

even though Senator COBURN does not bless every provision in this bill, this bill has huge support because the bills in this package will protect some of the most breathtaking places in the Nation, areas that provide a refuge for birdwatchers, hikers, campers, equestrians, fishermen, and other visitors who are looking to escape our Nation's crowded, fast-passed cities to enjoy the tranquility of nature.

I am going to show a few pictures. This is in the Eastern Sierra, the bighorn sheep. We are protecting this magnificent creature that I know Senator HARKIN appreciates.

The bald eagle, which we know we have been doing a lot to save, will be preserved in the many acres we preserve in my home State of California.

In the Riverside bill, this is another magnificent scene of the mountains and the beautiful vegetation that grows without any water to speak of.

The Eastern Sierra, these White Mountains—imagine the beauty of this. So when people come and say we are not doing right by America to save areas such as this, all I say is, open your eyes and gaze upon God's creation. It is so magnificent.

I have one more photo I would like to show you. I know Senator SCHUMER feels the way I do about this. In the Eastern Sierras, this beautiful creek here, a beautiful place to come and enjoy the day, as I said, get away from our crowded cities, bring your family, and stay in the area.

Many bills in this package provide much needed water resources for our communities. It provides recycled water to areas suffering from drought, restoring major watersheds. We are experiencing one of the worst droughts in our State's history. That is why a coalition of 16 western water agencies and organizations wrote to Congress about the urgency of passing this bill that we happily just passed.

You saw some of the magnificent photos of some of the wilderness areas in California that have been saved. They are in what is called the California Desert and Mountain Heritage Act, the Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Park Wilderness Act, and the Eastern Sierra and Northern San Gabriel Wild Heritage Act.

I want to make a point to colleagues. On each of these wilderness areas, I worked with colleagues in the House, many of whom are Republicans, and I thank them enormously for their work: BUCK MCKEON, MARY BONO MACK, DEVIN NUNES. I also worked with many Democrats, including JIM COSTA. So we have had a wonderful working relationship across party lines.

There are 700,000 acres of wilderness and/or wilderness study areas and 105 miles of wild and scenic rivers in this bill in my home State. I would say again to Senator COBURN, although I suppose the best thing I can say to him is his argument did not win the day, is that it is our responsibility, I would say to him, to protect these magnifi-

cent areas so future generations can enjoy them exactly as we do. These are breathtaking places in California. They provide critically important habitat, as you saw, for the Peninsular bighorn sheep, the mule deer, mountain lions, desert tortoises, and bald eagles.

Again, the economics of this are very clear. In a time of recession, we want to look to the future for jobs, and we know that wilderness bills, just the three of mine in this bill, will produce an estimated 420 jobs and \$7 million in income to my State. I cannot say enough about the importance of opportunities such as this when you save the environment and you create jobs and everybody comes away a winner.

I would like to respond to some things Senator COBURN has been saying about one of these bills, the California Desert and Mountain Heritage Act. He has questioned why we are designating Beauty Mountain and the Pinto Mountains as wilderness in this bill even though the Bureau of Land Management failed to recommend them for wilderness back in 1990. Well, the answer is that a lot has changed since then—private lands have since been acquired by the BLM and dozens of mining claims have been retired. Without these restrictions, the BLM now supports wilderness designation for these areas and has testified before Congress in support of this bill. Also, Congress has repeatedly asserted its right to name wilderness areas—the agencies make recommendations but we make the final decision based on what we are hearing from the constituents we represent.

These three bills have bipartisan, bicameral, and diverse support. They would not impact the use of private lands, but would simply improve the protection of existing Forest Service, National Park Service, or Bureau of Land Management lands.

While preserving these areas, we have been careful to accommodate stakeholders' needs. For example, we worked to clarify that the Eastern Sierra and Northern San Gabriel Wild Heritage bill's designation of a Wild and Scenic River on segments of Piru Creek will not affect the operations of the United Water Conservation District or Pyramid Dam on the creek, including any rights they may have to modify water releases.

I will close by thanking my colleague, Senator FEINSTEIN, for not only supporting my wilderness bills that are in here but for her leadership in the San Joaquin River Restoration Settlement Act, which is included in this bill.

Senator COBURN tried to remove it from this bill. I do not understand his motivation. The settlement ended 18 years of litigation over the impacts of the Friant Dam on Chinook salmon populations. Why on Earth would anyone try to derail a settlement and drive us back into the courthouse?

What is in here is a carefully crafted compromise solution that is good for

our environment, for our agricultural economy, and for our urban communities.

Again, there is more to be said on this matter. I will say again, to see Senator COBURN get up and try to torpedo this important legislation was kind of shocking to me because once in a while I say we should come together here to preserve our Nation's heritage and to try to avoid litigation.

You know, the fact is, the San Joaquin settlement had broad bipartisan support, has it in my State, from the Governor. We even have the support of the outgoing Bush administration, bipartisan House Members, water agencies, conservation groups, elected officials.

So it is a happy day, frankly, for my State of California, a very happy day—700,000 acres of wilderness, the settlement over the San Joaquin River—and for this whole Nation it is a wonderful moment because we addressed the drought some of our areas are facing.

The areas in this bill are truly magnificent places representing California's and the Nation's incredible range of landscapes and habitats. I look forward to working with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to enact this bill into law and protect these treasures for future generations of Americans.

I hope this bill will get much attention. I hope the President will have a ceremony when he signs this bill because it deserves far more attention than it has been getting. It is good for the environment, it is good for the economy, and it shows a spirit of bipartisanship that I know our President and all of us encourage.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

THE BUDGET

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Madam President, I thank the distinguished chairman of the Environment and Public Works Committee for her passionate defense of our natural resources. She is a constant ally of the very best we cull forth from each other as Senators where our most precious environmental concerns are engaged. It is an honor to follow her.

Before I yield the floor to the distinguished Senator from New Hampshire, who has already made an impact here, I wanted to say a few words about the President's new budget.

Across the country, families sit at their kitchen tables and talk and make tough choices about their own family budget, about what they can afford to spend, about what they have to save. What will they do when it is time for the kids to go to college? What will they do if the car breaks down? What will they do if an elderly parent becomes ill? How will they use their finances wisely to plan for the future? This year, those choices are more difficult than ever. We have families in Rhode Island, as I am sure we have

across the country, trying to save their homes, to save their jobs, to save their health care. The bills pile up, and all too often there is not enough to pay them. Well, our country is in a deep hole too. But I would like to remind my colleagues that it was not always this way.

In January 2001, when George Bush became President, the Congressional Budget Office, which is the non-partisan accounting arm of Congress that does our budget outlook on a regular basis, projected that we would see surpluses straight through the decade. These budget surpluses, the product of President Clinton's responsible governing, were projected to be enough to completely wipe out our national debt by 2009, this very year. Imagine, a debt-free America this year. Well, President Bush fixed that.

Usually when American families have a surplus, they use it responsibly, they pay down credit card debt or make an extra mortgage payment. They put it away in retirement savings. They set it aside for college for the kids. Or they spend it on something they need, such as a downpayment on a car or a house. Well, President Bush chose tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans, a misguided war he would not pay for—an irresponsible economic policy, leaving a mountain of debt to the next administration. He, of course, had the enthusiastic support of a Republican Congress which was with him every step of the way into this debt.

Today, the difference between the expected surpluses left by President Clinton and the actual deficit run up by President Bush is a staggering \$8.9 trillion—\$8.9 trillion on America from the Bush administration and its Republican allies in Congress.

So that is what President Obama inherited—a legacy of reckless borrowing, bad decisions, compounded by skyrocketing unemployment and now a deepening recession that only adds to our country's fiscal woes.

President Obama is trying to help us dig our way out of this mess by focusing his budget on the policies and programs that will repair our economy and create the foundation for long-term economic growth and success. He proposed, and we passed, an economic recovery plan to create jobs and support struggling families and make badly needed investments in our infrastructure during this recession. It wasn't perfect. It probably will not be enough. But it was a good start.

Now, the same Republican Party that thought tax cuts for the rich and an unnecessary war in Iraq were good uses of President Clinton's budget surpluses, the same Republican Party that ran up an \$8.9 trillion debt on the country now has its leaders calling President Obama's plans "the fleecing of America's children." It is hard to imagine that this irony eludes them.

President Obama wants to cut taxes for working families, invest in renewable energy, help more young people

get a college education, and reform our broken health care system—key priorities for the future of America. But some Republicans who stood by while our country became more and more dependent on foreign oil, while the cost of a college education went through the roof, and while a crisis brewed in our health care system are calling these investments in our future "a remarkable spending binge." Once again, the "department of irony" appears to be open late on the other side of the aisle.

Families in America know we will not get out of this mess with the same failed policies that got us into it—that it is time for new priorities. That is what President Obama's budget offers.

Perhaps our greatest challenge, certainly one of our greatest challenges and opportunities, is presented by our broken and dysfunctional health care system. Unless we take serious remedial action and soon, right away, this recession we are living through now will seem like an economic speed bump compared to what will happen when that \$35 trillion in unfunded Medicare liabilities, against which we have set not one nickel, comes bearing down on us.

We had a lot of fighting in this body about that Recovery and Reinvestment Act. The Recovery and Reinvestment Act was nearly \$800 billion. Compare that to the Bush debt I talked about that they ran up of \$8.9 trillion. Where was the complaining then? Compare that to the \$35 trillion in unfunded liabilities we face for Medicare. Where are the serious ideas about how we address this problem?

When you put these problems to scale, you will see that wave of cost, that tsunami of health care cost coming at us is something we have to address. We are facing truly the financial ruin of our health care system and, if nothing is done, the financial ruin of our country. Every one of us should share the goal of making sure health insurance coverage reaches every American. President Obama's budget makes a downpayment on that badly needed reform. But it is not enough just to give coverage to everybody. It is not enough just to get everybody on board, if the boat itself is sinking.

We have two toolboxes out of which we can fix our health care mess. One reduces coverage, cuts benefits, pays providers less, and raises taxes. That is the old-fashioned toolbox. It will work, but it will be brutal. It will be wrong, and we should do everything we can to prevent it. The other toolbox reforms the health care system itself, making it more intelligent, sensible, helpful, and efficient; with an information technology infrastructure so every American can count on their own secure electronic health record, with improvements in the quality of health care so we maximize the effectiveness while reducing the cost; and with reform of having paid for health care so the health care we want is the health care we are paying for.

The President sees that all of this is doable—and that we need to start now. His economic recovery legislation put nearly \$20 billion into health information infrastructure. But the President knows there is much more to be done, that these delivery system reforms in health care cannot be flipped on like a light switch. It will require complex workforce, regulatory, and infrastructure changes. Then those changes will have to be implemented and administered. It will take some years, and we need to start now. The Obama budget starts us on that course to fix our broken health care system.

I find it unfortunate that our Republican colleagues don't seem to appreciate the seriousness of these problems and have become a chorus of naysayers with no solutions. It is time to pass a budget that lives up to the expectations of the American people. I hope we will.

I thank the Chair and yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Hampshire.

AIG BONUSES

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Madam President, I would like to applaud my colleague, Senator WHITEHOUSE, for his comments, particularly around health care. I know all of us believe that is critical for us to address.

I rise to express my outrage that AIG has paid over \$165 million in bonuses to executives at the company, after they received a \$173 billion bailout in taxpayer funds. We all know the economic conditions we are facing are very difficult. Unemployment continues to climb around the country and in my home State of New Hampshire. Families are struggling to make ends meet. Existing home sales are at their lowest levels in more than a decade. Small businesses around the country and in New Hampshire are working hard just to make payroll, to buy inventory, and to keep their businesses viable. In fact, this morning I heard from a small businessman in New Hampshire, Mark Lane, who is the head of Coed Sportswear and Printed Matter, talk about the challenges he faces in this recession, trying to get access to credit to keep his business going.

Yet while small businesses and middle-class families are struggling to make it through these difficult times, the very people whose reckless decisionmaking helped put us in this precarious economic situation are rewarding themselves with bonuses paid for with taxpayer dollars. This is unconscionable.

We have been told nothing can be done about the bonuses to AIG employees because they are contractual commitments. Yesterday, we heard the CEO of AIG say he has asked the recipients of the bonuses to give the money back. I believe those employees should do that, and I hope they will. But we should make sure that when taxpayer money is used, we have done