

little closer to a level of spending that even the senior Senator from New York has called "reasonable."

The fact that Democrats are now rejecting this offer, which even members of their own leadership have described as "reasonable" is all the evidence you need that Democrats are more concerned about the politics of this debate than keeping the government running.

Let's be clear about something this morning: throughout this entire debate, Republicans have not only said that we would prefer a bipartisan agreement that funds the government and protects defense spending at a time when we have American troops fighting in two wars. There is a Republican plan on the table right now that would do just that.

Democrats can accept that proposal, or they can reject it. But they can't blame anyone but themselves if a shutdown does occur. Because they have done nothing to prevent it.

With the clock ticking, I would once again encourage our Democratic friends to get on board with this proposal, and to support the kind of spending cuts that the American people have asked for—and that their own leadership has already endorsed.

THE EPA AMENDMENT

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, later today, the Senate will vote on an amendment that one leading newspaper described last week as one of the best proposals for growth and job creation to make it onto the Senate docket in years. More specifically, this amendment, which is based on legislation proposed by Senator INHOFE, would prevent unelected bureaucrats at the Environmental Protection Agency from imposing a new national energy tax on American job creators.

Everyone knows that this attempt to handcuff American businesses with new costs and regulations is the last thing these job-creators need right now. That is why even Democrats in Congress have sought to secure the same kind of exemptions from the law for favored industries in their own States that we saw others from their party trying to secure for favored constituencies in the health care law.

Democrats from auto States tried to have the auto industry exempted. And Democrats from farming States tried to have farmers exempted.

What these efforts show, is that Democrats themselves recognize the dangers of these EPA regulations. Yet instead of just voting for the one amendment that solves the problem, they are hiding behind sham amendments designed to give them political cover.

Republicans have a better idea—let's try to make sure everybody is exempted. Let's not pick winners and losers. Let's let America's small businesses and entrepreneurs compete and grow on a level playing field without any more burdensome government regulations, costs, or redtape.

The amendment I have offered on behalf of Senator INHOFE would do that.

The amendment would give businesses the certainty that no unelected bureaucrat at the EPA is going to make their efforts to create jobs even more difficult than the administration already has. So once again, I thank Senator INHOFE for his strong leadership on this issue. He has led the way in protecting American jobs from this burdensome proposal with determination and common sense. He deserves the credit.

I also want to thank Chairman UPTON and my good friend, Congressman WHITFIELD, for fighting against this effort by the EPA and moving legislation to prevent it in the House.

COLOMBIA TRADE AGREEMENT

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, there are some signs today the administration is beginning to take seriously a pending trade agreement with Colombia. Republicans have been urging the administration to act on this critical trade deal for months. This agreement would help American businesses compete on a level playing field with businesses overseas. It would help create American jobs. And it would help our relationship with an important ally in Latin America.

Hopefully these reports are true, and the President will send this agreement, along with similar agreements related to Panama and South Korea to Congress soon. This would be some very good news for an economy that needs it.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Maryland is recognized.

THE BUDGET

Ms. MIKULSKI. Madam President, I rise to the floor to speak in morning business and to comment on the terrible situation we find ourselves in. We are in a terrible situation. The Republican leader is exactly right, the clock is ticking on a shutdown.

But I have a couple principles as we head into the midnight witching hour on Friday. First of all, my first principle is no shutdown. Let's have a sitdown. Let's not shut down government and cut off the funding for private sector contractors that do business with the government. Let's have a congressional sitdown and arrive at an orderly, rational agreement that does create a more frugal government but does not torpedo our economy.

But my second principle is, if we shut down the government and Federal employees and contractors do not get paid, Congress should not get paid. Not only should Congress not get paid, no back pay, no way. I spoke about the congressional no-pay position yesterday.

Today, I wish to talk about the consequences of the shutdown. I am

against a government shutdown. Shutting down the government breaks faith with Federal employees, jeopardizes our economic recovery, threatens the viability of small- and medium-sized businesses that do business with the Federal Government and even threatens the safety of our families and our economy.

That is why I am for a congressional sitdown, not a shutdown of the Federal Government. Democrats and Republicans should negotiate over spending cuts. But what is not open for negotiation is whether the Federal Government is worth keeping open. Parties must come together.

There is a belief that a shutdown will occur only in Washington. Oh, the lights will go out in the Washington Monument, maybe a museum will be closed here or there, maybe even a national park will be closed here or there. Both on the Senate floor, the House floor, and even in the media, it is followed by kind of a snicker or even a snarl. How foolish, how they do not understand the functioning of the Government of the United States of America.

I am afraid the lights will go out. I am afraid the government agencies will be shuttered. I am concerned that people who work on behalf of the Federal Government as those contractors, small- and medium-sized contractors, disabled veteran contractors will not get paid.

I am for cuts. I voted for the Democratic package with over \$51 billion in cuts. In my own appropriations bill, I reduced agency overhead by 10 percent. I cut out lavish conferences and so on by 25 percent. I could eliminate that year by year. But cuts alone are not a strategy to reduce the deficit.

What I do not want is to make sure our government will not be funded. There are other ways of doing it, and I will talk about that more tomorrow, about how we can actually pay for this, but today I wish to talk about the consequences of what we are doing. There is nobody on the Senate floor talking about it. I appreciate the minority leader, but on my side, if nobody is going to talk about it, I am going to talk about it.

A possible government shutdown creates uncertainty in consumer confidence and further damages the economy. Mark Zandi, the chief economist of Moody's, says it will damage the confidence in the economy and could result in the loss of 700,000 jobs. Well, let me tell you—and everybody says: Oh, well, that is government. I am going to talk about: Oh, well, that is government in a minute.

But let's take the private sector. Let's take that snickering and snarling over national parks. Do you know the national parks—we have 365 of them, 49 States, 300 million visitors. Do you know those national parks generate 270,000 private sector jobs in campgrounds, restaurants, gas stations, vendors to the national parks.

Oh, yes, you can laugh about closing down Yellowstone, and maybe that is not the explosive thing—270,000 jobs, mostly in the West. I did not hear that the West had such a low unemployment rate that they do not give a darn. Local communities near national parks will lose \$14 million a day. That is the national park argument.

Let me go to the contractors. I represent the State of Maryland, where we have a lot of contractors. Take the Goddard Space Agency, 3,000 civil servants who do everything from help run the Hubble telescope and green science, to figuring out how we can fix the satellites through robots in the sky. But there are 6,000 contractors—6,000 contractors. Some of them are small business, 8(a) contractors working their way up.

Many of them—some of them are women. Many of them are veterans who started small- to medium-sized businesses. These people, if there is a government shutdown, will not get paid. Hello, colleagues. This is not only going to happen in my State, this is going to happen in your State.

There was a major article in the Wall Street Journal yesterday about what the shutdown means to the private sector. Well, let's wake up and let's move more quickly to this sitdown.

I wish to talk about essential versus nonessential. In my State, I represent over 100,000 Federal employees. Three of them are Nobel Prize winners I will talk about in a minute—Nobel Prize winners who are civil servants. Those are not even the gangs at Hopkins and the University of Maryland. Those are three Nobel Prize winners who are actual civil servants.

Under this shutdown we are headed for, they are going to be told they are nonessential. We have a Nobel Prize winner at NIST who works on the development of new work on laser light. Secretary Chu was his partner.

We have a Nobel Prize winner at NIH who won the Nobel Prize for proteins and cellular communication that could lead to a cure for cancer and a Nobel Prize winner at Goddard in physics. I am not going to call their names; I do not want to feel awkward. But what am I going to do midnight Friday? Am I going to call these three Nobel Prize winners and say: Hey, guys, you are nonessential. We know you could be in the private sector making millions of dollars, but you are staying here to do research to save lives, save the planet, and lead to saving our economy. But, hey, I guess you are nonessential.

In other countries, they carry you around on their shoulders and so on. But here, no, we are told they are nonessential. It is not only Nobel Prize winners, it is all the other people who are working. We are going to turn out the lights at the National Institutes of Health. We are going to say to a researcher: I know you are working on that cure for cancer. I know you are working on that cure for Alzheimer's or autism or arthritis—sticking just

with the "A" words. But you know what, Washington, the Congress says, you are not essential.

What about Social Security? I have over 10,000 people who work at the Social Security Administration. You say: Well, my God, that is a lot. That is 24/7 to make sure it all functions properly and efficiently. We have the lowest overhead of any "insurance company" in America. But these lights are going to be shuttered at Social Security, not only in Senator BARB's and Senator BEN CARDIN's State, but it is also going to be shuttered, Madam President, in your State. When people want to come to apply for benefits they are eligible for, when people who are disabled want to apply for those benefits, they are going to come to a shuttered Social Security office. They are going to be told they are not essential.

Well, then, let's wait until Monday morning. Are they not going to come to work fired up, ready to work for America, ready to help America be great again? They are America's essential employees doing the work that goes on at NIH, Social Security, the National Institutes of Standards. They come up with new ideas.

Then look at commerce. I represent the great Port of Baltimore. Ships are going to come into the port. Who is going to inspect their cargo? Traffic coming into airports, who is going to inspect their cargo?

But, oh, no, we are going to tell them they are nonessential. Well, I am telling you, this is not going to be good. But you know what is not good, not only the consequences but the way we are functioning.

Madam President—hello? Madam President. I do not know if my speech is not that attention-getting, but can I have your attention?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator has consumed 10 minutes.

Ms. MIKULSKI. Well, then, my time is up. Well, maybe the Senate is not paying attention, but the American people are paying attention. I am telling you, this is a situation of enormous negative consequence. I think we are going to rue the day at the way we are functioning. We need to come to the table, and we need to sit around and act like rational human beings.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from New Hampshire.

STEM FIELDS

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Madam President, as Congress and the Obama administration grapples with how to responsibly address our long-term deficit, we need to remember why it is so important to get on a path to balanced budgets. We need to dress the long-term deficit because it is a threat to America's future prosperity. It is about economic growth and jobs. That is why the deficit matters. The deficit is not just

some math problem where it is solved if the numbers add up right. The choices we make, which spending programs we cut which tax expenditures we eliminate, where we continue to boost investment, matter.

The overarching challenge facing our country is how we keep our economy competitive.

We cannot compete with India and China for low-wage manufacturing jobs. That is not our future.

America's future is in continuing to be the global leader in science and technology. America makes the best, most innovative products and services, and that ingenuity and excellence is our chief economic strength as a nation.

But we are in danger of losing that edge. Science, technology, engineering and math, what we call the STEM fields, are the skills that drive innovation.

And jobs in the STEM fields are expected to be the fastest-growing occupations of the next decade. However, not enough students in our country are pursuing an education in STEM subjects to keep up with the increased demand.

For those students that do pursue education in STEM fields, they are being outperformed by international competitors. Studies show that by the end of eighth grade, students in the U.S. are 2 years behind their international peers in math. American students rank 21st in science and 25th in math among industrialized countries. In addition, the U.S. has produced a declining number of Ph.Ds in science and engineering compared to the European Union and China over the past 3 decades. It is clear that to remain competitive internationally, we must encourage and strengthen the supply of STEM-trained graduates.

That is why this week Leader REID and Senators KLOBUCHAR, KERRY, BEGICH, COONS and I introduced legislation, the Innovation Inspiration School Grant Program, which will bolster our Nation's ability to compete in the global economy.

My legislation will provide new incentives for our schools to think outside the box and embrace extra-curricular and nontraditional STEM education programs. It establishes a competitive grant program that will encourage schools to partner with the private sector, both for financial support and to provide mentors who can serve as guides and role models to students.

I am proud that New Hampshire is the home to the FIRST Robotics program. For over a decade, teams of students have been designing robots to compete against one another in regional, then national, competitions. On Monday we hosted FIRST teams from Maryland and Virginia who demonstrated in the Dirksen building how the robots they designed and built actually work. It is these kinds of non-traditional STEM programs that make