

it up for a vote, let's take the amendments that are available, move it forward, get a vote, and get a bill to the President that he can sign.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Tennessee.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Will the Chair kindly let me know when I have used 8 minutes?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator will be notified.

STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, last night the President spoke to the Nation in his State of the Union Address. It is one of the great traditions of American Government. One of the most interesting parts of this spectator sport is to watch and see who stands up on which issue when the President talks or who is sitting by whom. It is well watched across our country, and it is a sign of respect to the Presidency as an institution.

The President was in a good mood. It was his eighth such address. He was reflective, but he was decisive. He looked ahead. He talked about the issues facing our country. He did his job, and he challenged us to do ours.

The President devoted a good deal of time to the progress of the war in Iraq, and we devoted a good deal of time today to making sure we have a strong system of intelligence to protect ourselves from terrorists. So I wish to comment on what the President talked about at home, because a great deal of what President Bush said last night was that as important as our role is in the world, as important as the long-term fight against terrorism is, we have work to do at home, and we need to roll up our sleeves and get busy.

This is a Presidential year. Many of the pundits are saying, some politicians even: The Congress will get nothing done. We Republicans believe there is no excuse for taking a year off, given the number of serious issues facing our country. Let me mention a few the President discussed last night.

To begin with, the American economy. The President acknowledged that as strong as our economy is, 52 quarters of growing jobs, it has taken a downward turn, and we need to take appropriate action to help it continue to produce more jobs. That means steps that are temporary, targeted, and that grow the economy and not the Government.

The President has agreed with the Speaker of the House and the Republican leader of the House on a simple package that is aimed to do that: rebates for individuals, most of whom pay taxes, and incentives to small businesses to create new jobs. It is a simple idea.

Speaking as one Senator, I do not believe we can afford to let this economic growth package, which should pass the House today, become a Christmas tree in the Senate for everyone's favorite idea for spending taxpayers' dollars.

I have some ideas. I think every Member of the Senate has some ideas. But maybe we should recognize the American people would like to see us act and act promptly and act decisively.

Someone has said the Senate wishes to speak on the issue. I know very well none of us is guilty, usually, of having an unexpressed thought. We love to speak. But one way for us to speak is to say to the House of Representatives: Madam Speaker, and to the House itself, we agree with you. We think your package is simple, temporary, targeted, and a good idea. And to the President: Mr. President, each of us might have written the package a little differently, but we agree with you and we are ready to pass it before the end of next week.

I would like to write it differently, but I like the idea that it goes mostly to taxpayers, that it is family friendly, that it gives incentives to small business, and that it temporarily helps with housing.

I believe it is important for our Government, particularly at this moment, to send a strong message that we will take the action appropriate to keep the economy strong and that we are capable of functioning as a Government and working in bipartisan ways to deal with real issues.

The American people are tired of petty politics. They are tired of playpen politics on the Senate floor. They do not believe they elected us to stick our fingers in the eyes of the Democrats or the Democrats to stick their fingers in our eyes. We have a good example of our leadership working together with the President, and as one Senator, my recommendation is we support what the President and the House of Representatives is about to do.

The President said we should get to work this year to make sure every American can have access to health care insurance. At our Republican conference last week, that was the first item on our agenda, and I believe it is fair for me to say virtually every single Republican Senator believes every American should be insured and is ready to go to work this year to help make that possible.

The President talked about his plan, which he talked about last year, to redo our Tax Code so dollars would be available to American families to buy at least a basic health care policy that they wouldn't lose when they change jobs.

We have had a number of Senators on this side—Senator BURR, Senator CORKER, Senator COBURN, for example, Senator BENNETT who has authored a bill with Senator WYDEN, which has significant bipartisan support. We are all ready to go to work this year. We believe we should start this year to help make sure every American is insured.

Runaway Federal spending. The President talked about controlling en-

titlement spending. This is an issue that is beginning to get the country's attention, and it should have the country's attention. It certainly has mine.

What do we mean by entitlement spending? We mean 40 percent of the budget is Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid, and it goes up automatically every year. Over the next 10 years, the annual growth of Social Security is predicted to be about 6 percent, according to the Congressional Budget Office, Medicare about 7.2 percent, Medicaid about 8 percent. Entitlement spending and interest on the debt is 60 percent of every dollar we spend. Another 20 percent is defense, the war and other necessary actions to defend ourselves, and 19 percent is everything else.

The "everything else" was flat last year. The Congressional Budget Office says the "everything else"—that is, parks and roads and many of the items Americans believe Government ought to be doing—that is going to go up about 2 percent annually over the next 10 years, according to the Congressional Budget Office. Our defense goes up 3 percent annually, and entitlement spending goes up 7 or 8 percent.

Senator GREGG and Senator BOND have pointed out to us—they are the heads of our Budget Committee—that we pretty soon are going to be faced with an absolutely impossible situation that will require massive cuts in benefits, massive tax increases that the net worth even of this great country will not be able to pay, and that every year we wait, we risk another problem. The President said to do something about it. He challenged us to do it, and Senator GREGG and Senator BOND have a proposal to do that. We should act on it this year.

That is not all there is to holding down spending. The President mentioned earmarks. There are too many earmarks. They are not as transparent as they ought to be. That is a smaller part of the budget. It is our constitutional responsibility to deal with earmarks, but we should do that ourselves. We should begin that this year.

We could pass a 2-year budget plan, such as Senator DOMENICI and Senator LIEBERMAN and Senator FEINGOLD at various times have proposed, and Senator SESSIONS, Senator ISAKSON. That would give us oversight to repeal rules and regulations every other year. So there are three ways to get a handle on Federal spending.

Senator HUTCHISON and Senator BINGAMAN have been leaders, as well as others here, on keeping good jobs from going overseas. We passed the America COMPETES Act last year, and the President challenged us to fund it this year. He is right about that.

Finally, President Bush mentioned something that is close to my heart. He called it the Pell grants for kids. I remember being in a visit with him a couple years ago, and he said to me: We have to do something about inner-city children who cannot afford to go to

good schools. Why don't we have Pell grants for kids? I said: Mr. President, I had a hearing on that idea last month. He looked at me and said: I thought it was my idea. I said: Mr. President, it is your idea. Any idea the President has is his idea, but he had it before anyone suggested it to him.

The idea is very simple. We take this brilliant idea that Congress has invented over the last 50 years of giving money directly to college students which they can spend at any institution of education of their choice—public, private, nonprofit, Catholic, Jewish, the University of Tennessee, Notre Dame, National Auto Diesel College. As long as it is accredited, they can go there, and it especially helps those with less money. Let's try that with the poorest children.

Sixteen years ago, when I was Education Secretary, the first President Bush proposed a GI bill for kids. Much the same idea. It was the largest provision in his budget, half a billion dollars that year, to give poor kids access to some of the same educational opportunities others had.

I proposed, in a Pell grants for kids version, that we give every child, the middle- and low-income children—that is 60 percent of them all \$500 for after-school programs or other programs. The President has advanced the idea.

President Bush has painted a strong agenda for America this year. He has said let's give a boost to the economy, let's begin to give every American health insurance, let's control entitlement spending, let's fund programs to keep good jobs here, and let's give poor children an opportunity to go to more of the better schools. He has challenged us to go to work. We are ready to go to work. We are ready to get results, which means working across the aisle in a bipartisan way.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, may I inquire how much time remains on our side?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. There is 11 minutes remaining.

Mr. CORNYN. I appreciate that, Mr. President.

BIPARTISANSHIP

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, when I came to Washington about 5 years ago, a colleague of mine said: Welcome to Washington, DC. It is about 8 square miles of logic-free environment, where perception is reality.

I always chuckled when he would say that, and I have repeated it myself a few times to audiences back home in Texas because I think it, unfortunately, has a grain of truth to it. One reason I think people chuckle at that, and maybe groan a little bit inside when Washington is described that way, is because we send out such contradictory messages at the same time.

The Speaker of the House of Representatives and the Republican leader,

Mr. BOEHNER, and the President of the United States have come together and said: We have come up with a bipartisan package to stimulate our economy; to make sure, if it is possible, that we avoid a recession that puts many Americans out of work and hurts them in an economic and personal way.

That was a very welcome message that I heard and the public heard, and I think it was a hopeful one. I, for one, hoped it would signal some kind of new period of cooperation in light of the fact that, frankly, what we had been doing was not working very well, as evidenced by one of the historic lows in congressional approval ratings as a result of the dysfunction in the Senate, and Congress as a whole, last year.

By that I mean you will recall we didn't pass but 1 of the 12 appropriations bills on a timely basis by the end of the fiscal year last year, so we had to roll everything into a big Omnibus appropriations bill. Some say "ominous" appropriations bill, and I think that is an apt description. It was chock full of earmarks and things that people hadn't had adequate time to scrutinize, much less to debate and shine the sunlight of public scrutiny on. So I would hope we would learn from the dysfunction of last year and we would look to the example of bipartisan cooperation as evidenced by the House of Representatives and the White House on the economic stimulus.

Of course, it wasn't limited just to appropriations last year. We saw basically a standstill, after 36 votes on Iraq, on nonbinding resolutions calling for unilateral withdrawal. Finally, we passed, at the very end of last year, a \$70 billion emergency appropriations so that our troops in Afghanistan and Iraq would get the support we owe them as a moral obligation, as a sign of our commitment to support the troops, to protect our national security interests. But it took us a long time and a lot of hot air to finally get there.

Then, of course, there was the alternative minimum tax, which, true to form, people said: Well, let's tax the rich. Originally, it was designed to tax 155 taxpayers. Last year, it affected 6 million people. And if we hadn't acted, which we finally did at the end of last year, it would have affected 23 million middle American taxpayers. Thank goodness we were finally able to get the work done, that was our responsibility, but not, frankly, in good form last year.

So it is with some hope that we find ourselves learning from that experience last year and the low approval ratings that they brought. My hope was this early sign of bipartisan cooperation on the economic stimulus package would sort of start a new trend. Unfortunately, on a matter that really is fundamental to our responsibility—I think our first responsibility: to keep America and Americans safe—we find ourselves falling back into the old bad habits of dysfunction once again.

What I mean by that is, the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act is vital to our national security. It is vital that we continue to be able to listen to foreign terrorists who are communicating with each other, plotting and planning future terrorist attacks on our homeland and on our troops in Iraq and Afghanistan and around the world. Rather than pass legislation that would address that, we passed a patch in October for 6 months, which expired in December. So we passed another 1-month extension. And now we find ourselves with our backs up against the wall with this Protect America Act extension expiring February 1. And I was discouraged to hear the majority leader say this morning that it was impossible to pass a reauthorization of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act.

What he suggested is that we need another patch for 1 month, or a short period of time, without addressing the primary issues that need to be voted on. The Senator from Florida, Mr. MARTINEZ, talked about the civil liability immunity for the telecoms that may have cooperated with the United States Government at the highest levels based on a request from the President of the United States, the Commander in Chief, during a time of war, and the certification by the Attorney General that what they were being asked to do was legal and, in fact, necessary for us to protect ourselves against another attack, such as the one we suffered in Washington and in New York on September 11, 2001.

We know if this law expires without our addressing all aspects of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, our intelligence officials will be literally blind and deaf to the important intelligence that will allow us to detect and deter future attacks against American citizens. In fact, last summer the Director of National Intelligence told us we were missing about two-thirds of the communications between foreign terrorists that were necessary to protect our country. That is why we passed the Protect America Act. So why in the world we would get bogged down in the same sort of bickering and partisan divide rather than come together to solve this in a bipartisan fashion, frankly, escapes me.

As was pointed out earlier, this very same legislation passed in the Intelligence Committee by a vote of 13 to 2. That is a bipartisan supermajority, sponsored by the chairman, the Democrat, Senator ROCKEFELLER, and the vice chairman, Senator BOND, a Republican. So with that kind of bipartisan support for a product that the Director of National Intelligence and the leadership of our defense community tell us they need in order to continue to protect America against attacks, why is it impossible for us to pass this legislation? I don't know of any other explanation than just downright stubbornness. And, frankly, it is the kind that represents a sort of reminder of the bad habits of the past that I had hoped we would have learned from and change.