

our offices and looked at it as often as I could. I was very impressed with my colleagues who came and talked about why it is so important that we not have an increase in the interest rate for student loans. I have been very happy with my Democratic colleagues who have come here and made such a profound case. But I listened also to what the Republicans had to say, and it is beyond my comprehension how they can come to the floor with a straight face and say what they have said. I have listened as my Republican colleagues have come to the Senate floor to blame Democrats for stalling legislation to keep college affordable for 7 million people throughout our great country. The claim is pretty rich considering that Republicans voted unanimously yesterday to filibuster this legislation. What is a filibuster? It is stopping us from going to the legislation.

Our bill would prevent 7 million students from paying \$1,000 more on their loans. With college already unaffordable for far too many young people, Democrats believe we should be doing all we can to provide access to higher education. That is what these student loans are all about.

Republicans have repeatedly claimed they support efforts to support legislation to keep loans from doubling this summer, but they sure have a funny way of showing it with this endless filibuster. Today, Republicans have said that Democrats should negotiate a way out of this stalemate—again, a very strange reasoning. It is hard to negotiate without a partner.

Every Tuesday after we do our weekly caucus meetings, I go to what we call the Ohio Clock. One of the reporters said: Your Republican colleague Senator McCONNELL said you should negotiate on this issue with Speaker BOEHNER.

Now, how do you like that one, that I, the leader in the Senate, should go to the Republican House and start negotiating with them? That is a strange, strange way of doing business.

The Republicans claim their only objection to our legislation is how it is paid for—by closing a tax loophole that allows wealthy Americans to dodge taxes they already owe. That is what we feel should happen. We don't believe it is a tax increase—just that people should pay what they are supposed to pay. They now have a way of avoiding taxes. Rich accountants and lawyers avoid it by claiming they are going to pay dividends and not ordinary income. It is not fair to everyone else.

So if the Republicans object to this, fine. Democrats are willing to consider alternative offsets. In fact, we are even willing to vote on the House Republicans' own proposed offset. Now, that is a doozy, the offset from the Republicans coming from the House, which takes away money for preventive care for virtually everybody. The leading causes of death in America are diabetes, heart disease, and cancer. They want to take away preventive pro-

grams to stop heart disease. And, as we know, there are programs now—mammograms, for example—that stop people from having to get too far behind with the dread of breast cancer. That is their offset. We strongly oppose that alternative, but we are willing to vote on it. We are not running from it. And once their proposal to slash programs that save money and lives fails on a floor vote—and it will fail—we Democrats are still willing to consider other options to pay for this legislation. My Republican colleagues on the other hand have refused to consider alternative ways to pay for a bill they claim they support.

So I say to my Republican colleagues, let us bring this bill to the floor. If Republicans are so interested in negotiating a solution, they should be willing to take that first step. Once the bill is on the floor, we can debate it, we can amend it with an offset on which both sides can agree. But until Republicans end their obstructionist filibuster, there is no path forward.

So for my Republican colleagues to come down here and say “we support this legislation,” I repeat, what a strange way of supporting this legislation.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to a period of morning business, with Senators allowed to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

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

FLAG MAN LARRY ECKHARDT

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I was in Tazewell County—which is in the area of Pekin, in East Peoria, IL—last week at the Veterans Administration Commission.

I talked to a number of vets from the Vietnam war and other conflicts. We talked about obvious questions: veterans' unemployment, what was happening with disability payments, education for veterans, topics that most vets are very concerned about. They face some pretty significant challenges, as we know.

We promise these men and women that if they put up their hand and swear that they will risk their life for America, we swear we will be there when they come home. It is that basic. We have to keep our word. As a nation, we have a sacred pledge to take care of veterans who serve. I take it very seriously—I think both parties do—and we should.

We also need to honor those who have lost their lives. Just a few weeks ago, we buried another soldier from that county. There was a huge turnout at the memorial service. One particular local resident was doing his part to honor our fallen heroes in an extraordinary way. I learned about him when I visited Tazewell County. He is

from Little York, IL, and he is known as the Flag Man.

Larry Eckhardt is not a veteran, and there are no servicemembers in his family. But in 2006, Larry Eckhardt attended a funeral for a soldier from his area who had died. He said, “There aren't enough flags here.” So on his own, Larry bought 150 American flags and started hauling them in his truck to military funerals all across my State. As he puts it, “I just honestly don't believe there's any such thing as too many flags for a soldier.”

Larry's inventory of 150 flags has grown to 2,200 flags, and he can line them up to 14 miles of a fallen soldier's final journey.

Traveling in his old 1999 Ford van, stripped down to one seat to make room for all the flags, he has now graced more than 80 funerals from Wisconsin to Kentucky and Iowa to Indiana and certainly in his home State of Illinois. Last year, Larry drove 40,000 miles with his flags to these funerals. He covers all the costs out of his own pocket and a couple donations from friends. When asked why he does it, he simply says, “It's my way of giving back.”

Larry rarely uses the word “I.” He is quick to praise all the volunteers—often organized by veterans organizations—who help him stake the flags in the ground along the funeral procession routes. “Without them,” he says, “I couldn't get them all done.”

In one instance over a long weekend, dozens of volunteers helped Larry install the 2,200 flags to honor a 23-year-old Army sergeant during his funeral. After the service, volunteers helped pack up the flags for the next stop. Volunteers ranged from kids as young as 3, assisting their parents, to an 83-year-old woman who wanted to help out in Orchardville, IL. When she was asked her reason for weathering the tough January Illinois cold to help, she said, “We can only bake so many tuna casseroles.”

This story is what America and the State of Illinois are all about. It is the common man, such as Larry Eckhardt, following his heart and taking the initiative to do something extraordinary for our fallen heroes, and it is about a community rising to the occasion to lend its support and honor those who deserve so much of our gratitude. Larry may have said it best when he humbly stated:

This is my feeble attempt to say thank you to every soldier who has ever served and fought to protect the freedoms that I have.

This speech on the floor of the Senate is my feeble attempt to say thanks to you, Larry, and the countless Americans just like you who step up and do their part to show our veterans how much their service means to each and every one of us. They embody the enduring spirit and values that make America great and they make me proud to serve in the Senate and humbled to represent my State of Illinois.

Thank you, Larry, and thanks to all the other Americans who are doing

their part to support our veterans and their families.

TRIBUTE TO COACH FITZGERALD

Mr. DURBIN. I rise today to recognize Northwestern University head football coach Patrick Fitzgerald for his leadership and service to the community. Patrick "Coach Fitz" Fitzgerald, a lifelong Illinoisan, has enjoyed a long and distinguished relationship with Northwestern University.

He completed his undergraduate studies and played football at Northwestern, where he racked up several worthy achievements. A two-time first-team All-American, he won the Nagurski and Bednarik Awards twice, was named Big Ten Defensive Player of the Year and Linebacker of the Year, and received the George Ballentine, Jr., Memorial Leadership Award.

As Northwestern University's head football coach, Pat Fitzgerald has amassed an impressive record, leading the Wildcats to four consecutive postseason games and 5 consecutive years of eligibility for postseason games. And his leadership isn't confined to the football field. His commitment to academic achievement among Northwestern's football scholar-athletes has led to many being named Academic All-Big Ten students and the school's ranking among the Nation's leaders in annual graduation rates.

Coach Fitzgerald has been recognized for his work ethic, integrity, and positive attitude. He was designated one of college football's top recruiters and serves on the Ethics Committee of the American Football Coaches Association and USA Football's Tackle Advisory Committee.

Pat and his wife Stacy are active at Northwestern University and in the Chicago community, participating in many charitable activities, toy collection drives, and school health and wellness programs.

I congratulate Coach Pat Fitzgerald on the many successes of the Wildcats' football program and thank him for his service to one of our finest schools and the broader Chicago community.

TRIBUTE TO THE WHITAKER FAMILY

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, today I wish to honor a family who has chosen to live and work in the small town of Cromona, KY, which they have come to love over the years. The Whitaker family has successfully owned and operated Superior Printing and Publishing Company, Inc. since 1958. Three generations of Whitakers have been involved in the proceedings of the company, with a fourth learning the family trade as they grow.

Superior Printing was started as a local printing operation by Charles and Bobbie Whitaker. They began the business in a remote part of Letcher County, KY, in a town called Cromona. The small town now has a population of 665

people, but the success of Superior Printing has far surpassed the boundaries of little Cromona. The company has become one of the most popular printing firms in the tristate area, offering business in Kentucky, Virginia, and West Virginia.

You may be asking yourself, how does a company in such a small town become so successful? Charles's son, Mike Whitaker, president of Superior Printing, thinks it is due to their customer service. He has said that the only difference between Superior and the larger firms in metropolitan areas is the family atmosphere that Superior provides. Superior employees have love and pride for their hometown and home State, and they don't try to hide it.

Superior provides services that promote the local economy and the entities within the local economy alike. They offer professional color printing that has been known to help all of the local schools in the area with various things like sports programs and bulletins. They also are a big distributor of print for local fundraisers and fundraising groups. The Whitakers have also recently just began printing hardback books—something that isn't common in most local printing firms. Mike believes that the new hardback binding will help local authors be able to easily print and publish their books. With some of the amazing artistic talent I have seen come out of the Bluegrass State, I am anxious to see some of the works by Kentucky's own authors that will come from this new way to print and publish.

Not only does the Whitaker family run a successful printing and publishing business, but they keep busy with providing Letcher County with the news in their own paper, the News-Press. The Whitaker family is devoted to keeping the locals of Letcher County informed about what is going on in the county, State, and country, further proving that the Whitakers are truly focused on bettering themselves and those around them.

Charles and his wife Bobbie are the proud parents of Mike, who has two sons, Paul and Nick. Paul is a U.S. Army veteran who has completed two tours of Active Duty in Iraq, while Nick has just recently graduated from Eastern Kentucky University. Both Paul and Nick are planning on staying in Letcher County so that they can be close to their family and local community.

Whether it be creating a business that provides a convenient and professional service to the local community, making a conscience effort to support the local economy with their services, informing the citizens of Letcher County on the news, or helping many undiscovered Kentucky authors and artists get the exposure they deserve, the Whitaker family of Cromona, KY, have made a contribution to their State that will not go unnoticed. I am inspired to see an entire family give in so many ways to their local community.

Mr. President, I would like to ask at this time for my colleagues in the Senate to join me in recognizing the Whitaker family of Cromona, KY. There was recently an article published in Eastern Kentucky's local periodical magazine, the Sentinel-Echo: Silver Edition, highlighting the hard work of the Whitaker family. I ask unanimous consent that said article be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the Sentinel-Echo: Silver Edition, Nov. 2011]

SUPERIOR PRINTING: FAMILY PRIDE IN EACH AND EVERY JOB

As you wind along State Route 805 in northern Letcher County, you may not think there's much going on. But Cromona, Kentucky (population 665), is home to one of the finest print shops in the tri-state. Established in 1958 by Charles and Bobbie Whitaker, Superior Printing and Publishing Company, Inc. is a thriving, family-owned business with three generations of Whitakers working and a fourth generation expected to "watch and learn."

Charles and Bobbie Whitaker's older son, Mike, is the president of the company and currently sees to its day-to-day operations. The company offers all the expected print shop products and services like business forms, letterheads and envelopes, but what is surprising is that it also houses the region's only four-color, sheet-fed press capable of printing up to a 19-by-26 sheet.

"The installation of the press in 2008 has increased our production capabilities as well as the quality of products that we can offer," said Mike Whitaker. "Local firms no longer have to rely upon faraway print houses for their color-printing needs. We're very competitive with the big, out-of-town firms so we can save our customers time and money. Most of our customers really appreciate the convenience of having us close by, and they understand how important it is to keep business here at home when they can."

Mike explained how their press and booklet maker, which automatically collates, folds, staples, and trims books and magazines, has boosted the company's production of programs local schools use as fundraisers. "Last fall we produced football programs for 16 different schools in Kentucky and Virginia. Our jobs range from full-color brochures and rack cards for the tourism industry to flyers, multi-page newsletters, magazines and books. In fact, more than 500 businesses throughout the region have turned to us for their printing needs."

Since the press purchase, the Whitakers have added hardback book-binding capabilities to the business. "This is new to us, and we are just getting started producing hardback books in small and large quantities," Mike said. He is especially proud of a leather-bound project utilizing the new hardback book-binding equipment. "With the growing number of local authors, we are excited to offer both soft- and hardback book bindings to our customers."

In addition to commercial printing, the Whitakers own and operate the News-Press, a newspaper based in Letcher County. The conservative-based newspaper has promoted the coal industry, faith and family for over 50 years.

Offering quality products at competitive prices is the mark of any successful business, and Superior Printing is no exception. "Perhaps the only difference between our firm and one from a metropolitan area is the