

Families in every State, region, and corner of our country are facing the same challenges as the Albericis. Jeff and others like him were raised to believe that doing important work, such as being a schoolteacher, wouldn't make you rich but it would provide enough to live comfortably and raise a family. The middle-class dream—that American dream—is vanishing before our eyes.

Today, oil is trading near record levels again. It is up around \$140 a barrel. Gasoline now averages \$4.08 a gallon nationally, and in Nevada it is \$4.24 a gallon. This morning, we learned that utility companies across the country are raising rates another 29 percent on top of the 30-percent increases American consumers have already endured over the past 5 years.

On President Bush's watch, American families are earning less today than they did 8 years ago—and that is the truth—yet paying more than ever for everyday necessities, such as gasoline, heat for the home, and of course groceries. And they are paying more than ever for long-term needs, such as the goal of health care, college, and retirement. American families can't survive this squeeze indefinitely.

Right now, many are able to keep their heads above water by saving less, and sometimes not saving, and finding other ways to tighten their belts. Like the Albericis, they are eating more grilled cheese and putting less of their paychecks into savings.

Most Americans are too busy figuring out how to pay the bills and make ends meet to pay close attention to what is going on here in Congress. But if working families see one thing from Congress, it is this: Democrats get it. That is what Jeff said in his radio address. We know what is happening in America, and we are fighting every single day to make things better.

Republicans? They talk about our country's problems, but when the time comes to stand up and take action, they are nowhere to be found. Republicans talk about high gas prices, alternative energy, the housing crisis, and job loss, but each time there has been a proposed solution to those challenges, Republicans have said no.

Our Republican colleagues fill endless pages of the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD with speeches about the affordability crisis in America that a Republican President created and the Republican nominee, JOHN McCAIN, hopes to continue, but the American people need more than empty words.

Republicans can choose to keep standing on the sidelines, or keep sticking with the status quo, which they have done now for the entire year and a half we have been in the majority. They have that right. But Democrats will keep fighting to make the American dream affordable again for the Albericis of Auburn, NY, and the millions of American families like them who deserve better. Today we will give Republicans another oppor-

tunity to do the right thing by voting for cloture on the energy tax extenders bill. This legislation would lower taxes for businesses, entrepreneurs, and families. The deduction for State and local sales taxes helps level the playing field and provides tax relief to residents in States with no income tax. The tuition deduction helps families afford the skyrocketing cost of college. The teachers' deduction provides a small but important bit of help and appreciation to educators for out-of-pocket classroom expenses.

This legislation would also extend tax benefits for businesses, particularly those engaged in research and development for clean renewable energy, tax credits, Mr. President, for clean renewable energy. Today we are going to use 21 million barrels of oil. That is not necessary. We could change that. We need to allow the great business minds of America to invest in renewable energy—the Sun, the wind, geothermal. That is what this vote at 5:30 today is all about.

Republicans have opposed this legislation in the past because it is paid for and will not increase the national debt. How do we pay for these tax cuts for businesses and families? By closing a loophole that allows superwealthy hedge fund managers to avoid paying tax on their earnings.

This is unique, that the Republicans would oppose this. The hedge fund operators even know it is unfair and they support us on this. Why anyone opposes legislation on these grounds is beyond the ability of the American people to comprehend. Why Republicans would oppose tax relief for businesses and families in order to protect a tax loophole for multimillionaires seems preposterous. And keep in mind, even the hedge fund operators, I repeat, believe it would be fair to do what we seek.

Republicans have the right to side with hedge fund multimillionaires over small businesses and families. They have already done so by blocking the tax extenders bill twice this year. Now they have a third chance to reverse course and support this legislation. Maybe this week enough Republicans will see the suffering in their States and break with the President and Republican Senate leaders to do the right thing. Maybe this is the time enough Republicans will say enough is enough.

I know our Republican colleagues see the terrible economic burden the American people are carrying. The only question is, will they let it continue or join us in doing something about it? For all the Republicans sitting on the fence, and there are some seeing how bad things have gotten but still not ready to stand up to the Republican Party, I ask: If not now, when? Democrats stand ready to legislate. Join us and we can begin repairing the damage and restoring the American Dream.

I acknowledge that on the Medicare fix we tried to do last week, we got nine Republicans who supported us.

Had we had Senator KENNEDY back—and he soon will be back, and a few other Senators—we would have been able to have 60 votes. So I am glad to see that my friends on the other side, even though not enough, are coming forward and voting with us. We hope there will be more of that in the future.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader is recognized.

TRIBUTE TO TIM RUSSSERT

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, as Washington, and all of America, continue to pay tribute to Tim Russert, I wish to add a few more words about a man who impacted everybody in this body in one way or another over the years.

I have been a fairly regular guest on "Meet the Press" over the years, so I got to know Tim Russert primarily as a tough interviewer, but I also came to appreciate and admire his extraordinary people skills, which were as good as those of any politician here in Washington.

I remember him saying once that his son Luke was a big fan of Tubby Smith, the old UK Wildcats basketball coach. I think Luke even went to Tubby's basketball camp one summer. Well, anytime I or anybody else on the staff got on the phone with Tim, he would also start off with "Go Cats." It is just one example of the great mind he had for small personal details and how he employed that skill in a totally unpretentious way.

He also knew I was a Louisville Cardinal basketball fan, and he invariably would turn the subject to Rick Patino and his considerable skills, and that is a way in which he kind of related to everybody.

Bill Kristol was getting at the same thing in his column this morning, in which he related a story that has been around this town for a while. The story goes that when Pat Moynihan was trying to convince Tim to come down to the Capitol to be his Chief of Staff, Tim didn't want to come because Moynihan's office was all Ph.Ds and intellectuals. He didn't think he would fit in. Moynihan said:

Tim, the things they know you can learn. But the things you know they can never learn.

So as Tim Russert rose to the height of his profession, it became clear Pat Moynihan was right on target.

I found it particularly moving to see Luke paying tribute to his father on television this morning. As Tim often said, being a good father was the job he put the most stock in, and it appears he has done a superb job in that respect as well.

TAX EXTENDERS BILL

Today the Senate will vote on whether to proceed to the House-passed tax

extenders bill. Republicans support the provisions being extended in this legislation. That is why I, along with several of my colleagues, introduced an even stronger version of the House bill, one that contains even longer extensions of the expired provisions, provides AMT relief excluded from the House bill, and does both in a form that would avoid a veto; that is, of course, without raising taxes.

The tax provisions in question are an enormous help to millions of Americans, and a long-term extension would provide the added comfort of predictability into the family budget and the small business balance sheet in the midst of a difficult economic time.

Republicans have been firm on this point, which is why I read with some amusement a letter which was sent to me on Friday by my friend the majority leader, extolling the virtues of the House bill. As I said, Republicans truly agree that the expired provisions certainly merit extension. This is not a State secret. Our point of departure, the principle we have insisted on, is this: Short-term tax extensions should not be the occasion for permanent tax increases. If a new tax policy is being created, that is one thing. But if current taxes are simply being extended, those extensions should not be accompanied by new tax increases. To do so would be to transform the annual ritual of extending current tax law into a stealth exercise in increasing the size of Government.

Unfortunately, the House Democratic leadership seems to have dug in, saying it will not pass an extenders bill without tax hikes. This brings us to an impasse for no good reason. First of all, it strikes me as odd that the House Democratic leadership would single out these particular tax extenders for a fight on offsets. They didn't need offsets on the stimulus bill earlier this year. AMT relief will apparently not require offsets this year. House leaders have signaled that a new GI benefits expansion would not require offsets. And just last week, the House passed an unemployment insurance expansion bill that did not have offsets.

It is entirely possible that the Democratic leadership is open to compromise. Recall that during last year's AMT debate, House leaders also insisted on offsets. On December 18, just last year, House Democrats were saying they would not consider AMT relief unless it included tax hikes elsewhere. Then the following day, September 19, they passed an AMT bill without tax hikes by a vote of 352 to 64. After all the press releases and letters had been issued, our friends on the other side sat down with Republicans and did something we should do a lot more of around here: they negotiated.

So notwithstanding the letter I received on Friday from my good friend, the majority leader, I am hopeful we can do the same thing on this tax extenders bill—sit down together and come up with a solution that is accept-

able to both sides and which actually has a chance of being signed into law. I yield the floor.

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, the Senate will proceed to a period of morning business for up to 1 hour with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

The Senator from Minnesota is recognized.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that when I finish my remarks Senator HARKIN and Senator GRASSLEY follow me.

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

MIDWEST FLOODING

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, I rise to offer my thoughts and prayers to the people and communities throughout the Midwest who were hurt by last week's massive floods.

It appears that the floodwaters have begun to recede. But the long, hard process of cleaning up and rebuilding lies ahead.

In particular, I offer sympathy and support to my colleagues TOM HARKIN and CHARLES GRASSLEY, the Senators from Iowa, whose governor has declared 83 of the State's 99 counties to be disaster areas.

Worst hit was the city of Cedar Rapids, IA.

Over 9 square miles—or 1,300 blocks—were flooded in the city and 25,000 people had to be evacuated from their homes. Preliminary estimates indicate over \$700 million in damage. This is in Cedar Rapids alone.

In Cedar Rapids, it is being called not the flood of the century—but the flood of the half-millennium—an event that should occur only once in 500 years.

In fact, rescue workers from Minnesota have been deployed to Iowa to help the victims of the flooding there.

While the residents and businesses of Cedar Rapids were hit the hardest, they were hardly alone. Heavy rainfall last week submerged much of the Midwest—Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, and my own State of Minnesota.

Throughout the Midwest, corn and soybean fields turned into lakes. City streets turned into canals. It's like Waterworld. There is water nearly everywhere. And where there isn't water, there is mud. Lots of mud.

In terms of physical devastation, some are calling these floods "the Katrina of the Midwest."

Among the areas suffering flood damage was the southeastern corner of my state of Minnesota. Three major rivers in the area—the Root, the Cedar and the Zumbro—all flooded.

Four Minnesota counties were declared State disaster areas—Freeborn, Mower, Fillmore and Houston counties.

This includes areas that have already suffered extensive flood damage in the past year—both with the devastating floods in August last year as well as floods earlier this spring.

As you can see from this aerial photograph of Austin, MN, taken last week, flood, water poured across big sections of the city, flooding not just streets, but highways and freeway ramps.

This weekend, I spoke with the mayors of Austin, Rochester and Lanesboro. Later in the week, I plan to visit the area and meet with local leaders and residents. After the floods last August, I traveled to the area several times to survey the damage and work with local and State leaders to obtain Federal aid and assistance. My family and I even spent a weekend in the area.

I know these communities are strong—just as you will see with the State of Iowa, which State has been hit even harder, and they will make it through this latest disaster.

Last week's flooding resulted in the death of one Minnesota man, Dale Wangen, of rural Albert Lea. He was driving home in the dark, rainy night and suddenly his car plunged into the rushing flood waters because the road was washed away.

Emergency responders found him only because another car came along and also plunged into the water. That driver was able to get out. But he told rescuers that his car had crashed on top of another car.

Austin, MN, is home to Hormel Foods, a Fortune 500 company. They had to close their corporate offices because of the flood.

Here is a second photograph of Austin, also taken last week. You can see that it was not just a few wet basements. Some neighborhoods were flooded practically up to the treetops and had to be evacuated.

Fortunately, Austin was spared even worse damage because—ever since a major flood 30 years ago—they have been implementing a comprehensive flood mitigation plan, including the purchase of more than 250 homes in flood-prone areas.

Nonetheless, the three worst floods in Austin's history have all occurred since the year 2000—with the worst in 2004.

As one resident of Austin put it: "It seems like we're getting a 'hundred-year flood' every 3 or 4 years."

While the most attention is given to cities and towns damaged by the floods, the countryside has not been spared, either.

Houston County, at the far southeastern tip of Minnesota, is a rural area with a total population of just