

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SCOTT of Florida). Without objection, it is so ordered.

BIPARTISAN CONGRESSIONAL REFORM ACT

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, I rise to discuss the Bipartisan Congressional Reform Act I introduced with Senator WHITEHOUSE and many of my colleagues.

Last month, the Senate Budget Committee approved our legislation—that is the Senate Budget Committee—by a vote of 15 to 6, marking the first major legislation reported by the committee on a bipartisan basis in nearly 30 years. I am pleased that 21 Senators have now joined Senator WHITEHOUSE and me as cosponsors of this bill.

Since I became chairman of the Budget Committee, we have had more than a dozen hearings on budget process reform. We have met with budgeting experts, including some outstanding State officials, and we have listened to insights and concerns shared by colleagues on both sides of the aisle. Along the way, we collected a lot of good ideas that we tried to incorporate into our bill, and I thank all those who contributed.

Now, this legislation will not solve all of our fiscal challenges. It does, however, represent a good-faith, bipartisan effort to reform our budget process in a way that encourages long-term planning, realistic and responsible budget assumptions, and the end to the brinkmanship surrounding our Nation's statutory debt limit.

This bill will also make evident what needs to be done next. I think we struck a pretty good balance. The Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget says the bill “would improve transparency and accountability in the budget process” and would “make the budget resolution into a more effective governing tool.”

According to the Concord Coalition, which was founded by some Democrats, “This legislation would move the budget process in a very positive direction.”

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the letters from the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget and the Concord Coalition be printed in the RECORD at the conclusion of my remarks.

The reason I am giving the speech is to clarify some misunderstandings of other groups that were commenting on most of the original version of the bill before amendments from both parties were adopted in committee.

I will not detail all the reforms in this bill now, but I would like to highlight a handful of key elements of the bill and hopefully clear up some misunderstanding about it.

First of all, our bill tries to ensure that we have better information on which to base budgets. Imagine this for

a moment. It would require better information on which to base budgets and more active engagement from the tax-writing and each of the spending committees to ensure that every corner of the Federal budget is scrutinized and that budgets are realistic.

It would also require the Congressional Budget Office and the Government Accountability Office conduct portfolio reviews of Federal spending and tax expenditures to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of Federal programs.

Here is what that means: It means grouping projects regardless of which Cabinet Department has jurisdiction so we can see all that we are doing.

Use housing, for instance. We have 160 programs under 20 agencies. I can only see 5 reasons—not 160—and they should all be under one jurisdiction, not several Cabinet jurisdictions. So, currently, nobody is in charge of setting goals or seeing if they are effective. We are paying multiple administrators to argue over jurisdiction rather than results—160 of them.

Secondly, our bill would reorient the budget process from a yearly to a biannual cycle. Right now, under the Congressional Budget Act of 1974, Congress is supposed to approve a budget resolution each year that sets discretionary spending levels and provides fiscal parameters for a legislation brought to the Senate floor.

The budget resolution can also provide special instructions through a process called reconciliation. What that means is that instructions are given to authorizing and tax-writing committees to develop legislation to achieve hopeful and specific budgetary targets. For a variety of reasons, this process has not worked very well in recent years. Instead, Congress resorts to passing a series of 2-year deals that set discretionary spending limits rather than approving the budget.

I need to explain that word “discretionary.” Out of all the Federal dollars spent, Congress only votes on about 30 percent of the money spent each year. Seventy percent of the spending is on autopilot. That is mandated to be spent. Discretionary spending is the little amount that Congress actually votes on.

Under our bill, Congress would approve a budget resolution in the first year of a biennium that would, among other things, provide appropriators 2 years of discretionary spending totals, similar to a practice in recent years. Leadership, not the Budget Committee, has been negotiating these 2-year spending deals.

Thirdly, the bill would make significant reforms to the content of the budget resolution. Discretionary spending totals would be included in the resolution text, where individual Members could amend them. Mandatory spending totals would be broken up by budget function so we could see trends in portfolios of Federal spending.

Here is something really new. The budget resolution would also be re-

quired to include a target ratio of debt-to-gross domestic product, or GDP, which is generally viewed as the best measure of the country's ability to repay its debt. The hope is that by focusing on our debt-to-GDP target, we could put our country on a glide slope toward a more sustainable fiscal future. Under the reform bill, that glide slope can be cutting spending, raising revenue, or both.

Fourth, the bill would provide a mechanism to conform our country's statutory debt limit to the levels in the resolution. This will help incorporate the debt limit into our fiscal planning and provide a powerful incentive to ensure that the targets set in the resolution are attainable.

Neither side relishes voting to increase the debt limit, as it is easy fodder for political opponents. Yet there is nearly universal agreement that default would be unacceptable. Our bill tackles this issue in a way that it maintains the debt limit as a tool to ensure fiscal responsibility, while removing the brinkmanship surrounding the potential default.

Fifth, our bill would provide a means to initiate reconciliation in the second year of the biennium if Congress isn't living by its fiscal plan. There has been a lot of confusion about this process, so let me take a moment to explain it.

As I just mentioned, under our bill, each budget resolution would include 2 years' worth of discretionary spending levels and a debt-to-GDP target for the final year of the budget. That means each new Congress would set its own spending levels and debt targets in its budget agreement, and it would not be bound by the targets established by its predecessors.

If, in the second year of the biennium, the Congressional Budget Office finds that Congress is not on track to meet its debt-to-GDP target, then a special reconciliation process is made available. This is akin to what can already be done under current law if you pass a budget resolution in the second year of Congress, but because we are giving appropriators 2 years of discretionary spending levels upfront, we created a new process in the second year if Congress misses its fiscal goals. Contrary to a misconception that has been circulated, however, there is nothing automatic about this process.

Before reconciliation can proceed, the Senate Budget Committee, which will be renamed the Committee on Fiscal Control and the Budget, would need to approve a resolution providing deficit-reducing reconciliation instructions to one or more committees.

That resolution, which would be amendable, would then be considered by the full Senate. We have added protections to ensure that Senators have the ability to offer amendments and have built in flexibility for unforeseen realities, including economic downturns. We also applied the existing burden rule to this process, which means it cannot be used to make changes to Social Security.

Senators could offer amendments to reduce the amount of the deficit reduction called for or they can decide they don't want to proceed with this process at all. If they do decide to move forward with this special reconciliation, each committee that received an instruction would then report legislation within its jurisdiction to reduce the deficit. The instructions themselves could not dictate what particular programs are to be included in the reconciliation legislation. That is left up to the authorizing and the tax-writing committees that have specific policy expertise. One thing the instructions could not do is increase the deficit.

After each committee approves its instructions, all the recommendations would then be sent to the Committee on Fiscal Control and Budget, where, again, they would need to be approved and reported to the full Senate. After that step, the legislation would come to the floor, where it could be subject to unlimited amendments, giving every Senator another opportunity to support, amend, or oppose the legislation.

Each of these steps affords the Members the opportunity to have their ideas incorporated into the special reconciliation or to try to stop it altogether.

In addition, a similar process would have to play out in the House of Representatives, and the final bill would have to be signed by the President before any policy changes could be enacted.

In general, our legislation does not attempt to prescribe House procedures. That is in deference to the House and the constitutional prerogative of each Chamber of Congress to develop its own rules.

I have heard some concerns that this sets up a one-sided bet that could dictate spending cuts over revenue increases because only the House of Representatives can initiate revenue measures. That was never my intention, and during the Budget Committee markup to our legislation, a substitute amendment that Senator WHITEHOUSE and I drafted was adopted that would allow the Senate to deem a revenue measure approved by the House as a special reconciliation vehicle. I look forward to working with the House on addressing the procedural issues.

The intent of our special reconciliation process is to force a conversation about our growing debt and deficits, not to dictate what the outcome of that conversation will be.

As the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget said, the criticisms that this bill is somehow a threat to low-income programs "is largely misplaced." As the group said, "The tool would not automate any changes to spending or revenue, but would instead establish a process to consider deficit reduction measures. These measures would have to pass the Senate and the House and be signed by the President (a veto override system is also possible). Unlike current reconciliation

rules, which have been used to pass deficit-finance tax cuts, this process is limited to deficit reduction and could help policymakers agree to new revenue and to reforms to improve healthcare programs. And long-term deficit reduction can easily co-exist with near-term measures to counter a recession."

Finally, our bill would prioritize budget transparency. It would give the Senate new budget enforcement tools, and it would remove one of the disincentives to bringing the budget to the floor by fixing the process known as vote-aroma.

In developing our legislation, I specifically set out to establish a process that would allow us to be thoughtful and deliberate in our fiscal decision making, while avoiding the automatic spending cuts over the last decade, known as sequestration.

Under this bill, sequestration is gone. Our bill would not tilt the scales toward one party, ideology, or policy. Rather, it aims to create a neutral process to guide Congress in making reasoned budget decisions. Each Congress will decide what fiscal policy changes may be necessary, whether that means less spending, more revenue, or a combination of the two.

We cannot be content to bury our heads in the sand as our more than \$23 trillion debt grows unchecked, swallowing the opportunities of future generations. If you, like me, want to see Congress get back to actual budgeting and tackling the difficult fiscal issues that we all need to be addressed, then, please join me in supporting the bill. If you have suggestions on how to make it better, I want to hear them. We are always open to new ideas, and I think we have demonstrated it.

With that, I recognize my colleague, who helped to work on this bill. In addition to working on this bill, he was on the special committee for the Budget. It was a joint effort between the House and the Senate, and many of the ideas he brought to this bill from that committee.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

COMMITTEE FOR A RESPONSIBLE FEDERAL BUDGET

ENZI-WHITEHOUSE BUDGET PROCESS BILL
INCLUDES IMPORTANT REFORMS

Nov. 21 2019—Budget Process

The Senate Budget Committee recently marked up and reported bipartisan legislation to reform the budget process. The Bipartisan Congressional Budget Reform Act, introduced by Chairman Mike Enzi (R-WY) and Senator Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI), would improve transparency and accountability in the budget process. It would make the budget resolution into a more effective governing tool by making it easier for policymakers to choose fiscal targets and stick with them. That, we hope, would mean putting the debt on a more sustainable path. The Senate Budget Committee approved the legislation by a vote of 15 to 6, and it currently has 19 bipartisan cosponsors in the Senate.

While there may be room to make improvements and adjustments to the bill and

some amendments were adopted in committee, the legislation is a thoughtful, realistic, and helpful approach to improve the budget process on a bipartisan basis. Congress should build on and enact some version of this proposal.

What's in the Bipartisan Congressional Budget Reform Act?

The Bipartisan Congressional Budget Reform Act is the result of years of effort, building on several past proposals including those from Chairman Enzi, Senator Whitehouse, the recent Joint Select Committee on Budget and Appropriations Process Reform (JSC), and even our own Better Budget Process Initiative recommendations.

The proposal would incorporate debt-to-Gross-Domestic-Product (GDP) targets into the budget resolution and the budget process, adopt biennial budgeting while keeping annual appropriations, link debt limit increases and discretionary spending caps to passage of a budget resolution, and add transparency requirements such as including interest costs in Congressional Budget Office (CBO) scores.

A brief summary of the bill is available from the Senate Budget Committee.

How Might the Fiscal Targets in the Bipartisan Congressional Budget Reform Act Improve Fiscal Outcomes?

A key aspect is expanding the fiscal goals included in the budget process. Specifically, budget resolutions would set targets for the ratio of debt held by the public to Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Congress would set these targets in a joint budget resolution every odd-numbered year, and the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) would evaluate adherence to the target in even-numbered years. Adopting a budget resolution would automatically spin off debt-limit-increase legislation to be signed by the President as well as a special reconciliation process in some cases. Setting fiscal goals is an incredibly important first step toward achieving long-term sustainability, and integrating them into the budget resolution could give current members more ownership of those objectives and hopefully strengthen their ongoing commitment to meeting fiscal targets.

The proposal goes further than simply setting goals. It would establish a new, deficit-reduction-only reconciliation process if needed to achieve the debt-to-GDP levels agreed to in the earlier budget resolution. Under this process, the Senate Budget Committee, renamed the Committee on Fiscal Control and the Budget, would report a simple resolution with reconciliation instructions to the full Senate, where it would be open for amendments. If approved by the Senate, it would instruct applicable committees to produce deficit-reducing legislation to achieve compliance with debt targets. Senate procedures for regular reconciliation legislation would apply to the new reconciliation process, including the Byrd Rule that, among other provisions, prohibits changes to Social Security. When marking up the legislation, however, many members expressed a desire to understand this process more completely before floor consideration.

While some have criticized this new tool as a threat to low-income programs, we believe this concern is largely misplaced. The tool would not automate any changes to spending or revenue, but would instead establish a process to consider deficit reduction measures. These measures would have to pass the Senate and the House and be signed by the President (a veto override is also possible). Unlike current reconciliation rules, which have been used to pass deficit-financed tax cuts, this process is limited to deficit reduction and could help policymakers agree to new revenue and to reforms to improve

health care programs. And long-term deficit reduction can easily co-exist with near-term measures to counter a recession.

What other provisions might improve fiscal outcomes?

In addition to improving outcomes through this special reconciliation, the bill would establish a new pathway for a bipartisan budget resolution, previously championed by Sen. Whitehouse during the JSC last year and introduced separately as S. 63, the Bipartisan Budget and Appropriations Reform Act of 2019. A majority of both parties in the Senate Budget Committee and at least 15 members of the minority party on the Senate floor would be needed for a budget resolution to qualify for this new pathway. Under it, subsequent appropriations legislation would be easier to consider on the Senate floor, and the budget resolution would automatically spin off legislation with enforceable caps on discretionary spending in addition to increasing the debt limit. This process could help the parties to work together toward reasonable deficit reduction measures. Folding the debt limit and spending caps into the bipartisan pathway for the budget resolution would also reduce opportunities for isolated brinkmanship.

Other aspects of the bill—like asking CBO to estimate interest costs associated with legislation and restricting phony spending cuts known as changes in mandatory spending programs (CHIMPs)—could also improve budget outcomes. Adopting portfolio budgeting is another positive step, as it would provide a more holistic review of major program areas regardless of the committees of jurisdiction and thus help lawmakers coordinate related authorities.

To be sure, the Bipartisan Congressional Budget Reform Act would not fix the debt directly, nor does it include actual deficit reduction. Through improvements in the overall budget process, it would give lawmakers more opportunities to think seriously about the consequences of high and rising debt as well as more ability to budget comprehensively and mindfully.

What amendments have been proposed?

The Bipartisan Congressional Budget Reform Act was introduced on Oct. 31 and was ordered reported by the Senate Budget Committee on November 6. During the markup, the committee made the following changes:

A manager's amendment by Chairman Enzi to enhance the consensus-oriented aspects for special reconciliation.

An amendment by Senator Pat Toomey (R-PA) to create a new point of order intended to deter the use of the Crime Victims Fund to increase unrelated spending through CHIMPs.

An amendment by Senator Tim Kaine (D-VA) to add tax expenditures to the scope of portfolio budgeting.

An amendment by Senator Chris Van Hollen (D-MD) to restrict the ability of the President to use rescission authority near the end of fiscal years and to increase related reporting requirements.

In addition, the following amendments were considered but not adopted:

An amendment by Senator David Perdue (R-GA) to align the fiscal year with the calendar year. An amendment by Senator Ron Wyden (D-OR) to remove the new reconciliation process to enforce debt-to-GDP targets.

An amendment by Senator Jeff Merkley (D-OR) to require CBO to provide information on the distributional impacts of legislation. Nonetheless, Chairman Enzi pledged to work with Senator Merkley and other members to obtain the information they seek.

Lawmakers must continue to improve the budget process, which has contributed to

many years of inaction on a budget resolution and even more missed deadlines. Process reforms alone cannot create the political will to have a functioning budget, but they may allow latent political will to accomplish more. This bill offers thoughtful ideas to make the process more effective and to improve the framework for lawmakers to consider budget matters more comprehensively.

[From the Concord Coalition, Nov. 6, 2019]

THE CONCORD COALITION PRAISES BIPARTISAN SENATE BUDGET REFORM PLAN

WASHINGTON.—The Concord Coalition said today that a new budget process reform bill co-sponsored by Senate Budget Committee Chair Mike Enzi (R-WY) and Budget Committee member Senator Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI) proposes reforms that would address some of the most vexing problems plaguing the current budget process.

The Bipartisan Congressional Budget Reform Act is also co-sponsored by Senators Grassley (R-IA), Kaine (D-VA), Crapo (R-ID), King (I-ME), Graham (R-SC), Coons (D-DE), Barrasso (R-WY), Blunt (R-MO), Johnson (R-WI), Perdue (R-GA), Kennedy (R-LA), Cramer (R-ND), and Braun (R-IN).

"This legislation comes at a time when the budget process is clearly broken and partisan tensions run high. Senators Enzi, Whitehouse and their fellow co-sponsors are bucking both of these trends and demonstrating a timely and exemplary standard of leadership," said Robert L. Bixby, executive director of The Concord Coalition.

Among the proposed reforms are moving the budget to a two-year cycle, setting debt-to-GDP targets in the budget resolution and establishing a special enforcement process for these targets, creating a mechanism for conforming the debt limit to the budget resolution levels, and enhancing reporting requirements to promote transparency. It would also establish a new procedural option to encourage budget resolutions with substantial bipartisan support.

"The co-sponsors understand that budget process reform is not a panacea for the monumental fiscal challenges we face as a nation, nor is it a substitute for making real choices on taxes and spending," Bixby cautioned. "But creating a process that minimizes short-term brinkmanship and refocuses attention on long-term planning would help facilitate a discussion about how best to address these challenges. This legislation would move the budget process in a very positive direction."

Mr. ENZI. I yield the floor.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I thank Chairman ENZI. I am delighted to join Senator ENZI on the floor today to talk about our bill. An enormous amount of work has gone into preparing for it, including, I want to say, more than a dozen hearings that Chairman ENZI led in the Budget Committee to build the factual predicate for the work we were doing.

I will, as the Chairman has mentioned, also drop a word of appreciation to Chairman WOMACK and Chairman LOWEY, who ran the Select Committee on Budget and Appropriations Process Reform, which gave us a chance to work through some more of these issues.

The fundamental problem we are trying to address is that, in the Senate, no committee actually looks at the deficit, the debt, and the borrowing in any kind of a comprehensive way. In theory, the Budget Committee is supposed

to, but in practice, the Budget Committee has become two things: one, a vehicle for the majority to drive a political budget limited to appropriated spending through, with no bipartisan compromise. We have seen over and over how that has ended up. It has never been of any use. Even if you get it done, you break through the budget by getting to 60 votes, and we do most things around here by getting to 60 votes. It is a fence that is basically a line painted on the ground. It is a fence with no fence to it.

Moreover, we do reconciliation. That is usually a way to bust around the budget. Both parties have used it. The Republicans have used it for the so-called tax reform. We used it for one segment of the Affordable Care Act. That is what the Budget Committee is boiled down to—a partisan proposal on appropriations that means nothing and a vehicle for getting around the 60-vote filibuster on a regular basis through reconciliation. That is it. There is no serious look that is taken at the debt or at the deficit.

What does this bill do? It does some things for which there is very broad agreement. First of all, it was pretty much unanimous that the way you look at debt is in terms of a debt-to-GDP ratio, and this takes us down that path. Second, you have to do the arithmetic correct. You don't get to a proper debt-to-GDP ratio unless you look at the things that add up to the deficit, which are appropriated spending, healthcare spending, revenues, and tax spending.

For one quick word on tax spending, for 2018 the latest report I saw was that we spent \$1.4 trillion going out the back door of the Tax Code. That is more than we spend on Social Security. That is more than we spend on Medicare and Medicaid combined. That is more than defense and nondefense discretionary spending combined. You can't not look at tax spending and still have your math right. We address those.

We provide a reasonable timeframe to get to a debt-to-GDP target and some warnings about whether or not you are on that glide slope. There was pretty much unanimous consent agreement among all of our witnesses in the committee and in the select committee that that was the logical way to address debt and deficit.

There are also some sidebar things that are important that we get rid of here, such as, we move to biennial budgeting, which I think has broad bipartisan support. We deal with what I call "the bear trap in the bedroom"—the debt ceiling—which is a very dangerous thing if you should ever step on it and trigger it. To disarm that bear trap is very valuable to our efforts, and we do that.

Vote-arama is one of the most undistinguished, useless, humiliating, and embarrassing spectacles that the Senate presents. We solved, I believe, vote-arama.

So that is a pretty good package of good, useful reforms to get going in the right direction.

There is a very significant concern, mostly on my side of the aisle, about the special reconciliation process. In this bill you alternate between regular reconciliation and a special reconciliation process, and then, in the next biennial cycle, back to regular reconciliation and then special reconciliation. There is concern that the special reconciliation process might be used to jam things we don't like through—things like cuts to Medicare, things like very one-sided spending cuts that don't address the problem of tax spending.

We need to work to solve that. I pledge to Chairman ENZI that I will put my best efforts to try to come up with a way where we can get through that problem and move on to passing this bill, which I think will be very significant and very valuable once we iron out what I think is probably, actually, the last real gasp that we have in terms of objection to it.

I will also add that the bipartisan pathway that we have been working on for when the two parties can come together and agree to those things is in there. If we really want to do this in a bipartisan pathway, that is in this bill. I appreciate very much that Chairman ENZI included that in the bill. That provision passed the bicameral select committee unanimously—Republicans, Democrats, House Members, Senators, unanimously. That is a pretty good base to work off of.

I will close by quoting a phrase that I have heard usually from business folks from time to time. That is that in business, “debt doesn't matter, until it does.” But then it is the only thing that matters. At the moment, with interest rates where they are and with the world situation the way it is, one can make the case that debt doesn't matter. But when the day comes that it does matter, when interest rates pop up and the cost of servicing our debt begins to squeeze out other priorities, it gets very hard to go back and try to solve that problem then.

This is the kind of problem you have to head off in advance. So to the extent we can solve in a sensible way dealing with our debt and deficit during the calm period when debt doesn't matter, we will position ourselves to avoid the calamity that can come when it is the only thing that matters.

I pledge to use my best efforts to try to bring my side into agreement on this bill and to try to find a measure that solves our concern about what I think is really the only point of significant disagreement in this bill, which is what is behind the special reconciliation process, what mischief that might be got up to. I think if we can defang this, we can move forward.

Again, much appreciation to Chairman ENZI for his extraordinary leadership in the budget committee on this subject. I am determined to try to get

this done in this Congress while he is with us to see it through.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

DEBBIE SMITH REAUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2019

Ms. ERNST. Mr. President, I stand proudly before this body today in support of the passage of the Debbie Smith Act of 2019. Since its enactment in 2004, the Debbie Smith Act has been renewed twice with overwhelming bipartisan support. With the tireless work of Senator CORNYN and Senator FEINSTEIN, we will renew this vital piece of legislation for a third time today.

I want to thank Senator CORNYN very much for being such a diligent leader on behalf of this act.

The Debbie Smith Act removes one of the most substantial and burdensome roadblocks to survivors of sexual violence achieving the justice they deserve. I have told many people about the time I volunteered when I was a young woman in Iowa State University. I volunteered for a crisis hotline and a woman's shelter. The type of work I was able to volunteer for at that time was responding with a beeper to crisis calls at the hospital for women who had been through a rape. That, in itself, is very difficult, but the follow-on work that has to be done can often be just as difficult if evidence is not processed timely.

The Debbie Smith Act does this by providing funding for crime labs that process DNA evidence and by strengthening the national DNA database used to help solve these horrific crimes. In addition, this bipartisan bill supports audits of evidence awaiting analysis at law enforcement agencies and charges the Justice Department with the task of developing national testing guidelines.

We all know the criminal justice system isn't designed to be fair to survivors of sexual violence, and it is not easy on them. It certainly is not a comfortable process.

Coming forward as a survivor is not the end. It is just the beginning. That is why it is so important that this Congress, with Senator CORNYN's leadership, and our criminal justice system support survivors of sexual violence by funding the availability of DNA evidence to help bring these predators to justice.

Again, I thank the Senator for his diligent work on this. The bipartisan Debbie Smith Act helps to bring us to the end that our survivors need and they deserve. Thank you for your leadership.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, let me thank the Senator from Iowa for her leadership on so many issues, including this one. Obviously, through her work on the Judiciary Committee, where we

both serve and from where this important piece of legislation emanated, this has been a long journey. Unfortunately, the politics of the day seem to have slowed almost everything up that we are trying to do.

In particular, I also want to recognize the good work of the Senator from Iowa on the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act. I am a proud cosponsor of the legislation she is leading on. My hope is that after the fever breaks, sometime after the first of the year—I keep hoping for that moment—we will get back to the nonpartisan reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act. In the meantime, I am happy to join the Senator on the floor and to talk about the importance of the Debbie Smith Act and to celebrate its imminent passage.

Since 2004, the Debbie Smith Act has been the guiding force behind our Nation's effort to eliminate the rape kit backlog. Just so everybody understands, at one point there was a report that there were as many as 400,000 of these forensic kits, which are used to collect DNA evidence following sexual assault, sitting in evidence lockers and police stations or in labs and which remained untested.

Once we are reminded of the importance of this evidence and how powerful it is to enable law enforcement officials to identify an attacker with almost complete precision and accuracy, the importance of making sure these kits were tested becomes all that more obvious.

Since 2011, the Debbie Smith Act has helped Texas—my State alone—reduce its backlog of unsubmitted rape kits by approximately 90 percent.

The benefits don't stop there, though. The primary goal of this program is to reduce the rape kit backlog and identify attackers—people who commit sexual assaults.

Processing this evidence can also assist investigations in other unrelated crimes because perpetrators do leave their DNA in other places other than just in the crime of sexual assault.

Once this evidence is tested, it is uploaded into the FBI's DNA database called CODIS. This is similar to a criminal fingerprint database and can help identify and convict people who commit other crimes as well.

For the civil libertarians among us—and I would like to consider myself one of them—this evidence is also very powerful in discounting or disqualifying potential perpetrators from suspicion because if, in fact, DNA of some other person is identified, it obviously is by exclusion of the other person who may be suspected but who will thereby be exonerated.

According to the National Institute of Justice, 72 percent of the hits in the FBI database system are the direct result of Debbie Smith Act funding. The benefits of this law cannot be overstated, and it is time once again—past time, really—to reauthorize this critical program. The Debbie Smith Act of