

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader is recognized.

PUBLIC FINANCING OF CAMPAIGNS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, at the moment, I think it is safe to say that the most important issue for the American people is the state of the economy and the massive amount of taxing, spending, and borrowing that some in Washington are proposing as an antidote to the downturn.

Yet now comes news of another proposal out of Washington that is sure to make most Americans join together in unison and exclaim, "Only in Washington."

Earlier this week, the Washington Post reported on the return of a uniquely bad idea. I am referring to bailouts for politicians or what some people politely refer to as public financing of campaigns.

In recent years, this horrible idea has been championed by some who later abandoned this very system during their own campaigns. Well, it is hard to defend a system that is rejected even by its strongest advocates. It is harder still to justify handouts for politicians at a time of soaring deficits, a shrinking economy, and massive job losses.

At a time when most Americans are outraged that tax dollars have been used to pay million-dollar bonuses to executives at failed financial firms, it's hard to convince anyone that taxpayer dollars should cover the cost of balloons, bunting, and campaign barbecues.

But don't take it from me—every year, Americans register their opposition to the idea of taxpayer-funded campaigns in the largest nationwide poll ever devised. On April 15, Americans are asked on their tax forms whether they support taxpayer-funded elections. The question is clear and straightforward: Do we want our money to go to soldiers and schools or streamers and stump speeches? Well, more than 90 percent of us vote for the former—and the percentage only seems to get higher every year. In 1980, the percentage of Americans who agreed to divert their tax money from the Treasury to pay for political campaigns reached its high water mark at 28.7 percent. Since then, it's plummeted. In 2007, the last year for which figures are readily available, 8.3 percent of taxpayers thought taxpayer funded elections were a good idea.

America faces many challenges at the moment, and the American taxpayer is justifiably worried about the prospect of what too much spending, too much taxing, and too much borrowing will mean for the future of our country and for our children. Congress should heed the advice of nearly all Americans: Don't use our tax dollars to pay for your political campaigns. Tax-

payer-funded campaigns are a bad idea at any time, according to 90 percent of Americans. They are a really bad idea in the middle of a recession.

I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to 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 Republicans controlling the first half and the majority controlling the final half.

The Senator from Tennessee is recognized.

THE BUDGET

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I understand the Senator from North Dakota, the chairman of the Budget Committee, may come to the floor. If he does and wants to speak, I will defer to him.

In the meantime, I will address the President's budget, which the Senate will begin to consider this morning at 10 o'clock. Those of us who have spent a lot of time around schools, children, and education know there is a very good way to get a picture of the future and that is to walk into a first-grade class in Arkansas, Tennessee or anywhere else in America and take a photograph of the first graders. If you do that, you have a picture of that town, that neighborhood, that community, and our country 10, 15, 20 years out.

The President's budget plan for the next 10 years gives us that kind of photograph of the future of our country. I commend the President for his candor, but I don't like the picture I see. I think, increasingly, our friends around the world and people in this country feel the same way. The Budget Committee chairman, Senator CONRAD, has developed a different budget—somewhat different. He says it is about 98 percent similar to the President's budget. What the chairman, Senator CONRAD, does is say let's look 5 years out, not 10 years, as the President has suggested. Senator CONRAD has moved a few "children" out of the picture—the alternative minimum tax "child" is over here during the class photograph, so we will not be seeing that person. I think the "doc fix" to avoid cuts in physician payments, which we are going to spend money on, is over here, so we will not see that "child" during the class picture. The money for the banks—I think we all hope Secretary Geithner's plan to begin to get

toxic assets out of the banks will work. If it doesn't, we may have to go to plan B, and we should have the money in reserve if that is necessary. That "child" is also out of the class photograph.

With all respect, the attempt of the chairman of the committee to present a 5-year budget, leaving out items that we know we will be spending money on, doesn't come nearly as close to giving us an accurate picture of what the country would be like 10 years from now with the budget we are acting upon.

The President's photograph of the future is a more accurate picture, one we should pay attention to. But it is a blueprint for America that is a very different kind of America—an America with less freedom, with more Government, with more taxes, with more spending, with more borrowing, and an America that our children and our grandchildren will have difficulty affording. This blueprint that President Obama has laid out for us includes a trillion dollars more in spending for health care on top of the trillion dollars in so-called stimulus money that was spent. It includes more than a trillion dollars in taxes, including a national sales tax on energy in the middle of a recession. It would double the debt in 5 years and nearly triple the national debt in 10 years.

There is nothing in the President's budget that would seriously get to work on something he said he wants to work on, which is out-of-control entitlement spending, which accounts for more than 60 percent of the spending in this budget.

It is important for the American people to know this budget that we begin working on at 10 a.m. this morning is a budget of which 60 percent is out of Congress' hands. It is on automatic pilot. It is spending for Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and it is going up—everyone agrees—at an unsustainable rate, which means we cannot earn enough money to pay at that rate 10, 15, 20 years out; and there is nothing in the budget that would begin to take charge of that problem, such as the commission that Senator GREGG and Senator CONRAD have proposed; whereby, we would, as a Congress, come up with a plan and present the plan for controlling entitlement spending, and we would vote it up or down—much in the same way that we deal with the difficult problem of closing defense bases.

This 10-year picture of America's future is causing concern around the world. In China, where the savings rate is as high as 50 percent, compared to ours of about 1 percent—although it is up temporarily in the recession to about 5 percent. In China, a country that buys many of our dollars, leaders there express extraordinary concern about the value of the dollar and whether they should continue to buy our dollars.

Of course, if people overseas do not find buying our dollar as attractive,

the price of our dollar goes down and the cash we are paid when we work is worth less and we can buy less and our standard of living will be less.

We are a very lucky country. Here we are in the middle of this recession where people are hurting, where people are having difficulty finding jobs, and still in this year, we will be producing nearly a quarter of all the money in the world to be distributed among just 5 percent of the people in the world. One way we keep that high standard of living compared with the rest of the world is to make sure the dollars we produce and earn and spend are valuable dollars. If we spend too much and tax too much and borrow too much, they become worth less and China and other countries will not buy those dollars.

Not only is it causing concern in China, we have our European friends expressing concern about the U.S. financial condition. This is a turn of affairs. I have heard a lot of comment on this floor and over in the House of Representatives about: Oh, my goodness, we don't want to be like France, we don't want to be like some European country. We are already worse than that in some ways. In order to be admitted to the European Union, a country's annual deficit has to be less than 3 percent of its gross domestic product. We are already exceeding that. The President's 10-year budget plan would have us settle in, after the recession is over, at about 4 percent. So we would be permanently disqualified from joining the European Union, according to the plan that is laid out before us.

The plan also shows that every year of the 10 years of this budget, our total gross debt, which is all of the public debt we have—that is, debt that we individuals have when we loan money to our own Government or that we owe to the Chinese when they buy our dollars, or other countries around the world—that debt every year exceeds 90 percent of our gross domestic product, 90 percent of everything we work and earn and produce every year in this country that produces 25 percent of the world's income. We would be at that level for each of the 10 years. That is an alarming number. That is the highest amount of debt compared to our gross domestic product that we have had since the end of World War II. And, of course, during World War II we were just paying no attention to what we spent, what we borrowed, what we taxed because we had to win the war. Still we find ourselves today with that level of debt.

Polls show this not only is causing concern around the world, it is causing concern at home. I normally do not think it is wise for elected officials to rely on public opinion polls when they vote. We are sent here, of course, to respect the views of the people who elected us but also to make some independent judgments.

The Peter G. Peterson Foundation—which is headed by David Walker,

the former Comptroller General of the United States—has done some very important work over the last few years to try to bring to the American people the seriousness of the problem of our debt. Earlier this month, the Peter G. Peterson Foundation released a public opinion survey that was done jointly by Democratic and Republican pollsters. It showed the following: that voters rank the need to address our budget challenges as a top priority for the Obama administration second only to the need to get the economy back on track and get Americans back to work; that Americans see the threat to our future posed by our growing deficit and debt as more grave and more significant than global warming, more grave and more significant than declines in education, more grave and more significant than manufacturing, and more grave and more significant than the prospect of a rogue nation developing a nuclear weapon.

In other words, the American people, like people in the rest of the world, look at our fiscal condition, look at this budget discussion we are beginning at 10 a.m. today—in just a few minutes—and they are concerned about this issue. We are the world leaders. Our dollar is the world's currency by choice. People who buy and people who follow our leadership are concerned.

Another way to think about the importance of the debt is this way: In the 10th year of the President's budget, we will be spending \$800 billion on interest alone. Our credit card will have that big a monthly payment just for interest. That means we will be spending more on interest in the 10th year than we will on national defense, which is \$700 billion. We will be spending eight times as much on interest as we will be spending on education, eight times as much on interest as we will be spending on transportation. Every dollar we spend on interest is a dollar we will not be spending on investments to protect our nation's competitive edge in the future, it is a dollar we will not have in our pocket to spend for our families, it is a dollar the small businessperson will not have in his or her pocket to create a job, and it is a dollar that makes us a little less wealthy.

No one is suggesting that President Obama single-handedly caused these large deficits this year or that he is responsible for the economic mess in which we find ourselves. Our friends on the other side, the Democrats, always like to begin their speeches by blaming whatever they can on President Bush. But I think the American people are ready for a talk about where do we go from here.

President Bush did not cause Hurricane Katrina, but he got in some trouble for how he dealt with the cleanup after Hurricane Katrina. In the same way, President Obama had nothing to do with the economic mess in which we find ourselves today, but he will be judged and his administration will be correctly judged based upon how well

they lead us in responding to the economic mess in which we find ourselves today. We would suggest that spending this much, taxing this much, and borrowing this much will not help get us out of our economic mess.

The right way to deal with this is not to increase our debt levels to levels that have not been seen since World War II. The right way to deal with it is not to spend another trillion dollars on health care at a time when we are already spending 17 percent of the gross domestic product, which is that much more than every other industrialized country in the world is spending. The right way to do it is not to put a national energy tax on the American people in the middle of a recession.

There is a better way, and I will be offering an amendment in a few minutes in the Budget Committee to show how we can deal with climate change and clean air without new taxes.

We can do it by starting with conservation, with construction of 100 new nuclear powerplants. That is 70 percent of our carbon-free energy today. We can do it by electrifying half our cars and trucks and plugging them into nuclear plants and to coal plants at night when they have plenty of extra electricity. We do not have to build one new powerplant in the next 20 years for the purpose of charging plug-in electric cars unless we wish to. We need to have aggressive research to make solar power cost competitive, to find a way to capture the carbon produced by coal plants, to have the safe processing of nuclear waste. We need to be very aggressive on conservation and efficiency, which is the easiest way for us to deal with clean energy.

We need to develop our oil and gas offshore. We can do it 10 miles offshore so we cannot see it, but we need to do it because the natural gas is important for home heating and, to some extent, for electricity. We are going to be using oil even if we do electrify half our cars and trucks, and we should be using our own oil instead of sending billions of dollars overseas and making us hostage to countries that are not always friendly to us.

This is an important day in the Senate. This is a day when we begin to talk about the budget. We Republicans appreciate the fact that the President has given us a photograph of the future, in the same way we would take a photograph of first graders, and imagine what the country would look like in 10 years. We admire and appreciate his honesty in doing that, but we do not like the picture we see—too much spending, too much debt, too much borrowing, levels that concern the world and levels that concern the American people. It is not necessary to do that. It is not a wise way to create jobs in this country and to begin to get us out of this economic mess—but it will give us in that picture of our future a very different kind of country with more Government, more debt, less freedom, and a country that our children and

grandchildren will have a difficult time affording.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. JOHANNS. 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.

Mr. JOHANNS. Mr. President, I rise today to discuss the coming debate on the budget resolution. I am very concerned about the use of the budget process to pass very complex climate legislation.

When you think about it, cap-and-trade bills are enormous bills. They are complex, they require discussion, thought, debate, and a very careful weighing of the costs and the economic impacts of the legislation. Such a thoughtful, careful approach is simply not possible if we were to choose to move ahead with a cap-and-trade bill through a budget reconciliation process.

I am not alone in believing this. At least 32 of my colleagues agree with me, and I suspect there are more. But these 32 colleagues cosigned a letter which I circulated together with a man I admire and respect a great deal—the senior Senator from West Virginia—to the Budget Committee. The letter plainly stated that we oppose the use of the budget reconciliation process to consider complex cap-and-trade legislation. Thereafter, the junior Senator from North Dakota, another man I admire and respect, also from the other side of the aisle, sent a letter to the Senate Budget Committee expressing similar concerns.

Some of the cosigners support cap and trade. Yet they also oppose using budget reconciliation to enact it, to make it the law of the land. A group of Democrats in the House recently expressed identical concerns.

Despite this very bipartisan, bicameral expression of clear disapproval, there are some who continue to push the use of the budget reconciliation process for cap and trade. Press reports indicate that the leadership in the Senate and in the House continue to discuss passing cap and trade through the budget reconciliation process. Just this last weekend, administration officials indicated “all options remained on the table.”

Even more troubling to me, yesterday we learned that the House included reconciliation instructions for the Energy and Commerce Committee, directing it to reduce the deficit by \$1 billion by 2014. But don’t be deceived by the stated goal of reducing the deficit. The House language, in my opinion, is a Trojan horse.

The fact is, this language opens the door to cap-and-trade legislation at some point in the budget process. It

could be set up to bring in \$900 billion in fees and spend only \$899 billion, for example. Authors could claim to have reduced the deficit by \$1 billion, but in reality every American family will have to pay thousands of dollars per year in increased energy costs. The use of such language would clearly serve one purpose: to slip through a piece of legislation that could literally change the economic landscape of this country under the cloak of the budget process.

To be very clear, my comments today are not meant to address the general merits of climate change. I am simply saying no to shortchanging the legislative process and supporting instead a very careful, deliberate, and meaningful review of the legislation. It is troubling that leadership would even consider trying to put it in under the mask of another bill.

When the Senate considered climate legislation last year, the bill set caps on U.S. greenhouse gas emissions through the year 2050. That is 40 years. The cost of such a cap is estimated to be \$900 billion, according to the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office. It would reportedly require 400 additional staff at the Environmental Protection Agency just to set up the program and write the rules. What does that mean? It means requiring almost \$1 trillion in permits for the first 10 years, and according to the President’s budget director, of course, this will cost consumers.

In Senate testimony last year, the CBO Director at the time noted:

Firms would not ultimately bear most of the cost of the allowances, but instead would pass them along to customers in the form of higher prices.

Under the President’s proposal, an average American family would pay \$3,000 a year in increased energy bills. In this day and age, that is a very heavy burden. It simply is not right to contemplate imposing a tax of \$3,000 per family in legislation that is passed under the cloak of another bill.

To summarize, Mr. President, cap and trade is complex. It is as difficult a piece of legislation as we will face this year. It will set limits on economic growth for the next 40 years, it will require a small army of additional Federal employees, and it will require every American family to pay a price. So I urge my colleagues to support a thoughtful, deliberate, transparent effort to address this country’s energy challenges. I urge them to oppose the use of the budget to pass cap and trade in any form or fashion.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD the text of the two letters I referenced earlier in my remarks.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

U.S. SENATE,

Washington, DC, March 12, 2009.

Hon. KENT CONRAD,

Chairman, Committee on the Budget, U.S. Senate, Washington, DC.

Hon. JUDD GREGG,

Ranking Member, Committee on the Budget, U.S. Senate, Washington, DC.

DEAR CHAIRMAN CONRAD AND RANKING MEMBER GREGG: We oppose using the budget reconciliation process to expedite passage of climate legislation.

Enactment of a cap-and-trade regime is likely to influence nearly every feature of the U.S. economy. Legislation so far-reaching should be fully vetted and given appropriate time for debate, something the budget reconciliation process does not allow. Using this procedure would circumvent normal Senate practice and would be inconsistent with the Administration’s stated goals of bipartisanship, cooperation, and openness.

We commend you for holding the recent hearing, entitled “Procedures for Consideration of the Budget Resolution/Reconciliation,” which discussed important recommendations for the upcoming budget debate. Maintaining integrity in the budget process is critical to safeguarding the fiscal health of the United States in these challenging times.

Sincerely,

Mike Johanns; Robert C. Byrd; David Vitter; Blanche L. Lincoln; George V. Voinovich; Carl Levin; Johnny Isakson; Evan Bayh; Christopher S. Bond; Mary Landrieu; James E. Risch; E. Benjamin Nelson; Lamar Alexander; Robert P. Casey, Jr.; Michael B. Enzi; John McCain; Tom Coburn; Jim Bunning; John Barrasso; John Ensign; Bob Corker; James M. Inhofe; Chuck Grassley; Roger F. Wicker; Mike Crapo; Susan M. Collins; Thad Cochran; Kay Bailey Hutchison; Mark L. Pryor; Lisa Murkowski; Pat Roberts; Saxby Chambliss; Sam Brownback.

U.S. SENATE,

Washington, DC, March 13, 2009.

Hon. KENT CONRAD,

Chairman, Senate Budget Committee, Washington, DC.

Hon. JUDD GREGG,

Ranking Member, Senate Budget Committee, Washington, DC.

DEAR CHAIRMAN CONRAD AND RANKING MEMBER GREGG: Global climate change is a serious problem that demands the full attention of the Congress and the President. However, I believe that the budget reconciliation process is not an appropriate mechanism to expedite passage of climate change legislation. It unnecessarily short circuits Congress’s ability to more fully debate this complex and multifaceted public policy issue.

I fully expect that the U.S. will enact mandatory legislation that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the near future, and we must do so in a way that balances our energy security, economic development and environmental integrity goals. The far reaching implications of this legislation affect all sectors of the economy and require appropriate time for debate in a number of key standing committees.

I look forward to working with you to review and respond to the Administration’s budget request in a way that will allow us to enact innovative policy measures for the future of our nation.

Sincerely,

BYRON L. DORGAN,
U.S. Senator.

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

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

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CASEY. 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.

THE BUDGET

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I rise today to speak about the budget that is before the Congress, before the Senate, and before the American people. Like many others in this Chamber, as well as people from across the country, we look forward to working with President Obama to get this budget passed.

When we consider what a budget is, I believe it is a lot of things, of course, but it is not just a series of proposals and policies and numbers and charts and data. I believe a budget is really a reflection of our values. It is a mirror into which we look—at least here in the Federal budget—once a year to make an assessment or a reassessment of our values and our priorities. I think President Obama understands that. His budget reflects that understanding; that a budget is a set of values and priorities, and in the end it is also about people. It is not just about data and programs, but a budget is about people.

I was thinking this morning about some people with whom I have had contact through correspondence—people who write to our office and talk about their lives—such as Trisha Urban, who wrote to our office not too long ago. She is from Berks County, the county that has the city of Redding in it, on the eastern side of our State.

Trisha has a story about her life, her family, and about health care. Imagine this happening, Mr. President, in the life of one family—in this case Trisha Urban's family. Trisha was pregnant and awaiting the birth of a child, and at the same time her husband dies, literally within the same timeframe. She wrote to me and said:

We were anxiously awaiting the birth of our first child. A half hour later, two ambulances were in my driveway. As the paramedics were assessing the health of my baby and me, the paramedic from the other ambulance told me that my husband could not be revived.

This happened all in 1 day, all in 1 hour, literally.

She goes on to say in her letter:

My husband's death may have been prevented. Like many other Americans, we have difficulty with our health insurance. My husband had to leave his job for 1 year to complete an internship requirement to complete his doctorate in psychology. The internship was unpaid; we could not afford COBRA.

COBRA is the extension of health insurance. Continuing to quote her letter:

Because of preexisting conditions, neither my husband's health issues nor my pregnancy would be covered under private insurance.

And she goes on from there to talk about her own predicament. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD the full text of this letter that I received from Trisha Urban.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

DEAR MR. CASEY, Exactly one week and 7 hours ago, I was frantically trying to revive my husband who was doing some last minute errands before taking me to the hospital. My water had broke the night before, we were anxiously awaiting the birth of our first child. A half-hour later, 2 ambulances were in my driveway. As the paramedics were assessing the health of my baby and me, the paramedic from the other ambulance told me that my husband could not be revived.

My husband's death may have been prevented. Like many Americans, we have difficulty with our health insurance. My husband had to leave his job for one year to complete an internship requirement to complete his doctorate in psychology. The internship was unpaid; we could not afford COBRA. Because of pre-existing conditions, neither my husband's health issues nor my pregnancy would be covered under private insurance. I worked 4 part-time jobs and was not eligible for any health benefits. We ended up with a second rate health insurance plan through my husband's university. When medical bills started to add up, the insurance company decided to drop our coverage stating the internship did not qualify us for the benefits. We were left with close to \$100,000 worth of medical bills. Concerned with the upcoming financial responsibility of the birth of our daughter and the burden of current medical expenses, my husband missed his last doctor's appointment less than one month ago. I am a working class American and do not have the money or the insight to legally fight the health insurance company. We had no life insurance. I will probably lose my home, my car and everything we worked so hard to accumulate in our life will be gone in an instant.

If my story is heard, if legislation can be changed to help other uninsured Americans in a similar situation, I am willing to pay the price of losing everything. I am asking you to share my story with others in Congress and I am willing to speak on behalf of my husband so that his death will not be in vain.—Trisha Urban

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, here is how Trisha Urban concluded her letter. She said:

If my story is heard, if legislation could be changed to help other uninsured Americans in a similar situation, I am willing to pay the price of losing everything. I am asking you to share my story with others in Congress and I am willing to speak on behalf of my husband so that his death will not be in vain.

In this one single letter from a woman in Pennsylvania, a mother and now a widow, is contained all the challenges that we face in this budget, specifically with regard to health care. But I think it speaks to so many other challenges we face as well. So every budget we do, and especially at this time of economic crisis, is about people, and we all have to remember that.

I think President Obama understands this budget is about people—it is about people who are leading lives of struggle and sacrifice and setback. But at the

same time he understands the American people, even at this difficult time in our Nation's history, understand we will overcome this. We will pass a budget, and we will get to work on these important priorities—priorities such as health care, the priority of education, and also of making progress on a whole range of energy issues.

As we are passing this budget, we should remind the American people that even as we work on health care, energy, and education, this budget contains plenty of middle-class tax relief, and it is important to talk about that.

Now, I don't want to look in the rearview mirror and talk about the past too much, but I think it is important to provide a brief assessment of where we are. We can't make progress ahead of us if we don't know where we are and where we have been. Here is where we have been the last couple of years.

The prior administration inherited a \$236 billion surplus. When the prior administration ended, it was the exact opposite—record deficits at that time. The Congressional Budget Office projected the surplus—this is back in the early part of this decade—the projection was the surplus would grow at \$710 billion—a surplus of \$710 billion—by 2009. We know that is not the case today.

President Obama and the American people have inherited a deficit of almost \$1.3 trillion. If you look at it in terms of gross debt, it is like looking at the side of a mountain. We went from \$5.8 trillion up to over \$12 trillion in debt. That is what we face. And I think it is important to understand that is where we start.

But President Obama didn't spend a lot of time talking about the problem he inherited, he focused on solutions. So he put before the Congress an open, honest, and accountable budget. This is a budget that will come about because of his work and his leadership as President but also the work that Chairman KENT CONRAD and others in Congress do. I want to commend Chairman CONRAD for the work he has done on this budget. He has a great array of charts we are going to be using in the next couple of days to highlight some of these issues.

But this is an honest budget. It is not perfect, but it is honest, and it focuses on those priorities I mentioned before—health care, energy, education, deficit reduction, and tax relief.

Let me take a couple of moments to talk about health care. The story I told before, encompassing the letter from Trisha Urban, is an unusual story, a graphic and difficult story to tell about tragic events in the life of one family. But the problems that families are having with health care are not all that unusual. For the first time in a decade, we have a budget that tackles one of the biggest problems in the country—the health care crisis. We can't put it off to 2010, 2011, or 2012. We have to deal with this now, this year, with a new President and a new Congress committed to doing that.