

greatly to our deficits, including enormous tax cuts mainly for the wealthiest. No effort was made to pay for that policy or the two wars. They were financed by debt.

In fact, to the extent that our budget outlook is significantly worse at the end of this decade than it was in the beginning, decisions by the previous administration are by far the biggest contributor to the problem. In parceling out the blame for our massive deficit, one expert said, the Obama administration "is like a relief pitcher who enters a game in the fourth inning trailing 19-0 and allows another run to score. The extra run is nothing to cheer about, of course, but fans should be far angrier with the starting pitcher."

However we reached this point, it is our responsibility now to address the consequences of failing to act. That is why I believe the amendment offered by Senators CONRAD and GREGG is worthy of consideration.

Briefly, they propose to establish a task force to recommend changes to our budget policies to address our long-term fiscal crisis. The task force would consist of 18 members: 16 Members of Congress, equally divided between House and Senate and majority and minority, and 2 administration officials, the Treasury Secretary and another Presidential appointee. Recommendations would require approval of 14 of the commission's 18 members. Those recommendations would be referred to the Budget Committee and other committees of jurisdiction in each Chamber and then move automatically to floor votes in each Chamber, where passage would require a three-fifths vote.

There is much to recommend this approach. Our fiscal problem is so large partly because it is so politically difficult to address. Repairing our finances will require some combination of spending cuts and tax increases, and spending cuts and tax increases are rarely politically popular. The use of a task force to recommend difficult but necessary choices for the common good has been successful in the past, in several rounds of military base closings and with the Greenspan Commission on Social Security reform in 1983.

But this approach is not without flaw. One is the structure of the task force, which would include two executive branch appointees.

Some have argued that the legislative commission must include members from the executive branch to achieve Presidential buy-in on the commission's proposal. And I agree that gaining the support of the administration is vital in this effort. But in seeking that buy-in, I do not believe it is either necessary or proper to give executive branch officials votes, which are potentially decisive votes, on recommendations that would bypass the Senate's rules and procedures. The proper way to achieve Presidential buy-in is through Presidential communication

and consultation and the threat of an actual Presidential veto of a task force proposal, if passed by the Congress, if it is objectionable to the President. The appropriate buy-in before Congress acts could also be advanced with executive membership for the two executive appointees.

I was pleased that the task force proposal we are voting on today no longer gives the task force power to recommend changes to the Standing Rules of the Senate. That is a welcome change from its prior iterations. Successfully tackling our fiscal crisis will require far-reaching legislation, and procedural hurdles in both chambers make passing any far-reaching legislation extraordinarily difficult. But any permanent procedural changes in our rules should be made by the Members themselves in each Chamber and not through this process.

Despite my reservations, particularly about voting membership for executive branch officials on a congressional commission that has the power to bypass the normal rules of our body for consideration of its recommendations, I believe Senators CONRAD and GREGG have offered a way forward. Their 60-vote requirement for positive congressional approval of the task force's recommendations does significantly protect congressional prerogatives. It also is clear that our current political climate and ways of doing business have been unequal to the task. Addressing our deficit requires bold action. The consequences of failure to act are too severe for us to miss this chance to act. I will vote for the Conrad-Gregg proposal.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate now proceed to executive session to consider Executive Calendar No. 641, the nomination of Ben Bernanke.

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

NOMINATION OF BEN S. BERNANKE TO BE CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS OF THE FEDERAL RESERVE SYSTEM

The legislative clerk read the nomination of Ben S. Bernanke, of New Jersey, to be Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System for a term of 4 years.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Ben S. Bernanke, of New Jersey, to be Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System.

Christopher J. Dodd, Tom Udall, Edward E. Kaufman, Mark R. Warner, Patty Murray, Robert P. Casey, Jr., Paul G. Kirk, Jr., Daniel K. Inouye, Robert Menendez, Tim Johnson, Jack Reed, Debbie Stabenow, Tom Harkin, Max Baucus, Jon Tester, Joseph I. Lieberman, John D. Rockefeller IV.

Mr. DURBIN. I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum call be waived.

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

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate resume legislative session.

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

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

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

REMEMBERING DELIA MARTINEZ

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I rise today to honor Ms. Delia Martinez of Henderson, NV, who on January 19, 2010, passed away at the age of 61. Ms. Martinez was a dedicated public servant who volunteered countless hours of service to communities around the State of Nevada.

Ms. Martinez was born in Mexico City to U.S. Foreign Service officer Charles Coop and his wife Concepcion Martinez. When Delia was 7 years old her family moved to Nevada, where she would spend the rest of her life. After graduating with honors from Rancho High School in Las Vegas, Ms. Martinez went on to receive a degree in business management from the University of Nevada Reno in 1972.

From an early age, Delia was attracted to the ideals of justice and equality for all. As a high school student, she became actively involved in the civil rights movement, and worked diligently to this end all throughout her life. Ms. Martinez later enjoyed the opportunity to act on the passion for equality she had obtained earlier in life, when she became the first Hispanic female executive director of the Nevada Equal Rights Commission. In