

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator has consumed 10 minutes.

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, I ask for 5 additional minutes.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. There is only 3 minutes on the Senator's time.

Mr. ENZI. I ask for 3 additional minutes.

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

Mr. ENZI. The scorekeepers at the Congressional Budget Office estimate the silver plan under the Finance Committee bill will increase to \$392 a month. That is over a 300-percent increase. None of the folks I talked with from Wyoming can afford to pay 300 percent or more for their health insurance. In another economic time, this policy would be bad enough. In today's climate, it is irresponsible.

We all agree the health insurance market is broken and needs to be fixed. Everyone who wants health insurance should be able to get it, and they should not have to spend their hard-earned dollars to get it.

No American should be denied health insurance because they have cancer, diabetes, acne, or some other preexisting condition. No one should lose their health insurance because they forgot about an old injury when they filled out a form. No one should be denied health insurance, period.

These reforms are very important and long overdue. However, we can do better. These goals should be implemented in a way that drives down costs for the majority of Americans who already have health insurance. Congress needs to learn from the experiences of the States that have already enacted these types of reforms. The States did not pass reforms with the goal of increasing costs for a majority of their residents, but that is precisely what has happened over time.

We need to enact reforms that will actually reduce costs and make health insurance more affordable. That is what the American people want but, unfortunately, that is not what the current bills do.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I wish to speak for up to 10 minutes in morning business.

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

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE BENEFITS

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I again rise to urge my colleagues, particularly from the other side, to join us in passing an extension of unemployment insurance, to stop blocking a program that is so necessary to every person in this country, not just those who are losing jobs but those who are fearful their jobs might be taken away.

This is a national issue, an emergency. It requires attention and action now, not weeks from now. For the last several weeks, we have been trying to get an agreement to proceed. Last week, Leader REID justifiably filed the first of what could be three cloture motions that some on the other side would insist we must proceed through until we can enact this important effort and benefit for 15.1 million unemployed Americans.

Everyone in Congress, regardless of party affiliation, is concerned about jobs. There is no unemployment crisis just in red States or in blue States or in purple States or any color States. This is a nationwide problem. It requires a nationwide solution, and one of the first steps is simply extending unemployment benefits for the people who are running out of these benefits or who may, in fact, lose their employment and need these benefits.

We have to create jobs. That is the ultimate solution to the current economic crisis. We must have a sustainable and robust recovery. We are receiving some encouraging signs. It is estimated that when the gross domestic product for this quarter is reported, it will be about 3 percent, the first time GDP since the second quarter of 2008. But positive GDP is not the answer for people who are looking for work unsuccessfully. They need the benefits of extended unemployment compensation.

This legislation is very straightforward. It ensures that out-of-work Americans can provide for their families, can stay in their homes, and can maintain a sense of dignity while they continue to search for employment in a very difficult market.

Not only is it simply the right thing to do because it demonstrates some degree of recognition of the extraordinarily difficult situation facing so many in this Nation, but unemployment compensation insurance helps to aid the economy. You don't have to be an economist to understand that getting money to people who will spend it quickly on basic necessities spurs demand and helps prevent further erosion of the economy. Yet my colleagues on the Republican side continue to ignore the urgency of the situation.

As stated, last week the distinguished majority leader had to file a cloture motion to proceed to the House-passed unemployment insurance extension. This is unprecedented.

Congress has acted eight times—in 1958, 1961, 1971, 1974, 1982, 1991, 2002, and 2008—to establish temporary programs that provided additional weeks of unemployment compensation benefits beyond regular unemployment compensation and any extended benefits.

Let's take a moment to look back at the recent unemployment insurance extensions under both Democratic and Republican administrations.

President George Herbert Walker Bush signed an unemployment insurance bill into law that passed the Sen-

ate with near unanimous support. Not once, but twice—in November 1991 and February 1992, when the unemployment rate was 7 percent and 7.4 percent, respectively. And we are at a much more serious moment in our economic history today than those years ago.

In July 1992, President Clinton signed an unemployment insurance bill into law that passed with unanimous support in the Senate. The unemployment rate was 7.7 percent.

In March and November 1993, President Clinton signed two more bills into law that passed with overwhelming bipartisan support. The unemployment rate was 7 percent and 6.6 percent, respectively.

In the 1980s, President Reagan signed an unemployment insurance bill into law that unanimously passed a majority Republican Senate. The unemployment rate was 8.8 percent. Months earlier, it was double digits.

These past votes, under Republican and Democratic Presidents and majorities of both parties in the Senate, demonstrate the nonpartisan nature of extending unemployment insurance when the economy is weak and unemployment is high. It is that simple.

In fact, further reinforcing this notion is that the national unemployment rate has now risen to 9.8 percent and may not stabilize until next summer—much higher than the preceding incidents in which, on a bipartisan basis, under Republican and Democratic Presidents, we moved expeditiously to extend unemployment benefits.

Nearly 2 million Americans will exhaust their benefits by the end of the year, but as I speak on the Senate floor, hundreds of thousands of Americans have already exhausted their benefits.

Mr. President, 3,800 Rhode Islanders will benefit immediately from a Federal extension, a majority of whom have already exhausted their benefits going back, in some cases, several months. Hundreds more in my State exhaust their benefits each passing week.

So why are the Republicans sidetracking this legislation? Let's take a look at the list of amendments.

We all, as Senators, have a right to propose amendments, but when they are proposed simply to delay and not to constructively advance an issue, we have to look very skeptically at the amendments. There is an amendment concerning ACORN on which we have already voted. This seems to be just an attempt to delay not an attempt to responsibly legislate.

It is my understanding that Majority Leader REID has made many offers to the other side of the aisle so that the Senate can proceed to the immediate consideration of this critical legislation. It is disappointing these offers have been rejected.

This bill is about stabilizing our economy. It is about helping Americans who, through no fault of their

own, cannot find work. It is about this body, the Senate, taking action on behalf of people.

I urge immediate consideration of this extension. I hope we can pass it tonight rather than be forced to another series of pointless and political cloture motions.

I want to briefly mention another proposal related to this issue that is important to consider which would help in this terrible crisis of unemployment.

I have introduced the Keep Americans Working Act to strengthen and expand work share programs. These are programs in which 16 States, at the moment, pay a portion of unemployment benefits if the employer keeps the person on the payroll but reduces their hours to reduce costs and continues to pay their benefits—their pension and health care.

So far this year, approximately 137,000 layoffs have been averted in States that have this program. We have a breakdown of the 16 States. In 2008, 58,000 Americans were taking advantage of the work share program. They would work for 3 days a week, for example, and they would be off 2 days. They would receive unemployment compensation pro rata for those 2 days. The employer would keep benefits flowing, in terms of health care. They would have valuable workers not sent away from the firm but still engaged in productive activities.

I visited a firm in Rhode Island that has this program. It is wildly popular with not only the workers but also with the managers. In Rhode Island, we have jumped from 2,800 last year to 5,400 this year, and it is rising.

When I was at this plant, one of the workers said: This is the only way I can keep paying for my mortgage; this is the only way I can keep paying for the food we put on the table for our children. And the plant manager said: This is the only way I can keep a valuable worker so I can keep producing. I think it is a program that deserves close attention. This program in Rhode Island has helped many people avoid being completely laid off, and it has also helped the drain on the unemployment compensation fund because paying a pro rata share is a much better deal for the fund than paying the full benefits when someone is laid off completely.

There are 16 States, as indicated here. They rank from Arizona, California, Connecticut, Florida, Iowa, Kansas, Massachusetts, Maryland, Minnesota, Missouri, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Texas, Vermont, and Washington. Again, this program is not a one-State, one-region, one-area program. This is a national program which I hope can be emulated by the other States. It is a win-win, and I hope we can move forward and take up this legislation as a complement to what we are proposing in the extension of unemployment benefits.

The real key, though, ultimately is to get the jobs flowing again, and that

is something we have to work on. That is something on which we have made some progress but not sufficient progress. We can't rest until there is confidence again that throughout this land people have a job, they feel confident they can keep it, they can provide for their families, and they can contribute to this great Nation.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Illinois.

ADDRESSING AMERICA'S PRIORITIES

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I wish to commend my colleague from Rhode Island for his statement on the unemployment situation facing our country and also join in his remarks with some concern and dismay over the opposition of the Republican Senators to extending unemployment benefits.

Tens of thousands of people in my home State of Illinois and all across the United States have been unemployed for long periods of time and have now reached the end of their eligibility for unemployment compensation. They are still unemployed. They are still trying to keep their families together, pay the rent, put food on the table, pay for some medical bills, and they need unemployment compensation for that to continue. So we have proposed extending unemployment compensation benefits—the safety net for America—while they look for jobs and while this economy starts ever so slowly to turn around.

The opposition comes from the Republican side of the aisle. They oppose extending unemployment compensation benefits. You think: How could they rationalize that in an economy where there are six unemployed people for every available job? Their answer is: We have other, more important things we want to debate on the floor of the Senate.

Well, let's take a look at what those are. First, they want to return to the debate over an organization known as ACORN. ACORN is an organization that has not been in business in Illinois for 8 or 9 years, so I don't know any of the leaders in that organization personally. I can't say that I can recall working with them on any major issues. But you remember the videos a few weeks ago, those alarming videos of some ACORN employees who were apparently conspiring with people on how to break the law. Those employees have been fired, as they should have been. They should be investigated, and if they are guilty of criminal activity, they should be prosecuted. That is clear. But that is not enough for those who listen to the rightwing cable and TV shows. There has to be more.

Well, I have called for a full investigation of ACORN. I want the Government Accountability Office to find what Federal monies have been spent with that organization and make sure it was spent honestly and spent well.

An investigation is appropriate. It is known as due process. But that is not enough for some on the Republican side of the aisle.

One Senator from Louisiana wants to go further. He wants to offer another amendment to flog ACORN, and he is holding up unemployment benefits in Louisiana and Illinois and across the Nation until he gets his amendment, until he can make his speech, until he can beat on ACORN again. Well, that may be his idea of serving the public need. It is not mine. Let's save that debate for another day, if we have to have it at all. Let's not make thousands of people in Louisiana and Illinois—currently unemployed, desperate to keep their families together and a roof over the heads of their children—suffer because a Senator here wants to debate whether we can think of some new way to punish ACORN. You know, for most people, as President Obama said the other day in an interview, there are many more important things in life than this organization and the sorry conduct of a few employees. But for this Senator, it is enough to hold up unemployment compensation for literally hundreds of thousands of American people. That is the reality.

In addition, there is a program called E-Verify. E-Verify is a way to try to establish that a person applying for a job is actually a citizen. They want to use computers, accessed through telephones and computers, to determine whether the identity and the Social Security number given to the employer are, in fact, valid or illegal. It has been a tough program to get up and running. In fact, it is loaded with enough uncertainty and error that some question whether we should pursue it until we have worked out the details. Innocent people were caught up in the E-Verify early days and identified as not being legal when in fact they were. So what we have done is to extend this program for 3 years while we work out obvious problems with it.

One Senator on the other side of the aisle said it is not enough. I am going to hold up unemployment benefits, he says, until this program is extended permanently. Well, that is a worthy debate and topic, but is it worthy enough to deny unemployment compensation benefits to thousands of people out of work while we debate whether E-Verify should be extended 3 years or permanently? Doesn't seem to rise to the same level of importance, in my estimation.

That is what is holding up unemployment benefits for hundreds of thousands of people—amendments like that from the Republican side of the aisle which, to my way of thinking, don't really measure up to the gravity of the issue we are considering.

I wish those Senators from the States offering those amendments would go back home and meet some of these unemployed people, maybe sit down and buy them a cup of coffee, talk with them about what their lives