

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.