

have 20 percent of our roads not up to safety standards. Crumbling infrastructure is a terrible drag on our economy. But this crisis is also an opportunity. By rebuilding our transportation system, we can put 2 million Americans back to work and boost our economy right away.

The surface transportation bill that is on the Senate floor this week is one of the most important pieces of legislation we will consider the entire year. It will help modernize our transit system, rebuild America's roads and bridges, and create or save millions of middle-class jobs. And, it will do it in a fiscally responsible way.

Democrats and Republicans agree that making America's transportation system great again will boost our economy, and that is what this bill is all about. It is a bipartisan bill sponsored, of course, by the chairman of the committee BARBARA BOXER and the ranking member of the committee Senator INHOFE.

President Reagan called a world-class transportation system an investment in tomorrow that we must make today. So it is no wonder this strong bipartisan surface transportation legislation passed the committee unanimously. I am cautiously optimistic that spirit of cooperation will continue this week.

I hope the junior Senator from South Carolina did not speak for the majority of Republicans last week when he said, "We don't have shared goals with the Democrats." I would like to believe Republicans share our goal of strengthening the economy and creating millions of jobs for American workers. I would like to believe they share a goal, as Eisenhower and Clinton and Reagan did, of rebuilding a world-class transportation system to support a world-class economy.

This week Republicans have an opportunity to prove they share these goals. The surface transportation jobs bill is too important to get bogged down with ideological amendments. Unrelated legislation that would limit women's access to health care has no place on a transportation bill. So let's stay laser-focused on our most important task: putting 2 million Americans back to work rebuilding our roadways and railways. Together we can keep this Nation, as President Eisenhower said, "moving ahead every day."

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The minority leader is recognized.

THE BUDGET

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, President Obama released a budget today that isn't really a budget at all. It is a campaign document. The President's goal isn't to solve our problems but to ignore them for another year, which will only ensure they get even

worse. Once again, the President is shirking his responsibility to lead by using this budget to divide us.

The game plan is perfectly clear. Rather than reach out to Congress to craft a consensus budget, the President will take this budget on the road, as he did today, and talk about the parts he thinks audiences will like. What he will not say is that it is bad for job creation, bad for seniors, and it will make the economy worse.

The President's budget is bad for jobs because it includes the biggest tax hike in history and continues policies such as the Democrats' health care law that is making it harder for small businesses to hire.

A little more than a year ago, the President extended current tax rates because he thought raising them would be bad for jobs. Today he will call for raising them anyway because he thinks it is good for him.

The President's budget is bad for our seniors because it doesn't protect the security of Medicare and Social Security and assures those programs keep careening toward insolvency.

The President's budget is bad for our country's economic security because yet again the President failed to take the prime opportunity this budget provides to address the Nation's \$15 trillion debt.

Contrary to the President's claims out on the road, this budget is literally loaded with deficit reduction gimmicks that would trigger an IRS audit for anybody else and make our current economic situation even worse.

Now, the President isn't going to mention any of those things, but Americans deserve to know the whole truth about this budget. They deserve to know why the President's own party doesn't want to vote on it and why his own top advisers are trying to deflect serious questions about what is really going on here.

Yesterday, the President's Chief of Staff said the reason this budget will not get anywhere in the Senate is because it would take 60 votes to pass—60 votes to pass—and the Democrats don't have that many votes on their own.

Well, I would suggest Mr. Lew review his Sunday briefing materials a little more closely next time. As someone who has run the Office of Management and Budget for two different Presidents, he knows as well as anybody in Washington a simple majority is all it takes to pass a budget resolution in the Senate, a simple majority. In other words, Democrats could pass this President's budget without a single Republican vote—not one.

The inconvenient truth that President Obama and his own top advisers don't want to admit is that this budget isn't going anywhere because the President's own party doesn't want to have anything whatsoever to do with it. Indeed, the majority leader in the Senate has already declared it "dead on arrival."

Now, Jack Lew knows this as well as I do, and the fact that he does proves

beyond any doubt the President has no intention of this budget ever actually being implemented. If he can't even count on members of his own party to support it, who does he expect is going to support it?

The truth is, Democrats want to have it both ways. The President wants to be able to take his budget around the country to talk about the parts of it he thinks people will like, and Democrats in Congress want to be able to avoid a vote on it because it is so damaging for job creation and seniors and the economy.

Well, if anybody wants to know what a failure of leadership looks like, this is it. This is it. Three years ago, President Obama promised to cut the Federal deficit in half by the end of his first term. He hasn't even come close. Here he is once again proposing the same failed policies that have prolonged this economic crisis well into the President's fourth year in office. After the national debt increased under his watch by more than 40 percent, he is still throwing good money after bad. He is still spending money we don't have on things we don't need. He still refuses to lead.

Democrats in Congress have been more than happy to enable him. They haven't passed a budget of their own in 3 years, and all indications are they will not pass one this year either—a failure of congressional leadership that will surely go down in history. At this point, nothing seems capable of rousing this President to action. Every day we hear the alarm bells sounding from across the Atlantic. It doesn't seem to phase him. Every day we hear the warnings from experts and economists that our fiscal situation is unsustainable.

Just a few months ago, the unthinkable happened when America's credit rating was actually lowered for the first time in history.

What is this President's response? A budget he knows even his own party will not support. That is his response to this \$15 trillion debt. So this is a charade—a charade. The only question is when this President's own refusal to lead will catch up to all the rest of us.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I wish to continue the comments along the line of our distinguished Republican leader and talk about the President's proposed budget that was released today.

Unfortunately, the President's budget proposes more debt, more spending, and higher taxes. It is bad news for job creation and for America's job creators and portends nothing good; indeed, only does it portend ominously for our country getting back on the right economic track and creating the kind of growth that will generate jobs and prosperity.

The President's proposed budget again ignores his own bipartisan fiscal

commission, the Simpson-Bowles Commission, which concluded in December of 2010 that America faced “a moment of truth” because we simply had spent more money than we were taking in for too long and had accumulated too much debt, which was killing economic growth and threatening to turn us into a Western European country, which we see today that the eurozone is in jeopardy.

One week from today, millions of Americans will celebrate President's Day, our national holiday that honors all our Commanders in Chief. But this year, President Obama will share a distinction that no other President has ever had: He has proposed a budget that dwarfs all the debt accumulated over more than 22 decades by all his predecessors.

When President Obama took office in January 2009, the national debt was about \$10 trillion or, broken down for every man, woman, and child in America, about \$33,000, something that neither political party could be particularly proud of.

Today it is far worse: more than \$15 trillion, an increase of more than 50 percent in 3 years. Under this budget proposal that the President released today, Federal borrowing will never stop. The national debt will more than double to \$26 trillion or \$75,000 for every man, woman, and child in America. Simply put, the President's proposed budget makes it worse, not better.

We all know we can't keep this up. The sad part is the President understands this too but simply refuses to provide the leadership necessary to put us on the right path.

We have heard it before, but I will repeat it. Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, ADM Mike Mullen, said the debt is the biggest threat to our national security. How could that be? It is because, as Admiral Mullen knows and we are now learning, when we live in fiscally constrained times, some of the first cuts that occur are to the Defense Department. In fact, while the Defense Department incurs roughly 20 percent of discretionary spending, it has so far been planned for 50 percent of the cuts, increasing the national security risk to every American.

After promising the American people he would cut the deficit in half by the end of his first term, the President's most recent plan means America will have an annual deficit of more than \$1 trillion for every year of his Presidency. That is right, \$1 trillion of deficit for each of the 4 years of his first term in office. This is unprecedented and dangerous. It is dangerous to our prosperity and to our Nation's future.

While the President seems to be unwilling to come to grips with the nature of our debt crisis, my constituents in Texas understand that the national debt poses very real security risks because they are already beginning to see the cuts that are occurring or are planned in our national security spend-

ing. My constituents in Texas are also concerned, in a State that happens to be growing faster than almost any other part of the country, that the threat of higher taxes discourages the people to whom we look to create jobs, to start new businesses.

Rather than have a comprehensive review of our Tax Code, as the Simpson-Bowles Commission proposed, this budget proposes to target certain industries, such as the domestic oil and gas industry, despite rising prices at the pump. The White House seems oblivious to what would happen to the jobs that are generated by this industry and all the revenue the government would lose if we outsource even more of our energy production to foreign Nations.

The President appears to feel like small businesses are undertaxed because the so-called millionaire's tax he has proposed will hit many small businesses that we depend upon to create jobs. Indeed, as Senator MCCONNELL just acknowledged, it was only December of 2010 when the President himself agreed to extend expiring tax provisions because, as he stated, higher taxes would be the last thing we would want to do during a fragile economic recovery because we know it will serve as a wet blanket; it will be a disincentive on job creation.

We need a serious discussion on tax reform. The Simpson-Bowles Commission made a responsible proposal—not perfect but a good start. But the President has simply ignored the recommendations of his own bipartisan commission since those recommendations were made in December of 2010.

The President's budget also proposes about \$1.9 trillion in new taxes, as I indicated. The good news, from my perspective, is that we already had a number of votes last year on these kinds of tax increases, and the Congress has rejected them. The bad news is these assumed tax increases help mask the true size of the deficits in the President's proposed budget and will do damage to any hope of sustained job creation.

Then there is the phony accounting, the gimmicks. Unfortunately, all we have to do is look at the Gallup poll to see in what regard Congress is held; and it is the kind of gamesmanship and the gimmicks in this budget which contribute to people's cynicism about their elected officials and about their government.

What does the President do? He says we are going to save money from future war spending, and we are going to use that as an offset for new spending and to reduce the deficit. But I have to observe, that is cynical at best. His budget is claiming artificial savings from money that never would be spent in the first place for wars that hopefully will never be fought. But he is saying, because we will not fight this unspecified war, then we are going to take that savings as if we would and save it and offset it to try to balance the budget.

Even this gimmick cannot hide the fact the President wants to continue the record-level stimulus spending that began on his watch. You will recall Christina Romer, head of the White House Council of Economic Advisers, told us if we just pass this \$787 billion stimulus bill, unemployment will never go above 8 percent.

If we go back and look at those same charts and what they say about the first quarter of 2012, they project unemployment at 6 percent. Obviously, that stimulus failed to meet its own projections, and what President Obama wants us to do is more of the same and to spend more borrowed money.

The vacuum of leadership that starts at the White House extends, unfortunately, to this Chamber, a Senate led by Majority Leader REID, in which he has no plans to present a budget for the third year in a row. Even before the President released his budget, the Senate majority leader already told the American people the Senate will ignore it. He was quoted in the press saying it would be foolish for the majority to propose a budget.

Why? Because he doesn't want to subject members of his own caucus to hard votes, to tough decisions. These are exactly the kinds of tough decisions the American people sent us to make, and these are exactly the kinds of tough decisions every household and every small business in America is expected to make in order to cope with this economic crisis we find ourselves in. But this is exactly what Majority Leader REID has chosen to protect his members from making. Why? Because it will help solve the problem? No. Because he doesn't want them to be held accountable in the next election.

We know it has been more than 1,000 days since the Senate passed a budget, and it is just unthinkable, to me, that we would fail to meet one of our most basic responsibilities. Can you imagine a family or a small business operating without a budget? We know why it is so important and why the absence of a budget has encouraged and facilitated runaway spending: Because when we budget, we figure out how much money we have and we figure out what we must have and what our priorities are. Then we figure out what we would like to have but maybe can't afford to have now so we need to put off. And then we figure out what we want but we can't afford that so we are going to have to do without.

Congress has simply, under Senator REID and the Democratic majority of the Senate, refused to meet its responsibilities for fiscal discipline. It is clear they are running out of excuses.

Senator MCCONNELL pointed out that Jack Lew, the President's new Chief of Staff, said: The reason why Democrats can't pass a budget, even though they hold the majority, even though they control the agenda, is because of those mean old Republicans, because it takes 60 votes to pass a budget.

Mr. Lew has been around a long time and he knows that is not true. I had

hoped he would have corrected the record because he knows—and we all know—it takes a simple majority of the Senate to pass a budget. But before we can pass a budget, Majority Leader REID has to call it up and bring it on the floor of the Senate and schedule a vote, which he has simply refused to do.

So instead of acting responsibly and proposing a budget and voting on a budget and allowing it to be debated, the President has chosen to take the low road and, last year, simply to attack chairman of the House Budget Committee PAUL RYAN and House Republicans for the budget they passed. It is not perfect, but it was trying to do their job and to make a responsible proposal. But rather than meet that responsible proposal with a counterproposal and try to work out the differences during the legislative process, the President, unfortunately, took the low road and attacked and attacked and attacked, rather than trying to offer a viable solution.

It should come as no surprise that under the President's watch, the national debt has grown to more than \$15 trillion and is now larger than the U.S. economy. That is right, our debt is 100 percent of our gross domestic product. Government spending is now 25 percent of our economy; unfortunately, revenue is about 15 percent. So we have a 10-percent gap, which represents the annual deficit, and the cumulative deficits make up that \$15 trillion debt.

We know our Nation has lost its AAA credit rating from Standard & Poor's because they are becoming concerned about our willingness—indeed, about our ability—to meet our most basic responsibilities. All three major rating agencies have assigned a negative outlook to our Nation's long-term rating. What that means is potentially the specter of higher interest rates that we have to pay when China and other countries buy our sovereign debt. A 1-percent increase, if they became worried about our ability to repay our debts and they simply charged us more, would wipe out any savings we might otherwise be able to make through cuts.

The warning sound has been heard, and the fiscal tsunami that many budget experts have said in the past would not hit this Nation is fast approaching. It is a challenge that faces the country today, not just tomorrow, and we need solutions. The way the American people feel about this overhang of debt and the lack of clarity with regard to taxes and regulation in our future is shown in the stagnant job growth we have seen.

No sensible job creator is going to start a new business or to expand an existing business with such huge debt and such great uncertainty about their taxes, the regulatory overreach, and the economic environment. They are simply not going to do it. All we have to do is look across the Atlantic Ocean and watch our European friends and

what they are going through today and see what will happen when governments overspend and debt is allowed to run unchecked.

What is so disappointing is that President Obama has had multiple opportunities to embrace a bipartisan fiscal overhaul plan. The one I keep mentioning is the Simpson-Bowles plan, and the reason I do is because it is his debt commission that he appointed. It was bipartisan. We had three Republican Senators who were on that commission who voted for it; \$4 trillion worth of cuts, tax reform that would lower the marginal tax rates, eliminate \$1 trillion-plus in expenditures, and would create economic growth and certainty for our economy and help put America back to work in the meantime. Unfortunately, the President, instead of embracing that bipartisan proposal, with the budget submission he makes today indicates he has chosen once again to remain on the sidelines and to campaign rather than try to come up with real solutions. The President's plan fails to right the ship and will continue to lead us down the path of more debt, higher taxes, and runaway spending—a path that has brought the economies of many European countries to the brink.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Ohio.

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, I am here today to talk about the President's budget, which he submitted today. In an era of trillion-dollar deficits and historic debt and the greatest level of government spending since World War II, I believe the President's submission today was not a responsible budget. Instead of keeping his campaign promise to cut the deficit in half in his first term, this budget assumes continued deficits this year and next in the trillion-dollar range.

Given the promises President Obama made when he came to the White House and how poorly the last budget was received by Republicans and Democrats alike in Congress—in fact, it was voted on here on the floor of the Senate, and it was defeated by a vote of 97 to 0—given those things, I hoped President Obama would step forward and turn the rhetoric into action and put forward a responsible budget to deal with the fiscal problems our government faces—no more punting, no more gimmicks, a real budget that honestly faces the fiscal crisis we have and helps put us back on track. Instead, we see a document today that is really more tailored toward campaign talking points than really addressing the long-term solvency of the Federal Government.

The President begins by proposing a new \$350 billion in stimulus bill. By the way, that is \$350 billion with no offsets—in other words, no spending reductions to pay for it.

The President's budget then claims \$5.3 trillion in deficit reduction over the next decade. As I have looked at this budget today, it seems to me that only a minuscule amount of this is from new spending cuts. In fact, as I read this budget, 99.9 percent of the claimed deficit reduction consists of the following: No. 1, tax increases, about \$1.9 trillion; No. 2, Iraq, Afghanistan war savings, which is viewed by most here in Congress, both sides of the aisle, as a gimmick—in other words, spending money that was not going to be spent anyway—\$848 billion; No. 3, already enacted discretionary caps and entitlement changes, primarily from the Budget Control Act, these so-called sequesters or across-the-board spending cuts that Congress has already enacted, and that is \$1.7 trillion; and then finally net interest savings from those policies, which the budget says is going to be \$800 billion.

Out of the claimed \$5.3 trillion in deficit reduction, that leaves about .1 percent—\$4 billion—of the claimed savings over the decade. So 99.9 percent of the deficit reduction he claims is through tax increases or, again, changes in spending that either have already occurred or they are not going to occur. On top of that, the President hid in his baseline—in the baseline he assumes for his spending, he hides about \$479 billion in new spending. Now, this is on Pell grants and on the Medicare doc fix. So the claimed savings—even the \$4 billion—vanish completely.

Overall, when compared to the current policy baseline, the President would tax \$4 trillion more and spend about \$2 trillion more over the next 10 years of this budget. The yearly deficit would end the decade in the \$600 billion range, even assuming peace, prosperity, and historically low interest rates. The national debt over the next 10 years would rise by \$11 trillion, for a total debt of over \$25 trillion 10 years from now.

The main tax hike would end the 2001–2003 tax cuts for singles making over \$200,000 and couples making over \$250,000. There will be a lot of debate on the floor regarding this tax policy over the next year as we come to the end of the year when all of these tax cuts—\$5 trillion of them—are scheduled to end, but just with regard to this tax hike, this will result in lower economic growth and more job losses according to the Congressional Budget Office. They have now testified before the Budget Committee as to the fact that this will result in higher unemployment next year. This is in large part because, according to Internal Revenue Service data, 48 percent of small business income would be subject to higher taxes under this budget proposal.

I support tax reform. I think it is important. But simply taking the current

code and adding higher tax rates is going to have an impact on small businesses and therefore on our economy and on jobs. This is ultimately about jobs. It is about everyday economic concerns people in Ohio and around the country have.

In this budget document, we do see some honesty, but it does not make me optimistic at all. Acknowledging the impact this budget will have on the economy, the President's budget actually concedes unemployment rates next year higher than this year, and the year after higher than this year. His prediction is that unemployment rates will be 8.9 percent in 2012 and 8.6 percent in 2013—totally unacceptable and a testament to the fact that Washington cannot continue to rely on short-term sweeteners and budget spending gimmicks to grow our economy and get the country out of this fiscal mess.

Again, I am disappointed in the budget we have seen today. I hope the Senate will work its will, put together its own budget, taking the President's budget and other ideas but then coming up with something that actually does address the very real fiscal problems we face, bring such a budget to the floor of the Senate, have it debated by both sides, and work out what we have not done in this Senate for over 1,000 days, which is prepare a blueprint for the fiscal and economic future of our country. Until we get such a budget, I fear we will continue to see this lack of economic growth and job loss that all of us would like to see addressed.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RELIGIOUS LIBERTIES

Mr. JOHANNIS. Mr. President, I rise today to comment on the developments of the past few weeks which, in my view, have been incredibly tragic but maybe, on the other hand, reassuring. On the one hand, it is tragic that our own government launched an attack on first amendment rights. The President launched this assault unapologetically in the black-and-white print of a rule that clearly restricts religious liberties. It says contraceptives and abortion-inducing drugs must be provided free of charge to women. What the President did not anticipate by his rule was the backlash it would generate.

It is reassuring, on the other hand, to know that Americans will make their voices heard when their constitutional rights are being trampled. For the first time in many years, people of many

different faiths, as well as the defenders of the Constitution, have found a unifying rallying cry. They are sending the message that enough is enough; it is time to stop this administration's march into every single facet of our lives. At issue is one of the very basic rights in this country. It is one of the basic rights this country was founded to protect. It is the right to freely exercise religion—a right this President pledged to uphold when taking the oath of office.

Many Americans were lulled into complacency in 2009 by promises that apparently the President did not intend to uphold. Back then I came to the Senate floor to address this identical issue. In the thick of the very contentious health care debate, I urged my pro-life colleagues and the pro-life community to stand up against the health care bill that was being considered here in the Senate. I pointed out that the Hyde amendment, which prohibits taxpayer dollars from being used for abortion, was absolutely absent in the bill, something that now appears to be no accident whatsoever. On that day I shared the National Right to Life's very real concerns that the bill "tries to conceal that unpopular reality with layers of contrived definitions and hollow bookkeeping requirements." Unfortunately, though, empty promises that the bill respected life were enough to convince my presumably pro-life colleagues to support the bill. After all, they had heard the promises straight from the President's mouth.

Remember when the President told Americans "under our plan, no Federal dollars will be used to fund abortions, and Federal conscience laws will remain in place." Congress ignored the warnings, charged forward, blurry eyed, voting in the middle of the night, and passed the health care bill that we all now know violates the very conscience rights the President himself by his own words promised to protect.

As the law is being put into place, we are truly heading into uncharted waters for this Nation. On Friday, after weeks of criticism, the President announced a so-called compromise. We were told by his Chief of Staff that it will be that way or it will be the highway. So what is the compromise? It would still force every plan to offer free contraceptives and abortion-inducing drugs, even plans offered by religious organizations with deeply held religious beliefs.

The President claims religious employers with objections won't technically be required to offer the coverage because insurance companies will be forced to offer it free. What? Are we, as Americans, expected to believe that the many religious organizations paying the employer's share of the health care costs are not paying for these services? What kind of accounting gimmick is that? What kind of sleight of hand is that?

The President is blinded by his ideology. This fight is about religious and

moral beliefs. It is not about accounting. What we have witnessed this past week is another attempt to hide the unpopular reality with layers of misleading rhetoric and hollowed promises. The truth? The truth is that many individuals who object to contraceptives and abortion-inducing drugs as a matter of religious principle will still have to provide them and pay for them. Don't fool yourself; they are not going to be free. Drug companies don't walk in and give away free drugs. Pharmacists don't dispense them free. Of course, the cost will be passed along to every employer and every American in the form of premiums that we pay. Calling these services free is flat wrong. There is a cost and, unfortunately, it is a high one at that. They come at the cost of our religious freedoms.

The administration's position is that it can force insurers to provide contraceptive coverage for "free" because the drugs are cheaper than the cost of being pregnant. Our government said that at the very highest level. That logic is unprecedented and it is downright disturbing. Who is to say that in days to come the administration won't order health plans to cover abortion free on the premise that it is cheaper than the cost of prenatal care, birth, and caring for human life? The same twisted logic could apply for physician-assisted suicide and a whole array of controversial procedures.

Many out there may try to refute this by repeating the President's claim that the law prohibits mandated abortions, but that same claim promised to protect the religious liberties he is now forcing many to violate. Well, many of us will not sit idly by and watch this unprecedented effort, and I am not alone. The President should listen to the country. The gimmicks of the 2009 bill may have put some to sleep. This time Americans are not being fooled. Americans of all faiths, all beliefs, of different views on a whole variety of topics share a love for their Constitution and the rights embodied in that Constitution. Well, they are awake now and their eyes are fully open.

As a Catholic myself, I could not be more proud of the Catholic bishops for standing strongly. Their statement rejecting the President's smoke-and-mirrors compromise is compelling and it is spot on. The bishop said:

... today's proposal continues to involve needless government intrusion into the internal governance of religious institutions and to threaten government coercion of religious people . . . to violate their most deeply held convictions.

And they go on to say:

In a Nation dedicated to religious liberty as its first and its founding principle, we should not be limited to negotiating within these parameters. The only complete solution . . . is for HHS to rescind the mandate of these objectionable services.

Yes, we were told by the President's Chief of Staff negotiating is over, it will now be our way or the highway.