

Senator Paul Wellstone. Paul Wellstone, as we all remember, was a Senator from Minnesota. I am sure it seems odd to most people—recognizing their political proclivities; that is, those of Senator Wellstone and those of Senator Helms—why my mind picks up Paul Wellstone upon mentioning the name of Jesse Helms. It is hard to imagine two Senators more divergent in their views.

Senator Wellstone was clearly a liberal. Senator Helms was clearly a very conservative man. Their views were very divergent, very different. It is no secret because he told everyone when he came to Washington—Paul Wellstone made it clear he didn't like his rightwing colleague from North Carolina, Jesse Helms. He said that openly. But it was not long before Paul Wellstone publicly changed his view of Senator Helms. Senator Wellstone continued to fiercely disagree with Jesse Helms on most issues, but he quickly came to respect him for his sincerity.

When I came to the Senate, I, similar to all new Senators, was excited to be here and understood what a great honor it was to represent the people of the State of Nevada in the Senate. But one of the last people whom I was going to try to befriend was Jesse Helms. As a moderate Democrat, I found his views extreme. We found little common ground in points of policy, it appeared.

As a freshman Senator, I enjoyed presiding, as does the Presiding Officer now presiding over the Senate. I spent my share of time in the seat the Presiding Officer now has. I enjoyed that very much. During my time, that first 2 years I was in the Senate, I watched Jesse Helms right over here to my right, stand and talk often—and a lot. I can remember one time he was here—I was the Presiding Officer, he was over there—there was not another person in this Chamber. Jesse Helms said to me, as sincerely as anyone could say anything—and he had a distinct speaking voice—he said to me as sincerely as anyone could say anything, he said:

Mr. President, I don't want to be here on this issue but no one else will come and talk on it.

It was an issue dealing with pornography. The speech Jesse Helms gave was often on issues that other people would not speak out about. But I became so impressed with his sincerity, that he wasn't doing what he said for political reasons; he was doing it because that is what he believed. We all have to admire someone such as that, even though we may disagree with what they speak.

I came to understand what Paul Wellstone had come to realize. I came to it before Paul Wellstone did because I got here before he did. Whether you agreed with the Senator from North Carolina, his sincerity and his views and the forthright way in which he stood by them were remarkable. So I believe it is fitting that Jesse Helms' last day on Earth was the Fourth of

July. He loved his country. He spent every day doing what he believed was necessary to make it stronger. His wife Dorothy and children, Jane, Nancy, and Charles, along with seven Helms grandchildren and one great grandchild are in our thoughts.

Rest well, Jesse Helms.

I have some other things to say, but perhaps my colleague wants to say something about Senator Helms? If that is the case, I will save my remarks until he finishes.

TRIBUTE TO SENATOR JESSE HELMS

Mr. McCONNELL. I thank my friend, the majority leader. Let me just add, Jesse and Dot Helms were good friends of Elaine's and mine and good friends of a lot of other people in the Senate on both sides. There are a significant number of our conference planning to attend the funeral tomorrow. I thank the majority leader for his accommodation of those requests by having the votes on Wednesday morning. At Dot Helms' request, I will be doing one of the eulogies tomorrow at the funeral, and I will have more to say about the life of my good friend Jesse Helms when I get back. But I wish to echo the remarks of the majority leader about what a fine gentleman he was.

If you took a poll around here of the pages and the people who work in the Capitol about who was the most popular Member, I expect Jesse Helms would have won it—which would surprise an awful lot of people in the press and out in America who thought of Senator Helms as sort of a fierce individual. In fact, in person, he was as gentle, as accommodating, and as friendly as anybody I have ever met. We all will miss Jesse Helms a great deal.

I thank the majority leader for giving me an opportunity to make some comments at this point about our good friend Jesse Helms.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, we are going to go ahead and do our caucus tomorrow as we normally do, but the Republicans are going to do theirs on Wednesday. We will make sure there are no votes between 12:30 and 2 o'clock on Wednesday so they can do their business.

REPUBLICAN OBSTRUCTION AND THE ECONOMY

Mr. REID. Mr. President, just as the American people are recovering from a holiday weekend marked by record gas prices announced this morning, averaging \$4.11 a gallon—and it is much more than that in Nevada; it is \$4.25 in Nevada—another report in the news this morning suggests oil might reach \$200 before the end of the year—\$200 a barrel. It was only a couple months ago

that President Bush seemed shocked and confused when a reporter suggested that some analysts were predicting that gas would reach \$4 a gallon. Now some economists consider \$6 a gallon a very real possibility.

While most Americans enjoyed a day off from work on Friday to celebrate the Fourth of July, no one gets a day off from paying record gas prices, record oil prices, and record grocery prices.

I spoke an hour ago to Verie Doing, who owns the biggest business in Searchlight. Verie and her late husband, Warren Doing, ran what might not be much by most standards, but it is for the people in Searchlight. She employs 70 or 80 people, and it is the biggest employer in Searchlight. She has a bar and casino, a restaurant. She said she is feeling the impact of gas prices. Las Vegas is 60 miles away, there is no town closer, so in Searchlight you need the tourist trade.

She is similar to all small business people—they are struggling. That is why on Thursday it was announced that Starbucks is closing more than 600 stores; Dillard's will likely go out of business; Pep Boys will likely go out of business. There are huge cutbacks in many other companies. Nine thousand stores will close before the end of the year. That, of course, opens places that people are going to have to try to rent, probably at reduced rates if they even can rent them. So this is a snowballing effect.

With rare exception, all these problems economically are caused by two things: the gas prices and the housing crisis. We have 8,500 new home foreclosures every day. Americans are at risk of losing their homes. They don't get a day off, of course. As American people endure sleepless nights trying to figure out how to make ends meet and provide for their families, they deserve to know that Congress is working hard to help.

But what we are seeing is the Republican leaders, both in the House and in the Senate, simply refusing to work with Democrats on legislation essential to our country in this economic recession. Of course, it is more focused on the Senate because, as we know, if you are in the majority of the House, you can move things. In the Senate, that is not the way it is. We have the ability to filibuster things and, as we know, that is what has been going on in recent months.

My friend, Senator McCONNELL, said time and time again the way to get things done in the Senate is through bipartisanship. There is no question about that. The only way you get things done in this body is bipartisanship, and that is why I have said if there is a change in the number of Senators we have next year, if there are more seats on this side of the aisle next year, we still have to work on a bipartisan basis.

I am committed to doing that. I could not agree, as I have indicated,

more with Senator MCCONNELL that we have to work on a bipartisan basis. That is why in the waning days and hours of the last work period I brought to the Senate legislation that was bipartisan in the truest sense, the emergency supplemental appropriations bill that finally gives our troops the care and benefits they have earned with tremendous valor; one of the most important things this country has done in decades, a GI bill of rights.

Coincidentally, the Presiding Officer is the man who wrote that. There are a lot of people, I am sure, knowing the humility the Presiding Officer has that you want to give credit, but the credit starts with the Presiding Officer as the first person in line, in my mind, and Senator HAGEL.

But it was bipartisan. That is how we got it done. As good and as intelligent, as necessary, as the GI bill of rights was, we could never have gotten it done without the bipartisan support that Senator WEBB of Virginia got for that bill.

We also introduced, right before we left, a housing bill to stem the tide of foreclosures and correct flaws in the lending laws to prevent foreclosure of future homeowners. In that we did not finish that bill before we left, add 10 days, make it a short period of time, that is 85,000 homes have gone into foreclosure; 8,500 a day. Add one zero to that, that is 85,000.

We had a Medicare doctors fix to prevent payment cuts for doctors and improve care for patients. That was so important. I know that the attention is focused on the doctors, but it is more than the doctors. Of course, the doctors did not want a 10.6-percent cut. But that had a tremendous snowballing effect. Doctors cannot afford to take Medicare patients with this cut. They will not take them. I had the opportunity to go to dinner with two of my wife's physicians, people who have cared for her over the years, during the break. One of them said: I am not sure I can take Medicare patients anymore—an internist, great reputation.

Not only does it affect that, many entities base their reimbursement on what Medicare pays. So it is a very difficult situation. It was a bipartisan piece of legislation.

We also did, right before we left, a bill cutting taxes for innovators and entrepreneurs, for developing clean alternative fuels that would help end our addiction to foreign oil. So despite my friend, the Republican leader's, words on embracing bipartisanship, the Senate Republicans blocked all these strongly bipartisan bills except for the supplemental appropriations bill, every one of them, and a few more.

The housing bill is supported by a strong bipartisan majority of Republicans and Democrats. Cloture was invoked by a vote of 83 to 9, and the Dodd-Shelby-Baucus-Grassley substitute amendment was agreed to by a vote of 79 to 16. We could have finished that bill last work period, but Senate Republican leaders blocked housing.

Since then, as I have already said, another 85,000 homes have been foreclosed upon, or at least the foreclosure proceedings have started. The Medicare doctors fix passed the House with a stunning 355-to-59 vote. Could anything be more bipartisan? Virtually every House Democrat and two-thirds of the House Republicans supported it. Two-thirds of the House Republicans supported it. How could anything be more bipartisan?

As we talked about before we left, one of the Republicans who voted against it apologized publicly, wrote a letter saying: I made a mistake.

Yet Republican leaders blocked the Medicare fix and chose to protect insurance companies and the health care providers at the expense of elderly patients and their doctors. Last year these people my friends on the other side of the aisle are trying to protect with the Medicare Advantage Program, part of the Medicare bill that was passed some time ago, made more than \$15 billion.

To take care of this issue that is so important to the American people, the so-called doctors fix, I explained how important it is; we took a tiny bit of the \$15 billion. So we should have done this. We should have fixed it. It should not have been blocked. It was a choice made to protect the HMOs and the insurance companies at the expense of elderly patients and their doctors.

The alternative energy tax extenders also enjoy strong bipartisan support. Yet this legislation has been blocked, this legislation which would literally cut taxes. It seems that the Republican definition of "bipartisan" is not what the rest of us understand "bipartisanship" as meaning. Under their definition, even if a small handful of Republicans—remember, I have gone over the number of these bills passing overwhelmingly. Even if a small handful of Republicans oppose the legislation all of the rest support, the Republican leadership does not consider it to be bipartisan.

I understand the frustration the Republicans feel as a minority party. But the stakes are too high for inaction. If they, the Republicans in the Senate, seek bipartisanship, as they claim they do, my Republican friends should end their pointless, harmful obstruction and work with us to pass these bills that all enjoy strong and in many cases overwhelming bipartisan support: housing, tax extenders, including provisions for alternative energy, the Medicare bill, only to name a few.

Now, this work period is one that we have a lot of work to do, a whole lot of work to do. I had the good fortune of speaking with the Republican leader today, and I went over with him some of the things we need to do this work period. We need to complete a number of issues. We need one more to join us on Medicare. It is no big surprise that we are going to have a vote on Medicare again on Wednesday so everyone should be prepared for that. We can do

that. There can be some obstacles thrown up. But they cannot stop us from voting Wednesday afternoon. There can be an effort made to have a majority vote on this, one matter to proceed to it, and another one. But, of course, we wind up needing 60 votes. And there will be an opportunity Wednesday, probably in the late afternoon, to see if we can pick up that one extra vote.

We are going to pass FISA, a bill I oppose because of its unique provision. But a bipartisan majority of Senators will likely support that. We must also address gas prices. I have talked to the Republican leader about hopefully we can work something out on a bipartisan basis. I am certainly going to try.

One of the areas that it appears there is some agreement on is speculation, and maybe we can do something in that regard together, because there have been public statements made by the Republican colleagues that speculation is a problem. Maybe we can do something with the other aspects of that. I am happy to try to work something out.

We have to do PEPFAR. I hope we can do that by unanimous consent. I hope we do not have to go through all of the procedures. I mean there are literally a handful of Republicans holding that up. They have held it up for a long time. We have tried to move it on a number of occasions. There have been objections to it. So this work period we have to move forward on it.

I have talked about the energy tax extenders, the Consumer Product Safety conference report. That is going to come to us. That is almost completed. We are going to have to have a run at LIHEAP to see what we can do for that; the media shield law. Some of these may not go very far because there may be Republican objection, there may be bipartisan objection to some of these on proceeding to them. We will have to see.

There is also a package, I have talked to the Republican leader, a big package of bills we are putting together that has been held up by one Senator. We are going to put those together. They are already put together. We are going to move forward on those.

We also, I think, have to do the DOD authorization and appropriations bill. This is not a list of Democratic priorities or pet issues, it is not a platform for the Obama campaign or any of the Senate races around the country. These are critical priorities of the American people, every one of them.

The next several weeks can be easy or they can be difficult. If my colleagues on the other side of the aisle are willing, we can pass this legislation swiftly and with overwhelming support from Democrats and Republicans. But if we look to the last 18 months, past as prologue, then there be likely some heel dragging. If we finish these pieces of legislation in the first 4 weeks we are here, then I have no problem taking that first week in August off. If

these issues are more than we can bear, talk to me. I think I have been pretty reasonable in setting these out. But I have gone over these with the Republican leader, and I am happy to sit down and talk to him if he thinks that some of them are a bridge too far. But this, in my opinion, is what we need to do so that the Senate is respectful of the wishes of the American people.

A couple of other things. I do not think it is good for us that we try to accomplish nothing. I remind my Republican colleagues, and perhaps I do not need to do this, that the root of continued obstructionism is not without cost. Most importantly, it comes at a cost to the American people who are facing Medicare cuts, increasing home foreclosure, ever increasing gas prices, because Republicans refused to work with us last work period.

But continued obstruction is, I believe, in my opinion, coming at a cost to our Republican colleagues themselves as well. The American people see with clear eyes that our country's economic crisis continues to grow worse. The Republicans have dragged their heels. It is not coincidental that we have had editorials all over the country—I am not going point to those—indicating that the Republicans have to work more to get things done.

But there is good reason to show that Americans favor a Democratic control of Congress by the widest margin in the history of polling. Never, never has there been a wide margin between Democrats and Republicans as to who the American people feel will do a better job taking care of our country. So maybe after a week back home among family, friends, constituents, my Republican colleagues are ready to walk away from the small handful of their colleagues who insist upon inaction. Maybe enough voters back home explained to my friends on the other side of the aisle exactly how urgently they need help.

If so, I say to my Republican colleagues, I am here, we are here to work with you. It is not too late to be the 60th vote on Medicare and join us on housing, alternative fuels. I hope the July 4 recess will be remembered as a turning point for this Congress, and we can now move forward with the same urgency the American people feel to find common ground and change our country as it desperately needs changing.

The turning point can begin now. The Republicans can allow us to move forward and debate legislation to lower gas prices, invest in clean, renewable, alternative energy. I am not going to go over a list of unanimous-consent requests; I have done that in the past. I simply want to say, let's not have these objections to these pieces of legislation. Let's try to work together.

We frankly have had—and I spoke to a Republican Senator today, saying: We need more opportunity to offer amendments. I said to my friend, a Republican Senator: You know, we are in

the throes of a Presidential election. We have at the most about 9 weeks of legislative time before that election.

On opportunities that we had to legislate, where we brought to the floor pieces of legislation that were open to amendment, here is what we got: The 18-cent tax holiday was an effort of JOHN MCCAIN to do a campaign issue. Senator OBAMA said it was a political gimmick and it didn't go anywhere. Also on the GI bill of rights, as my friend the Presiding Officer will acknowledge, we had an open piece of legislation. What do they want to offer on that? Something to change the GI bill of rights because Senator MCCAIN said it was too generous. On housing, we want to legislate on housing. And when other issues come up, that is what we want to legislate on.

We are not going to have this as an opportunity to do a Presidential election here in the Senate. We have elections all over the country, and we have enough to do.

I would hope my friends will respond to the deafening calls from their constituents to take action. Instead of working with us on legislation to lower gas prices, they propose that we lease more land to oil companies. We participated in that. I led the effort over here, with a number of other Senators, to get Senators to go along with drilling in the gulf. We did that. We did that. But it is interesting, we have been told by those companies that any new offshore drilling, if they decide that is what they want to do, will take at least 2 years before they can get a piece of equipment to drill offshore. They don't have any. So we are not blind to the American people looking to every opportunity they can. We are not knee-jerk opposed to drilling, but we do acknowledge that our great country, with the wonderful natural resources Lewis and Clark and others discovered—we have less than 3 percent of the oil in the entire world, and that counts ANWR and all the offshore—less than 3 percent. We use more than 25 percent of all the oil that is used in the world. We use 21 million barrels a day 7 days a week. We are open to any reasonable approach that will lower gas prices, but let's also not forget that the oil industry already leases 68 million acres in America that they aren't using.

The State of Nevada is the seventh largest State in the Union. The 68 million acres is about the size as the State of Nevada. That is a lot of area to drill on. If you go from the southern tip of the State of Nevada to the northern tip of the State of Nevada, that is at least 750 miles. It is wide. At the top, it is about 400 miles wide. That is a lot of area to drill. That is how much land and offshore they have to drill on right now.

So even if the Republican proposal were enacted, it would take years and even decades to conduct exploration to begin drilling. Even then, the plan wouldn't lower gas prices. But we are

willing to take a look at any proposal like that. As I indicated, we helped get offshore drilling in the gulf.

So instead of proposing legislation that would just add more to the 68 million unused acres, I think we should try something that might be a little better than that. We are willing to do whatever is reasonable. We have done so in the past. As I indicated, in 2006, we helped pass a bipartisan plan for drilling in the Gulf of Mexico.

Republicans can work with us to end speculation on the oil markets that contributes tangibly to higher prices at the pump. I talked here a few minutes ago about how there appears to be bipartisan support for doing something about speculation. I will come to my Republican colleagues before the end of the week with a proposal on which I hope we can pick up Republican support. Is the plan I am going to come up with perfect? Of course not. But we have been doing a lot of work. I have a number of meetings, some of which are in the evening this week. If my Republican colleagues want to add something to this speculation thing to make it better, we will work with them.

The main thing, though, is that we have to work to make America, a country that contains less than 3 percent of the world's supply of oil, energy independent by investing in renewables, clean renewables. These steps would lower gas prices in the short term and it would create jobs, hundreds of thousands of jobs, clean jobs, high-paying jobs.

I hope that this next work period, we can work together and accomplish a lot for America. I have tried to outline here for my colleagues, both Democrats and Republicans, what is in store for us this next work period.

I look forward to leaving here for the conventions, during the time we are gone, which will bring us a new President. Hopefully, we will walk out of here with our shoulders back and our heads held high that we have been able to accomplish something this work period.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader.

GAS PRICES REDUCTION ACT

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, there is no question what the No. 1 issue is on the minds of the American people. It is the price of gas at the pump. It is literally off the charts. For those of us who have looked at surveys over the years, it is hard to recall, other than the post-9/11 period, a single issue that has enjoyed this kind of dominance in public opinion polls in America. I was home last week. I heard from a lot of Kentuckians on this issue. I know I wasn't the only one hearing the same thing. The high price of gas is the No. 1 issue facing Americans at this time. It should be the No. 1 issue for the Senate. Americans are hurting. They have every right to expect their elected representatives to actually do