

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.

We ought not to be stopping with this bill. We ought to be making it better in the Senate and passing it on for the President to sign it. We ought to be stamping it with our approval.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Chair announces that morning business is now closed.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Chair recognizes the majority leader.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. REID. 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.

ECONOMIC STIMULUS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, yesterday and again this morning we heard some remarkable statements from our Republican colleagues that matters within the stimulus package are pet projects. Later, after that statement was made, we had another Senator come and say that they were Christmas tree ornaments. Then we had another Republican come this morning and say the stimulus package is certainly not needed. One of the Senators said unemployment benefits are totally unnecessary and that all it will do is increase unemployment. I am not making this up. This is what they said.

Now, we heard the distinguished minority leader, Senator MCCONNELL, come to the floor with a statement that is simply untrue. He said:

If Americans are wondering why their checks aren't in the mail, they can find it in last week's news clips.

Everyone knows—if they don't, they should know—that no matter how the debate turns out, no one's check is going to be held up. Any stimulus plan—whether it is the House version standing alone as it now exists or the Senate Finance Committee version, which I favor strongly, or a combination of the two—would calculate rebate checks on the 2007 income tax returns. That is basically the only way you can do it. Taxes are not due until April 15. That is the way it always is. That is more than 2 months from today. So everyone should know that the checks aren't in the mail tomorrow. The only way it can be done is based upon the 2007 return, except for some people, and that is a very small minority. So let's not confuse or concern the American

people with claims that aren't based on facts. Perhaps the Republicans don't understand the timeframe of the stimulus package. If they do, it should be clarified.

Now, what are some of the other things we have heard from our Republican colleagues? One suggested that we ought not to do anything to stimulate the economy. I talked about that. He said we shouldn't provide any help at all to the millions of Americans struggling to pay their bills and feed their families. Republican Senators have suggested that sending stimulus checks to 21.5 million seniors on fixed incomes is a pet project, a Christmas tree ornament; that providing assistance to help struggling Americans pay their heating bills through the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program is a pet project or a Christmas tree ornament. I believe many Republicans—Republicans—could not disagree more strongly with those statements.

The stimulus package sent to us by the House of Representatives last week, as we have said from the very beginning, is a good start. I was part of a program to suggest the House should go first. There was some talk that we should try to get the two bodies together and do that. The way the Senate works, it would have taken too much time. Their rules are different from ours. So I said to go ahead and do it, and when they completed it, I gave them all the applause I could. I thought it was an important thing that they did that. But our job is to take the bill from the House and make it stronger.

The Republican leader and others have said this morning that working on bipartisan improvements is “playing politics.” I believe it is our constitutional obligation. It is how the Founding Fathers envisioned this country working. It is how they envisioned the legislative branch working.

But soon, Senators will have a chance to vote on the Senate Finance Committee's bipartisan plan. It will either be tomorrow, or it will be Thursday. Based on the House plan, it makes several improvements, the Baucus-Grassley package.

The Finance Committee package sends stimulus checks to roughly 21.5 million senior citizens who would get nothing at all from the House bill. Give them the money, and they will spend it.

The Finance Committee package sends checks to 250,000 disabled veterans who were left out of the House plan. Give them the money, and they will spend it.

The Finance Committee package extends unemployment benefits for those who have lost their jobs in the economy. To suggest, as has been done here on the floor, that extending unemployment benefits will make unemployment worse? We have people who are no longer counted as being unemployed because they have been off the rolls so

long. The House bill doesn't take care of unemployment benefits. Economists tell us that it is the single most effective way to stimulate the economy.

The Finance Committee package is business-friendly. It gives small businesses greater ability to immediately write off purchases of machinery or equipment. It helps larger businesses with “bonus” depreciation or an extended carryback period for past losses to recoup cash for future investments. It gives them a tax break, and they will spend it.

Realtors are in town. They come every year. Homebuilders don't come usually this time of year, but they are here now because this provision is so special to them.

Without exaggeration, the States of California, Florida, Nevada, and Michigan are in big trouble. Other States are in trouble also because of their housing crisis. The Finance Committee package addresses the housing crisis in a number of ways, but one is including mortgage revenue bonds to be used by the States to refinance subprime mortgages. That is very important. That is why the homebuilders are here en masse today.

The Finance Committee package includes an extension of energy efficiency and renewable energy incentives to create jobs, expand the clean energy industry, save consumers money on their energy bills, and help begin to stem the tide of global warming.

I will also offer an amendment that we can and should all support. First, the House-passed bill's language on housing will be included in this package that we will vote on. I don't know who could object to that.

This amendment will increase the conforming loan limits for Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, as well as the loan limits for FHA-backed mortgages, which will allow more homeowners to refinance and will reduce mortgage interest rates in virtually every part of the country.

Second, there is money to help low-income Americans heat their homes, through the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program, known as LIHEAP. This is important because it allows people to not have to choose between food, medicine or heat. So let's—while we are talking about heat—leave the overheated rhetoric aside and work on passing this legislation. This is important. We should do this.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the vote on the motion to invoke cloture on the amendment to H.R. 5140, which I have described, which contains the Finance Committee language on LIHEAP funding, occur on Wednesday, February 6 at 3 p.m., with the hour prior to that time equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CASEY). Is there objection?

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, it has never been our desire to delay consideration