

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

where more and more of your take-home pay will pay for health insurance which sadly will not provide as much coverage next year as it did this year. We also know that sometimes the people who have health insurance find out it is not there when they need it.

I ran into that. I had a gentleman in Quincy, IL, at one of my meetings the other day. He and his wife both lost their jobs. For 19 years he had been at the local bank, with health insurance, and he lost his job. Because he and his wife had a special needs child, they paid the COBRA premium. If you understand how this works, once you have lost a job you can keep your health insurance if you will pay the employer and employee portions. Even though we have made that more reasonable in cost, it is still very expensive, but because of the special needs child he decided he and his wife had to dip into their savings to keep the health insurance coverage for their kids and the family, even while they are unemployed.

Sadly, during this period of time of unemployment his son fell down the stairs and needed brain surgery. They shipped him across the river into Iowa where he was successfully operated on. That is the good news here. The father kept looking for a job, only to learn that the insurance company was going to deny their claim for this brain surgery. It would have been extremely expensive if the insurance company failed to pay. But now this man, unemployed, looking for a job, with a son who does have those special needs and a wife who is trying to find substitute teaching jobs to help out, has to spend a good part of his day fighting with the insurance company over whether his son is going to be covered for that emergency surgery.

It is not rare. In fact, it is too common that the average person, when they need the coverage of health insurance, finds out that they are in a battle, not with their doctor, a battle with someone who works for a health insurance company who says no.

That has to change. One of the things I hope both sides agree on, Republican and Democratic, is that people should not be denied health insurance coverage because of a preexisting condition. You should not be denied health insurance coverage when it turns out you are sick and you need it. You should also be able to take your health insurance from one job to another. You should not have a cap on the total amount of coverage in your lifetime. Your children should not be high and dry at 23 when they have to pay for their own health insurance or they are completely unprotected. These are things most people agree should be part of health insurance reform and I hope we can make it part of a common bipartisan effort when we talk about this issue.

There is another issue and it is one that I will address as I talk about this issue later in the week, and I think it

is a fundamental issue of social justice, that 47 million Americans today have no health insurance. We have about 300 million people in our country. About 100 million of them are under some sort of government health plan—Medicaid for the poor and disabled; Medicare for those in advanced years, which I am soon approaching; people covered by veterans' health care, and those who are covered in other forms, by children's health insurance programs.

So take the 100 million under government health programs aside, and in the remaining 200 million people in America, about 1 out of 4 has no health insurance. They are not the poorest people in America because the poorest people in America have Medicaid. They are not the fortunate like those of us who already have health insurance. They are people who get up and go to work every single day and have no health insurance.

I met plenty of them as I traveled around the State of Illinois. I do not understand—I do understand, but I certainly sympathize with the situation where you wake up in the morning and look at those children in that bed as a father and realize they are one accident or one diagnosis away from a medical catastrophe that could threaten their lives and wipe out your savings. That is what people without health insurance face every single day.

So in addition to the cost, in addition to whether the health insurance is there when you need it, is the fundamental question about whether if everybody in America should be drawn in under the protection of health insurance. I believe they should. The people without health insurance, when they reach a critical time in their lives and are desperate, show up at a hospital, and our hospitals treat them and pass along the expense of treating them to everyone else.

It would be far better in America for us to provide coverage and protection for everyone and to help those in the lowest income categories pay for that protection. I think that is fundamentally just. It is American. It is good, sound policy so that this have and have-not situation would not apply to circumstances of life and death, which is the way it does today.

Finally, we have to find a way to change this health care system when it comes to incentives. Currently, we have something called fee for service, which means if a doctor or hospital comes up with a new procedure or a new service, they are paid more. It creates an extra incentive to do more than may be necessary. We have to change that. And I think we can. We have to try to stress preventive care and wellness. We do not do enough of that, instead of just in rescue care and sickness, which is the hallmark of our current system.

Preventive care and wellness means having access to clinics and primary care providers across the United States. And I want to salute the Asso-

ciation of Family Physicians. They have joined me in every town in my State. They fully support this. They understand that health care reform is essential if families are going to have a fighting chance for good health care.

Well, those are the basics in the debate. There are all sorts of separate questions about a public option and individual mandates and many other issues with which we are going to have to wrestle. Senator ALEXANDER of Tennessee, whom I mentioned earlier in my comments, said a moment or two ago: Well, it is time for us to start over when it comes to the health care debate and engage both sides of the aisle in the debate.

I would say to Senator ALEXANDER: We have spent a lot of time learning a lot of things about the health care challenges in America and how to reach them, the way to deal with them. We have kept the door open for those on the other side of the aisle who are willing to come forward and discuss it. Some have said, no; they are not interested for a variety of reasons. Today, to date, only three have stepped into the bipartisan conversation, three Republican Senators. I hope more will. It would be healthy and positive.

The worst thing we can do is to walk away from this issue, to say that because some town meetings were disrupted or some people have strong emotional feelings about this issue we need to walk away from it, because the current health care system in America is unsustainable. It is too expensive. We spend twice as much per person for health care in America as any nation on Earth. Although there are positive things to point to in terms of our health care in our country, some countries spending far less, and get much better results in many areas. We can do better.

Secondly, who would oppose health insurance reform? I would hope everyone understands that at the end of the day what needs to be done should be done on a bipartisan basis. I hope there are those who feel we should create opportunities for those who are uninsured to have basic health insurance protection.

Those who criticize the cost of health care reform overlook the obvious: If we do not help low-income families and individuals in America pay for health insurance, they will not have it. If they do not have that coverage, we will be right where we are today, with one-fourth of those not covered by government plans having no health insurance protection whatsoever.

We need to change the system to focus on prevention and wellness. That means encouraging more primary care physicians and health care professionals to reach out to families in communities across Illinois and across the Nation. If we do not do something about this, I am not sure we can sustain the system much longer.

Just a few years ago, one out of three people filing for bankruptcy in America did so because of medical costs—

one out of three. Today it is two out of three. Two out of every three personal bankruptcies are over medical costs. Listen to this: 78 percent of the people filing for bankruptcy because of medical costs, 78 percent of them have health insurance. It is not very good. It does not protect them when they need it. It leaves them high and dry when major medical bills come through.

So those who are watching this debate saying: I am sorry people do not have health insurance, I am sorry some people are complaining, but I am OK, I am covered, they should pause and reflect for a moment that many of the people in bankruptcy court today facing bankruptcy and the loss of virtually all of their assets are people who also had health insurance and were also in the belief and security—

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. UDALL of Colorado.) The Senator's time has expired.

Mr. DURBIN. Let me conclude by saying that we have a chance in the coming weeks, after the President's speech tomorrow night, to come together on a bipartisan basis. I hope Republicans and Democrats who listen carefully at home understand that despite the anger and the temper and the emotions that we cannot leave the current system as it is. If we do not make a positive change, it is unsustainable.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Carolina.

TRAVEL PROMOTION ACT

Mr. DEMINT. Mr. President, if you were like me, you probably held a number of townhalls. I know a number of our colleagues over the holidays did. I saw a number of them on television and saw the many thousands of Americans who came to townhalls, as they did to mine, who were very concerned about the direction of our country.

Frankly, in South Carolina, I had several thousand people come to different townhall meetings, all with a very similar point of view. They thought this government had gotten too big, was spending too much money, or taxing too much and taking over too much of our economy.

A lot of people were very concerned, not just about health care. I cannot agree with the Senator. There are many things we need to do, but the last thing we should do is have this government take it over. There are many things we can do to make sure people get more insured. But the people who came to my townhalls and across the country in many other townhalls were not just concerned about one issue. They looked back over the last year, over a Republican and Democratic President, to see two failed stimulus bills, two bailouts—which many believe were unconstitutional—the proposed takeover of the energy and health care industries, and the actual takeover of banks and insurance companies and carmakers.

People are fed up. The Federal Government is simply too big. The debts we are looking at now for ourselves and our children and our grandchildren are truly unsustainable. People do not know where the money is coming from. They wonder what we are thinking about.

The amazing thing is, after what we saw over the break, the genuine outrage and concern by the American people, the very first item of business we are going to vote on in this Senate today after the August break is to vote to start another government program, to spend \$400 million, to increase taxes, to get the Federal Government involved in another private sector business.

What did we learn over our summer vacation? If we vote to pass this bill, we obviously learned very little. What I am talking about is the Travel Promotion Act. Many of you here in the gallery and around the country think I am probably making this up; that after what we saw across America we would actually have the nerve to bring up a bill that forms a new government-sponsored enterprise, a la Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, and it is going to be a government-sponsored enterprise that promotes travel and tourism in America. I guess we can call it Fannie Travel.

Well, now, let me tell you a little bit about the idea because the idea is that travel and tourism in America is a very important industry, which it is. It is the No. 1 industry in South Carolina. It is actually one of the most prosperous. That is the main reason we do not want the Federal Government to get involved.

But the idea is, that we are going to charge a \$10 fee for everyone who comes to visit America in order to pay for this advertising program that will promote America to people all over the world. All these fees would be pooled, and they would be matched by some of the major tourism industries such as Disney, and we would have a government-sponsored enterprise that is promoting tourism.

But they are saying it will not cost Americans anything because this is a tax on foreigners coming to this country. But I have a letter in my office from the European Union and other allies of this country that says this is violating the agreements we have with them, and if we do this they are going to add a similar fee to Americans visiting their country. We are going to start a war with some of our friends. It will ultimately end up costing Americans money. It will create another government entity.

Folks, it is not a crisis. This is not one of those emergencies that we have to do "this week." Why, when we have all of this debt, would we create another program with another tax that this Federal Government is going to run? Maybe it is Fannie Travel, maybe it is Cash for Tourism, but, folks, the problem with tourism in America is

not that people do not know we are here. The problem is we have one of the most notoriously unfriendly customs and immigration services in the world. We also are one of the most difficult countries to get a visa for.

I have a major international employer back in my home State who regularly needs to bring people from other parts of the world to train American workers. But they cannot get visas, so they send American workers to other countries to get the training they need because it is so much trouble to get the visas to get them here.

Major industries have trade shows outside of this country because they cannot get the visas for customers coming in looking at our products. The problem is not that people do not know we are here, it is that the government involvement that is already involved with tourism and travel in our country is not doing a good job.

When you have problems with the quality of your product, the last thing you do is raise your prices and increase advertising, which is what we are talking about doing with this bill. The first thing we need to do is make sure we have the most friendly and efficient customs system in the world and that people who want to come to our country can get a visa and a very quick background check so that we know the people who are coming here are safe.

But we are not going to solve those problems with hundreds of millions of dollars of advertising from a new government agency that is run by major corporate sponsors in our country. Tourism is too important to turn over to the government.

A lot of people around the country are concerned, as they look at what we are spending and the level of debt we are creating, that we are ignoring the constitutional principles we swore an oath to, and they are going to ask us when we vote on this bill: Where in the Constitution of the United States do we find the authority to run travel promotion?

Major tourism companies such as Disney are not having trouble. In fact, I think Disney reported a \$4 billion profit from last year, and they bought Marvel Comics for \$4 billion. Certainly, our economy has put a strain on tourism, but the Federal Government is the last entity that needs to try to bail them out. We don't have any money. We are going to have to borrow money or tax someone to create this new government program.

This is a debate that gets back to what does the Constitution allow us to do? One can't read the Constitution without seeing some very severe limits on what is expected of the Federal Government. Certainly, the bailout and cash for clunkers and this new travel and tourism agency they are starting has nothing to do with our constitutional functions.

We have over \$11 trillion in debt already. We are projecting to almost double that over the next 10 years with