

UNFINISHED SENATE BUSINESS

Mr. NICKLES. Mr. President, we are getting close to wrapping up this session. We did a lot of good things this year and some things we didn't get done. One thing we did not get done was passage of the stimulus package. That is unfortunate. It became way too partisan. It did not need to be. Recessions are not partisan. We have a lot of people out of work who need help. A lot of companies want to grow. We could have done that.

Senator GRASSLEY worked hard with the Bush administration. There was a lot of movement on this side of the aisle to help pass the stimulus package. It didn't happen. I regret that very much. We could have helped the economy, and we could have helped a lot of unemployed people.

Senator BAUCUS mentioned earlier that he hopes when people come back they are less partisan and more intent on getting some positive results for the American people. That needs to happen. I hope we do not hear: Well, we cannot bring something out unless it passes two-thirds on our side. That does not belong in the Senate. The Senate is a deliberative body, and we should have a chance to try to pass things, and pass them by majority vote. Try to get something done, try to make a positive contribution toward helping the economy, not a strictly Democrat or Republican package, but a package that helps the economy.

The House passed good legislation last night. Not perfect. Maybe we can improve upon it and help our economy and help the unemployed.

As we wind down, there are several nominations that are pending that should be confirmed. It is not fair to this administration. It is not fair to some of these individuals who have been languishing, waiting to be confirmed with no action. There are five district court nominees, Federal judges. We have confirmed 27; if we do 5 more, that will be 32. During President Clinton's first year, we confirmed 27 of 47. President Bush nominated 60. We have confirmed 27, not quite half. We confirmed over half for President Clinton, and if you look at what we did for the first President Bush or what we did for Ronald Reagan, we confirmed 91 percent of Ronald Reagan's judges and a much higher percentage for President Bush. We should confirm more than we have today. There are five on the calendar. There is no reason not to confirm these individuals. We all know they will be confirmed. Why not let them go ahead and assume their duties?

We have a judge from Alabama, a judge from Colorado, a judge from Nevada, a judge from Texas, a judge from Georgia. We have judges from Democrat States and Republican States. Let's not hold these five individuals hostage. We can pass them tonight and I urge my colleagues to help do that.

We also have four U.S. attorneys, from Alabama, New York, Arkansas,

and one from New Jersey. They need to be confirmed. They should be confirmed.

We have a couple of marshals who are pending. There is no reason why they should not be confirmed—actually just one marshal and one to be Chairman of the Foreign Claims Settlement Commission. Let's confirm these individuals. Let's do it tonight. Somebody says: Why are you doing it tonight? We confirmed more judges, more U.S. attorneys—all those are always done by voice votes.

We have Janet Hale to be Assistant Secretary of Health and Human Services. Secretary Thompson is entitled to have his Assistant Secretary for Health and Human Services be confirmed. So I urge my colleagues to vote on that nomination or to approve that nomination.

We also have a couple of other positions. We have James Lockhart III to be Deputy Commissioner of Social Security. That is an important position.

In the Department of Energy, we have Michael Smith, actually one of my constituents. He happens to be secretary of energy of the State of Oklahoma. He has been nominated to be Assistant Secretary of Energy dealing with fossil fuels. Secretary Abraham is completing his first year and he doesn't have his Assistant Secretary dealing with fossil fuels. We are now importing about 58 percent of our energy needs and he doesn't even have an Assistant Secretary dealing with fossil fuels.

One of the first bills we are going to be wrestling with next year is an energy bill. We have a commitment from the majority leader that we are going to take up energy early next year. That is great. You would think the administration would be entitled to have their Assistant Secretary to help the negotiations, to help prod Congress along. So I urge my colleagues to approve his nomination. He was reported out of the Energy Committee unanimously, as I believe Beverly Cook was, from Idaho, to be Assistant Secretary of Energy dealing with environment, safety, and health.

Also Margaret S.Y. Chu, of New Mexico, to be Director of the Office of Civilian Radioactive Waste Management, Department of Energy.

There is no reason why we cannot do most of these nominees. Most of these nominees passed by unanimous votes in the committees. Why can't we confirm these individuals?

I urge Senator DASCHLE and Senator REID and others to help.

There are a couple of others who are very important. The Department of State, John Hanford. John Hanford is an individual with whom many of us worked in the Senate for years. He worked for Senator LUGAR. He helped myself and others when we ended up passing the International Religious Freedom Act. Senator LIEBERMAN was a principal sponsor of that, and Senator SPECTER. The administration

nominated John Hanford III, of Virginia, to be Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom. When you think of the battles we have going on all across the world with religious freedom, and some of it is in Afghanistan and some in Pakistan and some in Sudan where you have individuals who are held captive, imprisoned, enslaved because of their religion, wouldn't it make sense for us to get our Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom confirmed so he can go to work and help protect and promote religious harmony and freedom throughout the world? Hopefully, his nomination will be confirmed tonight.

We have several other people in the Department of State who were confirmed by the Foreign Relations Committee unanimously who should be confirmed tonight. Many of these were just reported by the committee, by Senator BIDEN. I thank him for doing that. I am looking at John Ong, who is to be Ambassador to Norway and John Price to be Ambassador Extraordinary to the Republic of Mauritius; Arthur Dewey, of Maryland, to be Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees, and Migration.

Some of these, again, were just reported out. I thank my colleagues. We should be able to get those through as well, not to mention Gaddi Vasquez, of California, to be Director of the Peace Corps.

I mention these. These are not all. I did not mention Gene Scalia. I would really urge my colleagues—Gene Scalia has been on the calendar. He was nominated in, I believe, April, one of the earliest nominees of this administration, to be Solicitor of the Department of Labor. Secretary Chao is entitled to have a Solicitor. One of the most important positions in the Department of Labor is Solicitor. He has to make all kinds of rulings. It is very important that she have her Solicitor. I urge my colleagues, let's have a vote. If we cannot have it today, let's have it in January; let's vote up or down.

Somebody said we may have to file cloture. I can think of several people, including the previous Solicitor of Labor, to whom many on this side might have had a philosophical objection, but we did not require cloture. You should not require cloture on most nominees. You should not require cloture hardly ever on nominees unless they are really out of the Main Street. We had a vote on Joycelyn Elders and I opposed that nomination very significantly, but it was an up-or-down vote.

I think people are entitled to have a difference of opinion and have a debate. If we have a difference of opinion, let's discuss it. This is the Senate. But to not allow somebody to have a vote and hold their careers in limbo for an unlimited period of time, it is not fair to them, and I don't think it makes the Senate look very good.

Again, I urge our colleagues to move forward on Gene Scalia, to move forward on some of these other nominees,

many of whom, I hope and expect to be confirmed tonight. I hope they will. I urge the leadership on the Democrat side to work with us and see if we cannot clear up as many nominees as possible, confirm as many nominees as possible on the Executive Calendar.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

ECONOMIC STIMULUS

Mr. VOINOVICH. Mr. President, I rise to express my disappointment that the Senate did not have an opportunity today to vote on the White House and Senate Centrist Coalition compromise on the economic stimulus package to aid dislocated workers. I think the stimulus package, if passed, would have made a real difference for the American people. It would have helped individuals and families. It would have helped create jobs, or at least maintain jobs. And it would have responded to the needs of laid-off workers and their families.

Early this fall, when it became clear to me that our nation was in recession, I decided to get actively involved in developing and advocating a stimulus package. I recognized the package that was coming out of the House could not get through the Senate because it wasn't balanced. So I gathered together with my other colleagues in the Centrist Coalition. Six of us from the Coalition were the ones who really were the nucleus of it—I was one of them with OLYMPIA SNOWE and SUSAN COLLINS, and on the Democrat side there was JOHN BREAUX and two of my colleagues who were former Governors, ZELL MILLER, who was a former Governor of Georgia, and BEN NELSON, the former Governor of Nebraska.

We decided we would try to put something together that would be fair, and that would respond to the need to stimulate the economy, and at the same time, respond to the human needs that we see throughout this country. We wanted to try to work something out, and see if we could get something through Congress and particularly through the Senate.

We worked very conscientiously on that package. We finally were able to get the ear of the White House and got them to be part of this compromise package. Yesterday we were able to convince the leadership in the House of Representatives that it was a fair package, although a far cry from the package they had adopted. We had hoped that, somehow, miraculously, maybe, we would have had an opportunity to vote on that package in the Senate.

The Republican leader, Senator LOTT, talked about the fact that maybe during the period of time we are in recess, pressure will build up and maybe we will get a bill passed. Or maybe the pressure will not be out there and we will not need to pass a piece of legislation. However, I am here to tell you that this legislation is needed now.

This afternoon I met with about 50 steelworkers from Cleveland, OH, from LTV steel. That company is in bankruptcy. Their jobs are gone and they are displaced. They are petrified because they do not know how they are going to be able to take care of their medical costs. Their company had a health plan, but COBRA is no longer an option because the company is out of business. They are worried about how they are going to provide health care for their families. They will get their unemployment benefits, but they are really concerned about how to pay for their health care coverage.

I pointed out to them that the stimulus package the Centrist Coalition put together would subsidize their health care to the tune of 60 percent. They were pleased to learn that their was hope that someone would help them, that they could get insurance for their families to get them over this very difficult period. I can tell you: they are frightened.

I think so often when we talk about stimulus packages, we get caught up in the dollar amounts and we don't talk about real people. That is what this is about. For example, the rebate program that is in our stimulus package would provide help to some 38 million low-income workers who didn't qualify for rebate checks the last time around. Those rebates would mean \$13.5 billion would go into the pockets of those individuals to help them with their problems. And I am sure it would help stimulate the economy because they would likely spend that money.

Some describe the reduction in marginal rates as an awful thing because of the fact that we would reduce the marginal rate from 27½ down to 25 percent. I would like to point out that we are talking about single people who make between \$28,000 and \$68,000, and married couples who make between \$47,000 and \$113,000. That is about one-third of the taxpayers in this country, some 36 million people, who would have benefitted if we had gone forward with these rate reductions. Between the 38 million beneficiaries of the rebate checks, and the 36 million who would benefit from the reduction in marginal rates, a total of 74 million Americans would have been able to take advantage of this package.

The thing I would really like to concentrate on is the part of this package that deals with health care. When we got started debating the stimulus package, the House passed a package that had something like \$3 billion for health care. Likewise, the President's package had also had \$3 billion. Our centrist package had \$13.5 billion. The Democratic Finance Committee proposal was \$16.7 billion. At the end of the day, the Centrist Coalition and White House compromise package had \$21 billion in it for dislocated workers' health care, money for the States for national emergency grants, including \$4 billion to the States for Medicaid funding.

Now I would like to talk about what we do for displaced workers.

First of all, we include an extension of 13 weeks of unemployment benefits—benefits that would be available to those who became unemployed between March 15, 2001, and December 31 at the end of next year. An estimated 3 million unemployed workers would qualify for benefits averaging about \$230 a week. Those extended benefits would be 100-percent federally funded at a cost of about \$10 billion to the Federal Government, so States wouldn't have to pick up the tab.

The bill would allow states to accelerate the transfer of \$9 billion from State unemployment trust funds so they could distribute that money earlier than now possible. This transfer of money, which already belongs to the states, would help State treasuries, which are in dire straits today. This proposed advance would provide the States with the flexibility to pay administrative costs, provide additional benefits for part-time workers, adopt alternative base periods, and avoid raising their unemployment taxes during the current recessionary times.

Next, let us look at health care benefits.

The Centrist Coalition and White House compromise proposal includes \$19 billion in health care assistance for dislocated workers.

It provides a refundable, advanceable tax credit to all displaced workers, who are eligible for unemployment insurance, for the purchase of health insurance—not just individuals who are eligible for COBRA coverage.

Individuals with access to health insurance through a spouse wouldn't be eligible and couldn't get the credit.

However, the credit is available to unemployed people who do not have access to coverage through COBRA, since their employers did not provide health insurance or their employer went out of business. Under this bill, these individuals would have been able to get a 60-percent subsidy of their health insurance costs without any cap on the dollar amount of subsidy.

The proposal also includes reforms to ensure that people have access to health insurance coverage in the individual market. If a person has 12 months of employer-sponsored coverage, rather than 18 months as under the current law, health insurers are required to issue a policy and not impose any preexisting condition exclusion. In other words, if someone has a preexisting exclusion for which they would ordinarily be disqualified from getting health insurance, this reform requires that they be able to obtain health insurance.

The Centrist and White House proposal also includes \$4 billion in enhanced national emergency grants for the States which Governors could use to help all workers—not just those eligible for the tax credit. They could use this to pay for health insurance in both public and private plans. In other