

At Landstuhl, I will have to say the attitude of soldiers who had received, in some cases, very serious injuries was unbelievable. One young man who was from the home State of the Presiding Officer, as he and I discussed, who had his right leg shot off below the knee, made a comment to me as I walked in the room—and he had a big smile on his face. He said:

Senator, I'm leaving here and I am going to Walter Reed Hospital and I am going to get a new leg and as soon as I get me that new leg I want you to know I am going back to be with my buddies in Iraq.

What greater attitude, commitment, and dedication can you have from any individual? That young man is simply a shining light out there today and should far overshadow the stories we see coming out of Abu Ghraib.

Also, the spouses of the soldiers who are deployed to Iraq today, the spouses we visited with, about 35 or 40 of them, had, again, an unbelievable attitude. Our military families are truly that. They are families. They stand side by side with their spouses and support their deployment to any part of the world. But particularly now with respect to this very difficult and complex deployment in Iraq, these spouses had the opportunity to engage with us and to come forward to complain about a number of things, but they never did. They were all positive and said they knew their husbands were doing the right thing, they were truly supportive of them, and once again our military families were a shining light of which we can all be very proud.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. I ask unanimous consent that I be allowed to speak on Democratic time in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator is recognized for 10 minutes.

FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC POLICY

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, let me agree with the Senator from Georgia. The men and women in uniform representing the United States of America are our best. I have had a chance to meet with them, both the guard units in my State and their families, and to go to Walter Reed Hospital to meet those who have been seriously injured in combat. I have attended the funerals of those who have died from my State. My heart goes out to every single one of them and their families. They have given this country all we can ask and they have given Iraq millions of acts of kindness and bravery and good will, which we as citizens back home could never, ever repay.

But, having said all that, we cannot look beyond the fact that the policy and the decisions made by this administration that brought us into this war have raised the most serious and profound questions with the American people and with the Members of Congress. We understand now, sadly, that,

frankly, we were given the wrong reasons. We were wrong in the reasons the administration gave us for going to war. There were no weapons of mass destruction massed on our borders, poised to threaten our troops and poised to threaten others. There were no chemical and biological weapons, no nuclear weapons.

The administration was wrong when they talked about plutonium being shifted from Africa to Iraq. There was no evidence of that whatever.

There was no evidence whatever, despite the administration's statement, of the presence of al-Qaida in Iraq or any connection between Saddam Hussein and September 11.

This administration was wrong on the number of troops we needed. When General Shinseki boldly said we would need more forces to accomplish our goal, he faced derision from this administration. He has been proven right and, sadly, at a time when we were supposed to be bringing American troops home, we are bringing more troops into Iraq. We are escalating the number of forces that are necessary for us to protect even those who were on the ground.

We were wrong about our coalition. It was too thin and too weak at the start and still is today.

This is an American war, borne largely if not exclusively by American taxpayers, and almost exclusively by American troops. Despite the contributions by Great Britain and Poland and others, these are American forces whose lives are on the line.

We were wrong about the reaction of Iraqis who were supposed to greet us with parades and flowers as we liberated their country. Sadly, we see what is actually happening today. Now three-fourths of the Iraqis want Americans to leave. They are glad Saddam Hussein is gone, but now they want us to be gone. That was something that was not predicted.

We were wrong about the protection of our troops. The fact that our Humvees were not properly armored has meant that one out of four American lives were lost because of this lack of preparedness. We were wrong about body armor. A third of our troops in Iraq, as of last year, did not have body armor to protect them personally. We were wrong about protection when it came to the helicopters which sadly still do not have the necessary defensive equipment to fight off shoulder-fired missiles.

We have been wrong, as well, in terms of the human lives, the lives we have given; wrong in terms of the dollar costs. This administration in February said we need no more money to execute this war. As of last week, they said we need \$25 billion. Mr. Wolfowitz said it might be \$50 billion more to finish this war at least into the beginning of next year. And we were wrong in the prison at Abu Ghraib with improper personnel not properly trained, not properly supervised.

Frankly, we have been wrong on the impact of the war on terrorism. We believed somehow that standing our ground in Iraq would help us in the war on terrorism. It has made it more difficult. This has become a magnet for terrorists who come to Iraq to kill American soldiers and American civilians. That is something that was not predicted.

So this administration has been wrong—wrong in its policy, as we find every single day. The American people still stand foursquare behind our men and women in uniform. They are doing their patriotic duty and we are proud of them. But this administration has not prepared us, did not prepare us, for this invasion and, sadly, we are paying that price today.

There is another important element beyond foreign policy. It is the question of the domestic policies of this administration. The question which should be asked is not a question from a Democrat but one that was asked by President Ronald Reagan in 1980. It is very basic. The question you have to ask yourself every time we have an election is: Are you better off as an American today than you were 4 years ago?

Take a look at the state of our economy and you can understand we are not. The middle Americans across America have to say, frankly, we are not better off. In the first 2 years of the Bush administration, real income has dropped by almost \$1,500 per household. Growth and wages, remarkably weak. After growing at a healthy rate during the Clinton administration, wages have barely kept up with inflation under President George W. Bush. In fact, the Labor Department recently reported that in the last 12 months, wages and salaries grew at the slowest rate in over 20 years.

At the same time, Americans are facing skyrocketing costs. Take a look at this. Flat wages during the period that the President has been in office, average weekly earnings, are up 1 percent. Gasoline prices are up 25 percent, college tuition prices are up 28 percent, and family health care premiums are up 36 percent. These are the real costs of families across America.

So when this administration says, We are in recovery, things are looking a lot better, take a look at the reality of the bills that American families have to pay. These are, sadly, families who are not doing better today under President George W. Bush's economic plan.

For many Americans the problem is even worse than flat wages and high costs. For millions, the problem is because they have lost their job. We have lost 2.2 million private sector jobs under President George W. Bush. Under President Clinton, we increased the number of people working in America by 21 million. Under President George W. Bush we have lost 2.2 million jobs.

The manufacturing sector has been devastated, with jobs lost in 36 out of the 39 months under this President. We

have lost 2.7 million manufacturing jobs not likely to ever be replaced by jobs paying as well.

In 2000, the unemployment rate was 4 percent when President Bush took office. Today it is 5.6 percent. There are 8.2 million Americans out of work, a third more than when the President took office.

In addition, long-term unemployment has nearly tripled under President George Bush. Look at the situation with long-term employment. When he took office, 649,000 people were out of work. Today, 1.9 million are out of work. There are long-term unemployed and the Republican administration refuses, still, to provide unemployment benefits for these people struggling to keep their families together while they are out of work.

In addition, what we have seen is this administration has also turned record surpluses under President Clinton into record deficits. When President Bush took office, we were on track for a 10-year surplus of over \$5 trillion. Sadly, in this situation today, we are headed toward a 10-year deficit of over \$3 trillion.

In 2000, we were saving every penny of the Social Security trust fund for those who needed it in the future. Since 2001, we have raided it every year to pay for President Bush's tax cut for the wealthiest Americans. That does not add up. It does not add up to income security for seniors. It does not add up to fiscal responsibility, which this administration promised.

In addition, because of the weak state of the economy, State taxes have been on the increase, rising by \$14.5 billion in 2002 and 2003 after 7 straight years of going down.

So while the President may talk about tax cuts for wealthy people, State taxes and local taxes are increasing to make up the difference. Household debt has increased among families in America from \$7.1 trillion in the year 2000 to \$9.4 trillion at the end of last year, a 32.8-percent increase. Our public debt has reached record levels under this President and, unfortunately, that debt comes down to \$20,000 for every American—a \$20,000 mortgage we are carrying because this President insisted on tax cuts while we fought a war, the first President to ever ask for that. Consumer confidence has fallen by 20 percent under this President.

And we come back, again, to the famous question asked by President Reagan in 1980. That question—are you better off now than you were 4 years ago?—it is hard to see in any circumstance why families, on an economic basis, could be considered better off. Their wages are flat, jobs have escaped us, and the costs of doing business in America and raising a family in America continue to go up.

It is clearly a time for a new direction in America. We need strong leadership to point us in a new direction of fiscal responsibility and economic growth. For the next 4 years we need to

dedicate ourselves to working families struggling to make ends meet and raise a family that in the future can enjoy even a better standard of living than their parents.

We are not better off than we were, but we can be.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader.

STATE OF THE ECONOMY

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, I will use my leader time and save what Democratic morning business is still allocated to others. I compliment the distinguished Senator from Illinois for his comments this morning.

This week it will be our hope to discuss the question about how it is that Americans view themselves as we enter this critical decisionmaking period for our country, choosing its national leadership for the next 4 years.

Senator DURBIN has put his finger on the question that was so appropriately posed by then-candidate Reagan in 1980. The question he asked in 1980 to the American people was: Are you better off? In many cases, Americans had a right to say yes in 1980, but there was a perception that on many specific issues and circumstances they were not better off.

So we felt it was appropriate that we have some analysis of our circumstances today in the year 2004. Are we better off than we were in 2000? Are we better off in education today than we were back then, having passed but not funded the No Child Left Behind Act? Are we better off with our own national security and homeland security today than we were in 2000? Are we better off in our fiscal policy, our economic policy? Are we better off with regard to crime statistics? Are we better off with infrastructure? Where is it that we are better off?

I dare say no one could possibly say we are better off.

Well, this week, we hope to analyze a little bit of the lay of the land as the American people see it today. Wondering out loud, expressing concern, and certainly providing some of our own reaction to the question, Are you better off today?

Senator DURBIN, our distinguished colleague from Illinois, said it so well with regard to our circumstances for average working families. In asking the question, Are you better off than you were 4 years ago, when you look at the first 2 years of the Bush administration, real income actually dropped by \$1,500 per household, and throughout the last 4 years growth in wages has actually been very weak.

After growing at a healthy rate during the Clinton administration, wages have barely kept up with inflation under the Bush administration. In fact, the Labor Department recently reported that in the last 12 months wages and salaries grew at the slowest rate in 20 years. At the same time, Americans

are facing skyrocketing costs. Whether it is a 25-percent increase in gasoline prices at the pump, a 28-percent increase in college tuition, a 36-percent increase in family health care premiums, the middle class is being squeezed.

This chart says it as graphically as one can. Here you have the average weekly earnings for a typical American household. It has gone up 1 percent over this period of time. In that same timeframe, while wages have only gone up 1 percent, gasoline prices have gone up 25 percent; college tuition, 28 percent; health care premiums, a whopping 36 percent. So at times like these, the last thing you want to do is threaten wages, but that is exactly what the Bush administration is planning to do in August, by implementing rules that will actually strip millions of Americans of the ability to cope with this situation.

Here you have an increase in earnings of 1 percent. One of the ways Americans have historically coped with that situation is to say: OK, if I am only making a 1-percent increase, I am going to work harder and longer.

We already have the longest workweek in the world with regard to industrialized nations—the longest workweek in the world and Americans respond to these increasing pressures by saying: I am going to work longer. If they work longer, under current law, they are allowed overtime. But what the administration says is: We are going to make you work even harder and longer because we are going to take away some of your overtime. So the pressure is even greater.

For many Americans, the problem is even worse than just flat wages and high costs. For millions, the problem is no wages because they have lost their jobs. We have actually lost 2.2 million private sector jobs under President Bush, compared to 21 million jobs created during the time President Clinton was in office. The manufacturing sector has been particularly hard hit, with jobs lost in 36 out of 39 months under the Bush administration. In all, we have lost 2.7 million manufacturing jobs. And a net of 2.2 million private sector jobs lost—the first time since the Hoover administration we have actually seen an actual job loss over the 4 years of any one President's term in office.

So here you have it: During the Clinton administration, 21 million private sector jobs created; under the Bush administration, a loss of 2.2 million private sector jobs.

In 2000, the unemployment rate was 4 percent. Today, it is 5.6. Mr. President, 8.2 million Americans are actually out of work, a third more than when President Bush took office. In addition, long-term unemployment has nearly tripled in the last 4 years.

In 2000, the number of long-term unemployed people was 649,000. Now there are 1.9 million long-term unemployed people, three times what it was in 2000