

from 2000–2007 the median household income in Connecticut has increased by a mere 1 percent. Meanwhile, the cost of a gallon of gasoline in our State consistently tops the national average, and the cost of going to college in the State has risen by 29.1 percent since 1999.

For Connecticut, the need to act is clear. And with this bill, we are.

This legislation is paid for. The cost of these tax provisions will not, as the Bush tax cuts of 2001 and 2003 did, merely pass the cost on to our children and grandchildren. This bill provides crucial incentives for job creation, as well as middle-class tax relief, but it also pays for these benefits. It does so by changing the tax rules for executive compensation, and delays a rule that would provide incentives to firms operating abroad. And so not only do we hope to offset some of the economic ills that America is currently struggling with, this legislation also offers a big step toward restoring fiscal responsibility to our government, which this administration has utterly abandoned.

Now, our colleagues on the other side of the aisle are opposed to this fiscally responsible legislation for no other reason than that they are opposed to paying for tax breaks—opposed to the belief that future generations should not be stuck with our bill.

I see it differently—as does the business community of our Nation which supports these offsets for a simple reason:

Because they recognize the benefits that this legislation will provide not just to their bottom lines but to our economy.

Unfortunately, some in this body remain unconvinced—unconvinced that these tax provisions will spur new job creation, move us further towards energy independence, and restart our economy.

On June 9, a consortium of more than 300 different American businesses signed a letter to Chairman BAUCUS and Ranking Member GRASSLEY urging the Senate to work together in a bipartisan manner to pass this bill. These businesses represent some of the largest employers in our Nation, and at this moment the partisan paralysis that is affecting this body has put them in an awkward position. Many of these provisions are set to expire in December, and now is the time many of these employers are working to plan ahead and solidify new contracts, and sign new employees. They are making decisions about their futures. A recent study estimated that if we do not extend the tax provisions in this bill, we will not only lose \$19 billion in clean energy investment, but also 116,000 potential green jobs.

It is time for us to recognize that to get our economy back on track, we must lead. We must make critical decisions about the future of our Nation. And above all, we must put politics aside and work on behalf of not our political parties but the American people.

I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting this critically important legislation.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to a period of morning business for up to 2 hours, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with the time equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees, with the majority controlling the first hour and the Republicans controlling the next hour.

The Senator from Maryland.

Ms. MIKULSKI. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the following Senators be permitted to speak for up to 5 minutes: Myself, MCCASKILL, FEINSTEIN, LANDRIEU, MURRAY, BOXER, STABENOW, KLOBUCHAR, and LINCOLN.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

CHECKLIST FOR CHANGE

Ms. MIKULSKI. Mr. President, I take the floor today as the dean of the Democratic women in the Senate. I say to my colleagues and to all who are watching: We women are mad as hell, and we don't want to take it anymore. We are mad that in this institution, when all is said and done, more gets said than gets done.

We are here today, united as Democratic women, to be a voice, a voice for change. We have a checklist for change we think we can do before this Congress adjourns.

These are issues that focus on the big picture of what our country is facing, but they also focus on the impact these issues have on families. We look at macroissues that affect the world and the macaroni-and-cheese issues that affect families.

In order to get things done, women have checklists in their daily lives—whether it is to get the laundry done or pick the kids up from school. We have a checklist on what we want to do in terms of a legislative agenda. This is not about gender; it is about an agenda. We invite the good men of the Senate to join us, and we hope that people from the other side will join us. We want to work to bring about change, and we start with wanting to end the gridlock.

Look at these issues for which we stand. We want to provide equal pay for equal work, good jobs that stay in the United States, we want to make health care affordable, we want to take care of our military families and veterans. If they fought over there, they should have a safety net back here. We also want to restore America's credibility in the world, protect our environment. We are looking out for gas, and we are looking out for groceries. We want to make sure there is another FEMA. And, along the way, we protect the family checkbook. We want to

make sure we get rid of the boondoggles that are eating up our Federal budget.

For me, I am the leadoff. But every woman here has an issue to which she will be speaking. What do I want to speak to? I want to speak to equal pay for equal work.

Members might recall a few weeks ago we brought legislation to the floor to correct the gap in wage discrimination law. We lost that, but I said when the vote was over: The issue is not gone. I called upon the women to put their lipstick on, square their shoulders, suit up, and fight for an American revolution. This is why we are here today. This is another salvo.

Many people think, wage discrimination, didn't we solve that? No. Wage discrimination still exists. Women are earning just 77 cents for every dollar our male counterparts make. We can see this now in the famous Ledbetter v. Goodyear case. Lilly Ledbetter, a hard-working woman, challenged the system. She didn't find out until years later that she was being paid less than her male counterparts. She took it to the EEOC. The corporation fought her every step of the way. It ended up in the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court made an outrageous decision. They said she waited too long to file her complaint. The Court also said she didn't do it in time.

We think it is about time we change the law. What we want to do is bring back the Lilly Ledbetter legislation called the Fair Pay Restoration Act. We want to bring it back up for a vote because equal pay for equal work is about fairness. It is about justice. It is about respect. It is going to close the loophole on the so-called statute of limitations on when one can file a wage discrimination case. We believe the current practice has been a good one, but we disagree with the Supreme Court.

We are going to bring it back up for a vote. We ask our colleagues to join us. We don't want our agenda to die in parliamentary entanglements. What we want to do is untangle this law and make sure women get equal pay and experience it in their personal checkbook, and we have to change the Federal lawbook.

We are ready. We are suited up. We have signed up. Join with us. We know the Presiding Officer is one of the great guys in the Senate who supports us. Before we go out at the end of this session, let's bring about change. Let's make America proud of their Congress. Let's turn the page.

I yield the floor to my new but very able and experienced colleague from Missouri, who has been fighting boondoggles in that Federal checkbook.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri is recognized.

Mrs. MCCASKILL. Mr. President, the United States is so lucky to have the senior Senator from Maryland in this august body. She is smart and feisty, and she is not willing to yield any

ground when she thinks the people she represents are not being treated as they should be.

For women in this country, she has been a tremendous beacon of light and hope to finally get over some of the barriers that have held women back historically. So to the dean of the Senate women, I thank her for her leadership as we work on this checklist for change.

One of the things we want to check off the list is fiscal accountability. It sounds kind of boring, fiscal accountability. It sounds like this is where the numbers drone on and one loses track.

This is a big deal. This administration has driven us into an economic ditch. The numbers, frankly, are so big it is hard to believe they are real. Federal spending since President Bush took office has increased by almost \$1 trillion. Let me say that again. Federal spending under this President and under the leadership of the Republican Party has increased by \$1 trillion. Our debt has gone up by \$3.7 trillion. We now have a debt of \$9.3 trillion.

This is change that is not just important, it is urgent. We must be fiscally accountable for taxpayer money. It sounds nice, right? It is a moral imperative for our kids. It is the right thing to do for the generation that comes behind us, for our children and grandchildren. We are presenting them with a train wreck of unprecedented proportion if we don't get our fiscal house in order.

So how do we do that? The Checklist for Change is all about being tough and accountable with taxpayer money. The way you do that is: First, how do you spend it? Do you give out contracts based on whom you know? This administration has. Is it about cronyism? Too often it has been. Is it about no competition? Unfortunately, yes. Is it about cost-plus contracts? As a former auditor, I will tell you, cost-plus contracts have no place in Government. Cost-plus means, hey, you can charge the Government whatever you want, and then you get to make money on top of that.

Believe it or not, that is the kind of contracting that ruled the day in Iraq. As we were faced with a war that we did not have enough men and women to fight, we had to contract out such as our country has never contracted out in a time of war. What happened? We lost—and I am being conservative now because auditors are conservative by nature—literally, over \$150 billion that went up in smoke to waste, fraud, and abuse.

War profiteering. There has been an orgy of war profiteering during this conflict in Iraq. If we focused on the Department of Defense and the way they contract, we could realize enough savings so every young person in America could have help going to college, so every young child in America could have preschool—if we paid attention to the way we do contracting in the Department of Defense.

I will tell you, today is a good day. I wish to say to my colleagues, today is a good day because today a decision was rendered that shows we can get it right if we force companies to compete and we enforce the provisions of those contracts.

A major, expensive contract was the tanker deal at the Department of Defense. There was a competition—good news. A company was awarded the contract—fine. There were problems. So what happened? The losing company went to GAO, under our process of procedures, and said: Auditors, take a look at this. You tell us whether this contract was done fairly.

The good news is, GAO, as it always does, did its work professionally, and they announced their decision today and said Boeing was, in fact, treated unfairly in the tanker deal, that Boeing did not get a fair shake under that competitive contract, and that, in fact, the Air Force must change its decision as it relates to Boeing and the tanker deal.

Do I think that is important? Yes. But why is it important? It is important because what we have said from the beginning is compete these contracts. Do it fairly. Respect taxpayer money. Get a bargain. That is what women in America relate to because we are all about getting a bargain for our families. We need to treat taxpayer money the same way.

I am proud to be part of the Checklist for Change. I am proud to be emphasizing fiscal accountability.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from California.

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Mr. President, I thank you very much.

I particularly salute the Senator from Maryland. I thank her for her leadership of our group of Democratic women. Senator MIKULSKI has, from the get-go, been there for the women of the Senate. This is the second time I have participated in this Checklist for Change, which she has put together.

I also salute Senator MCCASKILL, who was on the floor, who has brought a very talented dimension to our group of women.

I think, as the other Democratic women as well come to the floor to discuss this Checklist for Change, you are going to see one thing; and that one thing is, we are all very committed to this country and very committed to see this country do the right thing by her people.

So it is with a great deal of pleasure that I participate in this effort. I thank both of them and the women who will come after me speaking as well.

My comments are forged by 15 years on the Senate Judiciary Committee. With the exception of Senator Moseley-Braun for a short period of time, I am the only woman who has served in history on the Judiciary Committee of the Senate and also serving 7 years as a member of the Intelligence Committee.

I have always taken great stock in the fact that the United States of

America has been a beacon of hope because people all over the world look to American justice and American human rights for inspiration.

We have represented not only a brighter future for people, but we have represented a government of law, a government under the Constitution, a government by the people, for the people, with justice for all—not just for a certain few but all.

Now that beacon has been dimmed. Despite President Bush's promise that the United States would fight the war on terror consistent with American values and "in the finest traditions of valor," the decision was made, as Vice President CHENEY said in 2001, to "go to the dark side."

Indeed, this administration has put our Nation on the wrong track in so many ways, including: creating a prisoner of war detention facility at Guantanamo Bay with a separate, lesser system of justice—now repudiated by the Supreme Court; authorizing interrogation techniques that constitute torture; reopening the nuclear door by seeking to develop low-yield battlefield nuclear weapons and 100-kiloton nuclear bunker busters; countenancing, for the first time, the use of nuclear weapons as a first strike against a non-nuclear threat, if chemical or biological weapons were threatened—not used but threatened—against the United States; preemptively invading Iraq, under the guise of weapons of mass destruction and a false nexus to al-Qaida.

So, today, we see America's credibility in the world diminished, and the administration's policies have become a recruiting tool for our enemies. So, in 7½ years, this great country has gone from a nation embraced to a nation often tarnished.

Yes, the time has come for a change. The time has come to: lay out an exit strategy in Iraq so we can begin to bring our people home; close Guantanamo, shut it down. The Secretary of Defense says shut it down. The former Secretary of State says shut it down. Governor Kean, Congressman Hamilton, a litany of four-star officers and flag officers have said shut it down. It does not become America's values.

The time has come to stop America's use of torture; establish a uniform standard for detentions and interrogations across our Government. This is part of the Senate's Intelligence authorization bill, and it will remain part of this bill. That bill essentially says all elements of the American Government will utilize the Army Field Manual and the procedures therein, both the prohibitions on eight specific items of torture as well as specific techniques to move ahead.

The time has come to use robust diplomacy; create coalitions; listen to allies; talk with adversaries. This makes us stronger, not weaker.

The time has come to develop a new, sensible nuclear weapons policy, so we do not encourage the very kind of proliferation we seek to prevent.

Yes, the time has come for change. The time has come to restore America's credibility as a moral and just nation, dedicated to liberty and justice.

We are the greatest military and economic power the world has ever seen. Our global influence is unmatched. For the past half century, our country has embraced international cooperation, not out of vulnerability or weakness but from a position of strength.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator's time has expired.

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Mr. President, if I can finish with this last statement.

Our strength as a nation emanates not just from our power but from our moral stature and our principled stand for truth, justice, and freedom. It must be restored.

I say to the Presiding Officer, thank you for your indulgence.

Mr. President, I see the distinguished Senator from Louisiana, whom I also compliment. I see my fellow colleague from California. They are part of Senator MIKULSKI's Checklist for Change.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Louisiana is recognized.

Ms. LANDRIEU. Mr. President, I thank my colleague from California, and I am pleased to join my colleagues in calling for the change Americans are hoping for, which this next election opportunity will bring, to focus on issues that need so much change in America.

One of the items on the top of our Checklist for Change is a FEMA that works, a plan that treats local and State governments as respected and able partners, having a disaster plan that spends taxpayer dollars with care and efficiency, having a plan that puts a premium on helping families and extended families stay together through an ordeal that rocks the economic foundation and future of so many families as they are displaced, sometimes for weeks, sometimes for months, and, yes, even sometimes for years.

We need a new FEMA. We need a muscular, robust, able, efficient, and effective FEMA to be a true partner with local and State governments and individual businesses and families in times of disaster.

I have spoken many times on the floor about the disasters of Katrina and Rita and how it affected the gulf coast, from Beaumont to Mobile, with the great city of New Orleans and the metropolitan area being most directly affected. But we are not isolated in that suffering by any means.

This week, we have seen what is happening today in Iowa, Wisconsin, Indiana, and Illinois. There has been \$1.5 billion in damages in Iowa alone, and 38,000 Iowans have been evacuated. More than 3,500 National Guard are deployed. More than 4.8 million sandbags have been used. I could go on and on about the towns that have been completely evacuated.

Yes, New Orleans was completely evacuated. So was Saint Bernard Parish and so were large swaths of Jefferson Parish—a parish of more than 450,000 people—3 years ago this August.

But today the towns of Hartford, Palo, and Fredonia have been completely evacuated—not as large as New Orleans but towns of substantial populations.

The question is, Does FEMA have its housing plan together yet? Is there a plan for people to be able to get their medicines if they are relocated, to get their prescription drugs from their hometown pharmacy or their neighborhood? I am not sure that has been done yet.

So we need a FEMA that works. We need an administration that understands it is not just disasters far away but disasters right here at home and that homeland security starts with hometown security, where people can be secure in their neighborhoods, in their homes, and that the levees that have been put up to protect them will actually hold the water and will not be breached or overturned.

We do not have that confidence right now in America. So not only do we need a new FEMA, but we need a FEMA that will be an advocate for proper investments in infrastructure.

It is embarrassing, I believe, to be in the atmosphere we are in, where people can look up and any day a bridge could collapse or any day a levee could break. We cannot prevent tornadoes. We cannot prevent hurricanes. We cannot prevent earthquakes. But I promise you, we can do a lot more than we are doing now to reform the Federal emergency system so it works better with local and State governments so that when earthquakes happen, when hurricanes happen, when other disasters happen, the people of the United States are getting the help they need.

So that is one of our top issues on our Checklist for Change: a disaster planning and response system second to none.

It is a long list. But it is a list that must get done. That is, in large measure, what this next election is about. It is about the kind of leadership that is going to bring about the changes necessary, so when a business collapses after 20 or 30 years of making a profit, or longer, when families' homes are destroyed, they have a Government they can count on—not to give them charity but to give them a hand up, to respond, to help them get back on their feet economically, spiritually, and emotionally. That is what our Government can do.

So I am proud to join this team. Again, we are asking for a FEMA that works.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. MCCASKILL). The Senator from California is recognized.

Mrs. BOXER. Madam President, it is wonderful to join the Presiding Officer, Senator LANDRIEU, Senator FEINSTEIN, and the other women who have come to join us.

I have to say to Senator MIKULSKI, the dean of the Democratic women, how much I appreciate her leadership and her ability to connect with the

American people. When she brought us together the first time—and it was a while back—she said: You know, we women at home make a checklist of the things we have to do for our families and the things we have to accomplish for the people who depend on us. Well, let's do the same thing for the people whom we represent. What emerged is each of the Democratic women picked an issue she knew we needed to have change on, and we have heard about some of them. As the chairman of the Environment and Public Works Committee, I am so proud to have that opportunity—the first woman, the first Californian to chair this committee.

I can just say, because I know this: We desperately need change when it comes to the environment. When we say the word "environment," some people think about the beautiful ocean, and they should; and they think about beautiful wetlands, and they should; and they think about beautiful lakes and streams and rivers and clean, flowing waterfalls, and they think about beautiful creatures that roam our environment, and all of that is true. But when we cut through it, a clean and healthy environment means healthy families. Healthy families means people who can work, kids who can go to school and not have to leave because they have asthma. These are the things we have to remember.

For 7½ long years now, since George Bush became President, this administration has done everything it could to roll back landmark environmental laws. What are these laws? The Clean Air Act, the Safe Drinking Water Act, the Endangered Species Act, and the Superfund Act. In every case, they have done this.

They have also stopped our progress on global warming. We had a bill on the floor a couple of weeks ago. They sent out a message that they were going to veto this bill, even before they saw it amended. Imagine.

I wish to tell the Senate—and I know there are a lot of folks who are watching in their offices—what I mean specifically by this terrible record of the Bush administration and why we want change on the environment. The first thing George Bush did—and I don't know if the Presiding Officer remembers—when he became the President in terms of the environment is try to weaken safe drinking water standards. He tried to actually roll back the standard for arsenic in drinking water—arsenic in drinking water. He tried to slip it through, weaken the standard. I remember working with Senator MIKULSKI on that issue. We turned it back. We worked in the Senate, and we stopped it. Then, a National Academy of Sciences study found that EPA had actually underestimated the cancer risks from arsenic in tap water, yet there was an effort to roll back the standard for arsenic.

Then there is perchlorate. Thirty-five States have a real problem—most of

our States—with perchlorate that has seeped into drinking water and seeped, therefore, into some of our agricultural products. Perchlorate comes from rocket fuel. It is a very dangerous leftover from rocket fuel. Let me tell my colleagues, it poses risks to the thyroid and special risks to pregnant women and infants.

The Bush administration not only has failed to set a standard for perchlorate, but it has stopped enforcing a law that says the water companies and the water utilities have to let people know how much perchlorate is in their drinking water. They no longer have to test for perchlorate. They have not set a standard. Here is their excuse: We don't have enough information. Massachusetts had enough information; they set a standard. California had enough information; they set a standard. But the great big Federal, National Government doesn't have enough information. We know perchlorate is dangerous, we know it is an endocrine disrupter, and we know what that means for pregnant women and children. It is bad news. They are doing nothing. That is why we have the environment on our checklist for change.

Mercury. Mercury is toxic to the brain. Let me repeat that. Mercury is toxic to the brain. We know that. There is no question about it. The Bush administration, under pressure from big utilities—I ask unanimous consent for 1 more minute.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mrs. BOXER. The Bush administration, under pressure from big utilities, set weak requirements for toxic mercury emissions, and now there is a big court case, and believe me, they are going to lose it.

There are other things. They slowed down Superfund cleanup. They are not protecting endangered species. They are weak on protecting us from smog pollution, particulate matter that gets into our lungs. We are talking about life and death, and then we are talking about global warming, the future of the planet.

Today, the President said to forget the offshore oil drilling moratorium in the most pristine waters of our coastline. Go in there and let the oil companies drill. What he didn't tell the American people is his father put that moratorium in place. What he didn't tell the American people is that there are 68 million acres of untapped leases the oil companies hold that they haven't drilled on, and he would put at risk God's gift that we have been given on these coastlines and he would jeopardize a \$60 billion coastal recreation and tourism economy that fosters more than 2 million jobs.

I am so proud to stand with the Presiding Officer and the Democratic women of the Senate, standing next to this checklist for change: Equal pay for equal work, good jobs, health care, taking care of our military and our veterans, restoring our credibility in the

world, protecting the environment, making us energy independent, preparing for future disasters, enforcing fiscal accountability, and protecting the family checkbook. This is a moment for change, and we Democratic women of the Senate wish to be agents of that change.

I thank Senator MIKULSKI, and thank you very much, Madam President.

I yield the floor.

Ms. MIKULSKI. Madam President, before the Senator leaves the floor—and we know our good friends, Senators STABENOW and KLOBUCHAR, are here who will speak. We know gas prices are a woman's issue. If anything is driving up groceries and family bills, it is gas.

This whole issue today of lifting the ban on drilling—is the Senator from California aware that there are currently 68 million acres of land, Federal land, on which the oil companies have a lease, and if they wanted to drill, they could drill?

Mrs. BOXER. That is right. The Senator from Maryland is reiterating what I said in my statement. Absolutely. We have learned that they have 68 million acres of leases, both onshore and offshore, and they are not drilling. They are holding those, I believe, for speculative purposes. Now the President announces—even without them lifting a finger on those leases, he wants to destroy the coastlines that are the economic engine of the Senator's State, my State, and many other coastal States. Yes.

Ms. MIKULSKI. Does the Senator share my frustration—and I believe the American people's frustration—that the President is trying to change the subject rather than change the policies, particularly the policies where he could, by Executive order, deal with price gouging of the consumer as well as the casino-like speculation that is going on?

Mrs. BOXER. Absolutely. My friend is so right. The Senator from Maryland is right.

This Senator from California can tell you this: His proposal to destroy our coastline is an economic disaster, and he has avoided going after the oil companies and their supply manipulation. He is ignoring the speculators. We believe they have added \$30 to \$50 to a barrel of oil. He is ignoring his Antitrust Division. He is doing nothing.

By the way, his own administration said today that even if they lifted this moratoria and every single inch was drilled—let's just say that were true, although we would never allow that to happen—we wouldn't feel one penny of price reduction until 2030. What he said is not true. This is changing the subject, and he is not using the power of the Presidency to go after the people who are manipulating this market. My colleague is correct.

Ms. MIKULSKI. So if people really want their gas prices lowered today, they should just e-mail the President and say: Don't change the subject,

change the policies. Get rid of price gouging and get rid of the speculation. You can do it by Executive order.

Mrs. BOXER. Exactly right, I say to my friend.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan is recognized.

Ms. STABENOW. Madam President, I wish to thank our dean of the Democratic women, Senator BARBARA MIKULSKI, for once again being right on point and Senator BARBARA BOXER for her leadership as it relates to protecting our environment and energy security. She and Senator MARIA CANTWELL have been our leaders as it relates to cutting gas prices and at the same time doing those things that allow us to protect our beautiful land and water and air. So I wish to thank my colleagues.

Listening to the discussion about what is happening in terms of gas prices just brings me back to what is an essential part of our checklist for change; that is, making sure Americans have jobs. We are going to pay those high gas prices which are absolutely outrageous. Senator MIKULSKI is right, it takes a change in policy. Senator BOXER is right when she talks about the fact that there are a lot of places the oil companies could be drilling right now. That is the problem. Right now, instead of buying more corporate jets and putting more money into bonuses for themselves, if they were to reinvest in the land that is already there, that would address their concern about supply. We know what is really happening. Unfortunately, for the last 8 years, we have literally had two oilmen in the White House, and we have watched the price of gasoline go beyond our wildest expectations. I know people in Michigan never would have thought we would be at over \$4 a gallon.

To add insult to injury, during this same time when we are looking at foreclosure rates at the highest level in my lifetime, certainly, and gas prices at the highest levels, food prices going up, the cost of health care going up, what is going down—and what is frightening for families across America—is their incomes, their jobs, and their standard of living. Just since January, 324,000 good-paying American jobs have been lost—just since January of this year, 324,000 families without a job, yet paying those high gas prices, paying those high food prices, trying to figure out how to send the kids to college or to pay tuition if they are in college. How do I make ends meet? How do I have my piece of the American dream when I am losing my job or my income is going down?

Our checklist for change is about the things Americans want to have happening in this country. It is frightening to see that since 2001, we have lost 3 million—3 million—think about this number—3 million manufacturing jobs in this country. Certainly, the people in Michigan have taken a big hit of that 3 million. But overall now, considering all of the policies and the lack of

action, including the dollars being sent to a war in Iraq rather than being invested here at home, we now are in a situation where 8.5 million Americans are unemployed—8.5 million Americans.

Our Republican colleagues would say: They should just go find a job. We don't want to extend unemployment benefits because that encourages people to stay home. That makes no sense if you are somebody who has been out of work trying to keep your house, trying to pay the food bill and the gas bill and everything else. But the reality is that we have about 4 million jobs in this country right now and 8.5 million people out of work—roughly 4 million available jobs and 8.5 million people unemployed.

We also have what I call a race to the bottom in general economically where Americans are being told: In a global economy, if you will only work for less, we can be competitive. If you will only lose your pension, lose your health care, we can be competitive.

We reject that. Our checklist for change rejects the notion of a race to the bottom and the loss of our American way of life.

What we embrace are strategies that create good-paying jobs, middle-class jobs at home in America. What we embrace is a race to the top. We want to export our products—not our jobs—in a global economy. To do so means a level playing field on trade, enforcing our trade laws, as well as creating new trade agreements. We want to make sure people are not losing jobs because of the high cost of health care, the burdens on small and large businesses today. So we believe the race to the top means a change in the way we fund health care in this country.

Finally, we understand it means investing like crazy in education, in innovation. That is the race to the top. That is what we embrace in our checklist for change. I am very proud of the fact that the Democratic Senate and House have put together a budget resolution for the next year that focuses on three major areas of job development—jobs and innovation through our green-collar jobs initiative; investing in the new advanced battery technology for the new vehicles; investing in conservation and energy efficiency through buildings and other kinds of efficiencies that are so important; job training in the new green-collar economy, investing not only in biofuels but making sure the pump is actually there, so when you drive your vehicle, you can get biofuel or biodiesel—you can actually find a pump. So green-collar jobs are an important piece of what we have put in place.

Secondly, jobs in America. When we are rebuilding highways, bridges, and water and sewer systems, those are jobs that will not be exported overseas. Those are good-paying jobs in America. Our checklist for change, as well as our budget, believes change should be done, and we can invest in good-paying jobs at home.

Finally, in our budget resolution we invest in job training and make a major investment in opportunity through education, from preschool all the way up to college.

We know that serious changes need to be made in the priorities of this country. I had the opportunity a while ago to be on a television show following a Republican colleague—a woman in the House—who looked at our checklist and said: We Republicans can support all those things.

In looking at that, I am scratching my head and going: We have had 6 years with President Bush and an entire Republican Congress, and they had control of every piece of the Government. They were not focusing on jobs, energy alternatives, fiscal accountability—as the occupant of the chair has talked about—or education or equal pay for equal work. They didn't fix that. They didn't address these issues that American families and businesses are asking us to do.

In the last 2 years, instead of working with us on the changes we have initiated, we have been blocked over and over again on the floor of the Senate. All we get is filibuster, filibuster, filibuster. So we come to the floor and to the American people as Democratic women who have been fighting, along with our Democratic male colleagues, for real change that will send gas prices down, not up, and that will send health care costs down, not up, and make it more available, to bring food prices down and, most important, bring wages up.

In the greatest country in the world, we can do better than losing 324,000 good-paying jobs just since this past January.

I am proud to join my wonderful colleagues in putting together a checklist that speaks to the things we know American families want to see happening. We are going to do everything possible, both this year, and as we go to the changes that we hope will happen next year, to embrace and actually get results on our checklist for change.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota is recognized.

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Madam President, I am proud to follow the Senator from Michigan, who has done so much to fight for jobs in her State, with its difficult economic conditions, and speak from the heart not only as a Senator but as a mother when she talks about this checklist for change.

So many of us who have come to the floor today are not just Senators but also mothers. I think about my family generations back and the women who have kept the checklist. My grandmother in Ely, Minnesota—I think of her writing in her perfect handwriting the lists that she made throughout the day. My grandpa, her husband, worked 1,500 feet underground in the mines in Ely. Neither of them graduated from high school. She had a checklist for her family. That list was making sure—at

the top of that list—that my dad and his brother went to college. They saved money in a coffee can in the basement of that little house. They had that coffee can to save the money in to send my dad and his brother to college. And I think of my own mother, who got divorced when I was about 16. My dad was always there for me, but my mother had to decide she was going to try to stay in her house raising two kids in the suburbs of Minneapolis. She decided she had to go back to work when they got divorced. She would write on the calendar in blue ink, which I remember.

In her head I know she was thinking would she be able to raise her kids and stay in that house when she retired. She ended up having to teach. At age 70, she had 30 second-graders. At age 80, she is still in that house. So she did it.

As for me, my husband and I have our own checklist on the refrigerator, with the things on it that we have to buy from the grocery store. Last week, my daughter who is 12, added to the checklist to get her a swimming suit for the seventh grade pool party.

So I think all the women in America understand what it is like to have these lists. What we are talking about today is a checklist for the entire country. For all of us, every American family, on the top of that checklist is balancing the family checkbook, protecting the family checkbook. As families sit down every day at the kitchen table to write their budgets and figure out if they have enough to make ends meet, they find out that things on their list cost a lot more. They have to manage to do a lot more with less.

In fact, as you can see on this chart, in the last 7 years since this administration took office, the average family wages have gone down \$1,175 for your average middle-class family making around \$48,000 a year. That is hard enough, but at the same time, as we all know, the average family expenses have increased. I can tell you that these are last year's figures, before we saw the huge increase in gas prices. But the average family expenses have increased more than \$4,500, and this is per year. We are talking about higher mortgage payments of \$1,700; higher gas bills of \$2,000; high food costs of \$230; higher phone bills of \$112; higher appliance costs of \$42; and higher health insurance, which is up \$363.

When you look at the wages lost and expenses gained, that is \$5,739 per year out of the average American families' checkbooks. So families are feeling the hurt. They are not doing anything wrong, but this is what we are seeing all over this country.

Why is this going on? In part, it is because everybody is nickel-and-diming our families. The oil companies are taking a huge chunk out of the family checkbook every week. In Minnesota, I saw family cars wrapped around the block at Costco, waiting in line for the discount gas pumps—just to save a few bucks.

Energy costs are skyrocketing, grocery bills are climbing, and while families are looking for ways to save every penny, big companies continue to nickel-and-dime them.

The drug companies are nickel-and-dime consumers by refusing to negotiate drug prices under Medicare Part D. The predatory lenders and unscrupulous creditors are taking a chunk out of the family checkbook with credit card scams and bad loan deals that are bringing down the values of homes.

Cell phone companies are nickel-and-dime families with early termination fees and excessive charges. Middle-class families are being squeezed from all sides, trying to keep up with the costs. You have heard about the "sandwich generation"—middle-class families trying to take care of their kids, while at the same time taking care of their aging parents.

Look at the cost of college and child care. Today, I am not sure my grandparents could have ever fit the money for college in a coffee can. The average student graduates with more than \$25,000 of debt. We owe our students a better start in life. Meanwhile, while my mom scrimped and saved to keep her house into retirement, many families do not have that same luxury and, instead, are putting every penny into nursing home living facilities.

On top of these financial worries, parents who may want to get a toy for their child's birthday are trying to save a few dollars, and they worry if they are going to get a toy that contains lead. They wonder about the tomatoes they bought at the store, or whether the pool drain in the local public pool will hurt their child. They worry: Is my family safe?

This isn't the American dream, and it should not be in this day and age. American families deserve an advocate for them, and the Democratic women today in the Senate stand ready to be those advocates, ready to make the change these families desperately need.

We not only need to change the agenda to help our middle-class families, we need to put a little change back in their wallets.

This last year, we stood up for America's middle-class families and their checkbooks: making college more affordable, increasing the minimum wage for the first time in 10 years. We took on the special interests from the oil companies to the toxic toy manufacturers.

So much more needs to be done to protect American families' checkbooks. We need to give tax breaks to the middle class by closing the loopholes that benefit only the wealthy.

We must put America's families first and find the relief they need from rising prices and falling wages and help them protect the family checkbook.

We must put the people of the country first, not the special interests, by enacting comprehensive, affordable health care reforms to make health care more affordable and enact a com-

prehensive energy policy so that instead of spending \$600,000 a minute on foreign oil and sending that money to the sultans of Saudi Arabia, we are spending it on the farmers and workers in this country.

We must be vigilant in protecting consumer rights, as we stand on the verge of passing the most sweeping consumer product reform in 16 years. We must continue to keep toxic toys and products off of our shores and out of our stores.

This checklist for change is from a group of women who all know what it is like to balance the family checkbook, and we know it is time for a change. The American people know it is time for a change.

As Senator BARBARA MIKULSKI, the dean of our delegation of women Senators, said today as she called on women of the Senate to work on this together: I call on the women in this country to put on your lipstick, square your shoulders, and suit up and take up this fight for change.

We are here today, shoulders squared, and with a checklist to accomplish the change that American families so desperately need.

I see that my colleague from Arkansas, BLANCHE LINCOLN, is here. She has always been a strong advocate for America's families. We both have children in the same junior high school. Mine is in seventh grade, quickly going into eighth. Hers are in the sixth grade. We have been dealing with the half schooldays in the Virginia schools. So it is good to be here together to talk about that issue.

I turn it over to the great leader from Arkansas, Senator LINCOLN.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arkansas is recognized.

Mrs. LINCOLN. Madam President, I thank all of my colleagues today. I am so pleased to come down to the floor and join my fellow Democratic women colleagues in the Senate to discuss our checklist for change.

Just so that people know, this checklist is not new. We started this several years ago. We got together and realized that all of us kept lists, like our mothers and grandmothers before us. Those checklists were helpful in accomplishing things. If there is anything we recognize from our constituents, it is that they are desperately wanting their Government to provide results, to get the results that the American people need, and they want to be able to move forward. And so we decided at that point, several years ago, that a checklist for change would be a good thing.

So here we come back to this body, come back to our colleagues presenting, yes, another checklist for change and to say it is time to change the direction our country is going in, and here are some of the biggest priorities we face. These are age-old problems that we need new and innovative solutions to, but they are not problems we can't solve. When we come together,

when we work together, we can solve these problems and bring forth for the American people what it is they are asking for, and that is results, there is no doubt.

We have heard our colleagues today touch on several issues of importance to the American people that we have listed on our checklist. I know my checklist is full of a lot of different things, as Senator KLOBUCHAR mentioned, with the end of school coming around, but I want to take a few minutes to discuss one of the most important priorities, and one of the most important things that appears on my personal checklist most frequently, and that is health care needs. Whether it is the health care forms for my boys to go to summer camp, or making sure they get their dental checkup, or ensuring they have gotten their immunizations to be able to start school, all those things are critically important to me, and there are many health care needs our working families out there are facing as well.

It is not a secret that a health care crisis is looming on the horizon. Health care access and affordability is out of reach for way too many of our hard-working American families. When we go out to our States, at least for me, anyway, and I talk with people, one of the issues that is paramount on their minds is health care, but it is synonymous, when they speak about it, with the economy and whether they can afford it with the economy of their family budget, and what it does to the economy of their small community if health care is not available, and what it does to the economy of this country if we wait so long to provide the access to affordable health care so that people are in acute care because it is more costly. It is costing our economy more and it is lessening the quality of life of Americans who so desperately want to find that access to affordable and good health care.

As many of my colleagues are very well aware, the number of uninsured in this country stands at about 47 million. You know, we see Americans are living longer. My husband's grandmother turns 111 this year, and she still lives on her own and does amazing things. My husband and I find that we are not just the sandwich generation, but we are the club sandwich generation.

As Americans live longer, we also know, because statistics tell us, that a baby girl born in this country today has a 50-percent chance of becoming a centenarian. Moreover, as the baby boom generation begins to retire, the current Medicare system is not equipped to effectively handle the strains of such a major demographic shift. It is an issue that constantly weighs on my mind, whether it is as a caregiver for my children or for aging parents or aging grandparents, and we know it is on the minds of all working Americans out there, not just mine and not just my colleagues.

I am sure it is on the minds of many of my colleagues, because we talk

about it all the time. We talk about caring for our aging parents and the needs of our kids, and it is not going away any time soon. And it is certainly not going away if we don't begin to make it a priority and do something about access to health care.

As mothers and daughters, wives, sisters, and legislators, the Democratic women of the Senate are committed to providing access to quality, affordable health care for all Americans. One way to address this issue is to put the focus first on small business owners, their employees, and self-employed individuals, who very often are those who are uninsured.

To give a snapshot, my small businesses are the No. 1 source of jobs in my home State of Arkansas. However, only 26 percent of businesses with fewer than 50 employees actually offer health insurance. Small businesses need assistance. They need innovative ways to offer affordable, accessible health care to their employees.

There is a misnomer out there that small businesses don't want to offer health insurance. They do, desperately. They know it increases their productivity, it increases their competitiveness, and their ability to attract good workers. But it has to be affordable. Small businesses have to maintain their competitive nature with big businesses and businesses all over the globe. That is why I have worked hard to design a comprehensive solution that will allow our small businesses to ban together and spread their risk, much like the programs that we as Federal employees enjoy.

We also have to focus on critical reforms of Medicare if we have any hopes of ensuring our seniors, those who have built this great land we enjoy, continue to receive the essential care they need as they age. Efficiencies, quality measures, all of these issues we have talked about recently in some of our Medicare efforts and what we are trying to do in our Medicare reform bill, will lower our costs and provide greater quality, which is what we want to do. Modernizing Medicare to take advantage of those efficiencies, those new technologies—health IT, e-prescription, and a whole host of different technologies—will help us, if we make that investment, by providing the quality as well as the efficiencies we need.

And we can't forget about the State Children's Health Insurance Program, known as SCHIP. We must make it a priority to expand health care coverage to the most vulnerable of our society—our children. I hope if my colleagues don't want to do it just because they love children, which most of us do—we understand they are our greatest blessing in this whole wide world—we should do it because it is an investment in our future.

We know children who are healthier are going to go to school, they are going to learn better, they are going to turn out to be better adults, they are going to get their education, get better

jobs, and pay more taxes. There will be a whole host of different things that will mean so much to this country if we provide that health care for our children.

The clock is ticking, and it is up to us in Washington to find a solution so the hard-working families of this country can be assured of a healthy tomorrow. Each year that passes without action places more and more Americans in a vulnerable position. I challenge our President and our colleagues in the Senate and on the other side of the aisle to stand with us, not against us, in providing quality and affordable health care for all Americans. Look at how much it means to this country, to those individuals, those working families who are the fabric of this country.

As the richest, most powerful country in the world, we owe it to our working families who want to protect themselves and their families from an uncertain future to provide the health care coverage they so desperately need. We owe it to the taxpayers of this country today and for generations to come to provide a quality health care system that is cost effective and sustainable. That is why I believe that providing access to good health care to America's working families is worth fighting for, and that is why it is primary on our checklist for change.

I thank the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the hour of morning business under the Republican control be divided equally among the following Senators: Senators ALEXANDER, KYL, HATCH, CORNYN, BOND, and MURKOWSKI.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Madam President, I ask that I be informed when I have consumed 9 minutes and have 1 minute remaining.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Chair will inform the Senator.

CHECKLIST FOR CHANGE

Mr. ALEXANDER. Madam President, Republican Senators—men and women—welcome this opportunity to talk about the checklist for change offered by Democratic Senators. As Senator MCCAIN has said: We all want change. But there is a right change and a wrong change. So I wish, in my few minutes, to take a few of the items on the Democratic checklist for change and talk about what I consider to be the right change and the wrong change.

Let's start with taking care of our military families and veterans. That probably should go at the top of our list because of our respect not only for the men and women who are fighting overseas but for those who are at home, both families without children or families with children. Those who are here also served.

We all have been seeking to update the GI bill for veterans so we can pro-

vide educational benefits to veterans today and to men and women who are on active duty that fit today's circumstances. Here is the major difference between Republicans and Democrats, an example of what I would consider to be the right change and the wrong change. Most Republicans favor an updating of the GI bill for veterans, as recommended by Senators MCCAIN, GRAHAM, and BURR, that would allow more servicemembers to transfer educational benefits to dependents. It would allow servicemembers to transfer educational benefits to their spouses or to their children. After serving at least 6 years, a member could transfer up to half of his or her education benefits to a spouse or children, or both. After serving for 12 years or more, a servicemember could transfer all of his or her education benefits to a spouse, children, or both.

In bottom-line terms, the Republican bill would do what the Democratic checklist says—take care of our military families and veterans—but most Republicans support the idea of giving this transferability of benefits, which could provide up to \$72,000 for a dependent or a spouse's education. The bill sponsored by most Democrats did not include that transferability of benefits. We believe we have the right change and that they have the wrong change.

Let me take another item on the checklist—enforced fiscal accountability, or protect the family checkbook, both of those. Here is an example of what we believe would be the right change in fiscal accountability and helping balance the family budget.

The Democrats had an opportunity, because they have the majority in this Chamber—remember, when we are talking about change, change in this Chamber would mean we would go from a Democratic majority to a Republican majority. The Democrats are in charge here. They set the agenda. What we talk about is what they bring up, the same as in the House of Representatives.

The Democratic budget provided a tax plan which will cause most Americans to be paying a lot more. Over the next 5 years, their tax plan provided for 84 million women to see a \$1,970 increase, because they would allow the 2001 and 2003 tax cuts to expire. Also, 48 million married couples would see a \$2,700 increase, and 12 million single women with children would see a \$1,000 increase. And more than 6 million low-income individuals and couples will no longer be exempt from the individual income tax.

Again, the right change for women and men in America would be the Republican version of lower taxes. The Democratic version is higher taxes.

Let me go to a third item—making America energy independent. How will we do that? The new economics professors on the other side of the aisle have come up with a brand new economics theory which would repeal supply from the law of supply and demand. They