have such authority. And the bill ensures that private taxpayer information is not shared unscrupulously. Certainly, these returns would not be released to the public.

This approach has precedent. Thirty years ago, Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas retired from the bench. Within days, President Ford nominated John Paul Stevens for the vacancy. The President hoped that the nomination of a moderate who had been given the American Bar Association's highest rating would help restore confidence in government in the wake of the Watergate scandals. As the confirmation hearings drew near, six members of the Senate Judiciary Committee wrote Chairman Eastland requesting ''the most thorough practicable investigation of the nominee.'' The Senators' letter requested full disclosure of Stevens' personal health and finances, including a complete and thorough review of his Federal and state tax returns. Stevens promptly complied.

When the full Senate took up the nomination, Chairman Eastland urged the confirmation of Stevens saying, ''his personal integrity, as reflected in his financial statements and income tax returns, is of the highest order.'' The Senate confirmed Stevens by a vote of 98 to 0 and he took the oath of office 2 days later at the age of 55.

Washington is now under a similar ethical cloud. But the White House has resisted my efforts to have the Joint Committee on Taxation review the tax returns of Chief Justice John Roberts, Ms. Harriet Miers, and Judge Samuel Alito. The administration's decision to put its Supreme Court nominees' tax returns off limits is consistent with its penchant for secrecy.

Its refusal to heed this most basic document request, however, is a barrier to the rigorous due diligence process required for prospective Government officials that come before the Senate Committee on Finance. All nominees, from Cabinet secretaries to Tax Court judges, have their tax returns scrutinized. On more than one occasion, the Finance Committee has admonished the administration for failing to do a better job of determining a candidate's compliance with the tax laws. In some cases, tax issues have contributed to the withdrawal of nominees who were before the Senate.

Despite these warnings and withdrawals, the administration still doesn't do a particularly good job of catching nominees' tax problems. Therefore, it is vital to the constitutional process of advice and consent for the Senate to have the information necessary to ensure fitness to serve. The Senate must not rely on the executive branch to provide oversight.

Finally, I am introducing this bill today to apply to all nominees—those nominated by Democratic Presidents and Republican Presidents. Careful oversight of nominees to the highest Court in the land should not be a partisan issue. It was Ronald Reagan who famously said, ''trust, but verify.'' This bill aims to embody President Reagan's maxim. Trust in government is an issue that Republicans, Democrats, and Independents value.

The noted Supreme Court justice Louis Brandeis said that ''secrecy necessarily breeds suspicion.'' The American people have a right to know that public officials—particularly those appointed for life—have faithfully and fully paid their taxes. Blocking Congressional access to Supreme Court nominees' returns creates questions that can breed public distrust in government. Providing access to those returns can help to provide the transparency and trust Americans deserve in the Supreme Court nomination process. I look forward to working with my colleagues to get this bill enacted.

By Mr. BIDEN:

S. 2095. A bill to ensure payment of United States assessments for United Nations peacekeeping operations in 2005 and 2006; to the Committee on Foreign Relations.

Mr. BIDEN. Mr. President, today I introduce legislation to ensure that the United States does create new arrears at the United Nations. At a time when our Government is seeking important reforms at the United Nations, it would be a mistake for us to fall short on our dues at the U.N. But unless Congress acts promptly, that is what we are about to do.

Here's why.

In 1994, Congress passed a law limiting U.S. payments for U.N. peacekeeping at 25 percent after 1995. At the time, the United States was assessed by the U.N. at a rate of about 31 percent for peacekeeping. Thus, the United States incurred arrears because of the 25 percent limitation—that is, the gap between the 25 percent and 31 percent.

In 1999, Congress approved the Helms-Biden law. It authorized the repayment of U.S. arrears to the U.N. conditioned on certain reforms in the U.N. system. One of those reforms was a negotiated reduction in the United Nations of the U.S. peacekeeping rate down to 25 percent. Through negotiations in 2000, U.S. Ambassador Holbrooke succeeded in reducing the U.S. assessments for peacekeeping to just over 27 percent.

In 2001, Congress amended the Helms-Biden law to allow the arrears payments to be provided to the U.N. at the higher rate—27 percent—that Ambassador Holbrooke negotiated. But the original 1994 law limiting our payments to 25 percent was never repealed.

In the past few years, Congress has amended the 1994 law on a temporary basis by raising the 25 percent limitation to conform it to the rate negotiated by Ambassador Holbrooke. That temporary change in law lasted through fiscal year 2005. But it has now expired.

Therefore, the law today is this: the United States may not pay more than 25 percent for peacekeeping—even though the United Nations assesses the United States at the rate of roughly 27 percent. In the coming weeks, we are scheduled to pay a bill of about $344 million that has come due since October 1. Under U.S. law, we will only be able to pay about $319 million, leaving a shortfall of about $25 million. At a time when our diplomats are in the final stages of negotiating important reforms in the U.N. system, it would be a mistake unilaterally to withhold payments to the U.N. Rather than encourage reform, it may cause an adverse reaction by other nation and undermine our reform agenda.

Earlier this year, the Bush administration recognized this coming train wreck. On March 1, the Department of State transmitted to Congress its official request for the Foreign Relations Authorization Act for fiscal year 2006 and 2007. Section 401 of that legislation would amend current law and raise the limitation on U.S. payments to 27.1 percent through calendar year 2007. The summary of the request said as follows: ''Without further relief, the U.N. peacekeeping cap would revert to 25% and the United States would go into arrears. The proposed section would . . . enable the United States to pay U.N. assessments at the rate assessed by the U.N. up to a rate of 27.1% . . . [t]his would allow the United States to pay its peacekeeping assessment in full, including funding for a new peace support operation in Sudan . . .''

Since then, however, the administration has done little to secure enactment of this provision. On December 1, 2005, the Secretary of State requested by letter to the chairman of the Committee on Appropriations several ''critical legislative proposals that are of a time sensitive nature and warrant enactment prior to the Congress' adjournment in mid-October.'' The request contains four provisions but does not include the provision required to assure full payment of U.N. peacekeeping assessments.

Mr. President, I realize that the Congress has a lot on its agenda in the final days of the first session. But we have a responsibility to ensure payment of our obligations to the United Nations—and to ensure that we do not undermine the negotiations on U.N. reform now underway.

AUTHORITIES FOR COMMITTEES TO MEET

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Armed Services be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on December 13, 2005, at 10:15 a.m., in executive session, to consider the nomination of J. Dorrance Smith to be Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation be authorized to meet on Tuesday, December 13, 2005, at 10:30 a.m., on the nominations of Deborah Taylor Tate and Michael Joseph Copps to be Federal Communications Commissioners.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

PRIVILEGE OF THE FLOOR

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I have a unanimous consent request, which I would like to make for Senator BAUCUS, that the following fellows and interns be granted floor privileges during the duration of the debate on this measure, Jonathan Coleman, Andreas Datsopoulos, and Holly Luck.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

UNANIMOUS-CONSENT AGREEMENT—S. 1932

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that on Wednesday, following morning business, the Chair lay before the Senate a message from the House to accompany S. 1932, the deficit reduction bill. I further ask consent that the Senate disagree to the amendment of the House, request a conference with the House, and that the Chair be authorized to appoint conferees on the part of the Senate with the ratio of 11 to 9; provided further that before the Chair appoints conferees, the following motions to instruct be the only motions in order and that they be considered under the following limitations: Kennedy, higher education, 60 minutes equally divided; Baucus, Medicaid, 5 minutes equally divided; DeWine, trade, 60 minutes equally divided; Kohl, child support enforcement, 60 minutes equally divided; Carper, TANF, 5 minutes equally divided; Harkin, food stamps, 5 minutes equally divided; and Reed, LIHEAP, 60 minutes equally divided.

I further ask consent that no amendments be in order to the motions and the only debate in order under the statute other than debate on the motions be 30 minutes equally divided for general debate, divided between the chairman and ranking member; further, that all motions be debated on Tuesday and Wednesday and that the vote occur in relation to the motions in the stacked sequence at a time determined by the majority leader after consultation with the Democratic leader; finally, that any votes which do not occur prior to 1 p.m. on Wednesday be stacked to occur beginning at 3:30 on Thursday, December 15.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

UNITED STATES-BAHRAIN FREE TRADE AGREEMENT IMPLEMENTATION ACT

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of H.R. 4340, the Bahrain Free Trade Agreement. I ask unanimous consent that all time be yielded back.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The clerk will report the bill by title.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 4340) to implement the United States-Bahrain Free Trade Agreement.

There being no objection, the Senate proceed to consider the bill.

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, the Bahrain free-trade agreement is a very important agreement that reflects in this post-9/11 environment the recommendation that had been made in terms of facilitating trade to nations such as Bahrain. I am delighted we were able to both debate it earlier today and ultimately pass this important free-trade agreement.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I reluctantly oppose the legislation implementing the U.S.-Bahrain Free Trade Agreement. I have nothing against expanded trade with Bahrain, and I know that there is plenty in this FTA that is appealing to the U.S. business community. However, this agreement is another example of the misplaced priorities in the Bush administration's flawed trade policy, which can best be described as a policy of ''fiddling while Rome is burning.''

If you were to ask Americans to list their top trade priorities, I think they would suggest the following: dealing with the enormous trade deficit, on pace to exceed $700 billion this year; addressing the rise of China; meeting the challenges of outsourcing and globalization; enforcing our existing agreements and rules for fair trade; and perhaps global negotiations in the World Trade Organization. A trade agreement with Bahrain would be nowhere near the top of the list; it probably would not even be on the list at all.

Yet, here we are, with the Bahrain FTA as the big trade item to close out the year. The U.S. has a trade deficit with China that is on pace to exceed $200 billion this year—more than a quarter of the entire U.S. trade deficit. Last year, China passed the U.S. as the largest exporter of high-tech information technology and communications products. There is no doubt that the rise of China presents an extraordinary challenge to the United States. Yet, the Bush administration has essentially no policy dealing with China's currency manipulation and the accompanying U.S. indebtedness to the government of China, rampant piracy of U.S. intellectual property, WTO violations, forced technology transfer requirements, and industrial policy in areas critical to the U.S. like semiconductors and automobiles.

Instead, we have the Bahrain FTA, which involves .03 percent of total U.S. trade.

The Bush administration has proposed no policies in the face of outsourcing and the revolution of globalization to ensure that America keeps good-paying jobs and remains the most competitive economy in the world. They basically say, ''Don't Worry, Be Happy.''

Instead, the U.S. uses the scarce resources of the U.S. Trade Representative to negotiate an FTA with Bahrain, which has an economy one-tenth-of-one percent the size of the U.S. economy.

When it comes to enforcing our current agreements, the Bush administration has been asleep at the wheel. While the Clinton administration brought on average 11 WTO cases per year to knock down foreign barriers to U.S. exports, the Bush administration has filed fewer than three cases per year.

Instead, they have focused their energies on negotiating an FTA which is so small that the independent ITC has stated, ''the effect of the FTA on total U.S. exports is likely to be minimal.''

Meanwhile, the WTO negotiations have delayed and floundered. Ironic may not be the right word, but it is a fitting testament to this administration's skewed priorities that Senators are stuck in Washington debating the Bahrain FTA this week, and so were not able to travel to Hong Kong to provide oversight on the WTO negotiations—which could have an impact thousands of times larger than a trade agreement with Bahrain.

Looking at the merits of the Bahrain FTA in isolation, let me note that I applaud the Government of Bahrain. It has been a good U.S. ally and is an important moderate Arab and Islamic country. I wish the people of Bahrain well and hope that the U.S. and Bahrain will continue to enjoy good relations, including trading relations. I also note that there are many good provisions in this agreement to ensure protection for U.S. intellectual property rights, to prevent expropriations of U.S. investments, to reduce barriers to U.S. exports, and to expand the access of U.S. service providers to Bahrain's market.

It is regrettable, though, that the Bush administration followed its flawed model in this FTA. In short, the interests of the business community are taken care of, but the interests of the average American are not. I certainly understand that many of the businesses that care about these FTAs make important contributions to the U.S. economy and are a critical source of employment, exports, and innovation. I value those contributions and think for the most part the chapters and provisions of the FTA important to the U.S. business community make sense. What I do have a problem with, however, is the fact that our trade agreements provide short shrift to areas of interest to human beings, including workers' rights and environmental protection.

When it comes to transparency in government regulation, telecommunications regulation, financial services regulation, other services regulation,