

was not being backed up, if they thought that we might renege on our IOUs, it could unravel the entire financial system.

These are scare tactics. These things need not happen. I am afraid they are meant to intimidate Members of Congress into voting for a debt limit increase without the underlying reforms and spending cuts that the President resists. I think it's irresponsible to make these suggestions because it is entirely within the power of the administration to avoid a catastrophic default even if the debt limit is not raised.

Now we have published reports that Treasury officials are making private phone calls to senior executives at big banks informing them that the Treasury will not allow a default—will choose not to default on our bonds. I think they should not default on our bonds, but it is all well and good to tell the big banks this. How about ordinary Americans who wonder: What about our savings, and what about Social Security payments?

This is unacceptable. That is why we introduced a bill called Ensuring the Full Faith and Credit of the United States and Protecting America's Soldiers and Seniors Act. We have over 35 cosponsors.

Our bill would instruct the Treasury Secretary that in the event, however unlikely, that the debt ceiling is not raised prior to August 2, they make certain obligations and priorities so they will be paid in full, on time, and without delay. Those three priorities are: interest on our debt, so we will not default and plunge our country into economic chaos; No. 2, Social Security payments because millions of senior citizens, including my parents, depend on Social Security payments. They have earned that benefit by virtue of the payments they have made. We can and must honor that obligation. Next is payroll for Active-Duty military personnel because those risking their lives for us deserve this certainty.

The fact is, there are far more than enough resources for the administration to make these payments. As this chart illustrates, the green bar reflects total minimum revenue expected to come in in August. The combination of interest on our debt, Active-Duty military pay, and Social Security benefits would add up to less than half of the revenue that we are going to take in in August alone. These are not my numbers. They come from the Bipartisan Policy Center. They illustrate clearly that we have the ability to pay these items and many others.

Let me be very clear. I am not suggesting this is a desirable outcome. I am not suggesting this bill is the substitute for raising the debt ceiling.

Mr. President, this chart illustrates that there clearly are more than enough financial resources that will be coming into the Treasury day in and day out in the form of ongoing tax revenue to easily be able to afford interest on our debt to avoid a default, Social

Security payments to seniors so that they can be assured of the income they deserve, and Active-Duty military pay, with a great deal left over.

These are not my numbers. They come independently verified by many organizations, including the Bipartisan Policy Center. This bill is not meant as a substitute for raising the debt limit. It is a mechanism for minimizing the disruption that might otherwise occur if the debt limit is not raised prior to August 2.

It is my hope that this legislation never needs to be implemented. But I believe it would be irresponsible for us to go into this period without having planned for how we will handle it in the event this happens.

I yield the floor.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

EXECUTIVE SESSION

NOMINATION OF ROBERT S. MUELLER, III, TO BE DIRECTOR OF THE FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to consider Executive Calendar No. 276, which the clerk will report.

The bill clerk read the nomination of Robert S. Mueller, III, of California, to be Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation for a term expiring September 4, 2013.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont is recognized.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, before I begin, unless all time is yielded back, we have 2 hours on this debate. I ask unanimous consent that any quorum calls during that 2 hours be charged equally to both sides.

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

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, today the Senate will consider the President's nomination of Robert Mueller to continue serving as the Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. This is consistent with the President's May 12, 2011 request that Congress pass legislation to enable the Director to continue serving, in light of the leadership transitions at several key national security agencies.

Prior to the President's request, I had discussed this with President Obama, and one of the things he noted was that we were going to have a new Secretary of Defense, a new Director of the CIA, and that he did not want to

have yet a third key member of the national security team be replaced at this time. I applaud the President for this, as he could have taken another route and named somebody who would serve for 10 years, beyond any time the President might be in office. Instead, the President decided to do what is best for the country and extend Director Mueller for 2 years. With the tenth anniversary of 9/11 approaching and the continued threat from al-Qaida, we find ourselves facing unique circumstances. We need leadership, stability, and continuity at the FBI as the President makes necessary shifts to his national security team.

After I met with the President and heard his request, I immediately went to work with a bipartisan group of Senators to draft and introduce a bill to create a one-time exception to the statute that limits the term of the FBI Director to 10 years. I worked in a bipartisan manner to hold a hearing and report the legislation to the full Senate on June 16, 2011. We worked in such a way it could not be seen as a Democratic or Republican bill but as bipartisan. Unfortunately, it then took a month to get consent from the other side to consider the bill. Once we obtained consent, the Senate was able to pass a version of it on July 21. The House of Representatives, to their credit, followed suit on July 25 and the President signed the bill into law yesterday.

The President's nomination of Director Mueller shows there was never any effort to impose a legislative appointment upon the President. The request to extend Director Mueller's term originated with the President, not Congress. Nor was it Director Mueller's idea. The President has prevailed upon Director Mueller and his family, for the good of the country, to alter their plans for Director Mueller to leave the FBI. Instead, both Director Mueller and Mrs. Mueller have answered the call of the country. Incidentally, I don't think I am disclosing anything inappropriate by saying that in my discussions with the President, when he was talking about extending the term of Director Mueller, I asked him: How does Director Mueller feel about this? The President said: I haven't talked with him yet, but he is a good, loyal American, a good Marine, and he will answer the call. And that is precisely what he did.

When we passed our legislation, I did insist we include a unanimous consent agreement to expedite consideration of this nomination when others insisted we adopt a form of statute that would require Director Mueller's renomination. The Majority Leader now has consent to take up the nomination, and after the use or yielding back of time for debate, the Senate will vote on the nomination. Some asked why I insisted upon such a unanimous consent agreement. I did it to prevent a recurrence of the delays and obstruction that have been used to complicate consideration

of so many of the President's nominations, especially in the area of national security, such as the Deputy Attorney General, the Assistant Attorney General for National Security, and so many others.

We have Senators who speak on the floor about the importance of protecting the security of the United States, but then at the same time delay and delay the people the President needs in place to protect our national security. The irony is that after these nominees have been held up month after month, they pass overwhelmingly in this body. In fact, there was even a hold originally on the legislation making Director Mueller's nomination possible. But now that is behind us and the Senate can vote to reconfirm Director Mueller to a new 2-year term before the August 2 deadline and avoid any lapse in leadership at the FBI.

Let me speak a little about the Director. He took over as FBI Director just days before the attacks of September 11, 2001. Since then, he has overseen and guided the Bureau through a major transformation and evolution. Of course, as in any major transformation, there have been problems, but the Director has consistently displayed professionalism and focus in increasing the FBI's national security and counterterrorism efforts, while still carrying out the Bureau's essential law enforcement responsibilities. So I applaud Director Mueller's commitment to ensuring that the FBI adheres to the values and freedoms Americans hold dear, while vigorously pursuing important law enforcement national security objectives.

As chairman of the Judiciary Committee, I intend to continue to conduct vigorous oversight of the FBI, and will work closely with the Director on these important issues. After all, oversight is one of Congress's most important responsibilities. For example, on June 17, I wrote a letter with Ranking Member GRASSLEY to Director Mueller about the proposed changes in the FBI's revised edition of the Domestic Investigations and Operations Guide. I remain committed to ensuring that this revised guide provides the FBI with the latitude it needs to carry out its duties while not infringing upon the civil liberties of Americans, and ensuring the Judiciary Committee and public are kept informed from its implementation.

I will continue to monitor the implementation of the USA PATRIOT Act, which Congress extended this past May. At the start of this Congress, I introduced legislation that would have extended the three expiring provisions of the USA PATRIOT Act, while improving oversight, promoting transparency, and expanding privacy and civil liberties safeguards in current law. Unfortunately, despite the fact that legislation was reported favorably by the Judiciary Committee, it was never allowed to receive an up-or-down

vote during the debate to extend the expiring provisions of the USA PATRIOT Act earlier this year. Nonetheless, I will work with Director Mueller, the Department of Justice, and all Senators of both parties to ensure oversight of the USA PATRIOT Act authorities.

It is important that we vote for this renomination this afternoon, given the ongoing threats to our Nation, and I appreciate Director Mueller's willingness to continue his service. At the Judiciary Committee hearing on the legislation allowing for this extension, while I noted that Director Mueller has dedicated his life to public service, I also made a point to mention his wife, Ann. All of us who serve in public office know that it puts extra strain on our family members. I know how much of a partner she has been with him in bringing him to where he is, and I know it has to have been a large part of their life together. I am certain that they both were hoping to be able to have some time without the pressures of being in such demanding public service. So I thank him for being willing to serve, but I thank Mrs. Mueller, too. So often we forget that Director Mueller has dedicated his life to public service, and we are grateful to him and his family for their continued sacrifice.

Mr. President, I see the distinguished ranking member on the floor, so I yield the floor to Senator GRASSLEY. And I note for the Senator from Iowa that I have already asked consent that when there is a quorum call, the time be divided equally.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa is recognized.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I am very pleased to support the renomination of Robert Mueller to be Director of the FBI.

Director Mueller has served as Director since days immediately preceding the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. In the wake of that tragedy, he has overseen a top-to-bottom transformation of the FBI from a domestic law enforcement agency to a national security agency and with a necessary global presence to combat terrorism.

Director Mueller has led the charge to ensure that the FBI's transformation is successful. This includes upgrading the workforce from an agent-driven agency to one that includes an ever-increasing number of intelligence analysts. I applaud the hard work that has been done, and I also applaud the leadership of Director Mueller. But more work remains.

Despite the recent successes, the FBI also has its share of black marks and skeletons in the closet. I have been an outspoken critic of the FBI's culture for many years because of its unwillingness to own up to mistakes. Too often, officials sought to protect the agency's reputation at the expense of the truth. My concerns are magnified by the way the FBI has treated internal whistleblowers who come forward

and report fraud and abuse. But these problems are not necessarily the fault of Director Mueller, and many of these problems were in place long before he arrived.

The Director has been forthright in coming before Congress and explaining these mistakes and not simply passing the buck. I appreciate his candor, and I believe the FBI is in good hands with his leadership. But I will continue, as he knows, to conduct extensive oversight of the FBI to ensure that taxpayers' dollars are spent appropriately and that the civil liberties of Americans are protected.

In 1976, following the excesses of J. Edgar Hoover, Congress limited the term of the Director of the FBI to one nonrenewable 10-year term. Congress did so to prevent the accumulation of excess power by a Director as well as to provide some political independence for the FBI.

Despite his knowing about Director Mueller's impending term limit and his initiating a search for a successor led by Attorney General and Vice President BIDEN, President Obama chose not to send the Senate a nomination for the Director of the FBI. Instead, the President decided, notwithstanding those statutory provisions, Director Mueller should continue to serve in this position for another 2 years.

Presidential decisions to make transitions in other national security positions are not a special circumstance supporting the extension of the Director's term. Those personnel changes were entirely within the control of the President. However, we do live in extraordinary times and currently face unusual national security threats. Between the recent death of Osama bin Laden and with the upcoming 10th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, there is an increased threat of a possible terrorist attack. Against this backdrop and with a heavy heart, I agreed to support the President's request to provide a one-time exception to the 10-year term limit on the FBI directorship.

With some reluctance, I joined as a cosponsor of the original S. 1103. The President recently signed into law a modified version of that bill that provides a one-time extension of the FBI Director's term. Early in the process, I said that as a requirement for my support of any legislation extending the 10-year term, regular procedure be followed. The purpose of this requirement was to set a substantial precedent against pursuing a simple process eviscerating the 10-year term limit.

The process of getting to today's confirmation vote has met my early requirement. A precedent has been set that the FBI Director's term would not be routinely extended—the process of holding a hearing where the FBI Director testified, a legislative markup, and a floor vote in both the House and Senate. Further, the bill was coupled with a unanimous consent agreement requiring a vote on the renomination of

Director Mueller. Taken together, this process has established a historical record that we do not take this extension lightly and that any future extensions should have to go through no less than this same process.

The 10-year limit has achieved its intended purpose. Until Director Mueller, no Director subject to the limit has served the full 10-year term. The limit has been successful in reducing the power of the Director and in preserving the vital civil liberties of all Americans.

It has also provided important political independence for the FBI Director. Only one Director has been fired in this period, and this did not occur for political reasons. The prohibition on reappointment has also preserved the Directors' independence by eliminating any potential that the Director will attempt to curry favor with the Presidents to be reappointed.

Director Mueller has done an admirable job on some areas of reform in an agency under difficult circumstances. I strongly support Director Mueller and believe he will continue to provide steady leadership at this agency during what continue to be extraordinary times, and you can say extraordinary times going back to at least September 11, 2001, but as you look on the history of the war on terror, it probably started 25 years before that in one form or another. However, it is clear to me, as the legislation the President signed requires, that in 2 years Director Mueller will need to move on and the President will send the Senate a new nominee to fill his shoes.

In the meantime, we all ought to thank Director Mueller for his willingness to serve for another 2 years in this very important position because I am sure he was already ready to move on. So the people of the United States as well as this Congress need to say thank you, Director Mueller, for being willing to serve your people again.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alabama.

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, I support the President's nomination of Robert Mueller to be the Director of the FBI for an additional 2-year term.

I believe Mr. Mueller is a fine Director of the FBI. I had the opportunity to observe him within the Department of Justice for a number of years. I served as U.S. attorney in Alabama for 12 years, and during that time he was the U.S. attorney. He was an attorney in the Department of Justice, and he was one of the top administrators of the Department of Justice. Director

Mueller was a decorated Marine officer and served in Vietnam. I truly believe he represents the highest and best ideals of American patriotism and capability.

He had the opportunity over the years to go into private practice and make a lot of money. He has stayed and committed himself to public service according to the highest ideals, I believe, of public service.

He had a 10-year term. Normally, we would expect that it would be just that, a 10-year term. The Director has given that long a period of time because there was a concern that when people stay too long, problems can arise in the system because it becomes personality driven rather than meritocracy and people can become entrenched in that sort of thing. So we have a 10-year term. I am not sure that is a perfect period of time, but that was the one that was decided, so it should not be lightly changed to a longer period of time without some serious thought.

Are we violating the very purposes of the act that limited his term? I am pleased that, instead of moving forward with the proposal as originally drafted, we are now moving forward with the proposal Senator COBURN offered, his substitute amendment. I think that is the better way to extend the term. I would like to talk about that a little bit.

The original proposal would have just amended the statute providing that the Director serve for only one 10-year term and created an exception to allow Director Mueller to serve an additional 2 years. I am concerned about the potential for creating a dangerous precedent that the 10-year term limit applies depending on who is the Director, his or her political popularity, and the political dynamics of the White House and the Congress. That was not our goal.

I do understand the President's desire to retain Director Mueller during this time in our Nation's history and to do so expeditiously and not to have some sort of interim uncertainty. Actually, I congratulate the President on his judgment in concluding that Director Mueller can do a good job and has done a good job. While it is true that the original legislative proposal would have accomplished those things, I believe it was the easy way out and would not only have been a temptation to future generations to replicate it, but, more important, it might have run afoul of the Constitution.

At the hearing before the Judiciary Committee, of which I am a member, concerns were raised about the original proposal. Those were raised by University of Virginia James Madison Distinguished Professor of Law John Harrison.

As we all recall, James Madison was considered to be the Founder of our Constitution, the most active member of our Constitutional Convention, the one whose notes told us what went on,

the one who went to the convention with an outline, a framework for the structure of government that eventually became our Constitution.

Mr. Harrison testified that it was an unconstitutional "attempt by Congress to exercise directly through legislation the appointments power."

Article II, section 2, clause 2 of the Constitution, the appointments clause—it is in the Constitution—states that the President "shall nominate and by and with the Advice and Consent of the Senate, shall appoint Ambassadors and other public Ministers and Consuls, Judges of the Supreme Court and all other Officers of the United States, whose appointments are not herein otherwise provided for, and which shall be established by law."

In the case of *Buckley v. Valeo*, the Supreme Court held that "any appointee exercising significant authority pursuant to the laws of the United States is an 'Officer of the United States' and must, therefore, be appointed in the manner prescribed by [section] 2, [clause] 2, of that Article."

In addition, the Supreme Court has long recognized that "the power of removal [is] incident to the power of appointment." Therefore, Congress may not involve itself in the removal process insofar as it interferes with the ability of the President to exercise Executive power and to perform his constitutional duty.

Professor Harrison explained that because "an appointment is a legal act that causes someone to hold an office that otherwise would be vacant or held by someone else," a "statutory extension of the term of an incumbent causes the current incumbent to hold an office that otherwise would have been vacant upon the expiration of the incumbent's term. It is thus a statutory appointment."

Professor Harrison further testified that the original proposal would have also run afoul of the fundamental constitutional principle that underlies the appointments clause. This is a fundamental principle because the President has the ultimate veto—the power to decide whether to appoint someone at all—and he has the absolute responsibility for their nomination, good or bad. He nominates them.

Indeed, the rationale for the structure of the appointments clause dates back to *Federalist No. 76* in which Alexander Hamilton explained:

The sole and undivided responsibility of one man will naturally beget a livelier sense of duty and a more exact regard to reputation. He will on this account feel himself under stronger obligation and more interested to investigate with care the qualities requisite to the stations to be filled, and to prefer with impartiality the persons who may have the fairest pretensions to them.

That is pretty effective language.

Dilution of the President's sole responsibility for nomination and appointment is inconsistent with constitutional principles.

Given that constitutional concerns were raised by these scholars, it was at

least arguable that had we proceeded with the original proposal, a judge could find Director Mueller's appointment and term of service to be unconstitutional if it were to be challenged by someone in court, and that was possible.

Particularly concerning was the suggestion that in a properly presented case involving an individual subject to a purported exercise of government power by the Director who was appointed pursuant to a statute such as the original proposal, a court could find that exercise of power to be invalid, either prospectively or retroactively. In the past, courts have enforced the appointments clause by holding invalid the actions of purported officers whose appointments did not comport with the Constitution.

When questioned about this possibility at the hearing, both Director Mueller and former Deputy Attorney General of the United States James Comey agreed that if serious constitutional concerns could be raised, they would favor proceeding with the re-appointment process in a different way, one that would pass constitutional muster and not raise questions.

Professor Harrison advises an alternative constitutional method, which is the proposal Congress passed and the President signed into law yesterday. He gave us a suggested way to proceed that would be constitutional, and we drafted it, agreed with it, and passed it.

I think it speaks pretty well of Congress that we are attuned to the complexities of the Constitution and are committed to being faithful to that document, not just taking convenience and going faster but taking the time to hear professors, to think it out, because in that way we respect the Constitution, we venerate it, we strengthen it. When we just bypass it or slide by, dismiss lightly concerns that actions of Congress or the President may be in violation of the Constitution and don't give due weight to that, we disrespect the document.

This law creates a new 2-year term that would run until September 4, 2013. It assumed that President Obama would nominate Director Mueller to that new term with the advice and consent of the Senate, requiring the confirmation vote we will proceed to shortly. Under the new law, Director Mueller is not eligible for another term after September 4, 2013, and after the expiration of that new term, the term for the Director of the FBI will revert to the previous law, the 10-year term; therefore, whoever is the President in 2013 can appoint a new Director to a 10-year term.

While I agree Congress should work to expedite the confirmation process in this unique situation, I also saw no reason to proceed in a constitutionally unsound manner. The formalities of the Constitution may sometimes create obstacles to getting things done as quickly as some would like, but the Constitution and its formalities exist

for a very important reason; that is, our constitutional tradition of the adherence to the rule of law. We cannot circumvent those formalities in the interest of some expediency or because it is a convenient means to a desired end. The words of the Constitution have meaning. They are not suggestions that we are free to ignore if it is inconvenient today.

I believe in the process by which we are now proceeding—creating a separate 2-year term and then calling on the President to make a new nomination. He didn't have to renominate Director Mueller, but he indicated that was his desire, and we have accorded him the opportunity to do that. He has renominated Director Mueller, and I hope in a few moments we will confirm him to this important position.

One of the discussions we had at that hearing was with Professor Van Alstyne. I heard him make a speech many years ago—I was a U.S. attorney, so it must have been 15, 20 years ago—at the Eleventh Circuit Conference, I think, in Georgia. He spoke to the judges. He said he had come to the belief that if one really respected the Constitution, they would follow it faithfully, the good and the bad parts, because that was the only way you respected the Constitution, that was the way to honor the Constitution. That is the way to respect it, to follow what it says.

To the extent to which we are tempted to move around the plain words, the plain intent of the Constitution for convenience, we weaken that document. In the long run, a weakened document will be less of a bulwark protecting our liberties and our freedom as individual Americans.

I thank the President, I thank the leadership, and I thank Senator LEAHY, the chairman of our committee, for responding to the professor's request and ideas and proceeding in a way that I think raises no question about constitutionality—or if it does, it is small—and in a way that took a little more effort.

I once again express my deep admiration for Director Mueller. He is a thoroughly professional law enforcement officer. For virtually the entire time of his law enforcement career, he has tried individual cases, prosecuted individual defendants for all kinds of crimes and depredations. He has understood the reality of courtroom experience. He has worked as a prosecutor with the FBI investigative agents over his entire career as a law enforcement officer, and now, as the Director of the FBI, he brings a unique experience to it. I believe he has done a fine job, and I believe he will continue to do a fine job for the people of the United States.

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, I rise today in strong support of FBI Director Robert Mueller continuing in his current position for another 2 years. He valiantly served our country in the Marine Corps, earning various commendations including the Purple Heart. He

also served our country in a variety of other important positions including as a Federal prosecutor, as the head of the of the criminal division at the Department of Justice, and as Acting Deputy Attorney General. He is the second-longest serving director in the FBI's history.

Robert was sworn in as the FBI Director exactly 1 week before the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. He inherited an agency ill-equipped at that time for detecting the emerging threats posed by terrorist organizations such as al-Qaida. Change does not come easily to Federal Government agencies, but Director Mueller immediately committed to Congress that he would alter the status quo that dominated and redefined the culture of the Bureau to effectively address the new emerging threats facing our Nation.

As Congress began looking at providing the FBI with badly needed terror investigation tools such as the USA PATRIOT Act and the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, Director Muller was a prominent and critical part of the process. In the 10 years since that terrible attack on our Nation, the agency that Director Mueller leads has detected numerous plots aimed at attacking Americans both at home and abroad. At the same time, the FBI still carries out its function as the Nation's leading criminal investigative agency at the Department of Justice.

Robert Mueller had a baptism by fire in those first days and weeks of his tenure. His leadership, character, and poise have remained constant and the net result has been a revamped FBI that is smarter, more nimble, and better equipped to meet the continuing threat of terrorism that America faces every day.

I not only support this opportunity for Director Mueller to serve for another 2 years, but I am very pleased that we achieved this end through a constitutional means. The initial legislation would have simply extended Director Mueller's statutory term without a new nomination and confirmation. That would have amounted to an appointment by the Senate. The Constitution, however, gives the appointment power to the President. We must not use unconstitutional means to achieve even desirable political ends.

I applaud the Senator from Oklahoma, Mr. COBURN, who offered the alternative of creating a single separate 2-year term that would be available only to Director Mueller. That approach leaves in place the statutory 10-year term for the position of FBI Director and respects the constitutional process of nomination and confirmation. It is indisputably constitutional. We have all taken the same oath to support and defend the Constitution, and that at least means we should choose a path that is constitutionally firm over a path that is constitutionally shaky. We did in this case, and I think it is a win-win. It achieves a

good purpose through a constitutional process.

So I am proud to vote once again to support Robert Mueller's nomination to be FBI Director. He is a great public servant and the right leader for these challenging times.

Ms. MIKULSKI. Mr. President, I rise today to support wholeheartedly the nomination of Robert S. Mueller III to continue serving as the Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, FBI, for an additional 2 years.

I have three criteria for nominees: (1) competence; (2) commitment to mission of the agency; and (3) highest integrity. Director Mueller surpasses all those tests with flying colors.

His competence cannot be questioned. Director Mueller came to the FBI just a week before the 9/11 terrorist attacks of 2001. Since then, he has provided steadfast leadership as the FBI has transformed from a traditional domestic law enforcement agency into a global counterterrorism and anticrime police force that has successfully kept Americans safe from terrorist attacks here at home and abroad. Prior to the FBI, he served our Nation as a decorated marine in Vietnam, and as a Federal prosecutor who tackled cases ranging from the bombing of Pan Am flight 103 to the prosecution of Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega.

He has shown unwavering commitment to the FBI's mission. Director Mueller is the only FBI Director to serve out a full 10-year term. From his first day on the job, he fought to make sure the hardworking men and women at the FBI have the tools they need to carry out their extraordinary responsibilities. As chairwoman of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee that funds the FBI and as a member of the Intelligence Committee, I am proud to call Director Mueller my steadfast partner in that fight. Together, we work to provide the FBI with the capabilities to stop terrorists before they attack us here at home, go after schemers and scammers who prey on hardworking American families, prevent cyberterrorists from devastating our technology infrastructure, and catch sexual predators before they harm our children. I look forward to continuing our strong partnership for the next 2 years.

Lastly, Director Mueller has strong integrity. He speaks truth to power, even when the truth is unpopular or inconvenient. He answered the call to service when President Bush asked him to serve as FBI director in 2001. And he has answered the call of President Obama when asked to serve 2 more years.

We live in extraordinarily critical times, facing threats from both within and outside our Nation, and the President's national security team has experienced major leadership changes in recent months. Keeping Director Mueller at the FBI for another 2 years means that one of the tested "Nighthawks"

will continue guarding our Nation's national security. The broad bipartisan support in the Senate to have him continue serving as Director is a testament to the faith we place in this proven leader. We are privileged to have such a committed and dedicated public servant leading the FBI, and I am proud to support his nomination.

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Mr. President, I rise to speak in strong support of the nomination of Robert Mueller to continue as the Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation for an additional 2 years.

In his 10 years at the FBI, Director Mueller has served admirably, instituting important reforms at the Bureau and strengthening its counterterrorism capabilities. An extension of his term will insure that those efforts can continue and provide important stability to the President's national security team during this challenging time.

It is not surprising that when searching for a replacement for Director Mueller, the President determined that it would be best if the Director would continue his service. Director Mueller has a long and distinguished career in public service and we are fortunate that he has agreed to continue in his position.

I know that my colleagues are generally familiar with Mr. Mueller's background, but I think this is an appropriate time to review his many accomplishments.

Director Mueller first began his service to our Nation when he joined the U.S. Marine Corps after graduating from Princeton University. He served as an officer for 3 years, leading a rifle platoon of the Third Marine Division in Vietnam. He received the Bronze Star, two Navy Commendation medals, the Purple Heart, and the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry.

After receiving his law degree from the University of Virginia Law School, Mr. Mueller headed to my home State of California to begin his legal career. He worked in San Francisco as a litigator until 1976, when he joined the U.S. Attorney's Office in the Northern District of California. Eventually, he would become the chief of the criminal division in that office.

In 1982, he moved to Boston to serve as an assistant U.S. attorney. He investigated and prosecuted major financial fraud, terrorism, and public corruption cases.

After serving in several positions in the public and private sectors, in 1998 Mr. Mueller was named U.S. attorney in San Francisco. That was when he first came to my attention as a skilled and committed prosecutor.

Mr. Mueller continued in that role until he was nominated to be FBI Director by President George W. Bush on July 5, 2001. That was an extremely challenging and difficult time to take on this responsibility, as he came to office only a few months before the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001.

Director Mueller more than rose to the occasion. He provided strong and

steady leadership, and worked to transform the Bureau into an agency that can better detect and prevent terrorist attacks against the United States.

Under Director Mueller's direction, the FBI has played an essential role in more than 20 significant counterterrorism operations, while infiltrating and arresting groups of individuals charged with planning attacks against our country.

The FBI has also built its cyber investigation capability, focused on counterintelligence, investigated public corruption cases, and tracked and disrupted gang activity.

Time and again, Director Mueller has met the many challenges facing the Bureau, and it is now one of our most respected government institutions.

Of course, Congress had good reasons for placing a term limit on the Director of the FBI. History has shown that the enormous power wielded by the Director and the FBI can be subject to abuse in the wrong hands.

Congress has recognized those concerns with regard to the extension of Director Mueller's term. With the implementing legislation that has passed Congress, and this subsequent nomination, Congress and the President have created a one-time extension that would only apply to Director Mueller. Future FBI Directors would still be limited to a 10-year term.

Extending Director Mueller's term at the FBI for an additional 2 years will ensure that the important reforms and progress he has made will continue. Additionally, it will provide important stability to the President's national security team during this sensitive and challenging time and while it is otherwise going through important leadership changes.

This summer Leon Panetta has succeeded Robert Gates as Secretary of Defense. Although General David Petraeus has been confirmed to be the next Director of the CIA, he will not arrive at Headquarters in Langley to take leadership of the Agency until after Labor Day.

There are additional changes in key military leadership positions, as well as at the National Counterterrorism Center.

In the midst of these changes, Director Mueller will be an experienced, steady hand among the President's national security advisors. Keeping Director Mueller in his position will provide important continuity and leadership during this transition.

Personally, I have deep admiration and respect for Director Mueller. His integrity, courage, and dedication are an inspiration, and his leadership and effectiveness serve as an example for all. I am very pleased to call him my friend, and thank him for his willingness to continue to serve for another 2 years.

I urge my colleagues to support his confirmation.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant editor of the Daily Digest proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

BUDGET CUT IMPACT

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, we are clearly at a momentous moment in American history. We are getting tens of thousands of people visiting our Web site, sanders.senate.gov, every day. People want to know what is going on. As the longest serving Independent in history in Congress, let me give my view of where we are right now.

First, I do wish to say I get a little bit tired of hearing some of our pundits and some of the politicians around here blithely talking about trillions of dollars in cuts. I see some of these guys making huge salaries on TV saying: Why don't they just come to an agreement—\$2 trillion in cuts, \$3 trillion in cuts. That may be OK if one is making a whole lot of money on television doing a television show, but, clearly, those people have not been talking to real Americans.

Let me go over what the media and many of us in Congress have not been talking about, and that is what the impacts of these trillions of dollars of cuts are about. These are not just words on a piece of paper. These are cuts which are going to have devastating impacts on people who are already suffering as a result of the worst recession since the Great Depression. Some people come up with this great idea and they say: The cost-of-living adjustment for Social Security is too high today, seniors and disabled vets are getting too much, and "noted economists"—I have not heard from these noted economists—think it is too extravagant.

Mr. President, go back to Baltimore and I will go to Vermont and we will ask seniors whether they think the COLAs they are getting now are too extravagant, given the fact they haven't gotten a COLA in the last 2 years. Studies I have seen say not only are the COLAs today not too extravagant for Social Security and disabled vets, they are, in fact, too low because they underestimate the real expenses of seniors, which largely have to do with health care and prescription drugs. The costs are soaring. Any of these pundits or any of these economists who go out and talk to real people and say Social Security COLAs are too high are going to get laughed right out of the room because it isn't true.

If we come forward with this so-called chained CPI, this new formulation for COLAs, this is what it will mean in the real world: If someone is 65 today, when they become 75 in 10 years, that will result in a \$560 decline in what they otherwise would have gotten in Social Security benefits, and when they are 85, 20 years from today, that

will be a \$1,000-a-year decline. I know in DC, with the lobbyists making millions a year, when we talk about \$1,000, that is what these guys spend on a fancy dinner. It is laughable. They don't know what goes on in the real world.

There are millions of seniors today hanging on, trying to pay their prescription drug costs, trying to pay their out-of-pocket costs for health care, and \$1,000 a year in 20 years is a lot of money for those people. In my view, it would be immoral and unacceptable to do what a number of plans out here are talking about; that is, to cut Social Security benefits very significantly. Clearly, that is where the Republicans are coming from, but it distresses me that I hear the President and Democrats in Congress also talking about that. This Senator will do everything he can to protect this enormously important program which, by the way, just in passing, has not contributed one nickel to the deficit because it is funded by the payroll tax and has a \$2.6 trillion surplus. From a moral perspective, we cannot and must not cut Social Security.

There are other geniuses out there who are saying: Well, the way Medicare health care costs are going up, maybe it is time we did something like make major cuts in Medicare, including raising the eligibility age from 65 to 67. What is the problem? What is 2 years? Clearly, those folks have not talked to anybody who has been struggling when they are 60 or 63 and looking forward to Medicare at 65. What happens if a person is a modest-income person and they are 66 years of age and they are dealing with a health care crisis? Maybe they were hospitalized, but the government has said, pundits have said, my Republican friends have said, we are going to raise the Medicare age to 67. Tell me what happens. Let the American people tell me what happens to those millions of people? What are they supposed to do? They get diagnosed with cancer, they have a serious heart problem, they are 66, have no money in the bank, what happens to them? How many of those people will not survive?

Then other people say: Well, Medicaid is an easy program to cut. I mean, let's be politically honest about Medicaid. Medicaid is for lower income people. They don't have lobbyists, they don't make large campaign contributions. Many low-income people don't vote. They are easy to go after. Let's cut hundreds of billions of dollars from Medicaid. Let's be clear. According to a recent study at Harvard University, some 45,000 Americans die each year unnecessarily because they don't get to a doctor on time. That is 45,000 Americans, 15 times what we lost in the disaster of 9/11. Every single year those people are dying.

What happens if we make savage cuts in Medicaid? How many children do we throw off the Children's Health Insurance Program? What happens to the

older people who are now in nursing homes on Medicaid? What happens to all those people? I guess we don't have to worry about them. Their lobbyists are not here. What happens to people on disability? We turn our back on those people, that is what we do.

One of the very interesting aspects of this whole debate and why the American people are so angry, so frustrated, and so disillusioned is that Congress is moving in a direction of exactly the opposite way that the American people want us to handle deficit reduction. Every single poll I have seen and in my experience in talking to people in the State of Vermont, people want shared sacrifice. People understand that the wealthiest people in this country are doing phenomenally well. Over a recent 25-year period, 80 percent of all new income went to the top 1 percent. The rich are getting richer, and you know what. Their effective tax rates today are one of the lowest in American history, about 18 percent. So the richest people in America who are doing phenomenally well are paying a lower tax rate than nurses, teachers, and police officers. The American people who see the middle class declining and the rich getting richer are saying: Hey, it is only fair that the wealthiest people help us contribute to deficit reduction. We can't place the whole burden on the backs of people who are getting poorer and poorer as a result of the recession.

The American people also understand we have large multinational corporations, such as General Electric, ExxonMobil, and many others that have been making billions of dollars in profits in recent years and don't pay a nickel in Federal taxes. Then, on top of that, we have the absurdity of a tax policy which allows the wealthy and large corporations to stash huge amounts of money in the Cayman Islands and in other tax havens so we are losing about \$100 billion a year in revenue. The American people are looking around and saying: That is crazy. The wealthy and large corporations, which are doing phenomenally well, which are not paying their fair share of taxes, have to contribute to deficit reduction. It cannot simply be on the backs of the elderly, the children, the sick, the poor. That is what the American people are saying in poll after poll.

There was a poll that just came out the other day—just one more of many polls. Washington Post: Should the wealthiest people in this country be asked to pay more? That is the question. They asked: In order to reduce the national debt, would you support or oppose the following: raising taxes on Americans with incomes of over \$250,000 a year. The response in that poll was 72 percent of the American people said yes, 27 percent said no. Overwhelmingly, every poll we see says the wealthy have to pay more in taxes, and then the same polls say: Protect Social Security, protect Medicare, protect Medicaid, protect education. Here is the irony: We are marching down a

path which will do exactly the opposite of what the American people want. Our Republican friends have been absolutely fanatically determined that no matter what happens, billionaires and large corporations will not pay a nickel more in taxes. That has been their religious belief, not a nickel more from the wealthiest people in this country. I have to say Democrats have not been particularly strong in opposition to that nor has the President been strong, with retreat after retreat.

In recent months, we have heard more and more discussion from Democrats about cuts in Social Security, cuts in Medicare, cuts in Medicaid. Now there is apparently a willingness to come forward with a proposal that would include only cuts and no revenue at all—no revenue at all.

I think the American people are angry. I think they are frustrated. I think they are disillusioned because what they want to see happen is deficit reduction done through shared sacrifice, although with the wealthy and large corporations playing their role appears not to be happening. And when they have said loudly and clearly that we must protect Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid, they are also seeing that it is not happening.

So I just conclude by saying I think there is a path toward deficit reduction which is fair and responsible. It does ask the big-money interests to understand that they are Americans also and they have to play a role in deficit reduction. It does say that at a time when we have tripled military spending since 1997, we have to make significant cuts there as well.

I hope our Republican friends give up their fanatical opposition to asking billionaires and millionaires and large corporations to play a role in deficit reduction. I hope my Democratic friends will stand tall. And I hope that at the end of the day, we have the deficit-reduction program the American people will feel good about.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MERKLEY). The Senator from Maryland.

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

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

FAA REAUTHORIZATION

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, we all know we are running against the deadline of Tuesday, August 2, on raising the debt of our Nation, and there is a real risk that if we don't make that deadline on Tuesday, there will be checks from the Federal Government that will not be able to go out. The number of 70 million is used as the number of checks written each month by the Federal Government that go to employees, that go to contractors, that go to recipients of certain benefits.

Let me talk about 4,000 Federal workers who already have been furloughed. It doesn't have to do with

raising the debt ceiling; it has to do with the failure of the House of Representatives to send a clean extension of the Federal Aviation Administration—the FAA reauthorization bill—for us to consider. As a result of the failure to pass the reauthorization of the Federal Aviation Administration or to pass a short-term extension of the FAA, 4,000 workers at the Federal Aviation Administration have been put on furlough. That in and of itself has a major impact on our economy. That is 4,000 Americans who are no longer receiving a paycheck. It affects people who work for the FAA in such fields as safety engineers, computer scientists, aeronautics engineers, physical scientists—the list goes on and on—jeopardizing the progress we have made in keeping our airways safe and jeopardizing the convenience to those who travel by air. Many of those workers live in the State of Maryland, so it is having a direct effect on the State I have the honor of representing in the Senate.

It goes beyond just the Federal workforce who have been put on furlough as a result of the failure to pass a short-term extension of the FAA. It also goes to construction contracts that are funded through aviation funds. At many airports around the Nation, there have now been stop orders on construction of runways, construction of towers, and construction of other improvements that are important to keep our airports modern and safe and convenient in handling the increased number of air passengers.

Let me tell my colleagues that, yes, it affects those large contractors who are doing the work of the Federal Government. It is going to affect their payrolls and their workforce, but it also affects a lot of small businesses in Maryland and around the Nation.

Let me give one example. Chappy Corporation is an electrical and mechanical operations small business specializing in airport landing systems and lighting. Chappy Corporation is the lead contractor implementing BWI's—the main airport in Maryland—ASDE-X project, a runway safety mechanism that enables air traffic controllers to detect potential runway conflicts by providing detailed coverage of movement on runways and taxiways. For the safety of all of us, I hope we would want to move forward with those types of improvements in our major airports in the Nation, including the one which most Marylanders use—BWI Airport. Chappy Corporation has been told to stop work on this important aviation safety project, thus decreasing their value and making it more difficult to make payroll. It is already tough for small companies out there today, and now, because of the failure of the House to send over to us a clean extension of the FAA bill, which we have done many times in the past, we have a company such as Chappy which is running the risk of its strength to continue with its current

workforce and to do important work at airports for safety.

It also goes beyond the Federal employees and the contractor employees who are not getting a paycheck and the contractors whose work has been stopped and they are not getting their construction contract payments. It also affects the Federal Aviation Administration's revenues. They collect a lot of revenue. There is a ticket tax. When a person buys an airline ticket, they pay a tax that goes into the Federal Aviation Administration's funds which are used for improvement projects at our airports. That amounts to about \$30 million that will not be collected. What happens to that money? Well, we lose it in the Federal Treasury. People say: Well, maybe it will make it less expensive for people to travel. But that is not the case.

Let me quote a headline from Reuters: "Airlines Raise Fares as Taxes Lapse."

I am quoting:

Many U.S. airlines have raised fares in recent days to take advantage of a lapse in U.S. ticket tax collection after Congress failed last week to fully fund the Federal Aviation Administration's budget, but passengers are not likely to notice any price difference.

JetBlue Airways Corp. and Southwest Airlines Co. began raising ticket prices by at least 7.5 percent on Friday, according to FareCompare.com. Other airlines, such as Delta Air Lines and United Continental Holdings Inc., boosted prices on Saturday.

So we can't collect the 7.5-percent tax and the airlines are pocketing the money. The people who are purchasing tickets are still paying the same amount even though none of that money is going to improve our airports. It makes no sense whatsoever.

All of these occurrences—the Federal workers not getting a paycheck and being put on furlough, contractors not getting paid and construction work not being done, revenues not being collected that are necessary for the Federal Government—are hurting our economy. All are making it more difficult for our recovery.

Why has this happened? The reason, quite frankly, is that we have not been able to pass the reauthorization bill. We passed the reauthorization bill early in the session, the Senate did. The House passed a bill about 100 days ago but has refused to appoint conferees to work out the differences. Then the House sends over—because we didn't meet the deadline—an extension bill that includes a partisan labor provision, an antilabor provision. Now, that should never be in an extension bill. It shouldn't be in any legislation. But it should be negotiated between the conferees of the House and Senate so we can get a reauthorization bill done. They shouldn't use an extension bill in order to get that done, and that is what they have done. As a result, we have the consequences of Federal workers being furloughed, contractors not being paid, and revenues necessary for our airport improvements not being collected.

So what should we do? What do we need to do? Well, we need to first pass a short-term extension, a clean short-term extension without these killer amendments attached to allow our workforce to be able to work and to get their paychecks, to allow contractors to continue the work they are doing, and to allow the government to collect the revenue necessary to keep our airports modern. That is the first thing we should do.

Secondly, we need to negotiate in good faith between the House and the Senate conferees so we can pass the Federal Aviation Administration reauthorization bill. That bill contains many very important provisions, including what we call NextGen, which is the way in which we can operate our air service in a much more efficient way, using less fuel, less time, and helping our economy. The FAA reauthorization bill is estimated to create hundreds of thousands of jobs for our country. We need to get that done. So we need to negotiate the bill, get that done, and all of that will help create more jobs for our community.

I urge my colleagues, particularly those in the House, to send us a clean extension bill, negotiate in good faith, and let's get the FAA bill done.

Actually, I see the ranking member of that committee, our colleague from Texas, who may wish to talk about it or some other issue.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

Mrs. HUTCHISON. Mr. President, I am here to talk about the renomination of FBI Director Mueller, but I certainly heard my colleague from Maryland, and I agree we must pass a clean extension of the FAA. We are losing the revenue, and we are losing the capability for projects that are ongoing to continue. Work has stopped at many of the airports that have building and repair projects that are supported by the FAA.

Honestly, the House needs to send a clean extension. There is a clean extension pending in the Senate. It has been objected to by one Member. This is not the way to go forward. I happen to agree with much of what the House wants to do, but not in this way. We have to put that in the context of the whole bill, which we certainly should be doing, and I hope the House will send us a clean extension so there will not be another weekend of disruption and people can get on with the projects.

I come to the floor today to speak about FBI Director Robert Mueller. He has been FBI Director since 2001. During a critical time when our country has experienced such major leadership changes on our national security team, this nomination offers the necessary stability and continuity from a proven leader who has wide support.

Director Mueller has strong bipartisan support. He was appointed on August 2, 2001—just before the 9/11 trag-

edy—by President Bush, and he began serving a week before the September 11 attacks. His term is said to expire next week on August 2.

The FBI has never experienced a larger transformation than while under his leadership, adding counterterrorism, counterintelligence, and cyber security to the Bureau's traditional crime-fighting mission. In the 10 years Mr. Mueller has been Director of the FBI, he has worked tirelessly to ensure that no international terrorist attacks have occurred on U.S. soil since 9/11, and there have been several plots that have been uncovered and kept from occurring.

Director Mueller has ensured that the FBI is a full member of the U.S. intelligence community and serves as a critical and singular link between the intelligence and law enforcement communities in the United States. He served our Nation with valor and integrity as a marine in Vietnam and as a Federal prosecutor. He answered the call to service from President Bush to be FBI Director and is once again answering the call by agreeing to serve 2 more years under President Obama. He is an admirable public servant, and I urge his swift confirmation.

THE DEBT CEILING

Mr. President, we are less than 6 days away from the date the Department of the Treasury has signified would shut down the Federal Government and exhaust all borrowing authority.

We all know we are at this point because we have a fundamental difference in the principles on how our government should be run. We all know we are at this point because the financial viability of our Nation is at stake.

I believe this debt ceiling debate presents Congress with a critical opportunity to get our country back on a sustainable and prosperous path. We must send a message to the markets, to the American people, and to American businesses that we are going to get our fiscal house in order with spending cuts, caps on future spending, and permanent budget reform in the form of a balanced budget amendment.

What we need now is a serious proposal to provide certainty and clear commitment to a reform measure that ensures spending cuts before the debt ceiling is raised. The Senate majority leader's and the House Speaker's plans have similarity, and I believe a common ground can be found in the two.

First, neither of the plans proposes tax increases to achieve deficit reduction, and both plans aim for significant deficit savings in the amount of \$1.2 trillion over the next 10 years.

Now, is that what we wanted? No. I would have had more cuts. We should be reaching for \$4 trillion in cuts, not \$1.2 trillion. But we have had plans put forward for \$4 trillion, we have had plans put forward for more, and we could not get those through. We could not get one through the Senate. Furthermore, entitlements are not in the plans that are before us, and entitle-

ment reform is essential for us to address. We can certainly put Social Security on the fiscally responsible path that will make it secure for 75 years with very minor changes and gradual changes if we do it now. This is an opportunity. Because we have only 6 days, we are not going to be able to do it in this vehicle.

But there is a plan going forward that our leader, Senator MCCONNELL, and Senator REID, along with a bipartisan group of Senators, have put forward a plan. I think we need to look towards the long term and not let this opportunity pass to do something that will be enduring for the fiscal responsibility of our country.

But we have 6 days, and now we have to do something as responsible as possible with the time we have left and keep open the option of doing what we should be doing for the long term before the end of this year. That is what Senator MCCONNELL, Senator REID, and many other Senators have put on the table. That is what we need to try to achieve.

But we have made great strides. What Republicans said from the beginning is, they are not going to support tax increases of any kind in this economic climate. Businesses are not hiring. A 9.2-percent unemployment rate is unacceptable. Our businesses are afraid of the Obama health care plan and its costs. They are factoring that into their plans, and they are not hiring people because of the expense. Add more tax increases on top of that and our economy is going to be stagnant for a long time. So tax increases are off the table.

But I do hope we can also make the cuts that will put us on a fiscally responsible plan so we will not have to address this debt ceiling ever again.

So we have made a major achievement. Sometimes it seems as though when we have to come together to do something that is not ideal, we do not take acknowledgment of the fact that we are making one smaller step in the right direction. I think in order to avoid a fiscal calamity, we do need to make the strongest step we can make, which is cutting spending and doing it without increasing taxes.

The idea that we could tax our way out of debt has been totally discounted. Neither of these plans includes tax hikes to offset the deficit reduction, and that is a strong endorsement. Both proposals also include budget enforcement of discretionary caps by requiring automatic across-the-board cuts if the caps are not met. That will put a Governor on future spending that will keep the promise we are making to cut spending.

Both proposals establish a bipartisan committee to identify further deficit reduction that would include tax reform and fix the broken entitlement programs. I hope we will not throw that out the window. Having a commission—I know people roll their eyes and say: Oh, another commission. Really?

Well, if we have a finite end date and have the opportunity to make more real cuts, it is worth another chance. We do need to make entitlement reforms.

If we can do tax reform that lowers the tax rate for everyone and brings in revenue by having more people hired off the unemployment rolls, that is a win. We raise revenue by putting more people back to work. That is the way you raise revenue, not by tax increases that put a lid on hiring.

So I think we have some good things that can be put together. We need to make sure we go forward, as much as we can with a divided Congress, and try to make a step in the right direction. Then, hopefully before the end of the year, we will be able to take stronger steps that will have a more lasting impact.

I, for one, think it is not even a possibility that we would allow the debt ceiling to be met and start the process then of watching the President decide who gets paid and who does not.

I have a bill I have introduced with strong support that would make the priority paying the interest on our debt and paying our soldiers, our men and women who have boots on the ground in harm's way. If you are Active-Duty military, you should not waste 1 minute thinking about whether you are going to make your mortgage.

I want to say that I commend USAA. USAA is the corporation that serves so many of our military personnel. They have put out their policy that in case the debt limit is reached, USAA has stated that for those military members, who are on active duty and have their paychecks directly deposited into their USAA account, they are going to provide a one-time, interest-free advance for their paycheck.

They also know the stresses on those members of the armed services. USAA is doing a wonderful thing by putting the families of loved ones across the sea fighting for our security at ease.

So I commend USAA. At the same time, I would like for my bill to be passed that assures that those military servicemembers who are not customers of USAA will also have the comfort of knowing their paychecks will be there on time. So I hope if all else fails in this body, we can pass the legislation that says we will pay our debts and we will pay our military and Social Security recipients will also be paid.

But I do not think we ought to get that far at all. That is why I am urging our Members to work with our leaders. Do not throw stones at our leaders. They have a tough job corralling 100 pretty big egos, and we ought to be helping them get to the point where we are all comfortable that we are doing the right thing. Sometimes we cannot get 100 percent of what we want when there are 100 people who have their individual ideas as well.

So I hope we will take this chance to do so much for our country that we have the opportunity to do. We may

have to do it in smaller steps to reach that goal, but if we reach the goal, we will have secured the future for our children, and that is what we are here for.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Virginia.

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

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

THE DEBT CEILING

Mr. WEBB. Mr. President, I would like to express my support for the majority leader's plan to raise the debt ceiling and reduce the deficit. Our Nation, as we all know, faces a looming crisis.

The markets have already warned us. Businesses are already postponing investments. We know the consequences of inaction. They are predictable. Borrowing costs for businesses and individuals will escalate. Interest payments on the debt will grow. Already anemic job growth will decline. Our Nation will run the risk of another financial catastrophe and possibly a return to recession. As Chairman Bernanke recently stated, the outcome would be "calamitous."

Many Americans are struggling. Far too many remain out of work. They cannot be asked to absorb the shock waves of yet another failure to act. It is time, as the Senator from Texas just pointed out—and others have—for both sides and both Chambers to find common ground.

Reasonable and responsible editorials from across the country have endorsed the majority leader's proposal. Well-meaning people on all sides have a genuine concern and have shown genuine concerns. We all—most all of us—share those concerns about the implications of not acting.

There are in the other party some individuals who view themselves as revolutionaries in the best sense of the word. They appear less concerned with the here and now than with where they want to take the country in the future. We all understand the two are connected and that looking to the future is vital to the country. The question, though, is the harm that might be caused by precipitous action.

Columnist George Will wrote a column a few days ago likening the tea party movement of today to the beginning of the Goldwater-Reagan conservative era; that the Goldwater movement of 1964, even though it did not bring Senator Goldwater to the Presidency, was the first step toward the conservative revolution that culminated in Ronald Reagan's election in 1980.

I am going to quote a couple of sentences Mr. Will wrote:

The tea party, [which in his view is] the most welcome . . . development since the Goldwater insurgency in 1964, lacks only the patience necessary when America lacks the consensus required to propel fundamental change. . . .

Mr. Will goes on to say:

If Washington's trajectory could be turned as quickly as tea partiers wish . . . their movement would not be as necessary as it is.

Those are Mr. Will's words. That is Mr. Will's considered opinion. That may be so, and it may not be so. But the first rule of good governance is to do no harm. That does not mean we should not make cuts. That does not mean we should not look toward some of the directions this debate has taken us. But it means be careful when you are dealing with a fragility of national policy at a time like this.

Some things sound better in a speech to a room full of activists than they actually are in the reality of how to govern and the practicality of how to actually bring about change, where change is needed.

Senator Goldwater did not attempt to torpedo the economy in order to get his way. Ronald Reagan, in whose administration I proudly served, by the way, raised the national debt 18 times—more than any other President.

I fought in Vietnam as an infantry marine. I am very proud of that. Those of us who did fight in Vietnam all remember the regretful quote of one infantry officer who lamented that during one battle he had to call in heavy artillery and airstrikes on a populated village; that he had to destroy a village in order to save it.

I do not think the Republicans who are using this issue as a lever to bring about their view of radical change want to look back at a fractured economic recovery, a downgraded credit rating for the world's No. 1 economy, a citizenry that has become more angry and less capable of predicting its own financial future, and then say, as if all of this were not predictable, that they destroyed the American economy in order to save it.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I know my distinguished colleague, the senior Senator from West Virginia, is going to be seeking recognition, and perhaps others. I certainly have no objection to that. I realize we are on the Mueller nomination.

I ask unanimous consent that notwithstanding any interruption for other business, the Mueller vote still be at the time we originally planned, which is around 4 p.m.

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

Mr. LEAHY. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from West Virginia.

FAA REAUTHORIZATION

Mr. ROCKEFELLER. Mr. President, last week I came to the Senate floor to

ask unanimous consent to pass something called—a very easy thing—a clean extension of the FAA bill, something the Senate has done 20 times. This is the 21st time—4 years waiting to pass a reauthorization bill.

But for the first time in these 4 years, the Republicans objected to this extraordinarily routine request. Shortly, I will renew my request to pass our 21st short-term extension of the FAA. But before I do, I want to highlight the very painful consequences of failing to pass this bill, which we can only do by getting a clean extension.

By objecting to my request last week, Republican Senators made sure that 4,000 hard-working FAA employees were furloughed already. Hundreds of critical airport safety capacity air traffic control projects were brought to a halt. Payments were stopped to hundreds of small businesses dependent upon reimbursement from the FAA for their work.

The Federal Government is being forced to forego almost \$30 million a day in aviation tax revenue that is critical, obviously, to supporting our overall airport infrastructure program. The introduction of the newest Boeing aircraft is being delayed because the FAA cannot certify that the planes operate safely.

I know in Washington we have a tendency to view these fights as purely policy disagreements that have no real impact on people. I stress that there is an enormous effect on people and businesses, large and small, and on the economy of the United States. Because some Republicans have refused to allow another clean extension of the FAA programs, something we have done 20 times in the last 4 years, we are inflicting real pain on very real people.

People are suffering. Small businesses are hurting. We are losing jobs and will lose a lot more. Even consumers are losing out on the airline ticket tax holidays.

The majority of the airline industry has greedily chosen to pocket those revenues rather than reducing ticket prices. In other words, they have a tax holiday because the expiration of the tax has already taken place a number of days ago. So they are taking this tax holiday, and rather than leaving at the present level the cost of a ticket for consumers—as Alaska Airlines is doing and Virgin Airlines is doing and one other airline is doing—they are taking the money to themselves, giving it to themselves.

I find that extraordinary. It reminds me of “Too Big to Fail”—the movie—the greed, the promise to help with small mortgages and they got all the money and didn’t spend a dime to help with small mortgages.

The damage we are doing to our aviation system is incredibly real. If we fail to act in a timely manner, it may be so devastating as to become irreversible. It makes sense when we think about it. If one were to operate on somebody and cut beyond a certain point, they can’t reverse the damage.

With so much pain being inflicted on so many, one may ask why my Republican colleagues have refused repeated requests to pass a clean extension—something we have done 20 times in the past 4 years.

They are willing, evidently, to hurt so many of these people for the benefit of one company. It is called Delta Airlines. As the chairman of the House Transportation Committee has stated publicly, the House inserted language on the Essential Air Service Program to leverage the Senate on including provisions relating to the National Mediation Board.

What do I mean? What they sent to us was all about essential air service. But that is not what it is about at all. The chairman, my counterpart in the House told me many times that essential air service is not a big deal to him. He doesn’t particularly have a dog in this hunt. We need to do some reform on it, which we offered to do. He didn’t mention a thing about the National Mediation Board. That is the only thing that motivates the House.

Delta Airlines is nonunion. The other airlines, for the most part, are union. Delta Airlines has had four elections in the last several years to unionize. Each time the company has prevailed over the union. So one might ask: Why is it that they are so strongly suggesting they need this National Mediation Board, which they changed in their bill.

It had been changed 2 years ago to say the number of votes that were cast were the number of votes that were reflected. In their bill, they want to say that anybody who does not vote in a union certification election, by definition, has voted no. I have never heard of that in America anywhere else. It is a rather ridiculous ploy.

This is not policy, this is pettiness. It has become the typical “my way or the highway” thinking of the House Republicans.

I note that we have forgone almost \$150 million in tax revenues by failing to act. It will go up by about \$25 million a day, which, when we think about it, would come close to paying for the whole Essential Air Service Program anyway, in just a week or so. Again, by the end of the week, we will have lost more revenue used for aviation infrastructure spending than on the entire Essential Air Service Program cost all of last year. It is embarrassing.

I wish my Republican colleagues would have defended the prerogatives of the Senate. Instead, some chose to back the House leadership.

Last week, as my friend from Utah—who is here now—outlined so honestly, Senate Republicans are not permitting the Senate to pass a clean extension because they want the Senate to accept language altering 85 years of labor law and legal precedent.

I wish I understood why the policy objections of one company—Delta Airlines—mattered so much to so few and also mattered so much more than the

livelihood of thousands of American workers who have or will be furloughed.

Last year, the CEO of Delta made \$9 million. Whether that was a salary or salary plus options, I know not. Delta paid its top executives almost \$20 million. Yet it is fighting to make sure its employees cannot organize—they already had four elections, and in all four Delta has prevailed—for fear they may secure a few extra dollars in their paychecks.

At the same time, it is pushing for special interest provisions in the FAA bill. Delta is not shy. Delta announced it was abandoning air services to 26 small, rural communities—leaving many of them, obviously, without any air service. One only has to live in a small, rural community or a State such as mine to understand what that means and what the cost truly is.

Delta then had the gall to announce publicly it would seek EAS subsidies to continue this service. Maybe Mr. Anderson and his colleagues can forgo some of their own salaries to help subsidize the air service. That is not my business. Maybe they could use some of the millions of dollars they are collecting in a tax holiday windfall to pay for this service. That is not my business, but it is theirs, and it is shameful.

Let me be clear. House Republicans and their Senate allies have thrown nearly 4,000 FAA employees out of work already, stopped critical airport safety projects, hurt hundreds of small businesses, and gutted the Aviation Trust Fund—or began to—so Delta Airlines—that one company—doesn’t have to allow its employees to organize in a fair or timely manner, if they chose to.

The needs of one company should not, in any deliberative body, dictate the safety and soundness of our aviation system. We need to pass a clean extension that will get people back to work and businesses and their employees back to work and build out our airport infrastructure.

It is so simple to pass a clean extension bill. We have done it so often. We have done it 20 times. The one time where there was some policy attached was 2 years ago, when the House and the Senate totally agreed on what was in the extension, and it passed. But it is such a simple thing to do. By not doing it, it is holding up our whole process.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—H.R. 2553

Therefore, I ask unanimous consent that, as in legislative session, the Senate proceed to the consideration of Calendar No. 109, H.R. 2553; that a Rockefeller-Hutchison substitute amendment, which is at the desk, be agreed to; that the bill, as amended, be read the third time and passed; and that the motions to reconsider be laid upon the table, with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. HATCH. I object, Madam President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. HATCH. Madam President, I will take a few minutes to explain why I am, once again, objecting to the legislation offered by my dear friend from West Virginia, my Finance Committee colleague. I wish to make it absolutely clear that a long-term FAA reauthorization is a priority for this country, and it is a personal priority for me.

Once again, I point out that I have worked with Chairman BAUCUS on reporting a Finance Committee title to the bill that passed the Senate earlier this year. The current lapse in FAA taxes and expenditures authority from the Airport and Airway Trust Fund is a detrimental situation brought on by the Senate majority's refusal to discontinue granting excessive favors for big labor and their refusal to cut any wasteful spending.

As I have said, I share House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman MICA's frustration that favors to organized labor have overshadowed the prospects for a long-term FAA reauthorization.

Last year, the National Mediation Board changed the rules under which employees of airlines and railroads are able to unionize. For decades, the standard has been that a majority of employees would have to agree in an election to form a union. However, the National Mediation Board rules changed that standard so all it takes to unionize is a majority of employees voting. This means the NMB wants to count an employee who doesn't vote as voting for big labor. Somehow, organized labor is able to claim it is democratic to appropriate someone else's vote without that person's input and participation.

The FAA reauthorization bill that passed the House earlier this year undoes this heavyhanded rule and lets airline employees decide for themselves how to use their own votes. The House bill would merely undo a big partisan favor done at the behest of big labor and put efforts to unionize airline workforces on the same footing they have been on for years.

The House bill does not create a new hurdle to unionization. Instead, it restores the longstanding ability of airline employees to make decisions for themselves. The House bill only undoes the NMB action that was taken to reverse 70 years of precedent for narrow political gain.

In addition to an impulse to cater to big labor, the Senate majority also is resistant to any attempt to cut any government spending, no matter how wasteful that spending may be. The House bill I am going to ask unanimous consent for in a few minutes has aroused the ire of the majority because it contains a provision that would limit essential air service eligibility to communities that are located 90 or more miles from a large- or medium-hub airport. This would save \$12.5 million a year. That is right, million with an "m", not a "b" or a "t."

The majority is resisting a provision that already passed this body as part of the Senate's long-term reauthorization bill that would save \$12.5 million a year, and they are willing to put the FAA's finance at risk in the process. The House bill I am going to offer also contains an additional proposal to limit essential air service subsidies for communities where the cost per passenger is greater than \$1,000. This provision would affect a grand total of three airports in the whole country. It is my understanding these three airports would also have ceased to receive EAS subsidies under another provision in the Senate-passed, long-term FAA bill that limited subsidies to airports averaging 10 or more passengers a day.

To sum this up, our friends on the other side, the Democrats, are holding this up over wasteful spending and handouts for President Obama's big union allies.

The point is, the Senate majority has cut the FAA off from its primary source of financing and created confusion for travel companies and tax-paying passengers by objecting to a short-term extension measure that doesn't do one single thing that is not done by a bill that passed the Senate by unanimous consent on April 7 of this year.

I wish to briefly discuss and hopefully clear away some of that confusion. Passengers who bought tickets while the taxes were still being collected may be entitled to a refund if they are traveling during a period in which the taxes have lapsed. I wish to make it clear that the inability of the Senate majority to process legislation should not constitute an additional burden to the already beleaguered travel industry. It is the responsibility of the IRS to refund ticket taxes, and while I recognize they want to do the right thing for taxpayers, I encourage the IRS to work closely with the travel industry. The travel industry is not responsible for the lapse in FAA taxes, and they should not bear extra costs because of that.

The lack of a long-term bill is bad for airports all across the country because they don't have the funding stability to plan and complete projects. Kicking the can farther down the road is not a viable alternative to actually doing what is in the best interests of all parties.

As a Senate conferee to the FAA bill, I stand ready to do everything I can to get to work with my House and Senate colleagues on a long-term FAA reauthorization, as soon as they are willing to get down to work.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—H.R. 2553

Madam President, as in legislative session, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of H.R. 2553, which was received from the House. I ask unanimous consent that the bill be read the third time and passed, the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table, and that any statements relating to the bill be printed in the RECORD.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. HAGAN). Is there objection?

Mr. ROCKEFELLER. Madam President, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. LEAHY. Madam President, have the yeas and nays been ordered on the Mueller nomination?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. No.

Mr. LEAHY. I ask for the yeas and nays on the Mueller nomination.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second? There is a sufficient second.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

Mr. LEAHY. Madam President, how much time remains until the vote on the Mueller nomination?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Four minutes.

Mr. LEAHY. Madam President, I hope all Senators will step forward and vote for this nomination. I can think of no reason why they should not. Director Mueller is typical of many in our government who serve the people of America tirelessly, without any gain to themselves but instead for what is best for all Americans and for our country. Director Mueller has worked—along with the thousands of individuals at the Department of Justice and the FBI who work around the clock every day to keep America safe to protect us from crime and to protect us from terrorists. Unfortunately some people try to lump together and deride government employees. The fact is the people at the FBI and Department of Justice are very brave men and women, many of whom put their lives on the line for us day by day, and we ought to acknowledge that.

Bob Mueller is the public face of the FBI, as its long-serving Director. Amazingly, he and Ann, his wife of many years, along with their grown children, are able to separate that their private life from the public life. Like so many who serve this country, Director Mueller's public life takes an inordinate amount of his time, and I think it is a testament to his dedication that he was willing to do this job for another two years, but it is also important to acknowledge the sacrifice of his wife Ann and his children. I think all Americans share in the good fortune that when the President asked Director Mueller to step forward and serve for another 2 years, he answered the call.

I also want to compliment President Obama. He knew he had the opportunity to name somebody who would be there as long as he, Barack Obama, may be President, whether he serves one term or two, and beyond. Instead, the President, as he has often done, did what he thought was best for the country.

Director Mueller is a fine public servant, and I would urge all Senators to vote "aye" on this nomination.

Madam President, how much time remains?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. There is 1 minute.

Mr. LEAHY. Madam President, I see no one else seeking the floor, so I yield back the remainder of the time, which is now about 30 seconds.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. All time has expired.

The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the nomination of Robert S. Mueller, III, of California, to be Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation for a term expiring September 4, 2013.

The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk called the roll.

The result was announced—yeas 100, nays 0, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 118 Ex.]

YEAS — 100

Akaka	Gillibrand	Moran
Alexander	Graham	Murkowski
Ayotte	Grassley	Murray
Barrasso	Hagan	Nelson (NE)
Baucus	Harkin	Nelson (FL)
Begich	Hatch	Paul
Bennet	Heller	Portman
Bingaman	Hoeben	Pryor
Blumenthal	Hutchison	Reed
Blunt	Inhofe	Reid
Boozman	Inouye	Risch
Boxer	Isakson	Roberts
Brown (MA)	Johanns	Rockefeller
Brown (OH)	Johnson (SD)	Rubio
Burr	Johnson (WI)	Sanders
Cantwell	Kerry	Schumer
Cardin	Kirk	Sessions
Carper	Klobuchar	Shaheen
Casey	Kohl	Shelby
Chambliss	Kyl	Snowe
Coats	Landrieu	Stabenow
Coburn	Lautenberg	Tester
Cochran	Leahy	Thune
Collins	Lee	Toomey
Conrad	Levin	Udall (CO)
Coons	Lieberman	Udall (NM)
Corker	Lugar	Vitter
Cornyn	Manchin	Warner
Crapo	McCain	Webb
DeMint	McCaskill	Whitehouse
Durbin	McConnell	Wicker
Enzi	Menendez	Wyden
Feinstein	Merkley	
Franken	Mikulski	

The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, a motion to reconsider is considered made and laid on the table. The President will be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume legislative session.

The majority leader.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. REID. Madam President, I have spoken to the Republican leader fairly recently—it is all relative time, I guess. There will be no more rollcall votes tonight.

I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to a period for morning business until 6:30 p.m. tonight, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each. Senator COBURN is not on the floor, but I understand he wanted to speak for more than 10 minutes. I ask that Senator COBURN be recognized at 5:30 p.m. for 30 minutes.

Mrs. BOXER. Reserving the right to object, and I will not object, I would like to get 20 minutes to speak following Senator COBURN.

Mr. REID. Sounds good to me.

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

Mr. REID. The rest of the Senators will be limited to 10 minutes.

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

Mr. REID. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that at 6:30 p.m., I be recognized.

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

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

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

The Senator from Kansas.

THE DEBT CEILING

Mr. MORAN. Madam President, I have spoken several times over the last several weeks with regard to the issue at hand. Clearly, the time continues to escape us, and the day of reckoning is coming in regard to the debt ceiling issue. I have said from the very beginning that in my view it would be irresponsible not to raise the debt ceiling, but it would be as irresponsible if not more so to raise the debt ceiling without reducing the spending, getting our books more in balance, and moving us in the right direction toward a balanced budget in the future. I recognize this cannot be accomplished overnight, and I recognize there are those who bring different points of view and perspectives to the Senate floor. This is a body of people who represent individuals who live in all 50 States and have points of view and philosophies and backgrounds that are different than perhaps the constituents I represent from the State of Kansas.

I have been a strong supporter of the legislation entitled “cut, cap, and balance.” I actually believe it is not just cut, cap, and balance; it is cut, cap, balance, and grow. We could do so much for our country both in the fiscal sense and with the idea that we could better pay our bills if the revenues are increased by putting people to work, by creating a climate in which people could find jobs, people could improve their situation in regard to their jobs, and in the process of doing that the revenues increase to the Federal Treasury.

It was back in the days of President Clinton that we came the closest to having our books balanced. While there was spending restraint and disagreement among Republicans and Democrats about new spending programs or bigger government, in my view, the

real reason we had a balanced budget was because the economy was growing.

So I again ask my colleagues to pay attention to what I believe was the message of the 2010 election: It is the economy. It is the desire of people to have a better life, to save money for their children's education, to save money for their retirement, and to be satisfied that the job they have today is the job they will have tomorrow.

I believe there is much that we can do with regard to the regulatory environment, making the Tax Code fair and certain, issues regarding access to credit, a trade policy that will allow us to increase exports—both agricultural and manufactured goods—and a trade policy that reduces our reliance on foreign energy and gives us greater control over its costs. But the time has come for us to reach an agreement, and we anxiously await what action the House of Representatives may take.

In light of this point in time, I would like to share with my colleagues in the Senate an e-mail I received from one of my constituents, a Kansan named Gina Reynolds. Gina is from Shawnee. She expresses this point of view I think very appropriately for where we are today. In asking Gina if I could share with you what she wrote to me, she indicated this was the very first time she had ever written a Member of Congress. Here is what she had to say that I hope we will take into account. Again, while we bring philosophies and viewpoints and approaches to government at Washington, DC, there is an opportunity for common sense and good judgment to prevail.

Here is what she says:

I firmly believe the United States needs to start living within our means. However, I am frustrated beyond belief with the inability of Congress to do their jobs and ensure that we do not throw the country back into recession. While I and my husband are employed, we feel lucky to have jobs. We work hard, pay our taxes and try to raise our children the right way. It absolutely boggles my mind that we cannot come to a compromise on the debt ceiling issue that is so critical to the financial markets and the average American citizen.

For it is us, the middle class, that will suffer the most; from lost jobs, to lost 401Ks, and lost savings. We need real tax reform, real entitlement reform (for even though I am 42 years old, I do not believe I will ever see a dime of Social Security) and real spending cuts. Congress has had months to work on this issue, and now the time is to act in the best interests of the People, not the political interest groups, not some ideology.

It is sad to say, but I honestly don't know if my children will have a better future than me. I know that there are a lot of tough decisions yet to be made regarding spending and taxes, but we only make it harder by defaulting on any of our country's obligations. I am fiscally conservative and generally vote Republican, but I do not blindly follow any one path. I try to use my vote wisely and pledge my loyalty to my God and my country, not a political party.