

So it is significant that the Arctic sea ice is continuing to shrink and for only the third time in satellite history now has covered less than 5 million square kilometers.

If you go from the far north to the tropic seas, there are signs of distress there as well. On September 20, the New York Times reported that in 1998, 16 percent of the world's shallow water reefs died as a result of record warm temperatures. It is estimated that the die-off could be even worse this year. In May, more than 60 percent of corals off the coast of Indonesia's Aceh Province bleached and died after Andaman Sea temperatures reached 93 degrees Fahrenheit.

It may not seem significant that corals are dying. It may seem indeed insignificant to many of my colleagues. But these coral areas are the nurseries for tropical seas. Many species depend on them to basically grow and feed in their early stages, and if they die, it creates a cascading effect through the food chain that has potentially significant effects for our kinds of species—set aside the local economy wanting to be able to support snorkelers and people such as that who go to see these rare and special beauties.

Finally, the Scientific American reported earlier this summer that the average phytoplankton population in our oceans has dropped about 1 percent a year between 1889 and 2008, resulting in a 40-percent drop overall in phytoplankton.

What is a phytoplankton? It is one of the tiny plant—almost microscopic—species that grows in the ocean and floats free in the ocean. Is that important? It is important because zooplankton and phytoplankton—animal and vegetable plankton—represent the base of the oceanic food chain. They are what the little fish feed on, and the little fish are what the big fish feed on, and up you go.

We have never had a situation in which the bottom of the food chain began to collapse. But we have been seeing it over the past century, and we anticipate seeing a lot more because the carbon our polluters release into the atmosphere with impunity—subsidized by all the rest of us—ends up being absorbed by the ocean—80 percent gets absorbed, if I am not mistaken—and that changes the pH level of the ocean, how acidic it is.

The ocean, right now, is more acidic than it has been in 8,000 centuries, and 8,000 centuries is a long time. We are engaged in a chemical experiment with our oceans that has potentially vast consequences for them by just injecting all this carbon and waiting to see what happens. Now we are out, far enough outside the range of where, in human experience, there has been a pH that we are 8,000 centuries away from it being at this level. All that—the acidification of the ocean—makes it more difficult for these plankton to survive. So the crash we are seeing is consistent with the damage that carbon pollution does to our oceans.

I say this because I know we are not going to get anywhere with energy before the election. Maybe nobody cares. But again, we can be as ignorant as we please. We can be as pleased with ourselves that we have delivered for interest groups and special interests as we please. We can suggest to Americans that climate change isn't real or isn't happening. We can participate in the propaganda battle the big polluters are sponsoring to try to raise doubt about the established science. We can do all those things and we can claim victory and block legislation and we can serve our special interest supporters. We can do all those things to prevent any serious legislation from coming through this body for years and years and years and, you know what, the Earth will not care.

You cannot legislate our environment. King Canute could stand in the oceans and order that the tide not come in, and he could have all his courtiers and all his supporters around him. He could have all the people who keep him in office and provide campaign contributions and it wouldn't make a darned bit of difference. The tide comes roaring in.

Our job in this body is not just to represent special interests, not just to achieve temporary political victories, not just to block progress of bills that interests that support us disagree with. We have another job as well; that is, to look out for the welfare of our country and of the American people and to prepare when the Earth plainly warns us of coming dangers. It is in the service of that job that I intend to continue coming to the floor to remind my colleagues that no matter what their opinions are, no matter what their politics are, no matter what the interest groups that support them are, the facts continue to announce themselves, and the announcement they are making to us is a warning. If we are not smart enough—with our God-given intelligence and foresight—to read the warnings nature is giving us and respond appropriately before it is too late, then it will be on us that we failed to do so.

People will look back from 20 years hence, from 30 years hence, from 40 years hence—the young pages who are here in the well, when they are my age, will look back at this generation that sat in this Senate, in this year, on this occasion, at this time—and they will say: How could you have been so negligent? How could you have allowed the politics of the moment to put you on this march of folly that failed to protect us when you knew—when you knew?

So I intend to continue because this is an issue that will not go away. Nature's warnings to us are persistent, and I intend to be persistent as well.

I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant editor of the Daily Digest proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. WHITEHOUSE). Without objection, it is so ordered.

EXPIRING TAX CUTS

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, I will be mercifully brief. I wished to come to the floor to briefly speak about a couple issues.

First and foremost, the raging debate that is occurring in the country about the expiring tax cuts—the so-called Bush tax cuts that were enacted in the year 2001 that cut taxes across the board. They cut taxes more generously for the wealthiest Americans, but nonetheless they cut taxes for all Americans as well, and they were designed, in 2001, to expire this year.

I did not vote for them in 2001. I voted in 2001 against those tax cuts and not because I wouldn't want to provide tax cuts to the American people, but the proposition, I thought, was flawed. The President inherited the last year of President Clinton's fiscal policy, which produced the only budget surplus we had had in 30 years. From that budget surplus that year, the projection by economists was that we were going to have budget surpluses for the next decade. As a result of that, Mr. Greenspan, the Chairman of the Federal Reserve Board, had an apoplectic seizure. He said he couldn't sleep because he was worried we were going to pay down the debt too fast.

The Bush administration said: If we are going to have these surpluses, we must return surpluses to the American people. We have to do that through these tax cuts.

I stood on the floor, at my desk, and I said: Why don't we be conservative? Let's decide to wait and see what happens. If we do, in fact, have surpluses, let us provide some tax cuts. But all we have are 10 years of projections. We don't have the real surpluses; we just have projections.

The response was: No, we are not going to do that. We are not going to wait. We are going to have big tax cuts, with the biggest tax cuts going to the wealthiest Americans.

So they were enacted. I did not vote for them, but they were enacted nonetheless.

Almost immediately, we were in a recession. Almost immediately after that, our country was attacked, on 9/11, by terrorists. Then we were in a war in Afghanistan. Then we were at war in Iraq and a war against terrorism generally. We began sending soldiers overseas in harm's way, and thousands were killed and tens of thousands were injured in war. Still the question has always been and remains now, even while we are watching our soldiers walk into harm's way, when do I get my tax cut? Will I continue to get my tax cut next year?

Let me read something Franklin Delano Roosevelt said at a time of war. He said:

Not all of us can have the privilege of fighting our enemies in distant parts of the world. Not all of us can have the privilege of working in a munitions factory or a shipyard, or on the farms or in the oil fields or the mines, producing the weapons or raw materials that are needed by our Armed Forces. But there is one front and one battle where everyone in the United States—every man, woman and child—is in action. . . . That front is right here at home, in our daily lives and in our daily tasks. Here at home everyone will have the privilege of making whatever self-denial is necessary, not only to supply our fighting men [and women], but to keep the economic structure of our country fortified and secure. . . .

“Everyone will have the privilege of making whatever self-denial is necessary.” We all know self-denial when we see it. We go to the events when the soldiers and National Guard organizations mobilize to leave our country, leave their families, leave their jobs, and go to Afghanistan to fight, go to Iraq to fight. In the morning, they strap on ceramic body armor, load their weapons, and go on their way. Yesterday, nine of them were killed in Afghanistan.

The question here at home is not are we going to pay for the costs of war, because we have not, never have in years. And President Bush, who pushed the tax cuts, said: You will not pay for them. Some of us stood on the Senate floor and said: If we are at war, how about paying for the costs of war? Why do we send soldiers to war and charge it and say to the soldiers: You come back and pay the bill.

We are still at war, we have a \$13 trillion debt, not having paid for a penny of the war, having put all the debt on the shoulders of those who will come home, then, to assume this debt. And now the question is, Can we extend the tax cuts for everyone?

Here is what I think we should do. I understand this economy is weak. I am not going to give a speech about what caused that. I have done that many times. This economy is still weak. I understand the virtue of saying to those earning under \$250,000: We will continue to extend that tax cut. I would extend it for 2 years. That is what I think we should do in terms of being able, 2 years from now, to take a look at what is happening in our country, what are our needs in order to lift our country's economy back up. We need to tighten our belt on spending. We need to cut some spending. We also are going to need some additional revenue.

The question is, for those who are making \$1 million a year in income and getting an \$80,000 tax cut from the 2001 tax bill that was passed by this Congress, should they continue to get that \$80,000-a-year tax cut at a time when we have a \$13 trillion debt and we are still sending men and women to war, when they are risking their lives and we are not paying for any of it? Should we still do that? The answer, in my judgment, is no.

The American people are waiting and watching for some semblance of seriousness here, some serious approaches

that will begin to address what ails this country. I think what Franklin Delano Roosevelt said is dead-on accurate: Not all of us can have the privilege of fighting our enemy in distant parts of the world, but for most of us, the front is right here at home in our daily lives and daily tasks, and here at home everyone would have the privilege of whatever self-denial is necessary, not only to supply our fighting men but to keep the economic structure of our country fortified and secure.

Is anyone going to think about the economic fortunes of America or is it just about ourselves individually? Isn't there a higher calling and higher purpose here in terms of making judgments about these things?

I think it would be wonderful if no one had to pay any taxes. That would be wonderful. But that is not the case. Who is going to pay the costs of some of the things that make this a great country? Who is going to build the roads? Who is going to build the schools and maintain the schools? Who is going to pay for the Centers For Disease Control? How about the Department of Defense? How about the U.S. Forest Service? It goes on and on. We can tighten our belt. Yes, we can spend less in a number of areas. I support that. But we have to have a fiscal policy that is serious. How on Earth, at a time when we are at war, can we decide that our priority is to give an \$80,000-a-year tax cut beyond next year—an \$80,000-a-year tax cut to someone making \$1 million a year? That makes no sense to me.

I think it is time for our country to understand that our national security is not just about our soldiers who are fighting in the field. It is a requirement that we support them, not just by saying we support them but by at least some semblance of self-denial, at least by those who are making millions of dollars a year. The proposition is only to ask that they pay at the same tax rate that they paid throughout the 1990s when the country was booming, sufficiently booming that we had a budget surplus. That is the tax rate the wealthiest in America paid back then. It did not diminish the economy; it lifted up the economy, the fact that we had a fiscal policy that was not moving us deeper into debt but a fiscal policy, rather, that was leading us toward a balanced budget and finally a budget surplus.

I think there is a higher purpose, and all of us need to be called to that higher purpose. It is not about, will we get our tax cut tonight, tomorrow, or next month? Will the wealthy get it? Will everybody get it? That is not what is of interest. What is of interest to everybody in this country, I hope, is, what kind of a future will our children have in the United States of America? Will we allow them to inherit a country that is growing and expanding and providing opportunity for our kids?

I think it is very disappointing that we end this year having done so little

because so much has been blocked in the Senate.

I noticed yesterday that another billionaire died in America. Boy, let me make sure I say that when someone makes \$1 billion in this country, in most cases I say: You know what, you are extraordinary. That is a pretty extraordinary thing. Many of them have great talents, and good for them. But when billionaires die today, they pay zero estate tax. Think about that. Five billionaires died this year, and this is the year the estate tax went to zero. Some said it is the “Throw Mama From the Train” year. This is the year in which there is no estate tax on the assets of billionaires who have never borne a tax. Some of the wealthiest people in this country who have billions of dollars of assets have it through growth appreciation of stock, and they have never borne a tax on that to help pay for a kid to go to school or build a road or help support our Department of Defense and our national security. What a disappointment.

This country deserves better from all of us, to get this done. Again, I believe the best approach at this point is to say, yes, let's go ahead and extend these tax cuts for middle-income workers up to \$250,000 a year. Let's do it for 2 years, and then let's see where we are and let's see what the needs of this economy are in order to be sure we have the opportunity to lift this country going forward and provide some economic opportunity in the future.

I wanted to mention one other issue. That is something that I and Senator BINGAMAN, Senator BROWNBACK, and others introduced yesterday. It deals with something called RES. That is not a foreign language, it is a renewable electricity standard. It is a policy that many other countries have and many of our States have. I believe there are 29 States and the District of Columbia that have renewable electricity standards saying it is our policy that electricity shall be produced from renewable sources for a certain percentage of the electric load.

We proposed 15 percent. We passed that on a bipartisan basis out of the Energy Committee. Why is this important? Because if we are going to be less dependent on foreign oil, move to less dependency on oil from countries that do not like us very much in many cases, if we are going to be less dependent on that, we have to change our energy mix. That means we have to produce more energy from renewable sources. We have to gather energy from the wind and the Sun, where the wind blows and the Sun shines, put it on a wire, and move it to the load centers. That changes the energy mix in our country. The way to do that is the way other countries and the way many of our States have already done it: drive it with a 15-percent renewable electricity standard. I prefer 20, but 15 is what we passed out of that committee, the Energy Committee.

It appears to me that now we are not going to get a larger energy bill in this Congress. That is too bad because we passed a bipartisan bill that would provide greater energy security for our country out of the Energy Committee. At the very least, let's pass a renewable electricity standard that is bipartisan, that will drive the production of new capability in wind and solar and other renewable sources.

In the second quarter of this year, we had a 70-percent reduction in wind energy production—that is the production of facilities to build wind energy. From last year, a 70-percent reduction. The reason? Because we do not have a renewable electricity standard. There was an expectation that we would, and we do not.

Let's not leave this Congress this year with so much unfinished business that I believe is essential to this country.

While I am speaking about it, let me make one additional point, and that is on another piece of legislation that must pass by the end of this year. It rests now in the Senate Finance Committee and it reauthorizes the Special Diabetes Program in this country that is so unbelievably important. The Special Diabetes Program helps all Americans, but it is especially targeted at Native Americans, who in some cases have rates of diabetes that are 10 and 12 times the rate of the national average. We must reauthorize the Special Diabetes Program. If my colleagues could walk into a dialysis center and see the number of people—on Indian reservations especially—hooked up to a dialysis machine, in some cases with only one leg or having lost an arm—the ravages of diabetes are unbelievable, and the number of new cases of diabetes among children of this country is just startling.

I want to show one chart about this. This chart shows the number of people in America over the past 30 years who have been diagnosed with diabetes. This is a full-blown, full-scale, unbelievable epidemic.

The Special Diabetes Program that I and Senator Domenici and Senator COLLINS and so many others have worked so hard on for a long time has to be reauthorized. I hope very much my colleagues will understand that this is not optional. Go to an dialysis center. Go to an Indian reservation and go to a dialysis center and talk to the people hooked up to those machines and see the amputations and talk to the relatives of people who have died in circumstances where people, over 50 years old on average, 50 or 60 percent of them are affected by diabetes. Especially take a look at the rate of diabetes among children on Indian reservations—and children all across the country. Then say to yourself that this bill doesn't matter. You cannot possibly say that. We must address this issue.

This Congress has done some big things, some important things, and there are some things yet to be done. It

is not the end of the year. We have some additional time. My hope is that our colleagues can attempt to give us the best of what both political parties have to offer rather than the worst of each. The American people expect more and deserve more from us.

I wonder sometimes how the majority leader is able to have the patience to try to find a way to steer almost anything through this Chamber. I said yesterday that even a Mother's Day resolution would likely engender a filibuster. It is very hard because we have people who see themselves as a set of human brake pads, whose only destiny is to try to stop everything. The problem is that there are a number of things that must get done for the economic health of this country and for the health of the American people.

I yield the floor.

SIXTH MONTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE AFFORDABLE CARE ACT

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, today marks exactly 6 months since the Affordable Care Act became law. And this truly is a banner day, because a key feature of the new law, the Patient's Bill of Rights, goes into effect—cracking down on the worst abuses of health insurance companies and giving Americans important new protections. These reforms are long overdue, and represent a new day in American health care. We are creating a reformed health insurance system that works in the interest of working Americans and their families—the healthy and the sick—and not just to boost the profits of insurance companies and the bonuses of their executives.

Starting today, insurance companies will no longer be allowed to cancel your policy if you get sick. They must end their abusive practice of scouring your health records for an excuse—any excuse—to cancel your coverage and leave you high and dry when you need insurance the most. One major insurer actually targeted women who were newly diagnosed with breast cancer. No longer will insurance companies be allowed to reward employees with bonuses for cancelling policies in order to pad company profits. This cruel practice, at long last, is illegal.

Starting today, children with pre-existing conditions can no longer be denied health insurance. This will ensure that all children receive access to preventive care and needed treatments and healthy start at life.

Beginning today, lifetime benefit limits on your health insurance plan will be banned, and annual benefit limits will be restricted. Over 100 million Americans have health plans that include a lifetime limit, which, in times of serious illness, can cause the loss of coverage when patients need it the most. No longer will a diagnosis of an acute illness such as cancer or ALS lead a patient to rapidly max out their health benefits.

Starting today, parents will no longer have to worry that their chil-

dren will be kicked off their health insurance plan when they turn 19 or finish college. Today, millions of American families with young adult children who don't receive health insurance through their employer will be able to keep their children on their family plan until age 26. I know that in my State of Iowa, this will help over 8,300 young adults this year.

Today, Americans receive yet another protection against health insurance company abuses. Starting today, if an insurer refuses to pay for your test or treatment, you are guaranteed the right to appeal that decision. If your appeal through the company is not favorable, you have the right to an independent appeal by a third-party reviewer. This is one of many new reforms that will keep insurance companies from boosting profits at the expense of sick patients.

And finally, today is a landmark day in the effort to transform our current sick care system into a true health care system—one focused on wellness, prevention, and public health—keeping people out of the hospital in the first place. That is why I am particularly pleased that, starting today, health plans must cover proven preventive services at no cost to the patient. This means that, starting today, you can visit your doctor for tests such as mammograms and colonoscopies for prenatal care, or for immunizations such as the seasonal flu shot, without paying a deductible, co-pay, or coinsurance. This represents an enormous benefit to the health of Americans, and to the well-being of this country. Because there is no better way to bend the cost curve downward than by keeping people healthy and catching illness in its earliest stages.

As I travel around the country, I hear from so many folks who have already benefitted from health care reform, and look forward to the many additional improvements still to come. I hear from mothers who are relieved their children can no longer be denied coverage for their asthma, from working families who will no longer have to worry about the cost of a co-pay for their annual flu shot, and from seniors who have received a \$250 rebate check to help with the cost of their prescription drugs.

Starting in January, seniors will also receive free preventive services—plus an annual wellness visit—through Medicare.

I talk to small business owners who have benefitted from the tax credits that make providing health coverage to their employees more affordable.

I would like to take a moment to share how health reform is helping everyday Americans by putting people ahead of profits. I recently learned about the case of a young Iowan from Cedar Falls, Sarah Posekany. She is just one of millions of Americans who have been plunged into financial ruin because their insurance company cut them off after they got sick.