

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

NATIONAL TEACHER DAY

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, tomorrow is National Teacher Day, granting us all an opportunity—an important opportunity—to honor and thank some of the most dedicated public servants in our land: our teachers. Their tireless devotion to the education of our children is the greatest investment made in the future success of this country. At no time is this more obvious than today. I rise to express my gratitude to those who make a difference in young lives every day.

My mother, who passed away 3 months ago, was a high school English teacher. She grew up in Georgia. She taught in Florida. She taught in Ohio. She always stressed the importance of an education but also impressed upon me and my two older brothers the importance of how we use that education.

So many teachers across the country are like my mother. They impart knowledge while they cultivate wisdom. They teach the facts while they encourage the imagination. Most importantly, our teachers inspire us to achieve our greatest goals while providing us with the foundation we need to do so.

There are over 100,000 Ohio teachers who spend each day devoted to the education and enrichment of our children. There is not one Senator here who does not owe his or her achievement in public service to a teacher who lit that path before us. Let's all take the time to remember that support for our teachers today is the surest way to promote a better tomorrow.

HEALTH INSURANCE REFORM

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, in the last 2-plus years, I have held almost 150 roundtables around my State, and there is one thing I know for sure: health care reform must include health insurance reform.

Ohioans—as are North Carolinians and people from Connecticut—are tired of trying to get coverage and being rebuffed because they have a “pre-existing health condition.” They are tired of premiums, deductibles, and copays that keep climbing. They are tired of fighting tooth and nail simply to get their claims paid. They are tired of wondering whether their insurer will pay for them to see the specialist they need, get the medicine they need, have the operation they need. They are tired

of health insurance, which is supposed to ease uncertainty, breeding uncertainty instead. If they lose their job, they lose their insurance. If they get sick, they cannot get insurance. If they submit a claim, it may be paid in a month, in 3 months, in 6 months. Sometimes they fight and fight and fight, and the claim is not paid at all. Ohioans are tired of their insurer treating them like unwanted guests rather than paying customers.

To be meaningful, health care reform must be responsive. And to be responsive, health care reform must address insurance affordability, insurance reliability, and insurance continuity. That requires a two-part strategy.

The first strategy is to give Ohioans and every American more options. They should be able to choose whether to keep the coverage they have or purchase coverage backed by the Federal Government. What is the difference between the two?

The federally backed plan—again, an option—would provide continuity; it would be available in every part of the country, no matter how rural, no matter how sparsely populated, its benefits would be guaranteed, and its cost-sharing would be affordable, no ifs, ands, or buts. The federally backed plan would be an option but certainly not the only option. Americans who have employer-sponsored coverage would still have it. Americans who have individual coverage through a private insurer would still have that. The federally backed insurance would be an option, not a mandate. Some people will choose it, others will not.

One reason such an option—a Federal option—is important is because hundreds of thousands of Americans are losing their jobs and have no place to go, have no affordable coverage options. This would give them one. Where would they turn otherwise? If you have ever tried to purchase affordable coverage in the individual insurance market, you understand why a federally backed insurance program is so important. If you live in a rural area where no affordable insurance coverage is available, you know why a federally backed insurance option is so important. There needs to be an option for people who cannot find what they need in the private insurance market—just as Medicare is there for seniors. The federally backed option will give those under 65 a place to turn.

The second strategy is to fix what is wrong with private insurance. Ohioans should not be discriminated against by insurers based on past health care needs. Take, for example, Debra from Summit County, OH, near Akron. She is one of the nearly 50 million Americans locked out of our health care system because she lacks insurance. Her income is too high for Medicaid, and her preexisting conditions—she has a spinal injury and is recovering from two heart attacks—disqualify her from finding affordable insurance in the private market. As a result, she has piled

up thousands of dollars in unpaid bills and is in constant pain.

She wrote to me:

My only option [is] to start paying for my funeral.

Ohioans should not have to go through 100 hoops just to get a claim paid or see the specialist they need. They should not have to wait for months to receive their claims check. They should not have to pay premiums that break the bank. They should not have to pay copays and deductibles so high that coverage, for all intents and purposes, is meaningless. They should not be subjected to huge bills based on the difference between what their provider charges and their insurer's reasonable and customary payments. When an insurer reimburses providers only pennies on the dollar and patients have to pick up the difference, that is not reasonable. That is not real insurance.

Long story short: Insurance reform, plus the public option, must be part of health care reform. We cannot claim we have fixed our health care system while leaving a fault-riddled insurance system intact. If we give consumers more options, including the option to purchase federally backed coverage designed to provide affordability, reliability, and continuity, and if we reform the private health insurance system to require insurers to actually do their job instead of skirting their liability, we will have gone a long way toward making the U.S. health care system work for every American.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. DODD. Mr. President, I compliment our colleague from Ohio for his eloquent statement. I think it is important that we all hear our colleagues as to what goes on in our respective States.

I commend my colleague, who has had around 150 roundtables in his State where he has been listening to his constituents on a wide range of issues. I think we all benefit from his report on those meetings.

I say to my colleague from Ohio, those responses you are hearing from your constituents in Ohio are not any different from what we are hearing from all across the country, as I know my colleague is aware. So we thank our colleague very much for that, and his comments on health care are very important.

KENTUCKY DERBY

Mr. BINGAMAN. Mr. President, even people who don't follow horse racing, and certainly those who do, have been thunderstruck by this year's Kentucky Derby results. The only reason I mention it is that the horse wearing the blanket of roses this year is a gelding from New Mexico. “Mine That Bird” swept the field on Saturday, coming from so far behind he was last, to win with nearly seven lengths separating him from his nearest competitor.

We have seen his trainer, Bennie "Chip" Woolley, and his owners, Mark Allen and Leonard Blach, talk about this remarkable victory and about the outstanding jockey, Calvin Borel. He took his horse from last to first by the shortest route possible—along the rail. It was a masterful display of ability and skill from all involved, not least the horse, and New Mexicans are delighted that our state is home to this year's Derby winner. It is a first for us.

IDAHOANS SPEAK OUT ON HIGH ENERGY PRICES

Mr. CRAPO. Mr. President, in mid-June, I asked Idahoans to share with me how high energy prices are affecting their lives, and they responded by the hundreds. The stories, numbering well over 1,200, are heartbreaking and touching. While energy prices have dropped in recent weeks, the concerns expressed remain very relevant. To respect the efforts of those who took the opportunity to share their thoughts, I am submitting every e-mail sent to me through an address set up specifically for this purpose to the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD. This is not an issue that will be easily resolved, but it is one that deserves immediate and serious attention, and Idahoans deserve to be heard. Their stories not only detail their struggles to meet everyday expenses, but also have suggestions and recommendations as to what Congress can do now to tackle this problem and find solutions that last beyond today. I ask unanimous consent to have today's letters printed in the RECORD.

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

I appreciate the opportunity to share my feelings on the outlandish energy circumstances of this great country and her citizens. There is no question that increasing prices have caused my family to rethink our spending habits. Though we are able to fuel the vehicles right now, in an attempt to save a little more we are spending substantially less in any other economic environment. We do not go out to eat anymore. Rarely do we seek entertainment the way we have in the past. Though we will still travel, I can only do that because of credit card points from my business. We are also relying on food storage more so we spend a great deal less at the grocery store. All of these combine to make one statement from our household: Current energy prices and future speculation have and will continue to impact our ability to support a once thriving economy.

For my business, I work with truck drivers: owner-operators. I have lost clients as they have shut down because they cannot afford fuel. More are on the way. Everything costs more. I do not need to belabor this point as I know all are feeling this. What I just do not understand is the stubborn bullheadedness in the legislature of those who work to block everything that could ease the pain. It is as if they want to destroy this country and her citizens—even those citizens who elected them. It is as if there is some conspiracy to destroy this country and such actions makes less than no sense to me. I appreciate the few of you who seem to be working to resolve the problem.

Increasing domestic production is the only immediate resolution and future technology

is the only long term resolution. I support green-focused energy but not at the immediate and deadly cost to our society, economy and national security—all of which are on the verge of collapse through our reliance on energy purchased from those who would have us destroyed—enemies foreign and domestic.

Again, thank you for this opportunity.

TROY.

Thank you for allowing us to make our voices heard. I am the mother of six wonderful children. My husband and I have been married almost 15 years. We are raising a beautiful family of good, caring, hard working children. The rising cost of fuel has affected us. We do not even have the option of purchasing a hybrid, or smaller car as our family will not even fit. We will be staying closer to home this summer, though we have family out of town we would love to visit. I do not have a heart-wrenching story to give you, but it affects our family every day. Due to the increasing price of food, clothing, and transportation, we have cut back. We will make it, but it takes money away from savings for college, savings for medical expenses, and just general peace of mind savings. I am a stay-at-home mom, who has thought more than once lately of finding a way to enter the workforce without leaving the upbringing of my six children to someone else.

I would very much like us to open up the resources we have in this great country. It seems ludicrous to me that we have the resources right around us, and yet continue to buy foreign fuels . . . The earth was placed here to support us and we can still take care of it even when tapping into those resources that are so abundant around us. Research alternative energy methods, find ways to harness those things around us to power our lives.

Thank you for listening.

SHEL, Meridian.

My husband and I are frustrated with having to spend so much on gasoline these days when the oil companies are making so high a profit that each quarter they set a new record. Why are they charging so high prices at the pump when they are continuously setting new records? I work in downtown Boise and live in southeast Boise near Micron where there are no public transportation services available and impossible to ride a bicycle. So I have no choice but to drive a car to work. Carpooling is not feasible due to my schedule after work.

If it were not for our Economic Stimulus Tax Rebate check, we would have to cancel our summer vacation to Oregon to visit family and the Oregon Coast. Due to gas prices we cannot make a trip to Washington this summer to visit our three other children and their families. Our daughter and son-in-law who live near Belfair, Washington, are faced with the difficulty with wondering how they will afford heat this winter because they have oil heat in their house. They cannot afford to purchase a new electric furnace nor can they afford to have their oil tank refilled with the current prices. A few weeks ago when it was still cold, they ran out of oil and had the tank refilled one-quarter. It costs them approximately \$450. A tank does not make it through the winter and they can in no way afford to pay current prices.

These prices are causing difficulty for many people and our government needs to take action to have the prices reduced to affordable levels such as more drilling here at home and not relying on foreign resources and other ways to help save energy. Back in the 70s and early 80s when we had the last fuel crisis, the federal government ordered

all states to drop the maximum speed limit to 55 mph so to save fuel. My husband and I find that both of our vehicles get more miles on a tank of gas if we drive under 60 mph so we are doing so. Perhaps the federal government could take this action again because driving 20 miles less per hour is not that difficult when you plan and allow the extra time on a long trip.

BETTY.

I need to express my concerns over the cost of energy. It has affected every part of my life. I drive 40 miles one way to work every day. I do this because I live in the country. My costs have tripled in the last seven years. I am now looking for a job that is closer to home. But, this is my problem. I am 55 years old and the sole support for my husband and I. He got laid off from the INL several years ago after a bad car accident and has not been able to find a job that pays more than \$8 a hour. As I am also older and I look closer to home, it will also cause me to find a lower-paying job with less benefits. I am currently spending about \$500 a month in gas. If I purchase a newer car that gets better gas mileage, I am not gaining anything because I would have to pay a larger car payment and more insurance which would eat up any savings. There is no public transportation in my area that I can use instead of driving. I have tried carpooling, but those who have ridden with me have not paid so, I am hauling people without any help. I am in an endless circle, and I do not appreciate the position it has put me in. I am an older person who sees that I am not going to be able to retire for a very long time.

What do I expect the government to do? I do not expect them to nationalize the oil companies or discourage business. I would like to see more alternative options than just gasoline. There are autos out there in other countries that are running on compressed air. According to the article I read on the internet, we do not accept them in this country because we do not recognize "air" as a fuel. Why not? If it works, let us allow it. Why are we behind other countries. I have heard that we do not have the support system for other resources like hydrogen. Why not? We did not have support for the gasoline engines either but we did it. What happened to the good ole American spirit? We have a can-do attitude and I do not think we should be whipped by the oil companies. Let us give them some competition in other alternative fuels. India uses methane gas to cook with. We have a lot of dairies here in Idaho with a lot of cow "by product" that is definitely renewable. So, lets encourage the American Can Do attitude and support ideas promoting renewable resources.

ELAINE.

Gas prices do not affect us in one single way but in hundreds of ways. They make everything more expensive and work to slow the economy as a whole. People travel less and buy less consumer items because they cost more. Therefore, companies buy less, expand less, and spend less on their facilities. It is like a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Please forget about short-term solutions such as the gas tax amnesty. That is a ridiculous idea. Our real solutions are all long-term. Invest now and in ten or twenty years you'll be patting yourself on the back.

Here are my priorities for making the U.S. energy independent:

1. More drilling everywhere, ANWR, the Gulf Coast, etc. Give oil companies more areas to drill.

2. More nuclear production. Please do everything you can to make it easier and cheaper for companies to put in new reactors.