

on a long-term budget agreement that is fair to the middle class, that gets our debt and deficit under control, and reflects the values and priorities of the American people.

The American people want a balanced deal. They want us to manage our finances. They want us to put together a budget and move forward. We want to do that. We want to get out of this "crisis by crisis." The program we are offering to replace the sequester for this year will allow us to get back to that process and begin to manage our country in a better way.

So I hope our Republican colleagues join us in this and help us move to a place where we can assure the American public that we do care about their future and their finances and the fragile economy we are now facing.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

TRIBUTE TO RAMONA LESSEN

Mr. CORKER. Madam President, I came to the U.S. Senate in 2006, and I was the only new Republican elected to the Senate that year. Many people considered that a great accomplishment. But my greatest accomplishment of 2006 was convincing Ramona Lessen—who is sitting with us today—to put off retirement for a few more years and stay on as my scheduler and executive assistant. And after 6 years in Washington, I know without a doubt that the biggest success of my first term is that Ramona did not fire me—until now.

Ramona is retiring this week after 34 years. I am told that she violated child labor laws by starting work when she was 5 years old.

Ramona came to the Senate in 1979 to work for Senator Larry Pressler from her native South Dakota. She worked for Senator Pressler for 16 years, plus 2 more when he was in the House.

When Ramona began working in the Senate in 1979, Jimmy Carter was President, Robert Byrd was the majority leader, and Howard Baker was the Republican leader. And probably most relevant to Ramona, ESPN started broadcasting, Post-It notes were invented, and one of the most popular songs was Gloria Gaynor's "I Will Survive." She has not only survived but thrived in the U.S. Senate for more than three decades.

In 1994, she took another new Tennessee Senator named Bill Frist under her wing. She worked for Senator Frist for 12 years. And then, in 2006, I convinced her to work in our office for just 1 year. That year has turned into 6.

In that time, Ramona has learned a lot about me, but I have learned a whole lot about her. I have learned that Ramona loves music. In fact, her first job was as a high school band director. She is a great piano player. She has played the piano in my home and at staff gatherings. She plays for her

church. Ramona loves country music, and I think that is a big reason she has adopted Tennessee as her second home State.

I have learned that it is not too hard to know where you stand with Ramona. Occasionally, I will make a request or a suggestion, and Ramona responds with a certain expression—it is a polite term for a look of disapproval. I know exactly where I stand and sometimes—candidly, often—I recalibrate my position or request.

I have learned that Ramona is a huge sports fan. If the Masters or the U.S. Open is on, I am not going to interrupt her. She also loves football, and that is appropriate because I have also learned that she is a master of the audible.

In 2008, I was heavily involved in an effort to bring Volkswagen's U.S. production facility to Chattanooga. Just before one of the final meetings in Tennessee, a plane full of decisionmakers was stuck on the tarmac in Germany without clearance to land in the United States—some kind of paperwork issue. Anybody who has been involved in a major recruitment effort knows that in something like this, even a small glitch can be a major setback. The Volkswagen folks called me. I talked with Ramona. I am not entirely sure what she did, but I know it was all totally legal and aboveboard. At one point, she was sitting there jockeying several phone calls on the switchboard and literally talking the plane off the runway in Germany. What I do know for sure is that the Volkswagen executives landed in the United States highly impressed with Ramona Lessen. And shortly thereafter they chose Chattanooga for their U.S. production facility.

That was a home run, no doubt. But I think Ramona's greatest contribution is her ability to make a staff a family and an office a home. Ramona makes sure we are celebrating each other—babies being born, people getting married, and life in general. At Christmas-time, she makes sure the office is decorated and filled with Christmas music. Her favorite moments in the office are when someone brings in a baby or a child. That child learns quickly, as we all do, that Ramona keeps a basket of candy on her desk. And there is a good chance that child's picture is on Ramona's cherished bulletin board. Her loud, infectious laugh is a staple at staff gatherings. It will be sorely missed.

There is a memorable scene in the movie "The Queen" where Queen Elizabeth tells Prime Minister Tony Blair: "You are my tenth Prime Minister, Mr. Blair." I am proud to have been Ramona Lessen's third Senator. Senators come and go, but for 34 years Ramona Lessen has been a constant in the Senate. The Senate is better for it. Our country and Tennessee are better for it. I know Senator Pressler and Senator Frist are better for it. Our staffs are better for it. And I am better for it.

Ramona, I thank you for taking pity on a new Senator and for showing me

the ropes over the past 6 years. I thank you for your friendship. I wish you and Joe the very best in the years to come. I know when the time comes, Tennessee, your second home State, will welcome you to retirement with open arms.

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. BROWN. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Mr. BROWN. Throughout this month, students across my State, across Ohio, are reciting speeches by Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., to commemorate Black History Month.

Dr. Carter Woodson started what was originally called Negro History Week in February between the birthdays of President Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass. Dr. Woodson initiated the weeklong tribute to incorporate the legacies, images, and historical contributions of African Americans into the greater American story.

Today, people throughout the United States celebrate African-American History Month to ensure all American stories are recognized. Ohio has been the scene for which many of these chapters were written.

In Mount Pleasant, OH, the first antislavery gazette newspaper in the United States, the Philanthropist, was published in 1817. The Ohio Anti-Slavery Society was founded in Zanesville in 1835. My home State has played a rich role in American history, as have so many Ohioans.

Every new U.S. passport includes the words of a formerly enslaved Oberlin College graduate Dr. Anna Julia Cooper. If you have a passport, you will see her words:

The cause of freedom is not the cause of a race or a sect, a party or a class—it is the cause of humankind, the very birthright of humanity.

In Yellow Springs, OH, a young music student at Antioch College, Coretta Scott, would later work alongside her husband, Dr. Martin Luther King, for social and economic justice in our country.

Former Wilberforce University student Bayard Rustin was the lead strategist of the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.

The only living American with a Nobel Prize in Literature, Toni Morrison, was born and raised in Lorain, OH. Akronite Rita Dove served as the Poet Laureate of the United States.

Today, in classrooms and communities across the State—and across the Nation—the next generation of Ohioans is starting to make its mark on American history.