

chance over here. That is why, with this most important issue we are facing; that is, not defaulting on our debt, they have to become real and send something over to us or we will send something to them or agree in the interim to something that will extend the debt.

As most know, I have worked hard in trying to figure a way through all this. Others have worked just as hard as I have. Right now, I am at a point where I am saying we need to hear from the House of Representatives. We have a plan to go forward over here. But until we hear from the House of Representatives, all of our work here would be for naught.

So I await the word from the Speaker. He indicated that he thought it would be appropriate they get this other matter out of the way first. I look forward to working on this.

I had a terrific conversation with the President last night. He understands the issue as well as anyone in the country, if not more so, because the buck does stop at his desk. So I tell all Senators to be calm and deliberate. I am confident we will be able to work our way through this very difficult time. But we are at this stage depending on the House of Representatives to help us find a path forward.

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#### ORDER FOR MEASURE TO BE PLACED ON THE CALENDAR—H.R. 2560

Mr. REID. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that when the Senate receives H.R. 2560, it be ordered to be read twice and placed on the calendar.

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

Mr. REID. Would the Chair announce morning business, please.

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#### RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

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#### MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business for 1 hour with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with the time equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees, with the majority controlling the first half and the Republicans controlling the final half.

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.

Mrs. MURRAY. 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.

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#### DEBT CEILING

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, our Nation is less than 2 weeks away from potentially facing what Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke has called a "calamitous outcome."

Unless we act, the United States of America, for the first time in our history, may face the prospect of defaulting on our loans, and not making good on the promises we have made to millions of our citizens.

This outcome is unthinkable, and we should be doing everything we can to avoid it. That is why I am so disappointed that instead of working with us to tackle this issue seriously, the Republican-led House of Representatives has chosen to put politics ahead of everything else, and has sent us a bill they call cut, cap, and balance.

First of all, this is a colossal waste of time. The Republican House has sent us a bill that may appeal to their extreme base, but right now the American people are looking for results, not more rhetoric.

The Washington Post reports this bill as being "a doomed plan." Even conservative columnist David Brooks said in his column yesterday that this bill has "zero chance of becoming law." And that it is "likely that Republicans will come to regret this missed opportunity."

But second of all, this bill is not just a waste of time, it's truly terrible policy. It would essentially enshrine into our Constitution the failed Republican policies that got us into this crisis in the first place.

It could bind our hands from responding to national emergencies that require quick and decisive action. Like another terrorist attack or Hurricane Katrina, payments for families who have lost their homes in tornadoes, or an infrastructure breach in states across the country like the Howard Hanson Dam in my home State of Washington.

It would force us to say "no" to families across the country who need some temporary support to help them get back on their feet, and at the same time help them contribute back to our economic strength.

This bill would have prevented us from taking any real actions after Wall Street brought us to the precipice of financial collapse in 2008, which would have led to thousands more job losses across the country at a time when we could afford it least.

And it would not allow Congress, as representatives of the American people, to make the investments we need to continue innovating, educating, and leading in the 21st century economy.

Republicans may be talking about the virtues of cutting, capping and balancing now, but their actions and votes speak much louder than these three words.

And the Republican budget this same House of Representatives just passed, a budget that slashes and burns away at the fabric of our society that cuts off millions of middle class and working families from the health care, nutrition, education, and housing support they need. Even this Republican budget would not meet the standards of cut, cap, and balance. And you know who else's budgets would not meet those standards? Ronald Reagan's and George W. Bush's.

It is truly unbelievable that they are playing these games with the clock ticking down to another financial crisis. We do not need a so-called cut, cap, and balance bill to put in place sensible policies that work for the American people.

My Republican colleagues may choose to ignore this fact these days, but we did some responsible cutting and balancing of our own here in America not too long ago and we did not need a constitutional amendment to do our jobs, either. Like many of them, I was here in 2000.

I remember that when President Clinton left office we were on a course to completely pay down the \$5.6 trillion debt by 2012. I remember the projections of surpluses. I remember some of my colleagues actually being worried that the large surpluses in years ahead could be a problem. And I remember the efforts by many of us to safeguard that funding for our seniors, for our future, and to pay down the debt.

But I also remember what Republicans chose to do with that surplus. They could not wait to get their hands on the nation's credit card. And when they did, after President Bush took office, they spent lavishly.

Throughout the Bush years, and particularly in the Bush tax cuts of 2001 and 2003, trillions of dollars in tax breaks went to the very wealthiest Americans.

There were capital gains tax roll-backs. Tax breaks designed to benefit corporate giants. And a new tax bracket that provided the very wealthiest Americans the lowest tax rates they have enjoyed since World War II.

These tax breaks were all unpaid for, all handed out to those who could most afford to pay, and all put on the Nation's credit card.

Our country was also led into two wars, and neither of them were paid for.

Now that the credit card bill has come due, now that all those tax cuts and spending need to be reckoned with, and just as our Nation is starting to recover from the Wall Street crisis that has devastated so many families, Republicans are playing political games with our future.

This is serious. If we cannot come to an agreement by August 2, the consequences will be dire.

A few weeks ago the Bipartisan Policy Center put out a report authored by a former Bush Treasury official about

what would happen if Congress failed to act and the administration was forced to make desperate spending decisions in August. And the scenarios were worse than grim.

Potentially at risk are: the benefits and health care we owe our veterans, loans for struggling small businesses, food stamps for those struggling to buy groceries, Social Security checks for our seniors, unemployment benefits for the millions of workers desperately seeking jobs, and even active duty pay for our military. These risks are unacceptable.

Senior citizens in this great country are worried that the Social Security checks they depend on, and that they have been promised, may not be coming in the mail in 2 weeks. And then they read the news and hear that Republicans are still "playing games."

Mothers and fathers are sitting around their kitchen table, trying to figure out what they would do if the food stamps they count on to feed their kids got cut off. And then they turn on the television, and see reports of the House of Representatives sending us a bill that cannot pass. This is an embarrassment. And the American people deserve better.

Democrats have come to the table again and again with reasonable proposals for coming to an agreement. We have come to the middle. We have offered up serious and deep cuts in Federal spending. But again and again, Republicans have said no.

So far, they have refused to make any deal that does not protect tax cuts and loopholes for oil companies, private jets, and millionaires and billionaires and as we see today, they seem to be more focused on offering up red meat to their base than actual solutions for the American people and more focused on negotiating tensions within their own party than on working with us to get results.

So, with 13 days to go, I urge House Republicans to get serious about this.

The so-called cut, cap, and balance bill is bad policy. It is the kind of silly politics that Americans are sick of, and it is a waste of time that we as a country simply cannot afford right now.

If all it took were slogans and gimmicks to solve this crisis, House Republicans would have this covered. But we know that is not the case. And the clock is ticking for families across America.

Democrats are going to keep working to solve this crisis. We are ready to compromise. And we need a partner at the table that is just as serious about this as we and the American people are.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Nebraska.

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#### HEALTHCARE FAIRNESS

Mr. NELSON of Nebraska. Madam President, I rise today to speak about legislation that I believe is very impor-

tant for the future of health care fairness in our country.

Yesterday, I introduced the Savings Through Eligibility Fairness Act, which addresses Medicaid fairness and debt reduction. My friend and colleague from Wyoming, the ranking member of the HELP Committee, Senator ENZI, has a shared interest in this issue, and I commend and appreciate his offering of similar legislation and offer to continue to work with him to deal with and find solutions to this issue.

Medicaid is an important safety net for Nebraska and our country's most vulnerable families. I am committed to making sure they will continue receiving health care coverage. Unfortunately, the health care reform law passed last year would inadvertently make some middle-class Americans eligible for Medicaid who should not be eligible for Medicaid. My bill changes the law to ensure that only the neediest Nebraskans and Americans would qualify for the Medicaid expansion and health exchange subsidies created by the health reform law.

This simple, reasonable change has a significant impact: It saves \$13 billion. Let me repeat that—\$13 billion worth of savings. My bill commits that \$13 billion will be used to pay down the national deficit. As Washington debates various debt-reduction plans, my bill offers one concrete, commonsense way to reduce the national debt by \$13 billion. We hear a lot of different ideas but not with the same level of concrete, commonsense approach.

I regularly hear from Nebraskans who are already benefiting from the new health care law—children remaining on their parents' coverage, seniors closing the doughnut hole, and young people no longer being denied coverage because of preexisting conditions. Those are Nebraskans who are already benefiting from the new health care law. So improvements such as the one I have proposed will save money and help reduce the national debt, while still protecting health care for Nebraska and American families.

In the current debate of how best to reduce spending and reduce our Nation's deficit, I believe Congress should start with this commonsense approach. It will maintain sensible eligibility requirements for the Medicaid expansion and health exchange subsidies rather than focusing on shifting costs to States, providers, and the people who rely on this most important program.

Right now, most States do include Social Security income when deciding who will be eligible for Medicaid. So my legislation will maintain that definition for establishing eligibility for both Medicaid and health exchange subsidies. Keeping this same definition consistently will ensure Medicaid will not start down the path of covering middle-income families, which has never been the purpose of this program, nor should it be. Rather, Medicaid is part of a critical safety net for the most vulnerable and the most in need.

Let me point out an important fact. Those who would no longer qualify for the Medicaid expansion would still be eligible to receive health insurance coverage through the State health insurance exchange and subsidies where appropriate. So they will receive the health care they need. As a result, the Congressional Budget Office has estimated that the savings through the Eligibility Fairness Act will have a negligible effect on the total number of individuals projected to be insured as a result of health care reform.

Let me conclude and summarize by saying that Medicaid is an important health safety net for Nebraska and America's most vulnerable citizens. I am committed to preserving this program for more than 200,000 Nebraskans out of 1.85 million who include children, seniors, pregnant mothers, and the disabled. I am committed to maintaining this coverage for these Nebraskans in this fashion.

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. MERKLEY. 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. MERKLEY. I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business for up to 10 minutes.

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

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#### THE BUDGET

Mr. MERKLEY. Madam President, this weekend I was in eastern Oregon holding townhalls. At each gathering, citizens asked me: How important is August 2? Are the Members of the Senate going to be able to come together and make sure our Nation doesn't default?

I rise today to address that question. Indeed, it would be historic, the first time in the history of the United States that we will have refused to pay our bills.

Some of my colleagues have called into question the significance of such an event. One of my colleagues said:

I am a little bit cynical about the scare mongering and putting America's back up against this August 2 deadline just to get an increase in the American credit card.

I heard some of my colleagues talk about the situation in which they view paying the interest on Treasury bills as equivalent to a family holding a mortgage; and the fact that the United States has other bills, such as checks to write to our veterans and our senior citizens, as more equivalent to utility bills; and that somehow, as long as you keep paying on your mortgage, you can quit making your payments on your utilities; that is, other payments for