

on a voucher program. That would be saying to seniors, if they are 83 and they have three chronic illnesses, and they run out of Medicare coverage, they are on their own. I can't imagine doing that.

But we compromised. We compromised and said: OK, we will set revenues aside, for now. You will not vote for revenues, Republican Party. Members of the House in the Republican Party, you will not vote for revenues.

So we took revenues off the table. By the way, some people in my party were not happy with that. I got those phone calls: Why did you capitulate? Why did you give in? We gave in because we care about our country, and we don't want to go over the cliff. That is why we gave in. So we gave in on revenues.

The Republicans wanted us to cut spending by more than we raised the debt ceiling. It is a political thing we need to do, not required by the economics, but we have done that. So now we put revenues aside—compromise. We have said we are going to cut spending by more than the rise in the debt ceiling.

Now the only thing we have not compromised on, the only thing—which I think is, really, when we think about it—I didn't think, frankly, this may have been as big of a deal until I stand here today—is to do this again in 6 months, to leave this loaded gun on the table. We are going to leave this loaded gun on the table for our economy?

People can talk to small businesses right now and learn they are scared about what is going to happen next week. Will they be able to borrow money? Will people be able to afford to borrow money to buy cars? Will they be able to afford to borrow money to buy homes?

We talk about the economy going in a tailspin, and we want to keep that loaded gun on the table for another 6 months? There is no way we can provide the certainty in this kind of economic climate if we leave the loaded gun on the table.

So the only thing we have not agreed to that is in the Boehner plan—well, it depends on which plan it is. They keep changing it to try to get enough votes. I don't know what it is today. But the only thing we are not going to budge on is saying to this country and our business community and our job creators: We are going to kill job creation for sure for the next 6 months by telling you we want to repeat this ridiculous exercise in 6 months. We are not going to do that.

The irony is, the people who want us to do that are the people who have been preaching certainty: We have to have certainty. By the way, let's do this again in 6 months. We have to have certainty. It is important we do this again in 6 months.

I know the leader is working on trying to get a compromise today, and I am confident that before the day is over there will be some kind of compromise that will be before this body that we will have a chance to vote on.

I will tell my colleagues this: People will never hear me brag about refusing to compromise. Some of my colleagues from Missouri who serve in the House of Representatives are willing right now to brag about refusing to compromise. They are willing to say it is a good thing to go off the cliff. I will never brag about refusing to compromise because I don't think that is what we do here. When we look back in history, America's brightest moments usually happened around the table of compromise. The most difficult questions this country has wrestled with through the years, we have forged a way forward through compromise, and that is what we needed to. That is what we need tomorrow. That is what we need as we approach the edge of the cliff.

So my last message I will leave with my colleagues across the aisle is this: We have shown our willingness to compromise. Please show us yours. Please show us yours and allow us to vote. Allow us to vote on the compromise. If my colleagues don't want to vote for the compromise, then don't vote for it. But allow us a chance to vote for it. Is that too much to ask, just to allow us an opportunity to move to a vote, to avoid this country having a permanently diminished status in the world? I don't think that is too much to ask.

So let us vote, and if my colleagues can't compromise on the substance of the compromises that will be put forward, at least allow our voices to be heard by allowing a vote.

Mr. President, I yield the floor, and I ask unanimous consent that the quorum call be equally divided.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

EXTENSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that morning business be extended until 3:30 this afternoon, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each; further, that at 3:30 p.m. the majority leader be recognized.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. REID. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for up to 15 minutes.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

FREE TRADE AGREEMENTS WITH SOUTH KOREA, COLOMBIA, AND PANAMA

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I want to remind my colleagues that this work period was supposed to be our opportunity to finally enact, after years of delay, the Free Trade Agreements with our allies South Korea, Colombia, and Panama.

These agreements were signed over 4 years ago, and this administration has had more than 2½ years to submit them to Congress for consideration, but they have failed to do so. Unfortunately, we are going to have to continue to wait at least until September before we get a vote.

Why does it matter that we pass these agreements? It matters for two reasons: first, because expanding trade opportunities creates American jobs; second, because we live in a competitive global economy and other nations are not standing still while we delay.

Economists overwhelmingly agree that expanding trade opportunities creates jobs. The Obama White House, for example, estimates that enactment of these three trade agreements will boost exports by at least \$12 billion, supporting over 70,000 American jobs.

The fact that lowering barriers to U.S. exports will create jobs for American workers is common sense. Consider that our market is already largely open to foreign imports, including those from Korea, Colombia, and Panama. Without trade agreements to ensure similar treatment for our exporters, American businesses will continue to face high tariff and nontariff barriers abroad.

Consider one example: the market for agricultural products in Korea, which is the world's thirteenth largest economy. Korea's tariffs on imported agricultural goods average 54 percent, compared to an average 9-percent tariff on these imports into the United States. Mr. President, 54 percent added on for us to get our agricultural products into Korea; only 9 percent for them to get those same products into the United States, that is a 45-percent differential.

Passage of the Korea Free Trade Agreement will level this playing field. Yet this administration continues to delay sending the agreements to Congress. The Obama White House would prefer to hold these agreements hostage because of a desire to expand the Trade Adjustment Assistance Program rather than improve the competitive position of American producers.

At a time of near record unemployment and slow economic growth, this

delay is unacceptable. I want to put a fine point on that by saying that just this morning the numbers came out. The Bureau of Economic Analysis released its advance estimate of growth in the inflation-adjusted gross domestic product, GDP, for the second quarter. According to the advance estimate, annualized GDP growth in the second quarter was 1.3 percent.

They went back and revised the first quarter of 2011. They revised it downward to .4 percent, down from a reported rate of 1.9 percent. So they have adjusted downward the first quarter growth rate from 1.9 percent down to .4 percent, and we now know, according to the advance estimate at least, that second quarter GDP growth is only 1.3 percent—way under what the assumptions have been, way under what the estimates have been, and way under what it is going to take for us to get the economy turned around and growing again and get people back to work.

Couple that with the job-crushing regulations, the taxes that have come since this administration has taken office, and it is making it very difficult for our economy to recover and to grow and to get back on track. So the administration wishes to hold these agreements hostage because of their desire to expand the Trade Adjustment Assistance Program rather than get these producers back access to these markets we should have access to in some of these countries, and we cannot afford to wait any longer to do that.

The reasons are very clear. We have an economy that is sluggish, that is struggling to get back on its feet. We have three free trade agreements that have been hanging around here languishing literally now for 4 years that would open up export opportunities and, as I said, even according to the President's own estimates, add 70,000 jobs to our economy.

The position of Leader MCCONNELL and Republican Senators has been consistent from the beginning. We are happy to have a debate on the merits of expanding trade adjustment assistance and to consider this bill as a stand-alone measure. But we will not hold the trade agreements hostage to consideration of trade adjustment assistance.

I want to commend my colleagues Senators PORTMAN and BLUNT for the letter they recently spearheaded with 10 other Republican Senators committing to support the necessary procedural votes to consider trade adjustment assistance as a stand-alone measure and on its own merits.

In light of this letter, it is very clear the administration has run out of excuses for not submitting the trade agreements to Congress.

I ask unanimous consent, Mr. President, to have the Portman-Blunt letter printed in the RECORD.

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

U.S. SENATE,

Washington, DC, July 19, 2011.

President BARACK OBAMA,
The White House,
Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. PRESIDENT: as Republican Senators, we urge you to submit the Korea, Colombia and Panama trade agreements as soon as possible, with the understanding that we will support a separate Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) bill that reflects the bipartisan reforms negotiated by Chairmen Baucus and Camp and the White House.

In order to move this process forward, we commit to supporting cloture on the motion to proceed to such a TAA bill and cloture on the bill itself. We believe that the trade agreements and TAA should receive separate up or down votes on their merits.

We therefore urge you to separate the pending trade agreements and TAA, and immediately submit the three trade agreements to Congress.

Sincerely,

Roy Blunt, Scott P. Brown, Rob Portman, John Boozman, John Hoeven, Susan Collins, Lisa Murkowski, Johnny Isakson, Ron Wicker, Dan Coats, Thad Cochran, Mike Johanns.

MR. THUNE. There is a path forward in both the House and the Senate for trade adjustment assistance, and we have bipartisan majorities in both Chambers waiting to vote for the Korea, Colombia, and Panama agreements. So why are we still waiting for the White House to do the right thing and send us these agreements?

This ongoing delay is having a real impact on American businesses, and it will only get worse. On July 1, the European Union-Korea trade agreement went into effect. According to press reports, European exports to Korea rose 16 percent in the first 13 days after the Korea-EU Free Trade Agreement entered into force.

Let's be clear about what this means. Korean consumers are choosing to buy German, French, and British cars, electronics, and agricultural products rather than American-made products because these European products now have a price advantage. This was entirely preventable if we had acted on the U.S.-Korea agreement sooner.

Likewise, the Canada-Colombia agreement will go into effect on August 15. This will result in an advantage for Canadian goods, such as construction equipment, aircraft, and a range of other industrial and agricultural products. Much as with Korea, the United States businesses will find themselves at a competitive disadvantage because we have failed to act.

Again, this did not have to happen. The administration finalized its labor action plan for Colombia back in April. We have had plenty of time to consider these agreements over the past several months. Instead, we are facing a situation where United States wheat producers are likely to be completely shut out of the Colombian market once the agreement with Canada has gone into effect.

This is amazing, when you think about it, when you consider that just a few years ago American wheat producers dominated the market in Co-

lombia with a 73-percent market share. That was as of 2008.

In 2010, for the first time in the history of United States-Colombia trade, the United States lost to Argentina its position as Colombia's No. 1 agricultural supplier.

Consider the story of three crops we grow in South Dakota: soybeans, corn, and wheat. The combined market share in Colombia for these three U.S. agricultural exports has decreased from 81 percent in 2008 to 19 percent as of 2010—a decline of 62 percentage points in a 2-year period; an 81-percent to a 19-percent market share in corn, wheat, and soybeans, for American agricultural producers. Think about that. That is a staggering collapse, which was totally avoidable, totally preventable, if we had simply acted on these trade agreements much sooner. This is the real cost of our delay while our trading partners continue to pursue new regional and bilateral trade agreements.

We are living in a global economy where America cannot afford to stand still on trade. As Senator BAUCUS noted at a recent Finance Committee hearing, in 1960, exports accounted for only 3.6 percent of our entire U.S. GDP; today, exports account for 12.5 percent of our GDP. Exports of U.S. goods and services support over 10 million American jobs.

It is long past time we get back in the game by passing the three pending trade agreements. America's manufacturers, America's farmers, and America's service providers cannot afford to wait any longer. So I call upon the administration to submit the trade agreements to Congress before the August recess. We are not going to be able to consider these agreements until September, but sending them to Congress now will send a strong signal that this administration is finally serious about getting them done. It would also be an important show of good faith to our close allies, South Korea, Colombia, and Panama. These job-creating, market-opening trade agreements should be at the top of the agenda when we get back in September.

Again, I want to reemphasize the importance of that in light of these economic numbers, the data that is coming out that points out that in the second quarter of this year our economic growth was a sluggish 1.3 percent, and that the revised estimate now for the first quarter of this year was .4 percent.

We will never get the unemployment rate down, we will never get America's economy expanding and back on its feet, we will never start dealing with these massive debt issues we have, one, if we do not cut spending—which is the other issue we are debating today—but also if we are not growing and expanding the American economy.

We can do that. There are so many things these trade agreements would do not only for agricultural exporters but for other producers of American goods, and we ought to be doing that.

It is high time we at least do some of the things we can do to get the economy growing again. I cannot emphasize enough the lost market opportunities, the lost chance at economic growth, the lost jobs that are associated with the fact that this administration has delayed now, since they have been in office—2½ years—in submitting these three free trade agreements to Congress, three free trade agreements that have broad bipartisan support from Congress, which we as Republicans have been waiting to act upon now for almost the 4 years since these agreements were negotiated in the first place.

So it is high time we change that. It is one thing that we can do to affect the economy in this country, among the other things. I would simply add as sort of a final point, the debate we are having about the debt limit is also one that needs to be dealt with if we are going to get serious about growing the economy and creating jobs.

If we look at the economy, we look at this President's economic record, and we look at the data, almost every metric we can measure, he has made this economy much worse. The President has said repeatedly—and he said it in his speech the other night—he blames the previous administration for where we are today. I do not think anybody here will dispute the fact that he inherited a difficult set of economic circumstances. But there is no question, if we look at every metric, that he has made the situation much worse.

Whether that is unemployment, which is up 18 percent—there are 2.1 million more people unemployed today than there were when he took office—whether it is the debt, which has grown by 35 percent since he took office; whether it is the number of Americans who are receiving food stamps, which has gone up by 40 percent since he took office—and I might add in my State of South Dakota, a 58-percent increase in the number of people receiving food stamps.

The cost of health care in this country is up 19 percent since this President took office. The cost of gasoline has gone up almost 100 percent—99 percent—since this President took office. The amount of the debt per person in this country has gone up by \$11,000. Every American now owes \$11,000 more as their share of our Federal debt since this President took office.

The economic record of this administration is abysmal. It is high time we took the steps to do something about that. It strikes me at least, as I look at the policies they have been putting in place, that they seem to want to make it more difficult and more expensive for people in this country to create jobs. We see that in regulations coming out of all of these various agencies. We see it in the massive runup in the growth, in the size of government, the new mandates that have been imposed on a lot of our small businesses as a result of the new health care bill, the

new taxes that have been imposed on our small businesses as a result of the new health care legislation.

At every turn American small businesses, which create the jobs that will get this economy growing again, tell us the economic uncertainty, the job-crushing policies that are coming out of this administration have been a major inhibitor, a major impediment to them creating jobs and getting people back to work in this country.

The trade agreements are just something I would add on to that list. We have three trade agreements that have been teed up. It has been almost 4 years since they were negotiated. This administration has been in office now for 2½ years. The President continually gets up, as he did at the State of the Union, and talks about wanting to double the trade in 5 years, talks about supporting these three trade agreements. Yet it is a very simple thing. All he has to do is submit them to Congress. The trade agreements are negotiated. All he has to do is send them here. We are ready to act to put Americans back to work, to open up export opportunities to American producers, to get the economy growing again, and create jobs.

I hope in addition to dealing with the issue of runaway spending and debt, which, in my view, is the predominant issue we need to deal with—and, clearly, between now and Tuesday we have to get a solution in place that will avert the economic adversity we could be dealing with, the adverse circumstances if we do not deal with that. But that needs to be accompanied by serious reductions in spending, spending reforms. Then we have to be putting in place policies that will enable economic growth in this country, that will make it less expensive, less difficult for small businesses to create jobs, not more difficult.

Unfortunately, that is the record to date of this administration. I hope we can change that and start today by sending these trade agreements to the Congress so we can act on them and get these things approved and get American businesses exporting to these three countries.

I yield the floor.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota.

Mr. CONRAD. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

THE DEBT CEILING

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, we are now reaching a critical hour in the Congress of the United States on the question of extending the debt limit of

the Nation and of fundamentally dealing with the debt of the Nation. I don't think there is any serious person in either body who does not understand that we must deal with the debt itself as we extend the debt limit. We are borrowing 40 cents of every dollar we spend. The gross debt of the United States will reach 100 percent of our GDP by the end of this year. The best economists in the country, of whatever philosophical stripe, are telling us we are on an unsustainable course that must be changed.

Mr. President, in the midst of this, we have had the House so far unable to send us a package. Now, we are told they do have the votes because they have added a balanced budget amendment to the Constitution as part of their package. The balanced budget amendment they previously proposed in the House of Representatives can never pass the Senate—at least as this body is currently constituted—and it should not pass this body. It is deeply flawed. To attach that to a measure that has to pass both Houses before Tuesday of next week, frankly, is an indication of a lack of seriousness on the part of our colleagues in the House of Representatives.

Ultimately, there has to be a bipartisan agreement. Our friends in the other party control the House of Representatives, the Senate is controlled by my party, the Democratic Party, and we have a Democrat in the White House. No serious person can fail to understand that putting an amendment to the Constitution of the United States that is deeply flawed into that package absolutely guarantees it cannot pass in this Chamber. That would take a two-thirds vote. I don't believe it would even command a simple majority here, much less a two-thirds vote.

So here we are at the eleventh hour, and people in the other body seemingly are still not serious about coping with the challenge of both extending the debt limit to avoid a default, which would be catastrophic, and dealing with the debt itself. I understand ideological rigidity. The time for that is past. The time now is to work together in some reasonable way so we advance legislation that both extends the debt limit to avoid the catastrophic consequences of a default and deals with the debt threat itself.

The New York Times on Wednesday had this story: "On All Levels of the Economy, Concern About the Impasse." What they were talking about is the rating agencies saying that if we don't do both, if we don't extend the debt limit and deal effectively with the debt itself, they are going to downgrade the rating of our credit as a country. The story goes on to say:

Economists and analysts are trying to gauge the costs to the economy and consumers if the United States loses its solid-gold credit rating—a move that appears more likely now that the stand-off in Washington over government spending has calcified. Some economists say the effects of lowering the Federal Government's credit rating