

would be immoral, it would be wrong for the supercommittee to cut Medicare and to cut Medicaid.

I hope the supercommittee does what the American people have said very loudly and clearly—they have said it in demonstrations, they have said it in polls, they have said it in communications with their Members in the House and the Senate—we have an opportunity to make significant progress in terms of deficit reduction, but that deficit reduction should not take place on the backs of the elderly, the children, the sick, and the poor. Those populations, the most vulnerable people in this country, are hurting enough right now.

I hope the supercommittee has the courage to do what is right. I hope they have the courage to do what the American people want them to do.

I yield the floor and note the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. FRANKEN). The clerk will call the roll. The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. 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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.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. WHITEHOUSE. I ask that I be allowed to speak for up to 15 minutes.

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

RIGGED ECONOMICS

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, we are going through one of the most difficult and painful periods in American history, and millions of Americans are wondering what is happening to our country. Behind the curtain of spin, propaganda, and political attacks, here is what I believe is happening.

The rules of the economic game in this country are increasingly being rigged to provide unfair advantage to the wealthy and well-connected and to take unfair advantage of regular folks and families. America has always promised a straight deal, and that straight deal, for many Americans, is getting harder and harder to find.

Let me say I am relentlessly proud to be an American. I grew up in the foreign service of this country, surrounded by families who put public service and pride in this country ahead of their comfort, their convenience, even their safety and their family's safety. I am absolutely convinced of American exceptionalism. I have seen it, and I have lived it.

That is why I am so upset to see our country in the shape it is in today. Our Founding Fathers changed the world when they set in place our finely balanced system of government, illuminated by the clear and guaranteed rights of the American people. We are squandering that inheritance. Our government is not working, our rights are

being undermined, and it is the American people who are paying the price. They are paying the price because too often they are not getting a straight deal anymore.

Let's look at some of the places where the deal is rigged, where special interest gets special deals, and where the regular American family doesn't get a straight deal. Big multistate banks are allowed to charge middle-class families 30 percent credit card interest rates that are likely illegal under the State laws where that family lives. Senators in this Chamber who are ardent States rights federalists in every other circumstance have no complaint when their State law is overruled and overborne by the big banks. Students with college loans—who now carry \$1 trillion of debt—and families with home mortgages are denied the privileges every corporate borrower gets to seek, bankruptcy protection against their debt when they are in over their heads.

Our individual tax system allows the wealthiest and highest income Americans to pay lower tax rates than middle-class wage earners pay or even hide their income in offshore tax havens and pay no tax at all. The corporate tax system allows international corporations to route their profits through foreign countries and through tax shelters to pay little or no tax in this country.

When you drill down to cases, GE, General Electric, on billions of dollars in profit, paid little or no Federal income tax. When you pull up to look system-wide, even though corporations are richer than ever, American people now contribute \$5 for every \$1 corporations contribute to sustaining our country's revenues. It used to be 1 to 1. For every \$1 corporations contributed, the American people contributed \$1. There was an even sharing of our Nation's revenue needs. But for 75 years now it has been steadily sliding, and now it is 5 to 1 against ordinary Americans and in favor of corporations.

The wealthy elite who make their fortunes in the marketplace don't protect and honor the marketplace. They try to rig the game, even when it puts the marketplace itself at risk. When that requires everybody else to come to their rescue, they show no shame and little gratitude and go right back to work gaming the system. Those who have become CEOs extract from their company's ridiculous amounts of compensation. CEO pay is up in my lifetime from 40 times the average wage of the employee to 400 times the average wage. These CEOs even extract princely compensation when they fail.

The big polluters have one party denying science entirely, denying the plain evidence of carbon pollution all around us and spinning the phony theory that the cost of controlling pollution is a burden on the economy when it is actually a huge net gain for our country. A party that used to proudly carry the banner of conservation and environmental protection is now re-

duced to serving corporate spin masters with phony fabrications, and it is the middle-class families who pay the price.

The appointees of one party on the Supreme Court, by a bare 5-to-4 majority, are willing to overturn precedent and flout the rules of judicial decision-making to decrease something novel and remarkable: that corporations are people and money is speech and, therefore, our precious constitutional rights to free speech, as American people, give corporations a right to spend as much money as they please, even anonymously, in American elections.

International corporations with no loyalty to any flag or nation but with virtually unlimited money may now drown out the voices of regular people, regular families in our American democracy. CEOs get to use the corporate megaphone amplified by the corporate treasury to drown out their employees' voices. Just one big corporation with just 5 percent of one-quarter's profits could match the entire political spending of both Presidential campaigns in the last election.

Our Constitution and Bill of Rights established the jury not once but three separate times as an important institution of freedom in our system of democracy. DeTocqueville—one of the great historians and commentators on the American system of government—called the American jury “one of the forms of the sovereignty of the people.” Big corporations go to court all the time and fight it out before a jury when they want to. Yet over and over again, a middle-class family, in contracts, cannot negotiate or control, in fine print they probably never even read, their credit card company, their cell phone company, the companies they do business with, quietly take away their right to go against them before an American jury. Over and over again those same Supreme Court Justices who decided a corporation was a person have let them down. They have to go, instead, to something called arbitration instead of a constitutional American jury.

To give an idea of how arbitration works, for a long time the biggest arbitration company in the country was a racket rigged to rule against the consumer. It had to be shut down by legal actions by our State attorneys general. Add it all up, all those different areas that I mentioned, and there have been a lot of changes since my childhood.

There are a lot of changes in how our country runs, and it is all in the same direction—special deals and special tax rates and special rules that help big corporations and people who are as wealthy as big corporations and leave out regular people who don't have masses of money, money, money; rules that allow corporations to intrude into our public discourse in this democracy and drown out people's voices through mighty corporate megaphones amplified by money, money, money; lies and nonsense cooked up in corporate spin

factories being treated as fact obtain- ing acceptability by how often the lies are repeated thanks to money, money, money.

Under all of that money, what is drowning is the sense we are all in this together as Americans. One of the things America actually stands for in this world is that we are fair with each other. We get a straight deal, and we give each other a straight deal. That is one of the ways we, as Americans, set an example in this world, an example of being fair. There are plenty of coun- tries in the world whose internal polit- ical and economic systems amount to a racket, a racket rigged for the benefit of the rich and powerful where farmers and workers and ordinary families get screwed and the wealthy skim all the cream. Some of these countries are so bad we call them kleptocracies. The world is full of that.

It has been the pride and joy of America that we are not like that. It has been our message to the world that it doesn't have to be like that. But now it is looking more and more like we ac- tually are becoming just like that.

What can we do about it? What can we do to make sure Americans are get- ting a straight deal in all of this? I pro- pose these actions: No. 1, big banks should have to follow the State laws just like local banks do and just like you and I do. No more going to South Dakota and marketing from their cred- it cards 30 percent interest rates that violate the laws of the home State.

No. 2, if big corporations can restruc- ture all their debts in bankruptcy court, so should students and families be able to. No second-class citizenship for those who borrowed college loans and home mortgages.

No. 3, amend the Constitution to make it clear that corporations are not people—never were, never could be. The Good Lord just did not make it that way. We need to make it crystal clear that corporations can't spend money in American elections anonymously or through phony shell organizations. If big oil wants to influence American elections, Americans should know it is big oil.

No. 4: Straighten out our tax systems and, until we do, put in a minimum tax for ultra-high income earners that is at least at the rate that ordinary Amer- ican taxpaying families pay. While we are at it, put in a minimum corporate tax rate that is at least half of what average corporations pay. No corpora- tion that is making millions or billions of dollars should get away with paying nothing in income tax.

No. 5: Shut down the offshore tax hav- ens and charge companies a CEO pay surtax on CEO compensation that is more than 100 times their average worker's compensation.

No. 6: Make polluters pay the actual costs of their pollution. Why should a polluting company be able to push onto all of the rest of us the costs of their pollution? Why should American fam- ilies bear that polluting corporation's

costs? Economics tells us that should be part of the company's cost of doing business.

No. 7: No more corporate tax deduc- tions for offshoring American jobs, and no more favoring of offshore corporate income derived from what used to be American jobs.

No. 8: Take out of those take-it-or- leave-it consumer contracts the provi- sions that take away in the fine print the American right to go before an American jury, as the Constitution and Bill of Rights promises whenever a cit- izen has a grievance or has been harmed.

None of these eight things I have mentioned asks anything of anyone that isn't fair, and most of them sim- ply ask that ordinary Americans get the same deal, or at least no worse of a deal, than special Americans get and big corporations get. This all does no more than put people on the same level, or at least under the same rules, as the rich and powerful.

When someone is getting a better deal than you because of who they are, you are not getting a straight deal. When someone is taking advantage of you because you are small and easy to take advantage of, you are not getting a straight deal. When the rules of the game are rigged to help the winners win and to make you a loser, you are not getting a straight deal. It is time we started giving the people of Amer- ica a straight deal around here.

I thank the Chair. I yield the floor and note the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. HAGAN). Without objection, it is so or- dered.

TRIBUTE TO MR. DELMER GROSS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, I rise today to pay tribute to an out- standing Kentuckian who dedicated his life to serving the children of Laurel County. Mr. Delmer Gross was a bus driver for the Laurel County Board of Education for 39 years and cherishes his memories driving kids to and from school—many of his former students are his good friends still to this day. In his spare time, Delmer serves as the pastor at London Community Church, a role he has enjoyed for almost 43 years.

Delmer started driving a school bus in 1969 when he was only 21 years old. He spent 5 years driving a double route as his first assignment. Each morning he would start by busing students in grades 1 through 12 to Swiss Colony. Then he would go to Mitchell Creek, lo- cated west of Interstate 75, and pick up elementary school students, only to re- turn them to Swiss Colony via the road that is now Ky. 1956.

His second route took him all the way down to Rockcastle River and was much more dangerous because of the truck traffic. "We didn't have a four- lane road then," Delmer recalls. "There were a lot of crooked places where I had to pick up kids on the op- posite side of a curve. I've had trucks slide at me sideways. A couple of times it was quite frightening." Delmer drove this route for almost 24 years before he began driving a town route with spe- cial-needs students in 1997.

One time, Delmer was driving on Ky. 1956 through freezing rain and snow and made a stop just under the crest of a hill. Two girls got off the bus just be- fore a car came over the hill and barely stopped in time. Unfortunately, a sec- ond car came along and was unable to stop. It crashed into the back of the first, sending the car spinning into a driveway. The second car bounced into Delmer's lane as a result of the crash and hit the bus head-on, clipping one of the girls in the knee. Delmer went straight home, got in his car, and drove over to the little girl's house to help her father take her to the hospital. Thankfully, she walked away with only minor injuries.

Delmer deeply cherishes the count- less memories that he made with the students he shuttled throughout his three-decade-long career, and he rarely had any disciplinary issues with any of the children. "I had a good relationship with almost all of the students I hauled," Delmer said.

Madam President, Mr. Delmer Gross's dedication to his job and the safety of his students is admirable. I commend him for his 39 years of excel- lent service to the children of Laurel County schools. Delmer's career serves as an inspiration to the people of our great Commonwealth and exemplifies the true spirit of Kentucky. The Laurel County-area Sentinel Echo published an article in the spring of this year to honor Mr. Delmer Gross's achieve- ments. I ask unanimous consent that the full article be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the article was ordered to be printed in the RECORD as follows:

[From the Sentinel Echo, Spring 2011]
DRIVING A BUS IS NO LAUGHING MATTER
(BY CAROL MILLS)

Delmer Gross loved being a bus driver for the Laurel County Board of Education for 39 years, but he saw the behavior of students getting worse over the years.

"The last 15 years the students have been getting progressively worse," he said. "Less respect for adults, less respect for authority. You had several that were pushing their boundaries. I see the attitudes of children, the discipline and behavior is a much greater problem than it was 20 years ago. It's becom- ing a problem in all public places. Kids don't have parents who really discipline them. As adults they have major problems with soci- ety. They weren't taught respect, weren't forced to respect and it's showing."

Gross said the Bible teaches "to spare the rod we hate our child." "I don't think we get much smarter than the man who said that," he said. "In his day he was the wisest man