

knew when the President was going to give his State of the Union Message. But it happens it is on tomorrow. So we have the State of the Union tomorrow night. We have the retreat tomorrow. We are not going to have any legislative issues here unless the Republicans have agreed. We are not going to interfere in any way with their retreat. These are extremely important. The two caucuses can move alone and not be bothered by other things. It is very important. We are going to do the same next week. I think what we have done in the last year or so has been important. We used to do these retreats on Fridays, but with schedules such as they are, not many people showed up, or not as many as we wanted. With the new schedule of having votes on Tuesday and Thursday, in fact, it causes people to want to be here on Wednesday.

I look forward to working with the Republican leader and others in coming up with a glidepath to finishing these matters as quickly as we can. By virtue of some cloture motions I filed, we are scheduled for votes in the morning. I want to do everything I can to avoid that and will maybe put those over until Thursday or maybe try to get rid of those votes today would be the best thing we could do.

I am happy to yield to my friend the Republican leader.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

THE ECONOMY

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, a year ago this week, millions of Americans were looking to Washington with the hope that always comes with a new beginning. In the midst of a terrible economic downturn, a new President was vowing to meet our problems head-on. Americans hoped for every success, but in the 12 months that have passed since then, Americans have not seen the improvements they were hoping for. Far from it. Since last January, nearly 3.5 million Americans have lost their jobs and nearly 3 million have lost their homes. Americans are still struggling, and they are looking to Washington for the policies that will right our economic ship.

To their credit, the President and his allies in Congress tried to do something about our economic situation. Unfortunately, their policies missed the mark, and 2009 was another very difficult year. Americans waited patiently for the administration and Congress to implement policies that would create the conditions for creating jobs, growing businesses, and helping struggling middle-class families weather the recession. Instead, they got policies that vastly increased government spending and put a crushing amount of

debt onto the Federal credit card. Then Americans looked on in disbelief as the administration spent almost an entire year—an entire year—pursuing a closed-door, partisan health care plan that would have raised their taxes and their health insurance premiums and slashed Medicare for seniors in the middle of a recession.

By the time November came around, Americans had clearly run out of patience—not with the President, whom they like, but with the administration's policies. They rejected a trillion-dollar stimulus bill that was supposed to stop unemployment at 8 percent but did not. They rejected a budget that will double the national debt in 5 years and triple it in 10. And they rejected a health care plan that would have led to higher costs, lower quality, and massive new government spending. The American people have spoken clearly. They want a new policy direction.

This is why some of the comments we have been hearing in the administration about its plans for the year ahead are so distressing. The lesson of the last year should be crystal clear: Americans are not happy with the administration's approach. They are tired of the spending, debt, and government takeovers. They want a step-by-step approach to our problems, not grand government experiments and schemes. Yet some in the administration seem to believe that the message of Virginia, New Jersey, and Massachusetts is something entirely different. They seem to think the voters are frustrated at nothing in particular, that they are just angry in general. The proper response to these elections, the administration seems to think, is to retool its message to make people believe it is finding new ways to help the economy, even as it continues to pursue the exact same policies as before. One of the President's top advisers insisted over the weekend, for example, that the administration will continue to pursue its plan for health care even as it works to retool its message on the economy. This is a clear sign that the administration has not gotten the message; that it has become too attached to its own pet goals; that it is stuck in neutral when the American people are asking it to change direction. And then the administration said over the weekend that Americans will not know what is in the Democratic plan for health care unless and until it is passed. That is precisely the problem. Americans do not want to have to learn about what politicians in Washington are doing to their health care after the fact. They want to know the details before the changes are approved, not later.

Americans are not frustrated in general; they are frustrated with an administration that insists on taking them in a direction they do not want to go and which does not seem to be interested in acknowledging the direction in which Americans actually want to go.

These are some of the signs that the administration has not gotten the message. But it is not too late. Tomorrow night, the President will deliver his State of the Union Address. It is my hope that he deals not in a retooled message but in a changed direction and that he advances it with the same kind of enthusiasm and intensity that he attempted to advance his health care plan.

Here are some of the things the President could do tomorrow night:

First, put the 2,700-page Democratic health care bill on the shelf and leave it there. The best first step we could take in righting our economic ship is to take this job-killing and tax-increasing monstrosity off the table once and for all and move toward the kind of step-by-step approach Americans really want.

Second, declare that taxes will not go up at the end of the year as scheduled for millions of American families and businesses. Even some Democrats are calling on the President to do this. Struggling small businesses are asking themselves whether they can hire new workers. The prospect of a massive tax hike makes it far less likely that they will.

Third, return unused TARP money and put it toward paying down the deficit. Taxpayers who bailed out the banks last year are wondering why their money is still laying around unspent. Money that has come back to the Treasury should be used to pay down the deficit, not used on new spending programs.

Fourth, job programs. The stimulus was sold to the public on the promise that it would hold unemployment at 8 percent. A year later, unemployment is at 10 percent, its highest level in a quarter century. At a time of trillion-dollar deficits, the President should direct unspent stimulus funds to pay down our debts right now, rather than have the money spent on questionable projects 9 years down the road.

Fifth, no more debt. Later this week, the administration, with an assist from Democrats in Congress, plans to increase the amount of money available on the Federal credit card by nearly \$2 trillion. In other words, they want to increase the amount of money we can borrow by an amount equivalent to what it cost to pay for the entire Federal budget 10 years ago.

Sixth, explain to the American people how the Federal Government will end its ownership of auto companies, insurance companies, and banks. Americans do not think the U.S. Government should be one of the largest shareholders of GM, Chrysler, and AIG.

Seventh, energy. Nuclear power is one of the cleanest, most efficient sources of energy. The President should commit to expanding it. Until these clean green sites are up and running, he should allow the States to drill for oil and natural gas off their shores, if they want to.

These are just a few concrete things the President could do to show the

American people he is committed to working with both parties to address the problems Americans are most concerned about, such as doing whatever it takes to create jobs and get people who have lost their jobs back to work.

Americans aren't looking for cosmetic proposals. They do not want the administration to push sweeping changes it wants but to nibble around the edges when it comes to changes the American people want. It is time for the White House to show it is listening to the American people. If the President opts for solutions that reflect the real concerns of the American people, if he moves to the middle with commonsense bipartisan ideas on job creation, then he can expect the support of Republicans.

It is not too late. It is not too late to deliver the kind of commonsense reforms Americans want.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

INCREASING THE STATUTORY LIMIT ON THE PUBLIC DEBT

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of H.J. Res. 45, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A joint resolution (H.J. Res. 45) increasing the statutory limit on the public debt.

Pending:

Baucus (for Reid) amendment No. 3299, in the nature of a substitute.

Baucus amendment No. 3300 (to amendment No. 3299), to protect Social Security.

Conrad-Gregg amendment No. 3302 (to amendment No. 3299), to establish a Bipartisan Task Force for Responsible Fiscal Action, to assure the long-term fiscal stability and economic security of the Federal Government of the United States, and to expand future prosperity and growth for all Americans.

Reid amendment No. 3305 (to amendment No. 3299), to reimpose statutory pay-as-you-go.

Baucus amendment No. 3306 (to amendment No. 3299), to establish a Bipartisan Task Force for Responsible Fiscal Action, to assure the long-term fiscal stability and economic security of the Federal Government of the United States, and to expand future prosperity and growth for all Americans.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the time until 11:30 shall be equally divided between the two leaders or their designees.

The Senator from Montana.

Mr. BAUCUS. Madam President, I understand there has been a time allocation amongst several of us, but I would like to yield 5 minutes of the time reserved to me to the Senator from Illinois.

Mr. GREGG. Madam President, if the Senator will yield, I ask unanimous

consent that I be recognized to manage the time on our side.

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

Mr. GREGG. After the Senator from Illinois, I will yield up to 10 minutes to the Senator from Alabama.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Illinois is recognized.

THE ECONOMY

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I thank the chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, the Senator from Montana, for yielding 5 minutes.

I have listened carefully to the statement made by the Republican minority leader on the floor, and I think he has characterized the last year leaving out some very important facts, some glaring omissions in his statement.

What the Republican leader failed to mention is, when this President came to the White House, he inherited the worst economic mess in the history of this country since the Great Depression. The President turned to both parties—Democrats and Republicans—and said: We need to turn this economy around and do it quickly. He, personally, appealed to the Republican Members of the Senate and the House to join him in a bipartisan effort to turn this economy around. At the end of the day, the President put forward a plan to reinvest in America and recover this economy that didn't draw one single Republican vote of support in the House and only three Republican Senate votes. It was, in fact, largely a Democratic effort but not because the President didn't try to include the Republicans in this effort.

What has been the net impact? The Senator from Kentucky comes to the floor and is very critical of the state of the economy. It is easy to be critical. But let us understand from where we came. When the President took office, we were losing in the range of 800,000 jobs a month in America—800,000 a month. It was awful. Now we are down to about 10 percent of that total per month that we are losing. It is still too high. We want to start gaining jobs. But understand, in 1 year, we have reduced by 90 percent the monthly loss in unemployment. It is a trend line which is positive, moving us toward a growing economy and growing employment. That is because the President took leadership, took control, and—largely with Democratic votes—passed a stimulus package.

Also, remember that in April of last year—2009—the Dow Jones industrial index was at 6,500. This morning it is at 10,000. That index, which at least is a reliable index of some economic growth, showed almost a 60-percent increase in value over this 1-year period of time.

To be totally dismissive of this effort by the administration is to ignore the obvious: We have come a long way. We have stared down at the abyss and we have drawn back and we are starting to

regain our stride, as we should. But to dismiss this and say it is just a vain effort that had no impact is to ignore the obvious.

Let me also say about the health care bill that we know—and the Senator from Montana, as our leader in the Finance Committee, knows this personally—of the efforts the Senator from Montana made to reach out to the Republican side of the aisle. He had 61 personal meetings with Republican Senators—Senators Grassley and Enzi and Snowe—in an effort to make this a bipartisan bill. Sadly, it didn't result in a bipartisan bill but not for lack of effort on our side, not for lack of effort in the Senate HELP Committee or the Senate Finance Committee, where 170 Republican amendments were adopted. Yet, at the end of the day, only one Republican Senator—Senator SNOWE of Maine—would cast a favorable vote for the committee effort. To argue this has been a partisan effort, well, it has been, to some extent, but not for lack of effort on the Democratic side to engage the Republicans.

What if the Republicans had their way on health care? What if we literally walked away from this challenge? I tell you what will happen: In 7 years, the Medicare Trust Fund will be exhausted. Under the bill we had before the Senate, we added 9 years of life to that Medicare Trust Fund. If we do nothing, as many Republicans would have us do, that Medicare Trust Fund will start to fail in 7 years.

Let me also add, if we do nothing, the number of uninsured will grow from 47 million today in America to 57 million and continue to grow. People will lose their insurance, and those insured will have little protection as this market becomes even more ruthless.

Finally, let me add, the cost of health insurance, if we do nothing, is going to grow dramatically. We expect it to more than double in 10 years. Think about that—what it means to individual wage earners, businesses, and families if more and more money has to be plowed into health insurance costs with no increase in coverage. That is the reality of the Republican approach. Do nothing or do little but go slowly. Take tiny, little pieces of this instead of looking at the challenge we face. That may be the political reality, but I don't applaud it.

Our effort at comprehensive health care reform took on an issue which is central to our economy's growth. If we don't deal with the cost of health care, unfortunately, we are going to find ourselves in a very difficult competitive position in the world.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator's time has expired.

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Alabama.

BERNANKE REAPPOINTMENT

Mr. SESSIONS. Madam President, I wish to share a few remarks on the reappointment of Mr. Bernanke as Chairman of the Federal Reserve Board. I do