

control of the majority leader or his designee.

Who seeks recognition?

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, the Democrat time this morning will be dispersed as follows: 8 minutes to Senator LINCOLN, 8 minutes to Senator CORZINE, and 8 minutes to Senator HARKIN. We will reserve the rest.

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

The Senator from Arkansas is recognized.

AMERICAN SPIRIT

Mrs. LINCOLN. Mr. President, we have so much to do in this body and so much to talk about. But I can't think of anything more important for us to talk about than relieving the stress on working families and the American people.

We had a joint session yesterday where we heard the President of Afghanistan who very joyously spoke of the brilliant spirit of the American people. I think if we look at that brilliant spirit and what composes us as American people and the things we are able to do, it ultimately depends on what makes us the kind of people we are.

I rise today to pay tribute to the American people. For well over 200 years, the American people have proven their ability to overcome all manner of obstacles. At times they have done so with the help of their duly elected government officials, and at times they have done so in spite of their duly elected government officials. But either way, in the end, the spirit and character of the American people move this Nation toward a greater realization of the principle written about by Thomas Jefferson over 228 years ago.

I am not normally a betting person, but I say that putting your money on the American people is about as close to a sure bet as you are going to get.

In 1945, when millions of soldiers came home from the war, this Nation put its money on the American people, and it gave those who served this country the GI bill so they could educate themselves and make a better life for them and for their families. That investment helped to create an economic boom the likes of which this Nation has never seen—not to mention the talented minds that were nurtured and those who were given the opportunity to reach their potential. Millions of families were able to raise their economic standing and take part in the American dream. That economic expansion is one of the clearest examples that investments in education can pay off.

As I mentioned, we have many issues to talk about, much to do for the security of our Nation and the people. One

of the key factors in making sure we deal with these issues and we have the ability to provide the security—whether it be economic, whether it be social, or whether it be the values and simple security of families in this country—depends on the American spirit. It is simple. If we invest in the American people, the American people always bring this Nation a good return.

Now we are faced with new economic realities and new challenges in an information age as well as an age where wars will be fought in many different ways than what we have seen in the past. The question is, Are we investing in the American people the way we once did in 1945? Are we providing for another of the greatest generations of Americans, or are we missing the opportunity to provide for the children of today who will be the future of this country?

Last month I was in Garland County, AR, for the grand opening of the new Head Start Center there. It was a proud day for me. The center was named in my honor, but it was not just because the center would be associated with my name that I was proud, but more importantly because my name would be associated with a center of learning. I remarked that day that programs such as Head Start were practical ways we could provide opportunity for working mothers to raise their economic standing, to eliminate some of the stress on these working families, these working American families who are at the base of what this Nation is all about. Head Start can be the difference between a family becoming part of the economic mainstream. When mothers have a nurturing place to send their children, they can go to work or to school with the kind of confidence they need to reach their potential. They are not put in the terrible position of having to choose between employment and the safety or health of their children.

With the rise we are seeing in both child abuse and neglect because of the cuts in so many vital assistance programs, the need for childcare is at an alltime high in this country. More than just relieving the stress of finding good childcare, a program such as Head Start helps to prepare children for a lifetime of learning.

Everyone knows the more you learn, the more you earn. In seeing the children in that Head Start Program walking by, all of those little 4-year-olds with their Styrofoam cup, with their individual toothbrush in their hand, so proud they were learning something that was going to be a part of their life forever—good dental hygiene. It is not just teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic; it is teaching these children how to be a person who can then contribute their whole potential to their community and Nation. They returned from having brushed their teeth with this huge smile on their face about what they had learned.

These are programs vital to this country and its well-being. Families in

Arkansas recognize the hope that programs such as Head Start and childcare assistance programs provide. Right now, 800-plus Arkansas families are waiting for childcare assistance. Think of that. There are 800 families in line for hope in reaching the American dream. However, for some reason this administration does not want to give that hope a chance. In the President's budget request, almost 40 programs to help low-income working families make that transition into the economic mainstream through programs such as Head Start were not adequately funded.

In addition to cutting programs to help working families, this administration has failed to fully fund the bipartisan No Child Left Behind Act. Last year, No Child Left Behind was underfunded by as much as \$9 billion. I supported No Child Left Behind because I believed that with proper funding it would give children an opportunity to reach their full educational potential. I still believe that it can be an effective engine of reform in our public education system. For that reform to be effective, it is going to require significant investment, which so far has not been forthcoming from this administration.

Unless we make education a priority, an entire generation of Americans could miss out on the American dream. The fact is our economy has changed, but our approach to supporting and funding education has not. We are training our children to take on manufacturing jobs that no longer exist or are quickly disappearing. Not only are we losing manufacturing jobs, but now technical and highly skilled tasks are leaving our shores for cheaper highly educated workers. We can no longer settle for doing what we have always done.

This administration believes we can have champagne for the price of beer. The reality is, if you poorly fund education, you get a poor educational system.

But the good news is that if you properly fund education—from Head Start through high school—the chances of a world class education system go up exponentially.

If we are to give working mothers, fathers and their children an opportunity to live the American dream we must invest in their future.

As I said at the outset, every time we have put our money on the American people it has paid off. Let's take that bet and make the investment one more time.

I believe the children of today who are the brilliant spirit of the American people of the future, are worth the investment.

Mr. REID. I yield 4 minutes to the Senator from Florida, Senator NELSON.

FLORIDA VOTING ROLLS

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I call to the attention of the Senate the potential disaster in the making with regard to the Presidential election in the State of Florida. Everyone in the country knows what we went through 4 years ago in the Presidential election. It ended up being the difference of 537 votes that then cast Florida's electoral votes to decide the national Presidential election.

To the great surprise and dismay of many registered voters who arrived at the polling places ready to cast their votes 4 years ago, they were told their names had been struck from the voting rolls because they were convicted felons, when, in fact, they were not. They had a similar name, like John Doe or Jane Doe, that was on a list of 100,000-plus convicted felon names that had been sent out to the 67 county election supervisors. They had struck these names.

Members of the Senate, we have a disaster in the making again. The State of Florida has now sent out a list of 48,000 convicted felons whose names are to be struck from the voting rolls when, in fact, the matches are not guaranteed. To the contrary, several election supervisors have already received the list and noticed, in fact, they have employees in their own offices who were to be struck. They are not convicted felons.

We simply cannot allow this to happen. This raises questions about our ability to cast our vote in a Presidential election.

Mr. REID. Will the Senator yield?

Mr. NELSON of Florida. I certainly yield to the distinguished Senator from Nevada.

Mr. REID. I appreciate very much the Senator bringing this matter to the attention of the Senate and the country.

I have strong views that if someone has been convicted of a crime and has fulfilled the terms of the sentence by that court and completed their probationary period or period of parole, that person should be able to vote. If a sentence is too short, give them longer sentences. But if someone, in effect, has been punished and completed their terms of punishment—retribution, call it whatever you want—that person should be able to vote.

It should be a national law that when someone completes the terms of their imprisonment, parole, probation, they should be able to vote. It is unfair to people who are trying to get back on their feet to not be able to be part of the American system. That is what we want them to do. We send them to prison to be rehabilitated. Part of their rehabilitation is the ability to vote.

Would the Senator acknowledge there is some merit to my statement?

Mr. NELSON of Florida. The Senator has pointed out an underlying principle of fairness. Florida is only one of seven States that has a process whereby a

convicted felon has to restore their voting rights.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator's time has expired.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, 1 additional minute.

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

Mr. NELSON of Florida. I thank the Senator.

I conclude by saying to the Senator from Nevada, it is important. This is another principle that is about to be violated; that is, the principle of the right to vote—that if you are a registered voter, and you get to the voting precinct, you find you cannot vote because your name has been mistakenly struck because it happens to be a match with the name of a convicted felon under another Florida law.

So what I have done is filed a friend of the court brief, an amicus curie, along with the CNN suit against the State of Florida that says the public ought to have a right to inspect those voting rolls and those lists of 48,000 names to be struck.

The State of Florida says, under a law, the public cannot inspect those records and copy them. I hope the suit will be successful in declaring the law unconstitutional and remove this cloud from our ability to vote.

Thank you, Mr. President.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator's time has expired.

The Senator from the great State of Iowa.

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, how much time do I have?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator has 8 minutes.

Mr. HARKIN. I thank the Presiding Officer.

HAMMERING THE MIDDLE CLASS

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, what we see happening in America today, after 3½ years of this administration, is what I call the middle-class squeeze, a squeeze which has been tightened incredibly by the policies of the Bush administration. The truth really is, it is not so much they are being squeezed, the middle class is actually being hammered.

Think about it. Since Mr. Bush took office in January of 2001, nearly 2 million private sector jobs have been lost, putting downward pressure on wages and salaries. There has been some job growth over the last couple of months, but just since the passage of the 2003 tax bill, 11 months ago, our economy created 1.2 million fewer jobs than the President's own Council of Economic Advisers predicted would be created without the tax bill. We have 2 million fewer jobs than what they predicted if they passed the tax bill.

Now, again, there have been a few jobs in the last couple months. Of course, when the glass is dry, a drop of

water seems like an ocean. That is what we have had. We have had a couple drops of water. We have had a couple months of job growth, but you don't judge an administration by 2 months, you judge it by 4 years, and over 4 years we have lost almost 2 million jobs. That is not even the half of it.

Family income has fallen 2 percent. Housing prices have increased 18 percent. Health insurance premiums are up 50 percent. Utility bills are up more than 15 percent. Credit card fees have doubled. And, in large measure, because of the Bush tax cuts and their negative impact on our State budgets, college tuition, under the Bush administration, is up a whopping 35 percent.

Do you know who pays college tuition? The middle class. Meanwhile, as the middle class gets squeezed, Mr. Bush's base has never had it so good. I refer my colleagues to an article in yesterday's Wall Street Journal titled "U.S. Led a Resurgence Last Year Among Millionaires World-Wide." This article, in yesterday's Wall Street Journal, reports that the number of North Americans with over \$1 million in financial or liquid assets increased by 13.5 percent last year, and their assets increased by 13.6 percent. At the same time, the wealth of the ultra-high net worth individuals—those with over \$30 million in assets—grew to a total of \$2.5 trillion.

In the last 3 years, corporate profits are up over fourfold—62 percent over the past 3 years—but private wages are actually down. When we look at all compensation, private wages are less than one-third of normal growth.

It says in this journal article that the number of millionaires in the U.S. is up, as I said, 14 percent—actually 13.6 percent—and that "the U.S. and Canada together added more new millionaires last year than Europe, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East combined."

Well, so much for the Bush tax breaks for the wealthy. That is exactly who they are helping. Clearly, the President's policies—tax cuts for the rich, lower taxes on investment income—are working for those at the top, but it is not working for those on Main Street. This administration is ignoring Main Street. It might be listening to Wall Street, but it is ignoring Main Street. Quite frankly, what Main Street is telling us, loudly and clearly, is that their No. 1 concern is economic security.

In the State of Iowa and across America, despite all the happy talk about the economy, people fear losing their jobs, their retirement, their health care. They are also worried about losing their right to time-and-a-half overtime. With the Labor Department's new overtime rule, people will be obligated to work 45, 50, 55, 60 hours a week with zero additional compensation. That is what is happening to the middle class.