructure we have let alone add additional infrastructure for our economy to thrive in the future. But the Republican plan does not invest in infrastructure.

Perhaps it invests in energy, recognizing that we are sending \$1 billion a day overseas, that oil and our addiction to oil is half of our trade deficit, that both for national security and for strength of our economy and for a sustainable environment, we need to change this.

But, no, the Republican budget sustains our addiction to oil and withdraws our investment in American—red, white, and blue American-made energy.

Perhaps the Republican budget has paid attention to our Secretary of Defense who has listed \$175 billion in programs that are not enhancing our national security and therefore should be cut. But, no, the Republican budget paid no attention to that, and, in fact, increased and overrode the vision laid out by the Secretary of Defense.

So at a time when our middle class is struggling to get back to their feet, the Republicans did not address education or infrastructure or energy or defense but instead chose to do two things: end Medicare as we know it and give bonus breaks to the best off in our society—take away from seniors across America and give to those who earn more than \$1 million a year and a whole lot more to those who earn more than \$10 million a year.

That is the Republican plan. In the Medicare side, there are two components. The first is to reopen the doughnut hole. That is the hole into which seniors fall when, after they have some assistance with the first drugs they need, they get no assistance until they reach a catastrophic level. It is in that hole that seniors have been devastated—had their finances devastated. We fixed it. Republicans want to unfix it and throw seniors back into the abyss.

Then, instead of guaranteeing Medicare coverage for a fixed set of benefits for every senior—as Medicare does now—the Republican plan gives seniors a coupon and says: Good luck. Go buy your insurance. If the insurance goes up, too bad.

In fact, seniors would pay \$6,359 more a year. In my working-class community, that is real money. That is money senior families do not have. That is money families do not have because they are wrestling just to pay their

basic expenses through Social Security.

It is not the folks with golden parachutes who have multimillion dollar endowments from their previous work at the top of the economic pyramid. Most do not realize that \$6,000 will devastate the family budgets of our seniors across this country.

Indeed, under the Republican plan, whereas seniors contribute 25 percent of their health care costs today, they would, by 2030, pay 68 percent, more than two-thirds—more than two-thirds. That is devastating.

Indeed, this voucher plan from our colleagues across the aisle puts an insurance company bureaucrat in the middle of our medical decisions, telling seniors what they get to have and what they do not get to have. The bottom line is that if something is good for your health, the insurance company does not want to pay for it, does not want to put it in the policy, that is too bad.

One of Oregon's larger insurers is planning a 24-percent increase in the cost of health care next year—premiums up by 24 percent. Seniors' coupons, under the Republican plan, are perhaps 2 percent. So that does not work.

Colleagues, our citizens have sent us to create jobs, not to destroy the lives of our seniors and hand the funds over to the best off in our society. Let's come back to planet Earth, recognize we are here to fight for an economy that raises working families and let's defeat this budget tonight.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont is recognized.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent for an additional 2 minutes, and I thank my friend from Alabama.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CONRAD). Is there objection? Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, let me begin by saying that I get a little bit tired of being lectured to about deficit reduction and how significant a problem our deficit is by many folks who voted for legislation time after time over the last 10 years that, in fact, has caused the deficit crisis we are in right now.

Some of us voted against the war in Iraq, which will end up costing \$2 trillion to \$3 trillion, unpaid for. Some of us voted against the Wall Street bailout. Some of us voted against tax breaks for millionaires and billionaires. Some of us voted against the Medicare Part D prescription drug program written by the insurance companies. Those four programs have resulted in trillions of dollars in debt. To those people who voted for that, please don't lecture us about the deficit crisis. We didn't help to cause it.

The debate over deficit reduction comes at a very unusual moment in American economic history. While the middle class is in rapid decline, while

real median family income is going down, while wages for millions of workers are going down, while poverty is increasing, we also are at a moment when the wealthiest people in this country have never had it so good. Over a recent 25-year period, 80 percent of all new income went to the top 1 percent.

Today, as a nation with the most unequal distribution of wealth and income of any major country, we have the 400 wealthiest people in America—just 400 people—owning more wealth than the bottom 125 million. When we deal with deficit reduction, we have to take into consideration the decline of the middle class, the increase in poverty, and the growing disparity in income and wealth between the people on top and everybody else.

Given the reality of record-breaking corporate profits and the increasing wealth of the people on top, it should surprise no one that poll after poll shows that the overwhelming majority of Americans want our deficit crisis to be addressed through shared sacrifice—not just coming down heavily on working families and the middle class, the children, the sick, and the elderly. The American people, in poll after poll, have said they want everybody to contribute and help toward deficit reduction, not just the most vulnerable people in this society.

Unfortunately, the House-passed budget moves us in exactly the wrong direction. It would end Medicare as we know it by giving senior citizens inadequate vouchers to buy health insurance from private companies. Seniors would, on average, see their out-of-pocket expenses double by about \$6,000 a year. Seniors at the age of 65 would be given an \$8,000 voucher to go to a private insurance company.

Now, you tell me—if you are 65 and you are suffering with cancer or another illness—what an \$8,000 plan will do for you. It would be a disaster.

Furthermore, the Republican plan would cut, over 10 years, \$770 billion from Medicaid, vastly increasing the number of uninsured and threatening the long-term care of the elderly who live in nursing homes.

The Republican budget would also make savage cuts in education, nutrition, affordable housing, infrastructure, environmental protection, and virtually every program on which low- and moderate-income Americans depend. With all of the focus on spending cuts, however, the Republican budget does nothing to reduce unnecessary military spending at a time when our military budget is triple what it was in 1997.

What people in Vermont tell me is what people in Oregon are telling the Presiding Officer—that the time is now to begin accelerating our troops out of Afghanistan. It is the right thing to do public policy-wise, and it is certainly the right thing to do for our budget.

Here is the kicker of this whole thing: The House Republican budget

does not ask the wealthiest people in this country, whose tax rates are now the lowest on record, to contribute one dime more for deficit reduction—not one dime more. Yet we can voucherize Medicare, slash Medicaid, education, infrastructure, and environmental protection, but to ask the wealthiest people in this country to pay one penny more in taxes after they receive hundreds of millions of dollars in tax breaks, my goodness, we can't do that.

I have another issue—and not just with the Republicans. It has to do, frankly, with the Democrats and with President Obama. Will the President demand that any deficit reduction agreement end the Bush-era tax breaks for the wealthy? Will he stand up and be tall and fight for that important principle? Will the President fight to eliminate corporate tax loopholes? Will he end the absurd policies that allow the wealthy and large corporations to avoid taxes by establishing phony addresses in offshore tax havens? We are losing about \$100 billion a year from the corporations and the wealthy who stash their money in the Cayman Islands and Bermuda.

My hope is—and I think the American people are hoping—that the President will stand firm in fighting to end those absurd loopholes. As a Vermont Senator and a member of the Budget Committee, I will not support a plan to reduce the deficit that does not call for shared sacrifice. At least 50 percent of any deficit reduction plan must come from increased revenue from the wealthy and large corporations. We must have the top 2 percent of income earners, who currently pay the lowest upper income tax rates on record, start paying their fair share. Instead of making it harder for working families to send their kids to college, we must end the foreign tax shelters that enable the wealthy and large corporations to avoid U.S. taxes.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MERKLEY). The majority leader.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Republicans have 2 additional minutes.

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

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I am going to use my leader time, and I ask unanimous consent that time not take anything away from the debate on the budget.

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

Mr. REID. Mr. President, the national security of the United States is at stake, and the junior Senator from Kentucky is complaining that he has not been able to offer amendments.

Let me take a moment to set the record straight. As all of us and the Senator from Kentucky are well aware, we have worked long and hard in good faith to get an agreement to consider amendments. In fact, I offered him a solution that is more than fair. I proposed a consent agreement that would

have brought before the Senate six amendments, more than half of which—specifically four—were written by the Senator from Kentucky.

Unfortunately, in order to continue his political grandstanding, he rejected that offer.

It is unfortunate because the inability to reach an agreement has serious consequences. At midnight tomorrow, the PATRIOT Act will expire. Unless the Senator from Kentucky stops standing in the way, our law enforcement will no longer be able to use some of the most critical tools it needs to counter terrorists and combat terrorism.

If they cannot use these tools—tools that identify and track terrorist suspects—it could have dire consequences for our national security.

When the clock strikes midnight tomorrow, we would be giving terrorists the opportunity to plot attacks against our country, undetected. In the last several years, the government has stopped dozens of would-be terrorists before they could strike. Now the Senator from Kentucky is threatening to take away the best tools we have for stopping them.

Does this mean the PATRIOT Act is perfect? Of course not. Today, the Republican leader and I received a letter from James Clapper, a three-star retired general from the U.S. military, the Nation's Director of National Intelligence. He knows better than any of us the real effects of letting terrorist-fighting tools expire. In his letter, he wrote about our ability to conduct surveillance on foreign radicals, to track purchases of bombmaking materials, and other classified programs. All of these would expire with the PATRIOT Act, if we let it.

This is a particularly bad time to shut down electronic surveillance activities. As has been widely reported in the press, we recovered thousands of documents, photos, videos and other materials from Osama bin Laden's compound. This material has opened dozens of investigations and leads to new terrorist suspects and terrorist activities directed toward the United States of America. It continues to yield more and more information every day.

If the Senator from Kentucky refuses to relent, the government will be unable to fully pursue these leads. That would increase the risk of a retaliatory terrorist strike against the homeland and hamper our ability to deal a truly fatal blow to al-Qaida.

I repeat, Director Clapper, a retired three-star general, asked us not to allow a moment's interruption in the intelligence community's ability to protect the American people.

Some may be asking: Then why is the Senator from Kentucky holding out? What is keeping him from accepting an agreement to move forward—one that I think is more than fair to him and the Senate? We could have a couple of strong Democratic amendments and his amendment—four in

number. The reason is, he is fighting for an amendment to protect the right of terrorists, not of average citizens, to cover up their gun purchases. It is all dealing with a gun amendment.

We all remember the tragic Fort Hood shooting less than 2 years ago. A radicalized American terrorist bought guns from a Texas gun store and used them to kill 13 innocent soldiers and civilians. It is hard to imagine why the Senator from Kentucky would want to hold up the PATRIOT Act for a misguided amendment that would make America far less safe.

The Senator from Kentucky also complains that the Senate has not had a week of debate. We all would like to have more debate on this issue. The Presiding Officer would. We would like to have a lot of debate on other things. The Presiding Officer is one of the Senators who led an effort earlier in this session to make sure we have more robust debate. We made a little progress but not enough.

The Senator from Kentucky, who is complaining that we haven't had a week of debate, better come up with something a little better. Here is why. This matter has been before the Senate for 1 week now. I moved to proceed to the PATRIOT Act last Thursday. Today is Wednesday. As of today the Senate has been working toward passing this measure for 6 or 7 days. There is no question that Senators have had the opportunity to debate. The only question has been how Senators have chosen to use these last 6 days.

The bottom line is that no matter how long it takes to get there, we are going to have this vote, and the vote will win. We will pass the PATRIOT Act and do everything we can to keep the American people safe. It is up to the Senator from Kentucky whether those national security programs will expire before we get a chance to vote. That expiration date is important. If he thinks it is going to be a badge of courage on his side to have held this up for a few hours, he has made a mistake. It will set this program back significantly, and that is too bad. The clock is ticking, and the ball is in his court.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alabama is recognized.

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, I appreciate the difficulties the majority leader has and would agree substantively that the PATRIOT Act does need to be passed. It doesn't need to have any gap in it. As a former Federal prosecutor for 15 years, I agree that the Paul amendment to make our terrorist investigators go further and have more difficulty in obtaining gun records than the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms investigators for far more minor crimes is a bad policy. I see where he is coming from, but I don't agree with that.

I would say that Senator PAUL is a courageous, strong, new Member of the Senate. He has some deep beliefs. He is entitled to advocate for those. I believe he has tried to do that in good faith. He

thought he had an agreement to be able to offer his amendment, and the majority leader suggested he could offer amendments, but only the ones he approved, and he won't approve the one on guns.

I think that is not healthy, in the defense of Senator PAUL, that he would not have an opportunity to offer the amendment he wants to offer, not the one that is approved in advance by the majority leader. I think, to the extent that happens, it diminishes the great robust tradition of debate in the Senate. It is a difficult matter. I know people feel strongly about it. I wanted to share those thoughts.

THE BUDGET

My good friend Senator CONRAD, who chairs the Budget Committee, made his speech. I was disappointed in some of it. He said one thing very dramatic in his statement. We should think about it. He said the Ryan budget is insufficient because it allows \$8 trillion in new debt to be incurred by the United States over the next 10 years. Think about that. He says that is unthinkable and it really is dramatic that we would have that much debt accrue.

The only budget that exists from the Democratic majority is the President's budget. The President's budget, as analyzed by the Congressional Budget Office, without any doubt or dispute would add \$13 trillion to the debt of the United States in 10 years. They conclude that the President's budget—the one that was praised by the Democrats when it came out—would increase the debt, increase spending, and increase taxes more than if we did nothing. I call it the most irresponsible budget ever to be introduced because it makes our debt situation worse at a time in which we have never faced a more serious systemic debt crisis in America.

Senator CONRAD says Federal education spending, which is basically the Department of Education and some other programs, should not have its funding reduced. He did not acknowledge the fact that the President's budget proposes to increase education spending through the Department of Education by 10.5 percent next year, at a time when we are in record deficits. The Department of Energy is proposed to receive a 9.5-percent increase. The Department of State is proposed to receive a 10.5-percent increase. The Department of Transportation, with a phantom assumption of revenue from a source unidentified by the administration, is projected to receive a 60-percent increase to fund new high-speed rail and other priorities that have not been proven to be effective today. Even if they are effective, we do not have the money. Sometimes you cannot do things you would like to do because you do not have the money. To that extent, I would say we are on the wrong track.

Let me say about Congressman RYAN's budget proposal that it does significantly reduce spending every year. It completely changes the debt

trajectory. It reduces spending and deficits every year. It does not get to a balance in 10 years, but it eventually gets to a balance in the outyears, according to their projections. Of course, intervening Congresses will have much to say about it. It does change the debt trajectory, and it does put us on the right path. If passed, in my opinion, it would be the kind of budget that would create confidence in the international markets, create jobs and growth in America, create vitality in our businesses, and it is something that would be better than doing nothing and absolutely better than the inexcusable budget that has been presented by the Democrats—the only one they have presented so far.

I wanted to make those points.

Madam President, the simple fact is that the American people are furious with Washington. And they have every right to be. They work hard, pay their taxes, and play by the rules. They sacrifice for their families, contribute to their communities, and uphold this Nation's values. They have built up the greatest, most dynamic economy on the face of the Earth. But Washington has wasted their tax dollars, eroded our values, and placed this Nation's economy at grave risk.

Politicians have arrogantly believed that the rules don't apply to them. In the midst of a deep recession, as American families tightened their belts, Washington went on a historic spending spree. By the end of the first 3 fiscal years of the Obama administration, we will have accumulated another \$5 trillion in total gross debt. Our deficit this year alone will approach \$1½ trillion. Our annual budget has nearly doubled from what it was at the beginning of the decade.

This enormous surging debt prompted the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to describe it as the greatest threat to our national security. At \$14 trillion it hovers over our economy like a dark cloud. It undermines confidence and fosters uncertainty. Studies show our crushing debt stifles job growth and robs us of as many as one million jobs a year.

We borrow \$5 billion a day, \$100 billion a month and, under the president's vision, we are on track to do the unthinkable: doubling our entire national debt in just 10 years. We are faced with what has rightly been called the most predictable economy crisis in our history. The question is not whether such a crisis will occur but whether we act in time to prevent it.

A major financial crisis is not just some hypothetical danger: it is very real and it is very serious. If the world loses confidence in our ability to control our spending and debt, our interest rates could dramatically spike. Greece saw its interest rates triple before its debt crisis hit. The rates for Ireland and Portugal quadrupled.

If the same were to happen to the United States we could become unable to pay the interest on our debt and face

a Greece-like debt crisis that plunges our country into a deep recession. This would not be some distant financial event, but an economic disaster felt most severely by everyday working Americans.

There is no reason we should be in this situation. America's workforce is the most productive on Earth. Our system of government is the envy of the world. But those who occupy the halls of power have failed to uphold the public trust. They have squandered this Nation's wealth and threatened our children's future.

So, again, the American people have every right to be furious.

They rose up in the last election and the big spenders in Washington took a shellacking. We saw the emergence of the Tea Party a diverse collection of Americans spread across the country who, after years of sitting silent, spoke out for the first time in their lives. They are good and decent patriotic Americans who fear for their country and for the future their children will inherit.

Their concerns are shared by the vast majority of Americans. Overall, more than 70 percent of Americans believe this country is on the wrong track.

To get back on the right track requires strong leadership. I have continued to hope that President Obama would rally the country behind needed reform. Unfortunately, the president seems determined to not only keep our country on its dangerous course but to accelerate our pace. He offered a budget in February a budget many Democrats praised that he and his budget director declared to the whole world would "not add more to the debt," "spend only money that we have each year," and "live within our means." But those statements were not honest. The President's budget never once produces a deficit less than \$748 billion. And the deficits climb to \$1.2 trillion in the 10th year.

And what about the Senate? What is this august body doing to confront this crisis? Is the Budget Committee meeting to work on a plan? Is there a Senate budget being considered on the floor today? Will we be amending a resolution on the Senate floor?

The answer to all of these questions is no. Today is the 756th day since the Democrat-led Senate passed a budget. In that time Congress has spent more than \$7 trillion. We have accumulated another \$3.2 trillion in debt. What do we have to show for it? Unemployment stuck around 9 percent, anemic economic growth, and the very real threat of a debt crisis.

But Majority Leader REID and the big spenders in the Democrat Party are determined to keep spending and spending and spending. The reason we have not seen a budget from Chairman CONRAD and the Democrat Senate is because they know that they can't put forward a plan that wins the support both of their caucus and of the American people. News reports confirmed

that budget proposal Senate Democrats were working on and then abandoned relied more heavily on taxes than savings. It would have cut only \$1.5 trillion over 10 years. That doesn't even come close to what we need to cut. We are going to spend \$45 trillion over the next 10 years. Our national debt will be 100 percent of GDP by the end of September.

House Republicans have stepped forward, fulfilled the duty they asked the American people to bestow on them, and presented an honest, courageous plan that will get the job done. It will save, or cut, around \$6 trillion. But Leader REID wants to use our floor time this week to simply vote down this plan while offering nothing in its place. He just wants to keep spending and spending and spending.

He is simply trying to remove himself from the spotlight that should be directed on the inability or unwillingness of his caucus to deliver a budget plan to the American people.

But the majority leader is more than happy to go into recess, more than 750 days since the Senate has passed a budget, and simply be content to have obstructed every single effort to reduce spending or impose budgetary control. He is content, it would seem, to send this Chamber into recess after he has failed miserably to protect this Nation from the financial danger ahead. He says "there's no need to have a Democratic budget." He says it would be "foolish" to present one. So we will just keep spending and spending and spending.

What is the real strategy here? The Democrat strategy is just to attack, vilify, and disparage House Republicans because they did the honorable thing and put forward an honest plan. Here is what Senator SCHUMER said earlier this week, speaking of today's votes:

We will exhibit this issue as an example of why we need to keep the Senate Democratic in order to counter House Republicans. We will point to this week and say the Republicans tried to end Medicare but a Democratic majority stopped it in the Senate. It's that simple.

Medicare is going to be insolvent in about 10 years. House Republicans have a plan to save it. People may disagree on aspects of that plan, may have different ideas for implementation. But the House Republican plan will save Medicare. The Democrat Senate plan is to allow Medicare to go bust and to waste the Senate's time savaging the House Republican plan with a series of false, dishonest attacks. The Democrat Senate plan is to ignore the danger and just keep spending and spending and spending.

Chairman CONRAD, I am sad to say, called the House Republican plan "ideological," "partisan," "unreasonable," and "draconian." I was surprised to hear this given that the chairman served on the fiscal commission, which issued the following statement in the preamble to its report:

In the weeks and months to come, countless advocacy groups and special interests will try mightily through expensive, dramatic, and heart-wrenching media assaults to exempt themselves from shared sacrifice and common purpose. The national interest, not special interests, must prevail. We urge leaders and citizens with principled concerns about any of our recommendations to follow what we call the Becerra Rule: Don't shoot down an idea without offering a better idea in its place.

So after this week's mockery, what is next for the Senate? We will promptly adjourn for recess. The Senate will adjourn for Memorial Day—a time when we honor those who have kept this country safe. But the Senate has done nothing to protect this country from the economic danger that draws nearer each day.

If, after this shameful display, Majority Leader REID wants to adjourn for recess, all I can say is this: not with my consent. I will force a vote on it. Senate Democrats will have to stand before the American people, having more than 750 days since passing a budget, and declare that they will go into a 1-week vacation having not taken a single, solitary step to address our Nation's fiscal crisis. They have not even allowed the Budget Committee to meet.

We are told we don't need public meetings, that a small group of lawmakers and White House officials should meet in secret to hammer out some 11th hour deal that nobody sees or scrutinizes until it is adopted. Well, it is that kind of thinking that got us here in the first place. What this process needs is more sunlight, not less. First, we were told to wait for the Gang of Six. Now we are to supposed to wait for the Biden talks. But at what point will we just do our duty under the law and work on a budget? I firmly believe that the best way out of this debt crisis is to have an open, honest, and public debate.

The one thing we haven't tried in this town is the one thing that I know will work: to have an open, transparent process before the whole world. Let's speak honestly about the dangers we face. Let's put forward a plan in the Senate to address those dangers. Let's open that plan to amendment and discussion. Let's stand and be counted before the American people. If Democrats think the way out of this crisis is to raise taxes, let them put that plan on paper and let's debate it. But enough operating in the shadows. Enough hiding. Enough ducking. Let's do the people's work. Let's give the American people the honest process and the honest budget they deserve.

We also need a budget that is based on facts. All of the evidence shows that deficit reduction plans relying on heavy tax increases are far less successful and result in far less prosperity. Though raising taxes is billed as the compassionate choice, there is nothing compassionate about weakening our economy and bankrupting our country. There is nothing compassionate about

dividing up an ever smaller amount of wealth. There is nothing compassionate about ignoring the facts, the evidence, and the lessons of history. A compassionate budget is one that improves the fortunes for every sector of American society—creating jobs, increasing wages, and expanding opportunity.

In other words, we must focus on growing the economy instead of the government. That is the only way to ensure that America is able to compete, to lead and to thrive in the 21st century.

An honest budget is one that not only puts our budget on a path to balance but our country on a path to balance. In other words, we need a budget that shifts the balance of power from Washington back to the people.

At its core, the debate over our Nation's debt is a debate over our Nation's identity. In his recent speech on the deficit, the president spoke of America's social compact to justify his big-government vision. But the social compact I am familiar with is very different. The American idea is that the government's role is to preserve our liberty, not control our lives.

Ultimately, what we are fighting for is a future for our children that is free from both the burden of debt and the burden of big government. I was not elected to this office to participate in the transformation of America to a European-style social democracy where government dominates our lives.

America's greatness is not found in the size of our government but in the scope of our freedoms. We need a budget that recognizes this essential truth.

I see my colleague Senator PAUL is here. I know he would like to take 5 minutes to respond to the majority leader. He is definitely entitled to that.

I ask unanimous consent that he be given 5 minutes, Mr. President, and that the 5 minutes not count against the time on this side.

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

The Senator from Kentucky.

Mr. PAUL. Mr. President, I rise in response to a scurrilous accusation. I have been accused of wanting to allow terrorists who attack America to have weapons. To be attacked of such a belief when I am here to discuss and debate the constitutionality of the PATRIOT Act is offensive. I find it personally insulting, and I think it demeans the body—it demeans the Senate body and the people that we cannot have an intelligent debate over the constitutionality of this bill.

I am somehow to be told that because I believe a judge should sign a warrant, that I am in favor of terrorists having weapons? The absurdity of it. The insult of it. If one argues that judges should sign warrants before they go into the house of an alleged murderer, are you in favor of murder? Can we not have a debate on a higher plane—a debate over whether there should be some constitutional protections, some con-

stitutional procedure—than to come to the floor and accuse me of being in favor of giving weapons to terrorists?

The question is, Can our Constitution withstand, is our Constitution strong enough that we could actually capture terrorists and protect our liberties at the same time? Should we have some rules that say, before they come into your house, before they go into your banking records, that a judge should be asked for permission; that there should be judicial review? Do we want a lawless land? Do we want a land that is so much without restraint, a government without restraint, that at any point in time they can come into your house? We were very worried about that very thing. That is why our country was founded on such principles as the fourth amendment, to protect us from an overzealous government.

But to transfer an argument, where good people might disagree, into an accusation that I would let terrorists have weapons? No, I believe we would stop terrorism but do it in a constitutional fashion, where one would have a warrant issued by a judge.

Some people say, we don't have enough time to do that. At 3 in the morning, judges are routinely called when someone is accused of rape or accused of murder. When there is an alleged crime, we get warrants, and it works. It has worked for 225 years, until we decided to throw out the Constitution. We threw out the Constitution with the PATRIOT Act because we changed the Constitution—not by two-thirds in this body voting for it and not by three-fourths of the States but by a scared 51 percent who threw out their liberties. They said: Make me safe. Make me safe. I am afraid. Make me safe. But they gave up their liberties.

I think that was a mistake, and I think we should have an intelligent and rational discussion. I don't think it furthers the debate to accuse someone who has constitutional concerns about the way we are doing things of being in favor of putting weapons into the hands of terrorists. I object strongly to this.

The leader has said they will compromise. He said 1 week of debate in February and open amendments; that they would be open to amendments—even amendments they disagreed with. We will do whatever people feel is appropriate on this bill. That doesn't mean just amendments that are not emotional or just amendments that have nothing to do with guns.

They are petrified to vote on issues over guns because they know a lot of people in America favor the second amendment; that they own guns and want to protect that right to own guns and the right to have those records not sifted through by the government. We don't want to have a government that eventually will allow for direction of the police toward those who own guns. We don't want our records to be public. We don't want our records to be sifted through by a government without judi-

cial review. But they do not want to vote on this because they know the American people agree with us. If we polled this question, we would find 80 to 90 percent of Americans don't want their banking records, don't want their gun records to be sifted through by a government without a judge ever giving any approval.

This is a constitutional question, and I would ask the leader to stand by his agreement to an open amendment process.

At this time, I ask unanimous consent that my amendments, Nos. 363, 365, and 368, be in order, with 1 hour of debate on each, followed by a rollcall vote. I ask unanimous consent that this occur at this time.

Mr. REID. Madam President, reserving the right to object, and, of course, as the Senator knows, I have given a statement on the floor that one amendment I understand is in his consent makes this whole arrangement impossible, and so, therefore, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. HAGAN). Objection is heard. Who yields time?

The Senator from Alabama.

Mr. SESSIONS. Madam President, I yield Senator AYOTTE up to 10 minutes or such time as she may consume.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Hampshire.

Ms. AYOTTE. Madam President, today marks the 756th day since the Democrat-controlled Senate passed a budget. The Democratic majority has abdicated a basic responsibility we have in our government; that is, to produce a budget. States produce a budget, cities and towns produce a budget, small businesses don't operate without a budget, and families produce a budget. Yet here we are, running over a \$1.6 trillion deficit this year alone, and the Democratic-controlled majority is not bringing forth a budget or a blueprint to put our country on a path to fiscal responsibility. It seems to me, if we do nothing else, that is a basic responsibility we have as Members of the Senate.

On Monday, all Republican Senators joined Senator SESSIONS and me in sending a letter to the majority leader, urging him to take the steps necessary to bring forward a fiscal year 2012 budget in committee, to have a full, honest debate there and then on to the floor to make sure we have a transparent budget debate so the American people can weigh in on that and we can move forward to putting our country on a fiscally responsible path.

As a reminder, the committee should have acted on the budget resolution before the statutorily-set deadline of April 1, and Congress should have completed that action by April 15. Yet, unfortunately, the majority in the budget committee and the majority leader has ignored that law. The reality is, the majority party controls the work flow in the Budget Committee and determines what is debated on the floor.

Given the enormity of the obvious fiscal challenges we face, there is no excuse for why my Democratic colleagues have not been able to have a transparent, serious debate about our country's fiscal future both in the Budget Committee and on this floor. The American people demand that and are owed nothing less.

Unfortunately, instead of coming up with a budget blueprint that puts us on a path to sustainability, many of my Democratic colleagues have primarily focused their efforts on distorting provisions of the House-passed budget plan, trying to score political points while our country's economic future becomes even more precarious. We have seen the warning signs for our country in other countries around the world, as well as the S&P's recent announcement of a negative outlook for the United States.

Astoundingly, last week, the majority leader said it would be foolish for his party to produce a budget plan. In talking directly with my constituents in New Hampshire, I can say with certainty that is the last word they would use to describe the Senate's refusal to have their own budget plan and to have a full and robust debate within the Budget Committee and within this body about the fiscal plan for our country's future. That is the last word they would use because they sit around their kitchen tables at home and they put together a budget. They look at the revenue coming in and the expenses they have and they balance their budgets. They have no idea why we are not doing that here. That fundamental responsibility is, unfortunately, what the majority leader has described as foolish, even though it is an exercise that families undertake every single day.

Last year, Congress failed to pass a budget, failed to pass any of the 12 annual appropriations bills and failed the Nation by recklessly funding the government on a series of short-term spending bills. The Senate cannot make the same mistake we made last year—a mistake that was made by the Democratically controlled Congress this year, given the fiscal path our country is on. With less than 6 months remaining until the start of the new fiscal year, it is past time for the Senate to produce a basic budget plan that substantively addresses our grave fiscal crisis.

We need leadership and I call on the majority leader to show that leadership and the chairman of the Budget Committee to bring forth a budget in our Senate committee. I am a brand new member of the Budget Committee. I look forward to having that debate in that very important committee in our body, to work together with Members on both sides of the aisle to craft a responsible budget plan that reduces spending and brings us to a balanced budget. That is what our country needs.

In the letter that was sent to the majority leader, Republicans made clear

we are ready to make the difficult choices to preserve our country and to get our fiscal house in order once and for all. We stand ready to preserve the greatest country in the world. There is no question that the budget process is broken when we don't even have a budget brought forth before the Budget Committee and a full and robust debate in this body.

Congress must get serious about putting in place spending reforms. I would like to see a balanced budget amendment to our Constitution, to make sure Congress can't get around any spending reforms we pass. States balance their budgets. Yet here in Washington we continue to spend money we do not have, unfortunately.

Congressman RYAN, in the House, has proposed, and the House has passed, a budget blueprint for our country. Yet my friends on the other side of the aisle have spent considerable time demagoguing the House budget blueprint and their plan, even though they have shown the courage to put forth a budget that puts us on a path to reduce spending and eventually bring us to a balanced budget. My Democratic colleagues have brought out the usual scare tactics. But for all their grandstanding, they haven't been straight with the American people.

We do need to address entitlement reform. We do need to make changes to Medicare—to preserve Medicare for those who are relying on Medicare right now and for future generations. I am the mother of two children, and I certainly don't want to look my children in the eyes—with the fiscal crisis our country is facing—and have them say to me: Mom, what did you do about this?

Now is the time to act. We have three choices when it comes to addressing rising health care costs in Medicare. We can do nothing and watch the program go bankrupt in 2024, as outlined by the recent trustees' report on Medicare—an objective report that basically says that program will go bankrupt by 2024. We can go forward with the President's proposal to ration care through the administration's plan to have an unelected board of 15 bureaucrats who will decide who is going to get coverage, when they are going to get coverage, and how physicians are going to get paid or we can show real leadership and strengthen the program to make it solvent for current beneficiaries and also for future beneficiaries and allow them to make the choices, instead of an unelected group of 15 individuals who are accountable not to Congress and certainly not to the people whose lives will be affected.

I commend Congressman RYAN for his courage. I challenge anyone, including the Members on the other side of the aisle who have been so critical of the plan: Where is your plan? What is your constructive plan to save Medicare? How do you go home to your constituents, your elderly constituents—people such as my grandparents who

are relying on Medicare—knowing that the trustees' report says it is going bankrupt in 2024—and say to them: I don't have a plan.

A constructive plan to preserve this program is important. It is what Republicans are committed to. We are here to save Medicare, to save our entitlement programs, and most of all, to save our country from financial ruin. Now is the time for leadership. It is time to look at the challenges we face with eyes wide open and to have the courage to fight for the American people and for the future of the greatest country in the world. We cannot afford to kick this can down the road.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Hampshire has consumed 10 minutes.

Ms. AYOTTE. I thank the Chair. If I may finish. I thank my colleague, Senator SESSIONS.

We cannot afford to kick this can down the road any further. We must act now. We must address our entitlement programs now. I would call on the majority leader and on Senate Democrats—rather than demagoguing the plan that has come forward from the House, if you have a constructive plan of your own—to please come to the floor right now and bring forth a plan that will preserve Medicare, will preserve our entitlement programs, and put us on a path to fiscal responsibility and sustainability, to a balanced budget to save our country.

I thank the Chair.

Mr. SESSIONS. Madam President, before the Senator departs, I thank her for her comments and her valuable and constructive insights. I would ask her about one thing. I know a lot of our new Members came to Congress, having campaigned and talked to people all over their States, with a passion to do something about the unsustainable spending path we are on. We had a large number who wanted to be on the Budget Committee, and we are glad she just joined us.

But let me ask, is it a disappointment to get on the Budget Committee, which the law says should write a budget and have hearings on the budget, and then to find the majority leader has decided not to even allow a budget hearing to take place?

Ms. AYOTTE. I thank the Senator from Alabama for that question. As the newest member of the Budget Committee, it is an extreme disappointment. I was looking forward to rolling up my sleeves and undertaking the responsibilities of putting forth a responsible budget to preserve our country. That is why I wanted to serve on the Budget Committee.

I come from a small business family. I know one can't operate a business without a budget. So many of my constituents and those I met on the campaign trail asked me all the time: I have no idea, how can we operate a government without a budget? Yet here we are. That is what has been so disappointing to me. I hope and I urge

our Democratic colleagues to change course and let the Budget Committee do what it is supposed to do.

Mr. SESSIONS. Madam President, I thank Senator AYOTTE of New Hampshire. She is following in the footsteps of a great budget leader, chairman, ranking member, Judd Gregg, and brings those good instincts to the body.

I ask unanimous consent that the following Republican speakers be limited to 10 minutes each. I, at this point, am pleased to recognize my very able and effective colleague, Senator DEMINT, for his comments at this time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered. The Senator from South Carolina.

Mr. DEMINT. Madam President, I thank Senator SESSIONS for leading these few minutes of debate we were allowed. It is an extraordinary situation where we are as a nation, that we are here with only a few minutes of debate about what has become the most serious situation our country has ever faced, and that is our debt.

When President Obama was a Senator in 2006, he said "increasing America's debt weakens us domestically and internationally."

Admiral Mullen, the Chairman of our Joint Chiefs of Staff, has said: "Our biggest national security threat is our debt."

We know the rating agencies that look at our financial condition, such as Standard & Poor's, have downgraded us. We know major capital funds have divested of Treasury notes, concerned about our political will to deal with our debt. Yet we do not have a budget. We do not have any plan to deal with the debt. Everything Republicans put forward in the House and the Senate the Democrats sit on the sidelines and criticize and misrepresent. Yet they offer no solutions themselves.

It is hard to deal with \$14 trillion in debt and what it really means. Here is one chart that is somewhat helpful. We hear in the news that Greece and Ireland and Portugal are bankrupt. They are close to defaulting. They are having to be bailed out by the International Monetary Fund. These charts just show the percent of debt relative to their total economy, their GDP.

We see Greece is already at 136 percent; Ireland is at 75 percent; Portugal, 82 percent. If we add up all the liabilities that we have as a nation, we are already at 95 percent, which means we have more debt relative to our total economy than Portugal and Ireland already, and very soon we are on a track to even outpace Greece. Yet we do not even have a budget, no plan of what to spend.

When Republicans talk about the need to cut spending all we get is criticism. The President has actually submitted a budget that nearly doubles our debt over the next 10 years. We will get a chance to vote on it. Not even the Democrats are going to vote for that budget. But they have not even presented one on their own.

We will also get a chance to vote on the House budget. The Democrats think if we do, that is going to hurt us. But I think we will see most Republicans vote for it because they know we have to deal with Medicare. The President's budget cuts what Medicare pays doctors another 35 percent. Already about 50 percent of the doctors in this country will not see new Medicare patients. The President cut \$½ trillion from Medicare to help pay for ObamaCare and somehow he can look us in the eye and say this strengthened Medicare. The fact is, the Democrats have Medicare on a course of bankruptcy that is going to happen much sooner than is projected because people will not be able to find a doctor if the President's budget is implemented anywhere close to where it is going to be implemented.

Republicans are trying to save Medicare and make sure there are options for seniors in the future that will be good options for them; that they will have a way to pay for health care in the future. Medicare will not be there. Anyone who looks at seniors today and tells seniors that traditional Medicare is going to be there 5 or 10 years from now is not telling the truth because it is not. Doctors will not see Medicare patients at the rate we are going to pay.

All we are doing today is having what we call message votes, show votes. They are set up to fail. The majority leader does not intend to pass any budget—not the President's budget, not a Republican budget, and they will not even offer one on their own. We are going to leave here today with this situation right here: with America approaching a debt level which we have seen take down other countries and continue to ignore the obvious.

As has already been referenced by Senator AYOTTE, the majority leader actually said:

There is no need to have a Democratic budget . . . it would be foolish of us to do a budget at this stage.

It would be foolish because it would reveal what they really intend to do, which is to keep spending and keep borrowing, keep investing, keep growing government programs, and not make those hard decisions that have to be made to pull our country away from the edge of a cliff, which is where we are.

Everyone outside Washington seems to understand that we have an urgent situation right now. Yet here we are today with just these show votes on a budget with no intent of dealing with this at all. What we need to be doing is—recognizing the President has said our debt is our biggest problem, and it is a failure of leadership to ask for an increase in the debt ceiling—we need to recognize we cannot raise this debt ceiling. We cannot increase our debt unless we make the hard decisions that need to be made for the future.

The only decision that will change this place is if we pass a balanced budg-

et requirement for the Congress that the States have to ratify. If we passed that this year before we voted on the debt ceiling, then the people of this country in all 50 States would have a chance to ratify that. It would take 1 year or 2, 3 years to be ratified; then there is another 5 years' implementation built into the bill. So we are talking 6 or 8 years to get to a balanced budget.

If we cannot make that commitment as a Congress, we are in effect committing to bankrupt our country because all of us know we cannot keep spending more than we are bringing in when they are already telling us we are at a debt level that is going to bankrupt our country. We cannot even pay the interest if interest rates go up at all.

We have to be responsible, and what we are doing today is completely irresponsible. I cannot raise the rhetorical level high enough to talk about the absurdity of where we are. We put our country in danger, our future at risk, and yet we are having show votes on budgets and no budget at all from the Democratic majority.

I appreciate the Senator from Alabama at least taking this time that we have to point out the real issues and the urgency of the matter in the fact that we need to move from show to real substance. We cannot roll up our sleeves and work together if the other side does not agree that we have a problem. We do have a problem, and the only way to change that is for us to agree as a Congress to balance our budget within a reasonable window and to put that structure on us so we keep that budget balanced in the future.

I thank Senator SESSIONS and yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Pennsylvania.

Mr. TOOMEY. Madam President, I thank the Senator from Alabama for giving me the opportunity to speak on this extremely important issue. Let me follow up on the central point that Senator DEMINT from South Carolina has been making.

When I go back to Pennsylvania and talk to my constituents about the fact that the Government of the United States, the world's biggest enterprise—an enterprise—is going to spend \$3.6 trillion this year, and we are doing it without a budget, they look at me in shocked disbelief that this could even be possible. But it is possible because my colleagues in the Senate, my Democratic colleagues, refuse to produce a budget. It is an unbelievable abdication of responsibility.

My colleagues have asked the American people to elect them to the Senate, have asked the American people to be the majority party of the Senate, which they are, and their attitude is they have no responsibility to lay out a plan for how they want to spend the \$3.6 trillion that they want to spend. They have no intention of laying out a plan of where the revenue is going to come from, how much is going to come

from which areas, and how this money should be spent—no overall blueprint, no guidelines, no architecture for spending this staggering sum of money. This is an extraordinary abandonment of a very fundamental responsibility.

I have to say, I have a hard time listening to the criticism of the House budget by people who have offered no budget as an alternative.

Let me speak about the House budget for just a minute. It has taken a great deal of criticism from my friends on the other side in particular because 10 years hence, in this budget, they recommend reforms to Medicare that save Medicare. I want to stress this point. The current policies being advocated—not in a budget but advocated elsewhere by my Democratic friends—they are currently in the process of crushing Medicare because that is what is happening.

Talk to your doctors back home, talk to your hospitals. We have small hospitals across Pennsylvania that are increasingly finding it so difficult to operate. Reimbursements are being gradually crushed down. We have this threat that doctors' reimbursements are going to be dramatically cut. We have created in the President's health care overhaul this Independent Payment Advisory Board, as it is called, the purpose of which is to find ways to ratchet down reimbursements for health care providers.

One of the things that breaks my heart is how often I have had the conversation with doctors who tell me, often choking up in the process, they are encouraging their kids to pursue some other line of work, some other profession other than health care, the profession to which they have dedicated their life. But this is the state of affairs that we have today because of where Medicare is and where it is heading.

So the House comes along and offers a plan that saves Medicare, puts it on a viable, sustainable footing for future generations, and they get attacked for it. Is it the perfect plan? Is it the only plan? I am sure it is not. But it would work.

One of the things that makes so much sense about what they are doing is they are altering the payments as a function of people's wealth and health. It makes a lot of sense. So when younger people reach retirement age, they get more financial help from the government if their income is lower and their health is worse, and they get less if they are wealthy and relatively healthy. This mechanism would put individuals in control of their own health care and put the government on a sustainable path.

Frankly, I think we ought to congratulate them for doing some very thoughtful work. I am going to vote for the House plan. The House plan addresses a very long term structural problem we have for our budget and does it in a very thoughtful and sensible way.

I am introducing an alternative budget because I wish to focus on the nearer term. My focus is these next 10 years, because I think we have a crisis staring us right in the face and we have to deal with it now. So I think we have to deal with it in next year's spending and in the immediate future.

A big part of my goal and what we have demonstrated in the budget I have introduced and that we will have a vote on in a little while is that we can balance this budget within 10 years. I think that is a very important goal. My budget accomplishes that with two elements: policies that generate strong economic growth which have all kinds of benefits, not the least of which is it generates more revenue for the Federal Government; and the other part of this is we have to tighten our belt. This government has been spending way too much money. My budget ratchets that back. The combination brings us to balance within 9 years and generates a modest surplus within 10 years. In the process, we dramatically reduce the amount of debt as a percentage of GDP.

We just saw the Senator from South Carolina present a comparison of what a dangerous position we are already in compared to that of other countries that have racked up too much debt as a percentage of their economies. We are following on this very dangerous path. My budget starts to reverse that curve. It starts to lower the debt as a percentage of GDP and, by bringing the budget into balance, it will actually stop growing the debt altogether, which I think is a very important goal. Part of that is through pro-growth tax policies.

No. 1, in this budget we would ask the relevant committees in the two bodies to enact reforms that would simplify the Tax Code dramatically and allow us to lower marginal rates. The combination of a simplified Tax Code and lower marginal rates is absolutely guaranteed to generate economic growth. I would do it on the corporate side as well as on the individual side and, on the corporate side, move to a territorial-based access system so we wouldn't continue to have the tremendous competitive disadvantage we have vis-a-vis our trading partners.

On health care, we take a different approach for Medicare. We are focused on these next 10 years. Over the next 10 years we do two things: One, we end the fiction that we are going to cut doctors by 30 percent, or end the threat, depending on how you choose to look at it. So the sustainable growth rate, as it is called around here—this notion that we have to massively cut reimbursements to doctors all of a sudden—that is done away with. We recognize that would be a very imprudent policy.

Another thing we do is adopt one of the recommendations from the Simpson-Bowles commission on medical malpractice liability. That helps to save some significant money across the board on health care, and certainly that includes Medicare.

On Medicaid, we adopt a very similar approach to that which is done in the House budget, which is to say this is completely unsustainable in its current form. Medicaid has been doubling every 8 years and it is a big driver of the deficit we have in Washington. It is also a big driver of huge deficits across the 50 States. It is a big problem, because the States have little or no flexibility in how they administer this program. They have a big financial burden that comes with it. What I think we ought to do is take these resources, block grant them to the States, and give the States the flexibility to figure out a better way to deliver health care services to low-income people. I think among our 50 States, I am very confident there will be many that will come up with better models and as they do, they will be adopted generally, and we can put this program on a sustainable path, which it is certainly not on today.

On some other areas of spending, on nondefense discretionary spending, we have to cut it. We have grown it too much. In fact, the big surge in the deficit in recent years has come from the discretionary side. So what we call for is lowering nondefense discretionary spending to the level it was in 2006 and then freezing that for 6 years, after which it would be indexed to the consumer price index. Other mandatory spending, aside from the big entitlement programs, would gradually be reduced to just over their 2007 level. I say gradually. We do this so people have a chance to adjust. Frankly, the economic growth we would get from the lower marginal tax rates would help facilitate this. It gets lowered to 2007 levels by 2014, after which it grows at CPI.

Our budget calls for no changes whatsoever to Social Security, and it calls for none of the structural changes to Medicare because those would occur after the 10-year window and we are focused on just these next 10 years.

I would strongly stress that we are staring at a full-blown crisis. We don't know whether it is a year from now or 2 years from now or 18 months or even nearer. That is impossible to know. But it is impossible to deny that we cannot continue on this course. We cannot continue running multitrillion-dollar deficits—deficits that are 10 percent of our entire economic output, that rack up this huge amount of debt as we have done in recent years. That is not sustainable.

My first career out of college was in finance. When I was working in finance, the idea of the Federal Government of the United States of America even having a credit rating was not something that was understood to be that way. The United States of America was above the credit rating system. It didn't apply to us. A triple A rating wasn't even relevant because we didn't even talk about the creditworthiness of the United States, except to refer to it as the risk-free interest rate, the risk-free security, the security for which

there was no risk of a failure because this was, after all, the Government of the United States of America.

Now we are in a position that is absolutely shocking to me. We very much are subject to a credit rating, but it is worse than that. We have S&P telling us they are actively contemplating the day on which they will lower our credit rating and we won't even be AAA. This is absolutely shocking to me and it has tremendously dire consequences.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator's time has expired.

Mr. TOOMEY. Madam President, I close by saying we cannot kick this can down the road anymore. We need to do something now. I have a budget that balances within 10 years and I urge my colleagues to support it. I thank the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alabama.

Mr. SESSIONS. I see my colleague Senator HATCH and I will be yielding to him for 10 minutes. I thank my colleague, Senator TOOMEY, a member of the Budget Committee. He served on the House Budget Committee. He has worked harder than maybe anybody on the committee and has proposed a plan that would actually balance our budget within 10 years. It is the kind of thing we should be debating in the committee. Unfortunately, I know the Senator has to be deeply disappointed because we are not having a markup in committee. We are not even having a chance to bring forth his budget and defend it and point out why he believes it will make America a better place.

I thank the Senator from his contributions to the debate and to the committee.

Let me note that Senator HATCH is the ranking member of the Finance Committee, a very significant, important committee that deals with the financial challenges our Nation faces every day. I thank the Senator, and I yield to him.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

Mr. HATCH. Madam President, I thank my colleague, and I thank Senator TOOMEY for his work.

Early this year, along with every one of my Republican colleagues, I introduced a balanced budget amendment to the Constitution.

The people of Utah want this amendment. The polls show that if Congress were to pass it and send it to the States for ratification, it would have significant support across the country.

From my perspective, the debate we have been having over the fiscal year 2012 budget this week—if you can even call it a debate—exemplifies yet again the need for a balanced budget amendment. It seems like a simple thing, but the balanced budget amendment would require the President to submit and Congress to pass a balanced budget. Given the budget process over the last few years, this simple requirement takes on added significance.

The fact is it has been 756 days since Democrats passed any budget, the most

basic of Congress's constitutional responsibilities. And the fact is that absent a balanced budget amendment, Congress will never adopt the spending restraint necessary to restore constitutional limits on the Federal Government and the Nation's fiscal integrity.

The consequences of this ineptitude reached a new low on the Senate floor yesterday. To recap for those who missed it, Democrats took to the Senate floor and accused Republicans who are attempting to right our fiscal ship by reforming programs for the poor and elderly of seeking to harm women, children, and other vulnerable members of our society. This verbal assault was deliberate and premeditated. I actually thank my colleagues on the other side who declined to participate in those attacks. Those attacks might make for good politics, but they are terrible for this country.

People here might wish to deny it, but the fiscal crisis we face is real. They might wish to say that Social Security's finances are just dandy, but the fact is the disability trust fund will be exhausted by 2018 and the overall trust fund will be exhausted in 2036, a year earlier than we previously thought.

As bad as Social Security is, the situation with Medicare is even worse. According to the Congressional Budget Office, Medicare will be insolvent in 2020. According to the Medicare trustees, Medicare's unfunded liability is \$38.4 trillion. And what is the Democratic response to this? All is well. Nothing to see here. Please move along. This is what the Democratic candidate in New York's special election had to say about her opponent's claim that reforms to Medicare were necessary to restore the solvency of this program:

That's simply a scare tactic to tell our seniors that there will be nothing for them. . . . That's not the truth.

Republicans are trying to scare seniors? That is rich. A liberal surrogate for the Democrats is currently running an advertisement that shows House Budget Committee Chairman PAUL RYAN pushing an old woman in a wheelchair off a cliff. Talk about a new low. The head of the Democratic National Committee—fresh from lecturing conservatives about civility in politics—described the House budget as a tornado through nursing homes.

Yesterday we were treated to claims on the Senate floor that stopped short of these attacks, but not that far short. Yet it is Republicans who are trying to scare seniors? Give me a break. Still, as bad as yesterday's display was, I ended my day positive about the future. Last night, I attended a dinner celebrating the centennial of President Ronald Reagan's birth and at that dinner I had the honor of introducing Lech Walesa, the former President of Poland, who helped to roll back the Iron Curtain and liberate a continent.

When Ronald Reagan became President, the Soviets were on the march. It

was not a foregone conclusion that Communists would wind up in the ash heap of history. When Lech Walesa mounted the fence at the Gdansk shipyards, the only thing he could be certain of was prosecution by Communist authorities. But Reagan and Walesa understood something. They understood that communism was a lie, played out on a world historical stage. And to borrow from Shakespeare, Reagan, and Walesa, that the truth will out.

The fundamental truth we face today—one that cannot be denied—is that our Nation faces a spending crisis that no amount of additional taxes can fix. So let's talk about this budget process in a serious way. Unfortunately, doing so will not reflect well on this Chamber.

Borrowing from another one of Shakespeare's plays, in *Hamlet* the character Marcellus observed that something is rotten in the state of Denmark. One might say the same about the Senate's action on the budget resolution. A budget is not law, but it is an important document that installs the guardrails for the operation of fiscal policy.

Under the Congressional Budget Act, each body is to report a resolution by April 15 of each year. President Obama submitted his budget, and the House met the April 15 deadline. But Senate Democrats have no budget of their own. Here is the Senate Democratic budget resolution: Just one big laid goose egg.

So here we are today talking about the House-passed budget. The simple truth is my colleagues on the other side don't want to vote on a Senate Democratic budget. Instead, they are determined to vote on a budget that everyone knows will not pass this body. Why is this? With all of their hard-edged partisan fury, and not even a thin reed of fiscal governance, like Marcellus, it is reasonable to conclude that something is rotten in the Senate. And if we follow the scent with our noses, we will find it comes down to numbers.

The magic number is 50. There are 100 Members of this body and 53 of those Members caucus with the Democrats. So why aren't there 50 votes for a single Democratic budget? We have heard Senate Democrats won't support the President's budget. The stated reason is that the President's do-over budget was nothing more than a speech that was so vague that our friends on the other side refuse to treat it as a budget. I believe there is a bigger problem holding up the Democratic caucus. The heart and soul of the Democratic caucus is liberal, and I respect that. But a healthy number of my friends on the other side are not entirely in that camp. And many more realize a pure liberal fiscal position might not be politically palatable. After all, the voters sent a message last fall to get spending under control and not to hike taxes.

So because Senate Democrats are jammed up, unable to get their act together, their leadership proposes no budget of their own. We are engaged in a Senate budget debate, but there is no substantive Senate Democratic budget before us, and we don't have one because at least 50 members of this body do not agree on one, even though they have 53 on their side. So how then do we define the majority's fiscal position?

What budget would the majority of Senate Democrats support if they could? That budget is lurking in the background of this debate. It is the budget the party's liberals would enact if they could. It is the budget the President, in his heart of hearts, supports. It is certainly the budget the folks at MSNBC support. It is the House Progressive Caucus's budget—an intellectually honest presentation of the liberal fiscal policy position. For interested folks, take a look at pages H2362 through H2870 of the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD of April 15, 2011. There you will find the House Progressive Caucus budget's fine print and the debate over it.

The Progressive Caucus budget is real and it is ambitious. It is also politically risky. Similar to the House budget developed by Chairman RYAN, it took political courage. It is a statement of policy principles and numbers. With a goose egg as the stated Senate Democratic budget, from my perspective, the best place to look for the Democrat's position is the budget of the House progressives. There is no doubt that is where the sentiments of a majority of the Senate Democrat caucus truly are.

I also think the House progressive budget offers a valuable contrast to the House-passed budget. Last time I checked, there are two major parties in Congress, and both parties should be accountable for what they would do about our perilous fiscal situation.

So let's hold them to account. The House progressives aim to balance the budget by 2021. They aim to reduce public debt as a percentage of GDP to 64.1 percent by 2021. They aim for both taxes and spending to grow significantly but to equal 22.3 percent of GDP by 2021. House progressives advocate a fulsome growth in the role of the Federal Government, with new domestic spending rising by \$1.7 trillion—new domestic spending.

How do they propose to pay for all this? While the Democrats play "hide the ball" on this issue, the House progressives are refreshingly frank. The short answer is, tax hikes and cuts in defense spending. They propose \$4 trillion in new taxes.

Let's take a look at these new taxes: raise marginal tax rates by 17 percent to 24 percent for single taxpayers. Look at that chart. There is an increase in the top marginal rates by 17 percent to 24 percent. There is a brandnew "millionaire" surtax, with rates reaching as high as 47 percent. There is a new

record-high death tax rate of 65 percent.

They treat capital gains and dividends as ordinary income. That means, in some cases, the marginal rate on capital gains and dividends would more than triple. They tax all overseas business income currently. That would mean, with respect to growing global markets, U.S. businesses would be subject to uniquely high levels of taxation.

They create new taxes on banks and financial transactions. I will remind folks that the CBO told us last year this kind of tax would be passed through to bank customers and depositors.

House progressives look to reform Social Security by raising the base of the payroll tax on both employers and employees.

Look at this. My goodness. On health care, House progressives' transparency is breathtaking for its honesty.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator has used 10 minutes.

Mr. SESSIONS. Madam President, I tell my distinguished colleague that we only have a few minutes left, and the Senator from Utah is waiting. So if the Senator could wrap up briefly. I have thoroughly enjoyed the Senator's remarks.

Mr. HATCH. All right. I thank my colleague.

Their budget anticipates taking ObamaCare to the next level with a government-run plan. Progressives would impose government negotiation of prescription drug payments.

Where are the spending cuts? One word, "defense." Defense will be cut by \$2.3 trillion. This is the progressive budget. The hearts of the Democratic Party would love to proceed down this path: ever higher spending and ever higher taxes to pay for it. But the heads of the party realize that this would be politically disastrous. And so, like Hamlet, they are paralyzed when action is demanded.

The failure of the Senate Democratic leadership to produce and vote on a budget of their own cannot be allowed to mask a simple fact. The Democrats might not like the solutions in the House budget, but their own failure to offer a proposal is a vote for the status quo. And a vote for the status quo is a vote for the destruction of Social Security and Medicare. And that is the true threat to America's elderly.

Serious times deserve serious measures. For that reason, I will be voting for the motion to proceed on the House-passed budget, as well as the budgets proposed by my colleague from Pennsylvania, Senator TOOMEY, and my colleague from Kentucky, Senator PAUL.

We have entitlement programs with unfunded liabilities in the tens of trillions. And the Democrats' response? Don't reform those programs to make them sustainable. Instead let's scare up \$21 billion by attacking tax breaks for oil companies.

If my Democratic colleagues want to have a tax reform debate, I am open to

that. But let's not pretend that increasing taxes on oil companies will make one iota's worth of difference in making the country's entitlement programs solvent. Let's not pretend that this is a remotely serious solution to the country's fiscal problems.

Instead of offering a serious budget proposal and debating it, Democrats chose to engage in the basest of politics, smearing Republicans as hostile to women and the elderly.

I wish it were not so, but Marcellus' observation is compelling today. Something is rotten in the U.S. Senate. Nonetheless, and in spite of these antics, I am optimistic about the future.

The truth will out, and the truth is that this country is racing toward a fiscal crisis. This fiscal crisis is still avoidable, if we take courageous actions.

Chairman RYAN, in proposing his budget, and the House leadership for voting on it, have done just that. And fortune favors the bold.

I thank my colleague for that little extra time. I intend to vote for three of these budgets today because the three of them make sense. They are not crazy, they are not phony, and each of the three would save Medicare and other matters in the Federal Government.

I thank my colleague.

Mr. SESSIONS. Madam President, I thank the Senator.

I have to say, the Senator's remarks about the progressive budget and the fact that it represents the heart of this Senate Democratic conference's view of the budget is probably correct. It also represents a view that would be widely and strongly rejected by the American people.

Senator LEE, from Utah, is a new Senator. He campaigned in every corner of his State. He has talked about this issue and spending and has listened to his people and I am delighted to hear from him at this time.

Madam President, how much time remains on this side?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. One minute fifteen seconds.

Mr. SESSIONS. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senator from Utah have 4 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. CONRAD. Madam President, reserving the right to object, I am fine with that if we would have that time added on our side as well.

Mr. SESSIONS. I thank the Senator.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, 3 minutes will be added to each side.

Mr. CONRAD. I thank the Presiding Officer.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

Mr. LEE. Madam President, my distinguished colleagues who have spoken this afternoon have pointed out a truth that is impossible to refute, which is, at the rate the Federal Government is spending, we will have acquired \$15

trillion of debt by the end of this year. That is a lot of money. It is requiring a lot of interest payment. That interest payment is only going to grow large in the coming years.

The Obama administration is already predicting that by the end of the decade, we will be paying \$1 trillion a year just to service the interest on our national debt. To put that in perspective, that is more than we spend on Social Security in an entire year, more than we spend on Medicare and Medicaid combined in an entire year, more than we spend on national defense in an entire year. I actually believe that 10 years is putting it optimistically. I think that day is coming much sooner.

For that reason, I believe this body needs to pass a budget, a budget that balances. The problem has been this body has refused to do this. Every time we proceed with the idea that we will cut so many billions of dollars over the next 10 years or every time we adopt statutory spending caps, as we did with the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings Act almost 30 years ago, as we did with the pay-go rules, Congress has treated those as something Congress can exempt itself out of. Congress has become a walking, breathing waiver unto itself.

The problem is that we, as a legislative body, cannot bind future Congresses. We can legislate. We can appropriate only for this Congress. So our commitment now to save later is not binding—unless, of course, we adopt an amendment to the U.S. Constitution that will bind future Congresses. That is why I have said I will oppose any and every attempt to raise the debt limit until such time as Congress has passed out of this body and presented to the States for ratification a balanced budget amendment to the U.S. Constitution—one that would require a two-thirds supermajority vote to authorize Congress to spend more than it takes in, in any given year, and to spend more than 18 percent of gross domestic product in any given year.

We cannot continue in perpetuity to rely on this kind of deficit spending. This will hurt every single Federal program. Whether you are most concerned, on the one hand, about preserving our ability to provide for our national defense or, on the other hand, if you are most concerned about preserving our entitlement programs, you ought to want a balanced budget amendment. You ought to be unwilling, as I am, to raise the debt limit until that amendment has been passed out by this body and passed by the House of Representatives and submitted to the States for ratification.

Thank you, Madam President.

I yield the floor to my distinguished colleague, the chairman of the Budget Committee, with whom I have appreciated the opportunity to work and would say, again, that he orchestrated a fine series of Budget hearings with some fabulous witnesses who made us all nervous but gave us some valuable

insight. I say to Senator CONRAD, I appreciate those good hearings and I appreciate the opportunity to work with you and I am sorry we are not able to mark up a budget this time, it looks like.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota.

Mr. CONRAD. Madam President, I thank the ranking member. Those hearings would not have been possible without the active working together of my office and his office, and I do think they were an excellent set of hearings talking about the dimensions of the problem we confront and that we are on an unsustainable course, where we are borrowing 40 cents of every \$1 we spend. It cannot continue.

Madam President, after my brief remarks, I ask unanimous consent that the following Senators be recognized for up to 5 minutes off the Democratic time: Senator MENENDEZ, Senator LAUTENBERG, Senator BEGICH, and Senator WHITEHOUSE.

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

Mr. CONRAD. Madam President, just briefly, I wish to address this question of why we on our side have not laid down our budget proposal. Let me repeat, we are in an unusual year. This is not going to be a circumstance in which there is a Republican budget, a Democratic budget, you go to conference committee, and they are resolved because we have a new process underway at the leadership level involving the White House. This is what the Republican leader himself said about that process:

[T]he discussions that can lead to a result between now and August are the talks being led by Vice President Biden. . . . That's a process that could lead to a result, a measurable result. . . . And in that meeting is the only Democrat who can sign a bill into law; in fact, the only American out of 307 million of us who can sign a bill into law. He is in those discussions. That will lead to a result.

We do not need a Democratic budget and a Republican budget. We need an American budget. We need a budget that is bipartisan because all of us know that is the only budget that can possibly be adopted. The Republicans control the House of Representatives. The Democrats control the Senate. The only possibility for us to make progress is a bipartisan budget.

That is why I was deeply involved in the process on the President's fiscal commission—18 of us for 1 year—and it is the only place a bipartisan budget has so far emerged. Madam President, 11 of us supported it—5 Democrats, 5 Republicans, and 1 Independent—11 of us out of the 18 on the Commission.

We now have underway a group of five talks—Democrats and Republicans working together. But, most important, we have, at the leadership level, Republican leaders from the House and the Senate, Democratic leaders from the House and the Senate, and the Vice President of the United States. What sense would it possibly make for us to go to markup of a budget before we

have seen the results of these leadership talks? That makes no sense. We have a bipartisan discussion underway—Republican leaders, Democratic leaders, and the White House. We ought to have the courtesy and the patience to see if they can come up with a plan that would then form the basis of the budget.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Madam President, I rise with deep concern about what the proposed Republican budget does—in real terms—to real families in this country.

I am deeply concerned that my colleagues on the other side—in their ideological haze—seem to have lost sight of the real people whose lives will be affected by the choices we make.

It seems to me that the Republican budget proposal fails to realize that budgets are not just about numbers. Budgets are about people—their hopes, their dreams, their expectations for a better life for themselves and their children. They are about the promise of America—the vision we have of safe, clean, vibrant communities in which to live and raise our families.

Budgets are a reflection of our values, not—as the House Budget Committee chairman would have us believe—a faceless calculation of pluses and minuses just to get to an arbitrary number—regardless of the impact on families, seniors, students, and every community in this country.

We all have a budget, every family has one, maybe not a formal budget, but we all have one. On the revenue side we have what we earn from gainful employment, investments, interest on savings. And on the flip side we have our expenses: our mortgage payment, groceries, utilities—and we have our contributions perhaps to our church or synagogue, donations to a favorite charity, a favorite cause. These are expressions of our personal values, just as the nation's budget is an expression of our collective values.

We may not always think of the budget in those terms, but we should. It is about our values.

Well, we found out last night, in upstate New York, that the Republican vision of ending Medicare as we know it does not reflect American values, and voters are not buying it.

Once again, our Republican colleagues have shown that they are out of touch with the American people and are on the wrong side of history when it comes to what Americans think is fair—what they think is right.

Americans don't think it's right to give subsidies to big oil companies, tax breaks to millionaires, and take Medicare away from seniors.

They are saying that it is time to abandon the tired refrain of privatization and ending Medicare as we know it. It is time to abandon their ideological agenda that leaves seniors to fend for themselves.

It is not who we are as a people, and it is not what Americans want.

This week I met with a group of seniors in Fort Lee, NJ. We discussed what

the Republican budget cuts would do to the Medicare system they have depended on for decades.

At the Fort Lee senior center, a typical 65-year-old, under the Republican budget proposal, would pay an additional \$7,060 by 2022. Right now, 142,834 seniors in New Jersey are impacted by the donut hole. Under the Republican plan those seniors will pay an additional \$80 million for prescription drugs next year, and by 2020 seniors currently in the donut hole will pay an additional \$1.6 billion.

Nationwide, nearly 4 million seniors would pay \$2.2 billion more for prescription drugs in 2012 alone under the Republican plan. The Republican plan to end Medicare would also force at least 1 million seniors to pay over \$110 million more for annual wellness visits in 2012.

And, by turning Medicaid into a block grant program, the Republican plan could cost America more than 2 million private-sector jobs over the next 5 years and threaten our economic recovery. But that is not all. Nationwide, the Republican plan could cut more than \$503 billion in Medicaid funding for seniors and the disabled, including life-saving nursing home care.

Leaving us with the uncomfortable and unanswerable question I pose to my Republican friends: What will those people do—where will they go? What happens to them under your budget plan?

These are people, not budget numbers. What happens to them?

The Republican budget, in my view, satisfies a narrow political agenda that has obsessed about diminishing the role of government at all costs, no matter the trade-offs, no matter who it hurts, or what we lose.

I believe we can debate the role of government, but let's have it straight-up. Let's not play this game of tearing away at the fabric of America thread-by-thread to satisfy a political agenda, and falsely claim it to be "fiscal responsibility." It is not fiscal responsibility; it's the single-minded goal of a conservative political agenda.

Fiscal responsibility is finding common ground and making difficult choices together. In a democracy, one view does not make a budget.

We can negotiate responsible cuts. We all agree that we must make cuts and reduce the deficit. So let's agree now to negotiate fair cuts and include revenue expenditures that truly balance the budget, and are truly fiscally responsible.

Cutting the deficit should not be a game of political brinksmanship. It requires serious people coming to the table willing to make difficult choices that balance cuts against revenues—balance necessary services and investments that protect our values and our way of life against wasteful spending—while creating opportunity for every American.

Balancing the budget isn't just about numbers. It is about protecting middle

class families who are struggling to make ends meet in this economy—and about reflecting their values, their hopes, their vision of what America is all about.

When considering our values as a nation, the question in this Senator's mind is: Who pays to lower the deficit and who does not under this Republican budget proposal?

The answer is clear. Middle class families pay. Seniors pay. Anyone looking for a Pell grant pays, but nothing is asked of the wealthiest Americans, and Big Oil still gets billions in subsidies.

The fact is the Republican approach to balancing the budget is anything but balanced.

It is skewed to those who have the most and have already benefited the most. A balanced long-term deficit reduction plan would have to include discretionary spending cuts, including defense, as well as entitlement changes. It would have to reduce revenue expenditures by closing tax loopholes.

That is what fairness demands; it is what balance would demand. And it is what makes sense.

In my view, the Republican plan—with \$1 trillion in tax cuts for the wealthy—makes no sense. It is as unbalanced a proposal as one could imagine. Yet our friends on the other side come to the floor and embrace it as rational, reasonable, and perfectly fair.

They look America in the eye, and say that giving the wealthiest Americans more in tax relief will magically create jobs. Although there clearly is not evidence that it has in the past. They tell us that it will raise all ships. They tell us—once again—that wealth will trickle down.

How many jobs-lost, how many jobs-outsourced, how many companies-moved-overseas do we have to endure before we admit that trickle-down-economics is a quaint but false notion? The one thing lacking in trickle-down is the trickle-down.

The fact is the Republican budget is not a balanced approach. It is, in fact, the epitome of imbalance. It memorializes a far-right political ideology and codifies it into a budget document that is fundamentally flawed.

My colleagues on the other side believe balancing the budget means putting \$1 trillion dollars in tax cuts for the wealthy on one side of the ledger, and \$1.4 trillion in cuts to Medicare and Medicaid over the next 10 years on the other. They believe it means a trillion dollars in tax cuts for millionaires who hold 40 percent of America's wealth while eliminating protections for seniors, children, and the disabled—a choice that will leave 34 million Americans with no medical insurance at all.

If we were serious about reducing the deficit in a balanced way, we would start with the obvious, subsidies for Big Oil. The top five oil companies earned nearly \$1 trillion over the last decade. Passing my bill to repeal oil

subsidies would save taxpayers \$21 billion over 10 years.

We can safely assume oil profits will be much greater in the decade to come with higher oil prices, but let's assume the top five oil companies only get another \$1 trillion in profits over the next decade.

And let's not forget that these profits are in Federal waters and on Federal lands, so they are making these profits with America's own resources. According to the data, the cost of exploration, development, and production of oil for the big five oil companies is about \$11 per barrel.

Oil has been trading at about \$100 a barrel. That means Big Oil companies are enjoying a profit of over \$90 per barrel of oil they extract.

Why in the world would they ever need subsidies in such conditions?

Handing out money to Big Oil companies and to the wealthiest Americans shows that the other side is not interested in balancing the budget or reducing the deficit, it wants to enact policies that favor the rich. They would rather dismantle Medicare, cut Social Security, cut Medicaid for seniors and the poorest among us in nursing homes who have no other place to go rather than solve our long term deficit problems in a fair and balanced way.

It wasn't long ago that the budget was, in fact, balanced—during another Democratic administration—when we had budget surpluses as far out as the eye could see.

How quickly we forget. The day Bill Clinton left office he handed the incoming president a \$236 billion surplus with a projected surplus of \$5.6 trillion over the next 10 years.

When President Bush left office he had turned a \$236 billion budget surplus into a \$1.3 trillion budget deficit with projected shortfalls of \$8 trillion over the next decade and handed the new President an economy headed off the cliff.

Now, our Republican colleagues want to go back to the same failed policies. They want to give more tax cuts to millionaires and billionaires, subsidies to Big Oil while they end Medicare as we know it, and gut Pell grants and all they mean to our economic future.

They insist on tax cuts that will cost \$700 billion on the revenue side over the next 10 years, and trillions more by slashing tax rates for corporations and millionaires. Those making more than \$1 million a year will see a windfall of \$125,000 each from the tax cuts, and tens-of-thousands-of-dollars more from the proposed rate cuts. While people in my State lose \$34 billion in health benefits and 400,000 New Jerseyans end up without health coverage at all. They want to shift the balance to millionaires and billionaires, while making draconian cuts to make up for the deficits they created—cuts that do not reflect our values as a people and a nation.

The fact is "balance" is not about subsidies to Big Oil while ending Medicare as we know it. It's not about \$1

trillion in tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans, while slashing Pell grants by 18 percent.

Balance means fairness. It means evenness and equality. It denotes a state of equilibrium, an equal distribution, a proportionate approach. It implies symmetry—not a lopsided view that protects those who need no protection, but does not protect the interest of middle class families struggling to make ends meet.

The Republican notion of “balance” not only ignores the concept of equality, fairness, shared responsibility and shared burden, but it flies in the face of the fundamental concept of American community articulated in our motto—*E Pluribus Unum*—Out of Many, One.

That we are all in this together and should benefit together, sacrifice together—each of us working together for the betterment of all of us.

With that, Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. WHITEHOUSE.) The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. LAUTENBERG. Mr. President, I rise with deepest hope that we are going to be able to defeat the House budget plan on which we are about to vote. This Republican budget is a scheme that would endanger the quality of life for millions of Americans who now struggle to get by. Just look at the gas pump and you will see what I am talking about.

The Republicans want to make sure the wealthy get wealthier with a new trillion-dollar tax cut and put the burden on seniors, the middle class, and young people to pay for it.

PAUL RYAN, the House Republican Member who hatched this scheme, has said, “This is not a budget; it is a cause.” If you ask me, it is a cause for alarm. The other side wants to terminate Medicare, one of the most successful programs ever developed in America, and turn it over to private insurance companies where CEOs now make millions. Under the Republican plan, many seniors will have to choose between medication and food to get by, and seniors’ out-of-pocket health costs will cost more than double the present rate, to \$12,500 a year. The Republicans would hand seniors’ health care over to insurance companies, where computers instead of doctors would decide which benefits they will receive. The Republicans also want to reduce Federal Medicaid spending by half, taking away vital services such as nursing homes for seniors and health services for expectant mothers. All told, the tea party Republican budget would rip away health care coverage from 50 million Americans.

But health care for seniors and other Americans is not the only place Republicans want to go to punish them. The House budget plan doesn’t just protect the Bush tax cuts for the rich, it reduces them to even lower levels at the expense of working families.

Instead of more tax breaks for the wealthiest, we should be lifting up the

foundation of our country—the middle class. In the past decade, the average income of the bottom 90 percent of workers has declined while prices for everything escalates, and the top 1 percent saw incomes go up by $\$1/4$ million each. Imagine. The average incomes of the bottom 90 percent declined while the top 1 percent saw incomes go up by $\$1/4$ million each.

This budget also cuts Pell grants which help reduce the cost of back-breaking tuition for millions of college students. I never would have been able to attend Columbia University without government help from the GI bill. It enabled me to cofound ADP, one of America’s most successful companies, employing over 40,000 people today.

In the post-World War II era, we created the “greatest generation.” I say invest more in our people so they can create the next “greatest generation,” which cannot be done without our help in education. We need help for a more balanced approach to solving our fiscal problems, including asking the wealthy to carry their fair share of the load.

I was a CEO for many years. I learned that you can’t create a great company or country without sufficient resources. This is no time, as we fight our way out of a recession, to penalize the middle class, the senior citizens, or the young. This is the time to invest in tomorrow without penalizing those who pay the largest price now for their very existence. Let those who can pay for the rebuilding of an America we all love. That is the way we ought to do it.

I urge my colleagues to vote no on this Ryan budget.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

Mr. BEGICH. Mr. President, I rise today to speak about the ongoing budget negotiations.

As a member of the Senate Budget Committee, I have jumped into this debate head-on. But we are all here together. That is why I have asked the Alaskans in my State and my communities all across the State to share their ideas with me on how to cut the budget. I have put forward a series of cuts and spending management programs from ideas from my colleagues and my members throughout the State but also ideas I have picked up in my budget hearings. We know we are all going to feel the pinch if we are serious about getting our budget and spending under control, but I have made it crystal clear that I absolutely will not balance the budget on the backs of seniors.

For me, the budget is a moral document. It reflects our values as a nation, and it demonstrates our commitment to supporting our elders and protecting our children. It is the future pathway of our great country. But the Republican House budget that has passed the House and is proposed today for us to vote on does not reflect these values. That is why Congressman RYAN received an earful from seniors when he

went back home to Wisconsin after rolling out his plan—his scheme, in my view—setting us back decades. That is why voters in New York yesterday rejected Republicans and their extreme plan to eliminate Medicare as we know it by electing a Democrat in a Republican district. I mention New York not because this was a win for Democrats or a loss for Republicans but because this was a win for our seniors and because the stakes are too high.

Americans all across the country are saying no to the current Republican plan that could fail to automatically enroll our seniors in Medicare and instead force them to buy health coverage from a private insurance company. And let me make it very clear on the private insurance company. Medicare today, to administer, costs about 1.5 percent. So all of the rest of the money for Medicare goes to services, to programs to ensure health care for our seniors. If insurance companies got hold of this, their costs to administer would be 20 to 30 percent—clearly fewer services for seniors.

In Alaska, over the next 10 years, under this Republican House plan that passed that is here in front of the Senate for us to vote on, it will move the cost for Medicare for my constituents in Alaska from \$5,000—their cost—in 10 years to over \$10,000. On top of that, it will force seniors to pay an average of \$3,500 more for prescription drugs over the next 10 years—again, adding about \$8,500 in additional health care costs to seniors. At the same time, this budget they want us to approve—which, of course, I am not willing to—will give millionaires another \$1.2 trillion in additional reductions, at the same time sticking it to our seniors. It will truly end Medicare as we know it today.

In Alaska, our elders are revered. We respect their wisdom, and they guide our decisions. As a people, it is our duty to care for our elders as they grow older. The Republican plan, the Ryan budget, will cost, as I said, Alaska seniors dearly—thousands and thousands of dollars per year more than they are paying today, seniors who are on fixed incomes. In Alaska, we have one of the fastest growing senior populations in the Nation by percent.

So I continue to look forward to working with my colleagues on the other side and my colleagues on this side to figure out how we are going to move forward on this budget, but let’s not do it on the backs of seniors by throwing them over the ship and never looking back. Seniors paid into it, seniors expect it, and we have an obligation to ensure they have the health care that ensures that they have a quality of life and live in dignity in their later years.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LAUTENBERG.) The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, we are gathered here on the Senate floor to face a very stark fact; that is, that

the House Republican budget would end Medicare as we know it for future generations. The House Republican budget would increase costs for current beneficiaries right away, and the House Republican budget would do real damage to seniors across this country and in my home State of Rhode Island.

With gas prices at near-record highs and unemployment numbers still in double digits, most folks are focused on making ends meet. They deserve a budget that will improve the economic opportunity in our country, balance our budget, and maintain Medicare, Medicaid, and other programs on which so many Americans rely. The House Republican budget fails every one of these tests. It ends Medicare, it lowers taxes for most corporations and the most fortunate, who too often already pay lower tax rates than the average American, all while failing to balance the budget.

The House Budget Committee chairman has claimed that "our budget makes no changes for those in or near retirement." This claim that this budget resolution will not affect Americans who are already retired is simply flatout false. The House budget reopens the Medicare Part D doughnut hole that we closed in the reform bill. That will cost nearly 17,000 Rhode Island seniors, in 2012 alone, nearly \$9.5 million out of pocket.

Seniors at the DaVinci Center in Providence, The Meadows in North Smithfield, and so many other places have gone without a cost-of-living adjustment in their Social Security benefits for 2 straight years even as costs have steadily risen at the pharmacy, at the grocery store, and at the gas pump. Taking away their prescription drug assistance, charging them an additional \$9.5 million hits them too hard and too soon—in 2012, literally right away.

The Republican budget also ends Medicare as we know it for future generations. Planning to retire in 11 years? No Medicare. You instead will be forced to buy private health insurance from insurance companies standing between you and your doctors instead of the reliable, affordable insurance provided by Medicare.

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office has estimated this would double what retirees would pay out of pocket under the current system—more than \$6,000 extra for retirees.

The Republican attack on Medicare overlooks a basic fact—that all health care costs are skyrocketing, irrespective of who the insurer is. Recently, Defense Secretary Gates said, "Everybody knows that we are being eaten alive by health care." There is a cost problem in health care, but attacking Medicare fundamentally misdiagnoses the problem. But that is another speech.

I recently held an official Senate Aging Committee hearing at the Johnston Senior Center in Rhode Island to give Rhode Islanders the chance to

make their voices heard. Audrey Brett, a Middletown resident who relies on Social Security and Medicare, said this:

For all those Americans who worked, paid their taxes, added to the betterment of the country, served in military and civil service—we cannot let them live and die in poverty. We owe them their final days of security and dignity.

Audrey is right. But the Republican budget gets rid of that promise of security and dignity contained in Medicare. Medicare as we know it is lost. Here is what is protected: low taxes for the superrich, who already pay lower tax rates than the average taxpaying American family—protected; low taxes for many large corporations, which for too long have been gaming the system and paying too little—protected. And remember, the Republicans just voted last week to protect Big Oil tax subsidies.

Wreck Medicare but protect those tax cuts and subsidies. Those are not America's priorities. Let's put real priorities first—Medicare and allowing our seniors to enjoy a stable and dignified retirement.

I see the majority leader on the floor. I yield back the remainder of my time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BEGICH). The majority leader.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, it is my understanding that we have 5 minutes. I will take that time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The leader is recognized.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, the vote we are going to have shortly is about more than just public policy; it is about priorities, about whether we hold fast to our values or break our promises.

There is a lot wrong with the House Republican budget on which Senators are about to cast their vote. But the most irresponsible and indefensible is a radical plan to end Medicare as we have known it. Doing so would break a solemn promise between our society and our seniors. It is a promise that for more than four decades has saved seniors from poverty, illness, and worse.

The promise of Medicare is this: If you work hard and contribute, America will make sure you are protected in your golden years from the hardships of affording health care. The Republican budget would break this promise. It would make life significantly more difficult and painful for America's seniors. It is as simple and as serious as that.

The Republican plan would kill Medicare. Even the conservative Wall Street Journal admitted this, even though most Republican U.S. Senators still refuse to face this reality; that is, as the Wall Street Journal said, the Republican plan would kill Medicare.

Here is what it would do. It would turn over seniors' health to profit-hungry insurance companies. It would let bureaucrats decide what tests and treatments seniors get. It would ask seniors to pay more for their benefits, for their health care, charging every

senior \$6,000 more every year in exchange for fewer benefits. That is a bad deal all around.

Those voting for this Republican plan would be forcing seniors in Nevada to pay more than twice as much as they pay today in out-of-pocket costs. Sadly, that is just not a Nevada problem, it is an Alaska problem, too, and a problem that faces every State in the Union—\$6,000 more for every senior.

Those voting for the Republican plan to kill Medicare would be voting to reopen the doughnut hole we closed to help seniors afford expensive prescription drugs. Opening the doughnut hole would send drug prices literally through the roof, costing, for example, 27,000 seniors in Nevada and every other State thousands of dollars more between now and the year 2020.

Those voting for the Republican plan to kill Medicare would also be forcing our seniors to pay almost a million dollars more for annual wellness visits that we put in our health care bill, and it would make it harder for seniors to access nursing home and long-term care. It would make at least 34 million more Americans uninsured.

The Republican plan to kill Medicare was written in the name of saving money. Listen to this, Mr. President. It costs seniors so much money that it doesn't do anything they said it would do. One study found that seniors would spend \$14 more for every dollar the government saves. That is 14 to 1 in the wrong direction. That is not effective economics anyplace. It is certainly not worth endangering the health of our seniors.

The Republican plan is a plan that tries to balance the budget literally on the backs of America's seniors. This is a clear window into the other party's priorities, though. While it asks seniors to pay more and more, it allows the wealthiest to pay less and less. It gives even more tax breaks to those who need it the least—oil companies, billionaires, and multinational companies that ship jobs overseas.

It comes down to this: The Republican plan to kill Medicare is a plan to make the rich richer and the sick sicker. A well-worn metaphor characterizes the Senate as a saucer, a deliberative body that cools the intense heat and occasional zeal of the House of Representatives. In voting down the radical Republican House-passed plan in Medicare, and keeping our priorities straight, and keeping our promise to our seniors, we are bringing that image to life that our Founding Fathers had of this great body, the United States Senate.

ESTABLISHING THE BUDGET FOR THE U.S. GOVERNMENT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2012—MOTION TO PROCEED

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I move to proceed to Calendar No. 36, H. Con. Res. 34, and I ask for the yeas and nays on my motion.