

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the time until 5:30 be equally divided between the two leaders or their designees.

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

THE ECONOMY

Mr. REID. Mr. President, our economic troubles can be tallied in statistics but numbers alone cannot tell their toll. Every American knows this. The people in Nevada know this especially well. They have felt the full force of this recession as intensely as anyone in America.

I received a letter this month from Bobby Mockbee. Bobby, his wife Julia, and their two children live in North Las Vegas, NV. Bobby is a stay-at-home dad, and a little over a year ago Julia was laid off from her job. Finding themselves near the end of tens of thousands of dollars they had saved and put away, Bobby and Julia recently tried to get a loan. Similar to many families who are hurting now, the Mockbees played by the rules. They had never been late on any bill at any time. They had excellent credit. Their credit score was terrific. They were no strangers to the ins and outs of the housing market—the job Mrs. Mockbee lost was as vice president of a large title and escrow company. But they were turned down for that loan. Now that the Mockbees are so stretched, they fear that before long they will be the latest in a long line of Nevada families to have lost their homes.

Unemployment in Nevada is now in the double digits—the highest it has been in a quarter of a century. To a worker such as Julia Mockbee, who can no longer collect a paycheck, job loss is more than an economic indicator. Families in my State lose their homes at the worst rate in the Nation. But to someone who has lost a share of the American dream, foreclosure is more than a cause and effect of the Wall Street collapse.

I am confident the steps we have taken this year to address this crisis will ultimately anchor our recovery, but it has not done so yet. As I visited with Nevadans over the past couple weeks, one message became very clear: We as legislators must keep going. We must do more. The hole we have inherited from George Bush is deep, and our long climb back has just begun.

We have seen promising progress and are beginning to see a return on the investments we made in our economic recovery plan, but we are still far closer to the starting line than the finish line. In that legislation, we indicated we would create or save at least 3½ million jobs. In States such as Texas, Florida, and Ohio, thousands of new construction jobs are already on their way. Students are getting better schools and a better education in Illi-

nois and Tennessee. Veterans, children, and low-income families in New Mexico and Maryland are getting better health care. In Nevada, investment in green technology is leading us not only to economic recovery but energy independence.

This Congress faced monumental challenges when we convened a few short months ago. Our response has been swift and strong. We cut taxes for the middle class so they can keep more of their paychecks at a time when they need it most. We made sure more children get the health care they need to stay healthy with the Children's Health Insurance Program—4 million more. We outlawed pay discrimination, to be sure women will be treated as equals in the workplace and ensure that hard work is rewarded fairly no matter who you are. That is the Ledbetter legislation. We passed a responsible budget that, when put into action, will make investments in health care, clean energy, and education to help us not only recover but to prosper. We passed one of the most important conservation bills in a quarter of a century. That legislation will protect our environment and natural resources for generations to come, and it created more than 2 million acres of wilderness. We also passed national service legislation—legislation that will allow 750,000 Americans to become involved in public service and, in the process, better their education.

I wish I could say we did these things with broad support from Republicans, our colleagues in the Senate. It would have been good for the country if we had. Unfortunately, we only had the help of a few courageous Republican Senators and basically no help in the House. Nevertheless, our progress so far is a healthy downpayment.

There is much more to do to address this crisis. That is why, in the coming weeks, we will keep going. We will attempt to give bankruptcy judges the chance to modify existing mortgages so responsible families who played by the rules can make their payments and stay in their homes.

It is so unusual that the law in our great country says that if someone has a home on the beach, in addition to their primary residence, or near a ski area in the mountains, and they have financial problems, they can go to bankruptcy court and readjust those loans on their second homes but they can't do that on their primary residence. If a person has lost their job, such as Julia Mockbee, or may lose their job, they can't go to bankruptcy court and get a readjustment of their loan. We have to change that.

We also wish to fight financial fraud in the mortgage business—there is a lot of that going on now—and hold accountable those who game the system on the backs of those who make an honest living. We will fix the criminal code to punish leaders who betray the public trust, take advantage of American families, and further endanger our

economy. We will finish work on the budget we passed earlier this month so we can begin to correct the mistakes of the past and invest in our future. We will ensure our troops will have the resources they need to fight effectively the extremists in the Middle East and make Americans safer.

These are not small ambitions, but they are not luxuries. They are priorities we must pass because American families are still suffering. They are still worried about losing their jobs and losing their homes. No effort to recover can succeed unless Democrats and Republicans work together. I had hoped this year for change would have inaugurated a new era of common purpose. Instead, Democrats have met an all-too-familiar wall that reflects Republican opposition. I still hold the hope that we will see the bipartisan cooperation necessary to fulfill the rest of our obligations to the American people. I still believe we can put aside our political differences and move forward.

The last time America looked up from an economic hole so deep, it resoundingly elected a new leader—Franklin Roosevelt—not with a mandate for reticence or for repeating the mistakes of the past but with an urgent instruction—in 1932—to lift our Nation, reject fear, and recover from financial turmoil. Just weeks before the election—again, in 1932—Americans would soon swarm to the polls, but they would also pack theaters to see a Marx Brothers blockbuster called “Horse Feathers.” The film starts with a song that could just as easily have been written by today's Republican Senators. Groucho Marx sang the following in that movie:

I don't know what they have to say. It makes no difference anyway. Whatever it is, I'm against it.

That was Groucho Marx. The lyrics were a hit in Hollywood, and that is where the song should stay. As a legislative strategy, it is nothing short of reckless. The American people expect more from their leaders, and their serious problems deserve better than a vaudeville act, but that is what the Americans have gotten from the Republicans in the Senate: Whatever you want, we are against it.

Nearly eight decades after this song sung by Groucho Marx and this movie with the Marx Brothers, in the face of familiar troubles, we cannot afford to say no because it is easier than doing the hard work to make life better for struggling families. We cannot afford to work against each other because it is more politically convenient than working together. We cannot afford to bet against America's resilience and recovery, as the Republicans are doing. The American people did not send anyone here to simply be against everything. They still want to hear what Republicans support, not just what they oppose.

One of the Republican leaders in the House said: We are going to be like a thousand mosquitoes. That is the effort

of the Republican leadership in the House—a thousand mosquitoes—just biting, not accomplishing anything.

Families are too busy trying to make this week's paycheck last until the next to keep track of who is scoring political points. They worry about paying the electric bill, the mortgage bill or the tuition bill—not about games and gimmicks. In the history of American Government, partisan bickering has never saved a single job or kept one family from losing their home.

I hope Republicans will join us to confront the crises in our communities and around the world, and I hope they will start this afternoon when we vote on moving forward with the nomination of Christopher Hill.

To this point—this few short weeks we have been in session—we have had to file cloture on five of the President's nominees. The Secretary of Labor, a very important job—Hilda Solis—was held up. We had to invoke cloture. The Deputy Attorney General, a man by the name of Ogden, we had to invoke cloture on the Republicans' filibuster of him. In his job, second in command, he is in charge of all the criminal prosecutions in this country. He is also the chief administrator of the attorney general's office. We had to invoke cloture on that.

Two members of the Council of Economic Advisers—we had to invoke cloture. Who are these people? They are the primary economists on whom the President depends. We had to waste valuable time invoking cloture on two filibusters there.

Incredibly, now, tonight, we are going to invoke cloture on the Ambassador to Iraq. I talked to Secretary Gates just a couple of days ago about a number of issues. One of the things he brought up was—Gates said that every time he talks to General Odierno, he asks: When can I get my civilian commander, my civilian counterpart in Iraq? That is what this is all about. We did everything we could prior to the 2-week recess to let us have a vote. No; cloture. We have to file cloture on the Ambassador to Iraq. What a shame.

Christopher Hill is a strong and skilled negotiator who has tackled some of the most complex diplomatic challenges in the world. After he graduated from Bowdoin College, he joined the Peace Corps and served in Africa. He joined the Foreign Service immediately after that and served tours in half a dozen countries. He has been an ambassador in any number of countries and served so well. He earned a graduate degree from the Naval War College.

The man we will send to Iraq is no stranger to dealing with difficult governments. He has worked hard on ethnic civil wars. He successfully coordinated multilateral negotiations on North Korea's nuclear program and was a key player in the peace talks that ended the conflicts in both Kosovo and Bosnia.

General Petraeus has always said that the cure of Iraq's troubles will be

prescribed politically, not militarily. General Odierno has called for civilian help to secure what his brave troops have accomplished. Experts from the left and the right alike have warned against taking our eye off the ball in Iraq. Yet our top diplomat in that country where more than 4,000 Americans have given their lives—and each day, 143,000 more risk their own—sits and waits. When is this man going to be able to come and go to work? It is a shame we have to go through this process on the Ambassador to Iraq.

Each of our three Ambassadors to Iraq since the beginning of the war has called on us to urgently fill this gaping hole in our diplomatic lineup and to fill it with Ambassador Hill. He has spent his entire career in the Foreign Service, and he is ready to answer his country's call once again. It is simply wrong that we have to wait for this man to get over there.

I didn't bring the subject up with Secretary Gates; he brought it up.

I hope Republicans will not make us use all of the 30 hours of procedural time. What do I mean by this? For those who are watching, after we invoke cloture there is 30 hours of time. I say to everyone, we are going to vote on this when the 30 hours expires. If it is midnight tomorrow night or 1 a.m. Wednesday morning, we are going to vote. We are not going to hold this up 1 minute. It is absolutely wrong that we have to do this. We cannot wait any longer for civilian leadership in Iraq. Those who stand in the way should stand down so Ambassador Hill can get to work making America more secure and so the Senate can move to the important work of getting our economy back on track. Democrats and Republicans alike have an interest in stabilizing the Middle East. Democrats and Republicans alike have an interest in stabilizing our economy. But neither security abroad nor prosperity at home can happen unless both Democrats and Republicans work together toward those common goals.

As we begin our common work here after a 2-week recess, I hope my colleagues keep in mind what they saw and heard across the country in the last few weeks. It was what I heard, that hard-working people in their communities are struggling against conditions they did not create, that the earliest signs of recovery are beginning to bloom in the spring, and with much more to be done, they hope their leaders will be up to the task.

I urge my Republican friends to think twice before they return to the refrain: Whatever Democrats are for, we are against. I remind them what we are for is the success and security of the American people. If we are going to turn the tide, if we are going to change the tone, it is time to sing a different tune and not a song sung by Groucho Marx.

RECOGNITION OF THE REPUBLICAN LEADER

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

AMERICAN CHALLENGES

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, toward the end of 2006, President Bush concluded that American security interests in the Persian Gulf were not being advanced by the military strategy that was then in place in Iraq. He directed a review of military plans and decided to accept the recommendation of GEN David Petraeus and other advisers to adopt a counterinsurgency strategy that would involve a surge of ground forces to secure the Iraqi population. In the face of growing sectarian violence in Iraq, President Bush announced this strategy in early 2007, and the success of this strategy is now so widely acknowledged that it is hard to believe that just 2 years ago some in Washington wanted to cut off funding for our forces on the battlefield and establish arbitrary deadlines for withdrawal without consideration to conditions on the ground.

Over the past 2 years, the American people have witnessed a gradual maturation of the Iraqi Government. Iraqi security forces, working with coalition forces, took control of Basra and Sadr City. General Petraeus's efforts to shift responsibility to the Iraqi Army took place in front of a pessimistic audience that included, of course, Iran. But it worked.

During the recess, I visited General Odierno in Baghdad, and despite ongoing challenges in some provinces and the continuing need of the Iraqi security forces for coalition support, he is optimistic that the security gains made in Iraq are indeed sustainable.

That is why I was encouraged when President Obama moved away from his campaign promise to withdraw all U.S. forces from Iraq within 16 months of his inauguration. Instead, he accepted the advice of Generals Petraeus and Odierno to draw down forces at a pace that will recognize conditions on the ground, the challenges associated with Iraqi elections, and the need to maintain a presence to conduct training, force protection, and counterterrorism.

To those of us who ignored the calls for arbitrary deadlines for withdrawal and efforts to cut off funding for our forces in combat, it is likewise encouraging to see President Obama has accepted the recommendations of General McKiernan and General Petraeus to order a surge of additional forces in Afghanistan in order to succeed there. I visited with General McKiernan in Kabul last week, and he explained his plans to deploy these additional forces. He is mindful of the challenges associated with Afghan national elections, the need to continue expanding the Afghan National Army and police, and the need to combat corruption within