

devastating cuts. I think very few people would have thought that possible. So I congratulate my Republican colleagues for their apparent victory. But this Senator is going to fight back. I was not elected to the Senate to make devastating cuts in Social Security, in Medicare, in Medicaid, in children's programs, while I lower tax rates for the wealthiest people in this country. That is not what I was elected to do, and I do not intend to do that.

So I hope the American people get engaged in this issue, stand, and demand that the Congress pass a fair and responsible deficit reduction program, not what we are talking about today.

With that, I yield the floor.

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.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

MILCON APPROPRIATIONS

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I come to the floor this afternoon to oppose the amendment offered by the Senator from Oklahoma which would undo decades of policies on how we treat veterans who are suffering from diseases associated with Agent Orange exposure. That violates the promise we have made to a generation of veterans. The legacy of Agent Orange exposure among Vietnam veterans is one of tragedy, roadblocks, neglect, pain, and then more roadblocks. It is the legacy of our military spraying millions of gallons of poisonous herbicide indiscriminately, without any consequences or without any repercussions.

At the time of the Vietnam war—and for far too long after it—the U.S. Government neglected to track Agent Orange exposures. Then, in the decades following the war, our government stonewalled veterans who developed horrible ailments of all kinds from those exposures.

To further compound the problem, for decades our government also failed to fund any research on Agent Orange and any other toxins that Vietnam veterans were exposed to. Those mistakes, those decades of neglect, have a cost. It is a cost to the veterans and their loved ones, a cost to the government that sent them to war, and a cost to all of us as Americans. It is a cost that, even in difficult budget times, even with our backs against the wall, we cannot walk away from.

I am not here to question any Senator's commitment to our veterans, but what I am here to do is to question the standard by which this amendment says they should be treated. This amendment that was offered says we should change the standard by which we have judged Agent Orange cases for two decades.

Currently, Vietnam veterans are presumed to be service-connected when the VA Secretary determines that a positive association exists between exposure to Agent Orange and a certain disease. One of the reasons Congress chose that mechanism is because it was impossible for these veterans to prove their exposure to Agent Orange caused their cancers or other diseases. These veterans were exposed decades ago. They don't know where exactly they were exposed or how much they inhaled. However, under the amendment of the Senator from Oklahoma, Vietnam veterans would be asked to now prove the impossible. They would be asked to prove they would never have gotten cancer or heart disease or any other disease or condition if not for Agent Orange.

Vietnam veterans who have diabetes or prostate cancer or lung cancer or blood-borne diseases would be denied care and benefits under this amendment. Not only would this be a new hurdle Vietnam veterans could never overcome, it would change the rules midstream. It would literally treat Vietnam veterans whose diseases have already been presumptively service-connected different than those whose diseases have not yet been positively associated with Agent Orange exposure.

I will not deny that compensation for exposure is a difficult issue and one that we continually have to look at. We have grappled with this issue in relation to Vietnam veterans and exposure to Agent Orange. Today we continue to deal with this issue as Iraq and Afghanistan veterans come home with illnesses potentially associated with their exposure to toxins released from burn pits or other environmental exposure.

Ultimately, we have to look at the facts with reason and compassion and weigh the years of our military's failure to track these exposures, the inevitable existence of uncertainty, and the word of our veterans. That is exactly what we have to do.

On the one hand, we have thousands of veterans who have come forward and believe their cancers and ailments were caused by an exposure to a known killer. We have studies that show veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange are more likely to have heart disease, cancer, or other conditions. We have the Institute of Medicine that has recommended giving veterans the benefit of the doubt, and we have the Secretary of Veterans Affairs who has decided that we must move forward to provide compensation to presumptively service-connected veterans exposed to Agent Orange for cancer and heart disease.

On the other hand, we may have a compelling fiscal case, but the Senator from Oklahoma hasn't presented one shred of evidence that Agent Orange does not cause heart disease, cancer, or any other condition. What has been presented is an amendment that asks

veterans to wait, wait, wait until there is more scientific evidence.

Well, these veterans have been waiting for 40 years. How much longer should they wait?

The Secretary of Veterans Affairs decided that the time for waiting was over. I ask that we respect and support this decision, and that we also remember that even in the midst of this whirlwind debt and deficit debate, we have made a promise to veterans, one that doesn't go away.

Vietnam veterans have paid enough for that war. They should not end up paying for our debt. It is us who owe them a debt.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alabama is recognized.

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that Senator HATCH and I be allowed to participate in a colloquy.

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

TAXING AND SPENDING

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, many of our good colleagues like to suggest our Nation has historic deficits because the American people are not taxed enough. Some claim the so-called Bush tax cuts are the culprit, but the numbers tell a different story. In fact, these tax cuts were fully implemented in 2003. Annual revenues have increased steadily from \$1.782 trillion to \$2.524 trillion in 2008, and they increase every year, for an increase of more than 40 percent. That is double the rate of inflation after the tax cuts took effect.

In fact, since the recession of 2008 and the weakest economic recovery in modern history, revenue has now declined. That makes sense. With high unemployment there are fewer taxpayers and, naturally, revenue declines.

Going forward, however, the CBO projects revenue as a share of the GDP will rise to 18.4 percentage points of GDP by 2021. That is assuming extension, not elimination, of the 2001 and 2003 tax reductions. Revenue is therefore projected to return to its historic 18.4 percent average.

It would seem, then, that the American people are already taxed enough to finance a government whose spending has grown wildly out of control. The real problem is, while revenue will return to its historic average, if nothing is done to slow spending, annual outlays will increase from \$3.7 trillion today to \$5.7 trillion by 2021, for an increase of more than 50 percent. As a share of GDP, spending will remain, on average, above 23 percent of GDP. That is nearly 3 percentage points above the historic average.

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, I could not agree more with the Senator's point on the real driver of our deficit and debt. We have this debt because government is spending too much. But this is not a matter of personal preference; this is an indisputable and empirically verifiable fact. The systemic