

last week, but it was shot down by the majority in this body with, to me, a contrived plan to actually lower the payroll tax and shift those taxes to someone else.

We are told that this week, just like last week, we are going to have some more political theater. The majority leader will propose once again a tax increase on others so that we can keep this payroll tax cut, and we will propose a side-by-side which is essentially the pay-for plan to keep the tax rate as it is. Both of these will fail because the majority leader intends for them to fail, and essentially we will have wasted 2 weeks at the end of this session of Congress by creating a manufactured disagreement for the sake of scoring political points.

Maybe after we get this week over with and we have had yet another week of gamesmanship, the Senate can get down to the business of passing a simple extension of the payroll rates in their current form and to offset that action with savings. There is an absolute majority in the Senate and in the House to do just that. In doing so, we can end 3 weeks of political theater with the Democrats trying to score points for 2012.

I wish we could fast-forward to next week and get this important piece of legislation done and enact a continuation of the payroll taxes that a vast majority of Republicans and Democrats support.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. WHITEHOUSE). The Senator from Louisiana.

NATIONAL FLOOD INSURANCE PROGRAM EXTENSION

Mr. VITTER. Mr. President, last week I came to the floor and urged all of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to come together in a commonsense, bipartisan way and extend for a significant period of time the very important National Flood Insurance Program. That program, which is essential to the country, involves a lot of properties essential to real estate closings, to allow that important part of our economy to happen as we struggle to get out of this recession. That program would otherwise expire 1 week from this Friday.

I also wrote Senator REID that same day, as I came to the floor, urging him to support this legislation, extending this vital program, to be passed quickly, hopefully unanimously, through the Senate.

The good news is that I have reached out to many folks—Democrats and Republicans—since then, and we have continued to build consensus to do that, to make sure there is no threat of the National Flood Insurance Program lapsing yet again, as it did, unfortunately, four times in 2010—no good reason—for a total of 53 days. Every time that happens or is even threatened to happen, within a few days there is great chaos and uncertainty in the real

estate market. Good closings are put off. Our economy slows down for no good reason, as we need every closing in sight to do exactly the opposite and to improve the economy. Again, the good news is that we have built consensus, and I think we have reached consensus to avoid that sort of lapse. So I return to the floor today to get that formally done.

I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of S. 1958, my bill, to extend the National Flood Insurance Program well into next year, to May 31, which I introduced earlier today.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 1958) to extend the National Flood Insurance Program until May 31, 2012.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Mr. VITTER. Mr. President, I know of no further debate on this measure. I will have a few closing comments after we formally pass it, but I urge its passage.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on the engrossment and third reading of the bill.

The bill was ordered to be engrossed for a third reading and was read the third time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The bill having been read the third time, the question is, Shall the bill pass?

The bill (S. 1958) was passed, as follows:

S. 1958

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. EXTENSION OF THE NATIONAL FLOOD INSURANCE PROGRAM.

(a) PROGRAM EXTENSION.—Section 1319 of the National Flood Insurance Act of 1968 (42 U.S.C. 4026) is amended by striking “September 30, 2011” and inserting “May 31, 2012”.

(b) FINANCING.—Section 1309(a) of the National Flood Insurance Act of 1968 (42 U.S.C. 4016(a)) is amended by striking “September 30, 2011” and inserting “May 31, 2012”.

(c) REPEAL.—The Continuing Appropriations Act, 2012 (Public Law 112-36; 125 Stat. 386) is amended by striking section 130.

Mr. VITTER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table and any statements be printed in the RECORD.

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

Mr. VITTER. Mr. President, in closing, I thank everyone, on both sides of the aisle, who worked in a very commonsense way to get this done. Again, sort of the worst case scenario is what we all experienced in 2010. Four different times in 2010 the program actually lapsed, a total of 53 days. More times than that it came within a few days of lapsing and created great uncertainty in the real estate market.

We do not need any of that. We have been trying to struggle out of a recession and a very bad economy which has

been led by a real estate downturn. We need every good closing we can get. Giving the market this certainty over a week before it would otherwise expire is very good as we try to create that certainty and build a better economic climate.

I am happy we came together in a commonsense bipartisan way to extend the National Flood Insurance Program, as is, to May 31. Let me also say in closing I strongly support a full 6-year reauthorization of the program. I have worked on that bill with many others in the relevant Senate committee, the Senate Banking Committee. We have reported a good bill out of committee. I want to get that to the Senate floor and merge it and compromise it in some reasonable way with the House reauthorization.

We need a full-blown 6-year reauthorization of the program with significant reforms. That was obviously not going to happen between now and a week from Friday. It is obviously not going to happen a month or two into the new year. So we needed to create the certainty this extension will create as we continue to work on that full reauthorization.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

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

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

MIDDLE CLASS TAX CUT ACT

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I come to the floor this evening to urge my colleagues to support legislation to extend and expand the payroll tax cut on which middle-class families across America depend. Last week Democrats brought a bill to the floor that would have not only accomplished this goal for our workers, it would have also cut the payroll tax for half of our Nation's employers and eliminated it entirely for businesses who were making new hires.

To pay for this proposal, Democrats proposed a small surtax on millionaires and billionaires; that is, people who are earning more than \$1 million a year. In order to extend and expand the critical tax break for middle-class families and small businesses owners, we thought it right to call on the wealthiest among us—those who can afford it—to pay just a little bit more at a time when a vast majority of Americans are struggling.

Our bill set up a choice, and we thought it was an easy one: Do you vote to extend critical tax cuts for middle-class families or do you vote to protect the wealthiest Americans from paying one penny more toward their fair share?