

security—it seems to last about as long as a winter snow on a warm day. It sounds good and looks good 1 day, and then melts away the next day. We need to stop squandering these opportunities to work together. We need to get some work done.

Last night, even though the majority leader had previously told us we would not be voting on either Monday or Tuesday, in light of the big election vote that was going to occur today, he changed his mind, and it is his prerogative to do so, so we had a vote on the economic stimulus package that the House passed, and which the Republican leader said we should take up and pass in a bipartisan way in order to expedite that legislation. The motion we voted on last night passed overwhelmingly in support of that House legislation by 80 to 4—80 to 4.

So why it is we can't, in a similar fashion, take up that legislation and pass it without slowing it down by adding on a lot of extraneous spending by people viewing this as a Christmas tree on which they want to hang their favorite ornament as a way to fund their pet projects; Why it is we can't resist that temptation and expedite passage of this important legislation is, frankly, beyond me. I wish we would take care of the Nation's business. Unfortunately, the majority leader handed us his alternative legislation last night, a 70-plus-page bill that is completely different both from the Finance Committee bill that was passed out of the Senate and the House bill that has been negotiated between the Speaker and the White House and the Republican leader in the House.

I think we ought to be aware of high-pressure tactics, and that was certainly a high-pressure tactic to try to come up with a brandnew bill that nobody has looked at and insist we pass that bill without an adequate time to review it and to see what goodies have been inserted in this piece of legislation that some of us may object to. So it is my sincere hope we will not continue to squander the opportunities we have been presented with to work together to pass this economic stimulus package on a bipartisan basis, or this Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act reauthorization which has been on the radar for the Senate since at least April of 2007. There is simply no excuse for not acting on a timely basis to deal with both of these issues.

Mr. President, I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mr. DURBIN. I ask if the Chair would advise me as to the current status of morning business.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republicans control 6 minutes 15 seconds, the Democrats control 29 minutes.

Mr. DURBIN. I ask unanimous consent that the Republican time be reserved; that I be allowed to speak in morning business on the Democratic side.

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

OBSTRUCTIONISM

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I was on the floor earlier this morning when Senator McCONNELL came and made a little statement I would like to address at this moment because it seems to me Senator McCONNELL said a few things which bear repeating.

He was critical of the bill which we passed in the Senate Finance Committee to try to get the American economy back on its feet. The economy is struggling now. We had troubling unemployment figures last week. We know the President said repeatedly we are moving toward a recession. We know a recession means high unemployment, business failures, and lost opportunities for Americans and American business.

So we certainly want to do everything we can to stop that. One of the things that has been done by the Federal Reserve is to cut interest rates in the hope that people will be encouraged to borrow money responsibly for purchases such as cars and homes and the like and that those purchases will breathe some life into the economy.

Then there is the other side of the ledger when it comes to our economy, what we can do in Congress and with the President. What we try to do is to give Americans more spending power. Right now there is less consumer confidence. People are worried about bills they have to pay, health insurance that has gone up dramatically over the last 7 years, the cost of gasoline which many in my home State of Illinois, particularly downstate, know very well personally has increased in cost dramatically.

We also understand people putting their kids through college have seen tremendous increases in the cost of college education. The increase in the cost of food, that sort of thing, has led a number of people to be worried about whether they should make a big expenditure. So one of the things we are considering is something to stimulate the economy, an economic stimulus package, what can we do, how can we put spending power and confidence back in the hands of American families.

The President met with the Speaker of the House, NANCY PELOSI, and the Republican leader, JOHN BOEHNER, and worked out at least the beginning of that stimulus approach. What they suggested was they would send checks of about \$600 to individual taxpayers

across America within certain income limits and \$1,200 for a family and extra for those with children.

That money would go directly to a lot of people who will spend it because there are folks who are struggling month to month, paycheck to paycheck. That is a good thing to do. It is a group that has often been overlooked recently, that the tax cuts in Washington, under this administration, have not focused on giving helping hands to working families as much as giving a helping hand to those who do not need it, the wealthiest in our country.

So this idea of an economic stimulus, which finally focuses our attention on struggling families, is a good thing. The House passed its version in a bipartisan fashion, sent it over to the Senate to consider. Senator MAX BAUCUS, Chairman of the Finance Committee, met with that committee, and worked on ways to change it or improve it that they think would be helpful.

At the end of the day, the proposal by the Senate Finance Committee, which passed with a bipartisan vote, three Republicans joining the Democrats in voting for it, is one that I think is a better package, a better approach.

The House's is good. I like the House stimulus approach, but I think the Senate stimulus package is better.

This morning McCONNELL came to the floor, the Republican Senate leader. He was very critical of what the Senate Finance Committee passed on a bipartisan basis. He was critical of their measure, which passed with the support of Republican Senators.

He used phrases and terms in describing it that I think are worth looking into. Senator McCONNELL suggested we were involved in pet projects in this Senate stimulus package.

Well, I have taken a look at it. I am curious as to what pet projects he is talking about. I find it hard to believe the Republicans feel 21 million seniors who will receive a helping hand with the Senate Finance Committee are somehow superfluous, not important, they are pet projects.

Well, I have to concede that point. The seniors of America are a pet project of mine and most Senators. We know many of them live on fixed incomes, struggle from month to month to get by, worry about paying their utility bills and making sure they can pay for their prescription drugs.

So giving them a helping hand, as we do in the Senate Finance bill, is a good thing. Good for them. Good for our economy. Senator McCONNELL was obviously very critical of that. He hasn't said directly, but I wish he would go on record: Does he or does he not support providing an economic rebate check for 21 million Americans, those seniors who otherwise would not get a helping hand?

So when Senator McCONNELL returns to the floor, will he sign up for our pet project to help 21 million Americans or is he against it? I am sure the voters of Kentucky would love to know.

Then there is another pet project in the bill, 250,000, one-quarter of a million disabled veterans, many of them just returning from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. I have met many of them. I am sure Senator MCCONNELL has met many of them. To think adding them to the bill is something that would be negative in the eyes of Senator MCCONNELL is hard for me to understand.

These are men and women who risked their lives and came back injured from the war; many of them had to fight the bureaucracy of our Government to get the basic care we promised them. In the Senate Finance bill, we provide a helping hand for a quarter of a million veterans, which the House bill does not. Is Senator MCCONNELL opposed to that?

Well, when he comes to the floor and states whether he is for providing assistance to 21 million seniors, I hope he will also state whether he is for providing a rebate check for a quarter of a million of our veterans.

We also have in the Senate bill a helping hand for those who are on unemployment. Unfortunately, the economy as it goes south has casualties, and they include millions of Americans. We know those people who have lost a job are looking for another one, scrape by with an unemployment check. And sometimes, even within the 26 weeks of unemployment, they cannot find a job they are looking for. So we suggested extending that for another 13 weeks. That is not a radical idea. It is a traditional way of helping people in a poor economy. It has been done over and over under Democrats and Republicans. We include that in the Senate bill.

So the obvious question for Senator MCCONNELL and the Republicans, when he comes to the floor to tell us where he stands on helping seniors and helping disabled veterans, is does he think unemployed people in Kentucky, for example, need a helping hand? If he says no, then it is a matter of record. If he says it is a pet product, a project we should vote against, then it will be on the record. I did not hear that this morning. I was listening for it.

Then there is this whole thing about the mystery and challenge of this bill. Senator MCCONNELL and Senator KYL are learned men. I have served with them in the Senate. I respect them very much. I know they have a great capacity for understanding complex issues. But they have said the trouble with this bill is they cannot seem to get their arms around it. It is, oh, so hard for them to understand the new provision in the bill. The new provision in the bill is less than a page and a half in length. The new provision in the bill can be described quite simply as about \$1 billion to a program called LIHEAP.

LIHEAP is the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program. It is a program which provides help to Arizona, primarily in the summer months but to Kentucky in the cold winter months,

so poor people, elderly, and others will have a helping hand to pay their heating bills.

Senator BERNIE SANDERS of Vermont has been a big leader on this issue. It has always been a bipartisan program. So I have to ask Senator MCCONNELL and the Republican leadership: Is this another one of those pet projects you cannot stand, something you think we should ignore when we talk about getting this economy on its feet? I think it is a matter that these Senators need to consider personally. Do they want to go home to Kentucky, for example, and tell those low-income individuals, struggling to pay their heating bills, that is a pet project we cannot afford at this point? I hope not. But at least let them be on the record by the end of the day.

The interesting thing is we could be having a real full-scale debate on the economic stimulus bill, but the Republicans have refused. They have told us they need more time to absorb the page and a half that was added to this bill. They need to think this one through. They need to study these words.

Well, it has been about 12 or 15 hours now that they have had to read this page and a half. I know they are up to it. I know they can do this. I know they can read that and understand it, even without the help of a Democrat.

When they do, maybe they will come to the floor, change their mind, and allow us to finally debate this bill. You see this is an empty Chamber. Sadly, it will be largely empty most of the day because the Republicans want to kill this day in the Senate. They do not want us to make any progress on the economic stimulus bill, nor on another important bill which is pending.

Senator REID, our Democratic majority leader, came to the floor yesterday and begged them again: Let us return and do some real business today. They said: No. Today, the Senate will stand around, it will not roll up its sleeves and do anything. We will not consider the Indian health reform bill Senator DORGAN of North Dakota has been working on, long overdue, 6 or 7 years. Some of the poorest people in America have not received the kind of health care which we would all like to have for our families. Senator DORGAN is trying to do something about it. They will not give him the time to finish the bill. This is a perfect day to do it. The Republicans will not give him an opportunity to do it.

Then there is another bill which has energy and water projects which have been needed all around our country. They have been held up by the objection of the Republican side. We have asked to return to them. Again, they have refused. We could do that today.

Then, of course, the economic stimulus package, which Senator MCCONNELL spoke of and then left the floor. I wish he would return. Let's have a real debate on it. Let's find out where he stands on helping seniors, disabled veterans, and others.

Then, of course, there is the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act. That is a bill we have been working on literally for weeks. We sat around for 3 days last week trying to come to some agreement about what would be in that bill, and we finally reached agreement.

Now we are ready to go. Several amendments have been debated and are near a vote. We have several more. Let's get going. Let's earn our pay around here instead of killing time and making speeches. We could actually consider debate. The Senate used to have that. It is a great Senate tradition. Senators with opposing views would come to the floor and respectfully disagree and argue their point of view and ask for a rollcall. I know some people who follow C-SPAN are wondering, when did that last occur? Was it in the last century? No, it has happened here from time to time. In the time I have been in the Senate, we have come perilously close to debate on at least a half dozen occasions. We can do that again. It would be a great return to Senate tradition. But it won't happen if the Republicans continue to filibuster, continue to obstruct, and continue to refuse to let us debate the important issues of our time.

Why wouldn't we want to debate today the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act? The President has told us over and over again it is critical. We need it. It is timely. We have to move on it. Yet when we want to call it on the floor, Senate Republicans refuse. They oppose us.

The day is not over. Senator REID will be on the floor a little later in an attempt to finally try to get us back to business. It is long overdue.

PRESIDENT'S BUDGET PROPOSAL

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, the President's budget is often described as "dead on arrival." In fairness to this President and others, we should look at it in a different way. This is the President's proposal for the budget for the next fiscal year. It is a fiscal year for which this President will not be here. The year begins on October 1. He will end his term in office January 20. So most of this budget will affect the next administration, the next President. This is pure speculation on his part about where America should be in the next year as the President leaves office.

The folks at the Office of Management and Budget must have worked up to the last minute, because when they posted the President's proposed budget on line yesterday, two of the first 15 words were misspelled. Far worse than misspellings, however, many of the priorities in the President's budget are misplaced. The President has proposed the first \$3 trillion budget in American history; \$3 trillion. Yet with all that money, the President, with his priorities, continues to cut education and health care, energy conservation and