

survive, going to soup kitchens and pantries to supplement their income.

Over the Christmas holidays—as many of us do—I visited some of those places, and I met a lot of people who work 40 hours a week. They come to the soup kitchens, they come to the pantries because that is the one way to supplement their income. Well, we can do better. We need to increase the Federal minimum wage. And as Senator REID said, it is one of our highest priorities.

Senator McCONNELL said, a few moments ago, when it comes to the Medicare prescription Part D program, he will not stand by and allow us to scrap the program. I say: Hear, hear. We do not want to scrap the program. It is long overdue. Prescription drugs under Medicare keep our seniors healthy, independent, and strong. But, sadly, we know the reality that when that bill was passed, it was written by the pharmaceutical industry. It took competition out of the program so they could charge higher prices. It created a maze of opportunities, but a maze of choices for many seniors who were bewildered by what to do. It created a doughnut hole, a period of time where seniors who were the sickest had no coverage whatsoever.

So I would say to my colleague on the other side of the aisle, we are not going to scrap it. We are going to do our best to improve it. And we can improve it, bring in some competition so we have reasonable cost drugs, so we have more coverage for seniors across America.

There is an old saying that there is no education in the second kick of a mule. No matter what side of the aisle we are on, there is a lesson for all of us. The American people have given us today a rare opportunity in our history. They have given us an order, too, to chart a better course for this Nation. They have asked us to listen. And if, at the end of the day, we play to a draw on these major issues—if we do not achieve results, if we do not show a good-faith effort toward compromise and cooperation—they will be just as harsh in their judgment 2 years from now as they were last November. And we deserve it.

As we begin anew this Congress, we need to resolve together, on a bipartisan basis, to find that path to a better and stronger America.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New York.

IMPORTANT PRIORITIES

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I rise as well to speak about our priorities that Senator REID has introduced. First, I compliment him for his vision and drive toward shaping these priorities, and his leadership that will ensure the Senate makes the concerns of the average American family our top priority.

I thank my colleague from Illinois, Senator DURBIN, who, as always, is able

to articulate in a very smart way, but also a way the average person can understand, how important these priorities are to us.

I also, in advance, thank my colleague Senator MURRAY for being here, and who again, in her usual wise and thoughtful way, will help us let the American people know what our priorities are.

Now, I wore a blue suit today, naturally, because we are all excited over the election in November. But in our excitement, we have to remember that we are here because of the people who sent us here, and to realize their desire for change, to make their lives better. We know a bipartisan approach is the best and perhaps the only way we will get this done.

If all our exultation and happiness today—and, believe me, I stood there with pride watching the new Members in particular be sworn in, knowing how fine they are, what a diverse group of people they are—the thing they share in common is coming from the bosom of the people of their State. Each one, each of the new representatives, each of the new Senators represents the people of their State.

They come to us with a message, and I don't think the message is left, right, or center, as some of the pundits have said. The message is to keep your eyes focused on the average family. All too often we in Washington get lost in the world of Washington. Too often politics here seems to be a minutiae, shadow boxing, sometimes real boxing, where each party and each individual is seeking advantage over the other, and the focus on getting something done—something done for the American people—gets lost.

If there was one message that this election had, I think that is it. The American people were pleading with us, crying out to us with a strong but plaintive voice: Help us. The world is changing, and we see that world change in every way. Technology has dramatically affected everything we do, whether it is terrorism, where technology has enabled small groups of bad people to hurt us; whether it is jobs in education, where we now have a one-world labor market, and our workers, our kids in the third grade are going to be competing not simply against the kids in the third grade across the hallway but the kids in the third grade in China, India, and Brazil; whether it is the technology that has allowed us to live longer.

I read somewhere that a little girl born today, if she lives in the early months and up to a year old, could well live to be 100. And not very unusually, that would almost be the average. That is incredible. What that means is new problems for Social Security and Medicare. It also means that our whole lifestyle changes as people get married later, have children later, and retire and have many years of leisure in life. So technology is changing everything.

The old messages—whether they be, in my judgment, the old Democratic

new deal message or the old Reagan Republican message—just don't work anymore. Voters, in November, didn't tell us to adopt a certain ideology or philosophy or even party. Their message to Washington was to stop fighting with each other and finally get something done for average Americans who are in more need of help now as the world changes quickly and dramatically.

The average American wants us to get to work on issues that matter to them on a daily basis: making them more secure, lifesaving medical research, fair wages, comprehensive immigration reform, energy independence, and affordable education and prescription drugs. They want us to go to work for them again. That is what we are going to do.

The 10 bills we have introduced are all aimed right at the heart of the average American in the sense of saying to the average American: We do know what you need, what you have asked us to do, and we are going to do our best to help you.

Make no mistake; overall, families are doing quite well, but they are beginning to hurt in certain ways: high gas prices, skyrocketing tuition, prescription drugs. These are all things the average person worries about that they probably didn't worry about 10 years ago. These first 10 bills that we are going to introduce represent the Democratic priorities for the Senate and the country. These bills take aim at making education and prescription drugs more affordable. They address our goals for energy independence, better homeland security, innovative medical research, a modernized military, and comprehensive immigration reform—priorities that have been neglected for far too long.

I first want to express my enthusiastic support for our bill to address college affordability, S. 7, which my colleagues will also address. We know we must make it easier for families to send their kids to college. As tuition costs rise, it gets harder and harder for them to do it. As college becomes more of a necessity, it also becomes less affordable. That is the dilemma we face. We are facing a critical time with this challenge coming, when a college education is vital not only to one's individual future but to our Nation's prosperity and independence.

We are competing now in a global market connected by technology, and we need a well-educated workforce. That is why I introduced upon arriving in the Senate a bill to permit a college tuition tax deduction. I have worked to support it ever since. We must ensure that this deduction does not expire, as it nearly did in December, by making it permanent. And we must do more. Just getting by is not enough when it comes to sending our kids to college. We must address other aspects of college costs, including Pell grants, loans, and lowering interest payments on loans. I know my colleague, Senator

KENNEDY, has big plans for addressing these issues. Just as I will work hard on the Finance Committee on the tuition issue, he, in the HELP Committee, will be leading many of my colleagues on those issues there.

What I have been asked to spend a few minutes to talk about is S. 4, a bill to implement the recommendations of the national commission on terrorist acts, the 9/11 Commission. It has now been over 5 years since the tragedy and devastation of September 11. On that day, our Nation changed irrevocably with the knowledge that terrorist forces, motivated by hatred, have the determination and ability to threaten America on our own soil. My own city of New York knows this devastation and tragedy well. On that day, and in the days following, we lost thousands of our friends and family members, including hundreds of brave firefighters and police officers who died trying to save others. We owe it to all those who lost their lives on that day to take up and implement the commission's recommendations.

On that day, it was clear that much needed to be done to improve the security of our homeland. The President and Congress responded in part by establishing the 9/11 Commission. This bipartisan commission did its work thoroughly and well, devising 41 core recommendations to prevent, defend against, and respond to the threat of future terrorist attacks. Each one of the recommendations was a vital part of the Commission's charge to Congress and the President. Yet Americans have not just been gravely disappointed but also endangered by the failure to implement all of the recommendations of the 9/11 Commission. It is high time for this failure to be rectified.

S. 4 expresses the sense of Congress that we must immediately work toward passage of legislation that will, after far too long, implement the solutions carefully crafted at our request. As the committee puts together a final detailed bill, S. 4 will serve as an important symbol of our priority for securing our Nation by implementing the recommendations. We have made some improvements since 9/11, but we still have so far to go.

America simply cannot wait any longer to fully protect our homeland. Whether it is improving communications between first responders, ensuring that law enforcement shares information about threats, or securing our transportation systems, which I know my colleague from Washington has worked on, we have a whole lot to do. We cannot wait longer for decisive action to stop weapons of mass destruction from falling into the hands of terrorists entering our country or being built by those who would destroy us. We cannot wait any longer to better combat the violent extremism that is growing around the globe.

This is only the beginning of the work that remains to be done. We have heard so much talk about homeland se-

curity in the years and days since 9/11, but in all this time we have seen far too little action. In the 110th Congress, at last that shameful state of affairs must and will come to an end.

In conclusion, the voters in November gave us great honor but humbling responsibility. We must now rise to meet that responsibility by returning the focus of our work to the basic needs of American families. Today is the first and important step toward meeting that responsibility.

So as we start this new Congress, I look forward to working with our Republican colleagues and the President to deliver these priorities for American families. Those families deserve no less.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SALAZAR). The Senator from Washington is recognized.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I am honored to be here with my Democratic colleague today. I listened to the Senator from New York talk about our top 10 priorities. Senator REID, our new majority leader, and Senator DURBIN before me talked about how we now in this new majority are going to focus on the real issues affecting American families. I congratulate Senators REID, the new majority leader, and MCCONNELL, the Republican leader, for setting the right tone today by bringing us together this morning and reminding us all that we are here together to work on a very important agenda for the American people. We will have our disagreements, our partisan battles, but at the end of the day we have to move legislation forward because if there was any message to me out of the November election that brought us to the majority now, it was that people want us to get past the partisan rancor on the floor of the Senate. They want us to get past the bickering. They expect debates, they like that, but at the end of the day they want us to move forward.

Across this country today, American families are struggling to send their kids to college, struggling to get health care, struggling with their pensions, struggling with their salaries, and they expect us, the 100 leaders of the Senate, to be here together to solve those issues in a way that moves them forward and gives promise and hope to the next generation.

Mr. President, that is what the top 10 priorities are that our new majority leader set out for us today. They are bills that focus on bringing back hope and opportunity for the thousands of American families that are hoping today that we have heard them and that we will respond and work hard to make sure their lives are better.

I am pleased that we are beginning next week with ethics reform. I think it is important to start with a strong message that we understand we have a responsibility to uphold the honor of this Senate, not just for today but for many years to come. I am very excited that within a few weeks we will be

talking about the minimum wage for the families out there who are struggling so hard to make sure they do the right thing for their kids and to send them a message that we understand and we are going to do a little bit to help them.

Senator SCHUMER talked about the 9/11 Commission and implementing their report—something we should have done long ago. The security of this Nation, people's fear about where we are, is a message that we all need to understand. I am pleased that is part of the top 10 priorities of this new Congress. In dealing with the Medicare prescription drug plan, I have met with many seniors in my home State and they are confused and frustrated. They are angry as they fall into the doughnut hole and realize that the promise we have given them of prescription drugs is not meeting that expectation, and we have a responsibility to do better. I hope that we can.

I heard Senator MCCONNELL a short while ago say he didn't want us to tear apart the Medicare prescription drug plan. Nobody does. We want to make it work. I hope we can work together in cooperation and make that happen. Stem cell research: The Senator from Iowa will be speaking in a few minutes. He has been a leader on that issue. It is about promise and hope for so many American families. I hope we can move it quickly through the Senate, through the House, and to the President's desk. If we have to, I hope we have the votes to override. Far too many families struggle today, and we should at least send them the promise of the future as generations before did for us. Energy independence is critical in my State and across the Nation. It is something I hear about everywhere I go.

Strengthening our military: Certainly, that is important today, as we know we face terrorism across the globe, and we have exhausted our forces in Iraq. We have to make sure that we work together in a bipartisan manner to strengthen our military not just for today but for those who come behind us.

Included in that for me is taking care of those who have served us, our veterans, keeping the promise we made to them when they served us overseas, that we will be there when they come home. We cannot tolerate the long lines our men and women are in, the fact that they are coming home and cannot get a job; that the unemployment rate for 18- to 24-year-olds who served in Iraq and Afghanistan is three times the national average. We have a lot of work to do there. I am pleased our leader has put out immigration. This is an issue the Senate has worked through. It is a tough one, but it is one that, if we work together, we can move forward.

Many other issues are coming before us, but one I want to mention, in my last few minutes, is the issue of education. That is the backbone of our country, it always has been: making

sure young people today can grow up and know that if they choose, they can go to college and it is affordable.

I am especially delighted that S. 7, one of the top 10 priorities, addresses the issue of college affordability. It is very disheartening to me to walk into a middle school today and have seventh and eighth graders say to me: Why should I get good grades; I can't afford to go to college. That is not the message we should be sending. We should be sending the message to them that if they work hard and get good grades, they will go to college.

We have to address that issue in the Senate. We all know the jobs of the future depend on our young people today and whether they get the education they need, and the money should not be a barrier.

I know this issue. Money was not a barrier for me when I was growing up. My father was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis when I was in high school. There are seven kids in our family. We all thought the door had been shut to us and the ability to go to college. But not so because leaders in the Senate stood up before I ever knew about them and said we need to have Pell grants and student loans and we need to make college affordable.

So all seven kids in my family—despite the fact my dad could no longer work and was confined to a wheelchair, that my mom had to go on welfare, she had to go back to school herself and raise seven kids—we were able to go to college on Pell grants and student loans. All seven of us graduated and went on and one of us became a Senator.

We should not be shutting that door of hope to any young American today. No matter what happens to them personally, no matter what their circumstances, no matter what State, city or community they grow up in, we want them to know the United States of America and leaders in their country know it is important for them to get an education.

So as we move forward in this session of Congress, we are going to focus on college affordability and making sure that the backbone of our country is strong once again.

We have much work ahead of us. We do need to work together. Mr. President, 51 to 49 in the Senate is very close, but we know that the issues in this country are extremely important and the families in this country are counting on us.

I look forward to working with all of my colleagues to achieve an agenda that sends that promise of hope once again.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, first, I thank the Senator from Washington for a very eloquent and very profound statement. The message the Senator from Washington put forward on the Senate floor is one that all Americans

ought to hear. It is a message of hope and promise.

I thank the Senator from Washington for her leadership in so many areas but especially in the area about which she spoke so eloquently—the area of education. I had not known that about her family. It brings home once again that in the America we love, anything should be possible for any child. No child should be deprived of the hopes and dreams of having an education and succeeding in life simply because they were born poor or born on the wrong side of the tracks, so to speak, or maybe the wrong color—whatever. Every child ought to have that opportunity.

I thank the Senator for so eloquently putting it forward on the Senate floor.

STEM CELL RESEARCH

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, I wish to pick up a little bit from Senator MURRAY's remarks and talk about S. 5, the stem cell bill, that was also introduced today by the majority leader, Senator REID.

Stem cell research, when it is stripped of all of the phony arguments and rhetoric, is basically about hope. It is hope for people with Lou Gehrig's disease. It is hope for people with spinal cord injuries, hope for kids suffering from juvenile diabetes, hope for people with Parkinson's disease.

In this Congress, we are going to bring those hopes one giant step closer to reality. At long last, hopefully, we will lift the President's restrictions on stem cell research and finally give our Nation's best scientists the tools they need to produce treatments and cures.

The bill we have introduced today, S. 5, the Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act of 2007, is the exact same bill that passed both Houses last year with strong bipartisan support. The House passed the bill 238 to 194. The Senate passed it 63 to 37.

Regrettably, the President chose to exercise his first and only veto of his administration in vetoing this bill. And with his veto, the President ignored the will of the American people, he ignored scores of Nobel laureates, he ignored top scientists at the National Institutes of Health, and with one stroke of his pen, he dashed the hopes of millions of Americans suffering from diseases that could one day be cured or treated through stem cell research.

But now we are back, it is a new Congress, and the voices of hope are stronger than ever. In November, the American people elected many new Members of Congress who support stem cell research and replaced many former Members of Congress who opposed this research. As a result, we will pass this bill again this year, and the margins of victory will be even wider.

Let me spend a moment reviewing what S. 5 would accomplish. More than 5 years ago, the President announced in a speech that federally funded scientists could conduct research only on

embryonic stem cell lines that were derived prior to 9 p.m. on August 9, 2001. The President gave his speech that evening, August 9, 2001. He said all of those stem cell lines derived before 9 p.m., that was OK, but if they were derived after 9 p.m., they could not be funded with Federal funds. I never understood that. Why was it 9 p.m.? Why wasn't it 9:15 p.m. or maybe 8:45, 9:13? Why was it 9 p.m.? At the beginning, one has to question the logic of why 9 p.m. was the time barrier.

When the President announced his policy, he said that 78 stem cell lines were eligible for research. We now know that is not so. Only 21 are eligible, not nearly enough to reflect the genetic diversity of this Nation.

What is more, every one of those lines, all 21 of those lines are contaminated with mouse cells. They were grown on mouse cells, so they are all contaminated. So none of them will ever be used for any kind of human treatment.

Meanwhile, hundreds of new stem cell lines have been derived since the President's arbitrary deadline. Many of these lines are uncontaminated, they are healthy, but they are totally off limits to federally funded scientists.

That is really a shame because if we are serious about realizing the promise of stem cell research, our scientists need access to the best stem cell lines possible. We need a stem cell policy that offers true and meaningful hope. That is what S. 5 would provide.

Under this bill, federally funded researchers could study any stem cell line, regardless of the date it was derived, as long as certain strong ethical guidelines are met. I point out, again, as I have in the past and I will continue to point out, that the ethical guidelines in S. 5 are stronger than the ethical guidelines under the existing policy.

What are those guidelines?

One, no money can be exchanged. No one can ever be paid for donating embryos.

Second, these embryos can only be used for stem cell research and for nothing else.

And third, the donors have to give informed consent for them to be used.

The final point is most important. The only way a stem cell line could be eligible for this federally funded research is if it were derived from an embryo that was otherwise going to be discarded. Let me, again, say what that means.

There are more than 400,000 embryos frozen in in vitro fertilization clinics all over the country—over 400,000. Right now, the only thing that can happen to those is that they be discarded. They are thrown away every day. Every day embryos are discarded in in vitro fertilization clinics all over America. The donors have no other choice.

Take friends of mine, a young couple. They couldn't have children. They finally went to an IVF clinic. That