

Senators deserve additional notice before voting to change Senate rules, so today I will follow the precedents set in 2005 and again in 2011. We will reserve the right of all Senators to propose changes to the Senate rules, and we will explicitly not acquiesce in the carrying over of all the old rules from the last Congress. It is my intention that the Senate will recess today, rather than adjourn, to continue the same legislative day and allow this important rules discussion to continue later this month.

I am confident that the Republican leader and I can come to an agreement that will allow the Senate to work more efficiently. We are going to talk again today. We just haven't had time, with the other things we have been dealing with, to spend enough time together to do this, but we definitely want to move forward to try to make this place work better. I appreciate his willingness to work on this. I will do my very utmost, as I know he will.

#### RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican leader is recognized.

#### OPENING OF THE 113TH CONGRESS

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, I would like to welcome everybody back after what we all realized was a somewhat abbreviated recess. In fact, I believe you would have to go back to 1970 to find the last time the Senate was in session and voting between Christmas and New Year's.

In particular, I want to welcome back Senator MARK KIRK. He has made a brilliant recovery since suffering a debilitating stroke almost a year ago. The fact that MARK is here today says a lot about his tenacity, his dedication, and his commitment to the people of Illinois.

I am told that about two-thirds of the patients in the facility where he has been recovering over the past year don't return to work, but true to form MARK opted for an experimental rehabilitation program so grueling, it has been compared to military boot camp. His staff counted 45 steps from the parking lot to the front door of the Senate, and during his treatment he made walking those steps his goal. Today he did it. He did it. So we admire him for his spirit, and we applaud his achievement. It is wonderful to have him back and ready to work.

I would also like to welcome the new Members who take their oaths of office today, particularly the four new Members of the Republican conference: Senator FLAKE of Arizona, Senator FISCHER of Nebraska, Senator CRUZ of Texas, and Senator SCOTT of South Carolina. Congratulations to you all. We welcome the energy and intelligence each of you brings to the challenges we face and especially to the transcendent challenge of our time: a Federal debt so

huge, so huge it threatens to permanently alter an economy that has provided generations of Americans the opportunity to fulfill their dreams of a better life.

Four straight years of trillion-dollar deficits and projected spending that no realistic amount of tax revenue could cover have put us at a crossroads. Either we tackle our Nation's spending problem or it is going to tackle us. It is that simple, and there is no better time to do the work we need to do than right now.

The bipartisan agreement we reached earlier this week was imperfect. I am the first to admit it—especially the process. But aside from shielding 99 percent of my constituents and many of yours from the painful effects of a middle-class tax hike—the President seemed all too willing, by the way, to impose that—it gave us something else: It settled the revenue debate for good. The revenue debate is over. President Obama declared the other night that those he calls rich are now paying their "fair share," so it is time to move on.

The President got his revenue, and now it is time to turn squarely to the real problem, which we all know is spending. We all knew that the tax hikes the President campaigned on were never going to solve the problem. Now that he has gotten them, he has a responsibility to put his preoccupation with taxes behind him and to work with us to actually solve the problem at hand. It is time to face up to the fact that our Nation is in grave fiscal danger—grave fiscal danger—and that it has everything to do with spending.

This is a debate the American people want us to have. The President liked to point out on the campaign trail that most Americans supported the idea of taxing the rich. What he conveniently left out is that even more Americans support the idea of cutting spending. One recent survey I saw said that about three-fourths of all Americans say they want to see major spending cuts in Washington. When you look at some of the things Washington has been wasting their dollars on, it is no wonder. I mean, if we can't stop spending taxpayer dollars on robo-squirrels, dancing robot DJs, or hot air balloon rides for Smokey the Bear, then there is no hope at all because if we can't fix the easy stuff, the robo-squirrels and the robot DJs, the things most of us agree on, how are we ever going to get at the hard stuff?

That is why the first step in this debate is for Democrats to get over their fanatical commitment to guarding every single dime the government ever got its hands on. This has to stop. The best time to stop it is now.

There is actually no better time for this debate. In a couple of months the President will ask us to raise the Nation's debt limit. We cannot agree to increase that borrowing limit without agreeing to reforms that lower the avalanche of spending that is creating this debt in the first place. It is not fair to

the American people, and it is not fair to our children, whom we are asking to foot the bill. The health of our economy requires it, so now is the time to get serious about spending.

If the past few weeks have taught us anything at all, it means the President needs to show up early this time. The American people will not tolerate the kinds of last-minute crises that we have seen again and again over the last 4 years as a result of this President's chronic inactivity and refusal to lead on the pressing issues of our time. We don't need speeches, we need action, and we need it now. We need courage because the only way we are going to address the spending that is at the root of our Nation's fiscal problems is if the President is willing to bring the members of his party to the table and get them to rise above the partisan voices on the left, who treat every single penny of government spending as sacred.

Hopefully, that kind of cooperation will be forthcoming but, if not, we will have several opportunities in the coming months to force the conversation Washington needs to have. The first such opportunity, as I have said, surrounds the President's upcoming request of us to raise the debt ceiling. After that, there is the continuing resolution. But let me be clear, there is no need for drama—no need for drama—and we don't want any. The President knows as well as I do what needs to be done. He can either engage now to significantly cut government spending or force a crisis later. It is his call.

But for the sake of the country we must have this debate now. So today I call on my friend the majority leader and the rest of my Democratic colleagues to start working with us right now—not 1 hour, 1 day, or 1 week before we hit the debt limit but ahead of time for once so we can pass a bipartisan solution on spending that everyone will have an opportunity to weigh in on in early February. We need a plan that can pass the House and actually begin to get Washington spending under control. If we are serious, we will get one done.

With taxes now off the table, the only way to achieve a balanced plan is to focus on the spending side of the equation, particularly, as the President pointed out, health care entitlement programs because, as I said, taxes simply can't go high enough to keep pace with the amount of money we have projected to spend on them without crushing our economy. The best way to reform these programs is to make them work better. The debt isn't exploding because these programs exist, it is exploding because they are inefficient. They were created in a different era—the era of black-and-white TV. They should be updated for the age of the iPad, and we should want to fix them not just because we want to lower the debt but because we want to strengthen and improve these programs themselves.