

business for debate only, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each, with Republicans controlling the time from 11:30 to 12:30 for the purpose of a colloquy and the Democrats controlling the time from 1 p.m. to 2 p.m.

Mr. REID. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader is recognized.

#### NEED FOR SERIOUS FISCAL ACTION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, all across the country this morning, Americans are struggling—and they are not getting much in the way of help or hope from Washington. Those who are unemployed or eager to hire are frustrated by the mountain of burdensome new rules and regulations Democrats have imposed on them in the past 2 years and by the uncertainty that comes with every proposal to create another one. They are shocked that a White House which does not even try to balance its checkbook would repeatedly propose to raise taxes. And more and more, they are worried about the consequences of our debt and the President's reluctance to do anything about it.

But even more upsetting to many Americans is the repeated attempts of the White House to seem as if it is doing something about these things when it is not. That is just what the President has sought to do in talking about the need to reform entitlements and lower the debt, but refusing to lift a finger to do either. And that is just what I fear he will do again this afternoon in outlining his vision for tackling these problems without so much as presenting a single new idea or anything approaching a workable plan to get us there.

The truth is, the President is only entering this debate at all because he can no longer ignore the growing bipartisan calls for action. If he were serious, he would be talking about a detailed roadmap for action, not just grabbing headlines by announcing another speech.

Of course, we can hope that the President presents more than just his vision for the future this afternoon. But those who have hoped for that from this President have been disappointed many times before. What we are likely to get instead is a broad-

brush notion of what the President wants to see—a vision that includes calls for strengthening entitlement programs that few people would disagree with but which will never come about absent Presidential leadership; a partisan call for tax hikes on struggling job creators, and, I fear, a call for tax hikes on energy producers when gas prices are already creating heavy burdens for so many.

No doubt we will also get a fair share of finger-pointing and an attempt to cast Republicans in the worst possible light for actually laying out a serious plan to address the crises we face while others merely talk about their vision. But we can still hope that the President leaves the scapegoating aside for a change and finally admits the obvious: that we can only solve these fiscal crises if we do so together.

So either the President agrees today that Republicans have a point when it comes to the seriousness of our fiscal problems and admits that the old approach of pretending they do not exist will not work anymore or those problems will become harder and harder to solve. Either he pretends that old programs, unlike everything else in life, do not need to adapt to survive or he joins us in acknowledging those programs will no longer be there for the people who are counting on them if we do not take serious action now.

We need to keep our promises to seniors and to a rising generation of Americans—and we will—but we can no longer afford to make promises to younger workers that we all know we cannot afford to keep.

Look: if big government created jobs and opportunity, then we would be in the middle of a boom right now. That experiment has failed. And that is why the national conversation has shifted from how much Democrats want to expand the scope of government to how much both parties should rein it in.

The fiscal crisis we face will not be solved by “freezing” unsustainable government spending or by raising taxes on the very small businesses we are counting on to create jobs. And the programs we cherish as Americans will not be preserved for the next generation through speeches alone. Americans do not want to hear the President's vision today—he has had 2 years to lay that out. They want to hear his plan.

Americans do not want to hear the President criticize or distort the serious efforts of those in our party who want to solve our problems head on. They want to hear a detailed counterproposal of his own. And they do not want to hear that the price of gas at the pump is going to get even higher, or that their opportunities to find or create jobs will shrink. Now is not a time for mere speeches or political attacks. It is a time for action.

That is what Americans want from this President. That is what they are failing to get. I hope that changes today.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. COONS. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### VOLUNTARISM

Mr. COONS. Madam President, I rise to mark National Volunteer Week and Delaware Volunteer Week. All week long throughout the Nation and across the great State of Delaware, Americans and Delawareans will be engaged in volunteer service. Volunteer opportunities include helping the homeless, tending to the environment, mentoring children in schools, and working to keep communities safer and stronger and free from fires and accidents and injuries, among many others.

Here in the Senate one can't talk about community service or national service or voluntarism without thanking and recognizing our colleague Senator BARBARA MIKULSKI from Delaware's neighboring State of Maryland. Senator MIKULSKI has been the leader on voluntarism for many years, most of them alongside the late Senator Ted Kennedy. I am proud to be working with her to fight to save our national service programs.

When Delaware's tireless Governor Jack Markell was sworn into office in 2009, he decided to forgo the traditional Governor's inaugural ball and he, along with his wonderful wife, our first lady Carla Markell, instead organized a week of service projects across the State. Today that week of service continues and has become a tremendous opportunity for nonprofit organizations and community service organizations across the State to connect with Delawareans excited about teaching our children the value of voluntarism, connecting with neighbors and helping improve and strengthen our communities.

I have long believed that those who engage in voluntarism and service to others in fact get more out of it than they put in.

Voluntarism, as you know, Madam President, is a fundamental part of what it means to be American. It is a great—some would say the greatest—part of America and its cultural traditions. However, voluntarism need not be confined to my State or this week. It is something from which every American can benefit at every stage in their life.

In my view, one of the most effective voluntarism efforts in modern history is one with which I was first engaged when I was a resident briefly of the State of the Acting President pro tempore when I was working for the national “I Have a Dream” Foundation in New York City now many years ago.

The national AmeriCorps program—a partnership between the Federal Government and local nonprofit communities—was launched with bipartisan support, initially an idea proposed by President Bush and then enacted by President Clinton. The AmeriCorps program is now one which has had a tremendous and far-reaching impact over the last 17 years. It enables 75,000 Americans to serve annually via AmeriCorps with a very wide range of programs—programs where the funding is raised and its focus is directed by State, by State commissions of volunteers, community leaders, who help identify the best and most appropriate, most effective partners for this federally funded program that is also matched one to one with dollars from the local community. So far more than 60 million hours of community service annually has been provided by AmeriCorps members.

In Delaware, voluntarism has a long tradition and a great history, and the volunteer fire service is one of the strongest parts of that long and proud history of our State. There are more than 88 volunteer fire companies in our State. They provide the vast majority of fire suppression services for our communities.

They faced a real problem when I became county executive: a steady loss in membership. As working-class families were under more and more pressure, with both parents working, they were under more stress, more demands, and it became more difficult for people to dedicate the time and energy needed to be trained and to serve as volunteer firefighters, and, in particular, to deliver ambulance service—one of the most important aspects of our volunteer fire service.

So in partnership with our New Castle County Volunteer Firefighters Association, and with the YMCA, and with AmeriCorps, I worked tirelessly to launch a new AmeriCorps program called the Emergency Services Corps.

The Emergency Services Corps helps recruit volunteer firefighters and conducts CPR and first aid training and provides fire awareness training for schoolchildren all across our county. So far they have recruited more than 220 volunteer firefighters and logged more than 108,000 hours of service to our community in the 5 years since it was created as a partnership between all these different entities.

I just thought I would draw attention to that one example today of the hundreds of AmeriCorps programs across our country that I think are a shining example of how the young people of this country—people at all ages across this country—bring their gifts, their talents, and their spirit to volunteering.

In every generation of Americans, heeding the call to service has been the answer to our greatest challenges, and with so many out of work, suffering from hunger or facing homelessness right here in our own country, I think

it is critical we all pitch in to help. It is an affirmation of our bond of citizenship and our compassion for our fellow citizens.

So I would like to encourage everyone in my State to visit the Volunteer Delaware Web site to find service opportunities this week. I am putting a link to it on my Web site at [www.coons.senate.gov](http://www.coons.senate.gov). For those who happen to be outside Delaware, I hope they will visit [www.nationalservice.gov](http://www.nationalservice.gov) and participate in this National Volunteer Week.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Madam President, may I be recognized to speak in morning business.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senate is in morning business.

#### MEDICARE

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Madam President, the Paul Ryan/tea party budget of the House of Representatives privatizes Medicare. Let me repeat that. Medicare, the program of medical care for senior citizens that our seniors have come to depend on—the Paul Ryan/tea party budget of the House of Representatives privatizes Medicare.

This is not an empty threat. It is not this Senator's or any other Senator's political interpretation. The budget of the House Republican Budget Committee chairman would end Medicare as we know it. It ends Medicare. It hands seniors' health care over to insurance companies. It would break a sacred contract between workers who paid into the system thinking it would be there for them when they retired. But under this new scheme, senior citizens will not have a Medicare Program anymore. They would have to pick an insurance plan, and a voucher would be given directly to the insurance company.

Under the proposal—I am not making this up—a voucher, paid for by the Federal Government, would be given not to the senior citizen to go shopping, it would be given to the insurance company that they chose. Medicare for senior citizens would be turned over to insurance companies. If this sounds incredible, it is, because under that plan insurers would decide what doctors seniors get to see and what health benefits get covered.

Now, why do I say that? That is an HMO. An HMO is a health maintenance organization. That is an insurance company. They have a panel of doctors, they have a panel of hospitals, and

they determine what is in the coverage that a senior citizen gets.

Contrast that to Medicare now, that Medicare fee-for-service. The senior citizen makes the choice of their doctor, of what are the things they look for in their total medical care, paid for because they are senior citizens and are eligible for Medicare, of which they have been paying in all of their lives through a Medicare tax.

So now this proposal is to privatize Medicare, take it out of being a government fee-for-service plan, and, instead, insert it into a privatized insurance company.

Do senior citizens want to change their Medicare and turn it over to insurance companies? I do not think so. If insurance plans raise their costs, which we know they do, seniors then would have to pick up the bill. Seniors would have to pay more out of their pocket for this voucher program.

According to the Congressional Budget Office, out-of-pocket costs—this is according to CBO, the nonpartisan actuarial accounting organization—according to CBO, out-of-pocket costs would more than double for seniors.

This voucher program proposed by the chairman of the Budget Committee in the House, Congressman RYAN, is not like Medicare Advantage. Medicare Advantage has been a great program for senior citizens, and in our State of Florida we have more signed up for Medicare Advantage than any other State because of what it does. It provides benefits at low cost to senior citizens because the Federal Government directly negotiates with the insurance companies' plans. That is different from what Congressman RYAN and the tea party are proposing. So insurance companies, under Medicare Advantage, have to provide guaranteed health benefits at a low price that is negotiated. As a result of the new health care reform law, Medicare Advantage premiums have actually gone down. These are the premiums that are paid by senior citizens.

So do not let folks confuse you between what is proposed by the Budget chairman in the House and the existing Medicare Advantage Program. The Ryan/tea party budget leaves these decisions up to the insurance plan. In other words, insurance companies will be in charge of seniors' health care. I do not think that is what our senior citizens intend to have happen.

The tea party wants to end Medicare. That is the bottom line. Yet the House budget does little—interestingly, little—if anything to actually reduce the Federal deficit, which is what they say their budget is for, to reduce the Federal deficit.

Well, look at it. The House Budget chairman claims his budget includes \$5.8 trillion in spending cuts, but when we look at it closer we learn this claim was an accounting gimmick. We have seen these gimmicks over and over in budgeting in the Federal Government.