

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY
LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The minority leader is recognized.

PAST ATTEMPTS AT DEFICIT
REDUCTION

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I wish to give those within the sound of my voice a very brief tutorial on how serious the Republicans are about balancing the budget.

I led a trip to South America. We had 10 or 12 Senators, equally divided between Democrats and Republicans. It was a wonderful trip. I chose purposely Kent Conrad, who was the No. 1 person on the Democratic side of the aisle at the time on numbers, and I also decided to see if Judd Gregg, who was the Republican's No. 1 person on numbers, could go. These two good men sat together that whole trip, hour after hour. They had their yellow tablets, and they were doing what they loved to do—play around with numbers.

When the trip ended, they had an idea. They were both experienced legislators. They had been here when we did something that hadn't been done before. We had military bases in America going back to World War I that should have been closed, but we couldn't do it because of the politics of the Senate. But we decided long ago to try something different. We appointed a commission, they would report back to the Senate and the House, and they would make a decision as to which bases should be closed—no filibuster, no tricky procedural rules; yes or no on what they recommended. We did two rounds of base closings and we closed scores of bases, saving the country billions of dollars.

Conrad and Judd decided to do the same thing with this deficit we have. They drafted legislation based on the base closing commission legislation, and they brought it before the Senate. It had a like number of Democrats and Republicans supporting this Conrad-Gregg legislation. We had seven Republican cosponsors. Even the Republican leader today, at that time didn't cosponsor it, but he said he liked it. He said publicly that he liked it. In fact, he said: "This proposal is our best hope for addressing the out-of-control spending and debt levels that are threatening our Nation's fiscal future."

What a tremendous idea. I was so happy to have had something to do with setting this program up.

But look at what happened. Seven of those Republicans who cosponsored the legislation voted against proceeding to it. We couldn't even get on the bill because the Republicans ran away from it. They ran away from doing something about the deficit. Why? Ask them. I have ideas, but that is the way it is. Even my friend, the now Republican leader, voted against it. It failed by 7 votes—7 votes of the Republicans who cosponsored it but who no longer voted for it.

So, based upon that, we were in a quandary. What should we do? So a number of us, Democrats and Republicans, asked President Obama if he could do something with a commission of his own. Now, it wouldn't be as good as what we had tried because that was pretty specific—to bring it back for an up-or-down vote.

So the President did what was the right thing to do. He found two stunningly good people who are good with money, good with numbers, including the former Senator from the State of Wyoming, who is such a great guy, Senator Simpson. He is just a fine man with a great sense of humor, and he knew his numbers. Senator Simpson teamed with Erskine Bowles, who had been the President's Chief of Staff. They set up the Bowles-Simpson Commission. It was terrific. It gave us some hope that maybe something could be done. They had long hearings. It was really good. The hearings included people from the private sector and from the House and the Senate—Democrats and Republicans.

Now, even before that, when the Conrad-Judd effort failed, we thought that we had some hope. Once again, the Republicans on the Bowles-Simpson Commission walked away from it. It really is unfortunate, but that is what happened. It was quite interesting. People who had been criticized over the years for being too liberal, big spenders—someone such as DICK DURBIN from Illinois—voted for the Bowles-Simpson Commission. It took a lot of courage for him to do that, but he did. But Republicans who we thought would have been for it voted against it, and it failed.

Then, Senator BIDEN, because of his close relationship having served in the Senate for 36 years, got with some Republicans, and they made a run at it. There were all kinds of press that they were making progress. What happened? The Republicans took a hike. They broke up the meeting, wouldn't go any further, and that ended that.

So then, we had one last attempt. I worked hard on this. Others worked hard on this. It passed. It passed the Congress. We set up a supercommittee: the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction. The committee had an equal number of Democrats and Republicans—six of each. What happened? The Republicans, once again, walked away from it.

So all of this happy talk I heard this morning and I am going to hear over this week and over the next couple of days about this great budget the Republicans have is an absolute farce. Pundits have written accordingly. Talk about a balanced budget—they have revenue coming in. One example—of course, Republicans want to repeal ObamaCare, but they want to use the revenue coming from ObamaCare for this fake budget of theirs.

Any time the Republicans are asked to close tax breaks for companies shipping jobs overseas—no—but they are

happy to cut Social Security, Medicare, and of course, never focus on middle class priorities. They use the words, but it is just a joke. They want a loophole for wealthy hedge fund managers. They want unlimited tax breaks for the oil and gas industry. In this budget, they have not asked millionaires and billionaires to pay one extra penny.

So all this talk about this great budget we have is an absolute farce. There are editorials all over the country. I read a number of them yesterday, what they say about this.

ANTIQUITIES ACT

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I know people are anxious to go to work on other things, but I want to talk about something called the Antiquities Act. It passed in 1906. President Theodore Roosevelt was the President at the time. Congress wanted to give him the authority to designate special lands and cultural resources as national monuments, and he did that. Since then, 16 Presidents—8 Democrats and 8 Republicans—have used this 1906 act to protect America's treasures.

For example, way back in 1922, President Harding used the Antiquities Act to protect the Lehman Caves. It is now a beautiful facility. I have been down there. They are certainly not the deepest or the biggest caves in the world, but they are unique and good, and we have enjoyed them in Nevada. That was the basis for the 1986 legislation I initiated to create a national park in Nevada. The only national park we have in Nevada is the result of the 1922 action of President Harding. That is why we have Great Basin National Park. It is a wonderful facility. It has a glacier, the oldest living things in the world, the bristlecone pines. It is a great park, and people from all over the world visit this wonderful facility. So Nevada's lone national park exists today because President Harding used the Antiquities Act to first designate the Lehman Caves.

Some Members of Congress—frankly, it is a minority—believe we should repeal or gut this bill. They advocate weakening the Presidential authority that in the past has protected the Grand Canyon and even the Statue of Liberty. Who in this body thinks America has suffered because Presidents in the past have protected the Petrified Forest in Arizona, the Craters of the Moon in Idaho, and Capitol Reef, Bryce Canyon, and Arches in Utah? I have been to all of them, and even though Utah is an extremely conservative State, I have not heard one single Member of Congress or governmental authority say they were a huge mistake. They draw millions of visitors to the State of Utah with the beautiful lands they have there. What about Muir Woods in California? It is just stunningly important, and it came about as a result of a President designating them a national treasure under the Antiquities Act.