

is estimated to be one of the most costly disasters ever to hit this country. It caused flooding and wind damage from Florida to Maine. That is a long ways. It is a huge coastline. But its damage was not only to the coastline. Interior States such as Vermont suffered terrible damage, hundreds of bridges in Vermont, and scores of bridges in the State of the Presiding Officer, the State of New Hampshire. Crops were drowned all over the Northeast. It is rarely that this has ever happened.

Just a few short weeks ago an earthquake such as we have not had in this part of the country for 65 years occurred. The epicenter was in Virginia. It was felt by tens of millions of people in every corner of the Eastern United States. It damaged buildings in Richmond and closed the Washington Monument. The National Cathedral had some of its spires damaged. It is closed now. The 9/11 celebration was to take place there. They had to move it to the Kennedy Center. Some of the spires were knocked off the Mormon Temple that we see as we drive down the beltway. There was record flooding on the Mississippi and Missouri that cost lives and devastated farmland.

To get a picture of the devastation, 3 million acres of farmland is underwater now. This is not rice that grows there, these are crops that need to be away from that much water. It is devastating to farmland in that part of the country.

In February a massive blizzard buried the Midwest and Northeast with as much as 3 feet of snow, paralyzing the city of Chicago, and 36 people died. Even now, firefighters are battling terrible wildfires that have ravaged for weeks and weeks across central Texas. Those fires have killed people and driven residents from their homes, homes they will never see again. In Texas, 2,000 homes have been burned to the ground. Since January, Texas has responded—this is not a misstatement—20,000 fires. Some of the small fires developed into big fires, burning almost 4 million acres of land. The State Forest Service in Texas responded to 19 new fires on Sunday alone, in 24 hours—almost a new fire an hour in Texas.

This year President Obama has issued disaster declarations in 48 States, and it is only September. Some States have had multiple disasters. The United States has had \$10 billion worth of disasters already this year. It is no wonder there are limited moneys left in FEMA's Disaster Relief Fund. FEMA has spent about \$400 million in the last 2 weeks alone making whole American families, victims of Irene and Lee, a tropical storm and a hurricane.

In short, FEMA is running out of money. They are almost broke. Funds are so low FEMA stopped rebuilding Joplin, MO, where more than 150 people died in that terrible tornado. FEMA has programs where they were rebuilding the schools and some of the public services that were so necessary. But they wanted to have enough money to

supply the food, water, and emergency housing for victims of Hurricane Irene, so they pulled out of Joplin, MO.

We have seen the pictures. It is hard to comprehend what winds blowing almost 300 miles an hour do. They just eliminate everything on the ground. Any structure was eliminated.

This is not some Democratic idea that has come about, that we need to fund FEMA. Republican Governors are desperate for money. They have seen the destruction firsthand. I will pick just two: the Governor in New Jersey, Governor Christie, said this:

Our people are suffering now and they need support now.

Governor McDonald of Virginia said this:

My concern is that we help people in need.

He responded in that way because the Republican majority leader of the House said what we need to do is make sure these emergencies are paid for by taking money from programs that are now in existence.

We cannot be held hostage on that issue to appease the tea party. Hundreds of millions of dollars in disaster recovery projects are on hold. I mentioned Joplin, MO, as just one example. No matter how often we wish for a crystal ball, the process of guessing how much money we will need for natural disasters is not perfect. We have tried, but this has been a very devastating year. Each year Congress estimates how much it will cost this country to recover from inevitable storms and fires and floods, and then it reacts to what Mother Nature sends our way.

Now is the time to react. It is time to show Americans, as we did in the wake of September 11, that when disaster strikes the Federal Government will be there to help rebuild.

These are very hard personal issues. Here in a Virginia suburb, a 12-year-old boy was out watching it rain. He was swept off his back step, and he is dead. Scores of people have been killed just in Lee and Irene. It is time for Republicans to prove that this Congress, for the first time, is willing to put politics aside for the good of the American people.

FEMA is an issue that is bipartisan in nature. Those storms don't just hit Republicans; they don't just hit Democrats; they don't just hit Independents; they hit us all. That is why we have to react to help people in America because they have been hurt.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

THE JOBS PLAN

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, last week President Obama came up to Capitol Hill to unveil a stimulus bill he is calling a jobs plan, and yesterday

the White House explained how they would like to pay for it. The first thing to say about this plan is that it is now obvious why the President left out the specifics last week. Not only does it reveal the political nature of this bill, it also reinforces the growing perception that this administration is not all that interested in economic policies that will actually work.

But none of this is news. Over the past few days, press reports have made it perfectly clear that this legislation is more of a reelection plan than a jobs plan. It is an open secret which Democrats all over Washington have been acknowledging to reporters since the moment the President revealed it. They have said that despite the President's calls to pass this bill immediately, the real plan is to let it hang out there for a while so Democrats can use it as an issue on the campaign trail. What is more, the President knew as well as I did when he unveiled this plan that Democrats in the Senate had already scheduled a full slate of legislative business for the next few weeks. So unless the White House wants to admit that it has no regard for its own party's legislative business in Congress, the President's call for immediate action was clearly little more than a rhetorical flourish.

But the specifics we got yesterday only reinforced the impression that this was largely a political exercise. For one, they undermined the President's claim that it is a bipartisan proposal because much of what he is proposing has already been rejected on a bipartisan basis. The \$½ trillion tax hike the White House proposed yesterday will not only face a tough road in Congress among Republicans but from Democrats too.

The central tax hike included in this bill, capping deductions for individuals and small businesses, was already dismissed by a filibuster-proof, Democratic-controlled Senate in 2009. Another idea floated by the White House yesterday, a tax on investment income, has been vehemently opposed by the No. 3 Democrat in the Senate, among others. A proposal to raise taxes on the oil and gas industry was rejected as a job-destroying tax hike by both Democrats and Republicans just a few months ago, and for good reason, since the nonpartisan Congressional Research Service tells us it would not only raise gas prices but, in addition to raising gas prices, would move jobs overseas. So claiming this bill is bipartisan may sound good if you are out there on the campaign trail, but surely the President could come up with some proposals that both sides had not already rejected.

Here is how one prominent left-leaning analyst put it yesterday: "These aren't new policy ideas," he wrote. "The Obama administration has been looking to cap itemized deductions since the 2009 budget. Nor are they bipartisan policy ideas. . . ."

The specifics we got yesterday were disappointing for another reason as

well. Not only have they failed to attract wide bipartisan support in the past, even if they did enjoy bipartisan support they wouldn't create any jobs. The President knows raising taxes is the last thing you want to do to spur job creation. He said so himself. Yet that is basically all he is proposing: temporary stimulus to be paid for later by permanent tax hikes so that when the dust clears and the economy is no better off than it was after the first stimulus folks find themselves with an even bigger tax bill than today.

The President can call this bill whatever he wants, but in reality all he is doing is proposing a hodgepodge of retreat ideas aimed at convincing people that a temporary fix is permanent and that it will create permanent jobs, and then daring Republicans to vote against it.

I think most people see through all of this. I think most Americans are smarter than that. I think they know our economic challenges are more serious than this and that they require serious long-term solutions. I think the American people realize we can do a lot better.

I have talked with a lot of job creators over the past few weeks, including many in my own State. It is no secret that they need to create jobs. Every one of them says the same thing. Yet the President refuses to do any of it.

If the President is truly interested in growing the economy and putting Americans back to work, then he will leave the temporary proposals and the half measures and the tax hikes aside. He will consult with both parties and work with us on a plan that indicates he has learned something from the failures of the past 2 years and which actually has a chance of attracting bipartisan support.

He could start with a permanent reform of our broken tax system, reducing out-of-control Federal regulations, and by passing the trade bills that have been sitting on his desk since Inauguration Day 2009. All of this is doable, all of it should attract bipartisan support, and all of it would actually create jobs. That would be a jobs plan worthy of the seriousness of the moment.

But make no mistake, what the President proposed so far is not serious, and it is not a jobs plan. After what we learned yesterday that should be clear to everyone.

I yield the floor.

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 for 1 hour, 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 final half.

The Senator from Illinois.

THE PRESIDENT'S JOBS SPEECH

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I listened carefully to the statement made by the Republican leader. I noticed that for the last few days the Republicans have been very quiet and calm and circumspect in their reaction to the President's speech to a joint session of Congress last Thursday night. The President, of course, came to us and said this economy needs a helping hand; we have to step in and do something. We have to act and act now. He came up with a list of proposals Thursday night that I think really do address what America needs: First and foremost, to create jobs—that is the No. 1 priority. The President says we will do this by creating tax incentives for small businesses in particular to hire people who have been unemployed and to give raises to those who currently work.

He knows families are struggling across America, working families, middle-class families. Many of them are living paycheck to paycheck. A recent poll asked working families in America how many could come up with \$2,000 in 30 days, either from savings or borrowing, to meet a medical emergency, for example. It turns out barely half of the working American families polled can do so. Barely half of them could come up with \$2,000. It is a reminder to many of us who have a comfortable life that the vast majority of working families struggle every single month to make ends meet. President Obama understands that, and that is why he has proposed a payroll tax cut that will put more money in the hands of working families. In Illinois, it will be an average of about \$1,400 a year. I wish it were more, but it is a recognition by the President that to get this economy moving again, people have to have more confidence in their own situation at home and more confidence in the future. Giving working families this spending power can make that difference.

The President also understands and I am sure the Presiding Officer understands as well that many of the families who are unemployed now are desperate. I visited with many of them during the August recess, going to the Elgin Work Center and to others in McHenry County. I sat down with these people who have been out of work for months—some even years—and asked them: What is your day like? They come to these job centers, they sit down, and they work on their resumes. They pore through all of the want ads, they pore through all of the information about people seeking new employees, and they send out their resumes as quickly as possible. Of course, very few of them get any response at all.

It is a desperate situation. Some of them have lost their homes. Some of them are seeing their kids returning from college, unable to continue their studies because Dad is out of work. Some of the marriages that have been involved have been strained and some have failed because of this economic hardship. The President understands that, and I hope we do too.

Unemployment compensation is absolutely essential as a lifeline to these families, and the President makes that part of his package.

When I hear the Republican leader call these suggestions a hodgepodge, I don't think he is fair and I don't think he is just. Take a look at the specifics: incentives for businesses to hire new workers, payroll tax cuts for working families for more spending money in hand, unemployment compensation for those who are out of work so they can survive.

The President also focuses on critical people. How many of us in the last 48 hours have given a speech somewhere at home or here talking about the great first responders of 9/11? The policemen, the firefighters, the medical professionals who literally risked and some even gave their lives in response to that national emergency. We know what is happening across America. Many of these policemen and firefighters are losing their jobs, along with teachers. The President understands that, and he puts resources into saving some of those jobs so that we can have the protection we need in our communities and the teachers we need for the next generation of workers.

President Obama believes, and I agree, that we need to invest in America. When we build the infrastructure in America that will serve us in the 21st century, we create good-paying jobs right here at home. These are not jobs you can ship overseas. President Obama understands that. That is why that is a major part of his proposal. We are talking about highways and bridges and airports and ports and waterways and schools. The President understands that investment in America not only helps us today in invigorating the economy but will pay off for generations to come.

There were very few lines the President gave at his speech that drew standing applause from the Republican side. I felt at one point that the temperature of the Republican side of the aisle in the House Chamber was 40 degrees below that on the Democratic side. It was cold over there. There was one line they finally acknowledged, and that was when the President said: For goodness' sake, we owe it to our veterans who have come home to put them to work. To know that 10 percent of those people who risked their lives for America are now back home and in unemployment lines is absolutely unacceptable, and President Obama recognizes that in what he has called for to get this economy moving forward.

I don't think the Republican leader is fair in calling this a hodgepodge. It is