

trillion in the last 3 years and \$10 trillion accumulated up until 3 years ago.

It is my hope we will start a leadership in the administration tonight at the State of the Union—a leadership that we haven't seen yet because all we have seen are the same old tax-and-spend proposals we are used to seeing. It is nothing new and nothing fresh. But the people of America know we have to change course. The people of America in the polls say, by huge numbers, we are going in the wrong direction in this country. Seventy percent of Americans have said in the latest polls of "How do you feel about where we are now," 70 percent believe this country is going in the wrong direction.

Only we can do something about it, along with the President, and I hope he will provide the leadership. But I don't think raising the debt ceiling, with no plan in the future to cut spending is going to happen this week. That is not leadership, and I hope there will be a change in direction.

I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mr. RUBIO. I ask unanimous consent that I be recognized to speak as in morning business for up to 15 minutes.

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

LEGISLATIVE CHALLENGES

Mr. RUBIO. Mr. President, it is good to be back at work here in Washington, DC. We have the big State of the Union tonight, which is kind of the beginning of the legislative year. I am looking forward to the challenges and, hopefully, accomplishments we will have together both in this Chamber and in this building in the coming year.

As we prepare for the State of the Union, I think it is always a good time for us to reflect on where we are as a nation and where we have been. I think all of us can look back on the 20th century and say it was truly the American century. I was blessed to be born in that century and to be a beneficiary of so much of America's greatness. Those of us who have been beneficiaries of America's past have an obligation—certainly those who serve here—to be defenders of America's greatness in the future. At the core of everything we debate today are these issues about America's future and how we make the 21st century an American century as well.

If we examine some of what has really distinguished us from the rest of the world, that has made America and life in America different from life in other countries, there are three things that

come to mind. The first is this concept of fairness. We are a people who strongly believe in the concept of fairness. For Americans, fairness has meant equality of opportunity—in essence, the belief that it doesn't matter where you come from, it doesn't matter if your parents are poor, it doesn't matter if you grow up in a disadvantaged background, every single American should have the equality of opportunity, the same opportunity to succeed and accomplish their hopes and dreams.

Maybe we take that for granted from time to time, but that is not a universal concept. In multiple societies and economies around the world, I daresay that in the majority of them there is not a strong belief in this notion. In fact, people believe that what you are going to be in life should be determined by the circumstances of your birth. Not in America. This Chamber, the membership here—basically everywhere you go in America—is a testament to people who were born in a very different place or into very different circumstances than the ones they live in now and that which they have been able to achieve.

As Americans, we have always embraced the concept of prosperity, the ability to accomplish your economic dreams and hopes. Sometimes that means people make billions of dollars, and sometimes that means you make enough money to provide for your family and give them the opportunity to do even better than yourself, but we embrace the concept of prosperity.

Last but not least, we Americans have always embraced the concept of responsibility, the responsibility that all of us have as individuals, as neighbors, as members of a community, as family members. Deep in this concept of responsibility is the notion that while we want fairness and equality of opportunity and while we want prosperity, we are also a compassionate people who do not want to see others left behind. In essence, we do not want the price of our prosperity to be leaving people behind. To that end, Americans, as I outlined in a speech earlier last year, have always struggled and have fought for the notion of balancing those two important goals—being a nation of prosperity and also a nation of responsibility.

These are the central things, these are at the core of our values as a people that defined our greatness in the last century, and therefore they must remain at the core of who we are as a nation if we want the 21st century to be an American century as well. Let's examine some of the challenges to those three principles that are so important to our future.

On the issue of fairness, on the issue of equality of opportunity, what are the things standing in the way of equality of opportunity in America? In essence, what are the things keeping some people from climbing the ladder, from doing better than their parents

did, from being able to pursue and fulfill their dreams as they should in a nation so deeply committed to equality of opportunity?

In essence, there are a few things that are standing in the way. The first is skills. There are some Americans right now who do not have access to the kind of training they need to build the skills they need, for example, to create or to have a middle-class job. Part of that is our own doing as a nation. We have, for example, stigmatized career and technical education. For the life of me, I do not understand why we have done that. Not every kid wants to go to a 4-year university. Not every kid wants to graduate with a Ph.D. Some kids want to grow up and fix airplane engines or build things. That is good and important, necessary work. Yet we do not train our kids to do that. A number of jobs in America require more than a high school education but less than a 4-year degree in college. Why can't kids graduate from high school with a high school diploma and an industry certification and a career that will employ them right away? That is one of the impediments that are standing in the way of growing middle-class jobs. If we are truly committed to the principle of fairness, we should invest in that, encourage that, particularly at the State level.

There is another thing standing in the way of fairness, equality of opportunity; that is, the playing field is not always even. And there are two things in particular that stand out: our regulations and our Tax Code. It is not me saying that, it is the job creators, small businesspeople trying to make it. Let me tell you what I mean by that. We have a complicated Tax Code, and it is broken. Here is the deal. If you are a large, major, Fortune 500 company, you can afford the best lawyers and accountants in the world to navigate it. You may not like the large, complicated Tax Code, but you can deal with it. The people who cannot deal with a large, complicated Tax Code are the people who are trying to make it—the sole practitioner, the entrepreneur, the small businessperson starting out in the garage or spare bedroom of their home. They cannot deal with the taxes, and they cannot deal with the regulations because they cannot hire the army of specialists it takes to navigate these things.

In case you say somehow we are making this up or somehow this is coming out of nowhere, let me tell you that the U.S. Chamber of Commerce did a survey of small businesses earlier this year. They found that 86 percent of small businesses—which are, by the way, not just the backbone of America's economy, they are the backbone of America's prosperity—86 percent of them say they are worried that regulations, restrictions, and taxes are hurting their ability to do business. This is a fact.

In terms of there not being a playing field that is even in America, in my

opinion, the single greatest contributor to making it more difficult for people who are trying to make it is some of the policies—as well-intentioned as they may be—that are being implemented at the governmental level. We need to invest and commit deeply to this notion of fairness, which is defined in America as equality of opportunity.

The second thing we need to continue to believe in is prosperity. Prosperity in America has and must continue to mean private sector economic growth. The private sector grows and creates private jobs which employ people and turn those people into parents who can send their kids on to college and consumers who can spend money in our economy. The creation of middle-class jobs is not just the backbone of our economy, it is the backbone of our prosperity.

How are jobs created in the private sector? It is simple. Someone has an idea, they have a business or product they want to invest in, they have access to money, whether it is their own money or someone else's money, and they use that money to put that idea into practice. They start a business, it works, and as a result people get jobs, people are employed, and the cycle repeats itself. The job for us in Washington is to make it easier for people to do that at every level. No. 1 is to make it easier for people to have ideas, and that is the easiest one of all. Americans have not run out of good ideas, and Americans have not forgotten how to create jobs. There are plenty of great ideas. There are great business ideas for the 21st century. There are a bunch of them that exist in the minds of hundreds of thousands of Americans who are waiting for the chance to put that dream into practice.

The second thing we have to do is make it easier for them to get access to the money they need to start their businesses, and that means to encourage investment. I do not understand why we would punish or discourage investment. Why raise taxes on people who want to invest in businesses that allow these businesses to grow and hire more people? It is important we make that easier as well.

I would like to talk again about small businesses. The survey I outlined a minute ago showed that 78 percent of small businesses say taxes and regulations coming from Washington also make it harder for them to hire more employees. So in addition to making it easier for people to make money available to investors to allow these ideas to go into practice, we also have to lower the cost of doing business and the barriers to entry, and the equation is pretty straightforward.

If you are an employee working for somebody and decide you can do a better job than your boss and want to start your own business and want to compete against him, well, the regulations that impact that industry and the tax code that applies to that industry are too complicated and too bur-

densome so you cannot do it. If you are a small business trying to grow, no matter how much money you have invested, you may not be able to deal with that as well.

By the way, there are two industries I hope we will look at as real growth opportunities and prosperity in America. We are an energy-rich country and advances in technology have made certain deposits of energy once inaccessible to us accessible. Natural gas is a great example. We need to stop punishing investment in the energy sector by raising taxes. We need to stop passing regulations that put entire areas of this country completely off limits and make it difficult to access our energy deposits. I think energy is an area on which we should focus.

The other is manufacturing. As labor costs rise around the world, there is no reason more and more manufacturing cannot return to the United States. But this is not going to happen if we regulate people looking to do manufacturing in a way that they decide America is not the place they should do business and if the tax treatment of America puts us at a competitive disadvantage.

Let me close by saying that the opportunity before us is real. The 21st century holds promise, promise that holds no parallel in human history. I don't think it is an exaggeration to say we can see the kind of economic growth here and around the world that we have never seen before. That is how promising the 21st century is. It all comes down to a choice. We have to make a choice. Are we prepared to abandon the principles and ideals that made us unique and special or are we going to reembrace those principles and ideals and in so doing make this new century an American century as well?

When I hear some of the talk in this building, it concerns me. When I hear people telling the American people that the way to protect their jobs is to raise their bosses' taxes, I think that is counterproductive. When I hear policymakers in Washington pitting the American people against each other, telling people that the only way they can do better is if someone else is worse off, I get concerned. Not only is it not true, that type of thought has never worked anywhere in the world. In fact, people flee from countries that think in that way.

The American experience has been something very important. The American experience has been that this is a country where everybody can do better, where the people who have made it can stay there, and the people who are trying to make it can join them. We have never believed that the way for us to do better is for other people to do worse. We have never believed in order to climb the ladder, we have to pull somebody else down. For me, it is not theory, it is the experience of my life.

My parents raised me with middle-class jobs in the service sector. My dad,

for example, was a bartender, and I thank God every night there was someone out there willing to risk their money to build a hotel in Miami Beach and later in Las Vegas where he could later work. I thank God there was enough prosperity in America so people could go on vacation and leave tips in my dad's tip jar. With the money he raised as a bartender, he gave me the opportunity to do what he never had a chance to do.

We had help along the way. I had student loans and grants from the government to help me get my education. I went to a public school system, and that is an important role for government to play.

Let's not forget we cannot have more government than our economy can afford. That is why those of us who desperately want to see a country that continues to have prosperity but also compassion believe safety net programs should exist to help those who cannot help themselves and help those who have fallen to stand and try again. That is why we believe we have to have a strong and robust economy.

What is startling is that we, the largest and most prosperous Nation in human history, have built a government so massive that not even the richest country in the history of the world can afford it, and we cannot continue on that road either.

I will close by saying that I hope this new year will be the beginning of our work toward a new American century. I know it worked in the past. I know this is a nation where anyone from anywhere can accomplish anything. It is not just something I read about in a magazine. I have seen it in my own life. There is no reason it cannot continue here if only we are creative.

I yield the floor. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. FRANKEN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for up to 18 minutes.

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

THE BUDGET

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, today, state of the Union day, marks 1,000 days since this Senate has fulfilled its statutory responsibility of passing a budget. This is not a little bitty matter, and it implicates the leadership of the Democratically controlled Senate and their willingness to address the American people honestly and effectively concerning the very significant financial threats this Nation faces.

Indeed, President Obama, on April 29, 2009, when we last had a budget, said this: