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DESIGNATING CERTAIN LAND COMPONENTS OF THE NATIONAL **WILDERNESS** PRESERVATION SYSTEM-MOTION TO PROCEED

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SPEAKER: Mr. SPECTER; Mr. COBURN; Mr. SESSIONS; Mr. NELSON of Florida; Ms. STABENOW; Mr. REID

TEXT: [*287]

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

Mr. COBURN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be recognized for what time I might consume.

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

The Senator from Oklahoma is recognized.

Mr. COBURN. Mr. President, we had an interesting day yesterday. We brought a lot of people to work, I believe unnecessarily, to adopt a motion to proceed that we could have voted on today.

I want to spend some time today outlining what our new, soon to be President, President-elect Obama, said during his campaign and what he said to me personally several times about how we fix what is wrong with our country. If you go to his Web site or what his transition team has said, what you will find are some very significant things that both he and I have worked on over the past 4 years.

He has a plan. It is called the Obama plan for restoring fiscal discipline. It is a good plan. What does it include? It includes conducting an exhaustive line-by-line review of Federal spending and eliminating Government programs that are not performing or are wasteful or are obsolete or are duplicative, paying for new spending commitments-new spending commitments-by cutting other programs-let me say that again-paying for new spending commitments by cutting other programs, slashing porkbarrel spending, rooting out redundancy, and requiring all Federal contracts over \$25,000, including earmarks, to be competitively bid, to truly measure program performance without ideologic slant, and enforcing goals and demanding that new initiatives be selected on the basis of merit, not a political process that rewards lobbyists and campaign donors and makes Members of Congress just look good at home.

That is President-elect Obama. I don't know anybody outside of Washington who would not embrace that message. That is a great message for our country. It is a message that our country needs to heed. It is one that we need to accomplish. Unfortunately, the first week we are back in session, we are doing exactly the opposite. Here we have President-elect Obama who next week will become President Obama, and one of his main goals we are working to undermine in the

Senate today.

I am going to be an ally of the President-elect on these issues. Every opportunity when we are not doing what he suggested we be doing, I am going to be raising questions about it. We are going to work hard for the hope and change he promised the American people he would deliver.

We have before us a lands package. It is not really a lands package. It has all sorts of stuff in it- 165 bills. Initially, it spends \$1 billion, but that is not even honest because after 10 years it spends \$2 billion to \$3 billion more on one program alone. CBO has not even scored [*292]

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this new package. The last package they scored, if appropriated, would be \$8 billion. So we have \$10 billion to \$12 billion in new spending.

The opportunity to offer amendments on that has been foreclosed.

So I thought, in light of what this bill is and in light of what President Obama said he would like to see us do, that I would highlight some of the amendments I would have offered had the minority, the Republican Party, the Republican Members of the Senate, been given an opportunity to amend this bill.

The best tradition of the Senate-the best tradition of the Senate-is where the best ideas get debated, the back and forth goes on, and then we settle on what is almost always a compromise but a compromise that is thoroughly debated and where an individual Senator has to put their stamp of yea or nay on ideas to either make it better or not. That is not available in this bill. As a matter of fact, it hasn't been available for 124 days. It has been available once to Republican Members of the Senate in 184 days.

So if we are to accomplish, or at least move in the direction that our soon-to-be President would like for us to, one of the things that is going to be required for that is taking tough votes. The idea we don't want our Members to have to take tough votes is the height of inside political baseball and it wrecks of a lack of courage. As a Senator from Oklahoma, if I can't go home and defend my votes in a cogent and reasonable manner, I shouldn't be sent back up here. That is all there is to it. If Oklahoma citizens believe I have not stood on the principles of which I told them I would try to represent them in this body, they should not send me back to the Senate. But to not have the votes in the first place, so we don't have to defend anything, goes against not just the culture of the Senate but it goes against the very courage that this whole country was based upon and that is the freedom to express and work and try to accomplish what you think is best for the country in the long run.

One of the great qualities of our country is this freedom to get out and express. Until recently, that freedom has been available in the Senate. But this didn't start with Harry Reid. It goes all the way back to George Mitchell and Trent Lott and Bill Frist. It has been perfected under our current majority leader. My thought would be that maybe we ought to take the hard votes rather than ruin the institution. Maybe we ought to do what the American people would expect us to do.

Now, my intent has never been, in all my proceedings on the floor, to extend debate. I mean, I think I could accomplish a filibuster if I wanted to do that. Having delivered 4,000 babies, I know how to stay up all night. My goal is to have the opportunity to do amendments and to have a vote on them. As most people know, agreements to time on amendments are easily obtained, and limitation on amendments are most often very easily obtained.

So the fact is we find ourselves on a \$12 billion bill that has lots of good things in it and has lots of mediocre things that probably would be a priority if we didn't find ourselves with a \$1.8 trillion deficit this year and getting ready to pass an \$800 billion stimulus package that is about \$2,700 per man, woman, and child in this country, or about \$10,000 per family, none of which is going

to be paid for—none of which is going to be paid for. It will ultimately be paid for, and here is how it will be paid for. When we look toward our grandchildren, what we are going to find is that not so many of them get to go to college because they will not be able to afford to. When we look toward them owning a home, regardless of the housing crisis we find ourselves in now, 30 years from now the ability to earn an income big enough to be able to afford a mortgage is going to be limited because we have been poor stewards with their taxpayer money. So we will have shackled our grandchildren.

So let me spend a minute talking about eliminating wasteful programs, or things that are not a priority, and go over a couple of the amendments we were going to offer simply to point out that we are doing the opposite of what I believe the intent of our new President is going to be. I might also add, it wasn't that long ago that all of us were paying \$4 for a gallon of gasoline. There is no question in my mind that a good portion of that price was because of speculation of the very rich in this country asking the very poor to pay out of their disposable income while they made millions upon billions of dollars manipulating the futures markets. But nevertheless, in this bill, we are putting a patch over our eye and limiting our ability in the future to increase our energy independence by taking millions of acres of land and forever closing them to any source of energy. It would not matter what any new technology might be, and it would not matter if we could do it totally without any environmental impact, we are closing that completely off.

That set aside, one of the amendments we were going to offer in this bill was to strike \$3.5 million to go to the city of St. Augustine, FL. Now, you might ask, what for? Well, they are going to have a birthday party in 6 years to recognize the 450th year of St. Augustine's existence, the longest Colonial outpost on this continent. I would say maybe that might be a St. Augustine, FL, responsibility or maybe the State of Florida, but when we are running a deficit in this country of \$20,000 per family per year, it seems ludicrous to me that we would send \$3.5 million for a party. How does that set with priorities? How does that set with eliminating wasteful spending? It doesn't. Yet it is in here, and we don't have the opportunity to try to take it out.

There is \$12 million in the bill to build a new facility in Maryland for orchids for the Smithsonian. We may need to do that, but we certainly don't need to do that right now. That is a luxury item. Every family in this country today is making a reassessment because everybody is afraid, and they are going through their budgets and saying: What is necessary? What is excess? What can we do without? Should we be putting money away in case X happens? Everybody in the country is doing that except the Congress. So here we have a new orchid building, costing \$12 or \$14 million, I don't remember exactly which, that we are going to put in this bill, and we are going to say this is a priority.

Now, some will say: Well, we might not appropriate it. We appropriate \$300 billion a year for things that are not authorized anyway, and most of those things are not priority as well. But the fact is, it is a clue to the American public that we don't get it; that in this time of significant economic downturn, in this time of significant debt laying on to the next generations, we continue to want to do things the average person of common sense would say: How can that be a priority? Well, it can't.

There is \$5 million in here for new botanical gardens in Hawaii and Florida. I don't doubt that could be a great thing that we could do. No. 1, I would ask the question again: Why isn't that a State responsibility instead of a Federal responsibility? If the State of Florida and the State of Hawaii think that is a priority, they ought to fund it. No. 2, if it is our priority, if it is our responsibility, is that something we should be funding now; that we should be authorizing; we should be saying it is okay to do this?

We are in perilous times. Yet we act like nothing is going on out there; that the average family isn't getting hit hard, that people aren't worried about their jobs; that 573,000 people didn't lose their jobs last month. That is how we are behaving.

One of the other amendments we would have offered is to prohibit the use of eminent domain both in the national trails, the **wilderness** areas, the new heritage areas, and the new national parks area. It is one thing for the Government to have its land; it is totally different for it, through the force of law, to take your land away from you and tell you what they are going to do with it. There is minimal prohibition in this bill for the protection of property rights in this country—a fundamental freedom guaranteed to every American. This bill steps all over those property rights.

We offered a total of 13 amendments, and we would have probably accepted 5 or 6, with less than an hour debate on each one of them. We could have been finished with this bill. We could have accomplished it last Thursday or Friday. But because we don't want to have to take tough votes or we want to protect a Member from a vote on some [*293]

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piece of pork that was put in a bill, we have decided to have no votes, no debate on any amendment will be the standard for this body. It is not a good day for the Senate. More importantly, it is a terrible day for this country because we are saying that, even though we have great hope and promise of change by an incoming President, his own party is going to step on that—the careerists, the people who think politically only, the people who think short term only about political gain, instead of thinking about what is in the best long-term interests of our country.

It is interesting to know we have 108 million acres of **wilderness** in this country right now—more than anywhere else in the world. That number is actually greater than the amount of developed land we have in this country, which is 106 million acres. It is also interesting to know the Government already owns 653 million acres, and we are going to take, at a minimum, another 2.2 million acres and totally wall it off—can't ride a dirt bike through it, minimal access, can't hunt on it, can't do the things you have always done. If you happen to be unfortunate enough to have property next to it, you fall peril to having the National Park Service fund organizations that are going to take your property rights away, to limit your ability on the land you have that is abutting these areas.

As we come into next week, we approach the celebration of a very great milestone in our country, something that speaks volumes about the American system: the installment and swearing in of the first African-American President, one who leads on these issues while we in the Senate say we are going to keep doing it the way we have been doing it regardless of the tremendous hope that he brought to the American people, the hope for change, that we would operate differently. We hope he will lead a Government that operates differently—and I believe he will try. He is a very dear friend of mine. I believe he is going to try to do that as here we sit in the Senate, worrying about the political consequences of taking a few votes on amendments because we might not look good enough at home.

Talk about the lack of courage; talk about the decline that will be manifested in our country if we continue to have leadership that operates on the basis of fear instead of courage.

My challenge and my hope is that this is the last time we are going to see this tactic brought forward in the Senate. My pledge to the majority leader is I will not delay anything if I get an opportunity to amend it. But if I get no opportunity to amend it, I will delay everything because the lack of an opportunity to amend says that over half of the people in this country, the 160 million who are represented by my side of the aisle, have no voice in the matter. It says, if we don't get it, our voice doesn't count.

I look forward with great hope to the leadership we are going to see at the other end of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. My prayer is that the leadership in this body can come up to the same level of character and courage that I believe we will see demonstrated at the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue.

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