

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak and to have that time allocated toward the majority time in morning business.

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

THE BUDGET PROCESS AND CHILDREN'S HEALTH CARE

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, a colleague and friend of mine on the other side of the aisle spoke a few minutes ago about the budget process. I come today to specifically talk about children's health care, but I think it is important to respond to what was said as it relates to the budget process and adopting a budget by October 1.

I was thinking as he was speaking, I have been here now—this is my seventh year, my seventh budget process. We have never met the October 1 deadline—never. In fact, I am not sure I remember having done it in the House when I was there for 4 years, either. We all know it is a nice political argument to make on the floor of the Senate, but it has no credibility because the reality is the October 1 deadline is something that is difficult to meet and we usually work through the fall on the budget. Everybody knows that.

What I think is significant, though, is the fact that if we are going to hold to that test as the test of responsible leadership, 6 of the last 7 years the Republican majority was in charge and 6 times they did not meet an October 1 deadline. In fact, last year, they never got a budget passed at all—at all. We came in as the new majority and had to pick up the pieces and figure out how to keep the Government going for the last half of the year. So I find it disingenuous—and I would say this to my friend if he were here—to come to the floor and make great political speeches and great theater. The reality is we all on both sides of the aisle know that the appropriators are working together now, coming to the floor on a bipartisan basis, to do what we do every single year—every single year in October and November and, unfortunately, at times into December.

But what I am very proud of is the fact that our leader, Senator REID, and our leadership in our caucus take very seriously our responsibilities on the budget; not only putting a budget in place, but a budget with the right values, the right priorities. We are changing the priorities on behalf of the people of this country. We are changing the priorities as they relate to funding the troops and pay raises and making sure our troops have what they need. We are changing the priorities. We will be dealing with a bill later this week as it relates to the Commerce, Justice,

and State appropriations where we are going to stop the cuts the President has made in law enforcement, in the COPS program, in the FBI, and in juvenile justice and drug enforcement. We will work to reinstate that and refocus us on those things that keep our communities safe, keep America safe.

I am very proud of that. I am very proud of the priorities we have been putting in place as relates to this budget. On top of that, we are not digging a bigger hole as it relates to the deficit of this country, because we have returned to a policy that was in place under the former administration, under President Clinton, that simply says if you are going to spend dollars, you have to pay for it. You either have to cut some place in order to increase another or you have to raise revenue. It is a basic principle. It ought to be a no-brainer. But that has been suspended in the last 6 years, creating the largest deficits in the history of the country.

I am happy to come to the floor and talk about budgets and process, and I am very proud of the direction we are going in.

I am also very proud of what we have done as it relates to another absolutely critical priority, and that is children's health care. We have a health care system for low-income individuals called Medicaid. If you work, two parents or a mom may be working two jobs, maybe three minimum-wage jobs to try to make sure she pays the bills and has a roof over her children's heads and food on the table, chances are she is a low-income working parent, or a couple working together, a dad working for his children. Chances are health care is going to be too expensive—just too expensive to buy in the individual market if you don't have it through the place where you work.

Ten years ago this Congress came together in a bipartisan way under a different President to say: We want to help families who are working hard every single day, who care about their children and who are doing everything they can to do the right thing—the values we should be supporting in this country, of hard work, family, and caring about our kids.

We want to help them by putting in place a children's insurance program so that at least the children of low-income working families are able to get the health care they need. It has been a huge success. We have overwhelming support from Governors, Republicans and Democrats, and State legislatures. In fact, this is the ultimate in strange bedfellows. We have the U.S. Chamber and the business community, the labor community, health care providers, children's advocates, and consumer advocates; we have the broadest possible group of Americans with the broadest possible interests that have come together to work with us to be able to design an extension of children's health care and, in fact, to be able to include additional children who qualify under that program for working families. We

passed that on a huge bipartisan vote in this Senate—enough to override a Presidential veto. The House of Representatives passed it with a very large bipartisan vote.

Today, the President, we assume, will be getting this bill. There is only one thing standing between 10 million children getting health insurance in this country, the parents of 10 million children being able to sleep a little easier tonight—there is only one thing standing between that happening and those families and that is the signature of the President of the United States.

So I am here today, as colleagues on both sides of the aisle have done, to thank our leadership—Senator REID and the bipartisan leadership of Senator MAX BAUCUS, Senator GRASSLEY, Senator ORRIN HATCH, and Senator ROCKEFELLER. They have done a magnificent job of doing what we are supposed to do: bring people's diverse interests together, develop a true compromise, and get things done.

I urge this President to look deep inside his heart, take a few moments to talk to some of these families before he puts his veto on this bill. This is one of the most significant things we will do in this Congress. It is one of the most significant moments for this President. He asked us, again, to fund a war that is not paid for. For 41 days of funding of that war, we could pay for 10 million children getting health insurance over the next 5 years. This is about values and priorities. It always has been.

In my home State, I can tell you we have 90,000 children and parents—families who are waiting and hoping and praying that this President will join with all of us in doing the right thing. Too many families are struggling. Health care is skyrocketing. These same families are being squeezed on all sides. Gas prices going up, health care costs are going up, they have challenges in keeping their mortgages, and what will happen to their jobs? Will they be shipped overseas? Will they get a pay cut? What is happening in terms of preparing to send their children to college? Middle-class families are being squeezed on all sides.

For a group of parents who are working very hard but don't have health insurance through their job, this Congress has done the right thing by passing a children's health care bill that will say at least your children will be able to get the health insurance they need and deserve.

When this President was at the Republican convention in 2004 accepting his nomination for reelection for his second term, President Bush said:

In the new term, we will lead an aggressive effort to enroll millions of poor children who are eligible but not signed up for Government health insurance programs. We will not allow a lack of attention, or information, to stand between these children and the health care they need.

Since that time, President Bush sent to us a budget that, in fact, as he funded it, would eliminate well over a million children who currently receive

health care under the Children's Health Care Program. We have rejected that, and we have turned to see how the program was working and found there were millions more children eligible for this very same program as the economy gets tougher and tougher for families, but the funding wasn't there to make sure those children receive children's health care as well. So we worked together, and we are now including an additional 4 million children whose families are working but have not been able to get health insurance. That, all together, equals 10 million children under the legislation we passed.

There is nothing more important we could do than to guarantee that children get a healthy start in life—whether it is the general practitioner they need to see, the dentist or whether they need mental health help. We have said the children of this country are a priority for our majority, for the Senate, for the House of Representatives.

I simply ask today at this critical moment: President Bush, please join us and sign this bill.

I yield the floor and 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.

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

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

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, are we in morning business?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Yes, we are.

Mr. DURBIN. It is my understanding the majority has its period.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. That is correct.

Mr. DURBIN. How much time remains?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. There is 17 minutes remaining.

IRAQ

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, 2 months ago, I traveled to Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kuwait, and Jordan. I also traveled to Iraq with my colleague Senator CASEY of Pennsylvania. We went to talk to and listen to our top generals and diplomats but, equally important, the soldiers and marines on the front lines of this war.

This was the third time for me visiting Iraq, the first time for Senator CASEY. Two impressions really struck me. More than either of my earlier visits, I felt overwhelmed by the tragedy that has been created in that country for Iraq, for its neighbors, for America's image around the world, and, sadly, for our troops.

I was also awed and deeply moved by the skill and bravery of our troops and their love for this Nation. In a time when sacrifice seems outdated to some

people, our troops are willing to endure almost inconceivable hardship and risk everything to protect us and our Nation.

When I visited Iraq, it was 120 degrees. Soldiers wore heavy body armor and backpacks and carried their ammunition, their weapons, had helmets on, drinking water every chance they had to try to stay hydrated and not suffer from heat exhaustion which had claimed the life of one of our soldiers just the day before.

Soldiers who knew who I was asked me occasionally when the politicians in Washington were going to start voting so they could come home. Despite the unbearable heat, the constant danger, longings for home, not one soldier I met in Iraq ever complained about walking point for America—not one.

We went 10 miles south of Baghdad to a place called Patrol Base Murray. I ate lunch with some Illinois soldiers from the 3rd Infantry Division out of Chicago, Aurora, Jacksonville, and Elmhurst. Most were on their first deployments. One was on his third. Half were married with kids. They try to keep in touch with things back home through e-mails, but it is tough.

They were laughing at me as I fumbled around trying to open up my MRE, a can of chicken and noodles with a built-in heater. I never quite got it right. I am glad I gave them some comic relief there, at least for a few minutes.

On August 11, after I came back home, 1 week after I visited this patrol base, two Illinois soldiers stationed there died in a roadside bomb explosion, along with two other soldiers, in a place called Arab Jabour. All four soldiers were assigned to the 3rd Infantry Division based in Fort Stewart, GA.

The Illinois soldiers lost were SPC Justin Penrod, 24 years old, of Mahomet; and SGT Andrew Lancaster, 23, of Stockton. They are 2 of the 146 sons and daughters of Illinois who have died so far in this conflict.

The same day they died, a fifth soldier from the 3rd ID died in Arab Jabour in a separate incident, while a sixth was killed in an IED blast in Afghanistan. Six soldiers dead in 1 day. Sadly, such grim numbers don't even make the big headlines anymore. After losing 3,800, I guess somebody who runs these newspapers and television stations decides it is not big news. For some people, the daily toll of soldiers killed and wounded in Iraq seems to have just become another statistic, like the weather, but not to the devastated families of these fallen soldiers, not to the children who will grow up never knowing their fathers or mothers who have died in this war, and not to the men and women with whom they served.

A week after SGT Andrew Lancaster died in Iraq, his platoon commander, 1LT Benjamin Kim, wrote me a letter about a man he considered a gifted leader and a brother. I have never met Lieutenant Kim. I can't imagine why

he sent this to me, other than to share deep feelings that he just couldn't leave inside. He wanted someone else to read them. I really trust, based on what that letter contained, that he would not mind if I read his words into the record about his fallen comrade. The letter is dated August 18, 2007.

Dear Senator DURBIN: My name is Benjamin Kim, and I am assigned to the 2nd Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division as an infantry officer. By the time you receive this letter it will have been a number of weeks since you came to Iraq and visited my unit. If you recall, you came to Patrol Base Murray in southeast Baghdad near a village called Arab Jabour, and you met some soldiers from Illinois serving here. One of these soldiers was a man named SGT Andrew Lancaster, and he was a squad leader in my platoon. He was killed in action on 11 August 2007, and as I write this letter, he and the bodies of four other soldiers who died with him that day are being prepared for transportation back to the United States.

The lieutenant went on to say:

The purpose of this letter is not to seek any political action. Nor is it to recount the grizzly details that resulted in the untimely deaths of five of my finest soldiers and subordinate leaders. I do not seek to achieve anything, except perhaps to communicate to you my boundless respect for the men who serve with me in this remote corner of the world. I will probably never meet you, and I shall make no plans to do so, but I find it oddly therapeutic to write to a man of your station and rank in an earnest and sincere manner. Whether you personally read this letter or not is irrelevant; as I write this I am finding temporary reprieve from my sorrow.

He goes on to write:

Andrew Lancaster was the iconic "Man of the Midwest." He was a pragmatist and he valued common sense and integrity as two of the most important traits a leader should have. He was straightforward with everything he said, and he was never afraid to speak his mind on issues that mattered to him. And yet, despite any of the pressures and frustrations that encumber a leader in combat, he kept his head cool and his professionalism was always above reproach.

He relentlessly pursued our elusive enemy with an intellect that any general would envy. There were countless times where he and I, and other leaders of the platoon, would discuss various tactics and methods we should apply in our mission, and more often than not we found ourselves listening attentively to his analysis of the situation.

He was also compassionate. In one instance, he spearheaded a platoon-level effort to capture a man who we suspected to be an IED emplacer and a high ranking insurgent in our area of operations. When we finally caught him, the insurgent knew he'd be going away for a long time. 'Caster, as we called him, gave him a final opportunity to kiss his family goodbye.

He was a soldier of the highest caliber, and yet his humility offered a pleasing contrast to his confidence in his own abilities. For all the times he furthered the interests of our platoon, I wanted to nominate him for a bronze star with a V-Device. His response was always the same—"I don't really care about awards. I just want all of us to go home alive and intact when these 15 months end." He was posthumously awarded his bronze star along with a purple heart; nevertheless, how ironic it is that the true heroes never want to claim themselves as such.

In his personal life, 'Caster was strongly devoted to his family. He would always sing