

ratings. We didn't talk about having a AAA rating because we were above even that. Our rating was so superior to anyone else's, the rating system didn't even really apply to the United States. Well, now, not only does it apply, but the danger is that we won't even qualify for the top rating.

Do you know what it is that would cause them to downgrade the debt of the United States? It is not a failure to raise the debt limit by August 2; it is the failure to address this fiscal imbalance, these massive, unsustainable deficits. That is what they have told us has to be corrected or else the downgrade follows, and a downgrade will be enormously problematic because it has all kinds of knock-on effects.

So we have heard about a lot of different ideas that have been floated, and I congratulate and commend everybody who has been involved in putting in a lot of effort. I don't agree with everything that everybody has talked about doing, but I think we have seen people from both parties make a good-faith effort to try to solve this problem one way or another. But the fact is there is only one proposal on the table that has passed either body, and there is only one proposal that actually solves our long-term fiscal challenge in the law that has already passed—the bill that has already been passed.

So my question now is, Will the President join us and put our government on a path to a balanced budget? We don't expect to get there overnight. By the way, the various levels of cuts and spending and the exact terms of the balanced budget amendment naturally would be subject to discussion. But will the President join us in this effort to restore fiscal sanity and give us the basis for strong economic growth? That is the question, and that is the opportunity for the President.

Now, I know the President has been dismissive of the idea of balancing our budget, but I certainly hope he is not so opposed to balancing our budget that he would reject the debt limit increase that he has said we desperately need. There is an opportunity here to solve two problems at once—to solve this problem over the looming date of August 2 by which he has said we absolutely must raise the debt limit, but the more important opportunity is to put our house in fiscal order.

The House took a very important step in that direction. The Senate will have a vote later this week. I hope my colleagues in the Senate will embrace this opportunity and the President will join us and will put our Federal Government on a path to balance.

With that, I yield the floor.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. HAGAN). Morning business is closed. The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. MERKLEY. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business for 5 minutes.

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

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION AND VETERANS AFFAIRS AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2012—Continued

Mr. MERKLEY. Madam President, I rise to address amendment No. 570, offered by Senator WYDEN, regarding closure of the Umatilla Chemical Depot. It is an amendment on which I am proud to partner with him.

This is a very important issue to my home State of Oregon. We have a situation where 20 years of planning have gone forward to arrange for the final transition of this chemical depot based on the recommendations of the Base Closure and Realignment Commission. Indeed, the BRAC Commission, as it is known, noted:

On completion of the chemical demilitarization mission in accordance with treaty obligations, close Umatilla Chemical Depot, Oregon.

This was language that was specifically done to recognize that the chemical depot had to complete its work dismantling the chemical weapons stored there according to the Chemical Weapons Convention Treaty. That treaty had a deadline of April 29, 2012, and thus it wasn't clear that the work would be done within the 6 years outlined for most of the BRAC's work. So they changed the language from "close the Umatilla Chemical Depot" to "on completion of the chemical demilitarization mission in accordance with treaty obligations."

So since this has been a discussion for so long, with the community working so hard with so many stakeholders in order to put the plans together to transition this base to a productive civilian role, it came as a complete shock recently when the community was notified by the Army that, despite the specific language that accommodated the treaty deadline of April 2012, they were going to rule that the transfer under the BRAC legislation could not be completed because it was an exception—even an exception written into the law—to the initial 6 years.

It was quite a shock because a local reuse authority has been formed and has been working hard with representatives from all local stakeholders to make sure this base is transferred in a way that creates the best possible economy and best use of this land. It has been a complicated task. It has been an earnest effort.

This is not the time for the Army to change the rules, digging up a clause and misapplying that clause, ignoring the exception written into the law, and claiming that this work done over all this time doesn't matter.

That is why I am so delighted to join with Senator WYDEN in putting a clarification into statute that says, yes, what the original legislation said with an April 2012 deadline recognizing our treaty obligations must be honored and

the BRAC process must be honored for the best use of this land in the community.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota.

Mr. JOHNSON of South Dakota. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to return to morning business.

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

THE RYAN PLAN

Mr. JOHNSON of South Dakota. Madam President, I quote former Reagan Economic Adviser Bartlett on the House Republican plan.

Distributionally, the Ryan plan is a monstrosity. The rich would receive huge tax cuts while the social safety net would be shredded to pay for them. Even as an opening bid to begin budget negotiations with the Democrats, the Ryan plan cannot be taken seriously. It is less of a wish list than a fairy tale, utterly disconnected from the real world, backed up by make-believe numbers and unreasonable assumptions. Ryan's plan isn't even an act of courage. It is just pandering to the Tea Party. A real act of courage would have been for him to admit, as all serious budget analysts know, that revenues will have to rise well above 19 percent of GDP to stabilize the debt.

Former Reagan administration economic adviser Bruce Bartlett from Capital Gains and Games Blog, "Imbalanced Budget."

I would clarify the impact of the balanced budget proposal. He has called it sheer idiocy. That comes from the former Reagan economic adviser.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION AND VETERANS AFFAIRS AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2012—Continued

AMENDMENT NO. 575

Ms. AYOTTE. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to set aside the pending amendment and call up my amendment No. 575, which is at the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The clerk will report.

The assistant bill clerk read as follows:

The Senator from New Hampshire [Ms. AYOTTE] proposes an amendment numbered 575.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. MCCAIN. I ask unanimous consent that further reading of the amendment be dispensed with.

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

The amendment is as follows: