

I am proud to note that the United States Olympic team ended these games with a total of 37 medals—more than any other country, and a new record for the most medals won at a single Winter Games.

I would especially like to recognize and congratulate the Olympic athletes who hail from my home State of Illinois. These young men and women had the great honor of representing this country on the world stage, and they did us proud. In fact, 8 of the 37 total U.S. medals were won by Illinoisans.

From Champaign to Chicago—from Wheaton, to Glenview, to Plainfield, to Glencoe, to Naperville—these 10 athletes took to the ski slopes, and the ice rinks, and the bobsled tracks, and they gave it their all. Some came home with Olympic gold. Some fell short of the finals. But they are all Olympians, and they all represented our country—and our State—with honor, integrity, and sportsmanship.

So I take great pride in thanking the following Illinoisans for their dedication and hard work at this year's Olympic games: Lana Gehring, Katherine Reutter, Brian Hansen, Nancy Swider-Peltz, Jr., Shani Davis, Jonathon Kuck, Lisa Chesson, Evan Lysacek, James Moriarty, and Ben Agosto.

I ask my colleagues to join me in congratulating these 10 Illinoisans, along with their teammates, and every coach, parent, and supporter who contributed to the success of Team USA. I thank them for all they accomplished in Vancouver, and wish them nothing but continued success in the future.

There are few international spectacles as singular and as inspiring as the Olympic games. A force for unity in a world divided, these competitions have the power to bring us together as one people, celebrating the human spirit with one voice.

Thanks to the world-class athletes who took part, from the United States and more than 80 countries in every corner of the globe, this year's Winter games in Vancouver were no exception.

I hope that as the world's athletes return to their respective countries, and as we turn our attention back to the challenges we face in our daily lives, this Olympic spirit of unity will persist until we meet again on the world stage, in London, for the 2012 Summer games.

Congratulations to the Illinoisans and all of those who participated from the great United States of America in these games.

Madam President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Madam President, last week Senate leadership reached agreement on a short-term extension of Federal unemployment benefits and other critical programs that were set to expire. But when we tried to pass the bill, sadly, one single Senator objected. Because of that one Senator and his filibuster, Federal unemployment benefits and health care subsidies for people who have lost their jobs have now expired. This Senator also single-handedly halted highway projects across the country and put workers' futures in jeopardy. The obstruction of this bill has brought to a standstill small business lending programs that have been successful at boosting the number of SBA-guaranteed loans since the Recovery Act was passed. Because of the Senator's actions, physicians will see their immediate care reimbursements slashed by over 21 percent, threatening the health care of too many seniors in New Hampshire and across this country.

There may be some people who don't realize the damage caused by these lapses, so I am here, as so many people have been here on the floor over the last several days, to talk about what is happening to too many people because of this filibuster.

First, this is about the struggles faced by individual workers and their families. Right now, with a record number of unemployed workers competing for each job, it has become harder than ever for people who lose a job to get back to work. Of the 16 million Americans who are out of work today, nearly 6 million—more than 1 in 3—have run through the benefits provided by their States. These 6 million people are the ones served by Federal unemployment, which is a critical safety net that helps families buy gas and groceries and helps them heat their homes and pay their mortgages and their rents while they look for the next job. Because of the actions of just one Member of this body—actions that I believe are irresponsible—more than 1.2 million people will get their last check during the month of March.

My office has heard from hundreds of constituents in the last week who are on the verge of losing their benefits, and their stories are heartbreaking. I wish to tell my colleagues about just one.

A woman named Linda wrote me. She said:

I've been unemployed for the first time in my life since August. I will be 60 on March 14, and I have not been able to find another full-time job. I own an older mobile home in Epping and don't have a retirement plan, a nest egg, or anything of that nature. The prospect of my unemployment benefits going away very soon (I may only have two to three weeks left) because of one Senator digging in his heels makes me feel sick. Please, please do everything you can to get

an extension for unemployment benefits passed. God has a plan for us all; I just pray that I don't lose everything, as many others have, and that one Senator isn't playing the partisan card just because he can. I'm not sure that America is the land of opportunity that it used to be.

That is the end of her quote.

While some may think it is no big deal to make people such as Linda wait a week or 2 weeks to get another unemployment check, even short-term expirations have damaging results. When State workforce agencies are forced to shut down and restart complicated Federal benefits programs, they experience huge backlogs in their systems that delay getting checks out the door. Phone lines at call centers are jammed with claimants, holding up others from filing for benefits, and lines at one-stop centers get longer and longer. In the best of circumstances, individuals who see their benefits lapse while this filibuster continues will have to wait weeks before they begin receiving checks again. That is a long time when you are living on unemployment.

Then there is the uncertainty and the fear that comes when someone opens the mail to find a notice that this check is the last one they will receive. Families can't make responsible budget choices when we abruptly interrupt safety net programs.

So this filibuster isn't just holding up benefits to those who are already out of work; it is causing more Americans to lose their jobs. By cutting off highway funding, one Senator has put thousands more Americans at risk of losing their jobs. For the first time in 20 years, construction projects across the country have halted. Without an extension of highway programs, construction companies in New Hampshire can't plan ahead. Workers in New Hampshire don't know whether there will be a job for them when construction season starts back up in the spring. Due to the actions of just one Senator, the future of these workers is uncertain.

This filibuster is especially egregious because it abuses the Senate rules, but, unfortunately, abusing the rules in order to prevent us from addressing the needs of families and small businesses has sadly become too routine. That is why I believe we need to take a very hard look at changing the Senate rules. It is time to stop playing political games with the lives of the American people. I hope that at least on this bill, every Member of the Senate can come together to support the millions of people who are counting on our leadership.

Thank you very much. I yield the floor and note the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

The Senator from South Carolina.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. DEMINT. Madam President, I know the Senate has been dealing with a difficult issue, and I wish to make some comments relative to the Senator from Kentucky, Mr. BUNNING, who I think has taken a lot of unfair criticism for asking our Democratic colleagues to abide by their own rules.

Much has been made in the Senate and in the Congress and at the White House over the last year about the unsustainable level of spending and borrowing and debt we have as a nation. Yet it seems that almost every week we create some new government program or expand spending in some area. I think it is time we expose the hypocrisy that is going on because we know the level of debt we have is going to eventually, sooner or later, bring our country down. Yet we don't seem to have the willpower to stop any spending.

Last week, we created a new government program, a new travel promotion agency. Now we are going to extend unemployment and COBRA benefits, which are good things. Certainly, in a down economy, we need to consider those around the country who are suffering and make sure we do everything we can that is fair to take care of them, but when we borrow the money to do it, we threaten the futures of our children and grandchildren, diminish their quality of life, and likely cause their unemployment in the future. We can hardly pat ourselves on the back for our compassion and generosity when we are not making any sacrifices or even any hard decisions in the Senate to pay for those things we say are a priority.

Instead of paying for this extension of unemployment benefits and COBRA, the Democrats want to pass it without any debate, without any vote. They don't want to pay for it. We are not even considering ways we can pay for this extension. Instead, we classify it as emergency spending at the last minute and try to force Congress into spending money we don't have. We brought it up at the very last minute at the end of last week and said, if we don't pass it now by unanimous consent, people will go without their unemployment and their COBRA.

This is not emergency spending. It was entirely predictable that these funds would run out, when existing funds would run out. Instead of acting prudently to extend these benefits in ways we could pay for them, the way my Democratic colleagues have promised we would with this pay-go rule, they are declaring an emergency at the last minute to ram it through without any debate and without a vote.

Moreover, they want to do this anonymously, through the process we call unanimous consent. That means they don't want a rollcall vote. Why don't they want a rollcall vote? Because it shows who means what they say. It shows who believes in this idea of pay as we go that we call pay-go, and it

will certainly damage prospects for November elections.

Senator BUNNING from Kentucky has taken a courageous stand to hold the Democrats—in fact, all of us—accountable to the things we say we believe. I believe, as does Senator BUNNING, that if we are going to renew these benefits, we should pay for them. We should look at areas of our government that we don't have to do and reduce them or eliminate them so we can pay for the things we feel we have to do. I think the names of the Senators who want to borrow the money to do this, who want to add to our debt to do this, should be recorded for the public to see.

This bill will cost \$10 billion. We could find the money to pay for this bill. We could repeal a very small part of the stimulus plan. We could repeal the TARP or the bailout money. We could cut some earmarks—some local parochial projects—or we could cut other government programs that have been deemed unnecessary or wasteful.

The Congressional Budget Office says the government would save \$12 billion if we allowed health insurance companies to compete in an interstate commerce fashion. We have talked about it a lot as part of the health care debate. If all we did—no taxpayer funds at all—is allowed interstate competition for health insurance, the government could save \$12 billion and more than pay for this bill we are talking about today. We could help people get insured, lower the cost of health insurance, help small businesses create jobs, and pay for the bill that extends unemployment benefits. But we are not even willing to talk about a responsible way to pay for a bill. Senator BUNNING says: Wait a minute. We have been talking about paying for these bills as we go, and the first two bills we brought up since we passed pay-go have not been paid for. He said we should at least bring it to the floor and have some debate and a vote. I think that is pretty reasonable.

Senator BUNNING was right to address this problem, and I commend him for it. I hope our colleagues will stop the hypocrisy, stop trying to create a crisis of our debt while we make that crisis worse every day, adding to the debt almost every week.

Now we have Members of this body looking at new ways to raise taxes or create new taxes on Americans. This is not the way to help our country, and it is not the way to lead. It is certainly hypocrisy. I thank Senator BUNNING for his stand. I ask all my colleagues to join us in looking at what this Federal Government has to do and to do those things well, to fund them properly, but to take those things that don't have to be done at the Federal level and move them to the States or back to the people, as the tenth amendment says. We clearly cannot move forward as a Nation with the Federal Government doing more than it is doing today.

If we are going to survive and thrive as a Nation, the Federal Government

will have to do less. That needs to begin here. It needs to start today. We can't keep expanding government, borrowing money every week, and complaining about the debt. Only in politics would that happen. We have to stop it here, this week. Again, I thank Senator BUNNING for his courage and clarity.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. BAUCUS. I just heard the Senator say, in defense of Senator BUNNING, that our side will not allow Senator BUNNING to have a vote. I want to clear up the record. That is not the case at all. As far as I am concerned, Senator BUNNING can have his vote. He can have his vote on his pay-for. The point is, does Senator BUNNING want an assurance that he has enough votes from the Democratic side so that his vote passes? Well, of course not. We vote here; that is what the Senate is for. Those in favor vote aye; those not in favor vote no. That is the democratic process. That is the process most Americans understand.

So if he wants his vote, he can ask for it and he can have that vote. I will not prejudice whether he will win or lose. As far as this Senator is concerned, he can have that vote. My expectation would be after that vote is concluded one way or another we can vote on the underlying 30-day amendment so we can finally get people their unemployment checks that are due, their COBRA benefits, and their health premium subsidies that are due. Finally, we can enable doctors to be paid so they can see Medicare patients.

This is a very simple solution. We can just vote. If Senator BUNNING wants to vote, I say: Fine, let's vote.

If he complains: Oh, no, I want to make sure I win, I don't think that is entirely proper. I think it is proper to have the votes, and Senators can vote their wishes and their views. We can have that vote. When that is concluded, we can go on to the 30-day resolution so that people can get the benefits they are due. That is the only responsible and reasonable way to deal with this. I hope we do that. We are waiting for the Senator from Kentucky to indicate whether he would like to vote. It is pretty simple.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from California is recognized.

Mrs. BOXER. Madam President, I came here in the hope that, as we begin work on this very important bill that is going to help reinvigorate our economy, we are making progress on getting Senator BUNNING to step down from his objection to a short-term extension of the number of programs that