of challenges that are thrown to him. So I want to associate myself with my colleague from Georgia.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to yield back the remainder of the time and I ask for the yeas and nays.

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

Is there a sufficient second? There appears to be a sufficient second.

The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the nomination of Michael H. Simon, of Oregon, to be United States District Judge for the District of Oregon? On this question, the yeas and nays have been ordered, and the clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. KYL. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from New Hampshire (Ms. AYOTTE).

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 64, nays 35, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 92 Ex.]

YEAS—64

Akaka	Graham	Murkowski
Alexander	Hagan	Murray
Baucus	Harkin	Nelson (NE)
Begich	Inouye	Nelson (FL)
Bennet	Johnson (SD)	Pryor
Bingaman	Kerry	Reed
Blumenthal	Kirk	Reid
Boxer	Klobuchar	Rockefeller
Brown (MA)	Kohl	Sanders
Brown (OH)	Kyl	Schumer
Cantwell	Landrieu	Shaheen
Cardin	Lautenberg	Snowe
Carper	Leahy	Stabenow
Casey	Levin	Tester
Collins	Lieberman	Udall (CO)
Conrad	Lugar	Udall (NM)
Coons	Manchin	Warner
Cornyn	McCain	Webb
Durbin	McCaskill	Whitehouse
Feinstein	Menendez	Wyden
Franken	Merkley	
Gillibrand	Mikulski	

NAYS—35

Barrasso	Grassley	Paul
Blunt	Hatch	Portman
Boozman	Heller	Risch
Burr	Hoeven	Roberts
Chambliss	Hutchison	Rubio
Coats	Inhofe	Sessions
Coburn	Isakson	Shelby
Cochran	Johanns	Thune
Corker	Johnson (WI)	Toomey
Crapo	Lee	Vitter
DeMint	McConnell	Wicker
Enzi	Moran	

NOT VOTING—1

Ayotte

The nomination was confirmed.

RECESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands in recess until 2:15 p.m.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 12:45 p.m., recessed and reassembled at 2:15 p.m. when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. WEBB).

EXECUTIVE SESSION

NOMINATION OF LEON E. PANETTA TO BE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to the consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of Leon E. Panetta, of California, to be Secretary of Defense.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there will be 2 hours of debate, equally divided, between the two leaders or their designees.

The Senator from Michigan.

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, I understand there is a time agreement on this nomination; is that correct?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator is correct—2 hours of debate, equally divided.

Mr. LEVIN. I thank the Presiding Officer, and I yield myself 10 minutes.

Mr. President, the nomination of Leon Panetta to be Secretary of Defense is a wise and a solid nomination. Director Panetta has given decades of dedicated public service to this Nation, and we should all be grateful he is once again willing to answer the call and take the helm at the Department of Defense. We are also grateful to his wife Sylvia for her significant sacrifices over the last 50 years in supporting Leon Panetta's efforts in the public and private sectors.

When Mr. Panetta appeared before the Armed Services Committee at his nomination hearing, all of our Members commented invariably in the same way—reflecting the view that we are grateful Mr. Panetta is willing to take on this position. He is going to bring a reassuring level of continuity and in-depth experience. He has been a critical member of President Obama's national security team during his tenure as Director of the Central Intelligence Agency. The Department of Defense will need Director Panetta's skill and his wisdom to navigate the extraordinarily complex set of challenges in the years ahead.

Foremost among those demands are the demands on our Armed Forces, and these are exemplified by the ongoing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Between those two conflicts, we continue to have approximately 150,000 troops deployed. The U.S. military is also providing support to NATO operations to protect the Libyan people. In addition, even after the extraordinary raid that killed Osama bin Laden, we face potential terrorist threats against us and against our allies which emanate from Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, and other places.

The risk of a terrorist organization getting their hands on and detonating an improvised nuclear device or other weapon of mass destruction remains one of the gravest possible threats to the United States. To counter that threat, the Defense Department is working with the Departments of State, Energy, Homeland Security, and other U.S. Government agencies to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons, fissile materials, and dangerous technologies. As Secretary of Defense, Director Panetta's leadership in this area will be of vital importance. Here again, it is that experience as Director of the CIA which will be so invaluable.

In the coming weeks, President Obama and his advisers will face a number of key national security decisions. While the drawdown of U.S. forces in Iraq remains on track, there have been recent signs of instability in that country. As a result, it is possible that Iraq's political leadership may ask for some kind of continuing U.S. military presence beyond the December 31 withdrawal deadline which was agreed to by President Bush and Prime Minister Maliki in the 2008 Security Agreement.

Another key decision point is looming in Afghanistan regarding reductions in U.S. forces starting next month. President Obama said the other day:

> It's now time for us to recognize that we have accomplished a big chunk of our mission and that it's time for Afghans to take more responsibility.

The President also said a few months ago that the reductions starting next month will be ''significant.'' Hopefully, they will be. Director Panetta, while not assigning a specific number, agreed they need to be significant. A significant reduction in our troop level this year would send a critical signal to Afghan leaders that we mean it when we say our commitment is not open-ended and that they need to be urgently focused on preparing Afghanistan's security forces to assume security responsibility for all of Afghanistan. The more that Afghan security forces do that, the better the chances of success because the Taliban's biggest nightmare is facing a large, effective Afghan Army—an army which is already respected by the Afghan people, but now, hopefully—and soon—in control of Afghanistan's security.

Another major issue facing the Department is the stress that 10 years of unbroken war has placed on our Armed Forces. Over the last decade, many of our service men and women have been away from their families and homes for multiple tours. Not only is our force stressed, so are our military families. We owe them our best efforts to reduce the number of deployments and increase the time between deployments.

The next Secretary of Defense will have to struggle with the competing demands on our forces while Washington struggles with an extremely challenging fiscal environment. The

Defense budget will not and should not be exempt from cuts. But Congress, working with the next Secretary of Defense, will need to scrub each Defense program and expenditure and make the tough choices and tradeoffs between our war fighters' requirements today and preparations for the threats of tomorrow.

Last week, the Armed Services Committee marked up the fiscal year 2012 National Defense Authorization Act. The committee cut about $6 billion from the President's budget request. However, the President has decided to reduce the national security budgets for the next 12 years by $400 billion. What we don't know is how much of that $400 billion he will recommend to come from the Defense budget and how much from the intelligence and homeland security budgets or how much is recommended to be in the first of that 12-year period—fiscal year 2012.

The Nation is fortunate that Director Panetta's compelling record of achievement and experience is well suited to the demands of the position of the Secretary of Defense. Mr. Panetta is the right person to help our military through the fiscal challenges that confront this Nation. His service as President Clinton's Director of the Office of Management and Budget is invaluable because he understands the budget process and because he shaped the decisions that helped achieve the budget surpluses of the late 1990s.

Leon Panetta has repeatedly demonstrated an ability to reach across party lines and work in a bipartisan spirit since entering public service 45 years ago. He worked on the staff of the Republican whip in the Senate and headed the Office of Civil Rights in the Nixon administration. He later won election to the House of Representatives as a Democrat, where he served 16 years, earning the respect of his peers and becoming the chairman of the House Budget Committee.

Throughout his time in public service, Leon Panetta has been guided by a clear moral compass. He has said:

> In politics there has to be a line beyond which you don't go—the line that marks the difference between right and wrong, what your conscience tells you is right. Too often people don't know where the line is. My family, how I was raised, my education, all reinforced my being able to see that line.

Leon Panetta has been intimately involved in the most pressing national security issues of our time. During his tenure as Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, President Obama turned to Director Panetta to personally oversee the manhunt for Osama bin Laden and the awe-inspiring operation that brought an end to al-Qaida's murderous leader and provided a measure of relief to the families and friends who have suffered since September 11, 2001. The raid on the bin Laden compound epitomizes the way in which the CIA and the Defense Department are finally working together to support each other in counterterrorism operations, and Director Panetta deserves credit for this close coordination.

Before concluding, I wish to pass along my gratitude and deep admiration for the man who is stepping down as head of the Department of Defense, Secretary Robert Gates. Secretary Gates has provided extraordinary service to this country, spanning the administrations of eight Presidents. Four and a half years ago, he left the comfort and rewards of private life, following a long career in government, to once again serve the critical post of President Bush's Secretary of Defense at one of the most difficult times in recent history. Throughout his tenure, across the Bush and Obama administrations, Secretary Gates' leadership, judgment, and candor have earned him the trust and respect of all who have worked with him.

Secretary Gates has combined vision and thoughtfulness with toughness, clarity and courageous decision-making. Secretary Gates established a direct and open relationship with Congress and with our Senate Armed Services Committee in particular. As chairman of that committee, I will always be personally grateful for that.

Secretary Gates' tenure as Secretary of Defense will be judged by history to have been truly exceptional. So our next Secretary of Defense will have enormous responsibilities but also big shoes to fill. I am confident Leon Panetta is the right person to take on that challenge, and I urge our colleagues to support this nomination.

Mr. President, I yield the floor, I suggest the absence of a quorum, and I ask unanimous consent that any time consumed during the quorum call be equally divided.

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

The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I rise in strong support of President Obama's nominee to serve as our 23rd Secretary of Defense, Mr. Leon Panetta. These are big shoes to fill. Secretary Gates has had a remarkable term as Secretary and a remarkable career in public service. In addition, the challenges our military faces in this economic climate are significant. We must have a serious discussion about crafting a sustainable way forward.

I sat down with Director Panetta earlier this month to discuss these challenges. I can say with certainty, Leon Panetta is up to the test. He has the experience and wisdom required, and I look forward to working with him once the Senate gives its advice and consent to his nomination.

I have known Leon Panetta for a long time. We served together in the House of Representatives, and we worked together in government for many years. He has an amazing history of public service to America. We served together on the House Budget Committee when we were both Congressmen in the early 1990s, and he chaired that committee. He understands budgets and the challenges they present.

As Director of the Office of Management and Budget, he took that skill to the executive branch; and as Chief of Staff to President William Jefferson Clinton, he crafted the proposal which brought us to balance in our budget as a nation.

It is hard to imagine it was only 10 years ago that we had a balanced Federal budget. In fact, we were generating a surplus, putting that money into the Social Security trust fund to make it stronger. Ten years later, mired deep in debt, it is hard to imagine that happened, but it did, and Leon Panetta was a big part of that occurrence.

He advised President George W. Bush on how to bring a close to the Iraq war in a responsible way. For the last 2 years he has had an awesome responsibility as Director of the Central Intelligence Agency.

Thanks to the President's strategic focus and Director Panetta's extraordinary leadership, Special Forces and CIA operatives were able to locate and capture Osama bin Laden last month in Pakistan. These are precisely the skills and experiences we need at the table at this moment.

I know Leon Panetta as more than just a fellow colleague in the House and a person who shared some time in public service when I did. I know him as a person. I know his family. I know what he thinks. I know his values. I have to tell you, President Obama and America are fortunate to have a person of this quality who is willing to give even more of his life in public service. He could have stayed out in Monterey, CA, his home area, and no hardship assignment, but he chose not to. He came to Washington to head up the Central Intelligence Agency and now has accepted this invitation to head up the Department of Defense. There is no question in my mind that he will bring to it an extraordinary skill level and amazing values.

Director Panetta and I have talked a little bit about some subjects, and one near and dear to my heart, the DREAM Act. The DREAM Act is legislation I introduced almost 10 years ago allowing immigrant students who have no country an opportunity to contribute to America. These young people came to the United States with their parents when they were just kids and infants. They have lived here all their lives. All they want is a chance to prove how much they love this country. The bill I introduced said there are two ways they should be allowed to do it: No. 1, to complete at least 2 years of college, to have, obviously, a high school diploma and good background; but another, to serve in our Nation's military.

I have been proud to have the support of Secretary of Defense Gates in this effort, and I look forward to the same support from the next, Secretary Panetta. The DREAM Act would strengthen our military and strengthen our Nation, and I am sure, as General Colin Powell has said, ''Immigration is what's keeping this country's lifeblood moving forward.'' These young people can help us move forward as a nation to be safer and create more opportunity.

We have a number of challenges ahead. Our men and women are fighting wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and now Libya. Servicemembers and their families have borne an incredible burden of sacrifice in these conflicts over the last decade. As a nation, we are spending tens of billions of dollars a month to sustain them in their efforts.

At the same time, public support for these undertakings will not last forever. The current situation needs to change, and the President is about to make an announcement when it comes to our troop levels in Afghanistan. We have to craft a way forward and deal honestly and responsibly with what is possibly one of our most challenging situations in Afghanistan. I believe it has to begin with a substantial redeployment of U.S. troops back to America from Afghanistan.

Last week I joined Senator JEFF MERKLEY of Oregon and 24 of my colleagues in a letter to the President expressing these concerns. I trust the President and incoming Secretary of Defense and Congress can find a responsible path forward. We need to take a hard look at every aspect of our Federal budget, including our Department of Defense, to sustain our men and women in uniform but not to waste money on privatization, on contractors, and on runaway contracts.

As Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mullen has commented that our greatest national security threat is our ballooning deficit. Of course, we need to protect our country, but we need to do it in a fiscally responsible manner. Even as we address the path forward in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya, even as we trim the spending in the defense budget, we will not back away from our commitment to the men and women in uniform. I know Leon shares that statement.

I support Leon Panetta as our next Secretary of Defense because now more than ever we need his steady hand, his leadership, to tackle these challenges in budgets, in management, and in the critical conflicts we are engaged in around the world. I congratulate President Obama for selecting Leon Panetta for this awesome responsibility, and I look forward to working with him on these issues and others in the years to come.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I rise today to express my strong support for the nomination of Leon Panetta as the next Secretary of Defense. Director Panetta comes to this job at an extraordinarily challenging time for the Department of Defense and for our Nation. Among the many issues he will confront, Mr. Panetta will oversee the completion of our direct military operations in Iraq, the beginning of the transition of our forces out of Afghanistan, the enhancement of our cyber defenses, and the reduction of our defense budget.

I have known Leon Panetta for many years, and I know he is particularly well suited to address all of these challenges. He is a man of great intellect, of great decency, and great determination.

At the end of this year, for example, in compliance with the Status of Forces Agreement, we will complete the withdrawal of our forces from Iraq and hand over primary responsibility for our ongoing relationship with Iraq to the Department of State. It remains to be seen whether the Iraqi Government will ask us to extend our military presence past December 31. But for now, we are thoroughly and determinately preparing our troops to leave. Having served as a member of the Iraq Study Group, Mr. Panetta certainly understands the importance of this transition and will carry it out.

As the next Secretary of Defense, Leon Panetta will also continue to focus our efforts on fighting terrorism in Afghanistan and Pakistan. We are facing a critical turning point in our operations. This week, we expect President Obama to announce his plan to begin reducing our force levels in Afghanistan this summer, a commitment he made in his speech at West Point in 2009.

Along with the reduction in forces we must sustain the security gains that we have accomplished during the past year and further build the capacity of the Afghan forces so they are able to take full responsibility for their own security. Mr. Panetta understands how important it is for all of our agencies to work together in this effort and all security missions; that using military force may be our primary weapon of securing areas but enduring success comes from coordination among the intelligence and law enforcement communities, from effective diplomacy, and from assistance programs administered by the Department of State and the USAID.

The conditions on the ground in Afghanistan are directly related to our ability to successfully attack the terrorist networks that are operating along the border in Pakistan. In his current position as Director of the CIA, Mr. Panetta has reinvigorated these efforts, most notably with the successful raid on Osama bin Laden. Indeed, I believe when history looks back, outside of the critical and ultimate decision by the President of the United States, one of the most important roles played in this effort to prepare the way for those courageous SEALs was the steady leadership of Leon Panetta at the Central Intelligence Agency. He understands the complexities of our relationship with Pakistan and, indeed, throughout the world. This expertise will be critical as we move forward, and critical for our next Secretary of Defense.

He will also lead the Department of Defense in preparing for the emerging threats to our national security, such as attacks to our cyber infrastructure. Indeed, every branch of government is working to define the roles various organizations will play in protecting people, infrastructure, and information within cyberspace.

During his confirmation hearings before the Senate Armed Services Committee, I discussed with Director Panetta the strategy the Department of Defense would employ in confronting the potential of a cyber attack against the United States. He responded in no uncertain terms. His words:

> I have often said that there is a strong likelihood that the next Pearl Harbor that we confront could very well be a cyberattack that cripples our power system, our grid, our security systems, our financial systems, our governmental systems. This is a real possibility in today's world. And as a result, I think we have to aggressively be able to counter that.

Indeed, Mr. Panetta understands the future as well as the present, and he will bring his experience as well as his vision to bear on the emerging challenges that face the United States.

Perhaps most challenging of all, Leon Panetta will lead the Department at a time of great fiscal constraints. As our Nation continues to find a path forward to rebound from the economic challenges of the last few years, there is an ever-growing pressure to reduce the size of the defense budget, which has nearly doubled over the past 10 years. But we must be careful to do so in a way that removes unsustainable costs without losing vital capability.

As a result of the high operational tempo and the duration of multiple overseas operations, all of our services are facing serious reset and recapitalization needs. Serious decisions will have to be made to ensure that we have the right systems in place to meet the threats we face, all at a price level that we can afford.

Having served as the House Budget Committee chairman, and as the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, there is no one who has more knowledge, more experience, more sense of the details than Leon Panetta, and I believe he is the most well qualified individual to tackle the huge budgetary issues that are facing the Department of Defense.

Leon will have an extraordinary role to play, particularly in the wake of the extraordinary service of Secretary of Defense Robert Gates. I can't think of anyone I respect or admire more. I can't think of anyone who has served this country with more distinction,

who has served with more selfless dedication to the Nation, and fundamentally who has made his decisions knowing full well that at the end of the day young Americans in the uniform of the United States will carry out his orders.

Bob Gates has done a superb job. But I have every confidence that Leon Panetta will continue to carry on, will continue to meet those standards, will continue to lead the Department of Defense with distinction, with dedication and great loyalty, just as Secretary Gates has done, and ultimately we will know that at the end of all the decisions emanating from the Pentagon there is a young American willing and able and ready to serve, to support this Nation and defend it.

With that, I rise to express my great support for Secretary-designee Panetta and wish him well in all of his endeavors and pledge to work with him closely.

I yield the floor.

I note the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. FRANKEN). The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. MANCHIN. Mr. President, first of all, I rise in total support of Mr. Leon Panetta as the new Secretary of Defense. He is an outstanding public servant who has served in many capacities and he has been a tremendous leader in every role he has held.

THE DEBT CEILING AND AFGHANISTAN

With that being said, I rise to speak on our war in Afghanistan. Very soon our Nation, this esteemed body, and particularly the President of the United States will address two of the greatest challenges our Nation currently faces. The first is Afghanistan.

The second issue is raising the debt ceiling and confronting our Nation's unsustainable spending and debt. To the average American, Afghanistan and raising our debt ceiling may seem unrelated, but they are, in fact, directly related. They are directly related to the hard fiscal and strategic choices our Nation must make if we are to remain safe and secure in the coming decades.

With respect to raising the debt ceiling, the budget realities we face are both striking and frightening. While some may choose to ignore this threat, mere words cannot give weight to the fiscal peril our Nation now faces. Only numbers can.

Since 1992, we have raised the debt ceiling 16 times. In 1992, our national debt stood at $4.1 trillion. Between 2002 and today, our national debt rose from $5.9 trillion to over $14.3 trillion. Now for the first time in our Nation's history, our yearly budget deficits may exceed $1 trillion for 4 years in a row. At the current pace of deficit spending, CRS projects our national debt will exceed $23.1 trillion by 2021.

In order to pay for the financial hole we have dug, the Congressional Budget Office projects that net interest payments will increase fourfold over the next 10 years, from $197 billion in fiscal year 2011 to $792 billion in fiscal year 2021. To put that number into perspective, one decade from today, interest payments on our $23.1 trillion debt will exceed the amount we currently spend on education, energy, and national defense combined. Numbers of this size are not only unimaginable, they will prove catastrophic for our Nation's future.

The fiscal peril we face reminds me of the words a former Senator said on this floor in declaring why he chose in 2006 to vote against raising the debt ceiling when our national debt stood at that time at $8.18 trillion. He said:

> The rising debt is a hidden domestic enemy, robbing our cities and States of the critical investments and infrastructure like bridges, ports, and levees; robbing our families and our children of critical investments in education and health care reform; robbing our seniors of the retirement and health security they counted on. Every dollar we pay in interest is a dollar that is not going to investment in America's priorities.

That former Senator was President Barack Obama.

While his perspective on these words may ring differently today, I believe they accurately capture the difficult choices we face today. The choice is this: Will we rebuild America's future?

Today, with our Nation facing a stagnant economy and a death spiral of debt, we can no longer have it all—or pretend we can. We must choose what as a nation we can and cannot afford to do. Our risky debt will not only undermine our economic security, it also threatens our national security. As ADM Michael Mullen said:

> I believe that our debt is the greatest threat to our national security. If we as a country do not address our fiscal imbalances in the near-term, our national power will erode, and the costs to our ability to maintain and sustain influences could be great.

We can no longer in good conscience cut services and programs at home, raise taxes, or—this is very important—lift the debt ceiling in order to fund nation building in Afghanistan.

Ten years ago, when our mission in Afghanistan began, it was a just and rightful mission to seek out and destroy those responsible for the terrorist attacks on 9/11 and the deaths of thousands of innocent Americans. We overthrew the Taliban government to provide a safe haven to al-Qaida. We have hunted down and killed Osama bin Laden as well as most of the senior members of this terrorist group. Today, in Afghanistan, in a nation of 30 million people, intelligence estimates suggest there are only between 50 and 100 al-Qaida terrorists harbored there. Because of the incredible work of our military men and women, the mission of destroying al-Qaida in Afghanistan by all accounts has been a success. But the real truth is, after 10 years, our current mission in Afghanistan has become less about destroying al-Qaida and more about building a country where, frankly, one has never existed.

In February, I saw firsthand the significant challenges our brave troops face as they pursue this nation building mission. During the trip I heard from Ambassador Eikenberry and General Petraeus. I visited Helmand Province and Kandahar. I met with local tribal leaders and President Karzai of Afghanistan. What I heard from many officials and diplomats was that progress could be just around the corner but only if we give it more time and more money. I heard we must stay to counter the threat of al-Qaida but then was told that only a handful of al-Qaida members existed in Afghanistan. I was told that governance was improving, but that corruption was so rampant that billions—yes, billions—of dollars were lost to corrupt officials who seemed more interested in improving their own lives than the lives of their own people. I was told we need a sizable force to diffuse the threat posed by the Taliban but that estimating the size of the enemy was difficult. Still, everyone acknowledges that their force is a fraction of the number of troops we have there now. I was told that because of rampant corruption and theft, the very cost of moving our supplies was indirectly funding the very enemy we face.

I was told that China—yes, China—could reap billions by extracting resources from Afghanistan, but guess what. They are not contributing anything to the cost of security. I was told that after years of spending billions training a new Afghanistan military and police force, it could be years longer before they could fully defend their nation and their people, and even then it would demand billions more in funding from us. I was also told we were building schools, roads, and infrastructure as well as providing billions in aid for small businesses and job creation so Afghanistan could become more self-sufficient. But today, 97 percent of the Afghan economy is based on foreign aid, and that is after 10 long years. I have been told again and again that American aid is critical to rebuilding Afghanistan but that local projects built with American tax dollars could not be branded as American-funded projects out of fear of reprisals. I was told the people of Afghanistan truly want us there but was then told in a meeting with President Karzai that it was time for America to leave.

The American people have been hearing all of these arguments and the sad facts for nearly a decade. Now, after 10 years, I had truly hoped progress in Afghanistan would be clear and the Afghan people would be united and their government and leaders would be one defined by honesty, integrity, and a shared determination to build a better state. But the real truth is impossible to ignore. After 10 years, we face the choice of whether we will continue to spend tens of billions of tax dollars and lose precious American lives not on

fighting and killing al-Qaida terrorists in Afghanistan but policing and building a state where the leaders seem indifferent to the difficulties of their people and their people seem indifferent at best, if not hostile, to our presence.

Tomorrow, President Obama will present to the American people his latest review on the war in Afghanistan and whether our mission will change. As is already clear, some in this esteemed body will argue for the President to stay the course and others will suggest a very different course. The question the President faces—and we all face—is quite simple: Will we choose to rebuild America or Afghanistan? In light of our Nation's fiscal perils, we cannot do both.

I believe if we are being honest with the American people about the depth of fiscal challenges we face at home, it is impossible to defend the mission in Afghanistan in which we are rebuilding schools, training police, teaching people to read—in other words, building a country—even at the expense of our own.

Neither the President nor any Senator can divorce the difficult decisions we must now make on Afghanistan from the equally difficult decisions we must now make on cutting domestic spending in order to raise the debt ceiling.

While the truth is the war on terrorism must be fought and it must be won, that war is not in Afghanistan. Yet, with every passing month, we are choosing to spend billions we can't afford to fight a war against an enemy that is no longer there.

Since the day I was sworn in, I have heard from countless of my fellow West Virginians who ask, How is it possible we are willing to spend hundreds of billions of dollars in Afghanistan while we face mountains of debt and spending cuts here at home? How is it possible we will choose to spend hundreds of billions of dollars to build Afghanistan when our children, our seniors, our veterans, the poor, and the middle class are being asked to bear the brunt of massive spending cuts?

I have carefully thought over these questions over these many months, and after hearing from my constituents, seeing Afghanistan again with my own eyes, listening to our soldiers on the ground, hearing from dozens of diplomats, foreign policy experts, and the military leaders over these many months, as well as confronting the truth about the fiscal and economic peril our Nation faces in the coming years, I believe it is time for President Obama to begin a substantial and responsible reduction in our military presence in Afghanistan. I believe it is time for us to rebuild America, not Afghanistan.

That is why I strongly agreed with Senators MERKLEY and LEE, and the words of 27 of my Republican and Democratic colleagues, who made it clear in a letter they sent to the President last Thursday that:

> . . . we must accelerate the transfer responsibility for Afghanistan's development to the Afghan people and their government. We should maintain our capacity to eliminate any new terrorist threats, continue to train the Afghan National Security Forces, and maintain our diplomatic and humanitarian efforts. However, these objectives do not require the presence of over 100,000 American troops engaged in intensive combat operations.

I believe it is time for us to compel the elected leaders of Afghanistan and its people to take responsibility for the destiny of their nation so we can ensure the destiny of ours. In that spirit, I have sent President Obama a letter calling on him to pursue significant reductions and end the scope of our current mission in Afghanistan well before 2014. I believe any further mission in Afghanistan should, as my Senate colleagues suggested in their letter, focus primarily on responding to any resurgent terrorist threat as well as providing targeted training for the Afghan military and police.

Throughout this transition period and beyond, I have asked the President to provide the American taxpayer a monthly accounting, to be published online, of every dollar that will be provided to Afghanistan government officials and agencies so as to ensure that no American tax dollars are lost to corruption and greed.

As for those on the right or the left who believe that leaving Afghanistan sooner is irresponsible, I simply ask them: Is 10 years not long enough? I ask them to tell the families of our brave military men and women who are on their third and fourth tour of duty, how much longer must they wait to come home. I ask them to look into the eyes of any American child and ask them to surrender our Nation's future for the sake of another. I ask all of them to explain to the American people the sanity of spending $485 billion more, on top of the $443 billion we have spent, to build Afghanistan over the next decade at the very same time our Nation drowns in a sea of debt.

The time has come to make the difficult decision. Charity begins at home. We can no longer afford to rebuild Afghanistan and America. We must choose, and I choose America.

As I made clear when I ran for this esteemed office, I would not put my political party before country, but I would do my best to do what is right for the people of my beloved State and great Nation. To that end, I promised to speak out and take positions, as difficult as they may be, not for the benefit of my next election but that are best for the next generation.

It is why I spoke out about the debt, to tell the American people and the people of West Virginia that I would not vote to raise the debt ceiling without a long-term permanent fix. I did this not because it was popular or easy but because we, as elected leaders of this great Nation, have a solemn obligation to rebuild our Nation before all others.

Our economy, our prosperity, our schools, our children, our veterans, our soldiers, our workers, our seniors, our Nation's future must come first. I, for one, will not look West Virginians in the eye and tell them that in order to raise the debt ceiling, vital programs and funding for Social Security, Medicare, our schools, roads, health care, veterans, seniors, and infrastructure will be slashed but we will continue to spend billions building schools, roads, and infrastructure in Afghanistan.

The time has come for us to realize the people of Afghanistan have to choose their own destiny. We cannot build it for them. The time has come for us to realize that in this time of fiscal peril, our solemn obligation is to build our own Nation, and that by doing so we will make America safer and stronger for generations to come.

The words of the great West Virginia statesman Robert C. Byrd ring even more true today than in October 2009 when he gave his last floor speech about the war in Afghanistan. Our friend said this:

> During a time of record deficits, some actually continue to suggest that the United States should sink hundreds of billions of borrowed dollars into Afghanistan, effectively turning our backs on our own substantial domestic needs, all the while deferring the costs and deferring the problems for future generations to address. Our national security interests lie in defeating—no, I go further, in destroying al-Qaida. Until we take that and only that mission seriously, we risk adding the United States to the long, long list of nations whose best laid plans have died on the cold, barren, rocky slopes of that far off country, Afghanistan.

May God bless the brave men and women who serve this Nation and the United States of America.

Thank you, Mr. President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, I rise in support of the nomination of Leon Panetta to succeed Robert Gates. But first I feel compelled to respond to the statements by the Senator from West Virginia which characterize the isolationist, withdrawal, lack of knowledge, of history attitude that seems to be on the rise in America.

In case the Senator from West Virginia forgot it or never knew it, we withdrew from Afghanistan one time. We withdrew from Afghanistan, and the Taliban came, eventually followed by al-Qaida, followed by attacks on the United States of America.

The Senator from West Virginia has expressed his admiration for the men and women who are serving. I hope he would pay attention to the finest military leader who will now be the head of the CIA, General Petraeus, whose knowledge and background may exceed that of the Senator from West Virginia.

If we leave Afghanistan in defeat, we will repeat the lessons of history. It is not our expenditures on Afghanistan that are the reasons we are now experiencing budget difficulties.

I am pleased the Senator from West Virginia went to Afghanistan once. I would suggest he consult with the people who know best that since 2009, when the surge began, we have had success on the ground in Afghanistan, and we are succeeding.

There are enormous challenges ahead of us. But as Secretary Gates has said: Withdrawal to ''Fortress America''—which is basically the message of the Senator from West Virginia—will inevitably lead to attacks from them on the United States of America. I view the remarks of the Senator from West Virginia as at least uninformed about history and strategy and the challenges we face from radical Islamic extremism, including al-Qaida.

I urge my colleagues in the Senate to vote in favor of this nomination today.

Director Panetta has had an extraordinary career of public service. He served in the House of Representatives, representing his California district for eight terms. He served in the White House as President Clinton's Chief of Staff and Director of the Office of Management and Budget.

Since February 2009 he has been the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, strengthening that agency and forging positive relationships in the interagency process and with the congressional intelligence oversight committees. It is my expectation that Director Panetta will work closely with GEN David Petraeus, the nominee to succeed him at the CIA, and continue the cooperation and commitment that enabled the finding and elimination of Osama bin Laden.

I am certainly hopeful that as Secretary of Defense Director Panetta will successfully lead the effort to find and eliminate Ayman al-Zawahiri, who we are told has assumed leadership of al-Qaida, and other al-Qaida leaders. Zawahiri is a sworn enemy of the United States and our way of life and, like bin Laden, must be dealt with in similar terms.

Before discussing the challenges Mr. Panetta will encounter, I want to express my thanks and admiration for the service of Secretary Gates as he nears the end of his 4½-year tenure as Secretary of Defense. I recall that through much of 2007 and 2008 we heard about Secretary Gates' countdown wristwatch that displayed the number of days until a new administration would take over in January 2009, and he and his wife Becky could finally return to their peaceful lakeside home and retirement in Washington State. It is fortunate for the country that President Obama asked, and Secretary Gates agreed to postpone retirement, and that he continued to serve and, presumably, discarded that wristwatch.

Secretary Gates testified at his nomination hearing on December 5, 2006, that he agreed to leave Texas A&M University and return to government out of love for his country, and he and his family have provided one of the greatest examples I have seen of that kind of patriotism, answering the call to duty when his talents were most needed. For this, and for innumerable other contributions he has made to the men and women of the Armed Forces, he has truly earned a place in history as one of America's greatest Secretaries of Defense.

In December 2006, at a time when so many Senators were clamoring for a cut-and-run strategy in Iraq—just as they are calling for a cut-and-run strategy in Afghanistan—Secretary Gates made the following statement at his nomination hearing:

> While I am open to alternative ideas about our future strategy and tactics in Iraq, I feel quite strongly about one point. Developments in Iraq over the next year or two will, I believe, shape the entire Middle East and greatly influence global geopolitics for many years to come. Our course over the next year or two will determine whether the American and Iraqi people, and the next President of the United States, will face a slowly, but steadily improving situation in Iraq and in the region or will face the very real risk, and possible reality, of a regional conflagration. We need to work together to develop a strategy that does not leave Iraq in chaos and that protects our long-term interests in, and hopes for the region.

Mr. President, you could substitute the word ''Afghanistan'' for exactly what Secretary Gates then said in December 2006. Then we had the surge. There were 59 votes against the surge that would have called for withdrawal in the summer of 2007. Some of us knew what was right and fought for it, and we have succeeded in Iraq, just as we will fight to continue the surge in Afghanistan. We will succeed in Afghanistan, and we will come home with honor, and Afghanistan will not deteriorate to a cockpit of conflict between regional countries that will then cause again the threat of radical Islamic extremism to threaten our very existence—certainly pose threats of attacks on the United States.

Secretary Gates was, of course, correct then about Iraq. Today we must add Afghanistan and Libya to his warning about the future consequences of the decisions we make today. In the next few months, our country faces decisions related to our national security and defense that will echo for decades to come—decisions that will determine whether we remain the world's leading global military power, able to meet our many commitments worldwide, or whether we will begin abandoning that role.

One of these decisions that will have perhaps the most impact on this outcome is our response to the President's stated goal of cutting $400 billion in national security spending by 2023—on top of the $178 billion in efficiencies and top line reductions that Secretary Gates already has imposed.

Secretary Gates and Admiral Mullen have sounded the alarm against misguided and excessive reductions in defense spending that cut into the muscle of our military capabilities. If we get this wrong, it will result in a dramatic drop in U.S. influence and, as Secretary Gates has said, ''a smaller military able to go fewer places and do fewer things.''

Defense spending is not what is sinking this country into fiscal crisis, and if the President and Congress act on that flawed assumption they will create a situation that is truly unaffordable: the decline of U.S. military power and influence.

It is inevitable there will be cuts to defense spending, and some reductions are no doubt necessary to improve the efficiency of the Department of Defense. But I also remember GEN Edward Meyer, then-Chief of Staff of the Army, who warned in 1980 that excessive defense cuts over many years had produced a ''hollow army.'' That is not an experience we can or should repeat in the years to come. We must learn the lessons of history.

I sincerely hope Director Panetta, upon assuming office, will not focus exclusively on how but on whether the President's proposal should be implemented and will apply his independent judgment in providing advice to the President on the cuts that can be made without damage to our national security.

Last week, the Committee on Armed Services completed its markup for the Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2012. In a very tough fiscal environment, this markup represents an effort to support our warfighters and bolster the readiness of the U.S. military. Unfortunately, the committee chose to authorize hundreds of millions of dollars in unnecessary and unrequested porkbarrel projects and rejected my efforts to stop the out-of-control cost overruns of the F–35 program.

The Defense authorization bill is an important piece of legislation while our country continues to be engaged in two wars; therefore, I voted to move the bill out of committee. Nevertheless, I will continue my efforts to fight the egregious and wasteful spending during debate on the floor of the Senate, and I will urge Director Panetta, once he is confirmed, to favorably endorse the proposals I will make to properly use precious national defense dollars.

In addition, especially in this budget environment, it will be important to continue to eliminate weapons programs that are over cost, behind schedule, and not providing improvements in combat power and capabilities. After 10 years of war, we must continue to eliminate every dollar of wasteful spending that siphons resources away from our most vital need: enabling our troops to succeed in combat.

One of the key criteria I am looking for in the next Secretary of Defense is continuity—the continuation of the wise judgment, policies, and decision-making that have characterized Secretary Gates' leadership of the Department of Defense. As Director of the CIA, Mr. Panetta has demonstrated that he possesses the experience and

ability to ensure that we achieve our objectives in the three conflicts in which U.S. forces are now engaged: Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya.

In Iraq, the key question now is whether some presence of U.S. forces will remain beyond the end of this year, pending an Iraqi request and approval, to support Iraq's continuing needs and our enduring national interests. I believe such a presence is necessary, and I encourage the administration to work closely with the Maliki government to bring about this outcome.

In Afghanistan, the main question is the size and scope of the drawdown of forces beginning this July. Here, too, I agree with Secretary Gates that any drawdown should be modest so as to maximize our ability to lock in the hard-won gains of our troops through the next fighting season. I hope Director Panetta, as the Secretary of Defense, will support ''modest'' reductions and take no action that would undermine the hard-won gains in Afghanistan.

Finally, we know that there is growing opposition to continuing the U.S. involvement in Libya. There has already been one legislative attempt to bind the President's authority as Commander-in-Chief, and there will likely be others. In short, the accumulated consequences of the administration's delay, confusion, and lack of meaningful consultation have been a wholesale revolt in Congress against the administration's policy.

Although I have disagreed, and disagreed strongly at times, with aspects of the administration's policy in Libya, I believe the President did the right thing by intervening to stop a humanitarian disaster in Libya. Amid all of our present arguments about legal and constitutional interpretations, we cannot forget the main point: In the midst of the most groundbreaking geopolitical event in two decades, as peaceful protests for democracy were sweeping the Middle East, with Qadhafi's forces ready to strike Benghazi, and with Arabs and Muslims in Libya and across the region pleading for the U.S. military to stop the bloodshed, the United States and our allies took action and prevented the massacre that Qadhafi had promised to commit in a city of 700,000 people. By doing so, we began creating conditions that are increasing the pressure on Qadhafi to give up power.

Director Panetta has been nominated to lead our Armed Forces amid their tenth year of sustained overseas combat. Not surprisingly, this has placed a major strain on our forces and their families. And yet, our military is performing better today than at any time in our history. That is thanks to the thousands of brave young Americans in uniform who are writing a new chapter in the history of our great country. They have shown themselves to be the equals of the greatest generations before them. And the calling that all of us must answer, in our service, is to be equal and forever faithful to the sacrifice of these amazing Americans.

I have outlined some of the challenges that lay before Mr. Panetta. I have the highest confidence, however, that he is their equal.

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Mr. President, I rise in strong support of the nomination of Leon Panetta to be the 23rd Secretary of Defense.

Mr. Panetta, who currently serves as the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, was nominated by President Obama on April 28. The Senate Armed Services Committee held a hearing on his nomination on June 9, and I was honored to introduce him at that hearing. His nomination was approved unanimously by the committee on June 14.

I would like to speak briefly about Director Panetta's career, and in particular his time at the Central Intelligence Agency.

In his 47 years of public service, Director Panetta has held the positions of Congressman, chairman of the House Budget Committee, Director of the Office of Management and Budget, chief of staff to the White House, codirector, with his wife, of the Leon & Sylvia Panetta Institute for Public Policy, which I have had the pleasure of speaking before, member of the Iraq Study Group, and Director of the CIA.

His career and service started in 1964 as a second lieutenant in the U.S. Army, and now 47 years later he has come full circle to be nominated to lead the Department of Defense and U.S. Armed Forces.

In the course of 2 years as Director of the CIA, Mr. Panetta has mastered the intelligence field, led the CIA through a very tumultuous time, restored badly damaged relationships with Congress and with the Director of National Intelligence, and carried out President Obama's personal instruction to him to find Osama bin Laden.

It has been my pleasure to serve as the chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence during this time and to be able to work closely with Mr. Panetta.

I have no doubt that his past experience and his capabilities prepare Leon Panetta to meet the major challenges before the Department of Defense.

With knowledge of CIA operations and analysis, he will come to the Pentagon with a thorough understanding of the situation in Afghanistan as well as the aggravating factors of our relationship with Pakistan. Through CIA analysis and operations, he is also well aware of the other contingencies around the globe where the U.S. military may be called to deploy.

Director Panetta is also well positioned to guide the Department through the constrained budget environment. The budget cuts to the Pentagon have already begun, for the first time in 10 years, with the appropriations bills now moving through the Congress.

The Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, on which I serve, held a hearing last week with Secretary Robert Gates and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, ADM Mike Mullen. Both of them expressed concerns that budget cuts not lead to a ''hollow force'' or deprive the Department and the Nation of needed capabilities.

I am confident that Leon Panetta possesses the credentials and experience to make cuts where needed and where prudent, but that he will do so in a way that keeps the military strong and capable, and in a way that maintains the cohesion of the Department and its services.

Beyond Director Panetta's experience is his leadership style, his character, and a deft personal touch. As we all know, personal relationships and the way one approaches things matter a great deal, whether within Cabinet meetings or negotiating with foreign counterparts. Mr. Panetta's approach is effective, and it provides for a very good working relationship with the Congress.

Positions like the Director of the CIA or the Secretary of Defense require a strong character and a strong moral compass, qualities that this nominee possesses.

Let me give you an example. Early in his tenure at the CIA in 2009, Director Panetta was briefed on a number of active and recent intelligence programs. One of them, which I can't describe here, was particularly sensitive and provoked questions and concern. Director Panetta asked the CIA staff if the congressional intelligence committees had been briefed on this program. He was told they had not.

Mr. Panetta immediately requested an urgent meeting with the Intelligence Committee to brief us. He said he found it unacceptable that this program had been withheld from Congress, and terminated it in large part on that basis.

In the 2 years since, he has never declined to answer a question or provide us with his candid views. He has been completely forthright, and motivated only by what is best for the CIA, and more importantly, this nation.

The Department of Defense is the largest Department in the Federal Government. As Secretary Gates recently noted, the health care budget of the Department of Defense is bigger than the entire budget of the CIA. The Secretary of Defense is responsible for thousands of young men and women serving in Afghanistan, Iraq, and deployed around the world, and bears the burden of every death and casualty we suffer.

I agree with Secretary Gates that no other position can fully prepare someone to be Secretary of Defense. But I believe that Leon Panetta, who has served honorably and successfully in Congress, at the Office of Management and Budget, at the White House, and now the CIA, is uniquely qualified to be

another outstanding Secretary of Defense in this very challenging time.

I urge his confirmation.

Ms. SNOWE. Mr. President, I rise today to enthusiastically support the nomination of Leon Panetta, the current Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, to be the 23rd Secretary of Defense.

Director Panetta has contributed nearly five decades of public service to our Nation, including as an officer in the U.S. Army, a distinguished Congressman, and most recently as Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, a position for which he was confirmed by the Senate on February 12, 2009. He and I served together in the House of Representatives from my first term in 1979 until he departed in 1993 to become Director of the Office of Management and Budget. Over the past 2½ years, I have had the opportunity to frequently work with Director Panetta, in my role as a senior member of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence.

Like his predecessor, Dr. Robert Gates—who also served as CIA Director before becoming Secretary of Defense—Director Panetta brings to the Pentagon a wealth of experience built over a lifetime of service to his Nation and his fellow Americans. Over the past 2½ years, Director Panetta has repaired a damaged relationship between the CIA and Congress, an impressive accomplishment, to say the least, and led the agency and the Nation's human intelligence activities at a time when the Nation waged two wars and contended with such threats as Islamic extremism, terrorism, and cyber intrusion and attack.

And of course, Director Panetta will forever be remembered as the CIA Director during the May 1, 2011, mission in which U.S. forces once and for all rid the world of public enemy No. 1 and brought justice to the evil incarnate that was Osama bin Laden. On that night, the combined might of our Nations military, intelligence, and counterterrorism professionals sent the unmistakable message to the terrorists of the world that America will prevail in this fight.

I deeply appreciate Director Panetta's efforts at the CIA, and believe he leaves the entire Agency, from the halls of Langley to its agents in the farthest reaches of the world, a better and more capable organization than it was when he arrived. I am confident that Director Panetta's unique experiences within the military, the Congress, and the intelligence communities will serve him, the Department of Defense, and the Nation well when he assumes the role of Secretary of Defense.

More than 4½ years ago, in December 2006, I rose in support of the nomination of Dr. Gates for the position for which we consider Director Panetta today. At the time, I said that Dr. Gates and the Nation were facing the imperative of charting a new course and strategy in Iraq, rising violence in Afghanistan, global terrorism, the threats posed by nuclear states such as North Korea and possibly Iran, and the increasing strains on our military.

Director Panetta faces similar challenges today. He must continue to help shape our role in Iraq, define our strategy for the Nation's future involvement in Afghanistan, and recapitalize and reconstitute the elements of our military that have been at war for nearly a decade, while ensuring that the U.S. military is prepared to meet and overcome any hurdle on the horizon, whether in North Korea, China, Africa, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, or other, as yet unknowable, places around this globe.

At his confirmation hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee on June 9, Director Panetta said, ''We are no longer in the Cold War. This is more like the blizzard war—a blizzard of challenges that draws speed and intensity from terrorism, from rapidly developing technologies, and the rising number of powers on the world stage.''

Director Panetta must confront the unpredictable vagaries of this ''blizzard war'' within perhaps the most arduous budgetary environment our Nation has faced since the Great Depression—an environment in which President Obama has already called for $400 billion in reductions to national security spending over the next decade, much of which will come out of Department of Defense budgets.

It is hard to imagine how exactly cuts of hundreds of billions of dollars to national security budgets can be possible without both significant tradeoffs and a fundamental retooling of our national security strategy. Perhaps more imperative than any other task confronting him, Director Panetta will likely be the individual most responsible for ensuring that our national security strategy is appropriate for meeting our global and national security interests, and that our defense budgets are sufficient to meet those challenges.

In this era in which distance alone is insufficient to insulate the United States and our global interests from terrorists and nations that wish to do us harm, Director Panetta faces the extraordinary task of ensuring that our Armed Forces remain able to defeat today's conventional and irregular threats, project power and U.S. presence around the world, and develop the war fighting capabilities necessary for our soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines to prevail in the conflicts of the future.

If any nominee possesses the defense and budget bona fides required for such times, it is Director Panetta, who has demonstrated his capabilities as Director of the CIA, as former OMB Director, and as the former chair of the House Budget Committee. I believe that he is well prepared for the challenges of leading the Department of Defense, and I will vote to confirm Director Panetta as our 23rd Secretary of Defense.

On a final note, Secretary Gates will soon take leave from his post at the Pentagon, and I believe that he will be remembered for his consummate role in transforming our Nation's military from a force that focused on Cold War operations to one that was capable of defeating threats in Iraq and Afghanistan, while possessing the flexibility necessary to successfully carry out a mission like the one that killed bin Laden.

As Secretary Gates prepares to depart public life, I would like to thank him for the countless sacrifices he has made over a lifetime of contributions to the nation, which includes serving eight Presidents, as well as the distinctions of being the only Secretary of Defense in U.S. history asked to remain in that office by a newly elected President, and the only career officer in the CIA's history to rise from entry-level employee to Director. These two standout achievements speak volumes about Secretary Gates' work ethic and love of country. Our country and our security have been forever enhanced by his dedication to public service, and I wish him well in his future endeavors.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. MANCHIN. Mr. President, I have the utmost respect for the Senator from Arizona and his commitment to this country and his service to this country.

I can only report what I have seen. I was in Afghanistan twice—as a Governor in 2006, representing the National Guard of West Virginia, and I went back in 2010. While there, I saw deterioration. I did not see a country that had an infrastructure and an economy. I saw corrupt leadership and nothing good coming of it.

With that, I know that the Senator has had much more experience. I can only speak from common sense and for the people of West Virginia about what they feel. We are a very hawkish State and a patriotic State. If 10 years is not enough, how long is enough—I think that is the question being asked—for the sacrifices being asked of them? When we cannot buy water lines and sewer lines or fix roads and repair bridges in West Virginia, yet they hear about the billions we are spending in a country that doesn't want us there, I think it is time to leave.

Respectfully, that might be the disagreement we have.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. GRAHAM. Mr. President, I rise in support of the nomination of Leon Panetta for Secretary of Defense. The President has chosen wisely. He has a terrific national security team in place. General Petraeus has become the CIA Director. Mr. Donilon has done a great job as National Security Adviser. In Leon Panetta, the President could not have chosen better. I am pleased with Ambassador Crocker, Ambassador Eikenberry, and General Petraeus did a heck of a job in Afghanistan. Ambassador Crocker will be the best we have to offer on that side for the military-civilian partnership in Afghanistan.

Leon Panetta heading up the Department of Defense is a home-run choice. I have known Leon for quite a while. I want to let the country know I think the President made a very wise decision. Tomorrow night, he is supposed to tell us about Afghanistan.

Mr. SCHUMER. Will my colleague yield?

Mr. GRAHAM. Yes.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I wish to add my accolades about Leon Panetta. I know him well. We roomed together for 11 years here in Washington. He is a strong, smart, honorable, and devout man. He will be a great Secretary of Defense. I thank my colleague for praising him and add my accolades.

Mr. GRAHAM. Mr. President, that shows you how bipartisan it is going to be—GRAHAM and SCHUMER. That shows you the depth and breadth of Leon Panetta—the way people view him here.

One of the first decisions he will have to make is what to tell the President about Afghanistan. I know we are war weary and have been there for 10 years. We didn't just throw a dart at the map when we decided to go there. That is the place the Taliban was controlling, they invited al-Qaida to be their honored guests, and bin Laden had a welcome home in Afghanistan. The rest is history.

President Bush understood that the Taliban was a force for evil. They allowed bin Laden to come to Afghanistan and plan the 9/11 attacks. They had a choice to make, and they chose poorly. We went in there to take the Taliban down.

We have a war in Iraq—and we can debate whether we should have done that. One of the reasons we are still not where we would like to be 10 years later is because a lot of the resources we had in Afghanistan went to Iraq. Now we finally got it right.

For the last 17 months, we have had enough troops in Afghanistan to make a difference. To President Obama, that was a hard decision for you to make—to add 30,000 additional troops at a time when most people said: Why are we still there? Can't we come home? But the President chose wisely, and 2014 is the transition goal—to transition to Afghan control. I think we are well on track.

Tomorrow night, the President will tell us about withdrawing troops. I believe we can, not because we are tired but because of the success on the ground. Let me point out some successes that would allow the President to make a reasoned judgment to withdraw troops. The one thing I urge the President to do is never lose sight of why we went there and our national security goals in Afghanistan. We will all be judged by what we leave behind. We want to leave behind the ability of the Afghan people to say no to the Taliban and reject extremism. They have the will, but they don't have the capacity yet. But they are getting there. Anytime you have the desire of the people who are oppressed by the Taliban and al-Qaida and you can help them help themselves, that makes it all safer.

Here is what happened since the President sent surge forces in. In November of 2009, there were two nations and 30 NATO trainers—two nations helping train the Afghan security forces from NATO. They had a combined 30 people. You could put them all in a bus. One thing the President did when he surged American forces in was that he insisted NATO step up their game. Here we are today, and we have 1,300 NATO trainers in Afghanistan with 32 countries providing assistance. We have 49 different countries helping in some form of training.

In the last 17 months, we have added 90,000 Afghan Army and police forces. So there has been a surge, far beyond the American coalition surge, in Afghan forces. How did that happen? We have better training. In September of 2009, 800 people were joining the Afghan Army per month. They were losing 2,000 a month. That was a terrible trend. In December of 2009, because of this new construct we came up with, we have been averaging 6,000 army recruits a month and 3,000 for the police. Today, we have 160,000 in the Afghan National Army and 126,000 in the Afghan National Police. By the end of the year, we will have 305,000 army and police under arms in Afghanistan. And the reason that has happened is because we have changed the way we train the Afghan security forces.

So I hope the President, listening to Leon Panetta, Secretary Gates, and Secretary Petraeus, will tell the American people we can start bringing forces home beginning this summer because we have been successful, and we are not going to do anything to undermine that success because it has come at such a heavy price.

In reality, ladies and gentlemen, we have been in Afghanistan with the right configuration for about 18 months. The army retention rates today in the Afghan Army are 69 percent—almost doubled. The literacy rate among the Afghan Army and police force is twice that of the national population because we have focused on literacy. It is hard to be a policeman or army officer if you can't read or write. We are helping a people who have been dirt poor, who have been at war for 30 years, and who have been treated very poorly by everybody in the world. At the end of the day, it is in our national security interest to make sure the country where the Taliban took over and allowed bin Laden to come in as an honored guest never goes back into the hands of an extremist.

I am confident Leon Panetta has the wisdom and background, as the CIA Director, as a former Member of Congress, and as a successful businessperson, to lead the Pentagon at the most challenging time since World War II.

He is taking over from Bob Gates. There is not enough we can say or do for Secretary Gates to thank him. He has had the job for 5 years. When he came on board, Iraq was a hopeless, lost cause in the minds of many, and he and General Petraeus, Ambassador Crocker, and many others—mainly our troops and coalition forces—took an Iraq that was on the verge of an abyss and we are now on the verge of a representative government that can defend itself and be an ally of the United States. Having Saddam Hussein replaced by a representative government in Iraq aligned with us is priceless. If we could as a nation take the place from which we were once attacked and turn it over to people who want to go a different way than the Taliban, and they have the ability to fight back and say no, all of us will be safer.

I congratulate the President on picking Leon Panetta to be Secretary of Defense. I know he has had a lot of hard decisions in the war on terror, and one of the biggest decisions he will make is coming up maybe tomorrow night. I want to work with him, Republicans and Democrats together, in making sure our Nation is never attacked again from Afghanistan. That is possible. We are on the verge of getting that right.

As we draw down troops, I ask the President to please tell those who are left behind still fighting in Afghanistan that he hasn't lost sight of the prize. The prize is not just bringing our troops home, the prize is to make sure their children never have to go back and fight in the future. That is the goal—to withdraw from Afghanistan in a way that we are safer and that our national security is enhanced. We are on the verge of achieving that goal.

What Secretary Panetta and others are going to be challenged with as we go forward in the 21st century is going to be substantial. The enemy is still alive, even though not well. We have punished the enemy—al-Qaida and other extremist groups—but they will not give up easily. At the end of the day, the goal is for our country to be safe, and it will take more than killing bin Laden to do that. Killing bin Laden was a form of justice long overdue, and it did make us safer, but the ultimate security in this world lies not with our ability to kill individuals but with our ability to help those who need to fight in their own backyard and protect

themselves from terrorism. That really is security that is sustainable.

If we can leave Afghanistan in 2014 in a fashion that they have the capacity to marry up with their will to say no to the Taliban and turn their country around toward the light and not the darkness, then I say without any doubt that our country did them right. If we cut this operation short because we are tired and weary, we will pay a price. Our values are so much better than the enemy's. They have patience and bad ideas. We have a lot of good ideas for the future of mankind. The question is, Do we have the patience to make sure those ideas can flourish?

This is a long, hard war, fought by a few. We are on the verge of success. I could not think of a better person to lead us to a complete success, an enduring success, than Leon Panetta. So I look forward, in a bipartisan fashion, to voting for I think one of the best choices the President could have made as Secretary of Defense.

To Bob Gates, I would say: Whatever you do in retirement, wherever you go, you have my respect, my admiration, and on behalf of the American people you will go down in history as one of the steadiest hands America could have ever had during challenging times.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. SHAHEEN). The Senator from Michigan.

Mr. LEVIN. Madam President, first, let me thank the Senator from South Carolina for his analysis on Afghanistan as well as his great support for Leon Panetta and his comments about Bob Gates, which I very much share and commented about this afternoon in a very similar way.

I particularly wish to commend Senator GRAHAM for his analysis of what has changed in Afghanistan in the last 17 or 18 months, so that the reductions which will be announced tomorrow are not based on getting tired but are being based, I am sure, on the conditions on the ground or in Afghanistan and on the critical changes which have taken place in Afghanistan.

I very much agree with his assessment about the surge in the Afghan forces. I was listening to his comments from a monitor, and when I heard his analysis about 90,000 additional Afghan forces, he is exactly right. The surge has not just been 30,000 of our troops but three times as many in terms of Afghan troops. And the importance of that is not just the numbers, not just the training, and not just the literacy, which the Senator pointed out, but also the mentoring and the partnering in the field with coalition forces.

We have tracked this very carefully, and there has been a significant increase in the number of Afghan units that consistently are in the field partnering with our troops and with other coalition members' troops, and that makes a huge difference too because when the Afghan people see Afghan troops in the lead instead of foreign nations' troops in the lead, they understand that, in fact, the Taliban's argument that they are being occupied is a false propaganda argument, and that weakens the Taliban tremendously as well.

Mr. GRAHAM. Will the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. LEVIN. Yes.

Mr. GRAHAM. This is the time to have some good bipartisanship.

Senator LEVIN, is it not true—I have to ask you a question—that you have been saying as long as I can remember that the surge that really needs to occur is on the Afghan side?

You have focused like a laser in the last couple of years on training capacity. Not only are we producing 90,000 additional Afghan Army and police forces, 97 percent of them now can pass Western shooting standards. Two years ago, that number was less than a third. Of the NCOs—noncommissioned officers—graduating from the schools in Afghanistan, there is about an 80-percent literacy rate. Two years ago, it was less than 50 percent.

So what I wish to acknowledge is that Senator LEVIN has been focusing on what I think is the ticket home with honor and security: building up an Afghan army and police force that can fight the fight without 100,000 Americans. We are well on the way. If we had not changed our training program—which the Senator has been focused on for a very long time—we would not have had this success. And General Caldwell is one of the unsung heroes of this war.

But I couldn't agree more with my colleague from Michigan. The reason we can bring American troops home is because there are more Afghans to do the fighting. And the Senator mentioned that during the surge in Helmand, it was a 10-to-1 ratio. For every Afghan, there were 10 American forces. It is almost 50–50 today, with a climb to where it will be Afghans in the lead.

The final thought is that among the trainers themselves, the goal by 2013 is to replace NATO trainers with Afghan trainers, and we are well on our way to having a majority of the training done by Afghans themselves. So if we can get the fighting ratios to 1-to-1 this year and improve on that by 2014, we will be able to turn the country over to the Afghan security forces. And I think we have a good plan. Let's just stick with it.

Mr. LEVIN. I want to first of all thank my good friend from South Carolina for those comments. He has been very perceptive of the importance of turning this responsibility over to the Afghans as soon as possible, and we are clearly on track to do exactly that. It is that improvement in the situation on the ground that will allow, hopefully, for a significant reduction that will be announced tomorrow. That is our hope—my hope.

But I think the Senator from South Carolina has seen this right from the beginning, that we wanted success and we could have success in Afghanistan. Indeed, we see some real evidence of that success in the military situation on the ground. If only that could be equivalent to the governance situation, we all would be a lot more comfortable.

Mr. GRAHAM. If the Senator will yield for one final thought, the two big impediments to our success in Afghanistan are Pakistan and poor governance. The reason the Taliban came back is because the governance in Afghanistan was poor, not well-accepted by the people, and lack of security. We now have better security, and I do see signs of better governance. And we have to fix the Pakistan side of the equation. On the Afghan side of the border, we are doing about everything we can do to build up the Afghan people. We will deal with Pakistan and we will deal with better governance, but none of that is possible without better security. Now we have a security environment that I think will lead to better governance. But don't lose sight of the prize, and that is to leave the country in a sustainable manner.

I look forward to working with Senator LEVIN to push the Afghan Government to do their part and also to engage Pakistan and say: What you are doing in Pakistan is unacceptable. Stop the double-dealing. Get involved.

I thank the Senator.

Mr. LEVIN. I think we know our Presiding Officer, Senator SHAHEEN, is very much into the issue of putting some real pressure on Pakistan to end the Haqqani network's intrusions and excursions into Afghanistan. And I think we are all together on that essential goal of changing Pakistani behavior in terms of what they are allowing to occur on their soil, which is that safe haven, particularly for the Haqqanis.

I again thank my friend from South Carolina, and I am reminded by something he said of an earlier visit I made to Afghanistan, by the way, with a number of colleagues—I think Senator REED and one other Senator were with me. We were with a bunch of Afghan leaders in a small town. This is what they call their Shura. It just happened that they were having this the day we were visiting. There were maybe 50 or 60, 70 guys—old guys, all guys—sitting on the ground on a dirt floor. We intruded, barged in, and I asked one question.

I said: Do you want us here?

The answer: We want you to train our army and leave, and then we will invite you back as guests.

You can't say it much more succinctly.

I thank my colleague.

I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. LEVIN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that further proceedings under the quorum call be dispensed with.

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

Mr. LEVIN. We are prepared to yield back the remainder of our time and do so.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. All time has expired.

The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the nomination of Leon E. Panetta, of California, to be Secretary of Defense?

Mr. LEVIN. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There is a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

The result was announced—yeas 100, nays 0, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 93 Ex.]

YEAS—100

Akaka	Gillibrand	Moran
Alexander	Graham	Murkowski
Ayotte	Grassley	Murray
Barrasso	Hagan	Nelson (NE)
Baucus	Harkin	Nelson (FL)
Begich	Hatch	Paul
Bennet	Heller	Portman
Bingaman	Hoeven	Pryor
Blumenthal	Hutchison	Reed
Blunt	Inhofe	Reid
Boozman	Inouye	Risch
Boxer	Isakson	Roberts
Brown (MA)	Johanns	Rockefeller
Brown (OH)	Johnson (SD)	Rubio
Burr	Johnson (WI)	Sanders
Cantwell	Kerry	Schumer
Cardin	Kirk	Sessions
Carper	Klobuchar	Shaheen
Casey	Kohl	Shelby
Chambliss	Kyl	Snowe
Coats	Landrieu	Stabenow
Coburn	Lautenberg	Tester
Cochran	Leahy	Thune
Collins	Lee	Toomey
Conrad	Levin	Udall (CO)
Coons	Lieberman	Udall (NM)
Corker	Lugar	Vitter
Cornyn	Manchin	Warner
Crapo	McCain	Webb
DeMint	McCaskill	Whitehouse
Durbin	McConnell	Wicker
Enzi	Menendez	Wyden
Feinstein	Merkley	
Franken	Mikulski	

The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the motions to reconsider are considered made and laid upon the table.

The President shall be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate shall resume legislative session.

The majority leader is recognized.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. REID. Madam President, we have 10 minutes. Senators should listen to the debate. It is very important. We have an important vote in just 10 minutes, and it is my understanding that the arrangements have been made that Senator BOXER would close. She would have the final 5 minutes. Does anybody have any problem with that?

I ask unanimous consent that be the case.

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

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT REVITALIZATION ACT OF 2011

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of S. 782, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 782) to amend the Public Works and Economic Development Act of 1965 to reauthorize that Act, and for other purposes.

Pending:

DeMint amendment No. 394, to repeal the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act.

Paul amendment No. 414, to implement the President's request to increase the statutory limit on the public debt.

Cardin amendment No. 407, to require the FHA to equitably treat home buyers who have repaid in full their FHA-insured mortgages.

Merkley/Snowe amendment No. 428, to establish clear regulatory standards for mortgage servicers.

Kohl amendment No. 389, to amend the Sherman Act to make oil-producing and exporting cartels illegal.

Hutchison amendment No. 423, to delay the implementation of the health reform law in the United States until there is final resolution in pending lawsuits.

Portman amendment No. 417, to provide for the inclusion of independent regulatory agencies in the application of the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act of 1995 (2 U.S.C. 1501 et seq.).

Portman amendment No. 418, to amend the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act of 1995 (2 U.S.C. 1501 et seq.) to strengthen the economic impact analyses for major rules, require agencies to analyze the effect of major rules on jobs, and require adoption of the least burdensome regulatory means.

McCain amendment No. 412, to repeal the wage rate requirements commonly known as the Davis-Bacon Act.

Merkley amendment No. 440, to require the Secretary of Energy to establish an Energy Efficiency Loan Program under which the Secretary shall make funds available to States to support financial assistance provided by qualified financing entities for making qualified energy efficiency or renewable efficiency improvements.

Coburn modified amendment No. 436, to repeal the Volumetric Ethanol Excise Tax Credit.

Brown (MA)/Snowe amendment No. 405, to repeal the imposition of withholding on certain payments made to vendors by government entities.

Inhofe amendment No. 430, to reduce amounts authorized to be appropriated.

Inhofe amendment No. 438, to provide for the establishment of a committee to assess the effects of certain Federal regulatory mandates.

Merkley amendment No. 427, to make a technical correction to the HUBZone designation process.

McCain amendment No. 441 (to Coburn modified amendment No. 436), to prohibit the use of Federal funds to construct ethanol blender pumps or ethanol storage facilities.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there will be 10 minutes of debate only equally divided between the two leaders or their designees.

Who yields time?

The Senator from Wyoming.

Mr. BARRASSO. Madam President, I yield back Republican time.

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, the one thing that all Members of Congress agree we need more of is jobs.

Illinois recently published its most recent statewide unemployment numbers and there is no question that the numbers are disappointing. Following 15 straight months of declining unemployment, unemployment rates rose for the first time to 8.9 percent. The only way to decrease the unemployment rate is to ensure robust job growth in all parts of the country. And while Members from different parties often disagree on how to help create jobs, the Economic Development Administration, EDA, reauthorization before us today is a great example of bipartisan legislation that can help.

On May 1, 1961, President Kennedy signed into law a bill creating the precursor of the Economic Development Agency, the Area Redevelopment Administration, ARA. The ARA was championed by another Illinois Senator and the man who gave me my start as an intern in this building, Senator Paul Douglas.

ARA provided assistance to distressed areas through loans and grants for public facilities; technology and market information; and research grants in order to spur economic growth. Sound familiar? Paul Douglas believed then, as I believe now, there is a proper role for government to play in assisting distressed communities and regions.

Now for 50 years, the ARA and then the EDA have helped communities identify the best strategies for creating economic growth and leveraging private investment to help create jobs. EDA remains focused on assisting distressed communities and communities recovering from disasters.

And it has been very effective. Every Federal dollar invested in EDA projects attracts $7 additional dollars in private investments in these distressed communities. And even in the midst of this last recession and sparse private investments, EDA-funded public/private projects created an estimated 161,500 jobs in the last 2½ years.

In Illinois in 2009 and 2010 alone, EDA funded 52 projects that resulted in nearly $70 million in new investments in the State. But beyond just the numbers, I want to give you some real life examples of EDA's impact in Illinois communities

Under the 2010 EDA Community Trade Adjustment Assistance Program, the city of Galesburg and Knox County identified themselves as significantly impacted by trade. EDA funded a project that allowed for the creation of the Entrepreneurs Innovate & Go Global Initiative to help develop entrepreneurs at every level. The grantees are putting together workshops and training that focuses on entrepreneurship, innovation and globalization. EDA assistance also includes technical