

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. He has 1 minute remaining.

Mr. THOMAS. I thank the Chair.

Mr. SCHUMER. I yield the 1 minute to the Senator from Michigan.

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

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from New York.

Every economic indicator we want to go up is going down, and every one we want to go down is going up. The Senator and I have worked together on one of the most critical issues that affect Americans, their pocketbook and quality of life, which is access to prescription drugs. I share the concern that we do not see the focus on the economy and what needs to happen in the economy. The Schumer-McCain bill, now in the House of Representatives, which would lower prices for prescription drugs, is one very important piece of that economic puzzle. When we see that more people are lower income, their health care costs are rising, I appreciate his leadership on that issue.

Mr. SCHUMER. I thank the Senator for her leadership as well.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Wyoming.

SENATE AT A STANDSTILL

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, it is interesting. I wanted to visit a little bit about where we are on the floor and the fact we are not moving. We have been in the same place for 4 weeks.

I understand the frustration of the folks on the other side of the aisle. I recognize, too, that we are in the full swing of an election year. It is blame-game time, where we all stand up and blame the President for what is going on when there is no effort on the other side of the aisle to move off where we are and take up some of the issues we ought to be addressing.

We talk about prescription drugs. Prescription drugs is not on the floor because the leadership has not moved from where we are to make time to get it up here. I get a little exasperated, using all this time for political comments when there are no ideas of what to do coming from the other side of the floor.

Actually, that wasn't why I came here, but I have to tell you it is pretty frustrating to continue to hear that sort of thing—blaming the President when these folks have no idea what they want to do and no suggestions, no leadership coming from the Senate. What are we going to do about it?

What we have done is continue to work on two bills for about 4 weeks now. Homeland defense is one of the most important issues we have before us, and it has been stalled. Although we have differing views on how it ought to proceed, that is fine, that is part of the system here. We ought to take a vote on those views and move forward, but instead of that, we have had stalling on the other side, no chance to vote

on amendments, simply wanting to always vote on cloture, which is what we are faced with today.

The unwillingness of the majority leadership to allow votes on certain amendments has created a standoff. We keep hearing about what else you want to talk about over there, but we won't move off where we are. It is pretty frustrating. It seems as though that is the political moment. We have to really get down to what it is.

The same thing is true of Interior appropriations. It has been on the floor for 4 weeks. Yet we can't seem to move it to get some of the things done. For those of us in the West, it is very important—public land fees and, so on, in which we are so involved. Maybe even more important than that, the more immediate issue, there is some drought relief in this bill. There is something on forest fire suppression. We can do those things. But have we moved? No.

We continue to stall and to have votes on cloture, which does not resolve the issue. All we need to do is have a vote on the amendments. If you don't like the amendments, have a vote to table them. That is where we ought to be. That is the system.

To get up and start spending all of our time blaming the President for an economic slowdown that began under the Clinton administration, according to all the people who are familiar and knowledgeable about it, is to be a little tiresome, when we have an opportunity to move forward. There are a lot of things we ought to be doing in the relatively short time we have left.

Obviously, homeland defense is one that has to be done.

We need to debate the Iraq resolution, which is going to take some time. We need a CR if we are going to adjourn on the 19th of October. We have an energy bill which we ought to move forward. We talked about pharmaceuticals and Medicare. We could have done something in our committee, but the majority leader pulled it out of the committee. We will not have time to accomplish these items as long as we remain on the pending bills.

It seems to me it would be very frustrating to want to spend the time blaming the President for the economy when the Senate is not doing what we can and moving forward.

I will not take any more time. We ought to look at what we are accomplishing instead of trying to put the blame on everybody else when we have not succeeded in doing what we ought to be doing. I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Missouri.

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, I understand the distinguished Senator from Michigan would like 5 minutes so she can then assume the Chair. I will be happy to defer to her for 5 minutes, if I can then be recognized after her and have the attention of the body. I will be happy to accommodate her.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered. The Senator from Michigan.

THE ECONOMY

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, I thank my friend for his courtesy this morning, and I appreciate the opportunity to speak for a few moments before assuming the Chair. I did want to follow up on the discussion this morning on the economy. A few minutes ago, I indicated that every economic indicator that should be going down is going up: job losses; health care costs; foreclosures; national debt; interest rate costs; Social Security trust fund raid. Every part of the economy we wish to be going up is going down: economic growth, down; business investment, down; the stock market, down; retirement accounts, down; consumer confidence; minimum wage.

We have a very disturbing situation. I wish to speak for a moment about one piece of the economy that is so critical in the quality of life of American families and American businesses which are struggling to pay the costs. Let me speak to one piece of the economic record of the last 18 months, and that is that workers' payments for health insurance is soaring.

We are seeing that the cost of insurance to cover a family has gone up 16 percent, and the cost of an individual has gone up 27 percent, over one-fourth increase in their costs. The costs are going up. Their savings are down, their investments are down, and at the same time, we are seeing the biggest part of the reason for that health care cost going up as a result of the cost of prescription drugs.

We are seeing overall prescription drugs going up over three times the rate of inflation. This is a critical part of the economic pie, the costs for consumers right now. It is not inconsequential. It is not like buying a new pair of tennis shoes or "Gee, I would like to have a new coat." This is life-saving medicine, the difference between life and death, or whether a person goes into a nursing home or is able to live at home. I am very concerned about this. What is the response?

We in the Senate have been focused on Medicare prescription drug coverage and lowering prices for everyone. We have been successful in passing a bill that, in fact, lowers prices and creates more competition in the marketplace once a patent expires. But what is the response of the pharmaceutical industry within this context, with the struggles that are going on for families, businesses, and farmers across the country? What is their response right now? A new PR campaign, not putting the millions of dollars into lower prices and making prescription medications available, lowering the premiums for small businesses. They have gone on a huge PR campaign.

We are seeing ads that I find, I have to say, absolutely outrageous. One says: "Pray for a Miracle." It uses the picture of a child who, obviously, is deathly ill. It says: "Pray for a Miracle," because they say generic drugs will never cure him.

In the small print it says: "They don't do research." Of course they do not do research. They do not do research. They do not have to do research. The idea of generic drugs is to take the formulas and the patents after the research has been done, after the American people have helped to pay for that research through NIH funding, tax deductions, and supporting the companies with a 20-year patent so they do not have competition in recovering their costs.

The whole point of generics is the American public made a deal that, once the 20 years is up, once those subsidies are up, they will have that formula available so generic companies can manufacture those drugs and lower the prices.

Instead of working with us to have a system that works both for brand name companies to develop these new brand name drugs and also for the American people to get the bargain they are supposed to get, which is lower prices, the companies are putting millions of dollars into a front senior citizen group, ads on the air, getting involved in elections and running ads scaring people that somehow if we let the system work as we created it over the years in a bipartisan way, if we let the system work, this child, who is obviously seriously ill, will somehow be hurt. I find that absolutely outrageous.

I am concerned in the context of this economy and the debate and the American people trying to figure out when they sit down in the morning what they are going to pay for—are they going to be able to afford the health care premium? Is that senior going to be able to afford their medicine? Are they going to be able to pay for the clothes kids need for school? Are they going to be able to do the other things they need for their family?

Instead of working with us, the companies have chosen an outrageous PR propaganda campaign. I urge them to work with us to do the right thing. I thank the Chair.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. EDWARDS). The time of the Senator has expired.

The Senator from Missouri is recognized.

INTERIOR APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. BOND. I thank the Chair.

Mr. President, I have been listening to some of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle saying the economic problems we have are somebody else's fault. They blame the President. Unfortunately, in this instance, the President cannot pass legislation. The President was successful in working with us to pass the beginning of tax relief which took effect in 2001, and most responsible economists I know suggest that helped lessen the impact of the downturn which began in 2000, beginning as early as the first quarter of 2000 and hitting its peak the end of 2000 and the beginning of 2001.

We could do some things in this body. We could pass some laws that would make a difference and help the economy get going. Frankly, one of the great frustrations I feel is we cannot get about the business that we are supposed to do on the Senate floor. If the majority leadership had allowed the Senate Energy Committee to work its will on an energy bill, the committee would have reported out a proposal to allow drilling on 2,000 acres in the barren northlands above the Arctic Circle in Alaska. That is called ANWR.

ANWR not only has the potential to replace the oil we must now buy from the malevolent, deadly dictator Saddam Hussein, ANWR could put up to three-quarters of a million people to work throughout the country, not just in the drilling and work in ANWR, but providing the materials, making the steel and turning it into equipment, pipelines, providing the infrastructure through the private sector that we need to bring that oil down from ANWR.

I am still hoping we can get ANWR in the energy bill, a tremendous boost for the economy. Where else do we need a boost for the economy? In large construction projects. There are construction projects shut down all around the country because they cannot get insurance against terrorism.

Terrorism risk insurance was dealt with in the Banking Committee on a bipartisan basis. I understand they reported out a good bill to provide that the Federal Government would be a backstop, on a sharing basis, for the reinsurance of terrorism risk.

The majority leadership took it away. We cannot get a terrorism risk insurance bill through this body because the majority leadership has changed it into something that provides great new opportunities to sue the victims of terrorist attacks for punitive damages. Punitive damages are not a way to build the economy. Those are two pieces of legislation we could have gotten finished to help the economy get going. Making the tax cut permanent would be a third way of doing it.

I came to the floor to express what I believe is a great sense of frustration by all of us. The Senate is stuck in neutral.

I have only been in the Senate 16 years, and by some standards that is a pretty short time. We honored our distinguished senior colleague from South Carolina yesterday, and we know of the record of great service of others in this body, but in the short time I have been here I have never seen this body so dysfunctional. It is time we talked about why we are dysfunctional. What is happening? What has gone wrong? Why are we here? Quite simply, it is because some do not want to let us vote. This is the basic motivation and it is cloaked with all the talk about cloture and filibuster, but we are still on an Interior bill amendment which was offered 3 weeks ago. We are stuck because the

majority leadership does not want us to vote on that amendment.

There is plenty of time to vote, but for some reason some are apparently afraid to vote. It is no more complicated than that. If we vote, we could get to the remaining amendments, pass the bill, and move on in the next day or two. If the majority does not like it, they could move to table it and we could have a vote; might win, might lose. We could at least have a vote.

I have worked a long time on appropriations bills. I have worked very diligently with the Senator from Maryland, the excellent chairman of the VA/ HUD Committee. We have a bill we would like to present to the Senate because it deals with some very important things for veterans, for housing, for the environment, for economic development in our communities, for science, for space, for emergency management. We are ready and willing, and there are nine other bills that are ready, but when we spend more than 3 weeks on one appropriations bill, we are not going anywhere. We cannot get there until the Senate does what it is paid to do, which is to vote up or down, win or lose, and let the will of the Senate prevail.

Some are suggesting—and this, I believe, is truly outrageous—the sponsors of the amendment should pull the amendment so some do not have to cast a difficult vote. Yes, this is a political season and it is tough, but that is what we get paid to do. We have cast 223 votes this year, and I do not believe another one will make or break or overburden any of us.

The Senator from South Carolina and the Senator from West Virginia each have cast over 15,000 votes. They have shown they are not afraid to make hard decisions, and the hard decisions they have made have not taken them away. The sponsors of the Craig-Domenici amendment have had people die in their States. They have had millions of acres of trees, including old-growth trees, habitat, and wildlife, ruined by fire. Houses have burned. A sound and responsible solution has been put forward based on good science and sound forestry management. The Senate should have the courtesy, if not the common sense, to vote on it.

How poorly are we willing to treat the Senators from these Western States? I believe these Senators and their constituencies deserve a vote. If Senators want to vote against them, vote against them. They will have to explain it if they vote for them or if they vote against them.

Senator CRAIG does not have an opportunity to slip this provision into a conference report, so he is doing what the Senate should allow him to do and what we are paid to do, which is to offer amendments and have an up-or-down vote. Maybe they want a commitment to drop the amendment in a conference report. Why can't we vote?

There are a lot of reasons why appropriations bills are difficult to resolve,