

marked to the House budget resolution, the Paul Ryan budget resolution number. We cut funding by \$1.2 billion in budget authority discretionary numbers below the President's level. This bill comes in \$620 million below the 2011 enacted level, and it is even \$2.6 million below the House-passed level just adopted earlier this year, Chairman CULBERSON's bill in the House of Representatives.

The Senate voted by a vote of 71 to 26 for cloture to bring up this bill. This is the first of the working appropriations bills. I hope there are many others. The legislation is important. People may ask: How did we make the funding cuts to come in at the House level? The answer is, Chairman JOHNSON and I made some difficult decisions. We cut 24 separate military construction programs. A list is available in the report that accompanies this bill.

We made some very tough calls regarding spending that was proposed for Bahrain, for Germany, and for Korea. There was a worthwhile project proposed for the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims. They wanted a brandnew building and a courtroom. That was denied outright. Those tough decisions—those 24 reductions denying a new Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims building—making those cuts necessary then brought us under the House level, as approved by the Paul Ryan budget.

I remind Members the legislation is endorsed by the VFW, AMVETS, Disabled American Veterans, Paralyzed Veterans of America, and the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America. It had the unanimous support of Republicans in the subcommittee and in the full committee because it comes in at the House budget level. That is why I think it is necessary to move forward, especially as we talk about a budget crisis, in which checks may or may not go out. I very much hope they do. I think it is an important signal to send that the Paul Ryan-approved budget number, which is what this bill is at, goes forward, which ensures 2012 appropriated funding for our veterans and the military construction needs of our men and women in uniform.

With that, I yield the floor and 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. JOHNSON of South Dakota. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. FRANKEN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. JOHNSON of South Dakota. Mr. President, what is the pending business?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the question is on agreeing to the Vitter amendment.

Mr. JOHNSON of South Dakota. Mr. President, the Vitter amendment pending before the Senate is another at-

tempt to derail the progress we have made in a bipartisan fashion on the MilCon/VA bill.

The Senate has voted twice on this issue during consideration of this bill. At the outset of debate, the ranking member of the Budget Committee raised a point of order against consideration of this bill without prior adoption of a budget resolution. I made a motion to waive that budget point of order and the Senate voted 71 to 26 to cut off debate on the motion to waive. The Senate then agreed to waive the point of order 56 to 40.

Now we have an amendment that says none of the critical funding provided in the bill can be obligated in excess of a budget resolution that does not exist. The strictest interpretation of this means the VA can't spend money on benefits for vets, and our military can't construct new training, housing, or other critical facilities until we have a budget agreement.

I don't disagree that it is important to pass a budget, but the Senate has overwhelmingly voted to move this bill so as to not delay essential funding for our troops and vets while negotiations on the debt ceiling and budget continue.

I remind my colleagues this bill is \$618 million below the current level, \$1.25 billion below the President's budget request, and \$2.6 million below the House-passed bill. This is a responsible and bipartisan bill, and the pending amendment would stop all progress we have made. Therefore, I move to table the amendment No. 568, and I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There is a sufficient second.

The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. KYL. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Arkansas (Mr. BOOZMAN).

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 69, nays 30, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 113 Leg.]

YEAS—69

Akaka	Franken	Menendez
Alexander	Gillibrand	Merkley
Baucus	Graham	Mikulski
Begich	Hagan	Murkowski
Bennet	Harkin	Murray
Bingaman	Heller	Nelson (NE)
Blumenthal	Hoeven	Nelson (FL)
Boxer	Hutchison	Pryor
Brown (MA)	Inouye	Reed
Brown (OH)	Isakson	Reid
Burr	Johnson (SD)	Rockefeller
Cantwell	Kerry	Sanders
Cardin	Kirk	Schumer
Carper	Klobuchar	Shaheen
Casey	Kohl	Stabenow
Chambliss	Landrieu	Tester
Cochran	Lautenberg	Udall (CO)
Collins	Leahy	Udall (NM)
Conrad	Levin	Warner
Coons	Lieberman	Webb
Cornyn	Manchin	Whitehouse
Durbin	McCain	Wicker
Feinstein	McCaskill	Wyden

NAYS—30

Ayotte	Hatch	Portman
Barrasso	Inhofe	Risch
Blunt	Johanns	Roberts
Coats	Johnson (WI)	Rubio
Coburn	Kyl	Sessions
Corker	Lee	Shelby
Crapo	Lugar	Snowe
DeMint	McConnell	Thune
Enzi	Moran	Toomey
Grassley	Paul	Vitter

NOT VOTING—1

Boozman

The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the motion to reconsider is considered made and laid upon the table.

Mr. JOHNSON of South Dakota. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. JOHNSON of South Dakota. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. JOHNSON of South Dakota. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to a period of morning business until 2:15 p.m., with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

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

Mr. JOHNSON of South Dakota. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

CUT, CAP, AND BALANCE

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, we are going to move to a debate on our budget deficit, particularly on the debt ceiling we face on August 2. The proposal before us was enacted by the House yesterday on a virtually partisan rollcall, with one or two exceptions. The Republicans passed a proposal which they have characterized as cut, cap, and balance, and they will bring it to the floor of the Senate for consideration. It tries to project spending targets and cuts in spending for the years to come and also to include in the conversation the balanced budget amendment.

It is interesting, the way they approach it, because the balanced budget amendment is literally an amendment to the Constitution of the United States, and those of us who take our oath seriously—and I assume that is every Member of Congress and the Senate—understand that we are sworn to uphold this Constitution. In other

words, it is to be treated as the guiding document for our actions as Members of Congress. I have taken that oath many times as a House and Senate Member, and I take it seriously.

Also, because of that oath, I am skeptical of those who come forward and want to amend the Constitution on a regular basis. We have had 27 amendments to the Constitution. They have been enacted over the course of our Nation's history. They address some of the most serious issues and most historic moments in our history. I think we should address that document, that Constitution, with an air of humility, a feeling that before we add our words, whatever they may be, to this great document that has endured for more than 200 years, we should take care and be serious about it.

I don't often question the motives or the intentions of others who come to the floor, and I won't do it in this instance, but I will say that to have before us, as we will later in the day, a proposal that we amend the Constitution of the United States by choosing one of three options—and that literally is what we will face, three different versions of a balanced budget amendment to the Constitution, and what we will consider here will address choosing one of them. I don't think we were elected to the Senate and sworn to uphold the Constitution to be part of a multiple-choice test about what the next amendment will be. I think we should be much more serious in our undertaking.

I will also tell you that I have been here in Congress long enough to remember a little bit of history. There once was a President named Ronald Reagan, and Ronald Reagan, as President of the United States, was in a leadership position of the United States at a critical moment in our history, there is no question about it. Some amazing things occurred during his administration, but when it came to the budget side of things, there was some history made there as well.

We are considering the debt ceiling of the United States. What is the debt ceiling of the United States? The debt ceiling of the United States is the authority Congress gives to the President to borrow money.

Each year, the Treasury Secretary will call the President and say: I need additional authority to borrow money. Why does he ask for additional authority? Because Congress—the House and the Senate—sent requests for more spending, and the President has to borrow money to honor those requests. How much does the President have to borrow? In this day and age, about 40 cents for every dollar we spend.

So the President has been told that August 2 is the drop-dead date. He needs more authority to borrow money for the actions taken by Congress. As an example, many Members of Congress—even some who now say they won't give the President this authority—voted for America to go to war not

once but twice, and in so voting, for example, on the war in Afghanistan, they are committing the United States of America to spending \$10 billion a month in defense of our men and women in uniform, members of our family who are waging this war. They voted for that.

Now President Obama has said to them: The bill is coming in for the war in Afghanistan, and I have to borrow money to pay for it. These same Members of Congress—the House and Senate—who voted for the war in Afghanistan are now saying: We won't pay the bills. We won't extend the debt ceiling. We won't allow you, Mr. President, to borrow the money to sustain our military forces in Afghanistan.

That is literally what we are talking about here in this debate. The American people are starting to come to understand because when you first ask a person, do you want to extend the debt ceiling, the obvious answer is, no, are you crazy, Senator? Why would I want more debt in this country? We need less debt, not more. Don't you get it?

Understandably, that is the public reaction. But when you go to the point of explaining that this is to pay for debts we have already incurred—and it is not just to wage war; it is a debt incurred to pay for Medicare. We said to 65-year-olds across America: You get a health insurance plan called Medicare, and it will be there when you need it. When you go to the hospital and turn in your bills, we will pay that doctor and we will pay that hospital. And we borrowed money to do it.

Mr. BROWN of Ohio. Would the assistant majority leader yield?

Mr. DURBIN. I would be happy to yield.

Mr. BROWN of Ohio. I appreciate the Senator's comments about where we were. About 10 years ago, we had a budget surplus in this country, as you recall. We had a number of years of quarter after quarter of economic growth, and we know that when you have economic growth, obviously the budget gets in a better situation. But then it was the tax cuts in 2001 and 2003 that I believe the Senator opposed, as I did when I was in the House of Representatives, that went overwhelmingly to the wealthiest taxpayers; and then the two wars the Senator talked about that the people enthusiastically—some, not the Senator—voted for but didn't see a reason to pay for them; and then this Medicare bill, which was basically a bailout to the insurance and drug companies in the name of privatizing Medicare, and we are in a situation now where we are simply trying to pay the bills.

I appreciate the Senator's thoughts and comments about where that takes us. It seems to me it is not like raising your credit card debt limits. These are obligations we have, and we have to be responsible elected officials, as we would as responsible citizens, and pay the debts and the obligations we have incurred as a nation, correct?

Mr. DURBIN. That is correct. And I would say to the Senator from Ohio that when you look back in history, since 1939 when we had this debt ceiling, President after President has extended the debt ceiling because the cost of government—the debt of the United States—has generally gone up in most administrations.

The record holder for extending the debt ceiling in U.S. history since 1939: President Ronald Reagan, on 18 different occasions during an 8-year period of time, extended the debt ceiling. During his administration, we tripled our national debt, and so we needed to keep borrowing. So to say this debt ceiling extension is the product of a Democratic President is to misstate the case. Every President has faced it. Ronald Reagan asked for those debt ceiling extensions more than any other President. When it comes to incurring debt in 8 years in office, Ronald Reagan has the record for tripling the national debt, and coming in second is George W. Bush for doubling the national debt while he was in office and asking on seven different occasions to extend the debt ceiling.

The point I am making is that President Obama has asked to extend the debt ceiling, and there is ample history—some 89 different times—that it has been done, and it is done to pay for obligations we have already made, debts we have already incurred.

Now what happens if we don't extend the debt ceiling? Well, what would happen if the Durbin family of Springfield, IL, did not make our mortgage payment on our home this month? Not good. We are likely to get a call from the bank at some point saying: You probably overlooked it, but there was a mortgage payment due. And if you said: We are just not going to pay it, we are not going to continue to borrow money from your bank, they would say there are consequences. And the same thing is true if you don't extend the debt ceiling.

If we don't extend the debt ceiling of the United States and authorize the President to borrow money to meet our obligations, two things will happen. The credit report of the United States of America is not going to look good the next day. The same thing is true for individuals and families: If you don't pay your bills, your credit report doesn't look so hot. What is the difference? For the United States of America, it means the AAA credit rating we have enjoyed throughout our history will be in danger. It means the interest rates charged to the United States for our own debt will go up and interest rates across the economy will go up, affecting every family and business in America that borrows money, which would be most families and businesses.

Raising interest rates with this high rate of unemployment is exactly the wrong thing to do. Every single day, the Federal Reserve, under Ben Bernanke and his Board of Governors,

sits down and tries to figure out a way to make interest rates low so the economy will grow and jobs will be created. If we have a self-inflicted wound of not increasing the debt ceiling, the net result will be a higher interest rate on our government and higher interest rates on families and businesses. A 1-percent increase—1-percent increase—in the interest rate paid by our government on its debt costs us \$130 billion a year—1 percent.

We are running the risk, by missing the deadline of August 2, of raising that interest rate, killing jobs, making it more difficult for businesses to expand, and increasing the deficit. Can we imagine three worse outcomes at this moment in our history?

So when Members of the Senate and the House come and make these pious pronouncements of “I am never going to vote for an extension of the debt ceiling,” they are jeopardizing our economic recovery and the debt we face.

Some of them have said: I will tell you what. I will vote for a debt ceiling if we can amend the Constitution and put in a balanced budget amendment.

Throughout my time of service in the House and the Senate, I have never—underline “never”—voted for a balanced budget amendment and here is the reason: We don’t need the Constitution to tell us what to do. We know what we need to do. We should have the will to do it. For those who have been guilty of voting for all this spending and now want a balanced budget amendment to the Constitution, it reminds me of the person who says: I will not promise I will not steal again, but I will vote for the Ten Commandments. Well, great. Wouldn’t it be better if they changed their conduct and the way they acted? Wouldn’t it be better if Congress dealt with this budget deficit forthrightly? And we can.

For those who say we don’t have a very good track record, they are right. But efforts are underway on the part of what is known as the Group of 6, which is expanding in size, which is trying to, on a bipartisan basis—Democrats and Republicans—come up with a way through this budget deficit problem. It is not easy. We have been at it for more than 6 months. We have produced a plan which is now being carefully scrutinized and will be worked on, I am sure, for a long time to come, but it moves us in the direction of \$4 trillion in deficit reduction. It does it by putting everything on the table—everything—including spending cuts, entitlement programs, and revenue.

Spending cuts are easy compared to the other two—easier for us, I might add, because they generally involve future spending, and we make the reductions thinking, perhaps, it will not have the negative impact in the future that some imagine.

When it comes to the entitlement programs, I think we deal with a different mindset when it comes to the American people. I believe Social Security and Medicare have become even

more important to American families than they were 25 years ago because of the vulnerability of families today. Many families planned for their retirement and saved some money and maybe they had a pension plan at work and then they had Social Security. Well, over the years, perhaps the savings took a hit when the stock market went down some 30 percent a few years ago. Many of the pension plans didn’t survive corporate restructuring or bankruptcy, and Social Security was the last game in town for a lot of the people retiring.

So when we talk about changing Social Security, people all across America—40 million or 50 million Americans—perk up and say: Senator, what do you have in mind because we are counting on it and we don’t want you to mess it up.

Here is what I can say about Social Security. Untouched, with no changes—no changes—Social Security will make every promised payment with a cost-of-living adjustment for 25 years—25 years. That is pretty good. There isn’t another program in government that can say the same. But what happens at the end of 25 years? Then the trouble starts. We start running out of money and reducing Social Security payments 22 percent. About one-fifth—or a little more—of the payment a person is receiving today would disappear in 2 years. So what we are talking about in all the deficit conversations is to find ways to extend the life and solvency of Social Security.

There are ways to do it. We have talked about a variety of different ways to do it. Any savings in Social Security will stay in Social Security. It is similar to Las Vegas. We are going to make sure the savings we put in Social Security will be reinvested in the program to make it stronger longer.

I also want the program to be fair—we all do—in terms of beneficiaries, particularly the most vulnerable beneficiaries. About 20 percent of Social Security beneficiaries—the lowest 20 percent—are below the poverty line, even after they get the Social Security check. We need to change that. We shouldn’t allow that to happen. These are mainly elderly people who, with the helping hands of our government and Social Security, should be lifted above the poverty level.

Medicare is much the same. If we don’t deal with Medicare, the increasing cost of health care is going to cause that program to run into trouble. What we need to do is to make certain at the end we protect the benefits under Medicare but find ways to reduce the cost. We have to reward value rather than volume when it comes to medical treatment, and we have to keep our promise to the Medicare beneficiaries.

There have been proposals made. One was made by the House Republicans in their budget, the so-called PAUL RYAN budget, which would have dramatically changed Medicare. Out-of-pocket expenditures by senior citizens would

have more than doubled to \$6,000 a year. So \$500 a month, by a person who is retired, can be a hardship, if not an impossibility. Even worse, the House Republican budget would have taken Medicare as we know it and turned it upside down and said: In the future, under the House Republican plan, Medicare is going to be managed in the tender loving arms of private health insurance companies. I don’t think most Americans feel a sense of confidence or relief to hear that.

So as we begin this debate this afternoon on the so-called cut, cap, and balance, the point I wish to make is this: We should not be considering a plan which does not put in specific language a balanced budget amendment but asks Members of the Senate to vote for a multiple choice test as to what the next amendment to the Constitution will look like. Secondly, we should carefully scrutinize every word of that amendment. Those who have say they are poorly drafted and have no place in the most important document in America. Third, let’s accept the responsibility to do what we were elected to do—to reduce spending, to bring this budget to balance, and to do it in a sensible and humane way. The notion we would somehow amend our Constitution and wait for three-fourths of the States to ratify it is, in my mind, not responsible.

I am going to oppose this. I am not going to oppose efforts to reduce our deficit, but I am going to oppose this notion that somehow a balanced budget amendment to the Constitution is going to be our salvation. As the old Pogo cartoon used to say: We have met the enemy and they are us.

We have to do this ourselves—Members of the Senate on both sides of the aisle.

I yield the floor and 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. SANDERS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. UDALL of New Mexico). Without objection, it is so ordered.

GANG OF 6 PROPOSAL

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, if there was ever a time in the modern history of America for the American people to become engaged in what is going on here in Washington, now is that time. Decisions are being made as we speak which will impact not only our generation but the lives of our children and our grandchildren for decades to come. I fear very much that the decisions being contemplated are not good decisions, are not fair decisions.

Right now, there is a lot of discussion about two things: No. 1, the importance of the United States not defaulting for the first time in our history on our debts—I think there is increased