

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 \$½ 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?

Even if we do not know about any of the waste or the alleged cronyism, here is the bottom line: 2½ years after the President signed the first stimulus, there are 1.7 million fewer jobs in this country. That is 1.7 million fewer jobs after borrowing and spending \$825 billion to create them. What more do we need to know than that? We have done that. We have gone down that road before. Shouldn't we try something different? How about we do what just about every job creator in America is telling us they need in order to create jobs? Tax reform. Loosening the grip of government regulations and free-trade agreements. That is how we will create a better environment for jobs in our country. It might mean the President doesn't get his tax hikes, but it would mean more jobs.

I know some people sometimes get attached to a single idea, and this President seems to have come into office with one big idea; that there is not a problem we have in this country that bigger government cannot solve. At a certain point, we have to take stock. We have to check the results and see how we are doing. I think it is pretty clear to most people what the results suggest. It is time to change course.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois is recognized.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, how much time is remaining on the Democratic side?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. There is 18½ minutes remaining on the Democratic side.

Mr. DURBIN. I see several of my Republican colleagues, and I would like to ask unanimous consent that they be allowed to use their morning business time and our 18½ minutes remaining be preserved until after their speeches.

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

The senior Senator from Tennessee is recognized.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, the Republican Senators have come to talk about education, No Child Left Behind, and I ask consent to engage in a colloquy.

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

Mr. ALEXANDER. The Senators who will be here will be Senator ISAKSON, Senator BURR, Senator KIRK, and Senator ENZI. Will you let each of us know when we have consumed 5 minutes?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Chair will do so.

REFORM OF NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, in the world in which we live, every American's job is on the line. As every American knows, better schools mean better jobs. Schools and jobs are alike in this sense: Washington cannot cre-

ate good jobs and Washington cannot create better schools, but Washington can create an environment in which others can create good jobs and environments in which teachers and principals and students and communities can create better schools, along with their parents.

A good place for Washington to start is with the five pieces of legislation we introduced today to fix the law known as No Child Left Behind. No Child Left Behind was a bipartisan effort in 2001 and 2002. President Bush and Democratic Members of the Senate and the House and Republicans as well agreed on it. By the 2013-14 school year, the law said that all 50 million students in nearly 100,000 public schools would be proficient in reading and math. There would be State standards, tests to measure performance against those standards, and requirements that the more than 3,000 teachers in America be highly qualified. There would be school report cards, disaggregated by subgroups of students, and schools that failed to make what was called adequate yearly progress would receive Federal sanctions. There would also be more choices of schools and charter schools for parents.

During the last 9 years, Federal funding for elementary and secondary education programs has increased by 73 percent, while student achievement has stayed relatively flat. Our legislative proposals would set a new, realistic, but challenging goal to help all students succeed and to end the Federal mandates which have Washington, DC deciding which students and teachers are succeeding and failing.

Our legislation would require States to have high standards that promote college and career readiness for all students and would continue the reporting of student progress so parents, teachers, and communities can know whether students are succeeding. It would encourage teacher and principal evaluation systems, relating especially to student achievement, and would replace the Federal definition of a highly qualified teacher. It would consolidate Federal programs and make it easier to transfer funds within local school districts. It would expand charter schools and give parents more choices. For the bottom 5 percent of schools, the Federal Government would help States turn them around. Much has happened during the last 10 years, and it is time to transfer back to States and to local governments the responsibility for deciding whether schools and teachers are succeeding or failing.

Since 2002, 44 States have adopted common core academic standards. Two groups of States are developing common tests to see whether the students are meeting those standards, and more than 30 States are working together to develop common principles for holding schools and districts accountable for student achievement. Thanks to No Child Left Behind, we now have several years of school-by-school information

about student progress that puts the spotlight on success and puts the spotlight on where work needs to be done.

In addition, many States and school districts are finding ways to reward outstanding teaching and school leadership and to include student performance as a part of that evaluation. As common sense as that idea may seem, it was not until Tennessee created the Master Teacher Program in 1984 that one State paid one teacher one penny more for teaching well. All the sponsors of the five pieces of legislation we introduced today are Republicans. Many of the ideas were either first advanced or have been worked out in concert with President Obama and with his excellent Education Secretary, Arne Duncan, as well as with Democratic Senators here and with Republican and Democratic colleagues in the House. In other words, we have made a lot of progress.

In the Senate, my judgment is that we are not far from agreement on a bipartisan bill, with most of the differences of opinion centering around what I would characterize as provisions that would create a national school board. We on the Republican side want to continue to work with our colleagues across the aisle and in the House. Our purpose in offering our ideas is to spur progress so we can enact a bill before the end of the year. The House of Representatives has passed its first bill to fix No Child Left Behind with bipartisan support. It would expand charter schools and is similar to the charter school bill Senator KIRK will introduce today. The President has met with us and given us his blueprint. The Secretary has warned us that, under existing law, most schools will be labeled as failing within a few years, and he is proposing to use his waiver authority to avoid that. The Secretary clearly has that waiver authority under the law, and I support his use of it in appropriate ways.

I am introducing legislation today to make it clear that the appropriate use means using the waiver to accept or reject State proposals based upon whether those proposals enhance student achievement and not to impose a new set of Washington mandates. But the best way for us to relieve the Secretary of the need to consider waivers and to help American children learn what they need to know is for us to work together in the Senate and in the House to fix No Child Left Behind.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD following my remarks, and following the remarks of all the Senators, the following documents: Why we need to fix No Child Left Behind; how the environment has changed in the past 10 years; a summary of the nine proposals Secretary Duncan, Senator HARKIN, Senator ENZI, and others of us have worked on; a summary of the legislation introduced by Senator ISAKSON to fix title I; a summary of the legislation that I am