of a wife and seven children—only recently have they had the belief that he is alive.

We have brought this to all levels of our government. This Senator, who represents the State Christine Levinson lives in, went to the Iranian Ambassador at the United Nations years ago trying to intervene. Our Secretary of State has, in fact, pushed this very hard.

Why am I saying all this? Because on the occasion of the release of the hikers by the Iranian Government, for whatever compassion they have shown—the government bringing together disparate parties that had their own little power centers in Iran—whatever success they had in bringing that together and releasing those hikers back to their loved ones, we pray that same decisionmaking apparatus in Tehran would now activate the process to bring Bob Levinson home to his wife and seven children.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from West Virginia.

Mr. MANCHIN. Mr. President, first of all, I say to my good friend from Florida, I thank him so much for the compassion he has. I appreciate very much him bringing this issue to our light and to the attention of all of us, and maybe we can help. I thank the Senator.

To my good friend, the Senator from Louisiana, I think what she speaks about is us identifying who we are as Americans and the way we have taken care of each other. I do not know of any State that has not had to depend on FEMA for help—and not just the States she showed where ''hurricane alley'' is and where the tornadoes and hurricanes have hit, but basically all of us have had to depend on FEMA for assistance. So I think what she brings to light is the fairness we identify with as Americans and to do what we have always done: to take care of each other. I, for one, have said we need to rebuild America; we need to take care of Americans first.

FISCAL CHOICES

Mr. MANCHIN. Mr. President, I rise today to speak about the difficult fiscal choices we, as Members of Congress, must soon make and the deficit-cutting proposals that President Obama has recently made.

As we discuss these fiscal choices, and as we face our exploding debts and deficits, it is clear our Nation is truly at a crossroads. A nation that was built on the strength of our people's optimism must struggle to overcome a loss of confidence—a loss of confidence that comes from an economy that has struggled for far too long, a loss of confidence that comes from watching debt and deficits explode, a loss of confidence that comes from watching Republicans and Democrats engage in a fruitless partisan fight.

The American people worry about how to get their families out of debt and their financial house in order. They worry about finding or keeping a job. They worry about how they are going to pay the rent, how they are going to take care of their children, how they are going to keep clothes on their backs, and how, maybe, they can buy them a Christmas present.

Once again, instead of all of us coming together to do what is right for the Nation and lighten their worries, congressional Republicans and Democrats alike, and the President, are again gearing up for a fight about politics, even as our Nation's fiscal and economic picture gets worse every minute.

Today, we yet again find ourselves on the brink, and I cannot begin to explain why to the American people. This summer, they watched us go through this exercise—the Senate, the House, and the President—and then we agreed on spending cuts to keep the government working. Where I come from—the same as the Presiding Officer from the great State of Minnesota—your word is your bond, and an agreement is an agreement, and it is one that should be kept. It is one we negotiated. It should not be changed in midstream. I am committed to passing a clean CR to keep our government working until the supercommittee we all are supporting comes up with the recommendations to reduce the deficit.

In the midst of yet another disagreement over whether to keep the government running, the people of West Virginia and the American people are demanding we put our partisan differences aside and work together in the best interests of this country. They are pleading for us to quit fighting and worrying about the next election and start worrying about the next generation.

With our Nation facing a death spiral of debt, now is the time that each of us should be zeroing in on credible, commonsense solutions that have truly bipartisan support.

After carefully reviewing the President's recommendations to the so-called supercommittee, I believe they fall short of what this country needs to put our fiscal house in order. President Obama's deficit recommendations not only fall short of his stated $4.4 trillion goal, but could, according to an analysis done by the Center for Responsible Federal Budget, have the perverse effect of adding as much as $1.9 trillion to our Nation's debt.

I am also greatly concerned about rehashing unproductive recommendations such as raising tax rates on small businesses in a recession and budget gimmicks such as the notion that taxpayers will somehow ''save'' $1.1 trillion from not fighting wars in Afghanistan and Iraq—and I believe we should not be there anyway.

I have said this: On my best day, I cannot sell that to the people of West Virginia, nor should we try to sell it to the American people.

That is not to say that the President's proposal is all bad. There is some good stuff in there. I have long said our tax system needs to be more fair and balanced and that billionaires such as Mr. Buffett should pay their fair share. I appreciate the concept of the Buffett rule and look forward to seeing more details. And I agree that one of the best investments we all could make is in the infrastructure of this great country.

But as they stand right now, President Obama's proposals are too skewed to appeal to both sides of the aisle. So we see what we see happening again. If we are being serious about addressing our debt and deficits, neither Republicans nor Democrats can propose partisan proposals and then pretend they are credible. We cannot do that any longer. The American people deserve better, and I also know we can do a lot better.

In my short time in Congress, I have seen only one plan that has earned support from Members of both parties. In fact, the President's own bipartisan deficit commission—the Bowles-Simpson group—is the best example of what can be accomplished if we put politics aside and do what is right for our Nation. While no one, including me, will agree with everything in the Bowles-Simpson approach, it at least offered a commonsense, bipartisan template that would cut spending, restore tax fairness, and would help restore fiscal sanity to our Nation.

To date, it is the only plan that has offered a framework that has had bipartisan support from the beginning, and still has it now. But instead of this approach, there are many people on both sides of the aisle who have chosen a path that all but guarantees that Republicans and Democrats will continue to fight over how to solve our fiscal problems, instead of seeking common ground and commonsense solutions. For the sake of our Nation, for our families, we cannot let this happen. We must act, and we must act together.

Looking ahead to the vigorous debates of the fall, my hope is the deficit supercommittee will seize the moment and seek common ground to develop a plan that puts our Nation on the right path to fiscal accountability. Common sense, to me, is that you would start with a plan that already has bipartisan support because it will take both sides of the aisle to fix this problem.

I urge them and the President to look beyond partisan politics and do what is right for this country. I continue to urge the committee to look past their legal mandate of $1.5 trillion in savings and revenue and, instead, look for reforms that will create much broader fairness in our system that will lead to deficit reductions of at least $4 trillion.

I, for one, will work with the Senate Democrats and Republicans who are committed to develop a commonsense debt fix that responsibly reduces spending; makes our tax system more fair, cuts waste, fraud, and abuse, and

makes sure we protect critical programs such as Social Security and Medicare.

Mr. President, I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. UDALL of New Mexico. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mr. UDALL of New Mexico. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

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

ISRAEL AND THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE

Mr. UDALL of New Mexico. Mr. President, this week President Obama stood beside Israel and the cause of peace when he addressed the United Nations General Assembly. I rise today to also stand beside our ally and friend, Israel, and the goal of its two-state solution. I firmly believe that only a two-state solution can lead to a lasting peace between Israel and the Palestinian people.

Unfortunately, we are heading down a path that will not lead to a lasting peace. Involvement by the U.N. General Assembly will not lead to a solution but will act as a disruptive force. I urge the parties to use the time in New York to begin a constructive dialog toward agreement on final status issues. If peace is to be achievable, then we must break through the cycle of failure that has too often plagued negotiations. U.N. action will not resolve the issues acting as a roadblock to peace.

It is important also to note, as the President stated, that peace will not come until each side ''learns to stand in each other's shoes.'' Each party must realize the other's aspirations, because their futures are intricately intertwined. No action at the United Nations can remove or change what is an essential fact. For Israel, the two-state solution will enable its people to enjoy a secure and peaceful future. For the Palestinians, the goal of nationhood can only occur through negotiations with Israel.

I believe the President is making a good-faith attempt to realize and understand the aspirations of each party, while standing firm with our friends. The central reality is this: We will only recognize a Palestinian state as part of an agreement that leads to a lasting peace. This is in the best interests of Israel, the Palestinian people, the United States, and the international community.

There is no time like the present to restart the hard work needed to achieve a lasting peace. Former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert recently pressed on the urgent need to return to negotiations in an op-ed in the New York Times. I ask unanimous consent that this op-ed be printed in the RECORD at the end of my remarks.

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

(See exhibit 1.)

Mr. UDALL of New Mexico. While I don't agree with everything the Prime Minister wrote, I do believe he was especially correct about one point:

> I truly believe that a two-state solution is the only way to ensure a more stable Middle East and to grant Israel the security and well-being it desires. As tensions grow, I cannot but feel that we in the region are on the verge of missing an opportunity—one that we cannot afford to miss.

He concludes in his piece:

> Now is the time. There will be no better one. I hope that Mr. Netanyahu and Mr. Abbas will meet the challenge.

I also hope that today both parties sit down in New York and avoid the disruption that will be caused by a vote in the United Nations.

EXHIBIT 1

PEACE NOW, OR NEVER

(By Ehud Olmert)

JERUSALEM.—As the United Nations General Assembly opens this year, I feel uneasy. An unnecessary diplomatic clash between Israel and the Palestinians is taking shape in New York, and it will be harmful to Israel and to the future of the Middle East.

I know that things could and should have been different.

I truly believe that a two-state solution is the only way to ensure a more stable Middle Est and to grant Israel the security and well-being it desires. As tensions grow, I cannot but feel that we in the region are on the verge of missing an opportunity—one that we cannot afford to miss.

The Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas, plans to make a unilateral bid for recognition of a Palestinian state at the United Nations on Friday. He has the right to do so, and the vast majority of countries in the General Assembly support his move. But this is not the wisest step Mr. Abbas can take.

The Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, has declared publicly that he believes in the two-state solution, but he is expending all of his political effort to block Mr. Abbas's bid for statehood by rallying domestic support and appealing to other countries. This is not the wisest step Mr. Netanyahu can take.

In the worst-case scenario, chaos and violence could erupt, making the possibility of an agreement even more distant, if not impossible. If that happens, peace will definitely not be the outcome.

The parameters of a peace deal are well known and they have already been put on the table. I put them there in September 2008 when I presented a far-reaching offer to Mr. Abbas.

According to my offer, the territorial dispute would be solved by establishing a Palestinian state on territory equivalent in size to the pre-1967 West Bank and Gaza Strip with mutually agreed-upon land swaps that take into account the new realities on the ground.

The city of Jerusalem would be shared. Its Jewish areas would be the capital of Israel and its Arab neighborhoods would become the Palestinian capital. Neither side would declare sovereignty over the city's holy places; they wouldn't be administered jointly with the United States.

The Palestinian refugee problem would be addressed within the frame-work of the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative. The new Palestinian state would become the home of all the Palestinian refugees just as the state of Israel is the homeland of the Jewish people. Israel would, however, be prepared to absorb a small number of refugees on humanitarian grounds.

Because ensuring Israel's security is vital to the implementation of any agreement, the Palestinian state would be de-militarized and it would not form military alliances with other nations. Both states would cooperate to fight terrorism and violence.

These parameters were never formally rejected by Mr. Abbas, and they should be put on the table again today. Both Mr. Abbas and Mr. Netanyahu must then make brave and difficult decisions.

We Israelis simply do not have the luxury of spending more time postponing a solution. A further delay will only help extremists on both sides who seek to sabotage any prospect of a peaceful, negotiated two-state solution.

Moreover, the Arab Spring has changed the Middle East, and unpredictable developments in the region, such as the recent attack on Israel's embassy in Cairo, could easily explode into wide-spread chaos. It is therefore in Israel's strategic interest to cement existing peace agreements with its neighbors, Egypt and Jordan.

In addition, Israel must make every effort to defuse tensions with Turkey as soon as possible. Turkey is not an enemy of Israel. I have worked closely with the Turkish prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan. In spite of his recent statements and actions, I believe that he understands the importance of relations with Israel. Mr. Erdogan and Mr. Netanyahu must work to end this crisis immediately for the benefit of both countries and the stability of the region.

In Israel, we are sorry for the loss of life of Turkish citizens in May 2010, when Israel confronted a provocative flotilla of ships bound for Gaza. I am sure that the proper way to express these sentiments to the Turkish government and the Turkish people can be found.

The time for true leadership has come. Leadership is tested not by one's capacity to survive politically but by the ability to make tough decisions in trying times.

When I addressed international forums as prime minister, the Israeli people expected me to present bold political initiatives that would bring peace—not arguments outlining why achieving peace now is not possible. Today, such an initiative is more necessary than ever to prove to the world that Israel is a peace-seeking country.

The window of opportunity is limited. Israel will not always find itself sitting across the table from Palestinian leaders like Mr. Abbas and the prime minister, Salam Fayyad, who object to terrorism and want peace. Indeed, future Palestinian leaders might abandon the idea of two states and seek a one-state solution, making reconciliation impossible.

Now is the time. There will be no better one. I hope that Mr. Netanyahu and Mr. Abbas will meet the challenge.

Mr. UDALL of New Mexico. With that, 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.

Mr. UDALL of New Mexico. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.