

driving things within the House Republican Party.

Finally, the cut, cap, and kill Medicare bill would hold the debt limit hostage to an extremist constitutional amendment that has been widely criticized, even by many responsible voices on the right. If this dangerous constitutional amendment were to pass, the Congress of the United States would be unable to respond to an economic or national security emergency without steep supermajority votes, giving even more leverage to small extremist factions in Congress, as if it is not clear that is already not too much of a problem.

As dangerous, this constitutional amendment—this is hard to believe—this constitutional amendment would make it easier to cut Medicare and Social Security benefits than to take away tax subsidies from Big Oil, from offshoring corporations, and from billionaires. It would make it easier, as a matter of law, to cut Social Security and Medicare benefits than it would be to go after these special interest corporate tax loopholes and the gimmicks that allow billionaires to pay lower tax rates than truck drivers in this country.

It builds a constitutional preference for corporate and special interest loopholes into our Constitution, a Constitution renowned around the world for its commitment to equality. Into this great document that has shown the light of equality around the world, we would build a preference for corporate special interests over working people and the retirements they count on.

Constitutional amendments traditionally move this country forward. This would be a colossal step back. In summary, adding all those different features of the cut, cap and kill Medicare bill together, the Republicans in the House would require such severe spending cuts that the only way to achieve them—the only way to achieve them—would be to, in fact, get rid of Medicare as we know it and slash Social Security benefits for seniors.

It would hurt those who depend on government the most, while giving special protection to special interests and corporations with tax loopholes and subsidies that permit them to pay lower tax rates than middle-class families—in some cases, with some of our most profitable corporations—no taxes at all. That is what gets protected.

House Republicans know their cut, cap and kill Medicare plan has zero chance of passing the Senate. It is not going to happen—not now, not ever. It has already drawn a veto threat from President Obama. Nevertheless, as this deadline looms closer and closer, with those terrible consequences portending, the House Republican extremists have forced this piece of political theater while ignoring serious and constructive proposals for deficit reduction such as Budget Committee chairman KENT CONRAD's plan, which would reduce

deficits by \$4 trillion, more than the House's budget plan. We actually do better at solving the deficit than they do. But we do it with every dollar in spending cuts matched by a dollar in new revenue from closing tax loopholes and tax gimmicks. This plan would stabilize the budget and would reassure the financial markets, and would do so without cutting Social Security and Medicare benefits on which our seniors rely and which all working Americans are counting on. It is one of the basic freedoms we have as Americans—to know that that is waiting for us.

I was proud to introduce a resolution earlier this month which would express the sense of the Senate that "any agreement to reduce the budget deficit should not include cuts to Social Security benefits or Medicare benefits." I am grateful to Senators BLUMENTHAL, SHERROD BROWN, MERKLEY, FRANKEN, BOXER, and GILLIBRAND who have joined with me on the resolution, and I invite all of my colleagues to do the same.

The Conrad budget proves that we need not attack Medicare and Social Security to deal with our deficit. His budget is living proof that there is no reason to attack Medicare and Social Security to get through our deficit situation. That attack on Medicare and Social Security is a willful and unnecessary act by the Republicans.

Well, Rhode Islanders, in increasing numbers, have been writing to me urging me to continue fighting to preserve these retirement programs, to preserve this infrastructure of American freedom. Time is running short, and Americans are counting on their elected representatives to do the right thing. It is time to do the right thing.

Let me close by reading a piece from an editorial in *The Economist* magazine. *The Economist* is a very conservative publication, and it is very much in favor of free markets. I would say, by and large, it is a Republican journal. Here is what *The Economist* said about the situation we are in now:

The sticking point is not on the spending side. It is because the vast majority of Republicans, driven on by the wilder eyed members of their party and the cacophony of conservative media, are clinging to the position that not a single cent of deficit reduction must come from a higher tax take. This is economically illiterate and disgracefully cynical . . . even Ronald Reagan raised taxes when he needed to do so. And the closer you look, the more unprincipled the Republicans look. Earlier this year, House Republicans produced a report noting that an 85 percent to 15 percent split between spending cuts and tax rises was the average for successful fiscal consolidations, according to historical evidence. The White House is offering an 83 percent to 17 percent split (hardly a huge distance) and a promise that none of the revenue increase will come from higher marginal rates, only from eliminating loopholes. If the Republicans were real tax reformers, they would seize this offer. Both parties have in recent months been guilty of fiscal recklessness. Right now, though, the blame falls clearly on the Republicans. Independent voters should take note.

So it is not just Democratic Senators coming to the floor to point out that

the crisis we are at is an unnecessary one. It is a manufactured crisis, a crisis driven by extremism, and it is a crisis that threatens the survival of Medicare and Social Security—two cornerstone programs in the economic security and in the freedom of ordinary Americans.

I yield the floor.

#### MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

#### TRIBUTE TO ELAINE HAYS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I rise today to honor Mrs. Elaine Hays, whose story has been chosen to be recorded as part of the London, KY "Living Treasures" project.

Born in Elkhorn City, KY, on March 19, 1924, Mrs. Hays has lived in and been a part of the Kentucky community her entire life, and has called London home since 1949. She is the granddaughter of Austrian and German immigrants, and even has one ancestor who was on the McCoy side of the famous Hatfield-McCoy feud. Growing up in the Floyd County community of Betsy Layne, Mrs. Hays saw firsthand the development of the coal mining industry, as well as the devastating effects of the Great Depression.

After receiving her degree in home economics from Western Kentucky University, Mrs. Hays, sister to three war veterans, opened and subsequently ran a cannery at the Belfry High School in Betsy Layne where she was already working as a home economics teacher. Mrs. Hays wanted to help both the Nation and the families of Betsy Layne during the war by preserving food.

Mrs. Hays married her husband Earl in 1947 and taught alongside him at Belfry High until 1949. After an extensive interview process, The Hayses were hired by Sue Bennett College as teachers and program developers. Mr. Hays was to set up and run the college's farm which supplied food for the college dining hall, while Mrs. Hays was to develop a home economics program. In later years, Mrs. Hays became a "first lady" of sorts when Earl was chosen to become president of the college, a position he filled from 1958 to 1985. In between teaching and raising her two sons, Jim and Lon, Mrs. Hays still found the time to entertain students and other guests of the college. The eventual closure of Sue Bennett College was a somber day for Mrs. Hays, and her family alike, but its influence on their lives has been unforgettable.

Mrs. Hays retired in 1998 after working in the education field for 55 years.