

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

their children to have the American dream. I am very proud of that, despite 52 filibusters.

We have a leader who is tenacious, who is determined, who is smart—who comes to the floor every day and spends his time trying to make sure we can stop the filibusters and refocus on getting results for middle-class Americans. That is what we have done. I wish to take a moment today to share some of the results we are getting. Is it slower than we would like? Yes, when you are trying to battle 52 filibusters, things are slower than we would like to have happen. But we are not going to stop because this is not about politics. This should not be about election year strategy. This is about people every day in this country who see the American dream slipping away from them, who are worried their children will not have the same opportunities for our great American life that we have had. They are saying to us we want you to go in and fight for us and the greatness of America. We want to make sure that opportunity is there for everybody. That is what America is all about.

We are, in fact, getting results for middle-class Americans every single day, those folks who believe—and for good reason have believed for the past 6 years under this President and the former Congress—that nobody is looking out for them and the opportunities they need. We are, in fact, getting results for middle-class Americans.

We started this year—it is amazing to me to hear colleagues speak about how there is not a budget so far, when in fact they didn't even do a budget at all last year, not at all. We got to the end of the year: No budget. So we came in as a new majority and we had to go back and clean things up from the previous majority. We had to go back, figure out a way to get a budget for the current year that was already going, that had already been in place for 3 or 4 months. We, in fact, did that, and we did a number of things in that process, in putting that budget together—even though it was a continuation budget for the rest of the year, to complete the business that had not been done in the last Congress. But we also did a few things in that process. We said, even though this is a short-term continuation budget, there are too many young people struggling to go to college, so we put in a Pell increase. We said, there are too many veterans who have served us proudly, who are coming back from Iraq and Afghanistan and don't have the health care they need, so we put in some additional dollars for veterans health care into that budget.

We passed that continuation budget and then we went to work on the budget that, in fact, we are responsible for. After having done the work of our Republican colleagues, we put in place the budget we are now working on for this coming year. We did several things. We said: First of all, we know in the last 6 years we have seen record

deficits mount. In 2001, when President Bush came into office, when I first became a member of the Budget Committee, we saw the largest budget surpluses in the history of the country. That was squandered and turned into the largest deficits, which affect Social Security, which jeopardize Medicare and puts incredible pressure on critical safety net issues and programs for Americans, for families, and for seniors. So we said we are going to stop the digging. We know there is a hole that has been created. We are going to stop the digging and start taking us out of that hole by being fiscally responsible.

We put back in place something that was in place during President Clinton's years, which was to pay for spending. What a novel idea. That is something I try to teach my children, something we all should live by: Pay as you go; if you add something, you need to subtract something else to pay for it. So we said fiscal responsibility is important, and within that we put together a budget resolution that targeted those things middle-class Americans want to have us place as priorities: Education, No. 1; keeping our promise to our veterans, the second top priority; and children's health care, for moms and dads who are working hard every single day and could stay home and not work and qualify for Medicaid, but they choose to work.

We value work. We as a party, we as a majority, value work and want to support work. Families working hard for minimum wage in low-wage jobs, who cannot afford insurance, who don't have it on the job, ought to at least know their children can get the health insurance they need.

That is what we have been debating. That was a third priority for us, children's health care.

Then we said we are going to go back and we are going to restore the cuts in police officers on the streets. Our families, our communities want to know that their children are safe, that their homes are safe, that they are safe. We restored the COPS—police officers and firefighters, those things that are fundamental in America—safety.

We put together this budget resolution, and we are now in the process, despite filibuster after filibuster, to put the actual budget in place, the appropriations for next year.

But we have also done other things, despite 52 filibusters. We have raised the minimum wage which has not been raised for close to 10 years. Those same families—who appreciate and need to know their children can get health insurance—have not had a raise in the minimum wage for about 10 years, so we raised the minimum wage.

We then took a look at what we need to do in education and not only meeting the obligations and the promises of the laws put in place under Leave No Child Behind and the standards, but we said part of the American dream, a very important part, is being able to go to college.

So we have passed, on a bipartisan basis, and the President signed it, and we are very grateful for that—we have passed the largest increase in aid for students going to college since the GI bill, the largest financial aid since the GI bill.

We gave the second Pell grant increase this year—the second. We have done it twice now this year, to bring back the value of the Pell grant for low-income students. We have cut in half the rates for subsidized loans. We do not believe young people or older people who are going to school and getting the skills they need to compete in a global economy and make America stronger should be able—we do not believe they should come out with this huge debt that takes years and years and years to pay back.

We want to help them, both on interest rates, and we made a number of changes that make that loan process more manageable. We have targeted teachers and are encouraging teachers teaching students with high achievement to receive extra support for going into math and science and other areas that are needed in certain parts of our communities.

We have also put a loan forgiveness program in place. Bottom line, we have passed, and we, in fact, have said, education is important, and we have now done it, the largest increase in student financial aid since the GI bill.

We also did something else on a bipartisan basis. We passed the America COMPETES Act, a major focus in investment. By the way, fully paid for, all of those things are fully paid for. A major investment in math and science and technology, both in terms of education and in terms of research—this was, again, bipartisan and something that we were proud to place as a priority for this Senate. So education is at the top of the list.

We have passed cuts in taxes for small businesses as part of an effort to spur—we know the economy, the majority of the jobs, are created by small businesses. We want to support our small businesses and farmers as well as larger businesses. We have done that through various tax cuts. We have passed changes in the FDA to improve safety. We have passed a mental health parity bill to say mental health services should be available just as physical health services are available, through the health care system. If you have insurance, both should be available.

We have reauthorized Head Start because we know education is not just about college, it is about children and whether they are prepared to start at the beginning of education. We have focused on Head Start.

We know it is incredibly important that we keep us safe both at home and abroad. I am very proud of the fact that after years of trying, under the previous Congress, Democrats have been able to lead the effort to pass the 9/11 Commission recommendations. One

area of major focus for me has been on making sure the radios work, making sure that police and fire and homeland security and the State departments can all communicate. We have addressed that and passed funding efforts to be able to focus on that.

In addition, we have, as I mentioned earlier, focused on our veterans. It is shameful that we have not seen the resources put forth to support our veterans as they have been coming home from Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as our older veterans from other wars.

We, as Democrats, have made that a top priority. I am very proud of that. I know in meeting with veterans organizations that they have worked closely with us. And for the first time—for the first time—those veterans organizations have been listened to and have been a part of the process. We are funding the needed services in health care, rehabilitation, other areas, at the level that our veterans organizations have indicated we should be funding them.

So we have veterans as a top priority. We are seeing changes. We have also addressed what happened at Walter Reed through the Wounded Warrior Act. I am so proud that my colleague, the senior Senator from Michigan, has led that effort to be able to focus on wounded warriors and those who get caught between the military system and the VA system.

I will just mention a couple of other things because I could go on for a long time. There is a lot we have been getting done. Despite 52 filibusters and counting, there is a lot that we have been getting done, from ethics and lobbying reform, to help with the gulf coast revitalization, folks down in New Orleans and Mississippi, those areas that have been so devastated; reinvestment in our bridges and infrastructure; and our continuing effort to fight to change the direction in Iraq and to focus on counterterrorism and those things that will keep us safe.

We have held the President accountable. The Attorney General position has changed because the political efforts going on in the Attorney General's Office were brought forward and publicized. The light of day was shone. In fact, the Attorney General was forced to step down because of the questions and bringing to light what was happening in that department.

So there is a whole range of areas of accountability where tough questions have been asked about war profiteering, about other areas where we need to change the priorities of this Government to reflect what Americans are concerned about.

People work too hard for their money. They want to know that public services work. They want to know that we are fiscally responsible. They want to know that we are focused on the things that directly affect them and their families. We have a great country. I am very proud to be part of a majority that understands what is happening in this country today; that we

are in a fight for our way of life in a global economy.

We want this to be a race up, through education, innovation, fair trade laws, changing the way we fund health care, supporting our businesses that want to stay in the United States and do business here and employ here. We do not want a race to the bottom, a strategy that has been used by this President and the former Congress, saying: If you only work for less, we can be competitive. If you only lose your health care and lose your pension, we can be competitive. We do not care about safety standards. We let lead toys in or we let toothpaste in or dog food in because we are not worried about our trade laws. Somehow we can be competitive if we lose our standard of living.

We do not buy that. This caucus does not buy that. This Democratic Senate and House is fighting for our American way of life. We have placed the priorities of the middle-class Americans at the top of the list. They have had to wait too long for that to happen. And despite over and over again, filibuster after filibuster after filibuster to slow things down, with the determination, the tenacity of our Senate majority leader, and the support of our Members, we are getting results. We are getting results every day for middle-class Americans.

We will not lose our focus. I do not care if there are another 50 filibusters or if there are another 100 filibusters, we are going to keep focused on those things that have created the American dream, that have created the greatest country in the world.

We are going to make sure middle-class Americans know we are here fighting for those things they care about for their families.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The junior Senator from Tennessee.

TRIBUTE TO BENJAMIN HOOKS

Mr. CORKER. Mr. President, I rise today to honor an exceptional Tennessean and a pioneer in the civil rights movement. Benjamin Hooks was born in Memphis, TN, in 1925, the fifth of seven children by Robert and Bessie Hooks.

He grew up in a loving family who taught him to succeed in both education and life. After high school, Dr. Hooks began his higher education by taking pre-law classes at LeMoyné College in Memphis. Prior to finishing his degree, he was drafted into the Army, honorably serving our country in World War II. When he returned home, he went to graduate school at Howard University and afterwards received a law degree from DePaul University in Chicago.

As Dr. Hooks went through life and excelled in various endeavors, there was one experience that greatly molded the future direction of his life: being born into and growing up in the

scourge of racial segregation. After Dr. Hooks graduated college, he returned home and vowed to do his part to end racial segregation.

Initially, he fought the fight by becoming one of the first African-American lawyers in Tennessee. It was during this time he met and married Ms. Frances Dancy. Frances was a school teacher and guidance counselor. Eventually, her career took a different path, and she became her husband's assistant, adviser, and traveling companion. They had one daughter together, Patricia Hooks Gray.

As Dr. Hooks continued to practice law, he was called to fight for civil rights from another forum, the ministry. In 1956, he was ordained a Baptist minister and began to preach regularly at the Middle Baptist Church in Memphis, TN. It was there he joined Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Southern Christian Leadership Conference and became a pioneer in the NAACP-sponsored restaurant sit-ins and other boycotts.

Through these efforts, he became a respected voice in the community and in the State. In 1965, Gov. Frank Clement appointed him to become the first African-American criminal court judge in Tennessee history.

His efforts as a preacher, judge, and civil rights pioneer eventually led Hooks to Washington, DC, to become the first African-American appointee to the Federal Communications Commission. There he continued the civil rights fight by addressing numerous minority representation issues in the communications industry.

In 1976, he was elected as the executive director of the NAACP, where he led that organization for more than 15 years. As a director, he helped to increase membership and fundraising efforts, as well as plan for the organization's future for 17 years.

He also broadened the scope of the NAACP by exploring national issues such as energy, the environment, the criminal justice system, welfare, and national health insurance.

Throughout his work as a civil rights advocate, he has received numerous awards, including the Humanitarian Award from the National Conference of Christians and Jews, and the Freedom Award from the National Civil Rights Museum.

The University of Memphis created the Benjamin L. Hooks Institute for Social Change, honoring Benjamin Hooks. The Hooks Institute works to advance understanding of the civil rights movement through teaching, research, and community programs and put an emphasis on social movements, race relations, strong communities, public education, effective public participation, and social and economic justice.

On Monday, I am pleased that Dr. Hooks will receive one more honor, one of the highest civilian awards: the Presidential Medal of Freedom. This medal is given to individuals who have