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REMARKS ON THE SENATE FLOOR
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Mr. President, we are now three days into a completely unnecessary, completely avoidable Republican shutdown, and there is more talk than ever about the inability of our leaders to find common ground on central, economic, and fiscal issues of our time.

The government shutdown is throwing a major wrench into a fragile economic recovery. Nearly a million federal employees are sitting at home for no reason, and other public servants are working but not earning a paycheck. Cancer patients are being turned away from clinical trials at the NIH. Veterans' benefits are at risk. Basic nutrition services for pregnant women and new moms will be disrupted. Small businesses won't be able to get federal loan guarantees.

And all this is happening on top of the idiotic sequester--drastic, across-the-board spending cuts that have crippled Meals On Wheels, Head Start, and investments in medical research.

We all know how we got here.

For years now we have heard a small minority in this country rail against government. When I hear the latest tirades from some of the extremists in the House, I am struck by how vague these complaints are. From their rhetoric, you'd think they believed that anytime "We the People come together to improve our lives, the nation is committing some terrible wrong. From their rhetoric, you'd think they believe that the government that functions best is a government that doesn't function at all. So far, they haven't ended government, but they have achieved the next best thing -- shutting the government down.

But behind all the slogans of the tea party and all the thinly veiled calls for anarchy in Washington, behind all that there is a reality. The American people don't want the extremist Republicans' bizarre vision of a future without government. They don't support it. Why? Because the American people know that without government, we would no longer be a great nation with a bright future. The American people know that government matters.

The anarchy gang is quick to malign government, but when was the last time anyone called for regulators to go easier on companies that put lead in children's toys or for food inspectors to stop checking whether the meat in our grocery stores is crawling with deadly bacteria or for the FDA to ignore whether morning sickness drugs will cause horrible deformities in little babies?

We never hear that--not from political leaders in Washington and not from the American people. In fact, whenever the anarchy gang makes headway in their efforts to damage our government, the opposite happens. After the sequester kicked in, Republicans immediately turned around and called on us to protect funding for our national defense and to keep the air traffic controllers on the job.

And now that the House Republicans have shut down the government, holding the country hostage because of some imaginary health care boogey man, Republicans almost immediately turned around and called on us to start reopening parts of our government.

Why did they do this? Because the boogey man government is like the boogey man under the bed. It is not real. It doesn't exist. What is real and what does exist are all the specific important things we as Americans have chosen to do together through our government.

In our democracy, government is not some make-believe thing that has an independent will of its own. In our democracy, government is not some make believe thing that has an independent will of its own. In our democracy, government is just how we describe all of the things that “we the people” have already decided to do together.

It is not complicated. Our government has three basic functions: provide for the national defense; put in place rules of the road, such as speed limits, and bank regulations that are fair and transparent; and build the things together that none of us can build alone--roads, power grids, schools—the things that give everyone a chance to succeed.

We are a nation of innovators and entrepreneurs, growing small businesses and thriving big businesses. But our people succeed, our country succeeds because we have all come together to put public institutions and infrastructure together. We all decided to pass laws and put cops on the beat so that no one steals your purse on Main Street or your pension on Wall Street. We all decided to invest in public education so that businesses have skilled workers and a kid with an idea can create the next breakthrough company. We all decided to invest in basic science so there is a great pipeline of ideas to create our future.

These achievements aren't magic. They didn't simply occur on their own or through dumb luck. In each instance we made a choice as a people to come together.

The Food and Drug Administration makes sure that the white pills we take are antibiotics and not baking soda. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration oversees crash tests to make sure all new cars have effective brakes. The Consumer Product Safety Commission makes sure that babies' car seats don't collapse in a crash and that toasters don't explode.

We don't know who they are, but there is no question that there are Americans alive today, Americans who are healthier, Americans who are stronger, because of these and countless other government efforts--alive, healthier, stronger because of what we did together.

The anarchy gang in the House can dump on their make-believe version of government all they want, but when the real government fails to live up to the high expectations we have all set for it, politicians in both parties rush to outrage. Why? Because the American people know that government can work and believe government should work.

Today--that is right, today--marks the fifth anniversary of President Bush signing the bank bailout into law. That financial crisis cost us upwards of \$14 trillion--that is trillion with a “t.” That is \$120,000 for every American household – more than 2 years' worth of income for the

average family. Billions of dollars in retirement savings have disappeared, millions of workers lost their jobs, and millions more families lost their homes.

In April 2011, after a 2-year bipartisan inquiry, the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations released a 635-page report that made it plain: Regulators could have and should have used their existing tools to prevent the crisis. Republicans and Democrats, a bipartisan group, found strong agreement that--you better believe it--government matters.

The attacks on government are abstract, but the consequences of this shutdown are real: less accountability for cheaters and rule-breakers, less opportunity for our children, cracks in the foundations that businesses need to succeed, and a tilted playing field that limits opportunities for all of our people.

We know that government doesn't always work. We know that no institution is infallible. People make mistakes, ideas fail, and sometimes we get things wrong. But our response isn't to give up. Our response isn't to sit back and say: I told you so. We aren't a nation of quitters. Our response, the American response, is to fix it, to make government work better.

Our democracy is an experiment, and it is always evolving. We constantly redesign and reimagine and improve on what we do together. But time and time again throughout our history we have reaffirmed the simple truth that government matters.

Right now, right at this moment, if we look closely, we will see that we are reaffirming it once again. It is not an accident that the desire to shut down government is confined to one extremist faction of one political party of one chamber of Congress of one branch of government. It is not an accident that this extremist faction must resort to absurd hostage tactics--threats to turn off the government, threats to default on our debt, threats to tank the economy--to force their views on everyone else. It is not an accident that this faction is doing everything in its power to make government appear dysfunctional.

In a democracy, these hostage tactics are the last resort for those who can't win their fights through elections, can't win their fights through Congress, can't win their fights for the Presidency, and can't win their fights in court.

But these threats are not working and they will never work because this is a democracy, and for more than 200 years our democracy has defeated extremists and rejected the idea that government does not matter.

So Mr. President, to those who have forced us to the brink, to those who rail against a make-believe government, to those who seem to rejoice in anarchy, to those who have salivated at the chance to shut down our government because their extremist views have left them disconnected from the experiences of the American people, it is time to hear a simple message:

You can do your best to make government look like it doesn't work when you stop it from working. You can do your best to make government look paralyzed when you paralyze it. You can do your best to make government look incompetent through your incompetence and

ineffective through your ineffectiveness, but sooner or later the government will reopen because this is a democracy and this democracy has already rejected your views.

We have already chosen to do these things together because we all know we are stronger when we come together. And when this government reopens, when our markets are safe again, when our scientists can return to their research, when our small businesses can borrow, when our veterans can be respected for their service, when our flu shots resume and our Head Start programs get back to teaching our kids, we will have rejected your views once again.

We are not a country of anarchists. We are not a country of pessimists and ideologues whose motto is “I got mine. The rest of you are on your own.” We are not a country that tolerates dangerous drugs, unsafe meat, dirty air, or toxic mortgages. We are not that nation, we have never been that nation, and we will never be that nation.

Today, a political minority in the House that condemns government and begged for this shutdown has had its day. But like all the reckless and extremist factions that have come before it, their day will pass and our democracy will return to the important work we have already chosen to do together.

Thank you.