

get back to the Nation's business and get back to it soon. Americans are entitled to it, and we have waited too long to be able to do it.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

GRAMMY WINNER BARACK OBAMA

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, my colleague in the Senate, Senator BARACK OBAMA of Illinois, is carrying on a grand Illinois tradition. In the history of the United States of America, only two U.S. Senators have ever won a Grammy award. The first was Senator Everett McKinley Dirksen from Pekin, IL for his album "Gallant Men," which many of us can still recall, his deep baritone voice intoning those great patriotic verses that inspired so many.

Now another Senator from Illinois became the second Senator in history to win a Grammy award in the best spoken word category at Wednesday's Grammy Awards ceremony. Senator OBAMA won his Grammy for recording his autobiographical book "Dreams for My Father." The book was first published in 1995. It is an inspirational book, telling the story of not only BARACK's life but also of his quest to understand his heritage, returning to Kenya to the tribe where his father was raised, to meet the people, to learn the stories about his origins and his family's roots. It is a wonderful book. It has become a best seller. I was given a copy by BARACK long before he announced his candidacy to the Senate and value it as a great story about a great American with whom I am honored to serve.

There was stiff competition in that category for the spoken word. BARACK OBAMA prevailed. But others in the finals included Garrison Keillor, Al Franken, Sean Penn, and George Carlin. Who came out on top? The junior Senator from Illinois, BARACK OBAMA.

I understand that Senator HILLARY CLINTON won a Grammy when she was First Lady. Now, of course, she is a distinguished Senator from New York. But she won one for recording "It Takes a Village." Her husband, former President Bill Clinton, won a Grammy for the reading of his autobiography "My Life."

So far it is a clean sweep for Illinois Senators at the Grammys. With this distinguished record, many people will want to continue to follow the career of my junior colleague, Senator BARACK OBAMA.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I rise to speak to an issue important to every

American, certainly important to more than 40 million who are on Social Security. Buried deep in the President's 2,349-page budget are three proposals relating to Social Security. Some of them come as a surprise.

First, President Bush recommends spending more than \$700 billion to create Social Security private accounts. If we thought this was an issue that had gone away, obviously the White House does not want to abandon it. They are talking about \$700 billion to push for Social Security privatization. Second, the President wants to reduce benefits to future Social Security beneficiaries. And third, he calls for eliminating the \$255 death benefit awarded to families of people who passed away.

The American people have made it clear to the President they are not interested in this privatization scheme. The more the President traveled across America, the more he spoke about it, fewer people supported it. It is an indication that people have genuine concerns about it and for good reason. First, they know this privatization scheme is going to make Social Security's long-term funding problems worse, not better. Second, the President's proposal will force deep cuts in guaranteed Social Security benefits for future retirees, even if they don't choose a private account. Third, partially privatizing Social Security adds trillions of dollars to our national debt by taking money out of the Social Security trust fund. And that debt, under President Bush, has reached historic levels. Finally, partially privatizing Social Security would tie America's retirement security to the uncertainty of financial markets. As there are winners and losers in the stock market every day, there would be winners and losers among retirees in America. Those who guess wrong in their investments could easily end up in a predicament where they don't have the resources they need for a safe and comfortable retirement.

The President says he is for the ownership society. We know what that means. It means we are all in this alone. We know better. When we stand together as an American family with our seniors and our most vulnerable Americans, we are stronger, stronger because we are appealing to the values that make this Nation great. Social Security privatization is not consistent with those values.

Allowing people to divert 4 percent of their Social Security taxes into private accounts sounds harmless, but it is a pay-as-you-go system. Money that is diverted is money that isn't there to pay benefits. By the President's estimation, his plan will create a \$700 billion hole in the Social Security trust fund. That is what it says in the President's budget. Who is going to make up the difference? Unfortunately, some will suggest the way to make up the difference is to borrow it. Who will lend us the money? We know who our creditors are: Japan, China, Saudi Arabia,

the OPEC nations. Many countries around the world will loan us money now, but then, of course, they are our creditors. They are our mortgage-holders. We are beholden to them, creating an even greater debt for future generation, and greater vulnerability.

The benefit cuts the President has called for as well are not going to fly. He calls these benefit cuts progressive price indexing. It sounds good, cutting benefits for lower income workers less than for higher income workers, but the practical impact of the President's budget on Social Security benefits would mean that a worker 25 years old today, who retires at age 65 with career earnings equivalent to \$59,000 annually, would see a 24-percent benefit cut by the President's proposal. A similar worker, born 5 years from now, retiring at age 65, average career earnings of \$36,000, would face a 28-percent benefit cut. As people see their pension plans crumbling because of corporate mergers, bankruptcies, and sleight of hand, the President is calling for cutting basic Social Security benefits to people who are certainly not wealthy, if their average income is \$36,000 a year. These workers would be better off if the President didn't touch Social Security.

A worker born 5 years from now who retires at age 65 and has career earnings that average \$59,000 would suffer a 42-percent benefit cut.

This goes too far. I hope the Congress will not seriously consider these proposals by the President when it comes to Social Security.

It is interesting that this President is calling for cuts in Social Security at the same time he wants to cut the taxes paid by the wealthiest people in America. The cost of the President's tax cuts in 2001 and 2003, if made permanent, will be \$11.1 trillion over the next 75 years. It is the height of irresponsibility to give tax cuts to the most comfortable and wealthiest people in America and to cut the basic social safety net on which we count.

Finally, the President's budget proposes to cut the \$255 death benefit awarded to widows, widowers, and children left behind by the death of a member of their family who was covered by Social Security. The President would cut the \$255 death payment to widows and surviving children to pay for funeral expenses and then turn around and give a tax cut to people making over \$1 million a year. How can he possibly resolve the injustice that is part of that proposal?

If we are supposed to be a caring and compassionate people—and we are—wouldn't we care more for a widow who would get a check for \$255 to pay for funeral expenses than someone making \$1 million a year who would receive a \$35,000 tax cut under the President's proposal? That is why the President's priorities are upside down.

As Members start looking through this budget more closely, as we have, they are going to be startled by the

fact that the President still clings tenaciously to the unpopular privatization of Social Security. They will be worried over the idea of cutting Social Security benefits when pension plans are disappearing and cutting back their payout. They will be absolutely dumbfounded when they read that this President wants to cut that \$255 check for the widow to cover funeral expenses in order for us to give tax cuts to wealthy people.

The President said it is time for us to put aside partisan politics when it comes to Social Security and work together to get this problem solved. That is what he said in the State of the Union.

He proposed we create a commission. I support it. We have said that for a long time. Those of us who were fortunate enough to be here the last time a meaningful, bipartisan, balanced commission was created know that back in 1983 we got the job done. President Reagan had the right idea. Tip O'Neill, the Democratic leader in the House of Representatives, joined with him on a bipartisan basis and we ended up buying almost 50 years of solvency by following those commission recommendations. The same thing is true now.

The President has to walk away from privatization, walk away from deep cuts in benefits for people who are not wealthy in retirement. He certainly should not walk away from the widows and widowers across America who count on this \$255 check to meet some of the expenses of people who have passed away in their families. I urge my colleagues to look carefully at this budget when it comes to Social Security.

I close by saying when we return next week, we will take up another bill on reconciliation. It is an important bill about taxes and spending. It is going to reflect the President's priorities for tax cuts for the wealthiest in America and little or no help for the working families in America. These are the families struggling to pay for their kids' college education, trying to make mortgage payments, pay those property taxes, and trying to make certain they are paying the heating bills that have doubled this year. Why would we not give them a helping hand?

Unfortunately, the President's proposal puts the help in those homes that, frankly, are not worried too much about heating bills. They don't have to count pennies every month. We will face that again, and then we will return to the asbestos bill, which we have talked about all week. The first thing we will consider is a budget point of order that was raised by Senator JOHN ENSIGN from Nevada. It goes to the heart of this asbestos trust fund, and that is whether we are dealing with honest figures and whether we can say with confidence that this trust fund, which will close down the courthouses in America for asbestos victims, can truly be solvent for years to come and pay out to those victims and their families what they truly deserve.

Many of us questioned that. We asked the sponsor of the bill to justify the \$140 billion and tell us how he came up with that figure. Unfortunately, he cannot. We have asked him to give us the secret list that has the names of all of the businesses that are supposed to pay into this trust fund. Still no list is produced. Imagine that, a secret list of businesses in the possession of the Committee on the Judiciary that will not be shared with all of the Members of the Senate or, more importantly, with the American public. So we are supposed to have confidence in an approach that is veiled in secrecy and cannot be explained? That is why Senator ENSIGN's point of order is so important.

Even if you believe, as I do, that the asbestos system can be improved and that survivors should receive more compensation, in a more efficient way, we have to understand that this approach will not work. It will fail and its failure will be at the great expense of a lot of vulnerable Americans.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

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

LOW INCOME HOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I would like to begin my remarks today speaking about a topic that I have been involved with, along with many of my colleagues for months now. That is LIHEAP funding.

If you look at a weather map, you will see that temperatures across much of the United States are only expected to be in the thirties and forties today. Winter has finally arrived. In Providence, the high is only projected to be 19 degrees. A nor'easter is on its way up the east coast; they forecast snow that will hit here in the DC area tomorrow, all the way up to New England, and so winter has arrived.

I wanted to mention the weather forecast because we are at the end of the second week of February, and there is no new funding for the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program, and as far as I know, there are no plans by the majority to bring to the Senate a vote on a \$2 billion LIHEAP funding proposal. This funding proposal was removed from the Department of Defense Appropriations bill conference report. It was one of a few items that was stripped out, there were many other nondefense items that were included in

the Defense Appropriations conference report in December, but for some reason this was dropped. I think a reason it is adversely affecting thousands and thousands of Americans across the country, ranging from the Northeast into the mid-Atlantic, across the Midwest, out into the far West. People are struggling with rising energy prices, and today, falling temperatures.

On Monday, a bipartisan letter signed by 34 Governors urged Congress to pass \$2 billion in immediate additional LIHEAP assistance. These are Governors from across the country, Governors that are of both party affiliations, Governors who are trying to respond to these conditions of both weather and extraordinary price increases.

The letter states:

LIHEAP applications are projected to increase by as much as 25 percent in some States . . . If Congress does not increase LIHEAP funding in the next few weeks, state programs across the country could run dry and the number of households unable to meet their basic heating needs could skyrocket.

I ask unanimous consent that both of these letters be included in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

FEBRUARY 6, 2006.

Hon. BILL FRIST,
Majority Leader, U.S. Senate.

Hon. HARRY REID,
Minority Leader, U.S. Senate.

Hon. J. DENNIS HASTERT,
Speaker, House of Representatives.

Hon. NANCY PELOSI,
Minority Leader, House of Representatives.

DEAR SENATOR FRIST, SENATOR REID, SPEAKER HASTERT, AND REPRESENTATIVE PELOSI: For several months this winter, states have taken steps to help assure that our most vulnerable residents are not overwhelmed by the sharp rise in home heating costs. This has often meant significant state contributions to emergency relief funds or supplementing existing state-federal programs. Despite these actions by the states and the record cost of energy nationwide, federal funding for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) reflects a net decrease from the previous fiscal year's total. We urge Congress to join the states in meeting the well-documented need for additional home heating assistance by passing \$2 billion in immediate additional LIHEAP assistance.

Governors supported the progress that was made when LIHEAP was authorized at \$5.1 billion in the Energy Policy Act of 2005, but were disappointed when Congress appropriated only \$2.16 billion for FY 2006. While we appreciate the President's recent release of an additional \$100 million of emergency LIHEAP funds and Congress' proposal to add \$1 billion for FY 2007, urgent action is needed to address the Energy Information Administration (EIA)'s prediction of a 30 to 70 percent rise in consumer energy costs this winter.

Covering dramatic increases in natural gas and heating oil prices presents a potential hardship for our citizens. LIHEAP applications are projected to increase by as much as 25% in some states. As noted above, many states, energy industry leaders, and private citizens have done their part by increasing investments in the program. We are asking