

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. UDALL of New Mexico). Without objection, it is so ordered.

MIDDLE-CLASS TAX CUTS

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, middle-class families in our country today are paying very close attention to what we are doing here in Washington, DC. They really understand what is at stake. They know the impact our decisions will have on their lives, and they keep hoping their elected officials will finally come together around a budget deal that works for them.

Less than a month ago, we concluded an election season that engaged our Nation in a conversation about this very issue. Candidates for the Presidency and for the Senate on down all laid out their positions on some of the key questions we are now hoping to answer. Should the middle-class tax cuts be extended? Should the Bush tax cuts on the rich end? Should we end the Medicare guarantee for our seniors and the next generation?

Well, those big questions were discussed, argued, and clear positions were taken, and voters went to polling places on election day to render their verdict. The outcome was clear. Candidates who stood for the middle class won. Candidates who advocated for our seniors came out ahead. And in exit polls across the country, voters made very clear that they strongly supported the idea that the wealthy should pay higher tax rates and their fair share.

And everyone—Democrat, Republican, Independent; wealthy, low income, middle class; students, workers, retirees; older, younger, and in between—everyone supports extending the tax cuts for the middle class. Nobody thinks the taxes should go up for 98 percent of our workers and 97 percent of our small business owners.

This ought to be easy. The American people just weighed in supporting a continuation of the Bush tax cuts for the middle class. It is a policy Democrats and Republicans agree on, and it would cushion millions of middle-class families across the country from a significant portion of the upcoming so-called fiscal cliff.

So why isn't it already in law? Why aren't middle-class families already able to feel confident in their taxes not going up? Well, for one reason, and one reason alone. House Republicans continue to hold the middle class hostage in a desperate and deeply misguided attempt to buck the will of the people, ignore the results of this election, and protect the wealthiest Americans from paying their fair share. That is all there is to it.

If Republicans truly cared about keeping taxes low for the middle class, they can do it right now. The Senate passed a bill that would extend the tax cuts for 98 percent of families and 97

percent of workers. President Obama said he would sign it into law. He even showed us the pen. All the House has to do is let this bill come up for a vote and pass it and middle-class families can go into these holidays with the certainty they deserve.

I want to be very clear about something because some of my Republican colleagues seem intent on confusing the issue. Republicans do not have to support taxes going up on the rich in order to vote for our bill to keep taxes low on the middle class. Let me repeat that. Republicans can believe that the Bush tax cuts for the rich should be extended, they can remain committed to fighting for that misguided policy, in my opinion, and they can still vote on the portion of the tax cuts we all agree should be extended for the middle class. Then middle-class families would win, we would have worked together to extend tax cuts for 98 percent of workers and 97 percent of small business owners. Then when the middle class is taken care of, I would be happy to engage my Republican colleagues in a debate about extending the Bush tax cuts for the top 2 percent.

But the first step, the most obvious step, is for the Republican House to take the 98 percent both sides agree on, pass our Senate bill, and send it to the President for his signature.

Recently there have been some cracks in the Republican rhetorical armor that has held fast against compromise for years. More and more Republicans have begun to accept in their rhetoric what Democrats—and, frankly, every bipartisan group that has examined this issue—have known all along: A deficit deal is going to have to be balanced. It is going to have to include new revenue from the wealthiest Americans.

Grover Norquist calls these “impure thoughts,” but to most Americans it is common sense. Now the onus is on Republicans—and especially their leadership—to follow this encouraging rhetoric with some action. So far that has been lacking.

The lengths to which Republicans are now going in order to protect the rich from paying higher rates would be comical if it were not so detrimental. They say they have accepted that revenue needs to be on the table, but then the proposal that Speaker BOEHNER made to the President would actually cut rates for the rich. It lacks any details about where that claimed revenue would come from. And just as independent analysts confirmed about the Ryan plan, and just as we saw in the Romney plan, when you are talking about simply closing loopholes and ending deductions, either the math does not add up or the middle class ends up bearing the entire burden.

Republicans are tying themselves in knots to avoid the obvious: The easiest way to raise revenue from the wealthiest Americans is simply to allow the Bush tax cuts for the top 2 percent to expire as scheduled. That is what the

Democrats want, it is what the American people support, and it would move us a long way toward the balanced and bipartisan deal we are all working to get to.

My colleague in the House of Representatives, Minority Leader PELOSI, is circulating a discharge petition to bring the Senate bill to the House floor. I strongly support this move, and I urge House Republicans to sign on and allow this legislation to come to the floor for a vote.

Democrats have proven we are willing to make the tough compromises that a balanced and bipartisan deal will require. And we have been very clear we will not allow Republicans to push through a bad deal that forces seniors and the middle class to bear this burden all alone.

I am hopeful Speaker BOEHNER and House Republicans will decide to stop holding the middle class hostage, allow the Senate bill to come to the floor, put it up for a vote, and give our middle-class families the tax cuts on which we all agree.

I yield the floor.

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

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

MALI

Mr. COONS. Mr. President, I rise today to address a challenging situation in Mali. Mali is a west African country, a country of nearly ½ million square miles, a vast country that stretches from the Sahara Desert to the Niger River area and is home to roughly 15 million people. Yet it is not at the top of the list of concerns for many Americans.

This spring, back in March, a rogue element in Mali's security forces launched a coup and forcefully overthrew a longstanding, democratically elected government in the nation of Mali, our ally. This may seem inconsequential to the average American, but it could have big implications for our security, as well that of our regional and global allies, because in the power vacuum created in that spring coup, al-Qaida saw an opportunity, and they stepped in. Three different extremist groups, all linked to or controlled by al-Qaida in the Islamic Mahgreb, or AQIM, now control an area the size of Texas in the northern part of Mali. They succeeded in fracturing a formerly stable democracy and contributing to broad security, political, and humanitarian crises that I believe have grave implications for the Sahel region and for America's interests. To put it simply, this matters.

Mali, a relatively strong democracy for more than two decades and an ally