

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 Republicans controlling the final half.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, 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.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

EYE-OPENING POVERTY

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, the report this week about the rate of poverty in America is an eye opener. The numbers that have been reported are stunning. The number of Americans living in poverty now stands at 46.2 million people. That is an increase of 8.9 million since 2007, just in 4 years. This has increased significantly since the year 2000. The poverty threshold for a mother and father with two children is an annual income of \$22,000 a year. That is less than \$2,000 a month. So for that family of four, what we are seeing is 46 million Americans make less than that. I think all of us understand how difficult it is in this day and age to survive and raise a family, but this national poverty rate should be a wake-up call to us. I hope it puts a couple of things in perspective.

I spoke on the floor yesterday about visiting a warehouse in Champagne, IL, a warehouse for the food depositories in the area. It is a warehouse where they process and send out food for food pantries that are managed by local groups, churches and the like. Almost every State has them—I am sure they do. I was in this warehouse during the August recess to talk about the increased volume of people who are going to food pantries on a regular basis. I visit these food pantries to introduce myself to those who are coming in and to learn as much as they want to tell me about their circumstances.

At this warehouse in Champagne, IL, was a woman who was very attractive and well-dressed, standing there, and I assumed she worked at the warehouse. It turned out I was wrong because she said at one point she was a teacher's aide in the local school district. I thought, Why is she here? I kept think-

ing to myself, I wonder why she is here. Maybe she is on the board of this food depository. It turns out she was there to tell me her story. She is a single mom with two young children. She has a full-time job as a teacher's aide in the school district. Because her income is below the poverty level, she qualifies for not only food stamps but also uses these food pantries. She said to me she wanted to express her gratitude that we now have extended the SNAP program, the food stamp program, to include fresh produce, fruits, and vegetables. She said it means I can take my kids to the local farmers market and they get to meet the farmers and ask questions and hear stories about where these things come from, the fruits and vegetables we buy and, she said, I get to buy healthy food to give to my kids.

I never would have picked her out of a crowd as a person who needed help to feed her children—and she did. She told me: Without this, I would be struggling. It is an eye opener for all Americans, when we hear 46 million of us are living in poverty. These are our neighbors, our friends, the people with whom we go to church. These are folks you may see in the store. They are people who are struggling, many of them working but not making enough money. Some have full-time jobs, many have part-time jobs. It is a reminder, as we get into this deficit debate, never to lose sight of the safety net in America.

We are a kind and caring people. We have proven that over many generations. We do things many other countries do not do. For one thing, we have our young men and women volunteer to risk their lives in foreign lands to try to bring peace.

In addition to that, we have been engaged for over a century in helping other countries that are struggling. I just received a handwritten letter from two grade school children in Illinois about those who are starving in Somalia. It was a heartfelt letter, asking me to do something. That is not unusual. It is a sentiment expressed over and over again in our country. We need to have the same empathy and the same compassion for our own in America.

What that means is not only saying good things and perhaps helping through our churches and other charities, but also making certain that the safety net programs in our country are there for those who are struggling. We are engaged in a mighty debate now about deficit reduction. I have been part of it for a little while in some capacities. I keep reminding those who are in the debate that there are some programs that are absolutely essential. Some of them are obvious: the food stamp program, to make sure the lady I mentioned and others like her have enough food for their children; the Medicaid Program, which provides health insurance for one-third of America's children. In Illinois it pays for over 50 percent of births and it takes care of our elderly when they are in a

nursing home and run out of their savings.

As we talk about deficit reduction, let us focus on making certain at the end of the day the safety net is still in place. Let us make sure the childcare deductions that we have in the Tax Code are there for working families, the Earned Income Tax Credit, a program started under President Reagan which acknowledges that many people who are working still need a helping hand in our Tax Code; Medicaid, that I mentioned earlier; the food stamp program; housing programs for those who are homeless and need a helping hand. The safety net has to be honored and has to be preserved in the course of our deficit debate.

But I would also say, at this point, the President has challenged us to stop giving speeches and to start moving forward on getting America back to work. He made a proposal in last Thursday's joint session of Congress to give working families across America a payroll tax cut. What would it mean in Illinois? The average income in Illinois is about \$53,000 a year. The President's payroll tax cut would be worth \$1,400 to every family making that amount of money. That is \$120 a month. It may not sound like much for people who are wealthy, but for those who are struggling paycheck to paycheck, it could make a difference.

President Obama wants to give more income security to middle-income families. That is what his proposal is about. He has turned around and said when it comes to small businesses, let us give them incentives to hire the unemployed. The only line the President delivered a week ago that I remember got a standing ovation from both sides is when the President said let's incentivize employers to hire our veterans. Everybody stood up. We know that is the right thing. They served our country, they came home, and we ought to give them a hand to help them. That is part of the President's plan.

But he went beyond that and said if people have been unemployed and an employer is willing to hire them, let us give them a tax credit to do it. The President is moving tax benefits to small businesses, the so-called job creators we hear so much about, and I believe they are, as well as to working families. But it is all paid for. This is where many Republicans take exception.

How does the President pay for getting America back to work? He asked for sacrifice from the wealthiest people in America. There are some members of the Republican Party who would not impose 1 penny more in taxes on the wealthiest people in America. They are prepared to see every other family in America sacrifice except for those who can sacrifice without feeling any pain in their lives. I don't think that is fair and I think the President is right. Those who are making the highest incomes in America should join with

every other family in America and help us get beyond this recession.

Also, the President starts eliminating the subsidies, the Federal subsidies for oil companies. I don't have to remind Americans what the price of gasoline is; they know it. In Illinois it is over \$4 a gallon in many places I traveled to during the recess. These oil companies are witnessing the highest profits in the history of American business. The President has said, and I agree: It is time to cut the Federal subsidy, the tax subsidy for oil companies, these profitable companies that make so much money for their shareholders and give so many bonuses to their officers.

Many Republicans object. They do not want to raise taxes on the oil companies. They do not want to raise taxes on the wealthiest people in America. I think they ought to put it in perspective. If we can help middle-income and working families get through the recession, stop living paycheck to paycheck and have a little bit of a cushion in their lives, if we can give small businesses incentive to hire Americans and turn this economy around, that is what America needs. Let's get beyond the rhetoric that has stalled efforts in Washington. Let's get beyond the obstructionism and the obstacles. Let us finally work together with the President's leadership and come up with a plan to put America back to work.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican leader is recognized.

TRIBUTE TO SERGEANT DAKOTA MEYER

Mr. MCCONNELL. In a ceremony at the White House this afternoon, SGT Dakota Meyer of the U.S. Marine Corps will become the first living Marine recipient of the Medal of Honor, our Nation's highest award for valor, the first recipient in 41 years.

The Medal of Honor is awarded for conspicuous gallantry and bravery at the risk of one's own life, above and beyond the call of duty.

Every American can be proud of Sergeant Meyer, age 23, for his exceptional valor in combat in Afghanistan. I am particularly proud that Sergeant Meyer is a Kentuckian. I am honored that heroes like him come from the Bluegrass State. Sergeant Meyer hails from Columbia, KY, and is a 2006 graduate of Green County High School where he played on the football team. On September 8, 2009, his unit assignment was with Marine Embedded Training Team 2-8, Regional Corps Advisory Command 3-7, operating in Kunar Province, Afghanistan. That day he was sent to aid a group of marines, soldiers, and Afghans trapped under heavy enemy fire from three different sides. "We're surrounded," one of them broadcast over the radio. "They're moving in on us."

Air support to assist the Marines was unavailable, as the fighting was too

fierce for helicopters to land. Then Corporal Meyer requested permission to enter the zone of fire to come to their aid four times, and four times his request was denied. After four denials he decided to go anyway, in an armored vehicle mounted with a .50-caliber machine gun with one other marine as a driver. Twice they attempted to reach their comrades and twice were forced back by bullets, rocket-propelled grenades, and mortars. A bullet hit the vehicle's gun turret, striking Corporal Meyer's elbow with shrapnel. Ignoring his injury, he left the vehicle and charged ahead alone to rescue his fellow fighters. Under intense enemy fire, he reached a trench where helicopter pilots had reported their position. There he found his three fellow marines and a Navy hospital corpsman all dead from gunshot wounds. Still under fire, Corporal Meyer carried their bodies back to a humvee with the help of Afghan troops and escorted them to a forward-operating base about 1 mile away. He was determined to fulfill the Marines' credo, to never leave a marine behind. Corporal Meyer and the three marines whom he refused to abandon all knew each other well and worked together in the same four-man training team. He considered them close friends.

In addition to the four Americans Corporal Meyer pulled out of the firefight, a U.S. Army soldier and at least eight Afghan troops plus an Afghan interpreter were killed in the attack. They had faced more than 50 enemy insurgents armed with machine guns, assault rifles, and rocket-propelled grenades during a 6-hour firefight.

Now a sergeant, Meyer combines his great heroism with great humility. He said:

This isn't about me. If anything comes out of it for me, it's for those guys.

He left Active-Duty service in June 2010 and currently serves in the Inactive Ready Reserve of the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve.

I know my colleagues join me in saluting SGT Dakota Meyer for his extraordinary display of selfless valor, for which he will be awarded the Medal of Honor at a White House ceremony this afternoon. He may not think of himself as a hero, but his country certainly does. His heroism and meritorious service has already been recognized in the many awards, medals, and decorations he has received, including the Purple Heart Medal, the Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal with "V" Device for valor, the Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal, the Good Conduct Medal, and the Combat Action Ribbon.

His fellow Kentuckians and an entire grateful Nation thank him for his service. Brave men and women like him honor us and our country and make us proud that America boasts the finest Armed Forces in the world.

THE ECONOMY

Mr. MCCONNELL. It has been 1 week now since the President unveiled his second stimulus. Today, 1 week later, White House aides are expected to hold a briefing to explain it all to the Democrats who do not understand the details.

One would think they would want to be briefed on details before the President demanded they pass it right away, not after. Then, again, the White House probably expected stronger support from Democrats than it has gotten so far. After all, this bill's top selling point, according to the President, is that both parties should like it. Yet so far the only thing both parties in Congress seem to agree on is there has to be a better way.

Earlier this week, after several of us suggested the President would have a hard time convincing Members of his own party to support this plan, a number of them have proved us right. While the President was in Ohio insisting over and over that Congress pass the bill, it seemed as though the only Democrats who were even willing to talk about it on Capitol Hill were tearing it apart. We had the Democratic majority leader basically treating it like a legislative afterthought. One freshman Senator called parts of the bill frustrating and unfair. Another Democrat called a central part of the bill terrible. One veteran Democrat was tamping down expectations of it passing in one piece. Another veteran Democrat suggested a completely different approach to jobs. I know the President and his advisers are keen on this idea of making Republicans look bad, but from what I can tell, he has a big problem at the moment lining up supporters in his own party.

That brings me to the real issue. The truth is, the President has a problem that no amount of political strategizing can solve: His economic policies simply have not worked. Yet he and his advisers seem to be the only folks in Washington who are not ready to admit it. We are in the middle of a crisis. The average length of unemployment is at an alltime high. Median income is going down instead of up. Poverty levels are higher than they have ever been in two decades. Millions of Americans cannot find work. The numbers just keep getting worse and the President's solution is to demand another Washington stimulus bill. Is that because the first one worked out so well?

The first stimulus is a national punch line: turtle tunnels, sidewalks to nowhere, and now we are hearing reports that the White House fast-tracked a \$1/2 billion loan to a politically connected energy firm that their own analyst said was not ready for prime time. This place, this energy firm, was supposed to be the poster child of how the original stimulus would create jobs. Now it is bankrupt and most of its 1,100 employees are out of work. And they want another stimulus?