

his administration, President Obama has started to stop the bleeding and begun to heal our economy. The cornerstone of the President's near-term plan to end the freefall he inherited is the Economic Recovery Act, which will save and create 3.5 million jobs, while making critically needed investments in roads, bridges, tunnels, education, health care, and energy.

President Obama, along with Democrats in Congress, understands that as deep as our immediate problems may be, the worst mistake we could make is to stop investing for the future.

That is why the President's budget proposal lays the groundwork for an economy that just doesn't recover in the short term but also prospers in the long term. That starts with ending the previous administration's era of passing the buck, refusing to make tough choices, to plan for the future, or to hold anyone accountable for greed and corruption.

There will be no accounting tricks in the Obama budget. There will be honesty, accountability, lower taxes for working families, smart investments for a long-term prosperity that reaches beyond the privileged to lift up the middle class.

One of the most critical investments we can make today is in a new national energy policy that finally begins to end our addiction to oil. Since the first Model-T Ford left the assembly line more than 80 years ago, the risks associated with oil consumption have been known. Today, we face a three-pronged oil crisis threatening our economy, our national security, and our environment.

After years of writing bigger and bigger checks to foreign nations for more and more barrels of oil, this budget finally takes the logical approach that all Americans understand: We need to reduce our consumption, and we need to find new renewable sources of clean energy that we can grow, creating hundreds of thousands of good jobs right here at home.

We must make these investments now and, if we do, we will not only accomplish those goals but also lower future energy bills for every single American consumer, and we will save money for all middle-class families.

Remember, last year, we spent, buying oil from foreign nations, about a half trillion dollars, which is money that should have stayed at home. That is why President Obama is proposing a market-based cap on carbon pollution to drive production of renewable fuels and energy-efficient technology and reward companies that lead the way.

This budget will also invest \$15 billion a year to develop the renewable sources of energy that lie literally all around us—in the Sun, the wind, and just beneath the Earth in geothermal. All across America, the work of tapping these plentiful energy sources is underway.

In Pennsylvania, renewable energy has sparked more than \$1 billion in pri-

vate investment. In Iowa, shuttered factories have reopened to build parts for wind turbines. In Nevada, a State called the "Saudi Arabia of renewable energy," we already have enough renewable energy projects in operation to heat and cool hundreds of thousands of homes—without a drop of oil.

If we make renewable energy a priority in this budget, these projects will just be the beginning. The solar power in Nevada and the desert Southwest alone could meet our entire energy needs 7 times over—the needs of this country.

The wind energy in the Great Plains, the Midwest, and off both of our coasts is similarly abundant. The potential for geothermal energy—still largely untapped—is staggering.

Until recently, all of these outstanding projects have been moving forward with little, if any, Federal support. Our landscape is dotted with renewable energy projects, but right now we are not connecting the dots. The renewable energy is where people don't live; we need to bring that energy to where people live.

The fact that we are not connecting the dots has to end, and it will end when we begin to invest in a smarter and greener transmission grid that brings renewable energy from the places that produce it to the places that will use it.

We should be catalyzing the work of private sector innovators who are carrying the green revolution on their shoulders. Every job created by a new renewable energy project in California, Utah, Illinois, Nevada, or Iowa is a job that could never be shipped overseas.

Some on the other side may try to protect our country's biggest corporate polluters from cleaning up their act. Some may say that in this time of economic crisis, we should not be investing in our future. Some may criticize the President's budget, yet refuse to offer ideas of their own.

Over the next several weeks, we have the opportunity to engage in a serious and vigorous debate over this budget and the priorities it reflects.

I urge all my colleagues to choose sound policy over sound bites. We may not agree on everything, but I know we can agree that after 8 long years of irresponsibility, we must pass a budget that puts the American people first.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will be a period of morning business for up to 1 hour, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with the time equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees, with the majority con-

trolling the first half and the Republicans controlling the second half.

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

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

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam 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.

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, what is the order?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senate is conducting morning business. The majority controls the next 24½ minutes.

THE BUDGET

Mrs. MURRAY. I thank the Chair.

Madam President, for years, we have talked about the fact that the annual budget process is the truest test of priorities that the President and Congress engage in. For years, I was concerned about the last administration's budgets, and I was very vocal about that—too little investment in America, too many gimmicks, and too much focus on the few and not the many. It was those budgets and the policies they imposed that led us to the challenges we are now facing.

President Obama inherited huge problems not of his own making. That is why his first budget blueprint is such a breath of fresh air. President Obama's budget is both a statement of priorities and a test of our commitment to making our country stronger for all Americans.

Our Nation faces serious challenges now, but it is not a time to shy away from the investments that will ensure our prosperity and our competitiveness in the future. His budget builds the foundation that will make America stronger by investing in health care, energy independence, and education. The President inherited an economic recession and staggering deficits. The shortsighted budgets and policies of the past have left our infrastructure crumbling, our education system falling behind, and the debt of war in the pockets of our grandchildren.

There is no doubt we have to take some serious steps to dig out of this hole. President Obama's budget takes steps to cut our deficit in half and to restore fairness to our tax system. Importantly, after 8 years of gimmicks, this budget is transparent and tells the American people exactly where we are spending our money. The President accounts for war spending and leaves room for natural disasters or other emergencies we might face.

The President has been honest about the challenges that face this country, and now he is being honest about where we need to invest. He has warned Congress and the American people about the sacrifice we all have to make to

move our country forward, and they are many. But he has also been clear that now is the time to continue to invest in health care and energy and education reform to ensure our long-term strength and prosperity.

I come to the floor today to talk specifically about the need to invest in education. Investing in education is one of the most certain ways we can create jobs and strengthen our economy well into the future. Education means economic recovery, and in this global economy a good education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity, it is a prerequisite for success. Ensuring quality education for every American is essential to our future as a nation.

The President and this Congress made a downpayment on that commitment in the Economic Recovery Act we passed last month. That bill meant help for students in Washington State—my State—who are struggling to afford and attend college and students across the country. It means serving more K-12 students' needs. It means the ability to restore the education cuts our States are facing. It means keeping teachers in their jobs and our class sizes down.

Those investments we made in the economic recovery package are going to not only help create jobs, they are going to help our teachers and our parents in our communities keep their jobs while they modernize education for today's students. Those students are going to be tomorrow's highly skilled workforce, so we need to make this investment to stay strong as a nation. That economic recovery bill made a downpayment on our students' future. The next step we have to take is our budget, to help improve education for our kids and for all.

The budget we are going to be seeing puts a long-needed emphasis on preparing students for the jobs of today and tomorrow, with the focus on science, math and technology skills and equipment. It focuses on 21st century skills and early childhood education. It talks about career and technical education and accessing and affording higher education, which includes 2-year colleges and technical training.

So let me talk a minute about the budget and its details. The budget creates a 0-to-5 plan, which will continue to increase funding for Head Start, Early Head Start, and the child care development block grants. It encourages State and local investment in early education to help get information to parents about quality child care programs, including important home visiting programs for parents with young children.

The budget will make important investments in preparing and supporting great teachers and school leaders for our schools. It will allow students to achieve their college dream by making critical funding to raise the Pell grant in this time of need, and it continues

the new American Opportunity Tax Credit, which will help families across the Nation afford tuition.

The budget also makes a 5-year, \$2.5 billion investment in a new Access and Completion Incentive Fund to ensure that low-income students complete college. We know that only about 50 percent of our students who start a college education in this country complete it. We have to do a lot better than that because almost all of our good-paying jobs today require a credential beyond high school.

I come to the floor today to say that now is not a time to sit back and just worry. Now is a time to be bold and make the critical investments in our country that are so long overdue. Nowhere is this clearer than in education. I applaud the President for making his commitment clear, and I pledge to work with him and every one of my colleagues who are willing to ensure that ours becomes the greatest education system in the world.

Now let me say a word about some of the criticism we have been hearing from our friends on the other side of the aisle. I have heard a lot of talk about this budget "taxing" too much. Well, they must be reading a different budget than I am. President Obama's budget would not raise taxes on 95 percent of Americans. I think that is important, so let me say it again. Ninety-five percent of Americans will not see their taxes raised under this plan. In fact, too much of the tax burden in this country is being borne today by our working families, and President Obama is working hard to fix that. Nine of ten working families will see their taxes go down with his budget plan.

The President's Making Work Pay credit—\$400 for individuals and \$800 for families—is extended under his budget plan. That credit cuts taxes for 95 percent of our working families. It cuts taxes for 95 percent of our working families.

The American Opportunity Education Tax Credit is going to help our families pay for college by providing a \$2,500 credit to offset the cost of tuition and related expenses, and it makes the credit partially refundable.

Finally, the budget increases eligibility for the refundable portion of the child credit.

Those are just three ways this administration is focusing on tax relief for those who need it most—our working families. So while we are hearing a lot—and we will continue to hear a lot, no doubt—from our friends on the other side about "taxing" too much, it is important that we all look at the facts and not buy into the rhetoric.

After 8 long years of budgets that left our American families behind, I look forward to working with President Obama and a bipartisan group in Congress to move forward and invest in the future strength of this Nation. We have a lot of great challenges ahead, but I believe we can and we will overcome them by working together, making

some tough choices, and investing in the best resource we have—the American people.

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

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

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. VITTER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mr. VITTER. I ask unanimous consent the majority's remaining time be preserved and I be allowed to proceed with remarks under the minority time.

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

AUTOMATIC PAY RAISES

Mr. VITTER. Madam President, I rise again to discuss the issue of automatic pay raises for Members of Congress. As I said in our debate on the omnibus spending bill last week, I think this system of automatic pay raises—pay raises for Members of Congress on autopilot, without the need for any legislation, any debate, any vote—is truly wrong and truly offensive. I believe it is in the best of times, but I believe it is triply wrong and offensive right now as Americans all over our country, who have to work hard in the real world, face dire economic challenges and conditions.

I rise again to urge us to act, to do the right thing, to rebuild confidence among the American people by changing this system and no longer having automatic pay raises for Members of Congress. I proposed doing this as an amendment on the Omnibus appropriations bill. After some difficulty in getting my amendment even recognized and debated and voted on, I finally was able to do that and we had a meaningful debate. We had a vote. It was a close vote. Unfortunately, from my perspective, I fell a little bit short in terms of agreeing to the amendment. It was defeated 52 to 45. But in that process we did have an important debate and several other Members came forward and expressed support for the concept—most notably the majority leader, Senator REID. In fact, the very day after I finally secured a debate and a vote on my amendment, the day after that Senator REID introduced his own freestanding bill to get rid of automatic pay raises, at least after the next one scheduled, and to do away with that process.

Obviously, I completely agree with that concept. That is the whole impetus for my work, along with Senator FEINGOLD of Wisconsin and my other coauthors, Senator ENSIGN and Senator GRASSLEY.

During the debate on this issue, Senator REID went further. He spoke on the floor in support of this effort. He said several things: