

more expensive I would argue, for our small businesses to create jobs. Anywhere you go—in my State of South Dakota and elsewhere—you talk to small business owners, you talk to farmers and ranchers, and what they will tell you is the policies, the regulations, and the taxes that are coming out of Washington, DC, make it more expensive and more difficult for our job creators to create jobs.

If you look, the data on that it is pretty clear. Since this President took office, we have higher unemployment by 18 percent, we have 2.1 million more people unemployed than we did when he took office, and we have a 35-percent higher debt. We saw spending go up in the last 2 years alone, nondefense discretionary spending, by 24 percent. The number of people who are receiving food stamps in this country is up by 40 percent.

All the data, all the tools by which we can measure economic progress and growth demonstrate that the policies that have been put in place by this administration have been a complete failure. So what we need is a change in policies, and it starts by cutting Federal spending, capping it in the near term, and putting in place a long-term solution—a balanced budget amendment like so many States have in place, like the Senator from Kansas mentioned they have in his State of Kansas, like we have in my State of South Dakota, where our State governments have to live within their means. They cannot spend money they do not have. That is the problem we have in Washington, DC, today.

In terms of our small businesses, there was a survey done by the chamber of commerce a couple of weeks ago in which they found that 64 percent of the small businesses that responded to the survey said they are not going to hire this year. Another 12 percent actually said they are going to cut jobs. Why? Half of the small businesses listed economic uncertainty as the major reason. They are concerned about what is going to come out of Washington, DC. They don't know what policies and regulations are going to be imposed on them and what it is going to do to them and their cost of doing business, and as a consequence they are just hunkering down and trying to survive.

We need to change that. We change that by getting Federal spending under control. Cut, cap, and balance is an important step in that process, and I am pleased the House of Representatives last night passed it and sent it over here to the Senate. We will have an opportunity to vote on that in the next few days, and I would argue to my colleagues that this is fundamentally the best we can be doing to not only get our fiscal house in order and get it on a more sustainable path going forward but also to help get our economy growing again and get jobs created out there. You can't do it by making government larger. If that was the case, the trillion-dollar stimulus bill that

was passed last year would have brought unemployment down. But, as we all know, we are facing 9.2 percent unemployment today.

We continue to see an economy that is struggling, that is growing at a very slow rate. We need to unleash that economy, and the way we do that is by capping or cutting spending in Washington, DC, making the Federal Government smaller, not larger, getting that amount of spending as a percentage of our entire economy back into a more historical norm, and working to ensure that taxes and regulations stay low on our job creators in this country.

That is why I fundamentally object to what the President and many of his allies in Congress want to do with regard to the debt crisis; that is, increase revenues. You cannot create jobs, you cannot grow the economy by increasing taxes on our job creators. I can't think of a single tax that you could put on our economy that actually would help create jobs. It will have the opposite effect—it will make it more difficult for small businesses to create jobs, more difficult for us to get out of this economic downturn.

I hope my colleagues will support cut, cap, and balance and that it will get a big vote here in the Senate and get this country on a more sound fiscal footing and on a path where we can create jobs and get this economy growing.

I yield the floor.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is now closed.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION AND VETERANS AFFAIRS AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2012

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of H.R. 2055, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 2055) making appropriations for military construction, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2012, and for other purposes.

Pending:

Coburn (for McCain) amendment No. 553, to eliminate the additional amount of \$10,000,000, not included in the President's budget request for fiscal year 2012, appropriated for the Department of Defense for planning and design for the Energy Conservation Investment Program.

Johnson (SD) modified amendment No. 556, of a perfecting nature.

Vitter amendment No. 568, to provide that none of the funds appropriated or otherwise made available by this act may be obligated or expended at a rate higher than the level of the Senate and House of Representatives concurrent budget resolution for fiscal year 2012.

Wyden/Merkley amendment No. 570, to provide for the closure of Umatilla Army Chemical Depot, Oregon.

Coburn amendment No. 564, to require evidence of causal relationships for presumptions by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs of service connection for diseases associated with exposure to certain herbicide agents.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota.

Mr. JOHNSON of South Dakota. Mr. President, I am hopeful that the Senate will be able to complete action on the MILCON-VA appropriations bill today. Members have had ample opportunity to offer amendments, staff has been working to clear them, and I believe we now have a clear path to final passage.

I would like to spend a few minutes today talking about the military construction portion of this bill, which is so important to our troops and their families. The bill includes \$13.7 billion for MILCON, which is \$1 billion below the budget request. In drafting this bill, we took a hard look at the projects submitted by the administration and made strategic reductions in order to make wise use of our MILCON dollars without sacrificing key military priorities. I believe this bill is a prudent approach to addressing our military construction needs at home and abroad.

The bill fully funds the administration's request of \$1.2 billion for Guard and Reserve projects. Typically, Congress adds funds for our Guard and Reserve components; however, given the current budget pressures, that option was not available to us this year. It is my hope the services will acknowledge and address the chronic backlog of construction requirements for the Guard and Reserve forces in future budget requests.

Of note, this bill includes \$550 million to construct or modify 15 Department of Defense schools at home and overseas. As Newsweek magazine pointed out last month, a shocking number of DOD schools are crumbling and in need of replacing. The administration has made upgrading DOD schools a priority, and the committee wholeheartedly supports that goal. DOD school funding in this bill represents a significant downpayment on the estimated \$3.1 billion requirement for DOD school recapitalization.

The administration's request included funding for the move of Marines from Japan to Guam. While the committee recognizes the need to restructure force posture in the Pacific, we remain concerned about the ballooning cost of this plan and the lack of forward progress on the part of our Japanese allies. The report accompanying this bill directs the Navy to provide Congress with detailed information on the cost and prognosis of the Guam relocation initiative.

Additionally, the committee is concerned with the potential cost of related troop realignments in Korea and the long-term impact of troop reductions in Europe. The report accompanying this bill addresses these concerns in depth.

As I have said before, this is a sound and responsible bill. Senator KIRK and I have worked hand in hand to forge a bipartisan approach for the MILCON-VA bill, and I believe we have succeeded. I urge my colleagues to support final passage of the bill today.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. KIRK. Mr. President, I wish to join with my colleague and say that Republicans unanimously supported this bill that provides appropriations for our veterans and for our military construction needs unanimously in the subcommittee. Our Republican members unanimously supported this bill in the full committee, and the reason why is because this bill is marked to the House budget. This bill cuts spending on the budget authority discretionary side about \$1.2 billion below the President's request. The bill also cuts spending \$620 million below last year's level, and it even comes in \$2.6 million below Chairman CULBERSON's bill that passed the House of Representatives under their very strict budget guidelines.

I will note that we came together on a bipartisan basis in the Senate to bring up this very first of the appropriations bills, and the cloture motion to move forward to bring this bill to the floor passed by a vote of 71 to 26, with Leader MCCONNELL and our vice chairman, the lead Republican on the committee, Mr. COCHRAN, supporting that.

This bill has been endorsed by AMVETS, the Disabled American Veterans, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Paralyzed Veterans of America, and the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America.

I think it is very important as we look at the wider issue of deficits and debt, any danger of interrupting payments to veterans because of negotiations here on Capitol Hill, it is a very important signal that not just the House pass the appropriations bill to support our veterans but also the Senate. So my hope is we will consider the amendments this afternoon and then advise Members that we would seek to go to final passage and get this first of the appropriations bills done this year, sending a very clear message, especially to our veterans and men and women on Active Duty, that we are supporting their construction and veterans health care needs in a way that spends money according to the dictates of the House budget resolution.

I yield back and wait for our senior Member from Maryland.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maryland.

Mr. CARDIN. I ask unanimous consent to speak up to 10 minutes as if in morning business.

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

DEBT CEILING

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, I take this time to point out the obvious; that is, we are 13 days away from August 2,

the date Secretary Geithner has indicated, if we do not raise the debt ceiling, that America runs the risk of defaulting on its debt and not paying its bills. I bring this up because this is an issue on which we never should be this close to this deadline.

It has been pointed out many times that the debt ceiling has very little to do with how much money we spend. It has nothing to do with how much money we spend because we already spent this money. The question is whether we are going to pay our bills, whether the United States is going to live up to its obligations, or whether we are going to default on our debt.

The prospect of not making that deadline is basically unthinkable, that the United States would give up its preeminent position internationally. It could jeopardize the U.S. currency being the global currency. It would have an effect on everyone in this Nation.

We already have heard from the rating houses. Last week, both Standard & Poor's, S&P, and Moody's Investors Service warned they are considering downgrading the country's credit rating if the debt ceiling is not raised. A smaller firm, Egan-Jones Ratings, has already downgraded the U.S. securities. What happens if we get the major rating houses saying we are no longer AAA bond rated? Well, it will have an immediate effect on costs for taxpayers in this country. It will cost us more to borrow. That means we will have to pay higher taxes in order to pay the interest on the national debt. It will affect all credit in this country. It is estimated that the typical homeowner will pay an extra \$1,000 a year on mortgage costs. The average credit card holder will pay an extra \$250 a year in credit card interest. In other words, the interest rates of the Federal Treasury notes affect all the interest rates in this Nation. All of us will pay more, and it will cost jobs. It will cost us in our retirement savings. It will affect each one of us.

Yesterday, the people of Maryland found out another way the failure to increase the debt ceiling will have an effect on Maryland taxpayers; that is, the rating houses have indicated that if the Federal credit is jeopardized, the State of Maryland's AAA bond rating is in jeopardy. Why? Because Maryland depends, as do most States, upon the Federal Government.

Governor O'Malley, as the Presiding Officer knows—when you were Governor of West Virginia, you managed your State well. The credit ratings you deserved were based upon what you did in your State. That is true in Maryland. But Marylanders will find that their credit costs will go up if we don't increase the debt ceiling by August 2. We are all in this. We should never be this close. We should make sure we increase the debt ceiling by August 2.

Yes, I do hope we use this as an opportunity to get our spending and our budget in order. We need to manage

our deficit. We all understand that. We have to bring our debt under proper management.

I have taken the floor before to sort of go over how we got here. I am not going to do that today, but I am here to tell you that the Democrats in the Senate, under Senator CONRAD, have come in with a proposal that we think is well-balanced, that has more deficit reduction, quite frankly, than any plan that is out there. It is comprehensive, and it will allow us to be able to continue to grow our economy because the best thing we can do for our deficit is to create more jobs. The Conrad Democratic budget does that by investing in education, by investing in innovation and in infrastructure.

It also recognizes we have to bring the deficit under control. It protects Medicare and Medicaid because we know those programs are important for our seniors and important for our economy. So we protect high-priority programs and include more deficit reduction by having a balanced approach. That is what we should do in addition to raising the debt ceiling. We should have a comprehensive approach.

Let me cite some of the numbers of what the Conrad budget does. It brings spending down to 22 percent. I heard some of my colleagues talk about the historical averages. Twenty-two percent of our economy would be the same spending amount, on average, we had when Ronald Reagan was President. I think most of us would agree the Reagan years were certainly conservative in terms of government spending. That would bring down the percentages, despite the demographic changes in this country. I think that is quite an accomplishment.

The revenues would be equal to what the revenues were as a percentage of our economy when Bill Clinton was President of the United States and when we had the strongest economic growth and the greatest job growth in modern history. So these are responsible programs.

It also, by the way, says to our government workers, who should not be used as scapegoats and who are doing incredible work under difficult circumstances and are being asked to do more with less since they have already made the sacrifice with a 2-year pay freeze—the Conrad Democratic budget says enough is enough and doesn't ask our Federal workers to make additional sacrifices beyond the 2-year pay freeze they have already been subjected to.

I know there are other efforts and I hope we will continue those efforts. I have spoken before about the Bowles-Simpson approach, and we have the bipartisan group working. That is how we should proceed. But, quite frankly, this cut, cap, and balance is not a bipartisan effort; it is an extreme effort by Republicans to bring forward a budget that is even more severe and more radical than the Ryan budget. I call it cut, cap, and kill when it comes to Medicare.

Why do I say that? I have taken the floor regarding the Republican Ryan budget to point out the impact on the Medicare system, which would be to increase the costs, on average, to our seniors, when it is fully implemented, by an additional \$6,500 to pay for health care. I know the Presiding Officer has been through West Virginia and I have been through Maryland and I know our seniors are already paying too much for health care. They cannot afford another \$6,500 a year for their health care. We should be looking at reducing their health care costs, not increasing them.

But the cut, cap, and balance approach would go even beyond that. It is estimated there would be another \$2,500 in costs on top of the \$6,500, so \$9,000 of additional costs, when fully implemented, to our seniors for health care. That is cut, cap, and kill on Medicare, and I don't think any one of us wants to be responsible for that.

I heard my colleagues talk about job growth, and we are all for job growth. The cut, cap, and balance bill is estimated to cost us hundreds of thousands of private sector jobs.

Why do we say that? Well, the objective is not very subtle. The objective, as the Heritage Foundation has said—and this was just sent out to us—this would cut the size of the Federal Government by about half within 25 years. Are we going to tell our students they can do without half of their Pell grants? Yesterday, I joined students from around the Nation and presidents of colleges to talk about the importance of the Pell grant. At Morgan State University in Maryland and the University of Maryland Eastern Shore—both historically Black colleges and universities, in which 80 percent of their student body is made up of minority students—50 percent depend upon Pell grants. Half of that number could not be there without Pell grants. We are saying it is OK to cut the Pell grants in half? No, it is not OK.

Are we going to tell our seniors we are going to cut Social Security in half?

Are we going to tell those people who need unemployment insurance they are going to get 50 percent? It is not sustainable.

I heard my colleagues talk about predictability. Well, the cut, cap, and balance bill is not going to be sustained. It is a radical approach. We can do better.

Quite frankly, David Brooks, the conservative columnist, said it best. I will quote what he said about where the Republicans, particularly in the House, are trying to lead this Nation. David Brooks wrote:

... the Republican Party may no longer be a normal party. Over the past few years, it has been infected by a faction that is more of a psychological protest than a practical, governing alternative.

The members of this movement do not accept the logic of compromise, no matter how sweet the terms. If you ask them to raise taxes by an inch in order to cut government

by a foot, they will say no. If you ask them to raise taxes by an inch to cut government by a yard, they will still say no.

That is from David Brooks, the conservative columnist.

We need to have the system work. We need Democrats and Republicans working together. We need a budget plan that is predictable, that gets our budget under control, that allows America to create the jobs we need, and that invests in education, innovation, and infrastructure so America can continue to lead the world in economic growth. That is what we need to do. It starts by raising the debt limit so America does not default on its obligations and for us to work in a bipartisan manner to develop a budget plan that gets the debt under control but allows America to live up to its commitments to our seniors, to our students, and to create the job opportunities for tomorrow.

That is what we need to do, and that is what this Senator is prepared to do.

With that, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BARRASSO. Madam 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.

Mr. BARRASSO. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

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

THE NATIONAL DEBT

Mr. BARRASSO. Madam President, our country is 2 weeks away from a deadline date, and this deadline is approaching because of Washington's constant inaction. To me, this deadline has to do with our national debt. The President, on the other hand, says it has to do with our debt limit, the amount of money we are allowed by law to borrow.

I believe it has to do with the amount of money we have already borrowed and the amount of money they want to continue to borrow. I believe as Americans we can do better. I believe as Americans we must do better. Our country needs for us to act.

The President has repeatedly said we have to deal with this issue now. Last week he asked the most fundamental question. He said: If not now, when? The clock is ticking.

We got a wake-up call from Medicare not too long ago when we found out that it will be bankrupt 5 years sooner than they initially thought, just over a decade from now. As a doctor who has practiced medicine a long time, I will tell you we have to strengthen Medicare. We know in 25 years the same will happen to Social Security. Unlike our debt limit which Congress can legislate away, strengthening Medicare, saving Social Security, that cannot simply be

legislated away. We have to act now to prevent these programs from failing not just people on those programs today but also future generations.

The President has observed that we are in the eleventh hour when it comes to our debt ceiling, and the only clear path to raise the debt ceiling that has passed either House of Congress is the proposal that passed the House of Representatives last night, the Cut, Cap, and Balance Act. This act would only raise the debt ceiling if we put our country on the fast track back to fiscal sanity. That is where we need to be, on the track to fiscal sanity. It is an approach the American people will tell us we need now more than ever.

Our creditors are getting restive. This week Fitch credit ratings warned if the United States does not take action to avoid default, we could lose our AAA credit rating.

Standard & Poor's has already warned that unless we cut our budget, our credit rating could be at risk. Wasteful Washington spending has already saddled our children with over \$14 trillion of debt. If we default, this spending may also force them to pay punishingly high interest rates that will drain American dollars from our already sluggish economy.

I believe we will not default. We are already paying \$6,000 a second on interest alone on our debt. For those of us with children, we know what this impact is going to be on them years and years into the future. Well, the Cut, Cap, and Balance Act would put us on the path to resolving the issue by cutting spending immediately, by capping spending in the future, and by forcing—finally forcing—Washington to live within its means. This is the sort of law that the country needs and that the President should actually welcome.

What has the President done? Well, he has threatened to veto this law, he says, if it crosses his desk. The President has threatened to veto the only plan that actually solves the problem that has passed either House of Congress.

Why? Well, the administration emphasizes "public opinion" as their reason for opposing the hard choices required by our debt crisis. But yet the President said they are opposed to a balanced budget constitutional amendment. Well, in a recent Mason Dixon poll, 65 percent of Americans say they support a balanced budget constitutional amendment. Where is that respect the President talks about for public opinion?

Finally, the administration has hidden behind catch phrases rather than debate the merits of cut, cap, and balance. They refer to it by a different name. Well, when I hear the White House spokesman talk about cut, cap and balance in a different way, I say: How is that ducking the issue to confront both our spending problem and the debt ceiling head on? That is not

ducking the issue; that is facing the issue.

When the President's spokesman talks about dodging the issue, I will say: How is it a dodge to support commonsense solutions to our spending addiction, such as a balanced budget amendment?

Then he used the phrase about dismantling. I say: How does stopping our government from going bankrupt count as dismantling? The White House has even admitted that they do not have a plan. You know what, they do not think they need one. Is that astonishing? The White House—the United States, the most powerful country in the world—the White House does not think they need a plan at the eleventh hour. The White House Press Secretary just recently said: Leadership is not proposing a plan for the sake of having it voted up or down and likely voted down.

The budget that was brought to this floor—the President's budget—failed 0 to 97. Not one Republican voted for it. Not one Democrat voted for it. No one voted for what the President had proposed, no one of either party.

Perhaps the President ought to propose something new. Holding our country hostage to irresponsible Washington spending while trying to hit the economy with tax hikes is not leadership; it is denying the reality. Refusing to put forward a plan to resolve our spending crisis is not leadership; it is deferring the consequences.

Making the economy worse the way this administration has done for the past 2 years is not leadership, and it is hurting our country. The President's policies have made it worse—made the economy worse, made health care worse, made energy availability worse, housing worse. The policies have made it worse.

This administration can accuse cut, cap, and balance of ducking, and they can accuse it of dodging, and they can accuse it of dismantling, but the strategy coming out of the White House seems to be duck and cover. That is what we are seeing.

Anyone who knows the math knows this strategy was never acceptable before, and it is doubly unacceptable now. The amount of debt we owe right now is so high that it is hurting employment at home. Experts tell us our debt is costing us 1 million jobs. Spending like this makes it harder for the private sector to create new jobs, and the unemployment numbers that just came out show us at 9.2 percent unemployment.

With that kind of unemployment, energy prices are high, and people are noticing it in the quality of their lives. It is harder for American families to buy gas, buy groceries, buy cars, homes, pay tuition for their kids to go to college, and it is harder to create jobs for those kids who will be graduating this year and next year and every year until we get the spending under control.

Debt is not just a disaster for the distant future. Our debt is irresponsible. Our debt is unsustainable. Even our military leaders have condemned it. ADM Mike Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has said: The biggest threat to our national security is our debt.

The debt is the threat. It is not our enemies who are defeating us, it is our spending that is hurting us so very much. It is time for America to fight back. That is why I am supporting and have cosponsored cut, cap, and balance and will vote for it on the floor of the Senate.

This piece of legislation takes commonsense steps to get our country out of debt. It will immediately reduce spending by over \$100 billion as a downpayment on our children's future. It will place a hard cap on spending so that it never reaches the unsustainable heights of the past 2 years. It will send a balanced budget constitutional amendment to the American people for ratification, and it will prevent us from defaulting on our debt.

Passing this law is the kind of leadership that America deserves; and if the President wants to show he understands leadership, he should retract his veto threat and support this approach. I absolutely will support it when it comes to this body.

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

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

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. VITTER. Madam 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.

AMENDMENT NO. 568

Mr. VITTER. Madam President, I rise to ask support, bipartisan support, for the Vitter amendment which we will be voting on at 12 noon. This amendment is very simple. It is very straightforward. I think it is important and makes a central point.

The amendment says these funds in this bill will not be spent unless and until we have a 2012 budget, unless we start with first things first and decide what the overall budget framework is and then move forward with spending, with appropriations bills consistent with that budget. That is all it says. It is simple, straightforward, but it is an important point.

Folks around America, including in the market, are scratching their heads. They look at Washington and us and the Congress and the President and see almost complete dysfunction in the complete lack of a budget, even lack of an attempt to get a budget in place, which is a glaring, maybe the top example of that.

This isn't just a good, commonsense idea, something every family does, something every small business does; this also happens to be required by Federal law.

The Federal Budget Act mandates that we pass a budget by April 15 of every year. We have not done that. The House passed a budget. The Senate, quite frankly, has not even tried. The Senate Budget Committee has not even met to begin to do that in regular order, through the normal process. In fact, it is worse than that. The Senate didn't even try to do that last year under the same current leadership. So we are now over 800 days and counting, that the Senate, under this leadership, has not even tried to comply with Federal law and adopt a budget.

Again, my amendment is very simple. It says first things first. We need a budget so any appropriations bill, any spending is only done consistent with and in the context of that budget.

That is the right way to do it. That is the right way to run a railroad. That is what every Louisiana family does in setting its plans. That is what every Louisiana business does in setting its plans. That is what the American people and the markets want from us.

In the last few weeks, there has been great discussion about Moody's and Standard & Poor's and the threats to downgrade U.S. Treasury notes. What they have been saying is loud and clear. It is not a pure focus on the debt ceiling; it is even a more important focus as well on the underlying issue of spending and debt. They have been saying what every economist also says: We are on a completely unsustainable path in terms of spending and debt. They want to see a real change in that—the start of a real change, adding up to at least \$4 trillion of deficit reduction. We need to do that.

Step one to doing that is to have a budget. We can't begin to do that without a budget plan, without an outline. Again, that goes to the core, the simple, fundamental, straightforward and important point of this Vitter amendment. I urge my colleagues to put first things first. I urge my colleagues to say we need to start doing our business, starting with a 2012 budget.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. KIRK. Madam 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.

Mr. KIRK. Madam President, we are wrapping up to a vote that we hope will occur on Senator VITTER's amendment at noon. I will summarize where we are.

We are completing debate on a bill that provides funding for the Veterans' Administration and military construction needs. This bill backs up over 22 million veterans who have served our country.

The reason I and the Republicans on the Appropriations Committee have unanimously supported this bill is, it is

marked to the House budget resolution, the Paul Ryan budget resolution number. We cut funding by \$1.2 billion in budget authority discretionary numbers below the President's level. This bill comes in \$620 million below the 2011 enacted level, and it is even \$2.6 million below the House-passed level just adopted earlier this year, Chairman CULBERSON's bill in the House of Representatives.

The Senate voted by a vote of 71 to 26 for cloture to bring up this bill. This is the first of the working appropriations bills. I hope there are many others. The legislation is important. People may ask: How did we make the funding cuts to come in at the House level? The answer is, Chairman JOHNSON and I made some difficult decisions. We cut 24 separate military construction programs. A list is available in the report that accompanies this bill.

We made some very tough calls regarding spending that was proposed for Bahrain, for Germany, and for Korea. There was a worthwhile project proposed for the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims. They wanted a brandnew building and a courtroom. That was denied outright. Those tough decisions—those 24 reductions denying a new Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims building—making those cuts necessary then brought us under the House level, as approved by the Paul Ryan budget.

I remind Members the legislation is endorsed by the VFW, AMVETS, Disabled American Veterans, Paralyzed Veterans of America, and the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America. It had the unanimous support of Republicans in the subcommittee and in the full committee because it comes in at the House budget level. That is why I think it is necessary to move forward, especially as we talk about a budget crisis, in which checks may or may not go out. I very much hope they do. I think it is an important signal to send that the Paul Ryan-approved budget number, which is what this bill is at, goes forward, which ensures 2012 appropriated funding for our veterans and the military construction needs of our men and women in uniform.

With that, I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. JOHNSON of South Dakota. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. FRANKEN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. JOHNSON of South Dakota. Mr. President, what is the pending business?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the question is on agreeing to the Vitter amendment.

Mr. JOHNSON of South Dakota. Mr. President, the Vitter amendment pending before the Senate is another at-

tempt to derail the progress we have made in a bipartisan fashion on the MilCon/VA bill.

The Senate has voted twice on this issue during consideration of this bill. At the outset of debate, the ranking member of the Budget Committee raised a point of order against consideration of this bill without prior adoption of a budget resolution. I made a motion to waive that budget point of order and the Senate voted 71 to 26 to cut off debate on the motion to waive. The Senate then agreed to waive the point of order 56 to 40.

Now we have an amendment that says none of the critical funding provided in the bill can be obligated in excess of a budget resolution that does not exist. The strictest interpretation of this means the VA can't spend money on benefits for vets, and our military can't construct new training, housing, or other critical facilities until we have a budget agreement.

I don't disagree that it is important to pass a budget, but the Senate has overwhelmingly voted to move this bill so as to not delay essential funding for our troops and vets while negotiations on the debt ceiling and budget continue.

I remind my colleagues this bill is \$618 million below the current level, \$1.25 billion below the President's budget request, and \$2.6 million below the House-passed bill. This is a responsible and bipartisan bill, and the pending amendment would stop all progress we have made. Therefore, I move to table the amendment No. 568, and I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There is a sufficient second.

The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. KYL. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Arkansas (Mr. BOOZMAN).

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 69, nays 30, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 113 Leg.]

YEAS—69

Akaka	Franken	Menendez
Alexander	Gillibrand	Merkley
Baucus	Graham	Mikulski
Begich	Hagan	Murkowski
Bennet	Harkin	Murray
Bingaman	Heller	Nelson (NE)
Blumenthal	Hoeven	Nelson (FL)
Boxer	Hutchison	Pryor
Brown (MA)	Inouye	Reed
Brown (OH)	Isakson	Reid
Burr	Johnson (SD)	Rockefeller
Cantwell	Kerry	Sanders
Cardin	Kirk	Schumer
Carper	Klobuchar	Shaheen
Casey	Kohl	Stabenow
Chambliss	Landrieu	Tester
Cochran	Lautenberg	Udall (CO)
Collins	Leahy	Udall (NM)
Conrad	Levin	Warner
Coons	Lieberman	Webb
Cornyn	Manchin	Whitehouse
Durbin	McCain	Wicker
Feinstein	McCaskill	Wyden

NAYS—30

Ayotte	Hatch	Portman
Barrasso	Inhofe	Risch
Blunt	Johanns	Roberts
Coats	Johnson (WI)	Rubio
Coburn	Kyl	Sessions
Corker	Lee	Shelby
Crapo	Lugar	Snowe
DeMint	McConnell	Thune
Enzi	Moran	Toomey
Grassley	Paul	Vitter

NOT VOTING—1

Boozman

The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the motion to reconsider is considered made and laid upon the table.

Mr. JOHNSON of South Dakota. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. JOHNSON of South Dakota. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. JOHNSON of South Dakota. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to a period of morning business until 2:15 p.m., with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

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

Mr. JOHNSON of South Dakota. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

CUT, CAP, AND BALANCE

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, we are going to move to a debate on our budget deficit, particularly on the debt ceiling we face on August 2. The proposal before us was enacted by the House yesterday on a virtually partisan rollcall, with one or two exceptions. The Republicans passed a proposal which they have characterized as cut, cap, and balance, and they will bring it to the floor of the Senate for consideration. It tries to project spending targets and cuts in spending for the years to come and also to include in the conversation the balanced budget amendment.

It is interesting, the way they approach it, because the balanced budget amendment is literally an amendment to the Constitution of the United States, and those of us who take our oath seriously—and I assume that is every Member of Congress and the Senate—understand that we are sworn to uphold this Constitution. In other