

I don't think we can. I have a very busy, difficult schedule next weekend, but I am not sure I am going to meet the obligations I have already committed myself to—I want everybody else to understand—including parades and other events on Veterans Day. What do we have to do? We have to send appropriations bills to the President. At least the Labor/HHS bill, which is now tied in with the VA military construction—we need to send that to the President. We have a time schedule to do that.

We have to do the Defense appropriations bill. It is something we have to consider getting to the President as soon as possible. We have to do a continuing resolution. There is some talk about doing a bridge fund for Iraq. Chairman BYRD is talking about marking up in a week or 10 days the supplemental appropriations bill. We have numerous other things. It is very difficult.

Monday is not a vote day, so we have 4 days next week. So I say, with all sincerity, I am going to call our Presidential candidates and let them know they better look at their schedules because these are not votes you can miss—Defense appropriations; the first appropriations bill, Labor/HHS, with benefits for veterans tied into it, which we need to do before Veterans Day; the CR, which funds our Government; and whatever we decide to do with the bridge funds or the supplemental appropriations bill.

So everyone should be alerted to the fact that they better have their schedules somewhat loose for this coming weekend and, I repeat, Monday. There is always a way, it seems, to try to work out some of these difficulties. I hope we can find a way to not do it next Saturday, Sunday, and Monday, but we have to be prepared.

The things I have talked about doing are not things we can do some other time. We have to do them before we leave for the Thanksgiving holiday.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will now be a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The senior Senator from Rhode Island is recognized.

SCHIP REAUTHORIZATION

Mr. REED. Mr. President, yesterday I voted with great enthusiasm for the SCHIP reauthorization bill. I think the present version is commendable and a version we should support. I particularly thank Leader REID, Chairman

BAUCUS, and Senator ROCKEFELLER for their efforts, and I commend them.

The bill provides an additional \$35 billion to preserve coverage for all 6.6 million children currently enrolled, and it expands coverage to an additional 4 million children.

The President and House Republicans have already denied these children access to health care once, by first vetoing the legislation and then sustaining the veto in the House of Representatives. I hope this version can pass without a veto. If it is vetoed, I hope the veto can be overridden.

The President's proposal, rather than expanding coverage, would in fact dramatically restrict coverage, dropping 1.4 million children and pregnant women. That is according to the Congressional Budget Office. So there is a very stark choice between an administration that wants to restrict coverage for children and this legislation, which would maintain, and indeed expand, that coverage to cover 10 million children in the United States.

With respect to Rhode Island, this bill adds an additional \$75 million in Federal funds on the table. It has to be matched, but this would allow the State of Rhode Island to maintain its program of health care for children. The bill would prevent shortfalls that have periodically cropped up, where the State found itself expending all of its funds and hoping there would be a redistribution of funds from other States that have not used their funds.

Last year, and again early this year, I fought for \$56 million in Federal funds to cover Rhode Island's shortfall. But these 11th-hour stopgap measures are not sustainable. The legislation we passed yesterday would prevent my State from being in a constant situation of shortfalls, hoping that other States have excess funds, and depending upon individuals in our delegation to get those funds for Rhode Island.

If President Bush and the House Republicans fail to enact this bill—if he vetoes it, and they sustain that veto—21 States will be at risk of shortfalls, totaling \$1.6 billion. Rhode Island will have a shortfall of \$44.1 million, beginning next March. We can predict that today. I don't know where my State would get that \$44 million. It is in a severe budget crisis. State leaders are talking about trying to find \$100 million to \$200 million in cuts, which in our budget is a significant amount of money. So the idea that they would have to come up with \$44 million on top of that is something that would be a very difficult challenge for Rhode Island.

If Republicans do not enact this bill, we must fully fund an extension that covers these shortfalls. We will be back next spring scrambling to find money to keep these programs functioning. I hope we can prevail at this juncture to create a program and funding that will be sustainable, predictable, and supportive of efforts in my State, and many States across the country, to

reach out and insure children for their health care needs.

The President's opposition is not based on fact or common sense or, indeed, even common decency; it seems to be based on ideology. He says families would switch from private insurance to government-run health care. But the number of uninsured is rising because private insurance is too expensive. In Rhode Island, the average family premium for a year is \$11,924. If you look at a typical working family in Rhode Island, it is struggling now to pay its mortgage. We have seen what is happening in the mortgage market, where many of these families, in order to get into a home, signed up for what are termed an "exotic" mortgage. In my State, foreclosures are at record-high levels. People cannot keep up with their mortgage payments. Then, added to that dilemma, wages have essentially been flat over the last 5 to 6 years, mortgage payments are going up, the price of gasoline is now reaching significant heights, and it is estimated that this winter heating oil in New England will be 20 percent more expensive than last winter. Are you then going to tell them: Oh, just go out and buy private health insurance for \$11,000 a year?

That makes no sense for working families in Rhode Island. They are struggling to keep their homes and, literally, to keep the lights on and keep it a little warm during the wintertime. For many of these people, private health insurance, at \$11,000 a year, is way beyond their reach. So to sit there and seriously insist that this is a real choice for these families—a choice of getting into a public program or buying private insurance—verges on the ridiculous.

Without the SCHIP program, thousands of families in my State—and millions of children across the country—will not have health care. There is no choice.

There is also the President's argument that this is socialized medicine. I believe that is a gross misrepresentation. In Rhode Island, children are enrolled in private plans, and enrollees can choose their doctor. In fact, there is another program like this, called Medicare. I don't see the President rallying against Medicare, saying how it is socialized medicine. In fact, I can recall he proposed—and this Congress supported—one of the largest expansions of Medicare by adopting a drug benefit. That costs the Federal Government billions of dollars, and there is no discussion about that.

These arguments are baseless. The President says this bill costs too much. In fact, this bill is fully paid for; it is one of the few things in the last 6 to 7 years that has been fully paid for. It is paid for by a cigarette tax, and it is in sharp contrast to the President's repeated request for money for Iraq and Afghanistan, which is not paid for. He is spending about \$12 billion a month. Of that money, over the last several

years in Iraq, we have invested in items such as building Iraqi health care clinics and providing health care for Iraqis. In trying to reestablish stability in that country, the President recognizes that to have a decent, well-ordered society, you have to have access to health care for citizens. The problem is, he doesn't seem to recognize it here as much. So I believe we have to support this legislation.

The President also says the bill doesn't target low-income children. In fact, 80 percent of newly insured children would be from families below 200 percent of poverty. That is a pretty good target.

He talks about the bill expanding coverage to families making \$80,000 a year. That was always a misrepresentation. But we make it clear in this bill that eligibility is capped at 300 percent of poverty; that is, families making \$60,000 a year. That sounds like a lot, but if you are in a major urban area, with rents costing \$1,000 to \$1,500 to \$1,800 a month for just a fairly—and I emphasize “fairly”—decent two-bedroom apartment for your family, when you do the math, these people are not in a situation of excess wealth by any means.

In Rhode Island, 10,000 children remain uninsured. We can do much better. The Rhode Island program provides family-based health insurance. Rhode Island does enroll parents in this health care program. They found that it helps when the whole family is part of the delivery system. It has enhanced their ability to recruit children into the system. It has enhanced, in their view, health outcomes because now we have a family engaged rather than an individual child.

I think it is appropriate in Rhode Island that we have such a forward-thinking and progressive approach because the basic SCHIP program was, in many respects, the work of Senator John H. Chafee, my colleague, a former Republican Senator who was succeeded by his son Lincoln Chafee in this Chamber. Senator Chafee, who was a pragmatic, hardnosed Republican whose values were to provide opportunity to all citizens in the nation, understood that if we could deliver effective health care to children in this country, we would go a long way to give them the physical tools to be successful in school, to succeed in the workplace, and ultimately to be citizens of this great country. He fought hard for this program. He didn't do it on an ideological basis; he did it on a very pragmatic, practical basis. His success has been demonstrated over the last 10 years because we have given more children access to health care.

There are countless stories that will be forever unknown to us, but they will be decisive in the lives of children because this program has made a difference in their lives. Where they would have suffered with an undiagnosed disease that would have impaired their ability to thrive in

school and work, because they had simple, preventive health care early on, they have been successful in school, and they will be successful in life. Families have been relieved of one of the most grievous fears they carry, and that is: Oh, my gosh, what happens if my child gets sick; I have no health care coverage—the gnawing fear at night that something could happen the next day and you have no way to protect your child because you cannot afford to get them health care. That fear has been relieved.

There is a very popular commercial from one of the credit card companies: Such and such an item, \$10; such and such an item, \$9; having the ability to do this, priceless. For families, having the confidence that they have health care is priceless, and this bill has helped them.

I hope the President will sign this bill, and if he doesn't—if he continues to roam through his ideological warehouse and pick out different odds and ends to justify this veto—then I hope the House Republicans have the courage to stand up and say: No, we are going to do what is right for the children of America, not just what is politically convenient for the President.

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

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

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

FIGHTING FOR THE PEOPLE

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, I have had the opportunity, similar to all my colleagues throughout the week and in previous times, to have heard on the floor the lament from the distinguished Republican leader of the Senate and other Republican colleagues about how they wished we had the appropriations bills done or how more should be done. I come to the floor today to talk about the reality of what is happening.

We know, in politics, unfortunately, folks decide on a message and keep saying it over and over again, hoping in fact someone will believe it, even if it doesn't jibe with what the actual facts are.

We also know, at the beginning of the year, folks all over this country—people working hard every day who care about their families and expect to have services that work and expect to have someone eyeing the fiscal situation in the country and challenging what is happening in the war and caring about their children and so on—looked for a new direction. They voted for a new direction for this country, a new set of priorities.

People working hard every day want to know somebody is out there fighting

for them. I am proud to say I am part of a group of people, a group of Democrats who understand that people are feeling squeezed on all sides—higher gas prices, higher health care costs, they are seeing tuition go up for their children, their jobs being threatened. In my home State of Michigan, we have 7.5 percent unemployment. People are losing jobs, they are losing incomes. People are looking around saying: Who is fighting for us? We play by the rules. We love our country. We send our husbands and wives and sons and daughters to defend our country. Who, in fact, is on our side, looking out for us and making sure the rules in this country create a way for everybody to work hard and succeed and, in fact, there is competency and integrity in Government?

That is what we came into this year, in January. We came into this new year understanding, as a new majority, we are here to fight for middle-class Americans who work hard every day and those working hard to get into the middle class, those who want to have the American dream available for themselves and their families. People who believe right now our American way of life is slipping want us to fight for them. I am proud to say that is exactly what we have done.

It has not been easy because our colleagues on the other side of the aisle, I understand, have lost the majority. Unfortunately, their political strategy is to try to stop us from actually making a difference in the lives of middle-class Americans, so when we get to the end of the term, they can say: See, there is no difference between Democrats and Republicans—when, in fact, we all know there are substantial differences in priorities, in views of America, and whose side we are on.

As a strategy, we have seen filibuster after filibuster and something called “cloture” in the Senate which, to the average person, basically means we are seeing filibusters, a requirement for 60 votes rather than just a majority, which is how we should be operating under the democratic process.

We have seen a historic number. Never before, in fact, have we seen, at this point in time, 52 filibusters—52 and counting. My guess is next week it will be 53 and 54 and 55 and 56 and go on and on in efforts to slow things down, efforts to slow down the new direction we believe in, that we are fighting for, to slow down those things that will make a real difference in the lives of Americans.

We understand the strategy. We operate under this every week. We come to the floor and have to fight to get beyond a filibuster. I am proud to say we have done that. As we come to the end of our first year as a majority, we are, in fact, changing the direction of this country. We are, in fact, getting results for Americans, for middle-class Americans, who work hard every day and want somebody to be fighting for them, for an opportunity for them and