

and Alberto Gonzales—the allegation that somehow they have been involved in a Government policy of condoning torture or authorizing prisoner abuse is just false. It is important to stand up and say so.

Our disagreements about policy, indeed, the foreign policy of this Government, whether it be authorizing the use of force or whatever the issue may be, cannot be used as an excuse to make such scurrilous allegations against public servants who I believe are trying to do their best. If, in fact, somehow this administration and these individuals who are engaged in important public policy decisions did not care one whit about what the law is, what the definition of torture is, and how we can avoid somehow engaging in this sort of illegal and heinous act against any human being, why would they research the law? Why would they write lengthy legal memoranda? Why would they have debates among themselves about what the law is and what Congress proscribed—indeed, what our international treaty obligations prescribe in this area. They would not. You would not be so scrupulous and so careful about what the law provides if you did not care about following the law. That has been what these individuals and this administration and this Government have tried to do under very difficult circumstances.

In conclusion, I hope our disagreements about some aspects of our Nation's foreign policy, our policy in Iraq, should not be license to distort the facts and impugn the character of these nominees. Three are nominees, one already has been confirmed. We know Mr. Haynes has been renominated by the President to serve as a circuit judge. We know Condoleezza Rice's nomination to be Secretary of State will be debated tomorrow in the Senate.

Finally, I expect on Wednesday Judge Alberto Gonzales will be voted out of the Judiciary Committee and that nomination will soon come to the Senate.

It appears the opponents of this administration and its policies will pass no opportunity to continue to repeat false charges which cannot be borne out by the facts and which I think need to be corrected.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. STEVENS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

(The remarks of Mr. STEVENS pertaining to the introduction of S. 49 are printed in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

Mr. STEVENS. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

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Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### PRIORITIES OF THE DEMOCRATIC CAUCUS

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, I rise to speak to the American people about the values and priorities of the Senate Democratic caucus. Today Senate Democrats introduced 10 ambitious leadership bills that will make our country more secure, expand opportunity for all, and honor our responsibility to future and past generations.

The Democratic agenda stands in stark contrast to the priorities advanced by Republicans. Democrats understand that putting America's security first means providing troops and their families with the resources they have told us they need to protect our freedom. Where Republican mismanagement has put our country's security at risk, Democrats will stand with our troops and step up efforts against terrorists by targeting and shutting down the institutions that create them. Where Republicans have stood with big corporations and put the needs of the special interests ahead of the American people, Democrats will work to expand opportunity for families by bringing down health care costs, strengthening education, and creating good-paying jobs.

Democrats will promote fiscal responsibility in Washington with a return to commonsense budgeting. But our most urgent priority is to protect our Nation's security. That is why we will stand up for our troops. We believe that putting America's security first means standing up for our troops and their families. We will work to increase our military end strength by up to 40,000 by 2007, and we will create a Guard and Reserve bill of rights to protect and promote the interests of our dedicated citizen soldiers. That includes making sure our troops have the body armor and equipment they need and that their families receive health care and their pay on time while their loved ones are serving abroad. This bill would increase survivor benefits from \$12,000 to \$100,000 for their families, if, God forbid, a loved one loses his or her life while serving our country.

We will also target the terrorists more effectively. We will keep America secure by stepping up the fight against the radical terrorists. We will work to increase our special operations forces by 2,000 to attack the terrorists where they are and to protect our freedoms here at home.

Democrats are also united to ensure that the world's most dangerous weapons stay out of the hands of terrorists. We will expand the pace and scope of

programs to eliminate and safeguard nuclear materials, enhance efforts to keep these and other deadly materials out of the hands of terrorists, and assist State and local governments in equipping and training those responsible for dealing with the effects of terrorist attacks involving weapons of mass destruction.

When our veterans come home, we will not abandon them. We will keep our promise to them. We now have a new generation of veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. We will ensure that all veterans get the health care they deserve. We will make sure that no veteran is forced to choose between a retirement and a disability check.

We will also make the same commitment to the soldiers of today that was made to past veterans with a 21st century GI bill. We understand that one of the most effective ways to increase opportunities for our families is a high quality, good-paying job. The promise of America is that if you work hard and play by the rules, you should have a real opportunity to provide for yourself and your family. For too many Americans, this promise is out of reach today. We must ensure that it is within their grasp.

We must expand economic opportunity for all Americans by protecting American workers and ensuring that we are creating good jobs for today and for the future. Our plan creates new jobs with an expansion of infrastructure programs, encourages innovation, and ensures fair wages. It also eliminates tax incentives for companies that move jobs overseas. It ensures that we enforce our trade policies.

The Stabenow-Corzine bill ensures fair wages for our American workers. It restores overtime wages to 6 million workers and increases the Federal minimum wage over the next 2 years so that we can ensure a livable wage for every American worker. These are the people who serve our food and stock the shelves of our local grocery stores, care for our children and our elderly parents, and it is incredibly important that we honor, respect, and support them and the dignity of work.

It also provides relief to multi-employer pension plans to make them more solvent. These plans are used predominantly by small businesses to provide pension benefits to an estimated 9.7 million American workers. The Stabenow-Corzine bill creates good jobs for today and new jobs for the future, with an expansion of infrastructure programs and the encouragement of innovation.

Across America, thousands of infrastructure projects, from our smallest rural communities, to our biggest cities, await the Capitol to move forward. Making these investments in our roads, bridges, and buses, will enable our quality of life to improve and protect public health and safety. These investments will also create a huge boost to

our economy. For each \$1 billion in investment, we create 47,000 good-paying American jobs.

We also need to make investments in technology. Too many communities, mostly in rural and economically disadvantaged areas, lack access to broadband Internet service. More and more, Internet access is a critical part of our economy and our schools. This bill expands broadband access to those underserved areas by allowing broadband service providers to immediately deduct one-half of the cost of their investment in equipment to provide broadband access to rural and underserved areas. This is not just the right thing to do, it is the smart thing to do. We are a nation of innovators, of ideas. The key to our economic strength is our leadership in science and technology.

The U.S. is losing ground today to our foreign competitors. Research and development helps create higher quality jobs, better and safer products and higher productivity among American businesses.

It makes permanent a tax credit for entities that increase their research activities, which is so critical; and it makes credit available for collaborative partnerships, for research done by a group of businesses or other entities. We also want to ensure that we continue to lead and educate future leaders in science and technology.

Our bill also supports increases in federally funded research at the National Science Foundation, the Office of Science at the Department of Energy, the National Institutes of Health, and the National Institute of Science and Technology, as well as investments in math and science and technology programs at our secondary education institutions.

The Stabenow-Corzine bill eliminates tax incentives for companies that move jobs overseas—a critically important feature today for workers in every State, and I would certainly say in my State of Michigan, where we make things. We make things and grow things and do it well, and we don't want to see incentives in our Tax Code for companies to move jobs overseas.

We must eliminate tax incentives that actually give companies a tax incentive to move production facilities and jobs overseas. It doesn't make sense to reward a company for moving jobs overseas and, in effect, for pushing the promise of America farther away, farther out of reach.

Let me give you an example. In Greenville, MI—I have spoken about Greenville many times on the floor—is Electrolux. In Greenville, MI, they had three different shifts going and added over \$100 million in new investments in equipment at the Greenville Electrolux plant. They are efficient, effective, and they are doing the job. They are selling refrigerators. Electrolux decided they could make a bigger profit if they moved the plant to Mexico and paid \$1.57 an hour and no health benefits.

We are losing 2,700 jobs as a result of that and we, unfortunately, have incentives in the law today that encourage that to happen. That is wrong.

We need to tackle the issues of health care, and we are doing that in our legislation, with a lower cost for prescription drugs and a lower cost of health care for our businesses. Ultimately, we cannot compete and have a middle class in this country if we are telling everyone they need to work for \$1.57 an hour in order to have a job and we will create incentives for their businesses to move to another country. Our bill would require companies to immediately pay tax on the profits they earn abroad for products that are imported back to the United States. We think that is fair.

The Stabenow-Corzine bill ensures that America has a trade policy that addresses our now record trade deficit by enforcing our trade agreements, maintaining a level playing field, and helping workers who have lost their jobs due to unfair labor practices of other nations. We are determined to pursue a trade policy that protects American workers and addresses our record trade deficit.

This bill requires the administration to identify the most important export markets that remain closed to U.S. products and provides the tools needed to open them. As I have said so many times, if we create a level playing field—all we ask for are the same rules. If we have the same rules for our businesses and our workers that we see in other countries, we will compete and we will win. But it is our job to make sure that happens. That is why this legislation also creates the office of chief enforcement investigator/negotiator, whose sole responsibility will be to police our trading partners' performance of their obligations.

This bill will force China to stop manipulating its currency and force China to choose between revaluing its currency to its market value or face a tough tariff on all Chinese imports to the United States, equal to the unfair trade advantage China currently enjoys.

Let me give you an example of what I think is important. There are many in Michigan, but let me share this. I met with a group of people from Rexair Company in Cadillac, MI, a couple of weeks ago. They produce vacuum cleaners. The company's vice president claimed that the Chinese-made motors for the vacuum cleaners are cheaper because of currency manipulation. The motor is \$28.80 in the United States and \$21.30 in China. The company would prefer to use U.S.-made motors, but they have to go with the lower cost alternative in order to be competitive. There is no reason for that difference, except for currency manipulation.

When jobs are moved overseas it doesn't just hurt individuals, it hurts families, communities like Greenville, MI, and it hurts all of us. Trade adjustment assistance has helped thousands

of manufacturing workers get retraining, keep their health insurance, and make a new start. This bill will expand TAA to cover service workers who lose their jobs when companies move jobs overseas. It will also provide health coverage for unemployed workers who are in training programs so that they can complete their training and help rebuild communities affected by outsourcing or exporting jobs, by coordinating Federal, State, and local resources to develop a new plan and a new future for the people who live there. We have a ceiling of a national debt, but we don't have a ceiling on the U.S. foreign debt, or the annual trade deficits that feed it. That is wrong. It is irresponsible, particularly if you consider that America is now the world's largest debtor nation.

We will have serious consequences if our trade deficits continue. In the 109th Congress we are going to change that and put America on the path of a more responsible approach. Our bill will require the administration to convene an emergency interagency meeting and provide Congress with a trade deficit reduction plan, to lower debt levels below the statutory ceiling, whenever the overall foreign debt reaches 25 percent of our GDP or when the annual trade deficit reaches 5 percent of GDP.

Another component of expanding opportunity for everybody is to provide our children with the best education possible. We talk a lot about that. We have an opportunity in the 109th Congress to put in place those opportunities and mean it for our children.

That is why we are going to keep our promise to our children by increasing support for preschool education, fully funding No Child Left Behind, and improving its implementation.

We are committed to finally meeting the Federal commitment to children with disabilities. How long have we talked about that on the Senate floor?

We will also address the shortfall of math, science, and special education teachers by creating tuition incentives for college students to major in these critical fields. We will help expand educational opportunities for college by providing relief from skyrocketing college tuition, increasing the size and access to Pell grants, and supporting proven programs that encourage more young people to attend and succeed in college.

We will also work to make health care more affordable. Spiraling health care costs are putting the opportunity of America at risk, making it harder for families to buy health insurance and placing a difficult burden on our small and large businesses, our manufacturers, certainly.

We will address these concerns by making prescription drugs more affordable. How often have I spoken about this on the Senate floor? We will make prescription drugs more affordable through the legalization of prescription drug reimportation—in other words, allowing the pharmacists in America, in

Michigan, to do business with pharmacists across the border in Canada and in other places where we know it can be done safely.

In our legislation, we will be making sure prescription drugs are safe by ensuring that drugs are monitored after they are approved for use. We will ensure all children and pregnant women will have health care. We understand how critical it is that we protect Medicaid and work with the States across this country to make sure that health care is available through Medicaid.

We will also reduce the growing cost of health care to small businesses by offering tax credits, while also modernizing health care to cut costs for patients and businesses.

While we are lowering health care costs, we are going to revamp the last Congress' Medicare bill—if we have the opportunity to do so, that is certainly our wish as Democrats—and take the special interests out of the Medicare bill by repealing the provision that makes no sense at all that prevents Medicare from negotiating the best possible price for our seniors.

While we will eliminate the slush fund for HMOs, we will also improve the prescription drug benefit by phasing out the current coverage gap where seniors pay a premium but do not get a benefit.

I am told that if, in fact, we negotiated in Medicare the same price cuts that we do through the VA for the veterans, we would not have a gap in the Medicare prescription drug law at all. There would not be a gap in benefit. We need to make that change so our seniors have the very best possible Medicare prescription drug benefit.

We as Democrats will work to lower Part B premiums so premium increases are not as steep as the one that took effect in January. We will address incentives that encourage employers to drop retiree benefits and ensure that our seniors will not be forced into HMOs while other seniors transition into a new benefit.

In the United States, the foundation of our incredible democracy is the fundamental right to vote. That is another important part of the legislative package we have put forward today. It does not matter if one is rich or poor, black, brown or white, all Americans have the right to one vote. It is the great equalizer. When one is voting and walks out of the voting booth, each one of us walks out as an equal. Unfortunately, we have had major problems in our voting systems in the last few elections, as we all know. We have determined, as Democrats, to reform the voting system in this country to create Federal standards for our elections and to be able to add verification, accountability, and accuracy to this system. Together we should be moving as quickly as possible to do this.

Our legislation increases access to the polls with election day registration, shorter lines, early voting. The bill also aims to modernize our elec-

tion equipment and increase impartiality and provides the resources to our States to implement the bill.

While our agenda is ambitious, we have a plan to pay for every single initiative we are proposing at the beginning of this session, our vision of keeping America's promise.

Unfortunately, in the past 4 years, colleagues on the other side of the aisle and the administration have turned a large surplus, in fact the largest surplus in the history of the country, into the largest debt. We know that fiscal mismanagement today only leads to greater problems for our children and our grandchildren. It is our responsibility to address the fiscal irresponsibility of the current administration by imposing discipline today and we invite our colleagues on the other side of the aisle to make that a new priority, a fresh priority, in this new Congress. We are united to strengthen our budgeting rules that require the Government to live within its means.

The bottom line is that we today, the first day, we can introduce bills in the new session, have come together as Democrats to put forward our vision of keeping the promise of America. It is rooted in security. We must be safe. Our families must be safe. We must make sure we are providing all that we must for our troops and those who have served us and are now our veterans.

We are also committed to creating opportunity for everyone who works hard and plays by the rules, cares about their children, to create opportunity to be successful. We want everyone to dream big dreams and be able to reach for the stars and touch them and be successful within the American dream.

We also understand that when we create opportunity, with that comes responsibility. We each have responsibility to step up and work hard, but we also know we have responsibility for each other. We have responsibilities as parents to our children to create the security they need, the opportunity they need, and to instill responsibility in them, and that as a community we have responsibility one to another, just as we do for our family, and our country has a responsibility to make sure those opportunities are present.

This is an important day. It is the beginning of the new session, a new opportunity. We stand ready to work with the administration and our colleagues on the other side of the aisle to truly keep the promise of America, not just for some but for everyone in our country who is working hard every day and counting on us to make sure that dream is available and that promise is kept for them and their families.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

#### PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, many people recall that over a year ago there

was a debate on the Senate floor about the cost of prescription drugs. It was a lengthy debate, and it involved a lot of concern about the fact that a lot of senior citizens find the life-protecting drugs they are taking to be too expensive.

We have known for a long time that Medicare, a very valuable Federal Government program, has been more than miraculous in its results. When it was instituted during the term of President Lyndon Johnson, there was hope it would help seniors pay for their medical bills and improve the quality of their lives. It has done that and more. It has become an extremely valuable program because seniors have used Medicare for access to doctors and hospitals, and the proof is in longevity. Seniors are living longer. They are getting better medical care. It was truly one of the best Government programs ever created, but there was a gap in those programs. It didn't cover prescription drugs for those who were not in the hospital. So seniors found that new drugs that kept them healthy and out of the hospital were too expensive. Some couldn't take the drugs because they couldn't afford them. Others had to make terrible life choices between their lifesaving drugs and basic necessities of life.

For a long time we have talked about establishing under Medicare a prescription drug program that would help these seniors—and disabled people, who also qualify under Medicare. The debate got started, and it looked promising. There was the belief that we were finally moving to a goal that we have talked about for a long time. Unfortunately, during the course of the debate there were political forces at work in Washington. That is not unusual. The largest political force at work was the pharmaceutical drug industry. They understood that if we gave to Medicare the power to bargain for senior citizens in America, that power would force the drug companies to reduce their cost, so the pharmaceutical companies, one of the most powerful lobbying organizations in Washington, successfully lobbied the Bush administration and supporters of the bill to prohibit Medicare from creating a drug benefit program under Medicare which would hold the drug companies accountable for cost increases.

They got the best of both worlds. They not only could continue to sell expensive drugs to seniors, there is no pressure on them to reduce the cost. Drug companies are very profitable, and they understood that with this change in the law, they would continue to make enormous sums of money off of seniors and the Government for a long time to come.

Some of us who voted against the program as presented by the President suggested that, unless there was some cost containment here, this program would break the bank; it would cost too much; drug prices would go up, and