the middle-class tax cut, to working Americans by giving them more money to put in their pocket to spend and drive the economy forward.

However, we must not continue the payroll tax cut of the last 2 years because of the threat it poses to the integrity of Social Security. Two years ago, to help middle-class families through tough times, we reduced the amount they paid into Social Security by 2 percent, from 6.2 percent to 4.2 percent. In order to make up for that, we put money from the general fund into the Social Security trust fund. It is the first time we have ever done that. I said it was wrong, and I still say it is wrong. We then extended it for 1 year until the end of this year. I thought that would be the end of it. Now I am hearing voices say we ought to extend this payroll tax cut.

Two of the critical strengths of Social Security are that it is universal and it is self-funded. No dollar paid in benefits comes from any source other than the payroll tax. As such, Social Security does not add one dime to our deficit. Again, that fact alone is a strong argument for those of us defending Social Security from misguided attempts to cut the system in the name of deficit reduction.

I have often argued that Social Security doesn't add one dime to the deficit. It never has. However, if we are taking money out of the general fund, which we know is borrowed money, and we are putting that into the trust fund, then the trust fund is now taking money that is borrowed. No longer can we say every dime paid out of that is from the payroll tax since it is coming from the general fund. I think we made a mistake 1 year ago by extending it. Now it is the time to end it. It must not be extended. I, for one, will do whatever I can as a Senator to stop the extension of the payroll tax cut in order to help solve the deficit and in order to help middle-class families.

How can we help middle-class families? It is very easy. First of all, pass the tax cut extension that we have sitting before the House. Secondly, rather than cutting payroll taxes by 2 percent, we should put in place a modified version of the Making Work Pay tax credit that we did under the American Recovery Reinvestment Act. That credit provided working Americans with $400 per person, $800 per couple in 2009 and in 2010. We can adjust that credit and double it to $1,600 per couple to replace the payroll tax cut. So as we put the 2 percent back to where everyone pays back in at 6.2 percent, what we do on the other side is provide for a Making Work Pay tax credit that goes to people who are working. Obviously, no one gets the 2-percent payroll tax cut if they are not working. The Making Work Pay tax credit would also go to those who are working and make it a similar amount of money as they had on the Social Security payroll tax fund. This would have a greater bang for the buck because it would better target working Americans of modest means who tend to spend more of what they get back.

I will clarify what I mean by that. Under the Social Security payroll tax cut—the 2-percent cut—the maximum amount of money someone would get would be at the highest level they paid into Social Security, which is approximately $110,000 on a payroll of $110,000. So that person would get $2,200 back. That is for someone making at least $110,000 a year. If someone is making $20,000 a year, they would only get $400 back. So the higher your income, the more they get back; the lower the income, the less they get back. It is just topsy-turvy. It should be the other way around. There should be more benefits to lower income and less benefits to higher income.

With this tax credit, that is what we do. More would go to people who are making $40,000, $50,000 $60,000, $70,000, $80,000 a year than to those higher income people. That is why the Making Work Pay tax credit is much better than extending the Social Security payroll tax.

We are at a turning point in our economy. We can either move forward with an agenda that will strengthen the middle class or be dragged backward by misguided policies that consign us to additional decades of unequal growth and stagnant wages for working families.

I stand ready to work with my Senate colleagues to reduce the deficit and debt but not at the expense of hard-working, middle-class families who make this country the great country it is.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

Mr. CORKER. Mr. President, I ask to speak as in morning business.

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

(The remarks of Mr. CORKER pertaining to the introduction of S. 3673 are printed in today's RECORD under ''Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.'')

Mr. CORKER. So I thank the chair. I yield the floor, and I note the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. KLOBUCHAR). The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

The Senator from Oregon will suspend.

The majority leader is recognized.

Mr. REID. Madam President, I ask my friend to yield for a unanimous consent request and then he can have the floor as soon as I am finished.

Mr. MERKLEY. Absolutely.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREEMENT—H.R. 4310

Mr. REID. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that when the Senate receives the papers with respect to H.R. 4310, the Senate's passage of H.R. 4310, as amended, be vitiated; that adoption of the Senate amendment be vitiated; that the amendment, the text of S. 3254, as amended by the Senate, be modified with the changes that are at the desk; that no other amendments be in order, and the Senate proceed to vote in relation to the amendment, as modified; that if the substitute amendment, as modified, is agreed to, H.R. 4310, as amended, be read a third time and passed; finally, that the previous request with respect to the Senate's request for conference, including the appointment of conferees, be agreed to; with all of the above occurring with no intervening action or debate.

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

EXTENSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. REID. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that we be in a period of morning business until 5 p.m. today.

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

Mr. REID. Madam President, of course, Senators should be allowed to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

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

Mr. REID. I extend my appreciation to my friend, the Senator from Oregon.

THE FARM BILL

Mr. MERKLEY. Madam President, I rise today to address a critical issue for Oregon's farmers and ranchers.

If we turn the clock back from the most recent national disaster; that is, this terrible Hurricane Sandy that impacted New York and New Jersey and other areas, last summer we had another significant disaster, the worst wildfires to hit the State of Oregon since the 1800s and the worst wildfires in over a century. These wildfires devastated land and livestock. Yet our communities have been left stranded, without the protections they normally have, because of the inaction of the House and the Senate.

The Long Draw Fire in Malheur County burned 557,000 acres. Let's translate that. That is 900 square miles of land. The Miller Homestead Fire burned 160,000 acres or 250 square miles.

We have had many folks coming to the floor to discuss the terrible consequences of natural disasters. It was not long ago that I was on this floor, before Hurricane Sandy, calling for urgent, immediate action. But the challenge is that these emergency programs designed to respond to the ranchers and farmers who have lost so much land, so much forage in Oregon, those measures are in the farm bill.