

the HELP Committee, 400 amendments, and they say they have more to come. Here is a sample of some of their serious amendments: two amendments would force doctors to spy on each other, multiple amendments just to change the names of sections in the bill, and many amendments that simply would give greedy insurance companies the ability to deny coverage whenever they feel like it. Each of the 400 amendments says something different, but in truth they all say the same thing—no. They are designed to slow the process to a halt.

I am not making this up. Look at this newspaper today, Rollcall: “Senate GOP Still Saying ‘No.’” Listen to what the story says. This is more than just a headline.

Though Senate Democrats have handed them defeat after legislative defeat this year, Republicans say they plan to continue trying to slow down the Democratic agenda on the Senate floor as much as possible. “Democrats need to know when they bring [bills] up, we’re going to extend the debate as long as we can—even if we can’t win it—so that their people back home know that they’re voting for this junk, [said one Republican Senator]. And we’re going to see it on everything.”

The stalling on everything. How is that for moving this country out of the problems we have? “They plan to continue trying to slow down the Democratic agenda on the Senate floor as much as possible.”

Republicans waste the time of the American people in the morning and in the afternoon complain that government is inefficient. What do I mean? We have wasted the whole week with 60 hours of wasted time on two postclosure time blocks. It is just as they said, they are just stalling for time. During that period of time, we could have moved to appropriations bills, we could have moved to many things.

I have Senators come to me. There is a bipartisan bill—Senator KERRY has worked with Senator KYL—dealing with Pakistan. It is essential that we do that. But because of what is going on here on the Senate floor with Republicans stalling, we can’t get to that. I have been asked by Democrats and Republicans to do something about drug importation. We don’t have time to go to it because of the stalling. The Senate GOP is still just saying no. They complain about the government being inefficient? The only inefficiency I see in Washington today is the Republican caucus in the House and the Senate.

Again, our health care system is in serious distress, and serious problems deserve serious efforts by serious legislators to develop serious solutions. That is why we are committed to lowering the high cost of health care, ensuring every American has access to quality, affordable care, and letting people choose their own doctors, hospitals, and health plans. We are committed to protecting existing coverage when it is good, improving it when it is

not, and guaranteeing health care for the millions who have none. I don’t think doing nothing is an option because the cost of doing nothing is far too great. We must pass health care reform this year.

As we said at the start of this Congress, the start of the work period, and the start of this debate, we will continue doing the best work with Republicans—we will work with them. They have a place at the negotiating table, and they should take it. We will work hard to do a bipartisan bill. But in order for this bipartisan process to work, Republicans must demonstrate an interest in legislating, not this:

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I hope the American people who are watching talk to their Republican Representatives in the House and their Senators and say this isn’t right.

Despite what we have seen in recent days, such cooperation is not out of the realm of possibility. Here is an example of what it looks like when Republicans and Democrats work together with each other instead of against each other and against the interests of the American people. Yesterday, Wednesday, a group called the Bipartisan Policy Center proposed a thoughtful and thorough plan for stemming this country’s health care crisis. The group is led by three former Senate majority leaders—I have worked with all of them—Bob Dole from Kansas, Howard Baker from Tennessee, and Tom Daschle from South Dakota. I would mention about Tom Daschle, I think most people recognize he is a man who knows more about health care than just about anybody in America today. He has written a book, among other things. Together, Tom Daschle, a Democrat, and Senators Dole and Baker, Republicans, served a combined 80 years in the Congress. They know a thing or two about working across the aisle and getting things done. They know our job is public service, not lip-service. I may not agree with every part of their plan, but that is not the point. The point is, they have a good-faith effort. They have avoided the temptation to distract each other with misrepresentations and misinformation about the real problem. They have put people ahead of partisanship and were able to find common ground.

I encourage Republicans in Congress to read the Bipartisan Policy Center’s report. Even if they do not support its conclusions, I hope they take to heart its authors’ motivations. Baker, Dole, and Daschle—serious problems deserve serious efforts by serious legislators to develop serious solutions. The time for partisan games is long over. It is time to get serious about fixing our health care.

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 now be a period for morning business for 1 hour, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each, with the time divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees, with the majority controlling the first half and the Republicans controlling the final half.

The Senator from New Jersey is recognized.

THE RECOVERY ACT

Mr. MENENDEZ. Madam President, this February, Congress passed and the President signed a historic recovery package, setting the stage for the creation of 3½ million jobs and making critical investments to strengthen the 21st-century economy. We all agree that legislation has not ended the most serious economic crisis since the Great Depression. Americans know what this administration inherited and the time it will take to get out of it. Hundreds of thousands of Americans continue to lose their jobs every month, quality health care is still far from affordable for far too many, and we still have a dangerous dependence on foreign oil that threatens our safety, our wallets, and our planet at the same time.

But the optimism we feel is real. Quick action on our part has contributed to bringing the economy back from the brink of absolute collapse. There are green shoots in this economy, and the Recovery Act has fertilized them. It has cut taxes for working Americans; it has made education more affordable; it has jump-started urgent investments that will make our commutes faster and our air cleaner, investments such as repairing crumbling bridges and highways and building high-speed transit and light rail, investments that will pay off over the course of generations. The hundreds of thousands of Americans who are going to work this morning because of the Recovery Act can tell us in no uncertain terms that the legislation is working. It is creating jobs, making responsible investments, helping workers damaged by this crisis.

But in the face of these tremendous efforts, some are questioning the effectiveness of these investments. They have decided to attack the entire recovery process by jumping to conclusions, distorting the facts, and spreading outright falsehoods—all because of their failed George Bush-style ideology that created this crisis in the first place.

There have been some who have commissioned their own report, a report which picked a conclusion first and

then attempted to seek out facts later. The old saying goes, if the only tool you have is a hammer, everything starts to look like a nail. That is the case here. The radical conservative ideology that led to this report is like a steam hammer that its operators would like to use at all times, even if it means bashing away at the foundation of economic growth we are trying to build.

I notice this report did not mention any projects from my home State of New Jersey, and I guess, because the conclusion they wanted to draw was failure, that would make sense not to include projects in New Jersey because, in fact, if you look at the issue of how New Jersey is handling this among many other States in the Nation, you would have to take issue with the thousands of New Jerseyans who will owe their jobs to this act.

The report would have to take issue with an immediate tax cut for the average working family of up to \$800, money that helped New Jerseyans pay their bills and support their families, or the over 1.5 million New Jerseyans who avoided the alternative minimum tax as a result of that law as well—more money in their pockets, less money going to the government.

You would have to take issue with the college students and parents of college students in New Jersey who are finding their term bills just a little easier to pay because of the increased Pell grants in the Recovery Act. In addition to higher education, it would have to take issue with all the ways public elementary and secondary schools are being improved with \$957 million in funding that they would not otherwise have for critical needs ranging from up-to-date textbooks to better technology in the classroom.

It would have to take on all the teachers, police, and firefighters who have been able to keep their jobs and the individuals with disabilities who are now getting the support they need at school—made possible by the Recovery Act.

The Recovery Act was intended to create jobs fast, pump money into the economy quickly. How well has it done that in New Jersey? I saw firsthand how the funding created 250 construction and engineering jobs improving Route 46 in Lodi. It is a project that is going to reduce traffic congestion, cut down on the time it takes to commute, make it easier to do business, and protect the roadway against flooding so parents can feel just a little safer as they drive their kids in heavy rain.

I saw firsthand that the Recovery Act finally let us break ground on the Mass Transit Tunnel under the Hudson River that will ultimately create 6,000 jobs for several years and, at the end of the day, when that project is finished, over 50,000 permanent jobs. I met children who will be the future riders of that train and whose parents and neighbors are employed in its design, planning, and construction as we

speak. In terms of infrastructure, you can see these results statewide.

The Recovery Act required our State Department of Transportation to get enough projects ready for bidding so that 50 percent of that funding could be set aside within 120 days to get people to work. New Jersey met that requirement and plans to allocate the funding for all of its projects by the end of this month. The Recovery Act has been a lifeline for New Jersey and, for that matter, for millions of people across the country.

I could not agree more that accountability is crucial. We understand that every dollar in the Recovery Act belongs to the American taxpayer. They deserve assurances that their money is being invested wisely. We have to ensure unprecedented transparency, oversight, and accountability so Americans can see not only how their money is being spent but also the results of their investments.

That is why this act is being personally overseen by the Vice President of the United States. And it is why the Act provides for so much transparency, such as a Web site with all of the information about it readily available to the public. Ironically, the fact that there is so much transparency is the reason an individual Senator can issue a report about it at all, and it is the reason we can figure out so easily that many of the assertions in that report are wrong.

Accountability means making sure our investments are smart and making corrections as need be. What accountability does not mean is attacking the job that hard-working men and women are doing, that the legislation made possible, because your ideology does not square with the facts.

That is not accounting, that is undermining. Frankly, after 8 years of undermining, the American people are ready to build up this country again. And with the Recovery Act, with health care reform, so not only those nearly 50 million Americans who have no health care coverage in the greatest Nation in all of the world, but at the same time millions more who are one paycheck away from losing it, and so many who have health insurance, but have told me that, in fact, after listening to their insurance company and following all of the rules, they still get denied for claims of coverage they need.

That is part of the reform we seek. With additional steps to make us energy independent, we are going to, in essence, rebuild this country. That is the process of saying “yes” to America, not “no” to America.

Madam 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 legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. ALEXANDER. 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.

Mr. ALEXANDER. I ask unanimous consent to speak for up to 10 minutes as in morning business on the Republican side.

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

WASHINGTON TAKEOVER

Mr. ALEXANDER. Madam President, I just finished reading an excellent address by the Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan. Secretary Duncan made this to the National Governors Association. He said this:

I am continually struck by the profound wisdom underlying the American political system. The genius of our system is that much of our power that shapes our future was wisely distributed to the States instead of being confined in Washington.

Continuing, he says:

Our best ideas have always come from State and local governments, which are the real hothouses of innovation in America.

Secretary Duncan says:

On so many issues: energy efficiency, mass transit, public safety, housing, economic development, [and then he goes on to say] education, it is the States that are often leading the way, sometimes with Federal help and sometimes without.

That is indeed the American way. That is my comment. The American way was recognized by President Lincoln who honored the importance of States. He argued for a limited Federal Government. He used the limited Federal Government to confer opportunities through the Transcontinental Railway, the Land Grant Colleges, the Homestead Act, instead of a “Washington knows best” command and control sort of Federal Government.

It has been our tradition to rely on decentralism of government and a free market to build our country, and it has given us the best colleges and universities, and a standard of living that produces 25 percent of all of the money in the world for just 5 percent of the people in the world, the Americans who live here.

Unfortunately, the wisdom that Secretary Duncan expressed seems to lie almost exclusively in the Department of Education in this administration. It is an oasis of common sense, because at an astonishing rate, almost everything else in Washington seems to think that Washington knows best.

I was visited by a European auto executive the other day who said to me jokingly: Well, I am glad to be in the new American automotive capital: Washington, DC. It is not only America’s automotive headquarters, it is becoming America’s banking center and it is becoming America’s insurance center.

Unfortunately, even in education, Washington, DC is now about to become America’s student loan center for 15 million students, because the administration believes Washington knows