and my fellow senators there are a couple of other programs that we ought to eliminate. We are looking at those too. We looked at them in the Health and Human Services areas, Senator Coburn and I did, and found there was $9 billion on the table. Do we need duplication? I would hope not. Senator Coburn got so excited, he did this same study for the entire Federal Government and found $900 billion in duplication. Does that mean a whole lot of other agencies were a whole lot less efficient than Health and Human Services? No. It means we have duplicative programs in every single agency.

We also have financial literacy programs in every single agency. If we are spending $3.5 trillion and only getting $2.2 trillion in revenue, is the financial literacy in our government working? I don’t think so.

When I first got here, there were 119 preschool education programs. Preschool education programs. The start children get from when they are first born until they go to school makes a huge difference in their growth and development for the rest of their lives. However, we had 119 programs and once we took a closer look, we found many of them were operating in the same areas, or a combination of the two. As I said, I will give some other speeches to outline some of my other ideas. In the meantime, I hope everybody will take a look at the chart I have shown today.

We can’t look at it and say don’t touch Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security, we can’t have $5 trillion of extra spending in that category alone for long. There is another $416 trillion in mandatory spending in that same category. How long can we keep spending at this rate? What happens if interest rates go up? This piece of the spending pie can be much bigger and probably will. I don’t know how long we can keep interest rates as low rate as they are now. If they go up, it will help some seniors because they have some investments in cash that would earn higher rates, but for the country as a whole, rising interest rates that already make up 6 percent of our budget will only be more cause for worry. When that one expands above the 1 percent we are spending right now—and it is going to expand in the next couple of years because of what is happening in Europe—we had better be worried about it.

This is the kind of picture shown by the deficit commission that Erskine Bowles and Alan Simpson chaired. I was hoping we would repaint this picture a number of times between the time they released their report 1 year ago and now, because we have to get America to understand. Actually, I can tell you the people in my State understand this. I don’t need to explain it to them. They know how much more we are spending versus what we are taking in. They can even tell you the numbers. They are concerned, and they are very concerned. We all need to be concerned.

I am open to suggestions on this. I will have some speeches I’ll give later reiterating this definite problem we are in. I have said a number of times our country has maxed out its credit cards. A couple weeks ago during a trip to Wyoming, I checked into a hotel and I put out my credit card. I heard a few moments later, very embarrassed, said: “I am sorry, but your card is being rejected.” I said: “I guess the Federal Government is in worse trouble than I thought.” and used my own card and it went through. We had better be worrying about it now because we do have a problem. We have maxed out our credit cards, and there are not any other places we can go for money. We have been the bastion of money for years. Keep in this in mind. Start thinking of ways we can actually make some cuts and increase some revenues. I have ideas for both in speeches I’ll give in the future. We are in a crisis. It will be a more immediate crisis any time and we are no longer spending our grandkids’ money; we are spending our kids’ money, and it is about to come due on us. When I say “on us,” I am even including myself and the seniors in my audience. The day of reckoning is not far away.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

Mr. Lautenberg. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the roll be called.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. Lautenberg. Mr. President, we are here now deciding what kind of a country America might be in the future—whether it will be a place we can look back at and remember when everybody had a chance at success. It is hard to believe that when we look at the vote we just had. It confirmed where the Republicans are on the issue of whether middle-class families should get a tax break. The Republican answer, was no. The answer they gave for the quorum call was: Absolutely no. No, no, no.

To the struggling single parent who wants to provide for their family, works hard every day, the Republicans refuse to help. The tax break was: Absolutely no. No, no, no.

To the struggling single parent who wants to provide for their family, works hard every day, the Republicans refused to help them because their mission is to shield the wealthy from paying their fair share of our country’s obligations.
Across our country, Americans are watching Republicans in this Congress and wondering what they are going to do to supply encouragement and hope for people who need it. Are we going to be simply a big accounting firm, simply doing the numbers, or are we going to be there to stimulate activity for people, to give them a chance to elevate their living standards for their family, to get their kids educated, and take care of the family necessities?

Right now, 15 million Americans are jobless, and they are worried about how they are going to stay in their homes, feed their children, and keep their families warm this winter. But unemployed Americans are not the only people who are struggling. Hard-working Americans from all walks of life are struggling to make ends meet. They are coping with skyrocketing grocery prices, surging health premiums, soaring college tuition.

In my home State, 1 in 10 New Jerseyans is on food stamps, the highest level in more than a decade. New Jersey has traditionally been among the top States per capita income in the country, within the top three, often in the first position.

On this side of the aisle, we are trying to help struggling families. I learned the hard way about family struggles when I was growing up. My father took ill with cancer when he was 42; I was 18. My mother, when my father died, was 37 years old. We had all kinds of obligations to pay. My mother took over the family leadership. We owed pharmaceuticals, hospitals, for doctors. We were virtually bankrupt. I had enlisted in the Army.

Next week, it will be 69 years ago that I enlisted in the Army, in December of 1942.

I knew how tough it was and how much aggravation accompanies a family who just cannot keep their heads above water.

Here we are, in a day of some incredible promise, with this country growing around this room—and Republicans are trying to thwart our efforts to extend and expand the payroll tax cut for working families—for people who depend upon their incomes to take care of their family needs; not on their savings, not on their inheritance, on their jobs.

Millions of American families have benefitted from this tax cut that we have had this year, but it stands to expire on December 31. Our goal is to continue this tax cut and increase the size of that cut to help these families. In my State, this means a typical family would receive a total tax cut of $2,100 next year. For parents who need their families, educate their kids, pay their bills, an extra $2,100 goes a long way. To make sure that all working families receive this much needed relief next year, we are asking America’s millionaires to pay their fair share, but the Republicans would rather protect their wealthy friends than continue the payroll tax cut for working families.

First, the Republicans blocked our side’s efforts to cut taxes for the middle class. Then the Republicans offered their own plan. It was a disgrace. Their plan calls for a much smaller middle-class tax break, which they would have paid for by laying off 200,000 middle-class civil servants. This is how they would solve the problem—fire people. Don’t take it out of your bank account, don’t take it out of your salary—even if you make over $1 million a year—fire people. That will make sure they understand we are concerned about them as we are about the person who makes over $1 million a year.

It was a cynical ploy. It showed the other side’s true stripes. The Republicans say they are for lower taxes, but now we see that only goes for the jet set. Their tax-cutting zeal doesn’t extend to the middle class. Republican priorities? Raise taxes on middle-class families. Middle-class families do not need it, and when you raise their taxes, you are going to lose the revenue because the wealthy are faring just fine.

Make no mistake. Working families will suffer if the Republicans continue to block our efforts to extend and expand the payroll tax cut. That, of course, will so lose the Republicans’ protection ring. The fact is, American millionaires are doing just fine. They don’t need protection from the Republicans. Since the 1980s, our country’s wealthiest 1 percent have seen their average household income increase by 55 percent. But for the bottom 90 percent, average household income has not increased at all.

As we speak, even though incomes are growing for the very wealthy, their taxes are actually going down.

We can also look at CEOs to see how well the wealthy are faring. CEOs at the largest companies are now paid an average salary of $11 million a year. That is 343 times as much as the average worker’s salary of $33,000.

It used to be a much more modest comparison. In 1980, CEOs made 42 times the average worker’s salary. Just to look at that. Just a few decades ago the pay was much more reasonable, and the people who were working in the mills and making products and doing the service jobs and all of that were living significantly better than they are today.

Millionaires are making much more money today than they did in those years past. This is something I know something about directly. I was the president of a large company when I came to the Senate. And you know what? I got there? I had a boost from our country. I had enlisted in the Army, and I served in Europe. I got the GI bill. I went to Columbia University.

Later, one of my companies was one of the largest companies are now paid an average salary of $11 million a year. That is 343 times as much as the average worker’s salary of $33,000.

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Right now, 15 million Americans are jobless, and they are worried about how they are going to stay in their homes, feed their children, and keep their families warm this winter. But unemployed Americans are not the only people who are struggling. Hard-working Americans from all walks of life are struggling to make ends meet. They are coping with skyrocketing grocery prices, surging health premiums, soaring college tuition.

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their kids and take care of their obligations. That is the foundation that built America. It is the foundation of the development of something that was called the “greatest generation.”

That was the generation in the last century who served in World War II. All of us had an opportunity to get a college education when we otherwise would not have been near a college.

That built our country. That strengthened our foundation. Now we see people, Republicans, who want to make it tougher for people to make a living, tougher for people to get an education, tougher to provide heat for people who desperately need it in the wintertime, tougher to think ahead and say: You know what, I know my children will do better than I have done in my life.

That used to be a truism in our view of life in this country. We don’t hear that much anymore because people are unsure, and it does not help to have the Republicans sticking up for the wealthiest among us and turning their backs on working-class families in this country, the middle-class families. It is not right.

I hope the people across this country will say: No. We are going to say no to these Republican policies. I hope our Republican colleagues will disband their millionaires’ protection game, and say: You know what. I know my family. We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Norman L. Eisen, of the District of Columbia, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the Czech Republic.

Mr. REID. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that we now proceed to executive session to consider the following nominations concurrently: Calendar No. 360 and Calendar No. 501.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered. The clerk will report the nominations.

The assistant legislative clerk read the nominations of Norman L. Eisen, of the District of Columbia, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the Czech Republic.

Mr. REID. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that we now proceed to vote on Calendar Nos. 360 and 501, and I send two cloture motions to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered. The clerk will report the nominations.

The assistant legislative clerk read the nominations of Mari Carmen Aponte, of the District of Columbia, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the Republic of El Salvador.

Mr. REID. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that we now proceed to vote on Calendar No. 360.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered. The clerk will read the motion.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Mari Carmen Aponte, of the District of Columbia, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the Republic of El Salvador.

Mr. REID. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that we now proceed to vote on Calendar No. 501.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered. The clerk will report the nominations.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Mari Carmen Aponte, of the District of Columbia, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the Republic of El Salvador.

Tribute to Jacob’s Tree

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, I rise today to extend my personal blessing this holiday season to the family of Jacob Akin of Somerset, Kentucky. This year, the town of Somerset has graciously chosen to honor the Akin family by accepting their donation of a 20-foot cherry spruce tree to be displayed in the town’s Fountain Square as the county Christmas tree. More important, however, is the solemn but heart-warming story of the tree’s origin, and the inspiration it brings to the people of the community.

The tree, known as “Jacob’s Tree,” was planted in remembrance of Jacob Akin, who was tragically killed in a terrible accident on December 6, 1994. Five-year-old Jacob was playing with his older brother, Abraham, in a house when a chimney unexpectedly collapsed on top of him. Thus, the holiday season each year is especially burdensome for his family, as it serves as a constant reminder of the horrific accident that took place 17 years ago.

A year after his death, his family decided to plant a tree to honor young Jacob. Over the years, the tree has helped bring comfort and peace to the family. “We decided to put up the tree in memory of my son,” Jacob’s mother, Rebecca Buis, says. “I felt like as the tree grew, I could keep up with the