RECESS

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

Thereupon, the Senate, at 12:33 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Ms. BALDWIN).

MAKING CONTINUING APPROPRIATIONS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2014—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. MCCAIN. I come to the floor to speak in support of the 2-year bipartisan budget agreement reached by Representative RYAN and Senator MURRAY. I am pleased that the budget agreement passed the House of Representatives with overwhelming bipartisan support and that cloture was invoked in the Senate today.

I understand there are many of my colleagues on this side of the aisle who are very unhappy with this deal and intend to vote against it. My only response to that is I respect their vote, but I would like to know what we do in order to avoid another shutdown of the government. The American people steadfastly reject a shutdown of the government. I have concerns about the budget deal—I think everybody does—because of the nature of the way business is done. But to somehow vote against it without an alternative to keep the government from shutting down lacks some intellectual integrity.

My support and vote will be based on two important facts:

It will prevent another government shutdown, which we cannot put the American people through or the people of my State through again.

It goes a long way in alleviating the devastating impact of sequestration on our military. Have no doubt that the sequestration has had a devastating effect on many aspects of our ability to defend this Nation. Don't just talk to our leadership but talk to the men and women who are serving. They don't know where they are going to go next. The pilots aren't flying, the ships aren't sailing, and the training is not being conducted. That is unfair to the men and women who are serving their military, and I would remind us that all have volunteered to serve this country in harm's way.

This budget deal will avert another government shutdown and reduce the impact of sequestration. It will reduce the deficit by roughly $23 billion without raising taxes.

Peggy Noonan is a noted conservative columnist who writes for the Wall Street Journal and served in the Reagan administration. She observed in a Wall Street Journal op-ed:

> [t]he government is now unable even to pass a budget, to perform this minimal duty. Instead, Congress and the administration lurch from crisis to crisis, from shutdown to debt-ceiling battle. That gives a sense the process itself is broken, and this lends an air of instability, of Third World-ness, to the world's oldest continuing democracy. We can't even control our books. We don't even try. That's my context for the Ryan-Murray budget deal.

She continued:

> Should it be passed? Yes, yes and yes. The good things about it are very good. The idea that Republicans and Democrats are capable of coming to a budget agreement is good. The idea that they can negotiate and make concessions and accept gains is good. The idea the U.S. government is able to produce anything but stasis and acrimony is good. That we can still function even in the age of Obama—good.

She noted:

> [This] agreement moves us an inch or two in the right direction. Let me tell you what that's better than: It's better than moving a few inches in the wrong direction! And it's better than where we've been, in a state of agitated paralysis.

Only weeks ago we all witnessed firsthand the impact a government shutdown had on our constituents, and none of us wants to go through that again.

In my home State of Arizona, the impact was very significant. Nearly 500,000 visitors were turned away from Arizona's national parks during the shutdown. Arizona lost about $33 million in visitor spending. At Grand Canyon National Park, food banks had to rush supplies to 2,200 employees of the concessionaires inside the park who were furloughed or laid off. Arizona spent about $500,000 in donations to reopen the Grand Canyon for 5 days during the shutdown.

The list goes on and on.

Our approval rating, I would say to my friends on this side of the aisle, and our party's approval rating plummeted. The damage was severe.

Now we have an agreement. I repeat to my colleagues who would vote against this—both on that side of the aisle and this side of the aisle—if you have a better idea, bring it up, let's consider it, and let's vote on it because the only alternative to this is a government shutdown. Let's not deceive ourselves about why we are voting and what we are voting on.

I admit it is not perfect. I think it has caused heartburn for all of us. One potentially problematic provision—and it is problematic—would slow the growth of cost-of-living adjustments for working-age—and I emphasize ''working-age''—military retirees. Let me point out that the COLAs for working-age military retirees under the age of 62 will continue to grow after 2015, in most cases more slowly than before.

The fact is that the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee—one of the most admired and respected individuals in this Senate—has stated that we will review this provision, and we will review it in the context of the work that is already being done on the Senate Armed Services Committee, and that is a review of all paid benefits and aspects of our military that, in the words of former Secretary of Defense Mr. Gates that these entitlements in the military are ''eating us alive.''

I would like to give an example. In 2012 military retirees and survivor benefit recipients received $52 billion. In 10 years that will grow to $59 billion. By 2034 it will grow to $108 billion per year. From 2001 to 2011 payments to military retirees grew by 49 percent. Every penny of it is deserved. Every penny of it we are proud we gave them. But I don't think there is any doubt that we are going to have to look at this whole issue of the pay, benefits, retirement, and all of that of members of the military in a prospective fashion.

I am confident that one of the items taken up next year in the Senate Armed Services Committee will be what we are passing today, but it will be brought up in the context of all of the aspects of personnel costs in the military today—keeping in mind that we have an all-volunteer service and we are proud and pleased of the fact that we have America's finest in the military.

But I can say for a fact that with this lurching from shutdown to shutdown, these draconian effects of sequestration—and I know my colleagues know that in 2014 there will be a more severe cut than at any time—these brave young men and women are getting sick and tired of not being able to do their jobs, and the best and the brightest are already making decisions as to whether to remain in the military.

I wish to mention one small aspect that I think is indicative. About 20 years ago there was a very large influx of pilots into the civilian airlines as airlines began to expand rather dramatically. That very large number of pilots is now nearing retirement age.

There is going to be a dramatic demand for airline pilots, who, as we all know, are very well paid. We are offering pilots $225,000 to stay in and fly airplanes in the military. Do you know that the vast majority of these young pilots, these aviators, are not accepting that? One of the reasons they are not signing up is because a lot of times they don't fly anymore. They are not operating anymore, and they are spending time away from their homes and their families without being able to do what they were trained to do. This is only a small example of the impact of sequestration on the military.

I wish all of my colleagues who are members of the Armed Services Committee would listen to the testimony of our military leaders who tell us that already they may not be able to defend this Nation in the most efficient fashion because of the effects of sequestration.

All I can say is that if I had written this legislation—I think each one of us individually would have written it differently, but we didn't—the option of shutting down the government and the option of further damage inflicted by sequestration I hope would override the problems we see with this agreement. I want to promise my colleagues that I will work in every way with Senator

LEVIN under his leadership next year—remember, this COLA issue does not kick in until 2015—I will work with my colleagues under Senator LEVIN and Senator INHOFE's leadership to review this provision in this bill as to whether it is fair and whether it needs to be changed.

Again, I challenge my colleagues who will come to this floor and speak against this agreement to tell me what we can vote on and pass to prevent another government shutdown, and then I will be pleased to support it.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Virginia.

Mr. KAINE. I also rise today to talk about the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2013 and to echo many of the reasons for supporting that budget that were just spoken about by my colleague from Arizona.

This is the first Budget Conference Committee in a divided Congress since 1986, and compromise leaves every side with something they like and something they don't like, but it is what Americans expect us to do.

I applaud Senator MURRAY, our Senate budget chair, for her leadership since our very first Budget Committee meeting in January 2013. I applaud Congressman RYAN, the chair of the conference committee, for his work with his House colleagues. I was proud to be a part of the Budget Committee in this conference.

Americans want us to find a budget compromise to restore some certainty in a way that will help families, help businesses, and help our economy.

The day that I was sworn in as a Senator, before I took the oath of office, I was interviewed by a radio station in Virginia. They asked me what were the two things I wanted to do most immediately as a Senator. Only last week I was reminded what I said. I said: I want the Senate to find a budget that will be a budget for all of Congress, and I want to end sequester.

I have done a lot of budgets as a Governor and a mayor. It was challenging for me to understand how in February we were here without a Federal budget but on the verge of embracing nonstrategic across-the-board sequester cuts in a way that would hurt so many priorities Virginians care about.

I gave my first speech on the Senate floor in February to urge my colleagues to avoid sequester. In the months since, I have visited Virginia shipyards, research universities, and early childhood education centers and have seen the effect sequester has on Virginians, on Americans, and on our economy.

I am acutely aware of the budget impasse and continuing challenges that are imposed upon this economy by gimmicks such as sequester, and the absence of a budget for 4 years compounds those things. We have seen the harm sequester has done to so many of the priorities we care about.

No manager would embrace indiscriminate across-the-board cuts because not everything the Federal Government does is worth everything else. If we are going to be making cuts, they should be strategic. There are areas in which we shouldn't be making cuts at all. We should be putting more money into the budget to do what is strategic and what is necessary.

So what we have done with this budget deal is we have taken a step back to regular budgetary order to give certainty to the economy and to give certainty to our planners who work for the Federal Government. And while we are not replacing all of sequester—and how much I wish we were—we will do a lot to reverse some of its worse effects.

The budget deal is good in a number of ways.

It replaces $63 billion in sequestration cuts scheduled to go into effect in the next fiscal years—2014 and 2015—and replaces those nonstrategic cuts with a targeted mix of responsible spending reductions and new fees and revenue.

It increases the top-line discretionary spending level for fiscal year 2014 to $1.012 trillion and $1.014 trillion in 2015.

It provides budget certainty for 2 years. This is something many of us in State governments, who have State government experience, have long embraced—the virtue of 2-year budgets, which are common at the State level because they provide more certainty.

Under the agreement defense cuts of an additional $20 billion that were scheduled to take effect in January will not go into effect, and we will find ways to restore funding and avert sequester cuts to nondefense accounts as well.

The bill will let Chairwoman MIKULSKI and appropriators write full appropriations bills to reverse the cycle of widespread continuing resolutions. Many folks in the Federal Government tell me that as damaging as sequester is, a continuing resolution—that locks in line items at the level of last year or the year before that, instead of allowing flexibility to deal with these situations—is just as dangerous. So our appropriators can now write full-year appropriations bills for fiscal year 2014 and 2015.

With budgetary certainty, our Department of Defense will be able to plan and strategize for the future, as will our domestic agencies. We will fund critical readiness issues. We will allow the Navy in Virginia to continue to work on ship building and repair, which is so critical and, above all, we can show the American public that Congress can work together in a bipartisan way, which is what we are all trying to do and what the American public asks us to do.

We do know, as Senator MCCAIN and all have mentioned, like any compromise this budget compromise is not perfect. I would put on the top of my list as the most grievous challenge with the budget compromise not something that is in it but something that is not in it—the extension of unemployment insurance benefits to the long-term unemployed. In this economy, all of the economic data suggests the extension of those benefits is not only good for the individuals, they are good for the economy itself. The suggestion is the expiration of these benefits could cost the country 200,000 to 300,000 jobs. That is a weakness in this proposal.

An additional weakness is the way we have dealt with the cost-of-living increase for military retirees pre-age 62 who are not disabled. I don't agree with that compromise provision. It requires a reduction in the cost-of-living increase for certain military pensions. The Senate budget that all those currently in this Chamber worked so hard on to pass in March did not contain that provision. It was not the way we felt we should be dealing with the budget. Obviously, we liked the Senate budget, and we found a way to replace sequester without making this change to military pensions. But it was added during the conference in order to find compromise with the House to move forward. Compromise is necessary because absent compromise the very folks who will be affected by this particular change will also be affected, because we have seen sequester and shutdown and furloughs affect military employees. We have seen it affect military operations, and so the alternative of brinkmanship and shutdown is no better for our retirees than this provision.

We have heard from Secretary Hagel and Chairman Dempsey that they are supportive of the overall framework of the deal and it will help them address military readiness challenges. I am pleased Senator LEVIN, the chairman of Armed Services Committee—a committee on which I serve—has signaled his intention to review the COLA provisions in the Armed Services Committee next year, since it will not be scheduled to take effect until 2015.

I am also disappointed that new Federal employees will be targeted for increased pension contributions. We have now increased those contributions in a somewhat tiered level for new employees twice in the last 3 years. But again, while that compromise is challenging for those newly hired Federal employees, the alternative is more challenging, because we can't keep going through the uncertainty of shutdowns or furloughs. It wouldn't be fair to those employees for us to do that.

So again, we have replaced a portion of the nonstrategic cuts, and that is the way we should go going forward. I will continue to work to get rid of the rest of sequestration and replace it with similarly targeted strategies.

For those reasons I urge my colleagues to support this deal. While I wouldn't agree with all items in it, that is like any compromise I have ever engaged in in my life. All of us who are part of a group—from the Senate of the United States to families—know that if you are part of a group, it

is not always your way or the highway. You have to give and expect others to give as well, and that was an important aspect of this compromise.

I will say in conclusion that another aspect of this deal I like very much is that it has unified the Virginia congressional delegation. There are 13 of us, 11 in the House and 2 Senators. There are 8 Republicans and 5 Democrats. We get along well and work together well, but there aren't many issues like this—big policy issues—where all of us agree. In the House last week, all 11 Members of Congress of both parties voted for this budget compromise. Senator WARNER, as a budget conferee, together with all of us in the Chamber right now, are supporting this budget compromise. I am glad my colleagues from Virginia have pulled together, and I think it is a tribute to the fact we have all seen the impacts that the budget uncertainty and sequester have caused. I am glad we seem to be on the verge of providing that sense of certainty that will be good for the public and good for the economy.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. HARKIN. Madam President, I want to take the floor today because I am very disturbed by the apparent shift in attitude by many elected leaders, including some in this body and in the House—the attitude towards people who do the work that makes this country run. They do not sit behind desks. They do not wear coats and ties every day or wonderful clothes. They do not sit in air-conditioned offices. They do not clip coupons. They just do hard work. They are the people you run into every day when you go into the local coffee shop and you order your latte. Maybe you see them when you go out and have lunch at a restaurant or you hail a taxi. Maybe you get on a bus or the subway. Maybe now, since it is near Christmas time, you go to a department store to do your Christmas shopping, and it is that person standing behind the counter.

You think that person is only there for you when you go in there to buy your Christmas present. Think about it. She has probably been standing there all day long, and after you get out of there, she is still standing there to wait on somebody else.

That is who I am talking about. They are not the big wheels in our society. They never thought of themselves as being big wheels, but they are the cogs and the inner workings that make our country run.

There used to be fairly universal agreement that these people are the backbone of this country and the foundation of our economy; that our job as elected officials is to do all we can to ensure that all working Americans have a decent shot at the American dream. We used to agree that if someone worked hard and played by the rules, they should be able to earn enough to support their family, keep a roof over their head, put some money away for a rainy day, and have a secure retirement. We used to agree that if one loses their job through no fault of their own, especially at a time of chronically high unemployment, they should have some support to get them through the rough patch while they are looking for new work. We used to agree not too long ago, on both sides of the aisle, that no child in this country should go to bed hungry at night. I say both sides. I remember McGovern and Dole, Dole and McGovern, and the great work they did on hunger in America.

In recent years, it has been alarming to see how these fundamental principles and values are being attacked in our public discourse. For many, the new attitude is: You are on your own. If you struggle, even if you face insurmountable challenges, well, it is probably your own fault.

It just seems to me that there is a harshness in our land, a harshness that I think of as sort of borne of a benign neglect toward those Americans who have tough lives, may be ill-educated, marginally employed or they are just down on their luck. It used to be we only heard harsh rhetoric such as that from radio talk show partisans trying to get their ratings up. Sadly, it has now become a part of our everyday conversation, even in the Congress.

We hear how minimum wage workers don't deserve a fair increase because they are just not worth $10.10 an hour. We hear that unemployed workers should be cut off from unemployment insurance because they are becoming ''dependent.'' At a time when there are three job seekers for every job, we hear it is critical to take away food assistance from millions of individuals so that, supposedly, if we take away their food and take away their unemployment insurance, they will now somehow learn the redemptive power of work. As if young mothers working service jobs, laid-off factory workers delivering newspapers, unemployed families receiving SNAP benefits—that somehow they need to be lectured by Members of Congress about work. These people know what it is like to work.

What happened to our respect—our respect for the people who do the work and want to work in our country? What happened to our values, basic moral truths that people shouldn't go hungry in the richest country in the world? Whence comes this harshness of ours, reminiscent of the late 19th century workplace in America? How did we get to the point where many of us value the work of day traders pushing paper on Wall Street, but we ignore the contributions of the people who work in our daycare centers, educate our kids, care for our elderly in the twilight of their lives? What about their value?

I wish the people who are pushing this harsh rhetoric would talk to Terrence, a father of three in Kansas City, MO. He works 50 hours a week. Don't lecture him about working. Fifty hours a week, two jobs—one at Pizza Hut and one at Burger King—to try to make ends meet. He can barely insure his 15-year-old car or purchase shoes for his three girls. Last year, he lost his house. He told the Washington Times:

> We work hard for companies that are making millions. We're not asking for the world. We want to make enough to make a decent living. We deserve better. If they respect us and pay us and treat us right, it'll lift up the whole economy.

I will bet Terrence never got a degree in economics, but he says it better and understands it better than a lot of these economic thinkers down at our big banks and these economic think tanks.

They should speak with Edward, a father in Illinois. Both he and his fiancee earn the minimum wage. He said:

> We have three children and our paychecks combined barely cover the necessities like a roof over our heads, gas and lights, and clothes for the kids. We wouldn't be able to make it without government assistance like food stamps and a medical card. There is constant stress because we are living paycheck to paycheck and never have enough money. Everyone needs help sometimes, especially since the economy is so bad and it has made life even harder for working people. This isn't about needing more money for luxury things, we need a raise in the living wage in order to survive.

Edward and Terrence clearly are not lazy. They are doing exactly what we might expect them to do, what we have told them they must do to make it in this country. But they are slipping further and further behind, through no fault of their own.

The fact is our economy has changed. It is not working for many families right now. We can't stick our heads in the sand and pretend it is not true. We shouldn't suggest it is Edward's and Terrence's fault or that their kids don't deserve to eat or to wear shoes.

We as elected officials have an obligation to recognize the fundamental truths about the challenges working families face in America. We have a duty to support policies which will help these families both weather the continuing economic storm and also build a brighter future for their children.

First, we have to acknowledge the truth that while we are slowly moving in the right direction, the economy has not recovered, especially for those at the bottom of the economic ladder, the Edwards and Terrences and others. Jobs are still scarce. Four million people have been pounding the pavement for at least 6 months looking for new work. There are three job seekers for every job. Our economy is still millions of jobs short of what we need.

In the past when the job market was this challenging, politicians on both

sides of the aisle agreed the Federal Government had an obligation to step in and help the long-term unemployed while they are struggling to find work. In fact, the current Federal Unemployment Insurance Program was put in place in 2008, under a Republican President, George W. Bush, and we did it when the unemployment rate was 5.6 percent. Today the unemployment rate officially is 7 percent. We know it is higher. That is the official rate. But unofficially, if we include folks who want to work full time but can only find part-time work, those who have given up actively looking for work, the rate is actually 13.2 percent. That is the real unemployment rate in America.

So given that the unemployment rate remains high in many parts of the country, my colleague Senator JACK REED and I have introduced a modest proposal to extend the current system of federally funded extended unemployment insurance until the end of 2014. It is vitally important that we do so because it is going to expire in 2 weeks. Almost 5 million American workers will exhaust their State unemployment insurance and lose their last lifeline before the end of next year. We are their last lifeline. They are counting on us. How can we think about turning our backs on them?

But instead of joining a call to action, some of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle are actually suggesting that an extension of unemployment insurance will hurt jobless Americans. I was rather shocked when I heard this from our colleague from Kentucky, Senator PAUL, on a Sunday talk program. Here is what he said:

> When you allow people to be on unemployment insurance for 99 weeks, you're causing them to become part of this perpetual unemployed . . . group in our . . . economy, and . . . while it seems good, it actually does a disservice to the people you're trying to help.

A disservice? I don't understand this kind of harshness for people who are out of work, who have paid into unemployment insurance and they are seeking now to get their insurance payments. First of all, this 99 weeks is not quite right. The maximum is 73 weeks, and that is only for those who have been unemployed the longest and it is only in two States. Only two States have 73 weeks. Those are the two States with the highest unemployment rates. The rest of the States have access to, at most, 63 weeks. In my State, Iowa, it is only 40 weeks, not 99.

Secondly, unemployment insurance is a desperately needed program. Let's be clear, unemployed workers are not living high on the hog on these insurance payments which average about $310 per week nationally. If you are on it for 1 year, that averages about $15,000 per year. There are some that are less than that. Mississippi, for example, is $193 a week. The truth is they are barely subsisting, barely hanging on, not sitting around watching TV. Why? Because there is only one way you can collect unemployment insurance benefits. That is, No. 1, if you have worked and paid into the system. So you have already earned the right to access the insurance you paid for. Secondly, you can only collect on the insurance if you are actively looking for a job.

So contrary to the statement of my colleague from Kentucky, it is not a disservice to provide this meager benefit to the long-term unemployed, a benefit which they have earned. The only disservice is to float this absurd myth that jobless Americans want to be unemployed. I think it is offensive to suggest they are lazy and don't want to work. To me, it is morally repugnant to conclude that they will somehow be miraculously better able to find a job if we simply let their kids go hungry.

That same harsh kind of thinking has also crept into our national debate about the most fundamental aspect of our social safety net—food assistance. Millions of American families depend upon the SNAP program, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. It is what everybody thinks of as food stamps. Such a basic thing, having enough to eat, in this country. Again, many of these people are in working families.

In 2011, 41 percent of SNAP participants lived in a household where someone was working. Over the last several years, my Republican colleagues have sought again and again to slash food assistance for these families.

The House-passed farm bill, engineered by Republicans in the House, proposed cutting food stamps by $40 billion over the next 10 years. Contrast that to what we passed in the Senate. Under the leadership of Senator STABENOW, we passed a farm bill which made some cuts over 10 years of a little over $4 billion. That was supported by most people on both sides of the aisle. The House bill was only supported by the Republicans: Forty billion the Republicans wanted to cut versus $4 billion in the Senate. That would have cut 3.8 million individuals from the SNAP program next year.

Other parts of their proposal would have cut off food stamps and benefits in the future for some of the poorest adults, many of whom SNAP is the only income assistance they have or it would result in throwing 210,000 children out of their free school meals program, raising the level so low-income kids would be cut out of their free lunch program.

Yet another provision the House Republicans put into their bill would have provided strong financial incentives to States to kick people off the SNAP program. The House farm bill would allow States to cut off SNAP benefits to most adults receiving or applying for SNAP, including parents with children as young as 1 year old, if they are not working or participating in a work or training program for at least 20 hours a week. That was it. There was no exclusion for mothers with little kids.

The House bill meant that mothers with young children still in diapers could be cut off from the SNAP program even if they don't have affordable childcare. Imagine that—forcing a mother to choose between employment and safe child care for her child. That is harsh.

As I said, this is not realistic. We already said there are three job seekers for every job, and 48 States have a waiting list for our largest training program, the Workforce Investment Act. Are we going to tell a young mother with a child who can't get adequate childcare that she has to be in a job training program? The lists are so long that you can't get in. Are we then going to tell her that she has to work? There are three job seekers for every job. What is she going to do?

Never mind reality. Somehow Republicans seem to think that denying food assistance will magically make people find jobs despite the fact that jobs don't exist. Getting people into the workforce will require a stronger, growing economy with real jobs and strong job-training programs that really will help people get ahead. Promoting draconian cuts to SNAP programs under this benign-sounding work label does not make the effect any less harsh.

What we have seen in recent years with respect to the SNAP program are not concerted and sincere efforts to help people leave the SNAP programs because they have gained employment or because our economy is get stronger; quite the contrary. Many Republicans want to eliminate food assistance for families without regard for the true nature of the economy or the effect on those families. In addition to acknowledging the fundamental economic truth that our job market has not adequately recovered—and for many Americans, programs such as unemployment insurance and food stamps are essential to basic survival—we also have an obligation to face another, perhaps even more alarming, economic reality. For those at the bottom who are working and playing by the rules, it is not enough.

Hard-working people who are working full time—sometimes multiple jobs—are not getting paid enough to make ends meet. Full-time workers are living in poverty. Families are living in poverty. They go to work every day. This is a fundamental failure of our economy. It is something I believe we have a moral obligation to address by fixing and raising the minimum wage in America.

I have introduced a proposal that I have worked on for a long time with Congressman GEORGE MILLER in the House—the Fair Minimum Wage Act. It would gradually raise the minimum wage from $7.25 an hour, where it is now, to $10.10 an hour, then it would link the minimum wage to the cost of

living in the future. It would be indexed.

We would also provide a raise in the minimum wage for tipped workers, which has not been done in more than 20 years.

Let's look at what happened to the minimum wage. If we kept the minimum wage at the same level when adjusted for inflation, and made that adjustment based on the minimum wage for 1968, which was a pretty good economic year, the minimum wage today would be $10.75 an hour. It is now $7.25 an hour.

You wonder why there are more people on food stamps. Look at what's happened. By the way, these are people who are working, and they are people you see every day. You see them every day when you go in to get that coffee, go to that lunch counter or that department store. You see these minimum-wage workers every day. If you have daycare for your kids, you probably see them there too.

Again, if we kept at this level, that family making minimum wage would have an additional $7,000 every year to spend on necessities. It is no wonder that working people turn to the safety net. In fact, a recent study found that taxpayers have to pick up the tab for millions of working families who are getting minimum wage. We have to pick up the tab to the tune of about $243 billion a year. Why? That is what we pay for food stamps, Medicaid, and the Children's Health Insurance Program, the Earned Income Tax Credit Program, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. Taxpayers are picking up the tab to the tune of about $243 billion.

If you want to say who benefits from an increase in the minimum wage, it is not only the people who are making the minimum wage, taxpayers will benefit too because a lot of this would fall by the wayside because people wouldn't qualify any longer for the safety net programs.

Businesses will benefit too. The biggest problems for businesses—especially small businesses—is the lack of consumer demand and poor sales. If you put money back in the pockets of low-income workers, that will be a boon to small businesses, and it will be a boon to businesses on Main Street because that is where they will tend to shop.

Many of these low-income workers don't drive out to the suburbs. A lot of them don't go online and buy at amazon.com, but they will go to their neighborhood stores, and that is where they spend their money.

In a poll earlier this year two-thirds of small business owners said they support raising the minimum wage because they know it will help increase consumption and reduce pressure on taxpayer-funded public benefit programs.

We always hear the claim that if you raise the minimum wage, it will cost jobs. That is just not true. The most sophisticated empirical economic research conducted over the last 2 decades has shown repeatedly that minimum-wage increases do not cause job loss—not generally, not among teenagers, and not among restaurant workers.

In short, history shows us time and again that despite all the cries of doom and gloom from richly paid lobbyists and well-funded trade associations, there is simply no real negative economic consequences from an increase in the minimum wage. To the contrary, the benefits are enormous.

The Economic Policy Institute estimates that our bill would pump an additional $22 billion into the gross domestic product, thereby supporting 85,000 new jobs, and giving workers an additional $35 billion to spend over the 3 years of the implementation, and, of course, more beyond that.

Fourteen million children in America will have a parent who gets a raise because of increasing the minimum wage. Again, this makes a real difference in people's lives. They are not going to the Riviera. They are not taking vacations to the beach.

Fifteen million women, 13 million men, 4 million African-American workers, 7 million Hispanic workers, and 7 million parents will get a raise. It is going to make a real difference in their lives.

A boost to $10.10 would mean an extra $6,000 a year. Think about what that would mean for someone who is making the minimum wage, which puts them at $14,000 to $15,000. After 3 years of implementation, they would get $6,000 more a year, which amounts to 7 months of groceries, 6 months of rent, 1 semester at a 4-year public university or 1,600 gallons of gas. That is a real difference.

I have heard some say that they think the Earned Income Tax Credit should be the answer to the problem of low wages. What this overlooks is that the Earned Income Tax Credit only helps families with children. Childless adults who work full time at the minimum wage actually earn too much to qualify for the Earned Income Tax Credit. The minimum wage is not enough for a single person to survive on.

Moreover, just relying on the Earned Income Tax Credit would simply shift more costs to the taxpayers rather than requiring employers to pay a fair wage. It would actually incentivize employers to pay even less in wages, even to workers who don't qualify for EITC.

The minimum wage raise we are proposing is particularly important for millions of tipped workers. They will receive a raise for the first time in 22 years. Workers who receive tips will get a raise in their base wage. These include not only restaurant servers, but also nail salon workers, pizza delivery drivers, coat checkers, parking attendants, and many more.

Right now, under our current Federal law, employers are required to pay only $2.13 an hour to tipped workers. So rather than supplementing wages, tips have actually, over the last 20 years, replaced wages, which is insecure for workers. It often leaves them in poverty. There is no predictability when counting on tips. Often workers go home with only tips because tax deductions canceled out their cash wages.

This is an actual copy of a real check made out to a restaurant worker in the District of Columbia. It is a paycheck. The check date is 8/5/2013, and it says $0.00. This is made out to a real person. She got a paycheck for $0.00. Why? After they took out her withholding and FICA taxes, she didn't make enough to get paid. Some people might say, well, she got tips. Maybe. But anyone who gets tips can tell you one day they are up and the next day they are down. Sometimes they are good; sometimes they are not.

How do you budget on that? That is like saying the Earned Income Tax Credit. I have already pointed out the fallacy of that, but that only comes a year later. I am talking about—how do you live from paycheck to paycheck when your paycheck is zero? You can't make plans based on your budget, and you can't raise a family based on it. No one who works for a living should come home with a paycheck that says $0.00 when they have worked over 40 hours a week.

My bill would establish a fair balance between wages and tips by slowly—over 6 years—lifting the base wage for tipped workers from $2.13 an hour to 70 percent of the minimum wage. That is more in line with how the wage for tipped workers worked in the decades that have since passed.

The National Restaurant Association claims it can't afford to raise these wages. They say that every time we propose raising the minimum wage. The National Restaurant Association opposes any minimum wage increase at any time. But they can afford it.

In fact, the last minimum wage increase from 2007 to 2009, which meant raises for workers such as bussers, kitchen staff, and others who don't regularly receive tips, didn't hurt the industry. But they said so at the time. Here is what they said in 2007. When we were here debating an increase in the minimum wage, here is what they said: ''A minimum wage increase will cost our industry jobs.''

That is what they said in 2007.

Flash forward to 2012. Here is what the restaurant industry said: ''The restaurant industry not only provided much-needed job growth during the sluggish last decade, it also is poised to post steady growth well into the future.''

They can't have it both ways. This is the truth, that they provided job growth during that time. More power to them. But don't come and tell us that an increase in the minimum wage and an increase in the minimum wage for tipped workers is going to cost them jobs. That just doesn't hold.

I will close with one more statement from a real worker whose life will be improved if we step up and support the people who work in our country. She has a lesson for us. Jackie Perkins works at a restaurant in Denver, CO, and she says:

> You are talking about real people. You sit in your ivory tower in the legislature and talk about economics, numbers, jobs, but what you don't understand is there are real jobs and real workers who have families that they need to support, and raising the minimum wage helps me support myself and my family and to advance and to achieve the American dream.

So I believe in Jackie's dreams and those of all of these hard-working Americans, as I said earlier, who make the country work, who make it operate. As we look ahead to the Christmas season and the new year, I hope all my colleagues will take time over the holidays to think about all the blessings we have been given and all that we should be thankful for. I hope we put ourselves in the shoes of these working people who just want to build a better life for themselves and their children. Think about the minimum wage retail worker we see when we go into the store to shop for that Christmas present, who works hard running that cash register, standing on her feet all day, and she can't even afford to shop in her own store. Think of the unemployed worker who must go to the local food bank because he can't find a job. The food stamps have run out and he can't afford that nice big turkey and all the dressing and everything else for Christmas dinner.

I will close where I started. We have to stop being so harsh and having these harsh attitudes toward people at the lower economic end of the spectrum. They have value too. Their lives have value. Their work has tremendous value. The country couldn't exist, couldn't operate without people such as they.

So let's refine our public policies to be a little bit more considerate, a little bit more compassionate, a little bit more understanding of the tough lives some people have in our society. Let's have a compassion that is borne of an understanding that we are so privileged to live in the richest country in the world. We can afford to make sure people have enough food to eat. We can afford to make sure people who are unemployed get unemployment insurance benefits next year. We can afford that. We can afford to increase the minimum wage. We can afford these things, and we will be a better country socially and economically if we do so.

We have a duty, I believe, to put ourselves in their shoes. We have a duty to make sure people who do the work such as that in our country get a fair chance to aspire to the American dream.

So I hope we all have a good holiday season—Christmas and New Year's with our families and our friends. I hope we take time to pause and reflect also, as I said, on our blessings and our obligations toward people who may not be as fortunate as we are. I hope when we come back we will support a strong food assistance program, a deserved and long overdue increase in the minimum wage, and an extension of Federal unemployment insurance, and let's have a new year that is filled with less harshness and a little bit more compassion and understanding for our fellow Americans.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MANCHIN). The Senator from Georgia.

Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, I see the distinguished Senator from Washington on the floor who I assume wishes to speak; if not, I ask to be recognized for up to 5 minutes and then I will yield to the distinguished Senator from Washington.

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

Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, last Friday I left this Chamber with a folder containing most of the information from the Ryan-Murray comprehensive agreement on the budget. I left with the ringing of suggestions in my ear from some colleagues on the floor that it wasn't enough, it didn't do enough, and that we didn't need to pass it. But inside me I had that little voice of conscience all of us get from time to time that said the time was right to do what was right.

So on the airplane back to Atlanta, I read the entire agreement. Then, when I spent the weekend at home while doing Christmas shopping, going out with grandchildren and talking to my wife, I also listened to the people of Georgia. I listened to what they said, and there were some remarkable things that happened this weekend. At church on Sunday following a cantata—and usually I am accosted at church by people who have all kinds of various suggestions about what I should or should not be doing—but I was remarkably surprised by how many people came up to me and said: Thank goodness you all have finally found an agreement with predictability on the spending in our Federal budget. I received not one negative comment.

I left church, went to lunch, and then went shopping at the mall where I was stopped three or four times by people—some Democrats, some Republicans; some I knew, some I did not—again, the same comment: Finally, you guys have gotten your act together and you have gotten a bipartisan agreement on the budget.

I went to a dinner party with a lot of partisan activists Sunday night. Although there was some grumbling about not getting this or that, there was some relief that we weren't going to go through what we went through on October 1 and the threats we have gone through in the past about government shutdowns and the failure of our government to function.

Then I got on the plane to fly back to Washington yesterday morning and, once again, members of the military, people I did not know, people I do know; some with the bureaucracy, some not, all stopped and generally said the same thing: Finally, it is about time.

So when I voted earlier today to shut off the debate or end the debate and bring to a final vote a vote on the bipartisan budget agreement, I voted in favor of it because it is the right thing to do at the right time. When the final vote comes in the next 30 hours, I will vote for it again. I want to give three precise reasons why.

No. 1, I have been the voice of a biennial budget in this Congress for the last 15 years and in this Chamber for the last 9. I have talked about how we need to bring more predictability and more continuity to the budget process. I have spoken about how we can't continue to pass CR after CR after CR which, on its face, is an admission we cannot do our job.

JEANNE SHAHEEN, the distinguished Democratic Senator from New Hampshire, and I have coauthored the biennial budget proposal. This is a biennial budget taking us through 2015, giving us predictability. That is something we need to take advantage of and build on into the future and replicate over and over as we bring more continuity to the budget process.

No. 2, yes, I know there are a couple of pension tweaks and, yes, I know there are some savings in a couple of pension tweaks. But we are going to have to do a lot of tweaking in terms of long-term entitlements over the next few years if we are ever going to rein in the spending. Our biggest problem is not nearly as much as what we spend in discretionary spending in 1 year as the obligation and the mortgage we are accumulating over decades. This particular proposal will save $22.6 billion over the next decade but $100 billion over the decade to follow because it accumulates and it compounds and those savings on entitlement programs can make a tremendous difference.

No. 3, and most important, we stumbled and fell last October when we decided to shut down the government rather than do our job. I commend Senator MURRAY and I commend PAUL RYAN. I want to refer to my colleagues a conversation PAUL RYAN and I had on Saturday via cell phone. I was at Mount Bethel Methodist Church in the gymnasium watching my 8-year-old granddaughter play basketball. He was in Wisconsin watching his daughter play basketball as well. He called me on my cell phone and we talked for about 15 minutes, not as much about the budget proposal as about my granddaughter and his daughter, recognizing that if we fulfill our responsibility as representatives of the American people in this Congress this year, if we begin the process of predictability in appropriations and budgeting, and if we can begin the process of recognizing our entitlements are running away from us and that our debt and deficit will kill us, maybe—just maybe—instead of being the first generation of American

politicians to leave our children and grandchildren worse off, we will be the first generation of American politicians who returned to the sanity of fiscal soundness, biennial budgeting, and accountability in the way we do our business.

I vote for that, and I will vote for the Ryan-Murray budget tomorrow when it comes to the floor of the Senate.

I yield back the remainder of my time and defer to the Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. NELSON. 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. NELSON. Mr. President, I am here to speak on the budget, but until our other colleague from Pennsylvania gets here, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

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

DISAPPEARANCE OF BOB LEVINSON

Mr. NELSON. Mr. President, over the course of Friday and through the weekend there has been the publication, first by the Associated Press, of a missing American, a missing Floridian, Bob Levinson, a retired FBI agent and that publication has spurred other entities, primarily the New York Times, which had been holding the story for a number of years—well before the Associated Press ever got the story—to then print a story of additional information about the disappearance, 7 years ago, of Bob Levinson on Kish Island, a resort island in the Persian Gulf right off the coast of mainland Iran.

Of course, we have been searching for any shred of evidence about Bob. He has here in the U.S., in Florida, a wife and seven children. The length of time he has been missing, unfortunately, seems to have met or exceeded the amount of time of almost any American.

The family, of course, desperately seeks any shred of evidence. They were heartened 3 years ago when Christine Levinson, his wife, received a secretive email with a video that showed that Bob was alive. In it he made statements that he had served the government of the U.S. for 30 years and: Please help.

About a year later, she received, also by another circuitous email, a photograph of him, obviously later because his hair is long and there is a full beard. His hair is silver, his beard is silver. In both the video and the last item, the photograph, he appears quite gaunt. Of course, we know he has health problems, high blood pressure, and so forth, and, of course, we fear.

We also know that just this morning, on ''CBS This Morning,'' a fellow who he was seeing—an American who lives in Iran, a fellow who he was seeing on Kish Island—saw him taken by Iranian authorities.

It is no secret that all levels of the government, including their Florida Senator, have reached out to the Iranian Government over the years, including the President of the United States when he spoke to the newly elected President of Iran when that United Nations meeting occurred in September.

I have spoken within the last couple of days to the Iranian Ambassador to the United Nations and reiterated the plea of those of us on a humanitarian basis for this family to be reunited with their loved one and have offered to the Ambassador, if it would in any way help, that I am willing to go to Iran if in any way it would secure his release. If the Iranian authorities took him, somebody in the Government of Iran knows of his whereabouts.

I will conclude by saying that for the first time we have what appears to be successful talks going on between the two governments with regard to the Iranian nuclear program, and those are at a critical stage to, hopefully, bear fruit within about 5 months from now.

What better time for the Government of Iran to show their good will than to step forth and produce Bob Levinson so he can return home to his family.

Mr. President, that concludes my remarks on Bob Levinson for the moment. I will continue to speak on this matter.

Now I would like to turn to the matter at hand with regard to the budget, since my colleague from Pennsylvania and, of course, our chair, the Senator from Washington, are here.

I would like to take a moment to acknowledge a small but significant provision in this budget compromise. It is section 203 of the Budget Act of 2013, and it limits access to what is known as Social Security's Death Master File, which is important because criminals utilize fraudulently the Death Master File to steal people's identities.

When someone dies, the Social Security Administration puts their information into the Death Master File and releases it to the public through the Commerce Department. It lists their name, their Social Security number, and other personal identification information.

The public release shortly after death of the Death Master File came about as a result of a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit back in the 1980s. Over time, Federal agencies and industries came to rely on the information from the Death Master File. Life insurers use it to know when to pay out benefits. Banks and credit card companies use information from the file to prevent fraud. A whole host of Federal and State agencies, as well as other industries, depend on the information for legitimate purposes, including pension funds, unclaimed property auditors, and identity theft protection companies.

But there is somebody else who is using the Death Master File too. It is the criminals who are stealing identities, including especially the Social Security number. When that is posted online, they are using it fraudulently. What are they doing? They are filing an income tax return. They are utilizing somebody else's identity—in this case easily accessible, the Death Master File—creating a false return and getting a tax refund.

You may find this hard to believe, but this actually happened in Tampa, FL. Street crime—hijackings, stickups, burglaries, dope dealing—actually dropped because the criminals found a new way of being able to steal people's money. They did it with a laptop instead of with a crowbar or a gun. Street crime actually reduced because the criminals have found a new way.

They would steal people's identities in many different ways. They would go to senior citizens' mailboxes, and they would get their ID, they would get their Social Security number. They would go through hospital records, and they would get Social Security numbers. They would do it a number of ways. But one of the easiest ways was this Death Master File.

I want to tell you about the story of Alexis Agin, the daughter of two courageous parents John and Neely, who have joined us today. Tragically, Alexis died from cancer 2 weeks shy of her 5th birthday. Obviously, no parent should have to go through the pain of seeing their child go through this kind of ordeal and then losing the child.

So you can imagine how they felt when months later they learned that someone had used Alexis' identity, obtained from the Death Master File, to file a fraudulent tax return, claiming a refund, and the IRS—when they tried to correct this—asked them to prove that Alexis was their daughter and was not the one responsible for the fraudulent tax return.

Because I have heard so many stories of innocent Americans whose identities have been stolen, this Senator filed this legislation that would restrict access to the Death Master File by establishing a certification program run by the Commerce Department while still allowing access to the Death Master File for legitimate purposes.

This brings us to the budget agreement. I am very pleased that the Senator from Washington has included within this budget that we are going to pass—it would be nice if it were today, but it looks as if it is going to be tomorrow—what some of us have been calling on for years: restricting access to this master file, making it harder for criminals to steal identities and therefore making it harder to steal taxpayer money.

That is where this actually has a revenue effect because we are going to actually save the U.S. Government money by doing this. We are going to save the U.S. Government money that otherwise would be stolen. So I thank

the courageous chairman of the Budget Committee for including this idea in the act and for crafting what used to be S. 676, the Identity Theft and Tax Fraud Prevention Act.

It was never the intent of this Senator or the cosponsors to deny access to the master file by the people who need it for legitimate purposes. The language in this budget deal would include the file in the Freedom of Information Act exemptions so that it will not be available to just anyone off the street. However, the Social Security Administration and Commerce would still be able to release the information in the file for those who need it.

So I want to ask the distinguished chair of the committee whether is it true that as Commerce sets up a certification program, the Social Security Administration and Commerce will still be able to release the Death Master File to folks who need to use it for legitimate purposes?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I would ask unanimous consent to engage in a colloquy with the Senator from Florida and the Senator from Pennsylvania so I may respond.

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

Mrs. MURRAY. The Senator from Florida is correct. That is absolutely our intention. There is nothing in law that prevents the continued public release of the Death Master File while the Commerce Department sets up the certification program. This act simply exempts the Social Security Administration's death records from freedom of information requests under section 552 of title 5 of the United States Code, subsection (b).

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, echoing the comments of my colleague from Florida, I am pleased that the budget includes language to address the fraud that is perpetrated with information from the Death Master File. Tax fraud is a large and growing problem. We know that. In 2012, for example, the IRS reported that they identified over 1.2 million identity theft returns. As of June 2013, they identified 1.6 million for this year. Thousands of these cases involve the identities of deceased taxpayers. A recent audit of the 2011 tax year identified 19,000 fraudulent returns from recently deceased taxpayers. Under current practice, for $10, criminals can purchase the full name, Social Security number, date of birth, and date of death of a deceased citizen or legal resident.

As a member of the Finance Committee, I have worked with my colleagues to address this issue. I am pleased to see the language limiting access to the Death Master File in the budget deal.

As Commerce begins its rulemaking, it is essential to strike the correct balance. The reality is that the Death Master File is used by companies across Pennsylvania and the Nation to prevent fraud and provide other essential consumer protections. Banks, investment companies, insurers, and numerous other businesses run this file to ensure the identity of those accessing their services. Striking the correct balance in the regulatory process is critical to ensuring the continued legitimate use of this information.

Businesses and those who contract for assistance with fraud prevention and other businesses must maintain access to the file. Furthermore, access must remain available as those regulations are promulgated.

In short, as a certification program is set up, it is important that we get it right. The Death Master File is critical to fraud prevention and must remain available to legitimate users. To that point, I ask the Senator from Washington, the distinguished chairwoman, is it the intention of the Bipartisan Budget Act for the Commerce Department to seek input from stakeholders as it creates the certification program to ensure legitimate users maintain access to the file?

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, the Senator from Pennsylvania is correct. We intended for Commerce to follow notice-and-comment rulemaking procedures in the establishment of the certification program.

Mr. NELSON. Mr. President, I want to close by again thanking the distinguished chairwoman of the committee. She has been a quiet hero, and the proof is in the pudding of all of her labors. She deserves the praise of the country that we have a budget, No. 1, but I also thank her for making it a lot more difficult for criminals to steal the identities of those who have passed on.

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, I have decided to support the budget agreement, though it is by no means the budget solution that I would have written and it contains some imperfections.

Following up on earlier remarks today in a colloquy on the Senate floor by my colleagues from Florida, Pennsylvania, and the Senate Budget Committee Chair, Senator MURRAY, I wish to provide some instructive remarks about the Death Master File provision of the budget agreement. The Death Master File is a data set compiled by the Social Security Administration, and made available to various researchers and business interests through the Commerce Department. Many researchers, genealogists, and businesses use the data for bona fide reasons including fraud prevention, ancestry research, identifying remains of deceased individuals, retirement plan administration and prevention of improper payments. As long as they can show the Commerce Department that they have rigorous privacy protections and protocols put in place, they should be able to become certified by Commerce to have access to the Death Master File data.

I concur with what much of what my colleagues have said in their recent colloquy about the Death Master File provision of the budget agreement. Specifically, I wish to reiterate the need for balance in the regulatory process and in the rulemaking procedures that the Commerce Department is called upon in the budget legislation to undertake. We need a robust rulemaking process, where all interested parties are afforded the time and opportunity to adequately express their interests. And, importantly, we need to ensure that during that process, there will be access to Death Master File data for bona fide purposes, including fraud prevention, identifying remains of deceased individuals, forensic and other genealogical research, prevention of improper payments, and assurance of proper payments.

As the budget agreement is currently written, there appears to be some confusion and ambiguity concerning implementation of the regulatory process and rulemaking procedures that the Commerce Department is to undertake and whether access to data in the interim, when rules are being promulgated and aired, will be assured. I must say that a more robust and inclusive process for arriving at the Death Master File provision of the budget agreement could have eliminated the confusion and ambiguity that has arisen. The Finance Committee, of which I am the Ranking Member, has jurisdiction over the manner in which the Social Security Administration governs Death Master File data, and the Finance Committee has expertise that could have been called upon. Unfortunately, that was not the case, as the Death Master File provision of the budget agreement was not processed through regular order with adequate Finance Committee input.

Mr. President, it is becoming far too common for important legislation to bypass committees of jurisdiction and for it to be written by legislators who do not necessarily have the depth of knowledge and expertise necessary to avoid writing laws that either do not work or contain glitches, ambiguities, and confusing language. In my opinion, we need to return to regular order where committees of jurisdiction are the places where issues in their jurisdiction are debated, processed, and agreed upon in a bipartisan fashion. Certainly, committees of jurisdiction must be consulted when others decide to write legislation that involves issues that lie squarely within their jurisdictions. That will be the surest route to preventing a reoccurrence of the ambiguity and confusion that has, unfortunately, arisen from the Death Master File provision of the budget agreement.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, we are watching America pass from the hands of the ''greatest generation'' to the hands of the debt-paying generation with nothing to show for it but the bill. For months Republicans have challenged President Obama to fix the

Federal debt, to save entitlement programs that Americans depend upon, and to rescue young Americans from being forever known as the debt-paying generation.

Earlier this year, for example, I called on the President to show the same kind of leadership that President Johnson did on civil rights, that President Nixon did on China, that President Carter did on the Panama Canal Treaty, and that President Reagan did on Social Security. Confront your own party. Say what needs to be said. Do what needs to be done. This has not happened.

I appreciate very much the efforts of the Senator from Washington and Representative RYAN to try to bring certainty to the budget process. That is why I voted today to allow a vote on the House-passed budget agreement. It seems to me, at least, that a Republican Senator could allow a vote on legislation passed by the House of Representatives with the support of the House Republican leadership and two-thirds of the House Republicans, so I voted yes to allow a vote.

However, I am going to vote against the Ryan-Murray budget amendment because it avoids the Federal Government's single greatest challenge; that is, reducing the growth of runaway entitlement spending. Instead, it spends savings that should be used to strengthen Medicare, to strengthen pensions, and to strengthen the air transportation system.

I believe in user fees. When you build a highway, you have a gas tax to pay for the highway. You do not raise the gas tax to pay for education. You do not raise the gas tax to pay for a health program. A user fee is related to the service it provides. This budget agreement does not withstand that test.

It would have been much better to pay for this budget agreement by using a small part of the almost $1 trillion in entitlement savings that Senator CORKER and I have suggested in the Fiscal Sustainability Act or with meaningful entitlement savings from the President's own budget.

The Fiscal Sustainability Act that Senator CORKER and I have suggested would slow the growth of out-of-control mandatory spending by, among other things, recommending a more realistic Consumer Price Index. This is a Consumer Price Index that most economists have said is more realistic in its assessment of what the increase in the standard of living is. The monthly difference between the current Consumer Price Index and the more accurate Consumer Price Index is about $3 per month for the average beneficiary, which is less than the average cost of a gallon of gasoline. This modest change would help to slow the growth—not cut but help slow the growth of mandatory entitlement spending. The purpose of that is to help make those programs solvent so beneficiaries can depend on them.

The Medicare trustees have told us that Medicare will not have enough money in it in 13 years to pay all of the hospital bills. What are seniors going to think of Senators who in 2013 did not take the steps to make Medicare solvent? We could do that if we would begin to adopt some of the recommendations in the Corker-Alexander Fiscal Sustainability Act or in the President's own budget. He also recommended a smaller version of the more realistic Consumer Price Index. He recommended several hundred billion other dollars of changes in entitlement programs that Republican Senators might be able to agree with.

To go back to the Consumer Price Index, according to the Congressional Budget Office, we could save $162 billion over 10 years if we adopted a more realistic Consumer Price Index for entitlement programs. That is twice as much money as we needed for the budget agreement. The rest could have been used to reduce the debt today, and the reduction would be even more in future years.

As I emphasized before, the purpose of reducing the growth of entitlement spending is so the programs are solvent, so a Medicare beneficiary does not get to a point in 13 years and say: Why does Medicare not have enough money to pay for all of my hospital bill?

Here is another way we could have cut wasteful spending: Eliminate the wind production tax credit. The Senator from West Virginia and I have written a letter to the Finance Committee and suggested we do that. Here we are in the budget agreement struggling to find $63 billion over the next 10 years. Where could we find $63 billion? That amount about equals what we could save if we did not extend the wind production tax credit each year for the next 10 years.

So any way you slice it, we could either have taken some of the President's suggested savings in entitlement spending, some of Senator CORKER's and my suggested savings, we could have taken half of the savings from the more realistic Consumer Price Index, paid for the budget agreement that way, and then I could have voted for it because we would have moved money from the out-of-control side of the budget to relieve the sequester, and we would have done what we should have done.

What I have to ask with all respect is, Where was the President in all of this? I mean, if Lyndon Johnson can pass a civil rights bill and Richard Nixon can go to China, if Jimmy Carter can pass the Panama Canal Treaty and Ronald Reagan can work with Tip O'Neill on Social Security, why can't President Obama get involved with his own budget recommendations and help us begin to deal with entitlement spending, which everybody knows is the single biggest problem we have facing our country?

Washington could learn a lot about debt and taxes from Tennessee. Tennessee's tax burden ranks third lowest of any State, it has the lowest per capita debt, and it balances its budget every year. All that did not happen by accident. I was Governor when we needed three big road programs. Instead of borrowing the money, we paid for it as we went. We used user fees, the gasoline tax, but we applied that to the roads. Guess where we are today? We have one of the best four-lane highway systems in America and zero road debt. While other States have billions of dollars of road debt, we have zero. So all of our gas tax money goes to keeping one of the best four-lane highway systems in the country. Those policies have paid off. According to the Department of Labor, Tennessee is the fourth best State in the country in net new jobs.

Getting debt under control is the foremost problem we have facing our country. If we do not do that, the people who depend upon Medicare and other important programs will be not able to depend on them to pay their hospital bills. Runaway spending is going to leave our young Americans forever known as the debt-paying generation.

We are watching America pass from the hands of the ''greatest generation'' to the debt-paying generation with nothing to show for it but the bill.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Massachusetts.

(The remarks of Ms. WARREN pertaining to the introduction of S. 1837 are located in today's RECORD under ''Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.'')

Ms. WARREN. 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. REED. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mr. REED. I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

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

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. REED. I come again to the floor to remind my colleagues that in 11 days 1.3 million Americans will lose their unemployment insurance. With the goal of providing certainty to these families that they will continue to have access to this vital lifeline, I and my colleague from Nevada, Senator HELLER, are introducing a bill that would extend unemployment insurance compensation benefits for 3 months.

I hope this sensible and bipartisan approach will provide a path forward to extending the program through 2014, which will give families and our economy more time to recover.

In many parts of the country, recovery is just getting underway. My own State of Rhode Island has 9.2 percent

unemployment. There are States throughout the country that have over 8 percent unemployment. There are some States that are doing well and we are very pleased they are. But for the millions of people who are still looking for work, they need this help.

This program is designed so workers continue to look for work while they receive very modest compensation. In my State the average is about $354 a week. That is not the kind of money that is going to induce someone to simply sit back and collect. It is going to provide some support for them to just put food on the table.

This safety net is not only there for them, it is for everyone, as 23.9 million Americans have received these Federal benefits since the start of the program in 2008. Some, thankfully, have found work and returned to work. But all of them, in a very critical time, received assistance and support. They only qualified for the support because they worked. This is a program that is based on one fundamental principle—they have worked long enough to qualify for these benefits. As a result, I think we have to go ahead, follow through, and not leave 1.3 million people, on December 28, literally with nothing, in many cases.

As we look by household, the number of Americans this program has helped rises to about 69 million people, not only the workers but their families, sons, daughters, and spouses. In fact, it includes about 17 million children who would not have received support without the benefits provided by this program.

In terms of income, over 40 percent of those households new to receiving UI in 2012 had household income between $30,000 and $75,000. That is an important point to make. These are working families. These are people who were enjoying a reasonably good living and suddenly, because of many changes, globalization, downsizing, you name it, they are without a job in a very difficult job market.

They went from people with good, solid, middle-class jobs to desperately looking for work. At least this program gave them some support as they made that great effort to look for work.

This program has been and continues to be a crucial benefit to millions of American households all over the country and of nearly every conceivable demographic background. That is why it is such a significant part of our recovery too. Its expiration will hurt families.

It has been estimated that if we do not extend this program over the next year, we will lose 200,000 jobs. And the logic of this program is very compelling. People who receive these benefits, people who used to make $50,000 a year, for example—and many of them did—they are not going to go ahead, turn around, take these benefits and just sort of squirrel them away or go off on a vacation. This is about paying the rent and paying for fuel in a cold winter or a hot summer in the South and Southwest. It is about making sure their children get a little something. Again, about 17 million children have benefited over the last several years—since 2008—from this program.

This is absolutely critical. It is critical to our economy. It is not only the right thing to do, it is the economically smart thing to do. It has been estimated that without the extension of unemployment insurance, we will lose .2 percent of GDP growth this year, and this is at a time when we all very sincerely profess that our No. 1 job is jobs—getting people back to work and growing the economy. And if we grow the economy, that has many beneficial effects. Not only does it lower the number of people who need this type of assistance, but as a result of that and other activities, it begins to lower our deficit.

For so many reasons, both economic and central to our purpose as a government—which is when people who have worked hard run into a situation where they lose their employment through no fault of their own, this is something that is there for them, and I hope we can move forward on it.

I am so pleased Senator HELLER has stepped up and has joined me, and I will join him, in urging all my colleagues to give us the opportunity not only to bring this legislation up but for at least 3 months to extend it so we can look longer term. Some of my colleagues have raised some very interesting points about how perhaps there are reforms necessary for the program. Well, in the context of a program that expires on December 28, it is hard to take the legislative time and insight to develop reforms that will work for everyone. But if we can extend this for at least 3 months, we will have that opportunity.

Mr. President, again, I will return. This is not the last time I will speak on this point. But I did want to come back and remind people that this program is central to so many families. It is an important part of continuing our economic expansion, and it is particularly difficult at this time of year when 1.3 million Americans in this holiday season are facing a cutoff of benefits that to many of them are the difference between paying the rent, paying the mortgage, and keeping the kids in their sports programs or doing those things families in America need to do.

With that, 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.

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

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

Ms. AYOTTE. Mr. President, I come to the floor today to talk about an issue about which I am deeply concerned.

While I certainly appreciate the work done by Congressman RYAN and Senator MURRAY on the recent budget agreement, in my view there is a provision in this agreement which makes it a deal breaker. That provision is, there is $6 billion taken from our current military retirees over the next 10 years from their cost-of-living increases to pay for this budget agreement.

I do not believe we have to take from the backs of our men and women in uniform to pay for more spending. I believe there are other ways we can find $6 billion in the trillions and trillions we will spend over the next decade, rather than taking it from the men and women in uniform who have sacrificed the most for our country.

What troubles me most about this particular provision of this budget agreement is our military retirees under the age of 62 were singled out. There are some changes to the contributions that Federal employees will have to make to their retirement, but those changes are only made prospectively to new hires.

Our men and women in uniform were not grandfathered under this agreement. They are the only ones singled out under the agreement to have their benefits cut.

What I find most appalling is the question we pressed and we pressed the Department of Defense for an answer to, and that is: What happens to our disabled veterans?

Many of us have been to Walter Reed. We have seen the injuries our men and women in uniform have sustained fighting on our behalf in Afghanistan. Some did multiple tours in Afghanistan and also served our country in Iraq. When you have a disability that occurs in the line of duty, you are entitled to a disability retirement, and this agreement will also cut the cost-of-living increases for our disabled veterans, which I find appalling, particularly with some of the horrific injuries too many of our men and women in uniform have sustained in defending our country and taking bullets for us all.

Under this agreement, an E–7—sergeant first class—who retires at age 40 could stand to lose $72,000 by the time he or she turns age 62. To put that in perspective, the average retirement for an E–7 is roughly $25,000. So in that period, this cut of 1 percent to their COLA could equate to $72,000. Think about the impact that has on our veterans and our men and women in uniform who have done so much for our country. Why are they being singled out in this agreement?

The other issue I wish to raise is this notion about which some have said: We have to vote for this agreement or we are going to face another government shutdown. I think that is a false choice. We may be in a rush to get home to our families for the holidays, but the notion we can't find $6 billion somewhere else on a bipartisan basis for our men and women in uniform is a false one. We can keep this government

open, we can address the budget issues, but we should not do so on the backs of our men and women in uniform singled out in this agreement.

Right now, as this agreement stands, the so-called amendment tree has been filled. That means any amendments which either side would want to offer cannot be offered right now because the majority leader has filled every part of the amendment tree, not allowing individual Members to offer amendments.

Were I allowed to offer amendments, I have filed two amendments which would address this issue for our military and have found other pay-fors to address the issue. Those are just two ideas which I came up with. I am sure if we committed in this body to working on this issue, we could quickly find $6 billion that would not be taken from the backs of our men and women in uniform and would not be taken from the backs of our disabled veterans, who have already suffered too much on behalf of our Nation. I do not believe this is too much to ask of us.

We are blessed to be in this country and blessed to enjoy the freedoms we enjoy in this country because of our men and women in uniform and what they have done to defend our Nation.

Make no mistake, a military retirement is not like any other retirement. When you retire from the military, you understand that you can be called back. You can be called back at any time. And who is most likely to be called back? Our younger veterans. In fact, since 2001, thousands of our veterans who thought they were going back into civilian life have been called back by our government to serve their Nation again. They didn't get to say yes or no. They agreed to do that even though they thought they would be retired. That is what distinguishes a military retirement from other retirements, or an average civilian retirement.

They earned this for defending our country. I believe we should fulfill our responsibility to them, and that they should not be singled out. Of all the groups to be singled out, they should not be the group to be singled out, especially after everything they have done for our Nation.

I ask that we take a few moments in this body and come up with $6 billion some other way instead of taking it from the backs of our men and women in uniform. Why don't we have an amendment process that would allow us to address this issue and allow us to fix this now?

To those who are saying: We will fix this later, that is such a Washington answer. For those who are serving our country right now in Afghanistan, what kind of comfort is that to them that we will fix this down the line after we vote on this agreement? How about fixing this now?

I ask my colleagues to fix this now on behalf of our military, the best in the world, those who have sacrificed the most for our country.

If this body is to pass this agreement, I would call on our Commander in Chief to veto this agreement. Bring us to the White House. Make the House and the Senate sit together so we can resolve this issue. As the Commander in Chief of this country, don't accept the cuts to the military and have our military retirees singled out, particularly our disabled veterans, in this agreement.

We can get this done. We can get this done before the holidays. Yes, we will suffer some personal inconvenience, but think about that. That is nothing compared to what our veterans have done for us and continue to do for us every single day in this great country.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. WARREN). The Senator from South Carolina.

Mr. GRAHAM. Madam President, I join with the Senators from New Hampshire and Alabama in trying to urge the body to take a pause here and see if we can right a wrong before it matures. The good news is that we have a bipartisan agreement to try to fund the government in a fashion where we will not have a government by crisis. I appreciate that. I understand how hard it is to reach a consensus around here.

My objection is not to the deal as a whole. I appreciate the fact that sequestration relief occurred for our DOD budget for 2 years, and nondefense spending, and it was paid for. I appreciate that very much because sequestration has really cut into our ability to defend this Nation in a dramatic fashion, and to have it paid for is also a worthy goal and the right thing to do.

The point Senator AYOTTE, Senator SESSIONS, and I are trying to make is that a budget is about your priorities. What we are doing today is telling everybody in America what is important to the Congress, the Senate, and the House when it comes to getting a budget passed for 2 years and how we should pay for it. Here is what I can't understand: Of all the groups in America you would go to and single out, unlike any other group, to pay for the offset and come up with some money out of their pocket to get this budget deal passed—which doesn't keep us from becoming Greece, by any means, but I do applaud the effort—we picked the military community.

Here is what we have done to our military retirees, past, present, and future: We have taken their cost-of-living adjustment and reduced it by 1 percent until they get to age 62. If you are an E–7, a master sergeant in the Air Force, who retires at 42 in 2015, by the time you get to 62, this 1-percent reduction a year of your COLA amounts to almost $72,000 in lost benefits.

Do you know how much a master sergeant with 20 years of service makes in retirement? It is less than $25,000 a year. So that almost $72,000 number requires the master sergeant to give up 3 years of retirement, because $24,000 to $25,000 a year is what they make for a 20-year period, and the cost of the COLA reduction is almost $72,000, so basically you have taken 3 years of their retirement away to do a budget deal that could be accomplished without having to do that to our military.

By the way, nobody else in the country is doing this. No Social Security recipient has given up a dime. The COLA formula for the military is exactly the same as Social Security and other COLAs that we get around here.

Should we look at reforming our military retirement pay pension benefit system? Yes, because it is unsustainable in the future. Entitlement growth in the military is real, just as it is on the civilian side. Nobody has ever envisioned doing it this way, to take the military retiree community and retroactively apply a benefit cut to them that takes $6.3 billion out of the retiree community. These are the people who have been fighting the wars for 20 years. These are the people who have been serving continuously since 9/11, overseas and at home, trying to protect the Nation, and this COLA reduction doesn't just apply to people who have retired and are in good health at 40 or 42 or 45, it also applies to people who are medically retired. Someone who has had their legs blown off in Afghanistan or Iraq, and most likely will not be able to get a second job, is going to lose thousands of dollars in this cost-of-living adjustment, and nobody else in the country is so situated.

Can we do better? You better believe it. Here is what Congress told the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission. We set up a commission last year to advise the Congress next year on how we can fairly adjust retirement packages to make the personnel costs more sustainable in the Department of Defense in the future and how we can do that fairly.

Do you know what we told the commission. We mandated that any change they recommend has to grandfather existing forces and retirees. We put it in the law that created this commission. We put a restriction on the commission's ability to come up with pension, pay, and benefit reform by saying: You cannot apply it to people who have signed up and are expecting certain things. They are grandfathered.

We should have told ourselves that. We limited the commission, but we do exactly what the commission is not allowed to do. I don't know how my colleagues are going to explain this when they go back home. I hope somebody will ask what you are trying to accomplish. Trying to have a bipartisan budget that avoids a government shutdown is good, but asking the people who have been on the front lines of defending this Nation, who have been in the military for 20 years—and do you have any idea how many times the average military family moves in 20 years? Do you have any idea how many

schools their children will attend because they move every couple of years? Do you have any idea what it is like to serve this country since 9/11?

All I can say is if we want to find $6.3 billion over the next decade to pay for this budget deal, we can find better alternatives than this if we take some time.

If my colleagues don't like what Senator AYOTTE is doing, there are other ways. I am not asking a Democrat to defund ObamaCare to keep the government open. I am not asking a Democrat to take away a safety net from a group of Americans who are struggling. I am not asking a Republican to raise taxes. I am asking both of us, before Christmas, to rethink what we are doing here and take a little bit of time to fix a problem that, quite frankly, is unconscionable.

If you make over $250,000 a year in retirement, you receive $109 a month for a subsidy to pay for your Part D prescription drug bill. Here is what I would say: If you want to pick on rich people, let's do it. To me, $250,000 puts you in a category of living pretty good. Why in the world does our government give you $109 a month to pay your prescription drug bill when we as a nation are broke? That subsidy alone is worth $54 billion over the next 10 years. What if we took some of that money? What if we went to the $250,000 retiree and said: Would you give up some of your subsidy to pay your drug bill so military retirees don't have to lose the retirement benefits they have earned and have fought so hard to defend this Nation for so long? I bet they would say yes.

Here is the point: We are going to rush through this. If you ask me what bothers me the most about this, it is how insensitive we have become as a nation. We trip over ourselves to welcome the troops home when they come back from deployment. Members of Congress want to be there when the Guard unit leaves. We want to show how much we love the troops. That is a good thing.

Every American—Republican, Libertarian, vegetarian, Democrat—we all love the troops, but your Congress is expressing that love in a very strange way.

How far have we fallen? Do we have no shame? As a body elected by the American people to make sure the Nation is well run, what is the proper first role of the Federal Government? To defend the Nation. Tell me how to defend this Nation without people willing to die for it.

The budget doesn't defend this Nation. The CBO, the OMB, and all these acronyms do not defend the Nation against radical Islam. I am urging my colleagues in a spirit of bipartisanship and common decency: Do not single out the military retiree who has served so long and so hard and ask them to give so much when others are doing almost nothing.

As to our Federal employees, you are being asked to contribute more to the Federal retirement system, and I am sure that is a burden. But what do we do to Federal employees? We say that everybody who is in the system today does not share that burden. They are grandfathered. It is only for people who are hired in the future.

As to the military retiree, thank you for all of your hard work. Boy, do we have a deal for you.

This is not going to stand. This is going to pass because everybody is hellbent on getting out of here and going home and celebrating a bipartisan breakthrough, and we are going to talk about how we have become functional again. I do appreciate the effort to become functional, but to me, in our effort to become functional, we have lost our way and, quite frankly, lost our soul. Any political body that would do this in the name of good government has forgotten what government is all about. It is for, by, and of the people.

I will tell you right now, from the CEO to the doorman, when they hear about what we have done to pay for a budget deal at the expense of the military retired community, they are not going to be very appreciative. I promise this: If we don't fix it now, not only are we going to review it, we are going to fix it.

To our President: There is only one Commander in Chief. How could any Commander in Chief sign a bill that does this? Call us down to the White House, put us in a room, Republicans and Democrats, and don't let us out until we find a $6.3 billion offset that doesn't do injustice to the military retired community. If I were the President, I sure as hell would do that. Nobody would be going home until we got this right.

So the President owes a duty to the troops greater than anybody because he is their Commander in Chief. I don't know whether we are going to get this fixed. The train is running, and the retired military community is on the tracks, and a few of us are trying to get them off. I promise their families that if we fail today, we are going to come back at this tomorrow, over and over and over, until the Congress finds its soul.

I yield.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. INHOFE. Madam President, first of all, my good friend from South Carolina is a mind reader. He always looks at you and figures out what you are going to say and then he says it better.

There are a couple of things that haven't been said during this discussion, and I want to mention them, and then I know we are going to vote. One is that our military was told—and I talked to several of the groups, the military retiring groups and others—that they would be grandfathered in. Now, I want everyone grandfathered in if we are going to do something like this. Certainly, in one installation in my State of Oklahoma, we have 13,000 civilian employees who are going to be grandfathered in, and I want them to be grandfathered in. That is the right thing to do.

People make career decisions predicated on what they are told at the time. And these military guys—and I look around the room and most of the Senators who are in here have spent a lot of time, as I have, in Afghanistan and Iraq, and we talk to these guys in the mess hall, and they talk about how they happened to get in. They make these decisions, and then we come along and take it away.

I think it has been said enough, the example of the gunnery sergeant at age 42, having been in for 20 years, and it is going to cost him some $72,000, but not much is said about the officers. For the officers, it is actually a lot more than that. An O–5 officer at that agency under the same circumstances would lose $124,000. These are not wealthy people; these are people who depend upon this for their retirement.

They were told, as I mentioned, that they also—the military people—would be grandfathered in. Now, anytime one is grandfathered in, then obviously they change the rules and the new people making a career decision will make it predicated on those circumstances of retirement that are there at that time.

I have to say this: Tomorrow we are going to be involved in the bill that was put together by the big four. It is the NDAA. It is a must-pass bill. We will pass it. I can't imagine there won't be the votes to pass it. But I can tell my colleagues this: If we had known this was going to come up, we would have addressed this in the NDAA. This is something that could have been addressed and could have been offset.

So I agree with everyone who has spoken on this issue. I think it is very difficult to understand how this could happen. We do know this: One of the differences between civilian employees and military employees is that we can't recall civilian employees.

We have a figure here. Are my colleagues aware that we actually have, since September 11, 3,456 military retirees who have been recalled to duty? Every one of them is going to be affected by this. This is a travesty we cannot allow to happen.

I applaud my friend from Alabama for bringing this up, and hopefully we will be able to correct it. We are going to have a vote right now, and I hope this is a solution to it. Then tomorrow we will have a chance to get into the details about the NDAA bill, which is a very significant bill that addresses provisions such as this.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alabama.

Mr. SESSIONS. Madam President, I thank my colleagues for their heartfelt remarks about the cuts in this bill that will immediately impact the retirements of American military. They are subject to recall, to Active Duty. They are expecting these payments. Other

departments and agencies and government employees are not going to get their retirement reduced; only people who served in the military. It is not correct, and it should not happen.

What I want to emphasize to all of my colleagues and highlight for us here today is that the legislation before us now was brought forth in a way that will not allow any amendments. If people have an idea about a problem with this legislation that was agreed to in secret by a couple of Senators—I suppose maybe some staff involved, so they agreed to this language. It is the first time we have seen it. It is the first time it has been before the light of day in the Senate, and we find problems with it, real problems.

If people ask schoolchildren, if people ask senior citizens in America, if a bill hits the floor of the Senate and it has bad provisions in it, what can Senators do, well, they will say that Senators offer an amendment and they fix it. Isn't that what we were taught? Isn't that what the history of the Senate is all about? It is a place where people can debate and amend and improve legislation. But we are in an odd and unusual circumstance—not so odd in recent years.

The majority leader of the Senate has sought recognition, as he is able to do, and he has filled the amendment tree, and nobody can get an amendment. Nobody can get a vote on this amendment to fix this part of the legislation that plainly needs fixing. It is not available to us. That is awfully hard to believe. It is awfully hard to believe that in the great Senate—as Senator Robert Byrd said, there are two great Senates: the Roman Senate and the American Senate; and he defended it and its rights and priorities. But we have one leader of the Senate, supported by his colleagues, who says: We don't want amendments because we might have to take tough votes, and all we want to do is rubberstamp this agreement, this bill written in secret, and we want to pass it without any amendments.

How did that become the policy of America? How did that become the policy in the Senate? What justification can be given to the concept that duly-elected Senators can't stand up on the floor of this body and defend the rights of their constituents and their States by offering amendments to improve legislation?

Tomorrow we are going to have the Defense spending bill, authorizing the expenditure of over $500 billion—$500 billion-plus—to fund our military. A lot of people have ideas about how to improve that bill. We are not going to get a single amendment because the majority leader has filled the tree and he is going to deny the Members of this body, who represent millions of people in their States—and really we represent everybody—the right to offer amendments to improve that bill. It is contrary to our tradition. It is contrary to our heritage. It is contrary particularly to the heritage of the U.S. Senate, where open debate and discussion is so important.

I thank Senator WICKER. He spoke this morning. I thank Senators AYOTTE, GRAHAM, and INHOFE, who shared their thoughts about the lack of wisdom in this legislation.

I am going to offer a tabling motion, and the purpose of it will be to remove the parliamentary maneuver of Majority Leader REID and allow us to have a vote. So what is this motion about? This motion will remove the filling of the tree, and it will allow the Senate to vote on this amendment to strike the military retiree pay cut—and other amendments, perhaps, but this amendment in particular. I believe that is in the tradition of the Senate. I believe it is extremely important.

So, Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to set aside the pending motion so that I may offer a motion to concur with amendment No. 2572 which is filed at the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, reserving the right to object, and I will object, first, as many of my colleagues here know, I have dedicated much of my career to fighting for our Nation's veterans and our military families. I am the daughter of a World War II veteran. I am the first woman ever to chair the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee. I have worked tirelessly time and again to safeguard the health care and the benefits and services that those in our uniforms have sacrificed for. So obviously any provision that impacts them or the benefits our servicemembers have earned is of great concern to me.

As is true with any very difficult compromise, there are certain policy changes in this bill I would never have made on my own. Thankfully, though, we wrote this bill in a way that will allow 2 years before this change is implemented—2 years—so that Democrats and Republicans can keep working together to improve this provision or find smarter savings elsewhere. In that time I know there is an armed services-mandated military retirement commission due to report their findings, which would give both Chambers time to legislate a solution before any COLA change is ever implemented.

I also know the senior Senator from Michigan, the chairman of the Armed Services Committee, has indicated he is going to move forward with efforts to review this change before it takes effect, and I support that effort. I am quite sure other Members of the Senate will look for ways to replace these savings in a different way. In other words, we can and we will look at other hopefully better ways to change this policy going forward.

But opening this bill to changes today, after the vast majority of Congress has voiced their support for a deal that ends the repeated crises we have faced in this Nation, is not the solution. In fact, jeopardizing this deal right now only threatens our national security, and it will force layoffs of those very servicemembers and civilian military personnel so many Members have come out here to speak on behalf of.

As with any bill, the oversight process in Congress will move forward the moment we pass it, and there is no doubt that improvements will be made where they are needed. But this motion, I say to my colleagues, is an effort to bring down this bill, to stop us from moving forward, and for that reason alone it should be voted down. Therefore, Madam President, I object to the unanimous consent request.

Mr. WICKER. Will the distinguished chairman yield on her reservation?

Mr. SESSIONS. Madam President, I still have the floor, I believe.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. I believe that is correct.

Mr. SESSIONS. I yield to the Senator for a question.

Mr. WICKER. I don't mean to prolong this, but I wish to ask this of the distinguished chairman.

I think everyone should understand that although the Senator from Washington chairs the committee and was a member of the conference committee, this is not a report of the conference committee. The question I wish to ask is, Did the negotiators realize, when this COLA-less-1-percent provision was inserted in the conference committee, that it would mean $80,000 lifetime out of the retirement pay of the typical enlisted retiree? Did the conferees realize the magnitude of what they were agreeing to? Did the two negotiators agree to the magnitude of what they were sending to the House and Senate?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Does the Senator from Alabama yield to the Senator from Washington to answer that question?

Mr. SESSIONS. Madam President, I would be pleased to yield to the Senator without yielding the floor to answer that question.

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

The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, I would suggest that the Senator ask that question to Chairman RYAN. But I would say again, as many of us have talked about here today, this is not the deal Democrats would have written on our own. It is not the deal Republicans would have written on their own. Nobody got everything they wanted, and we each had to give up some things to get to where we are today, again, to bring us back to a time of certainty because without a budget moving forward today, we would be facing a time in a few short weeks where there would be dramatic changes and cuts to, in particular, our Department of Defense, meaning furloughs and layoffs and a threat to our national security, as so many Members of the military have told us.

So I hope we can move forward. I know we are going to go through some parliamentary inquiries and a motion here in a minute. But I hope our Members would take the time to say, ''What is the end process here.'' and vote with us to not change this at this point and to allow us to go forward and bring certainty to so many families across this country at this holiday season time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alabama has the floor.

Mr. WICKER. Madam President, I wonder if the Senator from Alabama would yield to me for 60 seconds.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alabama.

Mr. SESSIONS. I yield to the Senator without yielding the floor.

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

Mr. WICKER. Thank you, Madam President.

I would ask the Senator from Alabama, it seems to me no one wants to claim parenthood of this very onerous penalty on the retired servicemembers of the United States of America. I would have to infer from the answer of the Senator from Washington that she was not aware. One percent from COLAs sounds so innocuous, but when its comes to $130,000 for officers and $80,000 for enlisted people, it is real money.

This is a penalty, and it is hitting the people who step forward and volunteer to serve our country and protect our security. So until someone is willing to step forward and claim ownership, I have to assume the negotiators did not know the impact this would have on our military retirees. It seems to me the Senator from Alabama has devised a way to surgically remove this provision, pay for it elsewhere, and send it back to the House. I think we would be doing them a favor, frankly.

I thank my friend from Alabama for yielding.

Mr. SESSIONS. Well, I thank the Senator.

I would note that Senator AYOTTE, who has spoken, Senator GRAHAM, and Senator WICKER, along with myself, were conferees on the budget conference committee and that this was supposed to be the kind of thing we would discuss. But we were not called to the final discussion, and now this legislation is brought to the floor that we did not have time to approve in advance.

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

Mr. SESSIONS. I say to Senator GRAHAM from South Carolina, I am pleased to yield for a question.

Mr. GRAHAM. I thank the Senator.

To follow on what Senator WICKER said, I have been trying to find out how this started to begin with too. Whose good idea was this?

So I called the Secretary of Defense, and he said: We did not do this. I talked to Chuck Hagel, and he said: This did not come from us. Because I said: What are you all doing over there? Please understand, Senator GRAHAM, this did not come from us.

I think Senator WICKER knows the exact number. But if you are a military retiree, on your DD214 form—I do not know if the Senator from Alabama knows this, but when you get your retirement, your discharge DD214 form, at the bottom it says: Subject to being recalled.

Does the Senator know how many military retirees have been recalled since 9/11?

Mr. SESSIONS. I do not, I say to Senator GRAHAM.

Mr. GRAHAM. I think the Senator from Mississippi may have the exact number, and it amounts to a brigade of soldiers, almost.

I ask the Senator from Mississippi, what is the number?

Mr. WICKER. Madam President, if the Senator would yield for an answer to that question, precisely 3,456 DOD retirees—the very people we are penalizing in this provision—have been recalled to Active Duty since September 11, 2001.

Mr. SESSIONS. I say to Senator GRAHAM, you are a full colonel in the Air Force, still serving in the Reserve.

Mr. GRAHAM. Yes. Take my pay.

Mr. SESSIONS. Bless your heart. But it is a fact that this retirement pay is really more than retirement pay, is it not? It is really an income, a source of payment that ensures that the person can be recalled. So it is part of the right to recall you, a compensation for that.

Mr. GRAHAM. The answer is that when you retire after 20, you are subject to being recalled as long as you are physically able. I know one individual who was recalled at age 56 who was a JAG officer who had been out of the military for years. He set up his practice, and he said: Can they do this? I said: Hey, man, you are the lawyer. Of course. Read it. You know they can do this. And they did, only because we had to, and he went and did his part.

I bet you that of those 3,400, some of them were volunteers and some of them were not. But the cost-of-living adjustment is to make sure their retirement over time maintains its value. That is why we have a cost-of-living adjustment.

How much money do you make if you are a master sergeant after 20 years of service? It is less than $25,000 a year in retirement. So these people do not become millionaires when they retire. Try to raise a family of four on $25,000 without a COLA. So the COLA is designed to keep the benefit vibrant over time. When you do a COLA minus 1 percent, it does diminish the value of the package.

Here is what gets me the most. If we did it for everybody in the country, that would be one thing. These are the only people in America who get this special good deal.

Mr. SESSIONS. Madam President, I thank Senator GRAHAM. I think he made the defining point there, that this is a one-sided reduction of retirement benefits to people who served in the military, not impacting lots of others.

I want to return to the central point. This bill that will be voted on tomorrow—final passage—cuts military retirement by $6 billion. That $6 billion is counted in the numbers of the proponents of the legislation toward their justification for spending more money the next 2 years. They say they are paying for it by reducing this $6 billion over time. It is mandated. It is not an option in the bill. We should not pass legislation that does that.

So what I would propose is that we not go along with Majority Leader REID's determination to run the train over the men and women of our military, that we slow down and we follow the regular process of the Senate, not fill the tree, and allow amendments to be voted on on this substantive matter.

So parliamentary inquiry, Madam President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator will state his inquiry.

Mr. SESSIONS. Is it correct that while the majority leader's motion to concur in the House amendment with an amendment to which the majority leader has also offered a second-degree amendment is pending—while it is pending, no Senator is permitted to offer an amendment to the House-passed spending package?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator is correct.

Mr. SESSIONS. So let me repeat to be sure my colleagues and I understand the situation. The Chair has just told the Senate that I cannot offer an amendment to the House-passed spending bill that would strike the military retiree pay cut because the majority leader has filled the tree with his own amendments. I have read the majority leader's amendments, and I see they merely change the date of enactment by a few days.

Further, parliamentary inquiry, Madam President: If a motion to table the majority leader's motion to concur with an amendment is successful, would there be an opportunity for me to offer a motion to concur with amendment No. 2572?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Yes, there would.

Mr. SESSIONS. Again, summarizing for my colleagues, the Presiding Officer is telling this Senate that if there can be 51 votes to table the current amendment tree to the House-passed spending bill, then there will be an opportunity for me or other Senators to offer by motion a motion to concur with the amendment that strikes the military pay cut.

So, Madam President, in order to make a motion to concur with amendment No. 2572, I move to table the pending motion to concur with an amendment offered by the majority leader, and I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The yeas and nays have been requested.

Is there a sufficient second?

There is a sufficient second.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, I would just state to all of our colleagues that this motion is an effort to bring this bill down——

Mr. SESSIONS. Madam President, there is no debate on a motion to table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Debate is not in order.

The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The yeas and nays have been ordered.

The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

The result was announced—yeas 46, nays 54, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 280 Leg.]

YEAS—46

Alexander	Fischer	Moran
Ayotte	Flake	Murkowski
Barrasso	Graham	Paul
Blunt	Grassley	Portman
Boozman	Hagan	Risch
Burr	Hatch	Roberts
Chambliss	Heller	Rubio
Coats	Hoeven	Scott
Coburn	Inhofe	Sessions
Cochran	Isakson	Shelby
Collins	Johanns	Thune
Corker	Johnson (WI)	Toomey
Cornyn	Kirk	Vitter
Crapo	Lee	Wicker
Cruz	McCain	
Enzi	McConnell	

NAYS—54

Baldwin	Harkin	Murray
Baucus	Heinrich	Nelson
Begich	Heitkamp	Pryor
Bennet	Hirono	Reed
Blumenthal	Johnson (SD)	Reid
Booker	Kaine	Rockefeller
Boxer	King	Sanders
Brown	Klobuchar	Schatz
Cantwell	Landrieu	Schumer
Cardin	Leahy	Shaheen
Carper	Levin	Stabenow
Casey	Manchin	Tester
Coons	Markey	Udall (CO)
Donnelly	McCaskill	Udall (NM)
Durbin	Menendez	Warner
Feinstein	Merkley	Warren
Franken	Mikulski	Whitehouse
Gillibrand	Murphy	Wyden

The motion was rejected.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, Section 401 of the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2013 creates a new category of employee called a further revised annuity employee and would require further revised annuity employees to contribute additional amounts into the Civil Service Retirement and Disability Fund. It is the intent of Congress for the Office of Personnel Management to create a new normal cost for the further revised annuity employees, and to ensure that the retirement plan not be underfunded.

Additionally, it is the intent that for the new further revised annuity employee plan that the only determinant of whether an individual is a Federal Employee Retirement System, FERS, employee or Member, as opposed to a FERS revised annuity employee or FERS further revised annuity employee, is through application of the FERS revised annuity employee test. And that the new further revised annuity employee test only differentiates between FERS revised annuity employee coverage and new FERS further revised annuity employee coverage.

TRANSBOUNDARY AGREEMENTS

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I want to briefly discuss Section 304 of the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2013, which contained an amendment to the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act. I was disappointed to see that the amended Section 32 requires submissions regarding future transboundary hydrocarbon agreements be made to the Speaker of the House, the Senate Majority Leader, the chair of the Committee on Natural Resources of the House of Representatives, and the chair of the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources in the Senate. This language fails to mention the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, an omission I find curious in light of the Foreign Relations Committee's jurisdiction over international agreements. I would like to yield to my colleague from Washington in order to clarify that this language was not intended to negate the Foreign Relations Committee's jurisdiction of transboundary hydrocarbon agreements.

Mrs. MURRAY. I thank the Senator for his question, and I appreciate his leadership as Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. I understand his concerns and can assure him that the language in the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2013 was not intended to alter or negate the Foreign Relation Committee's jurisdiction.

Mr. MENENDEZ. I thank the Senator from Washington for her response, and I appreciate the tremendous work she has done to arrive at a budget agreement. Due to the importance of this issue, I want to seek additional confirmation of this point. The February 20, 2012 Agreement between the United States of America and the United Mexican States Concerning Transboundary Hydrocarbon Reservoirs in the Gulf of Mexico went through the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources with the approval of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee because the implementing legislation was narrow and addressed the ability of the Department of the Interior to carry out the agreement. However, the Foreign Relations Committee engaged in robust oversight of this agreement in meetings with high-ranking officials at the Department of State and the Department of the Interior, including the submission of a detailed letter with several questions, which received a lengthy response. These actions reflect the Senate Foreign Relations Committee's intention to retain oversight of transboundary hydrocarbon agreements, and to reserve the right to draft and oversee implementing legislation for future transboundary hydrocarbon agreements.

Mrs. MURRAY. I thank the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. It is quite clear by the extensive work the committee has done on the U.S.-Mexico Transboundary Hydrocarbon Agreement that the committee has an expertise in international agreements and should play an integral role in the oversight of future transboundary hydrocarbon agreements. The language in the Bipartisan Budget Act was not intended to undermine the Senate Foreign Relations Committee's jurisdiction with respect to any matter that would be properly before it.

Mr. MENENDEZ. I thank the chair of the Budget Committee for her responses.

NOT-FOR-PROFIT LOAN SERVICING

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I rise to enter into a colloquy with the chairman of the Budget Committee, Senator MURRAY, and several of my colleagues regarding the not-for-profit student loan servicing provisions in the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2013.

Is it your understanding and intent that the not-for-profit servicing provision in this act does not require the termination of the existing Federal loan servicing contracts of any not-for-profit servicers who are currently servicing Federal loans?

Is it further the understanding and intent of the chairman of the Senate Budget Committee that the Education Department will continue to enter into contracts with not-for-profit servicers based on their performance?

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, the Senator from Vermont is correct. It is my intent that existing contracts to use the services of not-for-profit servicers are not terminated by this bill and that they will be permitted to compete with the Department of Education's title IV servicers for additional accounts. I know several of my colleagues also feel strongly about this issue. I would like to recognize the following Senators to also join in on the colloquy: Senators LEAHY, HARKIN, ALEXANDER, HATCH, SHAHEEN, BEGICH, GRASSLEY, KING, BAUCUS, TESTER, and MURKOWSKI.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, if I may join in this colloquy, I am glad for the clarification from the senior Senator from Washington and am pleased to know it is her legislative intent for the Department of Education to continue to use not-for-profit servicers and maintain their existing contracts and that not-for-profit servicers will be permitted to compete in the future for additional accounts. Like other not-for-profits around the country, the Vermont Student Assistance Corporation, VSAC, has provided counseling services and low-cost loans to students and Vermonters for more than 40 years. Since then, VSAC has worked hard to establish and maintain strong and longstanding working relationships with Vermont's higher education institutions, as well as K–12 schools, to provide outreach programs critical to the economic vitality of Vermont. In their new role servicing Federal loans, VSAC has consistently received praise from their customers and scored high in customer satisfaction surveys. In fact,

when Congress switched to direct lending we ensured that not-for-profit servicers would continue to service Federal loans because of the superior customer service experience that not-for-profits servicers have consistently provided. I am glad that Congress is continuing to recognize the importance of not-for-profit servicers in our communities and intends to allow for their continued role of servicing Federal loans and helping more students gain access to college and more students to complete their degrees.

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, as chairman of the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, which holds jurisdiction over the servicing of our Federal student loan programs, it is my understanding that the intent of the budget agreement is to allow for the continuation of the existing not-for-profit servicer contracts and that they will be permitted to compete based on performance with the Department of Education's title IV servicers for additional accounts, so that students receive the best possible service and taxpayer funds are used efficiently.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Vermont for engaging in this dialogue and appreciate the Senator from Washington clarifying that it is the intent of the budget measure for the Department of Education to continue to use not-for-profit servicers for the Federal loan program and that these entities should be permitted to compete for additional loan volume in the future.

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Vermont and the Senator from Washington for providing clarification on this issue. I am happy to hear that the legislative intent of the budget deal is to continue the use of the not-for-profit student loan servicers and that they will be permitted to compete in the future for additional accounts.

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, I would like to associate myself with the comments of the senior Senator from Washington and am pleased to know it is her intent that not-for-profit servicers, like the New Hampshire Higher Education Loan Corporation and the NHHEAF Network, will be able to continue their important work and that they will be able to compete in the future for additional accounts.

For over 50 years, the New Hampshire Higher Education Loan Corporation and the NHHEAF Network have provided critical college access, financial education, and default-prevention programs to students in New Hampshire and across the country. The New Hampshire Higher Education Loan Corporation's dedicated staff services a national portfolio over 250,000 borrowers, helping them to manage repayment of almost $5 billion in student loans. These professionals play a uniquely important role in helping students to succeed in postsecondary education, and I am pleased that it is the Senator from Washington's intent to allow them to continue their work.

Mr. BEGICH. Mr. President, I rise as well to thank the senior Senator from Washington for her insight and to echo the comments from my colleagues, especially my good friend from Alaska. The not-for-profit student loan servicer in my State, the Alaska Student Loan Corporation, does an outstanding job of servicing student loans. They take a proactive and supportive role with the accounts they receive from the Department, and I want to ensure they will be able to continue to participate in this important program. I was pleased to learn that the chairman's intent in including this language was not to exclude not-for-profit servicers from competing for additional servicing accounts.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I would like to associate myself with the comments of the senior Senator from Washington and am pleased to know it is her intent that the use of not-for-profit servicers continues and that not-for-profit servicers will be permitted to compete on an equal basis in the future for additional accounts.

Mr. KING. Mr President, I wish to associate myself with the comments of the senior Senator from Washington. I am pleased to know that it is her intent that the work of not-for-profit servicers advances and that they will continue to be allowed to compete for additional accounts in the future. In Maine, two not-for-profit servicers, the Finance Authority of Maine and Maine Education Services, provide essential services to Maine students through financial literacy education and the servicing of Federal student loans. Indeed, not-for-profit servicers do meaningful work across the country, and I am glad to know it is the Senate Budget Committee Chairman's intent to continue to allow these State agencies and nonprofits to play a role in servicing federal student loans.

Mr. BAUCUS. Mr. President, I would also like to associate myself with the senior Senator from Washington, my colleague from Vermont, and my colleague from Montana. Our Montana servicer, the Student Assistance Foundation, provides vital services to Montana students by delivering financial aid education, scholarships, and grants. I am therefore pleased to know it is the intent of the chairman of the Senate Budget Committee that not-for-profit student loan servicers will continue to play a role in the servicing market and will be permitted to compete for future servicing contracts.

Mr. TESTER. Mr. President, I rise to share in this important discussion and would also like to associate myself with the comments of the senior Senator from Washington and my colleague from Montana. The Student Assistance Foundation is a strong employer in Montana, representing nearly 200 jobs, and I am pleased to know it is the chair of the Budget Committee's intent that the use of not-for-profit servicers continues. I am also pleased that not-for-profit servicers, such as the Student Assistance Foundation, will be permitted to compete in the future for additional accounts.

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I am pleased to know it is the intent of the chairman of the Senate Budget Committee—the chief Senate negotiator for the Bipartisan Budget Act—that nonprofit servicers will continue to play an important role in servicing Federal student loans, both now and in the future. I strongly support this intent and the vital public service role that nonprofit and State agency servicers have played in Federal student loan programs on behalf of Federal student loan borrowers and the American public. I will be one of those who will expect the Department to pay close attention to congressional intent in this matter. I also look forward to working with my colleagues on both the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee and the Appropriations Committee to ensure that this intent is carried out.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I would like to thank the chairman of the Senate Budget Committee, who coauthored this legislation, for clarifying that it is not the intent of the bill's authors to require that existing contracts with not-for-profit student loan servicers be canceled and that such servicers will continue to be able to compete for additional Department of Education contracts in the future. Not-for-profit servicers provide students in Maine and across the country with important financial counseling services, and I am pleased to know that they will continue to be allowed to compete to perform this work under this legislation.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arkansas.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Madam Chair, I yield 1 hour of my time postcloture to Senator SESSIONS.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator has that right.

The Senator from Washington.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mrs. MURRAY. I ask unanimous consent the Senate proceed to a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each, with the exception of Senator GRASSLEY for up to 20 minutes; further, that the time count postcloture.

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

The Senator from New York.

COMMUNITY FIRE SAFETY ACT

Mr. SCHUMER. I ask unanimous consent the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of H.R. 3588, which is at the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The bill clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 3588) to amend the Safe Drinking Water Act to exempt fire hydrants from the prohibition on the use of lead pipes, fittings, fixtures, solder, and flux.