

just referred to, almost 100 amendments, none of which related to the legislation at hand. Two more jobs bills passed the Senate but are wasting away in the House. All four of these bills are commonsense efforts to spur innovation, investment, and hiring by private companies. All four had a proven track record of creating jobs. The message the Republicans have sent is clear: They care more about partisan politics than they do about putting Americans back to work.

Later today, Democrats will talk about our plan to reduce the jobs deficit, a problem just as critical to Americans as our budget deficit. We hope our Republican colleagues will join us to tackle the problem. So far, they have put politics first.

I don't know what it will take for Republicans to get the message that people in Nevada and across the country care more about jobs than any other issue. It is the most important issue on which Congress should focus. Instead, Republicans are focused on the one thing Americans don't want to change: ending Medicare as we know it. It is wrong that Republicans are trying to end Medicare as we know it. The American public does not support this.

The vast majority of Americans say they oppose the Republican plan to balance the budget on the backs of seniors by killing Medicare. The number amongst seniors and Independents is sky high in opposition to the Republican plan to change Medicare as we know it. There is no mystery to why they oppose it. The Republican plan to end Medicare would put insurance company bureaucrats between seniors and their doctors. It would raise drug prices from day one. It would increase the cost of cancer screenings and treatments for 7 million seniors and do a lot more damage to our Medicare recipients.

Seniors cannot afford this dangerous plan nor can America. The Senate can't afford to waste any more time. It is our job to create jobs. It is time for Republicans to leave Medicare alone and let us get back to work creating jobs.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 11 a.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with the time equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees, with the majority controlling the first half and the Republicans controlling the second half.

Under a subsequent order, each side will have the full 45 minutes.

The Senator from Iowa.

AUSTERITY DISCONNECT

Mr. HARKIN. Madam President, I wish to pick up a little bit again in my remarks on what the majority leader was just talking about; that is, the lack of focus on jobs in this country.

I am disturbed by the growing disconnect between Washington's obsession with austerity and retrenchment and cutting and slashing and the dramatically different needs, priorities, and anxieties of ordinary working Americans. The so-called chattering class here in Washington has persuaded itself that the biggest issue is the budget deficit. But Americans outside the Beltway are most concerned with a far more urgent deficit, the jobs deficit, and their concerns are well founded.

Our Nation remains deeply mired in the most protracted period of joblessness since the Great Depression. Real unemployment is close to 16 percent. Tens of millions of people who are employed are increasingly anxious about being able to hold on to their jobs and to make ends meet.

The American people get it. They want to get this economy moving again, and they know the best way to reduce the budget deficit is to help 25 million unemployed Americans get good, middle-class jobs and become taxpayers once again. With the private sector engine sputtering, there is an absolutely critical role for the Federal Government in creating demand and preventing a double-dip recession.

We have to wonder, is Washington listening to working middle-class Americans? Is Washington listening to the legions of unemployed and the underemployed who are desperate for solutions to their plight? Sadly, I think the answer is, no, Washington is not listening.

Many of our political leaders are treating the jobs crisis as yesterday's news. They are putting deficit reduction above all else. They are demanding extraordinary—in fact, unprecedented—cuts to government funding and government investment. It is akin to a bidding war, driven by the hysteria of the auction rather than the value of the lot: Let's cut \$1 trillion. No, \$1.5 trillion here. No, I have \$2 trillion over here. How about \$4 trillion? It is akin to a bidding war to see how much we can cut government funding and investment.

I have to ask, has Washington lost its mind? Don't we realize these Draconian cuts are the economic equivalent of applying leeches and draining blood from a sick patient? Don't we realize this will make both the jobs deficit and the budget deficit far worse?

Of course, we must act aggressively to bring deficits under control. But we have to do this in ways that continue to create more jobs while also improving the long-term competitiveness of the American economy.

We have reached the point of maximum danger in the fragile economic recovery. We are at the point of maximum danger. Employment growth is weak and threatens to stall out altogether. Businesses remain reluctant to invest and hire for the simple reason that there is not sufficient demand for goods and services. All those unemployed and underemployed people are only spending enough to make ends meet. If they are getting unemployment compensation, they are barely making ends meet. There is no excess money. The middle class is tapped out, with stagnant incomes, insecure jobs, high levels of mortgage, and high levels of consumer debt. The threat of a double-dip recession is far too real, and the fear of more unemployment also hangs right over tomorrow's horizon.

In this context, to insist that we slash Federal funding by trillions of dollars is beyond foolish. It is government malpractice. It flies in the face of everything we know and have learned about how economies work.

Two weeks ago, Federal Reserve Chairman Bernanke stated the obvious. He warned us:

A sharp fiscal consolidation focused on the very near term could be self-defeating if it were to undercut the still-fragile economy.

Again I ask, is anyone listening? The alarm bells are ringing all over America.

Recently, the Federal Reserve Bank of New York published an online article about what it called "the mistake of 1937." What is that all about? The New York Fed was referring to the premature fiscal and monetary pullback in 1937 just as the economy was beginning to get its legs to get out of the Depression. That premature retrenchment was a historic mistake. It killed the recovery then in progress and sent us back into the Great Depression for another almost 4 years until it was finally ended with the stimulative spending of World War II.

Paul Krugman, the Nobel Prize-winning economist, says that in important ways we have already repeated the mistake of 1937. We have taken our eyes off of what should be our No. 1 priority—creating jobs—and we have pivoted to an obsession—again I repeat, an obsession—with deep, short-term budget cuts which by their very nature will destroy jobs and weaken the economy.

Let me cite another glaring example of the disconnect between Washington and the rest of the country. Here in Washington Republicans assert that the Recovery Act was a failure. Why do they claim that? Because they claim President Obama promised the Recovery Act would reduce unemployment to 8 percent and because that has not happened, it was a failure. We have researched this. The Republican talking point on this President Obama promise has no basis in fact. Independent fact checkers in the media have tried to find such a promise or a statement by President Obama, and they have come up empty.

I say again to my Republican friends, if you have some proof of President Obama saying the Recovery Act would reduce unemployment to 8 percent, please bring it forward. All we have found in checking this was an illustrative table from a report that was published—are you ready for this?—before President Obama took office, speculating that some future stimulus program might reduce unemployment to 8 percent depending on how big the stimulus was.

Those same fact checkers found that President Obama did promise one thing of the Recovery Act: He said it would prevent a new Great Depression and prevent unemployment rates of 12 or 13 percent. That did happen.

Fortunately, ordinary Americans have a better understanding of the Recovery Act. They know hundreds of billions of dollars in middle-class tax cuts in the Recovery Act gave them a modest but a significant boost in income. They know that because of the Recovery Act's assistance to the States, many tens of thousands of teachers, police officers, and other essential employees were able to keep their jobs. They have seen countless highway and other infrastructure projects funded by the Recovery Act. All of these have either preserved jobs or created new and more jobs. They provided significant benefits for our people, including better roads, better bridges, better schools, and other critical infrastructure for the future of our country.

Thanks in large part to the Recovery Act, we have gone from losing 700,000 jobs a month in late 2008 when President Obama took office to adding new jobs now for 16 consecutive months building the infrastructure of America. I know a little bit about this. If you go over to my office, you will see hanging on my wall in my office my father's WPA card. To all of you young people who do not know what WPA stands for, it stands for the Works Projects Administration. It started under Franklin Roosevelt during the Great Depression to hire people who were unemployed to work on infrastructure projects.

I know my father worked on three of those projects. One was Lake Ahquabi near Indianola, IA, which is still a State park and recreational area enjoyed by people all year-round, especially in the summertime. Another was a high school in Indianola, still in use, built by WPA. The other was the Maffitt Reservoir built by the WPA for a holding of the city of Des Moines reservoir. All three were built by the WPA, still in use today. We can see countless examples of this all over America. We have schools in Iowa which have been modified and upgraded but still were built by the WPA. That is true all over the country.

What happened is they built an infrastructure that helped the private sector be more efficient and more productive and make lives better for our people. We need to do that again, and we need to invest all over America. The

Recovery Act started that, but now we know it was not enough and it was not long enough. Just as in 1937, we are about to repeat that same mistake. If we had kept the stimulus going through 1937 and 1938, we would not have fallen back as we did at that time.

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimates that through the end of 2010 the Recovery Act had raised the gross domestic product by as much as 3.5 percent and increased the number of employed Americans by as many as 3.3 million people—employed in the public sector but also in the private sector.

Business columnists and pundits have no doubt that the Recovery Act has boosted the economy. You can go to CNBC or Bloomberg on cable TV. In recent months, it has almost become a cliché for commentators to say this: Sure the economy is growing again, but this is largely because of the Recovery Act and the easing by the Federal Reserve. As those things wind down, the economy will be in danger once again.

OK, it seems to me, then, that we do not want to wind them down. Why wind them down and throw us into a tailspin again? These business pundits are correct. The shot in the arm provided by the Recovery Act is now winding down. It threatens our fragile recovery. In the absence of Federal assistance, many States are making deep budget cuts or laying off their employees. In Texas, Governor Perry has proposed to cut education funding by a staggering \$10 billion. In New York City, Mayor Bloomberg has proposed laying off 6,000 teachers. Total State and local government layoffs just in the last 6 months have been nearly 350,000—350,000 people who were working no longer work. They are laid off. Where will the demand be for goods and services from the private sector from all these laid off individuals? Now, if the Federal Government follows suit, after what is happening in our States, with these massive short-term spending cuts, the prospect of a more severe recession will be very real, and we will go off that cliff.

So I reject the false choice between addressing the budget deficit and addressing the job deficit. We can and must do both. As I said earlier, the budget deficit is in large part caused because of the high jobs deficit. High unemployment over the last 3 years has ballooned the deficit by hundreds of billions of dollars because tax revenues have fallen. Federal spending has increased for things such as food stamps, nutrition assistance, unemployment benefits, Medicaid. How often do we hear that Medicaid spending is skyrocketing? You know, before you get Medicaid, you have to fall under certain poverty guidelines. The reason Medicaid is going up is because people are not working. People are not working because there aren't any jobs. And there aren't any jobs because the Federal Government will not prime the

pump, because the Federal Government—now we are being told we must cut back with huge cuts, tremendous cuts that will further make more people get laid off and will further make the problem even worse than it is now.

The smartest approach is to take measures to sharply reduce the deficits in the medium and long term but to invest in job creation in the short term. We have it backward. Washington now has it backward. My Republican friends have it backward. They are going to slash and cut, and that is going to push us into another recession. Better we invest in the infrastructure and keep new jobs and more jobs out there that will create the pent-up demand we need for goods and services. That will help us reduce the deficit in the medium and the long term.

We have to do it right, a balanced way—some spending cuts, revenue increases. People say: How can we invest, Senator HARKIN, in all these roads and new schools and new infrastructure, new energy systems—how can we do that when we are broke? Will we just have to borrow more money from China, go further into debt, put more debt on our kids and grandkids' heads?

I thoroughly reject the premise under which the Ryan budget and the Republican budget is based. It is based on the premise that we are broke, that we are poor, that we can't afford to have teachers and we can't afford to have more medical personnel out there taking care of our elderly, that we can't afford more roads and bridges and sewer and water systems and better school facilities and better technology and new energy systems—we can't afford to do that because we are broke. I reject that. We are not broke. We are not poor.

The United States of America is the richest nation in the history of mankind. We are the richest nation on the face of the Earth. We have the highest per capita income of any major nation in the world. So one has to ask the question, if we are so rich, why are we so broke? Why are we so poor? The reason is because the system is broken.

This really started with the massive tax cuts enacted under the George W. Bush administration in 2001. Need I remind anyone that we had 3 straight years of budget surplus? CBO said that if we kept on the track we were on, we would pay off the national debt by 2010. But as soon as President Bush was in office, Republicans took control of both the House and the Senate and gave, massive tax cuts mostly to the wealthy in our country. That, plus two unpaid-for wars and an unpaid-for Medicare benefit, put us into the greatest deficit and biggest debt we have ever had as a nation.

If 50 percent of the problem we have with the deficit was made because of the tax cuts that mostly went to the wealthy, then we have to think seriously—no, I will rephrase that. We don't have to think seriously; we must act decisively to raise revenues so we

do not have to borrow more money. There are revenues there to be had. A few people made a lot of money in the last 10 years. I don't think it is untoward to ask them to perhaps help rebuild America. The private sector companies, I am told, are sitting on about \$2 trillion in cash, and they will not invest it. There is money there. Our tax system—our system is screwed up. So we need both—yes, to make targeted cuts in certain programs. We can do that. But we also need to raise the revenues necessary to invest in putting people to work and rebuilding the infrastructure of this country.

Republicans are saying we need more tax breaks for the wealthy. If working people and the middle class are taking a hit in tough times, it should not be to pay for more tax breaks for the wealthy. As our leader just said, after weeks of debate, Republicans blocked passage of a bipartisan small business bill, and just this week they killed the Economic Development Administration development bill with a proven record of job creation. The key to renewing America and restoring our economy is to revitalize the middle class. That means investing in education, innovation, the infrastructure, boasting American competitiveness in a highly competitive global marketplace. How do we do both? We do it by making certain targeted cuts but raising revenues by raising revenues. I would have to add, one of those ways we have to think about cutting is, why we are continuing to spend billions of dollars and losing American lives in Afghanistan? What are we still doing in Iraq? I saw a recent report that said we have spent over \$87 billion in Iraq. What do we have to show for it? Higher gasoline prices than ever before and a country that is still torn apart by internal strife.

If we want to move ahead and create these jobs, it means a level playing field, fair taxation, an empowered workforce, a strong ladder of opportunity to give every American a shot at the middle class.

With the fragile economic recovery, we should not reduce fiscal support for job creation at this time. Deficit reduction efforts can start but sequenced in. When the economy is recovering, that is when they start taking place. Now is the time to invest in job creation. We need to keep our priorities straight. The greatest challenge right now is not the budget deficit. The greatest challenge is the jobs deficit. The greatest challenge is the erosion of the middle class, which is under siege in America. The middle class is being dismantled every day. People are losing their savings, their health care, their pensions and, in many cases, even their homes. These proposed gradual budget cuts, drastic budget cuts will destroy jobs and further damage the economy. The people, the middle class of America, have every reason to believe they are losing the American dream not just for themselves but for their children.

Instead of the Republican budget, which is being sold through fear and fatalism, we need a budget that reflects the hopes and aspirations of the American people. We need a budget that will invest to create jobs, that will bring future deficits under control as more people come to work, as fewer people need Medicaid, as fewer and fewer people need food stamps, as fewer and fewer people need unemployment compensation when they begin working and becoming taxpayers again. It is up to the Federal Government to take this step, and we should not be afraid to do so. It must be bold. It cannot be tinkering around the edges. It must be something that is big and that is bold and that will jump-start our economy. That is our No. 1 priority. I hope we can do this so it will not happen that we go into another Great Depression or what happened in the late 1930s; that we had to depend upon another war to stimulate Government spending and put people back to work. God help us if that is the only thing we can look forward to, to get our economy going again. We should have learned from the past, taken those lessons from the past and take the steps necessary right now to invest in jobs, to rebuild the middle class of America, and to have a fair taxation system so those people at the top who make so much—and I don't begrudge people making money, but I do begrudge if they are not paying their fair share in revenues to this country. That is our challenge. I hope Congress is up to meeting that challenge. The middle class is the backbone of America, and it is time this Congress showed the backbone to stick up for them.

I yield the floor.

Madam President, how much time is remaining on our side?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Nineteen minutes.

Mr. HARKIN. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Iowa.

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

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

Mr. HARKIN. Madam President, how much time do we have remaining now?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Eighteen minutes.

NEW NLRB RULES

Mr. HARKIN. Madam President, I also wanted to speak about the new National Labor Relations Board rules that came out just yesterday. It also has a lot to do with the middle class in America and what happens to the middle class.

In 1912, women went on strike at a textile plant in Lawrence, MA. They

inspired the Nation when they walked the picket lines with signs that said: "We want bread, but we want roses too." Well, what did they mean by that? They meant they wanted jobs, but they didn't want just bare subsistence and slave jobs. As you know, many women died in the terrible triangle shirtwaist textile plant fire. They wanted jobs, but they wanted jobs that paid a living wage. They wanted jobs that did not work people 12, 18 hours a day, 6 or 7 days a week. Those words helped to shape the character of the country we created, a shared prosperity for the American people.

Almost 100 years later, we face the same fundamental question about what kind of country we want to be. When we imagine the America of our dreams or our children and grandchildren, is bread just good enough for the middle class or should we have some roses too?

Republicans portray our country as poor and broke, and they have used that as an excuse to rationalize an unprecedented attack on the middle class. But, the reality is we are the wealthiest Nation in history. It is just more and more of our country's wealth is being concentrated at the top.

Certainly, the American people do not begrudge the rich their good fortune and success. But they do resent it when the wealthy and the powerful manipulate the political system to reap huge advantages at the expense of working people. Today, unfortunately, more and more people sense in their hearts that the rules of the game have been rigged in favor of CEOs and big corporations, and nowhere is this more apparent than the process by which workers form a union or, I should say, by which process workers are blocked from forming a union.

As it now stands, the union election process is a never-ending, bitter struggle marred by corporate intimidation and frivolous lawsuits. Workers have to walk through broken glass on their hands and knees to get the same basic rights that every wealthy CEO has the right to have the terms of their employment set out in an enforceable contract. Right now, CEO's bargain extremely generous salaries and golden-parachute retirements, but millions of hardworking Americans don't have a way to guarantee from week to week that they will have enough hours to feed their family or that their health benefits won't be cut without notice.

So the rules promulgated by the NLRB yesterday try to right this and to make it a fair and equitable process so people can form a union. The proposed rules are very modest. What it does is cut down on the number of frivolous lawsuits and removes unnecessary delays that prevent workers from getting a vote in elections. Sometimes it takes months and, in some cases, years before workers even get a chance to vote on whether or not they want to form a union. All the while, people are harassed and intimidated. These workers know first hand that justice delayed is justice denied. That is not the