

you have to get political reconciliation in order to have that political success.

Come on, Democratic Senators. Come on, Republican Senators. Let's get together. The amendment from Senator BIDEN is one we can get together on.

Mr. President, I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BROWN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

CHILDREN'S HEALTH CARE

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, I know we are in the middle of working on a very important bill, but I do wish to take a moment to respond to a press conference the President just held where he spoke about his intent to veto the bipartisan children's health care bill we will be sending to him.

It is very important we indicate that just because the President has a bully pulpit does not mean he is accurate or right. It does not matter how much spin they want to put on this situation, the reality is the President of the United States gave us a budget earlier this year—and the Budget Committee looked at this very carefully—this President proposed a budget that would cut, according to CBO, 1.6 million children from health care, current children. So when I hear the President at a press conference talking about the fact that he wants to make sure children are covered with health insurance, actions speak louder than words.

The President asked us to put forward a budget that would cut 1.6 million children of working families who currently have health insurance from their health care. We rejected that request. We looked at the fact that there are from 6 to 7 million children who currently qualify to receive children's health insurance. Again, these are working families, folks who do not qualify for low-income help. They are moms and dads working one, two, maybe three minimum wage jobs, who are desperately concerned that at least their children have the health care they need.

I am very proud the Senate came together and in a true bipartisan effort developed a health care program, an expansion that will not only make sure every child who currently has health insurance will keep that health care, but that 4 million more children will be able to have health care in this country. Their moms and dads will not have to go to bed at night praying: Please don't let the kids get sick.

Sixty-eight Members of this Senate, not counting the fact that Senator JOHNSON who is now back with us would make that 69 Members, voted together in true bipartisanship to say

that one of the basic values of this country is to make sure the children of working families have the opportunity to get the health care they need. It is pretty basic. This is a matter of values and priorities.

Later today, in a few moments, I am going to be joining with Families USA to announce their new study that says that 90 million Americans sometime in the last 2 years did not have health insurance. One out of three Americans sometime in the last 2 years did not have health insurance. This is a national tragedy. And for us not to at least focus on children, at least say our value as Americans is to make sure that children of low-income working families get the basic health care they need, to me is something I find incredibly important and appalling, quite frankly, that the President of the United States says on the one hand he will veto a bipartisan bill to expand health care coverage to children of working families and then have—I hate to say what I was going to say—the amazing position to come to us shortly and to ask somewhere up to another \$200 billion for the war in Iraq that the majority of Americans want to see changed.

Mr. DURBIN. Will the Senator yield for a question?

Ms. STABENOW. I would be happy to.

Mr. DURBIN. First, Mr. President, I wish to thank the Senator from Michigan for making this statement on the floor of the Senate. I listened to the news reports this morning and heard that some from the White House said they did not believe we should be helping to pay for health insurance for families who are well off, such as families making \$60,000 a year. That was the reference that was made.

The Senator from Michigan, I am sure, is aware that health insurance premiums—assuming the whole family is healthy—could, in some circumstances, cost a family thousands of dollars each year. If their gross income is \$60,000, and they are trying to get by with \$3,000 or \$4,000 a month, an \$800 health insurance bill for a healthy family, let alone \$1,200 or more for a family with a sick child, it is hard for me to understand how the White House could say a family making \$60,000 a year is so well off they would not need help in providing health insurance to their children.

I suggest to the Senator from Michigan that the President's position here seems to me to be inconsistent, in that he is willing to provide tax cuts for the wealthiest people in America and then is saying folks who make \$60,000 a year are well off and don't need a helping hand when it comes to their children's health insurance. So in addition to the cost of the war in Iraq, I ask the Senator from Michigan, isn't it a little difficult to understand the President's position of giving tax breaks to the wealthy and not giving working families making \$60,000 a year a helping

hand with their health insurance for kids?

Ms. STABENOW. Well, my distinguished colleague is absolutely correct, and I thank him for his comments.

This is truly a question of values and priorities. That is what we are about in this business, in this Chamber, when we make decisions. The President has said the wealthiest among us are much more important than moms and dads, most of whom, by the way, are making much less than what we are talking about or the numbers the White House has put out. Those families ought to be able to, at a minimum, know that their children have health insurance when they get sick.

But what adds insult to injury, I believe, for the American people, is to know that on top of that—on top of tax priorities for the wealthy versus families and their health care—is the fact that on the one hand we have put together something that is responsible, bipartisan, and fully paid for within the budget, and yet the President is going to be sending us a request for anywhere from \$150 billion to \$200 billion more for a war in Iraq that the American people want to change, a policy that is not supported by the majority of Americans. To add insult to injury, none of it is paid for. It will go directly on to the national debt.

So this is a question of values and priorities. It doesn't matter, again as I said when I began, how much the President wants to spin it. We all know he has a very big megaphone, a very big bully pulpit. But that doesn't mean he is right. The spin machine cannot outweigh what is going on here in terms of American families. We have something that we have done together on a bipartisan basis. We should all be very proud of it. A basic for every single one of our families is the ability to know they can care for their children and they will have the health care they need.

Far too many families today don't get help because they do not have a low enough income. They are working and putting it together. Maybe it is a single mom, maybe it is a single dad, maybe it is mom and dad. They are putting together the income in a way where they can pay all the increased costs that everybody is having to deal with—the gas prices that are going up and the possibility of losing jobs. Certainly in my State wages are going down, and health care costs going up—all of the things that are squeezing our working families. But we are saying, you know what, one of the things we can do together, and we have already done it here and we are going to be sending it to the President, is to allow for 4 million more children to get the health care they need for those moms and dads who are working but not making enough to be able to pay for health insurance.

We, as a country, ought to be able to say we at least want the children to receive the health insurance they need. Health care, in my opinion, should be a

right for the greatest country in the world, not a privilege. Too many things have been given to the privileged in this country while working families are trying hard every day to make ends meet.

So I wish to thank all our colleagues who have worked so hard on this legislation. It is something we can all be very proud of, and I ask the President to take another look. This body together, 68 Members who voted, were not playing politics. We were coming together in a bipartisan way to be able to give more children, American children, the ability to get their health care needs taken care of. It is time we had the President join with us in the right set of priorities for American families.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The assistant majority leader is recognized.

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

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

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Michigan for coming to the Senate floor. Occasionally, there are debates in this Chamber that really matter. The debate on the war in Iraq certainly leads that list. We have a deadly war underway. A hundred American soldiers are killed, on average, every single month. Almost 4,000 have died, with 30,000 having been injured. At least 10,000 have been seriously injured, with amputations and burns and traumatic brain injury. That should be the focal point of what we do on the floor of the Senate, and it is.

Yesterday, sadly, an important amendment by Senator WEBB of Virginia, an important amendment for soldiers and their families, was defeated, defeated on a vote of 56 to 44. The average person might say: It sounds like you won. Not by Senate math. By Senate math it takes 60 votes on controversial issues, and this required 60, so that wasn't enough. We were defeated in an effort to say something very straightforward: If you are going to ask our soldiers to be deployed in combat, risking their lives for 12 months, you should at least give them 12 months afterward to rest, be reunited with their family, retrained and reequipped, before they go back into combat. So 12 months on duty, 12 months off duty. That was defeated.

If you meet with these soldiers and their families, if you know the stress they are under, if you read the numbers about the divorce rate among our soldiers, the suicide rate, the post-traumatic stress disorder which they are battling as they return from the stress of battles, it is hard to imagine the Senate would not give that kind of consideration to our soldiers and their families. That is a critically important debate.

Now, we will soon move to another very important debate. It is about health insurance. Everybody in Amer-

ica knows there is something that needs to be done on health insurance. There are 47 million of our neighbors in America, people who live with us in our communities and go to church with us, who have no health insurance. In my home State of Illinois, I went back in August in deep southern Illinois, near Harrisburg, in Saline County, and a woman came to me and said: I am 63 years old. I am a realtor. I have never had health insurance 1 day in my life. It is hard to imagine, but that is the reality many working Americans face every single day. They are one diagnosis, one illness away from bankruptcy. Those are the people with no health insurance.

Now, let us speak about those who have health insurance but it isn't good enough; it costs more each year and covers less. We know the story. Businesses tell you, labor unions tell you, families tell you: I don't have the kind of coverage I want, and it costs a fortune. That is the reality.

We also know that in our great Nation there are 15 million children—of the 47 million I mentioned earlier, 15 million are children—with no health insurance. These are kids from families not poor enough to qualify for Medicaid and not fortunate enough to have a parent with a job that has health insurance. There are 15 million kids for whom the only opportunity for health care is a trip to an emergency room.

We wanted to change that 5 years ago, and we passed this CHIP program, Children's Health Insurance Program, and said let us do something about it. So we covered 6 million of the 15 million kids, but now the program is going to expire in a few days. Our hope with this new Congress was we could expand health insurance to cover more children, at least 3 million more. We want to make sure all 15 million are covered, but we are not going to quite reach that goal. We want to at least get closer, with 9 million covered.

We had a bipartisan agreement to do that. The Senate came together, cooperated, compromised, and reached an agreement to expand health insurance protection to another 3 million kids. This morning, the President of the United States had a press availability and announced he would oppose this bill expanding health insurance for children. At the time, the spokesman for his administration said: We don't want to give health insurance to families who are well off. They defined a family that is well off as one that makes \$60,000 a year.

Now, I have to tell you, \$60,000 is more than the average wage in my hometown of Springfield, IL, but not by much. And \$60,000 a year, after you pay your taxes, doesn't leave a lot of money for your mortgage payment, for your utility bills, for your property taxes, and for the kids' school expenses. If you happen to not have health insurance where you work, \$60,000 doesn't leave much of a cushion to turn around and buy health insur-

ance. That insurance is going to cost you \$60 or \$80, maybe \$1,000 or more a month.

We think those families, with kids who don't have health insurance, making \$60,000, deserve a helping hand so they can at least have the security of health insurance and know their kids are covered. But it is going to be a battle. We are going to pass this bill and send it to the President. He is going to veto this bill—at least he promises to. I hope he reconsiders. But if not, we will then get a chance to override his veto.

This is the kind of debate which matters. For millions of Americans and their families, this debate gets down to one of the real issues that keep parents awake at night, worrying about their kids.

Some of us in our lives have been through this experience. I was a law student when my wife and I had a little baby and were without health insurance. We had some medical issues with our baby. I didn't have health insurance to turn to. That happened many years ago. My daughter is now 40 years old. But let me tell you, I will never forget it. There was a sinking feeling that my girl was not going to get the best doctor and the best care because, as a father, I didn't have health insurance to cover her. It was only for a short period in my life, but I will never forget it. I can't imagine people living with that feeling every day, every week, every month, and every year. Shouldn't we, as a great and giving nation, care about our own first?

This President will not even blink when he sends us a bill in a week or so asking for \$198 billion more for the war in Iraq—\$198 billion. Yet he is unwilling to spend \$6 billion for health insurance for children. That is about what it is each year over a 5-year period of time. He will spend \$198 billion for the war in Iraq but not \$6 billion to make America stronger, to make America's families stronger.

This is a debate worth waging. This is an issue worth fighting for. This Senate will return to that issue in a week or two, and I hope the American people, on a bipartisan basis, as this bill is bipartisan, will join us in urging the Senate to pass the bill and to override the President's veto.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.