

sacrificed their lives to allow this movement to go forward and, ultimately, to have this legislation passed.

So if we look back historically, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 is one of the most magnificent pieces of legislation ever passed by Congress because what it did is jump forward 100 years following the Civil War and give African Americans the ability to register to vote. Counties and various States in the South that were basically all African American had no African-American voters. The Voting Rights Act changed that. And now African Americans all over this country, but especially in the South, have had their lives changed by not having to feel the crash of a baseball bat on their head like Reverend Reeb, who came to peacefully demonstrate to allow people to have the right to vote and was killed with the smash of a baseball bat on the side of his head. Lives were lost, I repeat, and many people were injured. Many were seriously injured in an attempt to exercise the basic right of voting in America.

Why do I bring this to the Senate's attention today? The reason I bring it to the Senate's attention today is, it was a short time ago, early May, and it was very hot in Washington, and we went to the east front on the House side to have a press conference. There were dozens of Members of Congress there. Cameras were there, and people were shoving for position so the camera could see them. Everybody was there to talk about the need to reauthorize the Voting Rights Act. The press event took a long time. We had a number of speakers there, and they all talked about how important it was that we reauthorize the Voting Rights Act. I was there, Senator FRIST was there, House leaders were there, chairman and ranking members of the Judiciary Committees were there, civil rights leaders were there to announce their support for the reauthorization of the Voting Rights Act. We stood together that day on the steps of the Capitol and announced a bipartisan, bicameral introduction of that bill.

I thought that day held great promise for the Congress and the Nation. The old days of the early 1960s were put behind us, and this would just go through here very quickly. I thought the legislation would be reauthorized and we would move down the road. I thought it showed great possibilities that leaders of both parties recognized that protecting the right to vote is not a partisan issue, it is an American issue and one we would join to support without qualification.

While finding common ground seems increasingly beyond our reach on many debates in the Senate, our joint support for the Voting Rights Act stood as a sign that we could still readily stand together to protect the rights upon which this Nation was founded.

In the weeks that followed, some progress was made in moving the bill forward in the House and the Senate.

In both Chambers, an exhaustive record was built, demonstrating without question the continued need for the Voting Rights Act protections.

I am sorry to report that progress has stalled. It has really stalled. Last week, House leaders failed to follow through on their commitment to move this reauthorization in that body. It is now not clear when or even if the House will act. We urge them to do so quickly. But the fact that the House hasn't acted doesn't mean we cannot act in the Senate. The commitment we all made in May on the east front of the Capitol is a commitment that the American people are going to hold us to. As I have said, we need not wait for the House. I am told the Senate Judiciary Committee is going to complete a markup of this important legislation in July. I hope so. As we know, the original timetable was May.

Mr. President, I stand ready to work with my friend, the distinguished majority leader, to move this matter forward in the Senate, and let the House do what they feel they need to do. We need to have the Judiciary Committee complete its work, bring this to the Senate floor in July, and spend time on it, talking about how important this legislation has been and how that President's Room back there could be used by President Bush to come and sign the reauthorization of this bill. Hopefully he can do it this summer.

I don't stand alone in the pursuit of passing the reauthorization of the Voting Rights Act. More than 40 Democratic and Republican Senators have signed as cosponsors of this legislation. I really believe that together we can fulfill the commitment we made in May to support the voting rights of all Americans, without equivocation, by calling this bill up in July and moving forward with its swift passage.

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

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

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

CHECKLIST FOR CHANGE

Mrs. CLINTON. Mr. President, last week, the Democratic women of the Senate, led by our dean, Senator BARBARA MIKULSKI, held an event at the Sewall Belmont House, which I am very proud to say put forth what we are calling the checklist for change. We came together around the importance of an agenda in Congress that meets the needs of all of the American people.

We have been given an hour this morning to discuss these issues. Our first speaker, our leader, is the Senator from Maryland, who has paved the way

for women not only in the Senate but in our country on so many issues. I am, with great pride, yielding to the Senator from Maryland.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Maryland is recognized.

Ms. MIKULSKI. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from New York, as well as all of my colleagues, the nine Democratic women from the U.S. Senate.

We are united today. We, the Democratic women of the Senate, rise in a united way to launch something we are calling the Democratic Women for Change. We want to change the agenda that is going through the Senate. We want to change the tone in the Senate for one of more civility, and we want to change the schedule to get things done.

The Senate has only been in session about 75 days, less time than most State legislatures. And what have we debated? Divisive constitutional amendments and tax breaks for zillionaires.

I regret that the Republican leadership has squandered time, squandered opportunity, and squandered taxpayers' money. We spent time with bills focused on reelecting Republicans instead of helping American families. It is time we bring real issues to the floor. We have only 50 days left before this Senate adjourns. This is why we have done our checklist.

We have a must-do list for change. It is specific, it is immediate, it is realizable, and it is also affordable.

We women know about checklists. We remember all the important things that we need to get done by having a checklist. It is what we use to keep our families on track, and now we bring a checklist to the Senate to get America on track.

These are the challenges that we can meet right now by the time Congress adjourns for the fall elections. Each and every one of us has a specific issue we want to see done, and we want to check that off.

I am advocating for reliable pensions. I want to talk about retirement security and giving help to those people who practice self-help all of their lives. In the United States of America, everyone should retire with financial security.

Honoring your father and your mother is not only a good commandment to live by, it is a very good policy by which to govern. That is why we the Democratic women of the Senate fought to stop the privatization of Social Security, and we were successful. Now we stand sentry on the Senate floor to make sure Social Security is never ever privatized.

We believe that Social Security should be a guaranteed benefit, not a guaranteed gamble. We want to make sure Social Security is reliable, undeniable, and inflation proof.

But as we stand sentry, we are alarmed to see that a budget bill will come soon to the Senate floor that

could be a backdoor way of privatizing Social Security. The so-called budget reform bill will create a commission on entitlements, fast-track authority, but it is really a backdoor way to privatize Social Security.

Under the guise of empowering an unelected commission, they would have the authority to cut benefits, to turn it over to Wall Street where seniors would have to rely on the bull of political promises or the bear of a market. We, your Democratic women, are standing sentry, and we will not let this happen.

But we also want to support the private sector, the good guys in America's entrepreneurial and business community who provide pensions. So we are fighting for pensions that workers can count on and so that good-guy businesses would have clear rules coming out of the legislative framework on which they could depend. And we want to protect taxpayers from a bailout of companies dumping their programs on a government program.

Where are we now? A pension bill has been languishing. We are stalled, we are sputtering, we are dithering. It has been 180 days since the House and the Senate passed each bill on pensions, and 110 days since conferees were named—110 days.

After all is said and done, more is being said than gets done. Time is running out. We must pass this bill. But most of all, time is running out on this Congress. The American people are running out of patience. That is why we bring to the Senate our economic list for change, and we ask that we adopt this checklist and let's bring about change that will make a difference for our constituents.

I now yield the floor to my wonderful colleague from New York, Mrs. CLINTON, and thank her for all of the extra work she is doing in standing up for New York and standing up for America.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from New York is recognized.

Mrs. CLINTON. Mr. President, I applaud my friend and colleague, Senator MIKULSKI, who is speaking out eloquently and strongly about the importance of pension and retirement security and pointing out the dangers of the legislation—coming out on a totally party-line vote—coming out of the Budget Committee that we believe would once again raise the specter of Social Security privatization.

So we are sounding the alarm, and we are making clear that the Democratic women of the Senate will stand sentry, as Senator MIKULSKI said, and we will stand firmly to protect Social Security because we know how many women depend on Social Security.

Part of our effort is to in very simple terms put forth this checklist for change. We know we have to secure our economy in a more competitive world and secure our energy supplies in that competitive world.

Our current energy policy is weakening our national security, hurting

our pocketbooks, violating our common values, and threatening our children's futures. Right now, instead of our national security dictating our energy policy, our failed energy policy dictates our national security. We want and need a fundamental change in direction to secure our Nation's energy future.

I believe a strong, balanced national energy policy is a key to strong economic and environmental policies as well.

It is time we decide do we allow our economic security and our national security to be weighed down by a failed energy policy or do we choose a new path? We think, the Democratic women of the Senate, that we need a new path.

Here is a concrete goal. Let's reduce our dependence on foreign oil by at least 50 percent by 2025. How will we get there? It starts by getting back our American can-do attitude and a new commitment, such as the Apollo project that sent a man to the Moon. We know how to do this. Americans are better at setting goals and solving problems than any people in the history of the world, but we are acting as though we can't control our own destiny when it comes to energy, that we can't possibly do what needs to be done to break our addiction to foreign oil.

I have introduced legislation to create a strategic energy fund, to commit our Nation wholly to a new energy future, to invest in alternatives and efficiency, to create jobs, to strengthen our economy, and to free our hands fully to protect our Nation in the world. I don't want to see one more year go by where we are not doing what it takes to prevent us from being blackmailed and extorted by oil regimes that have us literally over a barrel.

The strategic energy fund will invest in renewable energy, such as wind and solar, transform America's vehicles by expanding consumer tax credits, and making sure we have more hybrids and other advanced clean diesel automobiles and trucks.

We will accelerate home-grown biofuels by investing in research and loan guarantees for cellulosic ethanol production.

We will speed fuel infrastructure by pairing increased tax incentives for installation of E-85 pumps with a mandate to have them at 50 percent of our gas stations within 10 years.

And we will unleash American ingenuity by investing \$9 billion in a new energy research agency modeled on DARPA, which was created in the Defense Department after Sputnik went up and has given us so much, including the Internet.

We challenge the Republican Congress to make energy independence a priority by passing meaningful energy legislation, such as a strategic energy fund, this session.

I am so proud to stand with my Democratic women colleagues and put forth this checklist for change. It will

make a difference in America's future. Let's get about doing the business of America.

I yield the floor for my distinguished colleague from California, Senator BOXER.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from California is recognized.

Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, I thank Senator CLINTON. I am also very proud to be on the floor of this great body with my Democratic women Senate colleagues.

We held a press conference in which we challenged the Republican leadership to bring up issues on this floor that are meaningful to our families. Here is our checklist for change. Each of us has taken one of these issues. Mine happens to be protecting our air, land, and water.

The message we are here today to convey is that the Republicans run the Senate, the White House, and the House of Representatives. They control what issues come to the floor of the Congress for debate. We spent yesterday debating an amendment to the Constitution to ban flag burning. We also debated a bipartisan proposal by Senators BENNETT and CLINTON to ban flag burning via a statute.

Every one of us in this body voted to ban flag burning, be it by a statute or by an amendment. But one has to ask the question: Is that debate, which we have had four times, more important than the issues that are on our checklist for change?

There have been four reports of flag burnings this year. That is four too many, but they were four. Yet there are 44 million Americans whose pensions are at risk while this Congress fails to act to protect those pensions.

Four flags burned versus 7.5 million Americans who have been denied an increase in the minimum wage. And this Congress, under the Republicans, sees nothing wrong with giving themselves a pay raise, but they can't raise the minimum wage, and it has been flat for 9 years, which means it has gone down in value and people cannot make it on \$5.15 an hour.

Four flags have been burned—four too many—versus 170,000 talented college-ready students each year who stay home because they can't afford tuition.

Four flags burned—four too many—yet 30,000-plus veterans have waited in 2006 for their first medical appointment, an issue that will be taken up by Senator MURRAY.

Four flags burned versus 200,000 people in New Orleans living in trailers, unfinished houses, or tents in the front yards of their Katrina-ravaged homes.

Four flags burned this year—four too many—versus \$2.89 a gallon for regular gas. By the way, that is the national price. In California, we are looking at well over \$3 a gallon.

Four flags burned—four too many—versus 46 million Americans with no health insurance, and Senator LINCOLN will talk about that.

Four flags burned—four too many—versus over 500,000 Americans who have lost their lives while we wait for this Republican Congress to take action on stem cell legislation, an issue that has been championed by many of us in this Senate and on this checklist carried by Senator FEINSTEIN.

And, finally, four flags burned—four too many—versus 75 million Americans living near our most polluted toxic waste Superfund sites.

In conclusion, because my check-point is protect our air, land, and water, I call on this Republican Congress to address two pressing environmental crises: global warming and Superfund cleanup.

It is easy to put global warming on the back burner as long as our everyday lives are not affected, but some people think their everyday lives are beginning to be affected. The best scientists in the world warn us that we are near the tipping point on global warming.

Just the other day, the U.S. National Academy of Sciences, along with the national academy of science for 10 other nations, agreed that climate change is real and it has to be addressed. So we call on this Republican Congress to do something about it. Don't sit back and say this doesn't exist because you are ignoring science.

I am proud to say that in the State of California, they are listening. This week a historic global warming bill cleared the first hurdle and passed the California Senate Environmental Quality Committee. California has been a leader in the environment, and Senator FEINSTEIN and I want to make sure that we can bring some of that action right here to the Senate.

Last point: We need to clean up these Superfund sites that are hurting our families and hurting our communities. Under the Clinton administration, we cleaned up 80 of these sites a year. Now it is down to 40 sites a year. We owe our children a clean and healthy environment.

Mr. President, it is time for you and the Members of the Republican Congress to call on the Republican leadership to take up our checklist for change. We are very proud to be talking about this all together this morning on the Senate floor.

I am proud to yield now for Senator PATTY MURRAY of Washington.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Washington is recognized.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I am very proud to be here this morning with the other Democratic women of the Senate in urging the leadership to talk about the issues that are the true priorities of the American people. The issue I am talking about today is so important, and that is the treatment of our Nation's veterans. Our military men and women and their families are sacrificing every day for all of us. It should be our duty to honor that sacrifice, whether it is with jobs or train-

ing, support or health care. But on this issue, the Republican leadership has failed miserably.

Today, the Department of Veterans Affairs continues to be overwhelmed and underfunded. Listen to what we know. The VA is currently seeing 38 percent more Iraq war veterans than they budgeted for—38 percent more. In fact, in fiscal year 2006, the VA expected to provide medical care to 110,000, but that number is now closer to 170,000, and those veterans are waiting over a year to get the specialty care they need and deserve.

In Seattle, we have VA medical centers with over 2,000 veterans on waiting lists to get an initial doctor's appointment. Veterans around the country are waiting 18 months just to get their benefits. On Monday it was reported in the New York Times that veterans' spouses are being faced with an impenetrable wall of bureaucracy as they try to collect their survivor benefits.

To me, and to my women colleagues, that is simply intolerable. We are also woefully unprepared for the rising toll of post-traumatic stress disorder and other battlefield-related mental illnesses that are hitting our troops. Right now, it is estimated that one-third—one-third—of the 1.3 million Americans who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan are facing mental health challenges when they get home. The Department of Veterans Affairs recently revealed to us that it is on a pace to see nearly 20,000 new cases of postcombat stress this fiscal year among troops. Guess how many they estimated to see: 2,900. So they thought they would have 2,900, but they are on a pace to see 20,000. A VA Under Secretary noted that some of our VA clinics don't provide mental health care, or if they do, she said, waiting lists render that care virtually inaccessible. Our service men and women, veterans, and their families deserve more than virtually inaccessible care. We have to do more.

On top of that, we have to be working to pass Federal legislation that addresses the employment needs of veterans who are coming back home from the battle front. Do my colleagues know that among 20- to 24-year-olds, unemployment for veterans is double that of nonveterans, and it is three times the national average? That is unacceptable. Iraq war veterans are coming home, they are losing their jobs, they are not getting medical care, they are having a hard time accessing benefits, and they are struggling to just get by.

We have a job to do in this Senate, and that is why the Democratic women are here today to talk about our checklist for change and focusing on our veterans. Last week, I successfully amended the fiscal year 2007 Agriculture appropriations bill to include \$160 million to deal with the data theft of 26.5 million veterans. We have to make sure that our veterans don't have the double whammy of losing their data and then losing their health care to pay for it.

Our service men and women deserve a new direction. So today we challenge the Republican leadership to include the real cost of care for our veterans when they submit their budget and to do right by our veterans and our military families by holding hearings on the holes in transition assistance, mental health care, and health care that our veterans and families need.

Caring for our veterans is not a Republican or Democratic issue, it is an American issue. We call on this Congress to right now do the most patriotic thing we can do, and that is to fulfill our promise to our Nation's veterans.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD a letter to Senator FRIST from all of the Democratic women outlining our checklist for change and our call for action.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

DEMOCRATIC WOMEN FOR CHANGE,
June 21, 2006.

Hon. WILLIAM H. FRIST,
U.S. Senate, Hart Senate Office Building,
Washington, DC.

DEAR SENATOR FRIST, We, the Democratic women of the Senate, are writing to challenge you to change direction, change the tone, and change the agenda to match the priorities of the American people.

There are approximately 50 days left in this legislative session—still plenty of time to change direction and focus instead on meeting the challenges that affect the American people in their daily lives.

To that end, we present you with our "Checklist for Change"—nine challenges that Congress can meet right now. We ask that these goals be considered during the remainder of this session of Congress:

Safeguard America's Pensions: Americans deserve to retire with dignity and financial security. We will continue to oppose any plan to privatize social security, because seniors deserve a guarantee rather than a gamble. Recent corporate corruption and mismanagement has shown us that we must also protect employee pension plans. The Republican Congress has stalled these efforts. For the good of all American workers, we challenge the Republican Congress to pass a clean pension reform bill.

Keep Good Jobs in America: We need a jobs agenda that fights for American workers and businesses. The flight of American jobs overseas must be reversed. Currency manipulation and the free flow of counterfeit goods from countries like China have put American workers at an unfair disadvantage for too long. We challenge the Republican Congress to enact tax policies that Stop the outsourcing of American jobs, to level the international playing field by enforcing our trade agreements, and to raise the minimum wage.

Make College Affordable for All: The best guarantee of a good job is a quality education. In America, 170,000 college-ready students don't attend college each year because the cost is too high. Yet the Bush Administration has taken \$12 billion from student aid programs to pay for tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans. We challenge the Republican Congress to increase the maximum Pell Grant, make the college tuition tax credit permanent, and cut student loan interest rates.

Protect America and our Military Families: It is our duty to care for the brave men

and women who defend our nation at home and abroad. Yet the Bush Administration consistently shortchanges healthcare and other benefits for veterans, leaving many soldiers waiting a year or more treatment. We challenge the Republic Congress to provide benefits funding for veterans and to hold hearings on mental health care and transition assistance for those coming back from war abroad.

Prepare for Future Disasters: Nearly five years after September 11th and ten months after Hurricane Katrina, the Federal Government is still woefully unprepared to deal with potential future disasters. We challenge the Republican Congress to restore disaster to cabinet-level status; to implement the recommendations of the September 11th Commission; to develop safe evacuation plans; and to reform the Stafford Act to better manage large catastrophes.

Make America Energy Independent: America's lack of a coherent energy policy is weakening national security, hurting our pocketbooks, violating our common values and threatening our children's future. The Strategic Energy Fund bill will cut our dependence on foreign oil in half by 2025, invest in efficient energy alternatives and create good American jobs. We challenge the Republican Congress to pass the Strategic Energy Fund bill.

Make Small Business Healthcare Affordable: More than 46 million Americans are uninsured. Small businesses create two out of every three new jobs in America and account for nearly half of America's overall employment, yet just 26% of businesses with 50 or fewer employees provide health insurance. The Small Employers Health Benefits Program will create affordable, private health insurance for small businesses and give parents the comfort of knowing that their children are protected. We challenge the Republican Congress to pass this crucial legislation.

Invest in Life Saving Science: Stem cell research provides real hope for cures to many of the world's deadliest diseases. Against the wishes of the American people, the Bush Administration and the Republican Congress have blocked efforts to expand stem cell research so that scientists and doctors have every tool at their disposal to keep us healthy and safe. As a result, America trails the rest of the world in research. We challenge the Republican Congress to pass stem cell legislation this summer.

Protect our Air, Land and Water: The Bush Administration has been negligent in protecting Americans from environmental hazards. They have ignored the consensus of the best scientists in the world when it comes to the threat of global warming, and they have recklessly reduced clean ups of toxic waste at Superfund sites. We challenge the Republican Congress to pass a comprehensive science-based bill to reduce greenhouse gases and to restore funding for Superfund clean-up.

We hope that you will put these bedrock issues on the agenda, because the American people are counting on us to fight for them. We can and must do better.

Sincerely,

Barbara Mikulski, Barbara Boxer, Maria Cantwell, Hillary Rodham Clinton, Diane Feinstein, Mary Landrieu, Blanche Lincoln, Patty Murray, Debbie Stabenow.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I am proud to yield the floor for my colleague from Washington State, Senator CANTWELL.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. COLEMAN). The Senator from Washington is recognized.

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, I thank my colleague, Senator MURRAY from Washington, for her eloquent statement about the state of veterans affairs in our country and to make sure that those who patriotically served our country are taken care of in their time of need.

Many of my colleagues are here—and I appreciate being with my women Senate Democratic colleagues—to talk about our checklist for change and talk about the important issues we believe Congress and the Senate should be focusing on. But I know that people all across my State are wondering what we are doing here in the few days left before our Fourth of July recess.

In fact, one of the newspapers in my State basically said: If Members don't have better things to do than some of the proposals they have been bringing up to amend the Constitution, then we should just go home. Or, as one newspaper said: The checklists that we have been dealing with are full of political gimmicks and not national needs.

I would like to say that these are the national needs that we ought to be dealing with, and making college education affordable for all is a huge priority. As we have spoken out on this issue as a group of women Senators talking about the checklist for change, I am now hearing from students all over America who are feeling the same pinch.

A student from Central Washington University said: Like many others, I am feeling the cuts that affect financial aid.

Even students from outside the State of Washington are e-mailing me. One student from the University of Florida basically said they were coming here to Capitol Hill soon with their full group of presidents and vice presidents and student vice presidents. They reminded me that:

We are the future of America, and we must ensure that future by making sure students, regardless of wealth or other socioeconomic factors, have access to a good college education.

Mr. President, I couldn't agree with that student from the University of Florida more, and I look forward to seeing them in their efforts here on Capitol Hill to be successful.

But we are here this morning because we all know the best way to secure a good job is a quality education, and we know that the doors to educational opportunity are slamming shut for many Americans. This is something that is very personal to me as somebody who went to school on financial aid, and I can literally say I don't think I would be in the Senate or have been a successful executive at a business enterprise if I didn't have access to that good college education.

We can't let college education become a privilege for just a few of the wealthy, and we have to make sure that families and students can afford college, regardless of their financial resources.

Let me just lay out a few facts. Since 2001, the cost of a public higher education has increased by a staggering 46 percent. In Washington State alone, tuition costs at 4-year public schools have spiked, an increase of 63 percent since the fall of 2000. Tuition costs are skyrocketing, but family income, particularly of those with college-age students, has only risen about 3.4 percent between 2000 and 2003. So the challenge is we haven't seen income opportunities go up, but yet the cost of education has gone up. So while those costs have soared, almost 350,000 Washington students have basically had their Federal financial aid slashed. And families have to tell their children they can't afford to send them to college this year or next.

Well, I can tell you, Mr. President, that is unacceptable. We need to do better to make sure that we make college education affordable.

What have we been doing? Last January, we had the largest raid on student financial aid I have ever seen. The legislation that was passed by this body cut \$12.7 billion straight from student loan programs, the biggest single cut in the history of the Federal student loan program. That was coming on top of the President's budget, which basically also proposed a \$2.2 billion cut in the Education Department budget, which is the largest cut in the Education Department in 26 years of history.

So we are here this morning, and this Senator is here, because we believe we need a new direction. Today we are standing here to challenge Congress to act now in the best interests of American students, America's families, and certainly for the competitiveness of America's future economy. We challenge this Congress to make college education more affordable now, to help families save for college education.

Specifically, we are asking the leadership to make a priority legislation that would increase the Coverdell education savings account contribution to \$5,000 and let families make that tax deduction contribution to help them pay for that increase in college education; secondly, to make the college tuition tax deduction permanent, making it possible for families to put money into education and not feel the pinch; third, to pass my "GI Bill for Life" legislation that gives those returning from Iraq and Afghanistan who served in our military the opportunity to complete their college education and get the financial support, as they have supported our country, no matter how long it takes for them to complete that course in education.

It is time that we invest in the future of America and provide Americans the next opportunity of leadership in our economy by giving them access to a good education. We can act now and we can pass these legislative issues before Congress adjourns this year. We hope this checklist for change will be a priority—not some of the issues we have

been focusing on, but a real checklist to get busy with the priorities and needs of American families.

Now I would like to yield the floor for my colleague, Senator LINCOLN, who is going to talk about the affordability of health care in America.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arkansas is recognized.

Mrs. LINCOLN. Mr. President, I thank my colleague from Washington for her incredible focus on educating our children and making sure our families can afford higher education, and certainly focusing on energy independence, which is critically important to all of our households.

I am proud to be here today with all of my Democratic women colleagues to talk about the things that are so important to America's families, the working families who are the fabric of this Nation, who make us strong, who make us proud as Americans to look at the Nation and see what the foundation of our country is really all about.

Mr. President, I know that you and many of our other colleagues probably think this is just a honey-do list. Well, we all have our honey-do lists. For myself, as a mother of twin 10-year-olds and certainly a wife who wants to be supportive and caring for my husband, and as a daughter who is looking at aging parents and in-laws, and all of the many responsibilities in my life, I know that keeping a list to make sure I am actually accomplishing the things that are important to the people I love is critically important so that I know I am doing what I need to do.

I have a list on my refrigerator. I have a list on my desk. I carry a list in my car and in my purse to make sure that I can keep up with the things that are important, the responsibilities I have as a person not only for the things I want to do not just for my family but for my neighbors and for all of the people I report to and am responsible to. At home, my husband and I have a honey-do list that we share the responsibility for. Just last night, we were making sure we changed the air filters and the batteries in our smoke detectors which are critically important to the safety of our children and our home. We were making sure that we adjusted our budget to deal with the unbelievable increase in energy costs. Don't think that every household is not looking at how important that is. Or making sure that our children get their health checkup and that they are up to date on their immunizations.

How blessed I felt when I walked into that pediatrician's office to know that through the Federal employees, I have insurance that will cover that. But it is important to make sure the things on my list get done so that the people in this world whom I love so dearly are as safe and as healthy as they possibly can be.

On that list is also setting aside dollars each year and every quarter in order to know that when my children become college age, they are going to

have at least some kind of a nest egg, perhaps not enough to cover all that they need in order to get that education that I know is so critically important to their success and to the success of this country. These are the things that we want to challenge and to encourage our colleagues in the Senate to take up. These are the issues that American families see on their checklist every single day. These are things that we can do—we know that we can do. These are issues that affect every American family.

My good friend and colleague from California, Senator FEINSTEIN, is going to talk about a humane and moral solution to stem cell research, on which she has worked for over 8 years now. There was a wonderful event in Arkansas for the Diabetes Association where I met a young woman with a daughter who talked about the transition, the complete change in life for their family in order to deal with a disease like diabetes in a child who is only 12 years old.

Mr. President, we plead with you, take a look at this list. Look at the reasonable items we are talking about that mean so much to the American families of this country.

I am here to talk about the keen awareness that we have of the challenges that are faced by working families who want nothing more than the security that health insurance offers. We, as Federal employees, enjoy a tremendous security. For over 40 years, the Federal Government has figured out that if it pools all 8 million of the Federal employees across this great country, it can provide greater choice at a lower cost.

We, too, can do that for the small businesses of this country. If we look around, we realize that nearly 46 million Americans lack health insurance, including 456,000 of my own Arkansans. Small businesses are the No. 1 source of jobs in Arkansas and in most parts of our country. Yet only 26 percent of businesses with fewer than 50 employees offer health insurance coverage today. Workers at these businesses are most likely to be uninsured. Yet they are the engine of our economy. They are the jobs that are not going to go offshore. They are the companies and the businesses in our communities that support our Little League and that sponsor our scouting events. These are the fabric of our country. Yet fewer than 26 percent are insured.

Small businesses need innovative ways to offer affordable, accessible health care to their employees. Recognizing that need for a new direction, Senator DURBIN and I proposed the Small Employers Health Benefit Program. It is a comprehensive solution to our small business insurance crisis. It is based on 40 years of success with the Federal Employees Health Benefit Plan. It will create affordable private health insurance choices for small employers, and it will give working families the security and the comfort of mind that they need.

We challenge—we encourage—we plead with our Republican Congress and leadership to pass the Small Employers Health Benefit Program this session. It is something we can do that will make a tremendous difference in the lives of Americans.

We are going to keep fighting because we believe that working families should have the comfort of knowing that they can take their children to the doctor—whether it is for just a common cold or a broken arm or, heaven forbid, something much more serious—and be able to afford and access the care that they need.

We believe that expanding coverage for small businesses will go a long way toward making sure that the millions of Americans should and would have access to medical care. We believe that providing that kind of security is worth fighting for, and that is why we have joined together today to point out to the American people, particularly to our colleagues, the list that we carry around every single day in our pocket-books, on our desks, and on our refrigerators at home. It is no different than the list that we present to you, and it is no different than the list that every American family has in their home.

We ask you, Mr. President, take a look at what we propose. Look at the time that we have remaining and know that we can make a difference in the fabric of this country by looking at the list of what America's working families need the most in their households.

I am proud to yield for my good friend and colleague from California, Senator FEINSTEIN.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from California.

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Arkansas for her remarks. I don't think anyone speaks more eloquently about the needs of American families than BLANCHE LINCOLN. It is always real and it is always practical. I am just delighted to be a colleague of hers.

I rise today to say why stem cell research should be part of this Democratic Women's Checklist for Change. The reason is very simple, and that is because stem cell research offers the promise of historic advances in the treatment of catastrophic disease. It is that simple.

The potential for this research was in the news again last week, as scientists at Johns Hopkins announced that they used embryonic stem cells to regenerate damaged nerves in paralyzed rats. That is something that no one ever thought could be done. After being treated with cells harvested from mouse embryos, most of the rats regained enough strength to walk and bear weight on their previously paralyzed hind legs.

Just imagine what this discovery could one day mean for patients with spinal cord injuries, multiple sclerosis or ALS. It could be revolutionary because one thing science believed was that the spinal cord, once severed,

could never be regenerated. Now, for the first time in history, we see there may be a solution to that and it rests with stem cell research.

Translating this discovery into treatment of human patients will likely take several years, and it will likely not see fruition without Federal research dollars. Here is the rub. Our researchers face a major roadblock imposed by the President in August of 2001, when he limited Federal funding to 22 lines of stem cells. All of these available lines are now contaminated with mouse feeder cells, so virtually there is no Federal ongoing research.

Thirteen months ago, the House approved a bipartisan bill by Mr. CASTLE and Ms. DEGETTE, a bill that would remove this roadblock. It would permit promising research to go forward. It would offer new hope to millions of Americans suffering from disability, diseases, and spinal cord injuries. The Castle-DeGette bill essentially says that it would be possible to use embryos that are rejected in IVF clinics; that is, in vitro fertilization clinics. All of us know that tens of thousands, if not millions, of these embryos are rejected and they are destroyed. Those embryos could be taken to form new stem cell lines under this bill.

The votes are here to pass this bill today, but the President has vowed a veto, and the Republican leadership refuses to bring it to the floor. In the year that we have waited for Senate action, millions more are now waiting for cures that one day could come from stem cell research. In the last year, consider this: 1.4 million Americans were diagnosed with cancer; 60,000 Americans were diagnosed with Parkinson's disease; 11,000 Americans suffered spinal cord injuries; and 1.5 million adults were diagnosed with diabetes.

These are just new diagnoses. Think of all the Americans who continue to suffer cancer, heart disease, Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, spinal cord injuries, and catastrophic diseases which could potentially be helped by embryonic stem cell research.

The administration's policies have left our researchers far behind the rest of the world. In fact, other countries are, today, laying the foundation for groundbreaking cures, while U.S. scientists are not able to gain Federal funding for research. Evidence that the United States is no longer the world leader in embryonic stem cell research is mounting. Scientists around the world have created 128 new embryonic stem cell lines since President Bush announced his policy. Only 34 of these new lines were created in our country. The proportion of embryonic stem cell papers published by U.S. research groups has fallen dramatically in the past 2 years. At least 10 other nations—Germany, Finland, France, Sweden, the United Kingdom, South Korea, Singapore, Israel, China, Australia—are investing substantial sums of government money in embryonic stem cell

research. That is totaling hundreds of millions of dollars. Other nations are constructing facilities, they are attracting our American researchers who should be here at home doing this research, and they are learning more every day.

The United States, on the other hand, remains at the starting line. I don't think we can afford to watch other nations move ahead. Eight years ago, I introduced one of the first bills addressing stem cell research, so we have waited this long—8 years—for action. Time and time again, we have pressed for action on the floor of the Senate. We pressed for it privately. We pressed for it by letter. We pressed for it by press conference with groups of sufferers of catastrophic diseases. All of this has been to no avail. I can't believe it. I can't believe this kind of recalcitrance. And all of this is despite the fact that every poll shows a dominant majority of Americans support stem cell research.

It is time the Senate place the health of Americans ahead of the views of a limited number of people whose views are apart from the mainstream of America. We owe it to the 110 million Americans suffering daily from debilitating and catastrophic disease. Every day that we wait, more people develop diseases that could one day be cured. Every day we wait, other nations move further ahead.

I urge the Republican leadership to bring the Castle-DeGette stem cell bill to the floor and allow Federal research to move forward. A Democratic Senate would listen to the American people. A Democratic Senate would make the promotion of this promising research a reality. This Senate is in Republican control. The Republican-controlled House has passed this bill. A dominant majority of the American people say enact this bill. Yet this Senate, Republican controlled, becomes the roadblock.

I urge the Republican leadership to reconsider and bring the Castle-DeGette bill to the floor of the Senate for a vote.

Mr. President, I would like to yield for my colleague, the distinguished Senator from the great State that harbors the great city of New Orleans, LA. She will speak about making Americans upwardly economically mobile in the American workplace.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Louisiana is recognized.

Ms. LANDRIEU. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from California for her remarks and her passion and her focus on the issue of stem cell research. One day when millions of Americans have been cured of diseases that afflict us today because the research is just not there, we can thank Senator FEINSTEIN for staying on point, every month, every year—staying on point on stem cell research. It is something the vast number of Americans support. They understand the importance of pressing forward on this science to find

real cures for real people, for real families. That will not only relieve the pain and suffering that comes with disease but also promote the general economic well-being of a nation based on a free enterprise system that works much better when people are healthy than it does when they are sick.

I stand in awe of Senator FEINSTEIN's focus on this issue, and I support her wholeheartedly.

It is my opportunity to speak about one of the very important aspects on this checklist. We talked about safeguarding America's pensions, and we have talked about good jobs in America. Senator CANTWELL talked about college affordability for all Americans, about being the first person from her family to graduate from college, and as she has shared with us, going on to create a multimillion-dollar software business that, of course, helped her personally and her immediate family. But think of all the other people it helped because she received a great education from our system—protecting America and our military families and making America energy independent, as Senator CLINTON was so clearly stating, and small business health care as Senator LINCOLN spoke to this morning.

I am going to focus my attention on preparing for future disasters. It is, unfortunately, something that we in Louisiana have become somewhat experts on lately, having lived through and still trying to live and survive after the greatest natural disaster to hit our country in some time.

I begin by saying that if there was ever a wonder why our country was created, you can find the answer in the Preamble of the Constitution, one of the greatest documents ever written. It talks about providing for the common defense, promoting the general welfare, and securing the blessings of liberty for ourselves and our posterity. Our Federal Government, which was established over 220 years ago, has established institutions, large and small, to meet the promise of the Preamble of the Constitution.

We established the Department of Defense to support and provide for the common defense. It was called the War Department. Now it is called the Department of Defense. We established the Department of Health, Education, and Labor to promote the general welfare.

Thirty years ago we established the Federal Emergency Management Agency to help keep Americans secure in the blessings of their liberty in the middle of natural disasters.

On August 29, when Katrina hit land, a category 5 storm to hit the gulf coast and to hit the southeastern part of Louisiana and the southwestern part of Mississippi, and 3 weeks later when Hurricane Rita barreled into the southwestern part of our State, the Federal Government failed the people of the gulf coast.

Amazingly, nearly 1 year after this unprecedented failure, we have done

little, if anything, to ensure that this will not happen again.

Studies have been completed. Reports have been drafted. Senator LIEBERMAN and Senator COLLINS have been exemplary in their work in a bipartisan fashion in the Senate—1,000 hours of hearings, dozens of field hearings—to come up with comprehensive legislation. However, somewhere between the Republican leadership in the White House and the Republican leadership in Congress we have failed to come up with a single recommendation or a piece of legislation to come before this Congress to make sure that some of these recommendations are put into place.

The White House has not asked for a single law to be changed based on their own report of 125 recommendations. Contrast that with what happened after September 11. This Government was literally turned upside down and inside out. Laws—dozens of laws, maybe even hundreds of laws—were changed so that we could try to get to core answers to 9/11. Yet after the greatest natural disaster in American history, with the failure of the Federal Emergency Management, a failure that will be recorded in history for generations, not one law has been permanently changed. And it is almost 11 months after that storm.

Billions of dollars have been thrown at the problem. And at the request of myself and a few Members of our delegation, we have managed to move a few billion of those dollars out from this morass of a Federal agency that doesn't work to try to get money directly to parishes, counties, to economic development departments for the recovery and rebuilding.

I raise this point on this checklist not just for Louisiana which we are going to rebuild regardless of the mess we find ourselves in, but we want to raise this issue—I want to raise this issue—in hopes that it can prevent this kind of recovery taking place in Seattle, in the event of a tsunami, or in California in the event of an earthquake, or in Tennessee which also sits on a fault line of a geological structure.

I raise this point to honor the 1,836 victims of Katrina and the 120 victims of Rita. Surely there is enough sacrifice for people to make before their Government, led by a Republican Congress, takes the steps to make sure it will never happen again. I know that no Congress run by Democrats or Republicans can prevent a natural disaster. We understand that. We are going to have earthquakes, hurricanes, and we are going to have volcanic eruptions. While we can't prevent that, we can most certainly improve the response from the Federal level so that people do not have to suffer through the rebuilding that is going on now in Louisiana.

The first thing that must be done, which is part of our checklist, is to give the Director of FEMA the author-

ity and the access he had under the stewardship of its most successful Director, James Lee Witt, under the previous administration. At that time, it was a Cabinet level position that had the trust and access of the President and the full command of Federal resources during such disasters.

Regrettably, we have all watched in horror on the television screen, and I have watched personally upfront as a witness of the failings of FEMA on the ground, constrained by the priorities of the Homeland Security Director, which is different than what the needs of this great city and region are. And after reading the exchanges between Director Brown and Secretary Chertoff, it most certainly doesn't seem to be their focus on emergency response in homeland security. FEMA needs to stand and win the internal battles to get priorities on the budget. Moving boxes around in the Federal Government organizational charts should not be our focus. And that is not the solution. The issue is that FEMA must be a priority for the highest levels of leadership. It must be able to command the attention of the Federal Government and the many resources and assets that this Federal Government has to help rebuild and reestablish confidence in any community that would find itself virtually destroyed, as in the case of St. Bernard Parish, a small parish that doesn't get the attention of the national media. But 60,000 people live there, and 95 percent of their homes were destroyed with 15 to 20 feet of water.

Senator BAYH and I had the pleasure of visiting down in that great parish with the great spirit, and just last Friday we walked into an unbelievable sight. A small trailer was sitting in the middle of complete ruin, with brave teachers and administrators inside this trailer trying to conduct what I guess is a summer school for children. We walked into this classroom with the lights low at naptime, with music, where 20 little children were sleeping. When we walked out of that trailer, all you could see was destruction as if you were in a war zone. Yet the happiness on the faces of the children and the spirit of those teachers was really a testament to the resilience of people despite the fact that their Government is failing them. They are not going to fail themselves or their children. But we can do better.

On 9/11, when the terrorists attacked New York, everyone said that one of the major failings was the failure of the communications system. We lost 335 firefighters—not because they lacked bravery, not because they lacked leadership, not because they lacked the armor or the covering to protect them from the fire as they ran to the building when everyone was running away—we lost many of them because their radios didn't work. We couldn't find a few hundred dollars to buy a radio for firemen running into a skyscraper that was falling down. We all know what we did wrong.

Today, we still don't have a system of communication that can operate when the cell phone towers go down, whether they are burned down, blown out, or flooded out. It doesn't exist. Five years is a long time.

I will tell you what we have done in 5 years. We built a continental railroad in 5 years. From the time of Pearl Harbor to Victory Day was 5 years. From the time the *Apollo* drawings were on paper until we hit the Moon was 5 years. But it is 5 years since 9/11.

When the people of the gulf coast had two major hurricanes barrel down on them and they went to use a cell phone, a land line, or a computer, the communications system was down. We were blamed for not having an evacuation plan. Let me say for the last time that the best evacuation plan doesn't work if you can't communicate it to your neighbors, let alone to the doctor in the emergency room or the ambulance driver or the bus driver trying to run the bus or the Superdome operator trying to keep thousands of people safe and fed and cared for.

I know our time is up in just about 2 minutes. I have gone a little over my time. I want to say in closing that there is a lot the Republican Congress could do to keep us on point, to keep us focused on the things that matter to the American people dealing with natural disasters, helping them to rebuild their shattered lives, their homes, their schools, their churches, and their businesses. When these storms and floods come through is one thing. It is very important to the people of this country.

I wish, as a Democratic Senator from Louisiana, that we would spend a little bit more time making sure the communications system works, that FEMA works, and that all the money the taxpayers are spending is being spent well and not wasted. That is sort of the third disaster—not the disaster itself but the disaster of wasting money when people are so desperate for the resources they need to rebuild.

Thank you, Mr. President, for presiding this morning. It is probably not the easiest thing to listen to. But these are some shortcomings that we believe we need to step up to and address for our country and put before the American people, the practical solutions.

I yield the floor.

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, I rise today to join my colleagues in calling for a "Checklist for Change." We need a real jobs agenda in this country—one that stands strong and fights for American workers and American businesses.

This is about our way of life—a way of life based on good-paying, middle class jobs and the promise that—with hard work—every American can aspire to do better tomorrow than they did yesterday.

We need to stop the flow of American jobs overseas. Last year, a new \$2 billion tax cut that I authored took effect, rewarding companies that create

manufacturing jobs here in the United States.

We need to level the playing field for American businesses. Currency manipulation and the free flow of counterfeit goods from countries such as China have put American workers at an unfair disadvantage for too long.

It is time we had an international trade prosecutor who can go after countries that cheat and make sure that America is getting a fair deal in the world market.

We need a new direction for American workers.

We challenge the Republican Congress to enact tax policies that stop the outsourcing of American jobs.

We challenge them to stand up and enforce our trade agreements so American businesses can compete on a level playing field and keep good-paying jobs here at home.

Americans want to export our products, not our jobs.

And we challenge the Republican Congress to follow the lead of my State of Michigan and raise the minimum wage.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas is recognized.

RESPONSE TO THE CHECKLIST

Mrs. HUTCHISON. Mr. President, I have listened to part of the previous presentations. I think the impression has been given that if we just had a Democratic Senate we could accomplish so much more. But I think in the process of making such a presentation many things have been overlooked or not quite stated in a factual way.

Let me start by saying what has been said—that Republicans have cut \$12 billion from college student aid, frozen Pell grants for higher education. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Republican Congress, since President Bush has been in office, has dramatically increased the absolute commitment to helping lower income students, many who are first-time college graduates in their family, and we are helping at the Federal level to an extent never seen before.

For instance, Pell grants will grow by \$240 million. The number of recipients will increase by 59,000 to 5.3 million students. Funding for Pell grants rose from \$8.8 billion in 2001 to \$13 billion in 2006. In 2006, the Department of Education expects to make over \$77 billion in grants, loans, and other aid to over 10 million students. It is a fact that we are increasing Pell grants. We are increasing the number of students who are eligible for Pell grants. We need to be honest when we are talking about what the difference would be if there were a Democratic Senate versus the Republican accomplishments.

In addition, the Department of Education in 2006 will make or guarantee more than \$60 billion in new student loans, a \$4 billion increase over the previous year. That is a huge accomplishment in just one year.

In addition, one of the things this Senate is focusing on currently is trying to get more of our students into the areas of math, science, and engineering because that is where the jobs are in the future. To make sure our students from low-income areas are able to pursue this type of career and to give them special attention, we have added a SMART grants program for Pell-eligible students that will give them a bonus if they pursue a degree in math or science, or a foreign language deemed to be critical for national security. We have taken steps so low-income students, only Pell grant-eligible students, will get this bonus to move in the direction of good jobs in our country.

It is important to stay on the facts and talk about some of the things we have tried to do. "Tried to do is key." Many of the things I have heard in the last hour about what the Democrats would do if they were in charge were somewhat amusing because we have tried to do those very things; it is the other side of the aisle who has kept us from achieving those goals. Consider association health plans—small business health plans that would give millions of workers the opportunity to have affordable health care. Because they work for small businesses—maybe 10 employees or 20 employees—that employer cannot afford to offer health insurance options because the options are too expensive, and employers are not eligible for the big plans that bring the cost down.

We brought to the Senate floor, after trying for years, we passed legislation out of committee and brought to the Senate the small business health plans that would give millions of employees of small businesses the opportunity to have affordable health care. It was the Democrats, by an overwhelming majority of their caucus, who voted against association health plans again and again.

Making health care more affordable is a goal we have. One of the most important things we can do this year is to broaden the number of people who have health care coverage in our country. If the Democrats would sit down and work with us, we could do that. We cannot do it by ourselves. I am very concerned when it is implied that a Democratic Congress could produce this when it is the Democrats who have obstructed Republican initiatives.

Border security. I live in a border state. We have a northern border and a southern border. Since I came to the Senate, we have probably quadrupled the number of Border Patrol agents in both the northern and the southern sectors. We have put billions into more border control facilities, into surveillance techniques that extend the reach when you cannot have a person every mile. You cannot have a person every mile, but you can certainly extend your reach with infrared and UAVs. This is very helpful. We have put our money into this area, and we have

made it a focus. Securing our border is going to continue with a Republican Congress.

Tax cuts. I have heard many people say: How can you have tax cuts when we have deficits and so many needs in our country? Let's put the facts on the table. Every time in recent history when we have had tax cuts in this country—from President Kennedy, President Reagan, and President Bush—the revenue of our country has increased. It happened again after the tax cuts of 2003. When people can keep more of the money that they have worked for and earned in their pocketbooks, they will either reinvest it in capital, which will increase jobs and prosperity and, therefore, revenue to our country; or they will save it, which does the same thing; or they will spend it and create new opportunities for jobs in the manufacturing sector.

That is exactly what has happened when the Republicans, over the objections of the Democratic caucus, did push through tax cuts giving marriage penalty relief, giving lower tax brackets for every American who pays taxes, giving a 15-percent capital gains and dividends rate, giving relief across the board to the people who are earning the money in this country that has caused a revenue increase.

Therefore, the deficit of this country is going to be \$100 billion less this year than we thought might happen. If we do not continue the tax cuts, it will be a tax increase, and that will stall the economy. We will see the jobless rate rise and our economy will be adversely impacted. So tax cuts are a difference that we will see with a Republican-controlled Congress.

Now I will talk about energy. One of the things we have done in this Congress, which has not gotten very much play, is the Energy bill that was passed through the leadership of Senator PETE DOMENICI as chairman of the Energy Committee. For the first time in 10 years, we passed a significant Energy bill last year through this Republican-led Congress. The focus was on renewables, tax credits for renewables, increased investment in research into renewable energy.

Anyone who has filled up a gas tank, anyone who runs a small business and has higher costs of electricity and natural gas knows we have an energy crisis in this country. One of the reasons why is because we are over 60 percent dependent on foreign sources for our energy needs. These foreign sources are unreliable. We need to do what Americans do. That is, stand up and take control of our destiny. That means we are going to create energy that is renewable and clean, that protects the environment, energy such as biodiesel, made from soybeans; energy such as ethanol, made from corn. Wind energy is producing almost 10 percent of the electricity in my home State of Texas and Texas is a big State. It is very important that we have the wind energy credits we passed in that tax bill because it has enhanced energy resources