

clear the decks, set the agenda, tell us what to do, and sit down with the Democratic leader and the Republican leader and say: What can we do? And then the President, I respectfully suggest, needs to say—as President Eisenhower did half a century ago when he said, “I shall go to Korea”—that health care is the issue. I am the President, here is what I think we should do, and I am going to stay on this issue until it is done. Now, a Governor knows—and most Presidents know—that if they say that and do that and stick to it for as long as it takes, they can very usually wear everybody else out. The President may not get exactly what he wants. Of course, he probably won’t. But there might be improvements to the bill. When the Democratic majority in Tennessee used to improve my proposals, I could either attack them or say: You have improved my proposals. I usually said: You have improved my proposals, gave them credit, and went on to the next issue.

So people all over America are alarmed, some are even scared about Washington takeovers, debt doubling and tripling, and I suggest the right course for us is for the President to say: Let’s start over with health care. Let’s go step by step to re-earn the trust of the American people. Careful steps in the right direction are a very good way to get where we want to go, and I hope he tells us exactly what those steps should be.

I made a statement at the 75th anniversary of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park last Wednesday. It is our most visited national park. Secretary Salazar was there. He did a beautiful job, only exceeded by Dolly Parton, who was there and who made all the rest of us completely irrelevant by her performance. But to have that great park for 75 years in the Eastern United States, where 9 million people visit—three times as many visiting our great western parks—is a great advantage for our country. I am grateful to the Secretary for coming, and I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD a copy of my remarks.

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

STATEMENT OF U.S. SENATOR LAMAR ALEXANDER AT THE 75TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK  
NEWFOUND GAP, TENN.—U.S. Senator Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn.) delivered the following remarks here today at the 75th Anniversary of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park:

“Governors Bredesen and Perdue, Secretary Salazar, Dolly Parton, my colleagues in Congress, fellow friends of the Smokies, in 1934 a ranger wrote a memo identifying the wildlife he had found in this new park. There were 100 black bears. Today there are 1,600. There were 315 wild turkeys then. The other day I saw 21 outside my home two miles from the park boundary. 75 years ago there were 12 whitetail deer in Tennessee and six in North Carolina. Today they’re everywhere. Then there were no peregrine falcons, no river otters, no elk in the Great Smokies, but they are all here today.

“25 years ago, as Governor, I spoke at the 50th anniversary. There was no law then controlling acid rain and no organization called ‘Friends of the Smokies.’ Today, acid rain laws are working and the ‘Friends’ have contributed \$28 million.

“So what should we hope for as we look to the 100th anniversary? I hope we have finished cleaning the air so that, instead of seeing smog, we can always see the blue haze about which the Cherokee sang; and that we will have done more to celebrate the way of life of families who lived here; that we will have become better students of the remarkable environmental diversity here—more different kinds of trees than in all of Europe, new species discovered every year; that we do a better job of creating picturesque entrances and encouraging conservation easements along the park boundaries to protect the wildlife and the magnificent views. And I hope there are more private contributions and federal dollars to protect and maintain one of the dozen most visited places in the world.

“India has its Taj Mahal, Italy has its art, England its history, but we have the Great American Outdoors. Ken Burns says our national Parks are ‘America’s Best Idea.’ Well, then the Great Smokies must be the very best idea of all because so many more people come here.

“Just as remarkable, I believe, is how we who live here feel about the park. We feel like we own it because our families did. We love it because we grew up hiking here or adopted it as home. And we are proud we gave this park to the country for others to enjoy.

“The psalmist wrote, ‘I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills.’ There are 151 cemeteries in the Great Smokies, usually on a hilltop, closer to God. The headstones face east because, as mountaineers will tell you, ‘You don’t want to have your back to Jesus when he comes again.’

“There was a reverential feeling among the thousands who came to Cades Cove on a beautiful Sunday afternoon in June to hear fiddles imitate bagpipes as the Knoxville Symphony played ‘Amazing Grace.’ At the 50th anniversary, I tried to explain that feeling this way: ‘These mountains . . . (Blount County) . . . my home . . . are where I enjoy being, where I swap people for nature and feel closer to God . . . when I am here, it helps get the rest of my life in a little better order.’

“That is why I celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.”

#### MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to a period of morning business until 4:30 p.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The Senator from Illinois is recognized.

#### JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, 45 minutes ago exactly, history was made in America just across the street, not far from the steps of the Senate. If you go to those steps at this moment and look directly to the east, you will see the U.S. Supreme Court building. At 2 o’clock eastern time in that building the 111th Justice appointed to the U.S.

Supreme Court received her official investiture. It was a moment of great historic significance because the elevation of Sonia Sotomayor to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court marks the first time in our history that a person of Hispanic descent will serve on the highest Court of our land. In the course of our history, with 111 Supreme Court Justices, if my memory serves, only four have not been White males—two African Americans, two women, and now Justice Sotomayor.

The ceremony was very short. The President of the United States was there, the Vice President, a number of Members of Congress, and of course the other eight Supreme Court Justices and the retiring Justice Souter. There was a very stately, dignified, gracious presence as the Court was convened. After Eric Holder, the Attorney General, read the commission which authorizes the investiture of Justice Sotomayor, the oath was administered to her by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, John Roberts. The entire ceremony took 4 minutes. One of the Senators standing next to me, MEL MARTINEZ, who will retire from the Senate this week, said it would have taken longer if they had television cameras here. Those of us who serve in the Senate and served in the House know of what he speaks.

But the fact is, in that 4-minute period of time a page was turned in American history. We are offering an opportunity now for a person to serve on the Supreme Court—immensely qualified, a person with a great background in her life and her achievement to serve on the highest Court of the land.

Across America, in neighborhoods and towns and communities and schools, perhaps a child will look up and, when they learn of the appointment and ascension of Sonia Sotomayor to the Supreme Court, realize that the great promise of America continues, that this still is a land of opportunity, and that door to opportunity was opened a little wider just across the street at the U.S. Supreme Court about 45 minutes ago.

#### RESPECTING THE PRESIDENTIAL OFFICE

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, earlier today the President of the United States went back to school. He went to a local high school in the DC area to give a speech. It turned out that this speech became controversial.

I thought about that over the weekend because my wife and I went down to Mount Vernon, in Virginia, to the home of George Washington. It was a trip I promised my wife because the first time we went down there when I was a college student and drove down there in my little VW bug back in the 1960s, I got there to find out I did not have enough money for admission so we had to turn around and leave. I always told her: Loretta, we are going to

get back down here someday. It took a few years, but we made it.

Touring the grounds there as well as the education and learning center, learning a little bit more about our first President, you realize what an opportunity he had to define the institution of the Presidency. One of the first things they asked of George Washington, the first President, was: What do we call you? Your Excellency? Your Highness? He said: Just call me Mr. President.

His decision at that moment created a tradition, not just a formal tradition of how we address the President of the United States, but, more importantly, a tradition of how we view the President of the United States. He is not royalty nor is he to be treated as royalty. He is to be treated as another American, but one who at this moment in time, by the will of the American people, serves in the highest office in the land. So George Washington established a standard, a standard of respect but not awe, when it comes to the office of President.

I thought of that over the years. In my lifetime there have been Presidents I genuinely admired, their politics and personalities, and others I was more critical of, but I always believed the office deserved respect whoever occupies that office. If you believe in this form of government and you believe in this Nation, the election to that office at the least—at the least—should gather the respect that each American owes to the office.

This President announced he wanted to speak to the schoolchildren of America today on what is roughly the first day of school across our Nation. He was not the first President to make that suggestion. President Ronald Reagan offered a speech to the schoolchildren of America; President George Herbert Walker Bush the same. I can't recall any controversy associated with the addresses by either of those previous Presidents, but for reasons I cannot understand, critics came forward criticizing President Obama for wanting to speak to our schoolchildren. Even in my home State of Illinois, the President's home State, some school districts made a conscious decision that they would not broadcast or make available the President's speech. Others allowed children to opt out if their parents didn't want them to hear the President's speech.

I think that is unfortunate. It is unfortunate and I am happy to say there are those of both political parties who said that. Senator LAMAR ALEXANDER, from Tennessee, a Republican, was just on the floor—a former Secretary of Education, former Presidential candidate. He spoke out and said of course the President should be allowed to speak to schoolchildren across America. Laura Bush, the former First Lady, said that this morning. Others have said the same.

I think they understand two things: first, respect for the institution of the

Presidency, and, second, the fact that the President speaking may have some impact on young people across America. The President gave his speech. I hope his critics have been silenced because, as a parent and now as a grandparent, as I read his speech I would like every kid in America to hear it. He explained his own background and the tough times he went through growing up, the sacrifices made by his single mom, the fact that his father left at an early age, the fact that education became an important part of their lives even as they traveled around the world.

Barack, now President Obama, used to tell the story here in the Senate of his mother waking him up early in the morning when he lived overseas and saying: Let's get ready for school. When he would whine and cry about 5:30 in the morning and he is doing homework, his mom would say: It's no picnic for me either, buddy. She was a parent who cared, a mother who cared, and he a son who profited and benefited from her caring.

When I read his speech and elements of it today, I am glad the President spoke these words to the students of Virginia, and those school districts that decided their children should not hear this ought to stop and reflect on whether that was the right decision. When the President says:

But at the end of the day, the circumstances of your life—what you look like, where you come from, how much money you have, what you've got going on at home—that's no excuse for neglecting your homework or having a bad attitude. That's no excuse for talking back to your teacher, or cutting class, or dropping out of school. That's no excuse for not trying. Where you are right now doesn't have to determine where you'll end up.

The President said:

No one's written your destiny for you. Here in America, you write your own destiny. You make your own future.

He talked to these students not only about doing their homework and reading, getting involved in extracurricular activities, volunteering in their community, deciding to

... stand up for kids who are being teased or bullied because of who they are or how they look, because you believe, like I do, that all kids deserve a safe environment to study and learn.

The President went on to say:

No one is born being good at things. You become good at things through hard work.

And then he said:

And even when you're struggling, even when you're discouraged, and you feel like other people have given up on you—don't ever give up on yourself. Because when you give up on yourself, you give up on your country.

The story of America isn't about people who quit when things got tough. It's about people who kept going, who tried harder, who loved their country too much to do anything less than their best.

That speech by President Obama to the schoolchildren of America was a positive thing. It was a good thing. Some said it was a way to promote his

socialist agenda, it was political propaganda. I find nothing political about these comments. This is good advice to any child, any student across this country, and I am glad the President took this opportunity to use whatever influence he has over these young people to guide them in the right path as they start out in their school year.

#### HEALTH CARE REFORM

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, the last issue I wish to address for a moment is the August recess. August is a blazing hot month in the Midwest, with high temperatures and high humidity—though they were tempered a little this year, a little cooler than usual, a little wetter than is usual, but we had our hot days. But the hottest days were reserved for the political scene because in town meetings across the Midwest and across the Nation many times tempers flared, people were upset, there was shoving and shouting going on at these town meetings. If you have been on the political scene you know there are moments when the emotions of the American people are raised to a high fever pitch. Fortunately for us, the reason for this interest was genuine. We are talking about an issue, the changing of the health care system in America, which literally affects every person in our country. It is rare that we would tackle an issue that is that all embracing, that touches everybody. It is understandable that people have legitimate questions about what it means to their lives.

I found the same thing in Illinois. I traveled around the State. I met with doctors and nurses and hospital administrators, small business people, average folks, patients struggling with illness and disease, those who had been turned down by health insurance companies, even people coming up to me in restaurants and folks at the airport talking to me about their life's experience when it came to health care. It is an issue we all share in common and an issue we all care about.

But, sadly, there was an organized effort to disrupt many of these town meetings. These were not people who wanted to express their opposition to any pending legislation so much as to end the meeting, to try to raise their voices above all others and to stop the dialog that is so important as part of this. I don't think that point of view prevailed at the end of the day.

There are still legitimate, tough questions on health care reform, questions that will have to be answered directly and honestly as we proceed in this debate. But there is no question in my mind that the majority of the American people understand that we need to make some changes in our health care system.

There are some things that are very troubling. The cost of health insurance is going up three times faster than the wages of working Americans. We know what this means. It will reach a point