

bill. That was not the way the majority leader went on this bill. That is fine. That was his decision. I think it is regrettable. I think we could have done some things to increase employment, increase jobs.

I hope when we take up the agriculture bill, it will not be under cloture, it will be with both sides offering constructive amendments to improve a bill that is in desperate need of improvement.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. REED. I ask unanimous consent to be recognized for morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. We are in morning business.

UNEMPLOYMENT EXTENSION

Mr. REED. Madam President, I commend Senator DASCHLE, the majority leader, for his leadership on this very important measure to extend unemployment benefits. I am pleased this has received the unanimous support of this entire Senate. It is an outstanding issue that needs to be addressed today. There are millions of Americans who are exhausting benefits as we speak. Looking forward, the prospect is that more and more Americans will exhaust their benefits. The benefit extension is just simple justice for these Americans and will also provide real stimulus for our economy.

The reality is, if you have been laid off from work and you are depending upon unemployment checks, you are not typically putting that check under your mattress. You are going out and buying food, buying clothes for your children, paying your rent, doing those things that will put resources directly and immediately into the economy. That is the whole point of any stimulus proposal, to put resources directly and immediately into the economy.

That is why I have to take exception to the comments of some of our colleagues who talk about the fact that we have not done anything to stimulate the economy, to help secure the jobs of those who are still working.

Frankly, we can tell a lot about people from what they support and what they reject. If Members support the permanency of the estate tax, they should know that is not at all stimulative. It occurs 10 years from now, long after we have worked through this economic cycle one way or the other. It provides no immediate stimulus. It provides no immediate incentive for behavior because the estate tax comes with death—not a conscious decision by most people. So it has no stimulative effect. That is what they are proposing to help the Americans who are working today. It will not help people today. It will help a very few, and 10 years from now.

Now, they reject proposals such as Senator DASCHLE's proposal to provide a rebate for working Americans who did not pay income tax. It was quite

disturbing to me that the insinuation was that these people are not part of our economy; they did not pay income taxes, why should they get any rebates?

What those Members misperceive and misunderstand is the huge contributions that these millions of poor, working Americans make, in a range of endeavors, that immensely help our economy. They work very hard and, at the same time, payroll taxes are some of the most regressive taxes that Americans pay. As a result, these individuals should get some relief. Again, most likely those resources would go directly and immediately back into the economy.

So the arguments by the other side—their claims that nothing has been done to help Americans who are working today—are not consistent with the proposals they make and the proposals to which they object.

If you look in the President's budget, you'll find another indication of the insensitivity, I would say, to the issue of Americans struggling to keep their jobs and struggling to find jobs—a significant reduction in job training funds. These moneys are necessary to put people back into the workplace, to give individuals the skills they need to enhance their jobs or even keep their jobs in a tough, competitive climate.

So the rhetoric about doing nothing to stimulate the economy is just that. Senator DASCHLE made proposals that would stimulate this economy without long-run detrimental effects to our fiscal discipline.

That stimulus package, that I would argue is the only real stimulus package, was rejected by the other side. So we are left to do something that is absolutely necessary, necessary both on the grounds of providing justice for Americans and also on the grounds of providing some limited stimulus for our economy.

There are nearly 5 million workers who are out of the job market but want to work. Many have left the job market because they have been discouraged, which factors into the slightly lower unemployment rate last month. The unemployment rate went down not because there are more jobs. In fact, we lost jobs. The unemployment rate went down as people left the labor force, many discouraged by the lack of employment opportunities. For those people and for others, these unemployment benefits are important.

In January, more than 2.5 million people had been unemployed for 15 weeks or longer, and nearly half of those people had been unemployed for more than 6 months. We have in the past responded to that dilemma, that crisis, by extending unemployment benefits. I am pleased today this body has taken action to do that.

Even if the economy begins to recover, this problem will stay with us. At the end of the recessions of the last several decades, unemployment, particularly long-term unemployment,

continued to linger. On average, long-term unemployment rates grew for 9 months after the official end of the recession. So even if today—and I think we are unsure of this—even if today we are seeing some change in economic conditions, we will still see continued unemployment problems and we will still have to respond to it.

Indeed, this effort should be bipartisan because, not only in this Senate but throughout the country, I believe most people recognize the right thing to do and the smart thing to do is to give unemployed individuals a chance to get benefits until they get the opportunity to work again. Alan Greenspan, the Chairman of the Federal Reserve, has pointed it out. His words:

I have always been in favor of extending unemployment benefits during periods of rising unemployment. Clearly you cannot argue that somebody who runs past the 26-week level is slow for not looking for a job or not actively seeking to get re-employed. There are just no jobs out there.

Those are Chairman Greenspan's words. We have to respond to that, recognize that, and I am pleased that the majority leader today took that action and received the support of this Senate.

About a week ago Senator COLLINS and I wrote to Senator DASCHLE and to Senator LOTT and urged them to move on this measure if we could not find a compromise on the stimulus package. Again, I am pleased today this measure is moving forward. It does make sense. It is good policy with respect to people who need help. It is good for the economy. These resources will go back immediately and directly into our economy, helping to spur, we hope, consumer demand and help us out of this recession.

I commend the majority leader. I am pleased we are able at least to accomplish this today. I hope we can return to the stimulus debate again, but a debate about real stimulus proposals, not a debate about the warmed over tax proposals of last spring, the second phase of the tax cuts, the second phase of those tax cuts that contributed and will contribute more to the deficit in the years ahead.

Instead of those warmed over proposals, let's look at things that will help Americans and the American economy directly, immediately, in this quarter, not 10 years from now. Let's do those things.

I hope when we return to this debate we will be conscious of trying to stimulate the economy and not simply trying to rehash old tax proposals.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

Mr. BENNETT. I understand my friend from Michigan has a comment he wishes to make. I ask unanimous consent that I be allowed to yield to him for 2 minutes, and then I retain my right to the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered. The Senator from Michigan.

Mr. LEVIN. I very much thank my friend from Utah.

EXTENSION OF UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS

Mr. LEVIN. Madam President, I think we have a basic obligation to provide relief to Americans who have lost their jobs. This is one of the most fundamental responsibilities of this Congress. The extension of unemployment benefits today for an additional 13 weeks is a way of carrying out that obligation.

We are all aware of the increase in the number of Americans who have lost their jobs as a result of this recession. Every one of our States is feeling it. Michigan alone has over 300,000 workers who have lost their jobs, and that number, as the numbers in many of our States, is likely to continue to rise in the coming months.

I am terribly disappointed we could not agree on an economic stimulus package, but that is no excuse for failing to address the plight of Americans who have lost their jobs. Extending unemployment benefits is not just about doing what is right and doing what is equitable and doing what is fair; it is elementary economics. It is common sense. Providing additional unemployment benefits is a very good economic stimulus.

The Department of Labor has found that for every dollar invested in unemployment insurance, we generate \$2.15 for our gross domestic product. So putting money into the hands of people who need it, we are also putting money into the hands of people who are going to spend it. That helps our economy. That helps create jobs.

I congratulate Senator DASCHLE for offering this legislation today, and I hope now that the House will promptly pass it.

I thank my friend from Utah.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

INABILITY TO ACT

Mr. BENNETT. The Chamber seems to be filled with congratulatory messages. We are congratulating ourselves that we have finally acted, when, in fact, all we have done is the least possible, minimum, lowest common denominator kind of action, and we have demonstrated our inability to act on any kind of visionary plan.

The majority leader says he will be happy to bring this subject up again if there is an indication that we can get something upon which we can agree. There is an indication that we can get something upon which we can agree, that we can get something that is a compromise, that we can get something that cuts across party lines. That is the proposal made by the Centrist Coalition.

I have been a member of the Centrist Coalition, and its predecessor names of the group, ever since I came to the

Senate in 1993. We started out holding meetings in Senator John Chafee's hideaway. John Chafee was the founder of this group. He said, let's reach across party lines and see if we can't put partisanship aside and come up with some kind of a solution. We have had our good moments. We have had our disappointing moments. But we have hung together as a group, even as the membership has changed in the years since I have been here.

The Centrist Coalition, involving Democrats and Republicans, involving people of very strong positions on the liberal side of issues and very strong positions on the conservative side of issues, have said: For the good of the country, let's see if we can't fashion a package that makes sense. And the majority leader will not allow a vote on that package.

He will not allow us even to debate it. He will not allow us to bring it up. He will not allow people who were not part of the Centrist Coalition to offer amendments. Then as he shuts the process down, he says: I am open to any suggestion from anybody. I will take him at his word, and I have a suggestion for him. I say to the majority leader, bring up the Centrist Coalition stimulus package backed by Republicans as well as Democrats. Put it on the floor and allow it to be amended by those who say it isn't wonderful; allow the normal parliamentary procedure to go forward; and then allow it to come to a vote.

I suggest to you that if the majority leader really believes we need a stimulus package, if he is really true to his word that he is open to any suggestion, if he really does want to move in this direction, that is the way he should go. But he has not allowed that. He has not allowed a vote. Let us understand that.

There is a proposal. It is not a series of rehashed tax ideas, as the Senator from Rhode Island suggested, about some of the things people on this aisle wanted to put in. It is something worked out by a group of Republicans and Democrats acting in good faith and in consultation with the White House—reaching out beyond the Congress to get the opinion of the President of the United States, and receiving from the President the comment that, well, it is not exactly what I want but I would be willing to sign it.

It seems to me this is an extraordinary moment in cooperation, reaching out, and resolution that the majority leader will not allow to come up. This is an extraordinary opportunity which the majority leader will not allow to happen.

I hope the majority leader reconsiders. I hope he recognizes that taking a strong partisan position on one side, or taking a strong partisan position on the other side, has been proven ineffective; that he recognizes that there are those of us who have spent time talking to each other across the aisle outside of the partisan straitjacket who have reached out in an effort to find a

compromise that makes sense, who have crafted something that we think will pass and the President has indicated he will sign, and that this is available to the majority leader and to the country if the majority leader will simply allow it to come to a vote.

Mr. President, as you and others know, my father served in this body for 24 years. My first experience here was sitting up in the family gallery as a teenager watching the Senate operate as I tried to understand it. My father said something that was very profound. When people would say to him, why didn't you do this or why didn't you do that, he would say: We legislate at the highest level at which we can obtain a majority.

I think there is a majority for the centrist package. I ask the majority leader to let us find out.

NEED FOR AN ECONOMIC STIMULUS PACKAGE

Mr. BYRD. Mr. President, over four months after the idea was originally proposed, the Senate remains divided on an economic stimulus package.

Much has changed since an economic stimulus was first proposed in response to the September 11 attacks. Both the stock markets and the economy have proved to be more resilient than economists had expected.

Moreover, there are signs, as Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan told the Budget Committee last month, that some of the forces that have been restraining the economy over the past year are starting to loosen their strangle hold. The Fed Chairman told the Committee that "while 3 months ago, [a stimulus package] was clearly a desirable action . . . I do not think it is a critically important issue to do. I think the economy will recover in any event."

Aside from the positive economic data that have been released by government agencies in recent weeks, there is already a significant amount of stimulus in the pipelines.

That's not to say that we are home free. As Chairman Greenspan pointed out last month, the economy could go either way at this point. Most troubling is the higher unemployment rate since last year.

However, we must not delude ourselves into thinking that an economic stimulus package—whether crafted by Democrats or Republicans—is some sort of panacea. Stimulus packages can't work miracles. We have a \$10 trillion economy. That's gross domestic product—the total of all spending. We cannot flip the economy over like a pancake. A boost of \$70 billion to \$100 billion would amount to less than 1 percent of GDP.

Nobody can say at this point with certainty in which direction the economy is headed.

What we know is that, since the recession began last March, the Labor Department reports that 1.8 million