

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

independence, affordable housing, veterans programs, and many national priorities. Seven years ago, President Bush came to town as one of the luckiest Presidents in modern history. As some might say, using an analogy from Ann Richards in a speech she once gave to a Democratic convention, President Bush started his administration, in economic terms, on second base. Things had been done to improve America's economy and its budget, and they were given to this President to continue.

President Bush inherited the largest budget surplus in America's history. In his first budget address in 2001, he promised to use that surplus to fund our priorities, strengthen our economy, and even pay down the national debt. He said after all that was done, he would have enough money left over for tax cuts. Today, 7 years later, after President Bush and Vice President CHENEY have been in the White House working with a Congress largely under Republican control, America's economy is in trouble. Federal spending during their term has increased 53 percent. Our deficit is expected to hit \$410 billion this year, \$407 billion next year. Instead of paying down the national debt, this President, who inherited a surplus, has piled record amounts of new debt for America and for generations to come. Under George Bush the national debt has increased by more than \$3 trillion. We are going around the country, hat in hand, borrowing and begging from China, the Middle East oil states, Korea, Japan, about any other country that will pay our bills, because this President has been unable to. Now the President is demanding, nevertheless, that his tax cut ideas become permanent law.

How much would President Bush's tax cuts for wealthy people cost us if they were made permanent? Mr. President, \$4.3 trillion over the next 10 years, tax cuts primarily for people who weren't even asking for them. That is not all. While the President claims to oppose tax increases, he is about to impose one of the largest tax increases in America's history on more than 25 million working middle-class families. He refuses to patch and reform the alternative minimum tax beyond next year. That is a \$119 billion tax increase in 2010 alone.

The President continues to argue that we need to stay in Iraq and Afghanistan. His budget, nevertheless, cuts off funding for the troops after the spring of next year. What is that all about? The President says we have to stay the course. Senator JOHN MCCAIN said it could last as long as 100 years. President Bush in his budget cuts off spending for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in the spring of next year. He hasn't told us that the war is going to end then. I certainly hope it does. But he better get his story straight.

With the economy failing and time running out on this Presidency, one might think the President would

change his approach and accept new ideas. Unfortunately, he is stuck in the same old program and the same old message. Nine million more Americans are uninsured today than when President Bush took office. Half of those 9 million Americans lost their health insurance in the last 2 years. It is getting worse and at a pace most American families can't keep up with. What does the President say about that? He wants to cut the Medicare Program, a program for the elderly and the disabled. In Medicaid, he wants to make cuts, a program for those in lower income categories, many of whom have lost their jobs. He wants to cut other parts of America's health care safety net. His budget singles out health care for the heaviest cuts while continuing to provide large overpayments to many private insurance companies.

In Illinois, more than 1.5 million people depend on Medicare, more than 2 million depend on Medicaid. Under the President's budget, Illinois would receive \$123 million less in Federal Medicaid funds. Stroger Hospital in the city of Chicago is a public hospital of which I think very highly. They have a very competent medical staff. They treat the poorest of the poor, not just in Chicago and Cook County but for many surrounding counties. Over half the people who come to that hospital have no way to pay for their care. At Holy Cross Hospital in Marquette Park, 25 percent of those who are treated cannot pay for anything. Yet the President says we should cut the Federal Government's reimbursement to these hospitals? It doesn't make sense. We know what is going to happen. There will be an awful lot of Americans who will have no place to turn and won't have the professional medical care which we all want for our families.

When will this administration understand that Medicare is there to help our seniors, not to line the pockets of corporations? The President should fund Medicare.

In his State of the Union Address, the President also called on Congress to reauthorize No Child Left Behind. Yet once again, this President has underfunded his own law. The Department of Education estimates the President's budget will provide \$588 million in title I funding in Illinois. That is just over half the amount promised under No Child Left Behind. As a result, 120,000 Illinois children will be left without full title I services. It is one thing to ask kids to take tests to figure out whether they are making progress or falling behind. But once they need a helping hand, how can this President repeatedly refuse to come up with Federal funds to fund the very mandates he has created? The President also siphons away \$300 million from public schools to pay for vouchers for private and religious schools. Those vouchers come at the expense of 48 programs, including a lot of essential programs for students such as Perkins loans that help students go to college. I am not

opposed to private and religious schools. I am a product of religious school education. They have a valuable place in our society. But the first obligation of the Government is to the public education system. The President, unfortunately, is not going to meet that obligation.

When it comes to homeland security, again the President refuses to put money in the COPS Program, the single most practical and effective way to provide men and women in uniform so they are there when we need them. This year he slashes funding for State and local law enforcement assistance, such as the COPS Program and the Byrne grants.

On energy and global warming, the President's budget is, unfortunately, unresponsive to the real national and global emergency we face. Record high oil prices are harming the economy, record emissions and pollution threatening our globe and its climate. We ought to be investing aggressively in developing renewable energy options. Instead, the President's budget proposes a 7-percent reduction in solar energy research, a 27-percent reduction in energy efficiency programs, and a 79-percent cut in weatherization programs to help families trying to keep their homes warm and cool. The President's budget cuts LIHEAP by 22 percent. As a result, 15,000 Illinois families would lose assistance.

It also proposes to eliminate what was once the centerpiece of coal energy research in America, the FutureGen plant in Mattoon, IL. This is one near and dear to my heart. For 5 years, I worked with a bipartisan delegation—Congressman TIM JOHNSON, Republican of Illinois, Senator OBAMA, and others—to win this plant for our State. Governor Blagojevich, local officials, everybody pitched in. We were announced to be the winners in the middle of December. Last week the Secretary of Energy pulled the plug and said: We are not going to fund this project. How can this President walk away from a zero-emission coal energy plant that has been something he has bragged about for so many years?

The subprime mortgage crisis has plunged America into our worst housing crisis, some experts say, since the Great Depression.

Two million families are likely to lose their homes to foreclosure over the next 2 years. There is a dramatic need for affordable housing all across America, from big cities to small rural communities.

Yet the President wants to slash or even eliminate programs that help rural communities build affordable housing and help families own their own homes, like the multi-family housing direct loans, self-help housing grants and single family housing direct loans.

The President also wants to eliminate the HOPE IV program, which helps cities restore public housing, and the section 108 loan program, which helps families rehab their homes.

The President's budget cuts community development block grants by \$650 million. Illinois would lose \$40 million for police officers, improved street lighting and sewer lines, upgrading low income housing, reconstructing problem roadways and operating substance abuse programs and homeless shelters.

Amtrak is vitally important to Illinois and all of America. Unfortunately, the President and his administration are once again attempting to privatize and eventually eliminate Amtrak rail service.

The President's budget cuts the Airport Improvement Program funding by \$764 million.

Illinois would lose \$25 million, threatening a critical source of funding for new runway construction at O'Hare, and improvements at airports such as Waukegan, Marion, Peoria, Springfield and many other Illinois airports.

Once again the President has refused to include funding for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in his budget. After 6 years of fighting, this administration continues to skirt the rules and avoid accountability and openness.

Continuing to fund the war through supplemental funding is one way the administration tries to mask the full cost of these wars. Another way is by underfunding veterans health and other services our veterans have earned and need.

The President is requesting \$41.2 billion for the VA health care system—\$1.6 billion below the independent budget's recommendation.

His budget shortfalls mean that there will likely be little relief for Illinois's nearly 70,000 veterans, who must still wait for an average of nearly 5 months to have their disability claims processed.

More than 76,000 farm families in Illinois produce crops and livestock that feed families all over the world.

Agriculture research is vitally important to Illinois farm families and to our national economy. The President's budget would cut agriculture research by \$330 million, which could jeopardize promising research at the ARS lab in Peoria and the University of Illinois extension services.

In addition, the President proposes sharp cuts in rural broadband programs, rural housing, and rural business development.

In Illinois, which receives the second-highest total of USDA rural development assistance in the Nation, the President's cuts would all but eliminate popular grant programs that support innovative rural businesses, community facilities, and broadband networks.

President Bush is proposing the largest cut to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting in its 40-year history—a 56-percent reduction in funding.

America's 1,100 public radio and TV stations are an indispensable source of education, information for enrichment. The President's cuts would cripple them.

Illinois's 30 public radio stations would lose at least \$6.5 million in total support and lose all of their digital transition funding and culture for sources, civic education, and special local content to communities.

Finally, in foreign affairs, the President's budget cuts the U.S. contribution to the global fund to fight AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria by \$341 million—funds that could provide life-saving AIDS drugs for 37,500 more people, treat more than 272,000 people for TB, and provide more than 2.1 million bed nets to prevent for malaria.

As the world's wealthiest and most powerful Nation, our actions encourage other donor nations to step up and devote additional resources to fight the global AIDS pandemic. Keeping our commitments to the global AIDS fight can help to restore goodwill for America in Africa and around the world.

Someone at the White House corrected those misspelled words in the first draft of the President's budget. It is up to Congress to replace the misplaced priorities in the President's plan and agree on a budget plan that meets the needs of America's families and businesses and communities and puts our economy back on the right track.

I yield the floor.

(Mr. DURBIN assumed the Chair.)

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Montana.

Mr. TESTER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the time I consume apply against the Republican time.

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

DISABLED VETERANS

Mr. TESTER. Mr. President, this week the Senate will hopefully begin debate on an economic stimulus package. Front and center in the debate will be how we balance the need to get our economy going while once again addressing issues that revolve around the national debt. I hope there is one thing this body will agree on unanimously, that we must not forget America's disabled veterans in the debate. Earlier today I heard Members on the floor talk about pet projects. Veterans issues are an important project to me, and I will not forget about disabled vets as we move forward with this economic stimulus package.

There are about 2.8 million vets who receive some form of disability through the VA. The good news is that most of these folks hold down other employment and would get a tax rebate through the House's economic stimulus bill. But for another 250,000 disabled vets who have no other income other than their veterans disability benefit and maybe a Social Security disability check, they would get absolutely nothing from the House bill, not one red cent.

Let me say that again: The bill proposed by the House and by President Bush would not give a quarter of a mil-

lion disabled veterans one nickel. That is simply wrong.

Under the leadership of Senator BAUCUS, the Senate Finance package corrects that error. It would ensure that the folks who were injured in the cause of defending our freedom are able to get something back.

I assure my colleagues that these veterans feel the pinch of higher gas prices, heating costs, and everything else in between, just as much as any other household struggling on a fixed income. The difference is that these folks have worn the colors of our country. They have defended this country. The way we treat those who have fought for our freedom and our Nation says a great deal about our society because when it comes to veterans, we are not talking about a handout, we are talking about a country honoring our promise we have made to our service men and women.

I wish to take a minute to read a letter I received recently from Warren Matte, a veteran from Harlem, MT. Here is what he says:

For those of us who are combat veterans and poor people, we are now and have been in a recession for a good numbers of years. We are on the bottom rung of the ladder, and it looks like we will always be there. Some of us are surviving on VA benefits and Social Security. The long distances we have to travel here in Montana and the high cost of living is keeping us in poverty. There are 500,000 homeless veterans in this great Nation and no one cares. We put our lives on the line so everyone can be free and live the good life, and no one cares what happens to us and our families.

When our combat veterans are using phrases such as "the bottom rung of the ladder," I think we can do better than that. When disabled veterans worry that "no one cares," we must do better than that.

This Finance Committee bill is a step in the right direction. So I urge my colleagues, no matter what else you may think of the stimulus package, do not forget about the Warren Mattes of the world. Do not forget about our disabled veterans.

I have been in this body for a little over 1 year. I can tell my colleagues that from my perspective, the Senate is an easy place to stop things. If you choose, you can stop any piece of legislation from moving forward.

I think the House stimulus package is a good stimulus package, but it can be made a whole lot better, and we need to make it a whole lot better. For the 250,000 disabled vets, for the 2.5 million seniors, for those folks who need unemployment benefits, for those folks who need assistance with their heating bills, we need to make it better.

I am not sure this economic stimulus bill will get us out of the economic stresses we feel right now in this country, but I can tell my colleagues one thing: If we don't address the issues that revolve around the people I just talked about—the disabled vets, the seniors, the folks who need help with their heating, the folks who need unemployment benefits—we are making a huge mistake.