

This is the kind of approach we should be taking in the Senate, putting aside these great big partisan bills that Democrats know have bipartisan opposition and focusing on smaller proposals that can actually pass. On their own, these bills will not solve the jobs crisis. Frankly, no piece of legislation can, large or small—but they will help, and they make it easier for businesses to start hiring.

They will show the American people something they do not believe we do enough of around here; that is, to work together on their behalf. This is how divided government works, through real cooperation and a search for common ground and solutions. This is what Republicans on the joint committee have been trying to do for the past several weeks. It is what House Republicans have been doing all year.

I say let's take up these bills and pass them and then send them on down to the President for signature. The administration supports many of these House-passed bills. Democrats in the House strongly support many of them and Republicans support them overwhelmingly. So let's do it. Let's build on the momentum we have from last week after passing the 3-percent withholding and the veterans bill, and let's show the American people we have hit upon a formula for legislative success around here.

I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 11 a.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with the time equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees, with the majority controlling the first half and the Republicans controlling the final half.

The Senator from Maryland.

CHAINED CPI

Ms. MIKULSKI. Madam President, I wish to address one of the most important issues facing the supercommittee; that is: Where does Social Security fit into their plans? The Chair knows because she is very close to the people of New Hampshire, she knows all over her great State, and mine in Maryland, people are getting ready for Thanksgiving. As they get ready, they first of all give gratitude for living in the United States of America, the land of the free and the brave. But they are also wondering what kind of country are we living in right now because the Chair and I know they are worried about paying their bills. As they get

ready for their holiday dinner and the family gathering and all the wonderful traditions that go into this very special holiday they are saying: Where are we? Have we lost our way? Are we so mired in partisanship we cannot seem to find a path forward?

They think we are the turkeys. They want us to stuff it. They want us to get on and start worrying about the table, worry about their kitchen table, and bring everybody to the table here and begin to solve national problems and to do it in a way that brings the country together. What do they want us to do? While maybe at the kitchen table the children will argue over who gets the wishbone, they want us to have backbone to make the tough decisions that these times call for but not to be tough on one another.

As I think about this, I think about Social Security. We say everything should be on the table. I think everything should be on the table that caused our deficit. I think everything should be on the table that caused our debt. Social Security did not cause our debt. Social Security did not cause our deficit. Do we need to take a look at Social Security to ensure its safety and solvency for the rest of the century—or certainly well beyond 2050 or 2070? Absolutely. But I say this: While the supercommittee is charged with looking at a more frugal government, we must maintain the social contract. The social contract in the United States of America is the contract that the U.S. Government made with its people. It said, if a person went by the rules and they paid their dues, *à la* the payroll tax, there will be a benefit for them. It will be a defined benefit. It is called Social Security. It will be undeniable, it will be reliable, and it will be inflation-proof.

Every President has agreed there is a social contract. Every President has taken a look at how to provide for that. Some ways we have agreed with, some we have disagreed with. Where we agreed was the great, wonderful way we worked in the 1980s when Social Security was facing challenges and President Reagan reached out to Tip O'Neil, Bob Dole, Bob Byrd, Howard Baker, and we made Social Security solvent for 30 or 40 years. We did the same under President Bill Clinton.

President George Bush, the No. 2 Bush, "W," wanted to privatize Social Security. We stopped that. We do not believe in the privatization of Social Security. We did not want to turn Social Security over to Wall Street. We believed Wall Street got enough, they didn't have to get Social Security. If a person were older or sick, we didn't want them to rely on the bull of political promises or the bear of a market.

Social Security affects so many people. There are 50 million Americans who rely on Social Security: retired workers, their spouses, people with disabilities. For two-thirds of the people on Social Security, their benefit is between \$14,000 and \$15,000 a year. It

makes up all or more than half their income. In my own State, 500,000 workers are on Social Security, so protecting the social contract is clearly in our national interest.

What brings me to the floor today? Two things. No. 1, I don't think Social Security should be in the debate about how to reduce our debt or our deficit. I do think Social Security should be discussed in a rational, calm, nonpartisan way to ensure safety and solvency and reliability.

The other issue that brings me to the floor is how do we put our arms around the cost-of-living problem? It is indeed vexing. How do we meet the needs of the people but not exacerbate the drawdown in the trust fund? These are valid conversations. Wise people should talk about it. But one thing I am opposed to is called the chained CPI—isn't that a terrible word, "chained" CPI? In our country, the very word "chains" has such a negative connotation.

What I worry about is that its Draconian effect will have a chain reaction on seniors that will cause a tremendous crash. I am concerned we are about to shred the social contract. Let me tell you what the chained CPI is. It would actually cut Social Security by over \$100 billion over the next 10 years. It does it by changing the cost of living as calculated. It is based on a theory. It is based on social engineering, some kind of abstract concepts about human behavior, that invisible hand that Adam Smith talks about. I worry that this invisible hand will actually pinch Social Security. It assumes consumers will substitute lower cost items for what they normally purchase; that is, if the price of apples increases, they will go buy oranges. I am afraid what we are doing is we are going to buy lemons.

The chained CPI is inappropriate because actually seniors have a fixed market basket. They not only have a fixed income, but they have a fixed market basket. Their primary expenditure is health care, over which they have little control. The cost of health care continues to rise. Their next one is energy, then food, and then housing. For seniors, this is not like giving up opera tickets for movie tickets. It is not like giving up a latte for Dunkin' Donuts. For them, it is not giving up Whole Foods, it is having no food. We have to get real about the market basket of seniors.

I wish to make three points about the myths. No. 1, the chained CPI is not a technical fix. Despite popular notions, op-eds, editorial boards, it is not just a technical corrective. It would actually fundamentally restructure Social Security. It could very well have a chain reaction, pushing old people into poverty. Under the way the CPI is calculated, if a person is now getting \$15,000 a year when they are 65, when they are 75, they will have \$5,000 less, and if they live to 85, it will be reduced by \$1,000.