

serious plans. I also believe it is vitally important, before we raise the debt limit, that we can put this Nation on a path to a balanced budget. We cannot afford to continue to borrow 40 cents out of every dollar we spend in Washington. We cannot afford, as the commercial that many of us have seen on television, to have the Chinese own America's money, and the United States be in such debt that China has an increasing and unhealthy influence on the United States.

I intend to vote for this agreement. I believe we could have done a lot better, but it is a step in the right direction. It is the first time we have made serious efforts to reduce spending in quite a number of years around here. I hope it will serve as something that the American people can support and spur us on to greater efforts in the coming weeks and months.

I notice the presence of the majority leader, and I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

Mr. REID. Madam President, I say to my good friend from Arizona, we came to the House of Representatives together, came to the Senate together. When we came here, we both had the same service except the State of Arizona had more people than the State of Nevada, so he is one step ahead of me in seniority. I appreciate my friend's statement.

Mr. MCCAIN. That is in the eye of the beholder. I thank the Senator.

Mr. REID. I appreciate my friend's statement. He and I are both going to vote for this piece of legislation for different reasons, but as I have said publicly and privately, there have been very few people in the history of our country who have served our country so valiantly in battle and in the government than JOHN MCCAIN. Even though we have disagreed on a number of issues over the years, my admiration for him will always be there.

(Mr. WHITEHOUSE assumed the chair.)

RENO AIRPORT INCIDENT

Mr. REID. Mr. President, as the country learned today, certainly we learned in Nevada, there was a terrifying close call at the Reno airport last night. It is a miracle that everyone is OK today, and we are grateful they are.

This is what happened. Only one air traffic controller was in the tower during last night's overnight shift. Medical aircraft carrying a critically ill passenger couldn't land because the controller fell asleep on the job. We now know that the pilot circled several times. We now know that he tried to call the tower not once, not twice, but seven times. The controller slept through every one of the calls. He slept through the circling of the aircraft.

More than 15 minutes later, with the passenger critically ill in the airplane, minutes during which no one could reach the air traffic controller while

this critically ill passenger suffered in that aircraft, the pilot landed without any guidance from the airport.

The Reno airport is situated right below the great Sierra Nevada Mountains. It is an extremely difficult place to land. Those of us who have been landing there for all these years know how terribly rough it is many times coming out of there with the winds coming off the Sierras. To think this pilot was forced to land without any control on the land is very scary.

This should not happen in Nevada. It should not happen anywhere in the country. It shouldn't happen in any airplane, and it certainly shouldn't happen to an air ambulance.

Just a short time ago, I spoke with Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood. I am very happy he is acting, and acting quickly, to make sure this never happens again in Reno or anywhere else. We know we had an experience a few weeks ago right here in Washington, DC, the same type of situation.

Why did it happen? Reno was one of 27 airports across the country that sometimes had only one air traffic controller on the overnight shift. Because of Secretary LaHood's quick action, there will now be zero—effective immediately, every airport will have at least two air traffic controllers in the tower at any given time.

As I indicated, I have flown into and out of that airport many times. In October I was there for a celebration. We were opening a new control tower. It was very badly needed. From the old one, you couldn't see parts of the runway. When Reno's old control tower was built, Dwight Eisenhower was President and the Dodgers were in Brooklyn. In the half century since, the area's population has more than tripled. So it was fitting, we said at the time, that the airport open a control tower three times as tall as the old one.

Last night's near tragedy reminds us that state-of-the-art structures and the best technology work only as well as the people operating them. If these people fall asleep on the job, literally, they risk the lives of millions of Americans flying into and out of airports every day.

Secretary LaHood and Randy Babbitt, FAA Administrator, are doing their jobs. I appreciate their responsiveness and share their outrage that this ever happened, but Congress also has a key role to play. We have to do our jobs.

The Senate passed a bill in February to modernize America's air travel. With that legislation we created or saved 280,000 jobs. It would improve aviation safety and protect travelers, and that is an understatement. It would even help reduce delays, improve access to rural communities, and it would do all this while creating jobs.

The Republican House also passed a companion bill a few days ago, but the House bill is almost the opposite of

ours. It is dangerous. It doesn't protect passengers, it imperils passengers. The Republican bill would cut the modern navigation systems at our Nation's airports. It is hard to comprehend—an FAA bill, to which we have had to give short-term extensions—I don't know exactly the number of times but like 14 different times—now we are going to try to pass a bill that doesn't modernize our navigation systems at our airports. That would be wrong.

The FAA said the House bill would force it to furlough safety-related employees—not just any employees but those whose primary job is keeping air travel safe. That doesn't make any sense. It would also keep airports from making the infrastructure improvements they need and would completely end the program that ensures rural communities—in small towns such as Ely, NV—have air service.

The Senate-passed bill and the House-passed bill are now in conference to work out the differences. Clearly, there are a lot of differences. The conferees have some choices to make, and they are important, but they need to make them quickly so that both Houses can pass this bill and send it to the President, and do it quickly.

This bill passed on a huge bipartisan vote. Again, we are grateful everyone in Reno is OK, but the next time we may not be so fortunate. Let's make our airports and our travel as safe as possible as soon as possible so the next time we don't have to rely on luck. That is what it was.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

THE BUDGET

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I suppose I and a lot of my colleagues had an opportunity to hear the President's speech this afternoon. It is very nice that the President is being engaged for the first time in the budget debate and the long-term fiscal problems of this country, and the deficit problems of this country. It is good he is following on with some of the recommendations of his own deficit reduction commission. We have to remember a little less than a year ago he appointed a deficit reduction commission. They reported on December 5. It seems as though they had broad bipartisan support because the four Senators on the commission—two Democrats and two Republicans with probably very different political philosophies of the four—have endorsed it. Then, all of a sudden, since December 5 until today, there has been a lot of quiet on the part of the President of the United States about whether he