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# REMAPPING DEBATE

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Asking "Why" and "Why Not"

## When Democrats sang a different tune

**Readable Research** | By Samantha Cook | Budget deficit, Politics, Taxes

Jan. 16, 2013 — The resolution of the “fiscal cliff” pushed by President Obama and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) and accepted by Congress at the beginning of this year made permanent the Bush-era tax cuts for 99.3 percent of households, including the first \$450,000 of income for all couples regardless of their overall income level. It also kept capital gains and dividend tax rates well below the rates of ordinary income (and below their level under President Ronald Reagan).

Compared to allowing all the Bush-era tax cuts to expire and fixing only the alternative minimum income tax so that it did not ensnare middle-income taxpayers for whom it was not intended, the Obama-McConnell deal is projected by the Congressional Budget Office to cost the federal treasury approximately \$3 trillion over 10 years.

Of the Democrats and Independents in the Senate, all but three voted “yes” on the Obama-McConnell proposal, and only one of those in opposition — Senator Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) — cited the continuation of tax cuts for wealthy families as justification for his decision.

25 Democratic and Independent Senators who voted in favor of the plan had all voted “no,” either as Senators or as members of the House, on the 2001 Bush tax cuts as well as on the 2003 Bush tax cuts (the latter, lesser-known measure, lowered the tax rate on capital gains and dividend income).

What follows are illustrations of what those Democrats and Independents who supported the Obama-McConnell Plan had to say in opposition to the Bush tax cuts in 2001 and 2003.

For the source and date for a statement, follow the footnote at the end of that statement to the bottom of the page.

Note: most Democrats in 2001 supported a tax-cut proposal more modest than the Bush cuts that were passed, and less tilted to the wealthiest Americans. Senate Democrats also proposed an alternative plan in 2003 that included a more modest tax cut in the form of a wage credit.

You can scroll down to see statements from each of the senators (listed in alphabetical order). If you prefer, you can click on a senator’s name in the table on the next page to jump to that senator’s section. Additionally, you can navigate to a specific senator using the bookmarks associated with this document.

<a href="#">Sen. Daniel Akaka</a> †	<a href="#">Sen. Benjamin Cardin</a>	<a href="#">Sen. Carl Levin</a>	<a href="#">Sen. Bill Nelson</a>	<a href="#">Sen. Charles Schumer</a>
<a href="#">Sen. Jeff Bingaman</a> †	<a href="#">Sen. Kent Conrad</a> †	<a href="#">Sen. Joseph Lieberman</a> †	<a href="#">Sen. John Reed</a>	<a href="#">Sen. Debbie Stabenow</a>
<a href="#">Sen. Barbara Boxer</a>	<a href="#">Sen. Richard Durbin</a>	<a href="#">Sen. Robert Menendez</a>	<a href="#">Sen. Harry Reid</a>	<a href="#">Sen. Mark Udall</a>
<a href="#">Sen. Sherrod Brown</a>	<a href="#">Sen. John Kerry</a>	<a href="#">Sen. Barbara Mikulski</a>	<a href="#">Sen. John Rockefeller</a>	<a href="#">Sen. Tom Udall</a>
<a href="#">Sen. Maria Cantwell</a>	<a href="#">Sen. Patrick Leahy</a>	<a href="#">Sen. Patty Murray</a>	<a href="#">Sen. Bernard Sanders</a>	<a href="#">Sen. Ron Wyden</a>

† No longer in the Senate as of the new term

## Former Sen. Daniel Akaka (D-Hawaii)

In 2006, Sen. Akaka was asked whether the Bush tax cuts should be made permanent. He said they shouldn't:

“We cannot make the tax cut permanent. The reason for that is that our country has increased our debt so much that the future generations will be in trouble in trying to keep up our nation with those huge deficits.”<sup>1</sup>

“Government should be taking care of those who need help most and not take care of the richest.”<sup>1</sup>

## Former Sen. Jeff Bingaman (D-N.M.)

**2001:** “I’m very concerned that this tax cut will leave us with limited resources that will prevent us from making the right investments in education and health care.”<sup>2</sup>

**2003:** “It’s not good economics, considering the size of our deficits, to be locking in substantially larger deficits, which would be the impact (of the tax cut).”<sup>3</sup>

“It’s very heavily allocated toward the affluent elite.”<sup>3</sup>

“This proposal will add substantially to future deficits and is not constructed in a way that will stimulate the economy...We should get a better handle on how much we are going to need to cover the cost of the war with Iraq and its aftermath, as well as our other obligations, such as health care and education, before contemplating another tax cut.”<sup>4</sup>

1 2006 Hawaii Democratic Senate Primary Debate, August 31, 2006. <http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/HawaiiD>

2 “New Mexico Among States to Benefit Least,” Albuquerque Journal (New Mexico), May 22, 2001.

3 “President’s Stop Won’t Influence N.M. Dems,” Albuquerque Journal (NM), May 10, 2003.

4 “Raise Your Voices,” Albuquerque Journal (New Mexico), May 13, 2003.

## Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.)

**2001:** “It’s time that we learned from past mistakes. America tried this plan before in 1981, and it led to a period of economic recession that my state...will never forget.”<sup>5</sup>

“Mr. President, just as I voted no on the Senate version of this tax bill because it was fiscally irresponsible, raided Social Security and Medicare, and would force cuts in investments in working Americans, including education, so too do I oppose this conference report.”<sup>6</sup>

“This tax bill plays a game with our fiscal future. To meet the target of \$1.35 trillion of tax cuts over the next 10 years, all of the tax cuts in this bill expire in nine years. Why? Because if they were in effect 10 years from now, the cost of this bill would be astronomical, and it would be very clear to the American people that this tax bill is nothing but a riverboat gamble with our children’s future.”<sup>6</sup>

**2003:** “The president’s new tax plan is a federal budget buster and what it does to the state budgets is completely irresponsible.”<sup>7</sup>

“Mr. President, this bill is called the ‘Jobs and Growth Tax Relief Reconciliation Act.’ That name is wrong. This bill is not about creating jobs and stimulating economic growth. It is about helping the elite few with large tax cuts, while burdening the majority of Americans with a huge debt. Fairness is an American value. And this bill is far from fair.”<sup>8</sup>

## Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio) (Member of the House of Representatives in 2001 and 2003)

**2001:** “President Bush’s budget makes it impossible for us to add a Medicare prescription drug benefit or to adequately invest in public schools...This budget takes us in the wrong direction.”<sup>9</sup>

**2003:** “Two years ago, the President got his tax cut through Congress, which he claimed would create jobs. Two years later, today, we have lost since then 1.7 million jobs, and now they are saying we should do it again.”<sup>10</sup>

5 “President Appeals To Middle Ground; SPEECH Bush urges Congress to back tax cuts, spending plan,” The San Francisco Chronicle, February 28, 2001.

6 “ECONOMIC GROWTH AND TAX RELIEF RECONCILIATION ACT OF 2001—CONFERENCE REPORT—,” THOMAS Congressional Record, May 26, 2001.

7 “Senator Feinstein, backer of 2001 tax cut, opposes new reductions,” The Associated Press State & Local Wire, January 9, 2003.

8 “JOBS AND GROWTH TAX RELIEF RECONCILIATION ACT, 2003—CONFERENCE REPORT —,” THOMAS Congressional Record, May 23, 2003.

9 “REPUBLICANS AND DEMOCRATS DISAGREE ON BUSH PLAN,” States News Service, February 27, 2001.

10 “REPUBLICANS DENY WORKERS EXTENDED UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS DURING ECONOMIC DOWNTURN,” THOMAS Congressional Record, May 13, 2003.

## Sen. Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.)

**2001:** “I believe that the bill we have passed today is shortsighted and fiscally irresponsible. Comprehensive tax relief must be measured against the need to maintain fiscal discipline, and stimulate economic growth through continued federal investment in education and job training, as well as giving relief to citizens in times of surplus. The conference report passed today fails this test.”<sup>11</sup>

“It is very likely that we will only be able to afford this tax cut by raiding the Social Security and Medicare trust funds.”<sup>11</sup>

## Sen. Benjamin Cardin (D-Md.) (Member of the House of Representatives in 2001 and 2003)

**2001:** “Congress needs to make a choice: large tax cuts for the well off, or deal with poverty problems in America’s families.”<sup>12</sup>

## Former Sen. Kent Conrad (D-N.D.)

**2001:** “President Bush’s tax cut is just too big...It’s so big that it could easily drive us back to the deficits of the 1980s, leading to higher interest rates and putting the strength of our economy at risk.”<sup>13</sup>

“And what about the nation’s other needs? Where will the money come from to improve education, provide prescription drug coverage and strengthen national defense? Where will the money come from to pay down our long-term national debt?”<sup>14</sup>

“We’ve just spent the better part of the last decade putting this nation’s economy back on track. The results have been remarkable. We must not jeopardize that progress, and we must not return to the days of deficits and decline. America simply cannot afford the Bush tax plan.”<sup>14</sup>

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11 “ECONOMIC GROWTH AND TAX RELIEF RECONCILIATION ACT OF 2001—CONFERENCE REPORT—,” THOMAS Congressional Record, May 26, 2001.

12 “WELFARE PUZZLE THE NATION’S POOR ARE STILL VERY MUCH AT RISK AS PROBLEMS MULTIPLY,” The Post-Standard (Syracuse, NY), December 16, 2001.

13 “TAX CUT COULD THREATEN RETIREES; THE COST OF CARING FOR THE BABY BOOMERS WILL SHOW UP BY 2011, THE GAO SAYS,” Contra Costa Times (California), February 7, 2001.

14 “U.S. SENATOR KENT CONRAD DELIVERS DEMOCRATIC RESPONSE TO THE PRESIDENT’S WEEKLY RADIO ADDRESS,” FDCH Political Transcripts, February 10, 2001.

“We should have passed a more modest tax cut and reserved more money for long-term and short-term debt reduction, so we could be certain we are keeping on course to reduce this national debt.”<sup>15</sup>

“Have we learned nothing from the past? We tried this same approach in the 1980s, and it skyrocketed the deficits and the debt, and it took us 15 years to end it.”<sup>16</sup>

## Sen. Richard Durbin (D-Ill.)

**2001:** “The people I have spoken to across Illinois support a tax cut to benefit everyone, not primarily the rich...And they want that tax cut to be reasonable in size so we pay down our national debt and still invest in important priorities like education, prescription drugs for the elderly and reforming Social Security and Medicare.”<sup>17</sup>

“We did face a situation here where, after years of fighting off deficits, after years of a slow economy, we finally saw a turnaround, we saw a surplus, we had our opportunity, and we blew it. We blew it today with this vote in the United States Senate.”<sup>18</sup>

“I think this tax bill is a serious mistake. The Congress of the United States made a grievous error in the early 1980s under President Reagan when we accepted his message — and many voted for it — that called for a massive tax cut. It is easy to preach the gospel of a tax cut. What could be easier for a politician than to go to people and say, I want to reduce your taxes. There can’t be anything more appealing. But we have a responsibility in the Congress to reflect on what the tax cut means and whether or not it is the right thing to do. In the Reagan years, when many yielded to the siren call for a tax cut, they created a deficit situation in this country which crippled our economy for more than 10 years. History tells the story.”<sup>16</sup>

“This bill eliminates our ability to make necessary investments in the future of this country, the most important being education. All the speeches that have been given about bipartisan commitment to funding new education programs really disappear in a heartbeat when we vote to pass a tax cut which takes away the money that is absolutely essential for us to make sure that our kids in the 21st century are well prepared to lead the world. I encourage all of my colleagues to oppose this bill, to vote for a tax cut for American families that is fair, one that does not go too far and jeopardize our economy, Social Security, or Medicare.”<sup>16</sup>

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15 “THE RELIEF ACT,” THOMAS Congressional Record, May 23, 2001.

16 “ECONOMIC GROWTH AND TAX RELIEF RECONCILIATION ACT OF 2001—CONFERENCE REPORT –,” THOMAS Congressional Record, May 26, 2001.

17 “Bush stumps for tax cut in Dakotas,” United Press International, March 8, 2001.

18 “KENT CONRAD HOLDS NEWS CONFERENCE FOLLOWING FINAL PASSAGE OF THE TAX BILL,” FDCH Political Transcripts, May 23, 2001.

**2003:** “The majority of the benefits ought to go to the majority of Americans... This latest Bush proposal is as bad as the first one. It is not going to save the economy. It is going to help the fat cat contributors.”<sup>19</sup>

“If the President’s plan of tax cuts for wealthy people is exactly the medicine to cure our problems, how do we explain the fact that the economy is still so sick two years after the President tried this tax cut the first time?”<sup>20</sup>

“This bill is fiscally irresponsible. It was irresponsible two years ago. It devastated the economy. It added to our deficit. It has created more problems economically than this country has seen in many years.”<sup>20</sup>

### **Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.)**

**2001:** “This is a case of ‘here we go again,’ back to 1981 with Ronald Reagan. The American people have a clear choice. We can go back to Reaganomics, where you cut much more than you can, give a big tax cut mostly to the wealthy at the expense of a lot of people at the lower end.”<sup>21</sup>

“We want to make sure we pay down debt. We want to make sure we can invest in the future of this country, prescription drugs, education for our children, our transportation needs, a host of other issues.”<sup>21</sup>

“Well, Americans deserve a tax cut, but Americans do not deserve what this tax bill will do to them and to the country. This tax bill, regrettably, sets us on a course which will deny us the ability to maintain the fiscal responsibility we worked so hard to achieve the last eight years.”<sup>22</sup>

“I think this really defines, in the clearest of terms, a new fight. And a new fight begins now as a consequence of this tax bill. And that new fight is going to be over the real priorities of the American people and how they can be met within the straitjacket that has been created by the amount of money going back in this tax cut, most of it to one level.”<sup>22</sup>

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19 “What Bush’s tax cut means to you,” Chicago Sun-Times, January 8, 2003.

20 “JOBS AND GROWTH TAX RELIEF RECONCILIATION ACT OF 2003,” THOMAS Congressional Record, May 14, 2003.

21 “Is Bush’s Proposed Tax Cut Too Large?; How Have Pardon Scandals Hurt the Federal Government?” CNN Late Edition With Wolf Blitzer, February 25, 2001.

22 “KENT CONRAD HOLDS NEWS CONFERENCE FOLLOWING FINAL PASSAGE OF THE TAX BILL,” FDCH Political Transcripts, May 23, 2001.

“So what you’re seeing is a purposeful, strategically designed, crowding out of the real ability of Congress to address concerns, which they as a party, have never wanted to address and have even voted against time and time again. It’s hard to believe now, but some people even voted against Medicare originally. They voted against the Clean Water Act. They voted against the Clean Air Act. They voted against Safe Drinking Water Act. And in 1994 when they took over the House, they tried to undo those measures. This tax bill by its size alone is a back-door entry effort to try to squeeze out the beast that they don’t like and haven’t been able to contain otherwise, and it will now define the fight, really, for the next 10 or 15 years as a consequence of what’s happened here.”<sup>23</sup>

## Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.)

**2003:** “Sadly, this administration has chosen to support tax policies where affluent people will reap enormous benefits, while working families will receive very little tax relief.”<sup>24</sup>

“Passing another enormous tax cut this year will only amplify this trend of growing deficits and add to the economic burdens our children and grandchildren will inherit. Increasing deficits will decrease national savings and increase long-term interest rates — effectively lowering the incomes of working Americans.”<sup>24</sup>

“I just do not think we can afford another large tax cut at this time until we get our own fiscal house in order. Clearly, this tax cut plan is not about growing the economy or creating jobs. It is about starving the Government and wooing some voters.”<sup>24</sup>

“In 2001, I voted against the Bush tax cut bill because it was too skewed toward the wealthiest Americans and too fiscally irresponsible. Since then, we have gone from record surpluses to record deficits, and the economy is still floundering.”<sup>24</sup>

“As I said when this bill passed the Senate, I have two of the world’s most perfect grandchildren. And while the promise of another tax cut sounds great, I am not going to ask my grandchildren and everyone else’s grandchildren to pay for it. It is not right. It is not fair. And it is not the American way.”<sup>24</sup>

## Sen. Carl Levin (D-Mich.)

**2001:** “This is a fiscally irresponsible thing to do. It will put us, in all likelihood, back in a deficit ditch, which we have just climbed out of. We have not acted in a fiscally responsible way today.”<sup>23</sup>

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23 “KENT CONRAD HOLDS NEWS CONFERENCE FOLLOWING FINAL PASSAGE OF THE TAX BILL,” FDCH Political Transcripts, May 23, 2001.

24 “JOBS AND GROWTH TAX RELIEF RECONCILIATION ACT, 2003—CONFERENCE REPORT —,” THOMAS Congressional Record, May 23, 2003.

**2003:** “The president’s fiscal year 2004 budget request contains misplaced domestic and economic priorities.” The Bush tax cut is “a huge deficit creator [that] makes it impossible, as a result, to assist states like Michigan.”<sup>25</sup>

“A close look reveals too many ill-advised cuts in too many critical areas in order to help pay for a tax cut which is too large, too inequitable and which will worsen our fiscal situation without providing our economy the jump-start it needs.”<sup>26</sup>

### **Former Sen. Joseph Lieberman (I-Conn.)**

**2001:** “Just think of the conditions that this Bush administration found when it came to office: a government in [an] unprecedented position, with surpluses of more than — trillions of dollars ahead, and with the opportunity to work across party lines to put together a program that would invest in America’s future and continue America’s prosperity and progress. Those opportunities were lost.”<sup>27</sup>

“So I would say that this is a day, sadly, that could be titled “Opportunities Lost.” And the consequences of those opportunities lost, I’m afraid, are serious for our nation’s future. This is a sad day for fiscal responsibility in our government and for economic growth in the future of our country.”<sup>27</sup>

“This bill may prove to be nothing but a one-trick pony, and, if so, it’s a bad trick to play on the American people. No matter the well-intentioned claims of my colleagues, this bill promises something we cannot deliver. It abandons fiscal discipline, fails to invest the wealth our Nation has earned over the past eight years, and may send us back down the road to debt, higher interest rates, and higher unemployment. It is not what the American people deserve, nor is it what they expected it to be.”<sup>28</sup>

### **Sen. Robert Menendez (D-N.J.) (Member of the House of Representatives in 2001 and 2003)**

**2001:** “The Bush plan is unfair to working families...Forty-three percent of the tax cut goes to the wealthiest 1 percent of the country.”<sup>29</sup>

25 “Mich. Lawmakers say state unlikely to get more federal aid,” Gannet News Service, February 6, 2003.

26 “Michigan senators oppose budget,” The Associated Press State & Local Wire, March 30, 2003.

27 “KENT CONRAD HOLDS NEWS CONFERENCE FOLLOWING FINAL PASSAGE OF THE TAX BILL,” FDCH Political Transcripts, May 23, 2001.

28 “FINAL PASSAGE OF THE TAX BILL,” THOMAS Congressional Record, May 24, 2001.

29 “N.J. DELEGATION SPLIT ALONG PARTY LINES ON BUSH TAX CUT PROPOSAL,” States News Service, February 8, 2001.

“Worse yet, by committing all the surplus to pay for these lopsided tax cuts, there is no money left to invest in our nation’s priorities.”<sup>30</sup>

**2003:** “America simply cannot be red, white and broke and meet its challenges both at home and abroad in the years to come. It is time for Republicans to realize that their tax cut is not the answer to every problem. For two-and-a-half years it has not worked; ask the 8.8 million Americans who are unemployed.”<sup>31</sup>

### **Sen. Barbara Mikulski (D-Md.)**

**2001:** “...If you look at this, there is no money for justice, and there certainly is no money for opportunity. And when you divide the rich from the poor in this tax break, it certainly is not a single nation. The Bush budget is reckless. It mortgages America’s future with these lavish tax cuts. Now we Democrats believe that we do want to put money in people’s pocket books. But we want to do it in a way that’s here today, and they can count on it tomorrow.”<sup>32</sup>

### **Sen. Patty Murray (D-Wash.)**

**2001:** “The president seems to have his priorities backwards. He’s willing to pay for his tax cut at the expense of our children, our neighborhoods, our health, and our future.”<sup>33</sup>

**2003:** “Each week, we get more proof that Bush-a-nomics is failing American families...This week, consumer confidence plummeted to the lowest level in nine years.”<sup>34</sup>

### **Sen. Bill Nelson (D-Fla.)**

**2001:** “It poses a serious threat to our economy because it will use up what surplus there is so we cannot pay down the national debt ... and it seriously threatens our Medicare and Social Security trust funds.”<sup>35</sup>

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30 “Bush calls on Senate to pass tax-cut bill,” Associated Press, March 17, 2001.

31 “JOBS AND GROWTH RECONCILIATION TAX ACT OF 2003,” THOMAS Congressional Record, May 9, 2003.

32 “PRESS CONFERENCE WITH SENATE MINORITY LEADER TOM DASCHLE (D-SD) AND OTHERS RE: BUSH BUDGET,” Federal News Service, April 3, 2001.

33 “As Murray gains new clout, more combative side emerges,” The Seattle Times, June 3, 2001.

34 “DEMOCRATS CRITICIZE ‘BUSH-A-NOMICS’,” Orlando Sentinel (Florida), March 2, 2003.

35 “TAX-CUT PACKAGE FINALLY PASSES SENATE OK’S DEAL; HOUSE TALKS SET,” The Miami Herald, May 24, 2001.

“This legislation greatly increases the likelihood that the Federal Government will use up all of the projected surplus and there will not be any left over to pay down the national debt without raiding the Medicare and Social Security trust funds. That would be tragic. And if there are additional investments needed over the next decade, as there certainly will be, such as for education, the environment, health care, and national defense, then the federal budget will be written in the red ink of deficit spending.”<sup>36</sup>

### **Sen. John Reed (D-R.I.)**

**2002:** “We had 10 years where our government was focused on fiscal responsibility and we generated surpluses...Now, we are in a situation where a lot of opportunities are lost, where we just don’t have the resources to invest...we would be a lot better off had Congress been more judicious in passing the Bush administration tax cut.”<sup>37</sup>

**2003:** “The Bush tax-cut agenda...it surely and dramatically has made the tough problem even tougher. It makes the fiscal hole even deeper, and it unjustly pushes off most of the financial responsibility for the tax cuts and government programs we now enjoy onto our children and grandchildren. We’re putting our tax cuts on a credit card that our kids will have to pay off.”<sup>38</sup>

### **Sen. Harry Reid (D-Nev.)**

**2001:** “Whatever tax cut we give, we are in favor of tax cuts. Democrats want a tax cut. It’s a question of how much. Are we going to be able to spend all that money we don’t have now? Or would we be better approaching it a little more cautiously? We have to protect Social Security, Medicare. We have to give reasonable tax cuts, but most of all, do something about the huge debt that’s facing us now.”<sup>39</sup>

“Well, of course, the easiest thing for Democrats and Republicans to do is just vote for the tax cut. People always like tax cuts. So that would be the easiest thing to do. But, you know, sometimes in your political life you have to do what is the right thing to do for the country and for your respective states. I think that we’re going to get a tax cut, but it has to be one that we can afford.”<sup>40</sup>

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36 “ECONOMIC GROWTH AND TAX RELIEF RECONCILIATION ACT OF 2001—CONFERENCE REPORT—,” THOMAS Congressional Record, May 26, 2001.

37 “With apathy his opponent, Reed kicks off campaign,” Providence Journal-Bulletin (Rhode Island), May 20, 2002.

38 “JOBS AND GROWTH TAX RELIEF RECONCILIATION ACT OF 2003,” THOMAS, Congressional Record, May 14, 2003.

39 “Bush Begins Sales Pitch; Democrats Worry Bush Tax Cut May Jeopardize Federal Surplus,” CNN TODAY, February 5, 2001.

40 “PRESIDENT BUSH’S BUDGET PRIORITIES,” Talk of the Nation, February 28, 2001.

“We’re gonna take a look at what he’s proposed and we’re gonna say, ‘We’re only going to take what tax cut we can afford.’ We have to protect Social Security. We have to make sure that we have enough to pay down this terrible debt that’s developed and we have to make sure we have a few extra dollars to take care of the education needs of our country and to give a prescription drug benefit for senior citizens.”<sup>41</sup>

“This week, the Republicans in the House of Representatives passed a massive and irresponsible tax cut designed to give huge amounts of money to a handful of their rich campaign donors. Their plan spends money that we don’t have and might never get in order to benefit the few.”<sup>42</sup>

“To take all this money that we have in the way of surpluses and squander it on the tax cut is really the wrong way to go.”<sup>43</sup>

“Don’t you think it’s a better idea to spend that money on our water systems and sewer systems than to give Bill Gates a bigger tax break?”<sup>43</sup>

**2003:** “When they direct their tax programs to benefit the very, very, very few and eliminate the majority from any benefit of these tax cuts, it is class war.”<sup>44</sup>

## Sen. John Rockefeller IV (D-W.Va.)

**2001:** “Mr. President, I rise today in strong opposition to this fiscally irresponsible conference report. Today, this tax cut perpetrates a fraud on the American people. Their hard work created this surplus and this opportunity to sustain our economy and strengthen Social Security and Medicare. But no one should be fooled that this conference report is anything but an irresponsible, unfair, and politically motivated giveaway to the wealthiest in our society. I deeply regret that we have failed to take this historic opportunity to provide a meaningful tax cut to all Americans, and at the same time, continue to make real progress paying down our national debt and reserve sufficient resources to invest in our future.”<sup>45</sup>

“It is ludicrous to think that the Congress would impose a quarter-of-a-trillion-dollar tax increase on the American people in 2010 when this tax-cut proposal expires. These tax cuts will be extended, and their cost will thus explode to \$4 trillion and more. That’s not responsible, and it’s bad economic policy. What’s even worse, this bill is just not fair to hardworking Americans who created the surplus. This tax conference report simply gives too much to the wealthiest Americans and does too little to reduce our national debt.”<sup>45</sup>

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41 “PRESIDENT BUSH’S BUDGET PRIORITIES,” Talk of the Nation, February 28, 2001.

42 “White House Holds Firms on Tax Cut Numbers,” CNN SATURDAY, March 10, 2001.

43 “BUSH PROPOSAL: Reid calls tax plan unwise use,” Las Vegas Review-Journal (Nevada), March 13, 2001.

44 “W Tax Plan Too Rich, Dems Say,” Daily News (New York), January 6, 2003.

45 “ECONOMIC GROWTH AND TAX RELIEF RECONCILIATION ACT OF 2001—CONFERENCE REPORT—,” THOMAS Congressional Record, May 26, 2001.

“All of us remember the consequences of the Reagan tax cut: two decades of spiraling deficits. And for my state of West Virginia, the consequences were devastating. As a Governor, I know how my state suffered. I don’t want to return to those days, and West Virginians don’t either. This proposal, regretfully, sets us on that path.”<sup>46</sup>

**2003:** “Yes, we are in an economic downturn, and yes, we need to stimulate the economy, but the dividend tax cut is not the answer...It is fiscally irresponsible to pass a tax cut that will benefit the wealthy at the expense of hard-working, average taxpayers in West Virginia and across the country.”<sup>47</sup>

“These cuts do not reflect West Virginia’s needs...Key priorities are shortchanged, including fiscal aid to states, the child tax credit, school construction and extending unemployment benefits.”<sup>48</sup>

“I cannot support the deal that has been reached because it is so clearly designed to benefit the elite members of our society at the expense of average taxpayers in West Virginia and across the Nation. Proposals that could have stimulated the economy and helped working families got shortchanged to make room for enormous tax cuts for wealthy investors. I have little hope that this bill will stimulate economic growth; on the other hand, our national debt will be guaranteed to grow if we pass the bill.”<sup>49</sup>

## **Sen. Bernard Sanders (I-Vt.) (Member of the House of Representatives in 2001 and 2003)**

**2001:** “When you look at the crisis of education...then that tax proposal that Bush is proposing is an absolute disgrace.”<sup>50</sup>

“...President Bush is saying we want tax breaks primarily geared to the wealthiest people in the country — huge tax breaks — and we refuse to look at any trigger, regardless of the condition of the economy. In other words, if the economy moves into a recession, if the money coming into our Treasury goes down, if we run huge deficits and repeat what happened in the 1980s — all of that is irrelevant — because we are obsessed with the idea of tax breaks, especially tax breaks that go to the wealthiest people in the country. That is so irresponsible that it is hard to imagine that a president of the United States would say that.”<sup>51</sup>

46 “ECONOMIC GROWTH AND TAX RELIEF RECONCILIATION ACT OF 2001—CONFERENCE REPORT—,” THOMAS Congressional Record, May 26, 2001.

47 “W. Va. delegation opposes Bush tax plan May 4, 2003, Sunday,” Charleston Gazette (West Virginia), May 4, 2003.

48 “Bush tax cuts would hurt W. Va., Jay says May 10, 2003, Saturday,” Charleston Gazette (West Virginia), May 10, 2003.

49 “JOBS AND GROWTH TAX RELIEF RECONCILIATION ACT, 2003—CONFERENCE REPORT —,” THOMAS Congressional Record, May 23, 2003.

50 “Bush political honeymoon could crash on rocky shores of tax reform,” Agence France Presse — English, February 7, 2001.

51 “CONGRESSIONAL PROGRESSIVE CAUCUS NEWS CONFERENCE TOPIC: AMERICAN PEOPLE’S DIVIDEND, AN ALTERNATIVE TAX CUT,” Federal New Service, February 8, 2001.

**2003:** “Mr. Speaker, this bill is a fraud. It will do devastating harm to this country. It is an embarrassment that the Republican leadership brings it up, and it should be defeated.”<sup>52</sup>

“When you give hundreds of billions of dollars in tax breaks, you endanger the middle class. This will lead to drastic cutbacks in education, in Medicare, in Medicaid, in Head Start, in the programs that working families depend upon. Shame. Cutting back on education and Head Start to give tax breaks to billionaires.”<sup>52</sup>

“You talk about creating jobs. That is what you told us two years ago when you brought forth your tax breaks for the rich. You told America it was going to create jobs. In the last two years, we have lost two million jobs after your tax breaks for the rich. This proposal will do nothing more. If you want to create decent-paying jobs, build affordable housing. Protect workers right now who will lose their jobs at the state and city levels. Tax breaks for the rich do not create jobs.”<sup>52</sup>

“What you are really saying is you do not want the elderly to have prescription drugs. You do not want the kids to have an education. That is what you mean when you rant and rave against the government.”<sup>52</sup>

“I think the evidence suggests that, when you are in a deficit situation, you do not give hundreds of billions of dollars to the richest people in this country. That is absolutely irresponsible. And the evidence is very clear that the lion’s share of this problem is the huge tax breaks that President Bush and the Republican leadership have brought forth.”<sup>53</sup>

## Sen. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.)

**2001:** “The president has sacrificed resources that could have gone to building national education standards with his tax cut. And as a result, the president’s education budget for next year barely keeps pace with inflation, and he’s proposed no real increases after that. So Mr. President, which way is it? Is it President Bush, the education president, or is it President Bush, the tax-cut president? You can’t be both. And you can’t ignore inconsistencies nor can his troops.”<sup>54</sup>

**2003:** “At a time when we are struggling to find funds for homeland defense, public education, health services, and the environment, it is unacceptable to many of us to push through massive, multi-year tax cuts.”<sup>55</sup>

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52 “CONFERENCE REPORT ON H.R. 2, JOBS AND GROWTH TAX RELIEF RECONCILIATION ACT OF 2003,” THOMAS Congressional Record, May 22, 2003.

53 SCARBOROUGH COUNTRY, August 7, 2003.

54 “U.S. SENATOR CHARLES SCHUMER (D-NY) HOLDS NEWS CONFERENCE,” FDCH Political Transcripts, September 6, 2001.

55 “JOBS AND GROWTH TAX RELIEF RECONCILIATION ACT OF 2003,” THOMAS Congressional Record, May 14, 2003.

## Sen. Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich.)

**2001:** “When we talk about the broader issues, I hear a lot of people saying, ‘Why don’t you pay down the national debt?’...No one has approached me and mentioned tax cuts first.”<sup>56</sup>

“The approach being put forward says a very large supply-side tax cut will trickle down. Coupled, in the 1980s, with a very large increase in defense spending and not controlling other spending, what happened? We tripled the national debt, interest rates were at the highest level ever, and employment went down.”<sup>57</sup>

“I believe common sense would dictate we pay down the debt, we protect Medicare and Social Security, we give a major tax cut focused on our middle-income families and small businesses and family farmers, and that we can do that and also be able to continue investments to keep the economy going. This is the approach that worked. It is hard to argue with success. The policies in the 1990s were successful because of the hard work of both the private sector and the public sector to move us out of debt, to balance the budget, and to make investments in education and the economy.”<sup>57</sup>

**2003:** “It is astounding what has happened in a very short time, going from budget surpluses, a boom in the economy in the 1990s, and now, in a very short time, to a turnaround where we are plummeting into debt. We are seeing close to the worst job creation in 58 years. What we are seeing from this record, over and over again, is the plan to give tax breaks for the privileged few will not create jobs. It did not create jobs in the 1980s when it was done. The bill that was passed 2 years ago, in 2001, was the first round of the Bush tax breaks for the privileged few, and it has not created jobs. Now they are saying do it again.”<sup>58</sup>

“My question is, Why in the world are we going to do this again? Why in the world would we use the same policies that have not worked?”<sup>58</sup>

## Sen. Mark Udall (D-Colo.) (Member of the House of Representatives in 2001 and 2003)

**2001:** “There are reports that the president’s budget will seek to make room for his tax bill by cutting in other areas...We should take care to fund our priorities. To do otherwise would be to risk jeopardizing the future health of our children.”<sup>59</sup>

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56 “Voters fear Bush tax cut plan will hurt poor; Michigan lawmakers find taxpayers want a tax break, but they ask who will pay for the plan?” The Detroit News, April 15, 2001.

57 “TAXES AND THE ECONOMY,” THOMAS Congressional Record, May 25, 2001.

58 “HELPING THE ECONOMY,” THOMAS Congressional Record, May 13, 2003.

59 “Delegation Reacts to Bush Address,” States News Service, February 27, 2001.

## **Sen. Tom Udall (D-N.M.) (Member of the House of Representatives in 2001 and 2003)**

**2003:** “I don’t think it’s a good plan, and I don’t think we can afford it at this time...This is basically a debt-tax on our children.”<sup>60</sup>

## **Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.)**

**2001:** “If we don’t have a full debate on the tax cut, then it’s impossible to debate Medicare and prescription drugs.”<sup>61</sup>

**2003:** “I don’t want to tell the people of my home State, and I don’t think others in this body want to either, that the U.S. Congress can figure out a way to come up with billions and billions of dollars to reconstruct Iraq, hundreds of millions of dollars for tax cuts, and simply not come up with the critical dollars needed to keep our kids in school for a full year, to keep older people in health care systems that are a lifeline for them.”<sup>62</sup>

*This content originally appeared at <http://www.remappingdebate.org/node/1710>*

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60 “Raise Your Voices,” Albuquerque Journal (New Mexico), May 13, 2003.

61 “Democrats Tie Drug Benefit Bills to Broader Debate on Tax Cuts,” Congressional Quarterly Weekly, February 16, 2001

62 “JOBS AND GROWTH TAX RELIEF RECONCILIATION ACT OF 2003,” THOMAS, Congressional Record, May 14, 2003.