PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

WORKFORCE INVESTMENT ACT OF 2013—MOTION TO PROCEED—Resumed

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I move to proceed to Calendar No. 243.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will report the motion.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to Calendar No. 243, S. 1356, a bill to amend the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 to strengthen the United States workforce development system through innovation in, and alignment and improvement of, employment, training, and education programs in the United States, and to promote individual and national economic growth, and for other purposes.

SCHEDULE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, at 10 a.m. there will be a rollcall vote on the motion to invoke cloture on the motion to concur in the House message to accompany H.J. Res 59, the budget resolution.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MANCHIN). The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

BUDGET RESOLUTION

Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, it is my understanding that at 10 a.m. the Senate will proceed to a cloture vote on the proposed budget. It has already been passed by the House of Representatives. The cloture vote will take 60 Senators. If those 60 votes are in favor, we would then move to a period of debate—pro forma debate, actually, because the question would already have been decided. If Members do not favor this budget, the time to register that opposition is this morning. At 10 a.m. is the last chance to say no to this proposal and simply send it back to the negotiators and ask them to do a better job.

I rise this morning to reiterate my strong opposition to the House-passed budget, to the Murray-Ryan budget. I do so for one specific reason. I would first interject that there are many aspects of the budget that Members do not like, that we are not overly delighted with. We realized from the outset that there would be compromises and unpleasant decisions that had to be made because when you find additional revenues, when you cut programs that are popular, it hurts and it is uncomfortable. So I appreciate the fact that Senator MURRAY and Representative RYAN have made tough decisions. Apparently, the House of Representatives on a bipartisan basis has agreed to go along. But my objection that moves me from ''undecided'' to a ''no'' is what the budget does to current and military retirees and the fact that it breaks a promise that has been made to military retirees for years and years. It does so retroactively, unlike what it does to Federal employees, unlike what this Congress directed on an earlier occasion when establishing a commission to look into retirement. What it does to military retirees under the age of 62, instead of receiving the same cost-of-living adjustment everyone else would be receiving, it cuts their COLA back to COLA less 1 percent.

Why do we have a cost-of-living adjustment in the first place? The cost-of-living adjustment is designed to protect the purchasing power of a pension. So when a young man or young woman joined the military, say, 20 years ago at age 22, for example, they served for 20 years at least and they were entitled to a pension under the law. That was the deal. We agreed also that once that pension was received and was in place, we would protect that pension against inflation each year by a cost-of-living adjustment. It is simply fair. It protects the purchasing power and the real ability of that pension to protect and support the retired military person and that person's family.

What this budget does is it goes back on that promise. It says to people who have completed their service, who have completed the full 20 years of their bargain: You may have done what we asked you to do, but now the government is not going to do what we told you we would do. We are not going to protect the purchasing power of your pension. In the first year, we are going to cut that cost-of-living back 1 percent. The next year, whatever cost-of-living there is out there, you get that less 1 percent.

It adds up over time. I think Members have been astonished to learn that an E–7 retiring at age 40 today; that is, an enlisted person, would experience a loss of $83,000 in purchasing power over the course of the 22 years that pensioner would experience between ages 40 and 62—$83,000 in broken promises to our military retirees. An O–5 would lose some $124,000 lifetime with this budget agreement.

It is on the verge of being adopted. The only thing that stands in the way between our military retirees and this broken promise amounting to $83,000 for the typical enlisted person and $124,000 for the typical retiree officer—the only thing standing in the way is this vote at 10 a.m. on cloture.

Forty-one of us could say to the Senate: Hold on a minute. We know we have a problem. We know we have an $80 billion package. But there is $6 billion of it here that is unfair to military retirees. We can do better than that.

There are amendments we would like to offer. There are amendments Senator GRAHAM would like to offer. There is an amendment by Senator AYOTTE, the distinguished Senator from New Hampshire, that would eliminate this broken promise to our military retirees and pay for it with other savings elsewhere, savings that have already been endorsed as good government and are simply a matter of tightening up the enforcement of laws that are already there.

We can find, my colleagues, $6 billion elsewhere without breaking a promise to people who during the time of a global war on terror have stood forward, donned the uniform of the United States of America, and volunteered time and time again to re-up, to go overseas, place themselves in harm's way, and embark on a career in the U.S. military. We can pass a budget that accomplishes the goals of Murray-Ryan without breaking this promise. I so hope we will. But this is the time. Forty-seven minutes from now is the opportunity we will have. After that, it is a simple majority. The deal will be done. The news accounts say that the debate is over, that the votes are already in.

I would hope that somewhere someone within the sound of my voice is realizing this is just another example of the government breaking its word. When we do this, when we tell falsehoods and change our minds and change our positions to the American people over and over again, what does that do to the confidence the American people should have in their government and the confidence in their elected officials to do what we promised to do and to fulfil our side of the agreement?

I implore my colleagues even at this late hour to take a pause, perhaps ask the committee, the conference committee which I was a member of and which was not consulted, to take another look, find the $6 billion in savings elsewhere, and fulfill our promise to the American people.

One other point before I yield back. I wish to point out that a commission was established last year by Congress entitled the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission. The purpose of this commission is to provide us with a comprehensive list of ways to make meaningful reforms to military pay and benefits.

Members should remember that we specifically told this commission it could recommend any option as long as it grandfathered in those who currently serve and those who are currently retired. That was the sense of the Senate, and that was the sense of the Congress last year.