

My point is the commitment has been made, an unequivocal commitment has been made. In the Senate, of course, how we deal with all issues is related to keeping our word. It will be important for the Senate to understand, before we go much further this year, what the majority leader's intentions are. Does he plan to keep his word issued in January of 2011 and January of 2013 or not? I think the Senate is entitled to an answer. All Senators would be entitled to an answer, but particularly the minority would be interested in an answer to that before we go any further into this session.

STUDENT LOANS

With regard to the loan rates for students, I think it is interesting to note, as we go into this needless controversy because we are not that far apart, one of the driving reasons for the increase in the student loan rates—two of them—is directly related to the passage of ObamaCare. In ObamaCare, the Democratic majority, without a single Republican vote, abolished the student loan program. The government took it over and raised the rates. So that is one reason rates are going up. The second reason is the Medicaid mandate, which the Supreme Court said is optional, but States are now wrestling with whether to accept this additional responsibility for vast new numbers of Americans who will receive a free health care card.

The two biggest items in every State budget are Medicaid and education. As Medicaid expenses rise, what State governments all across America have done is reduced educational funding to public colleges and universities, and in response to that the colleges and universities raise tuition. So the new generation coming along is getting it both ways: The rates are going up and the tuition is going up, so they have to pay back more at a higher rate, all related to something young people had nothing to do with, which was the passage of ObamaCare.

Washington has had to grapple with a lot of big issues over the past few years and we have had some pretty heated debates because there were real philosophical differences over how to address those challenges. That is why it is so nice to work on an issue where the two parties are in relative agreement. We are not that far apart on this student loan issue now. Neither party wants to see the rates rise in July, and both the President and Republicans generally agree on the way to make that happen. So there is no reason we should be fighting over this issue at this particular point. There is no reason the President should be holding campaign-style events to bash Republicans for supposedly opposing him on student loans when we are in agreement on the need for a permanent reform and when the plan we put forward is actually pretty similar to his own. Yet, somehow, that is what we saw last Friday at the White House.

That is certainly not going to help the students. Having a true policy de-

bate is one thing, but provoking a partisan squabble seemingly for its own sake is, frankly, ridiculous. Our constituents sent us here to govern, not to try to pick fake fights in some crusade to restore NANCY PELOSI to her speakership.

What I am saying to the President and my Democratic friends is this: Let's put politicking aside. There is no reason for a fight here. I hope we can finally begin to work. Students are counting on us to actually get something done.

Here is a quick rundown of where we are on the issue. There is the Senate Democratic plan that everyone knows is just a political bill—a short-term fix that would only apply to less than half of the students who plan to take out new loans—new loans—and it would impose permanent tax hikes—permanent tax hikes—in return for a temporary plan for half of the students. Let me repeat that: Another temporary fix paid for with a permanent tax hike. Even the President has dismissed this approach. So in my view it is not worth much of a discussion at this point.

The fact is the proposals Republicans put forward are actually closer to what President Obama has asked for. We both agree on the need for permanent reform that takes the decisions on interest rates out of the hands of politicians. The House has already passed a bill that would achieve those two goals, and Senate Republicans have put forward a bill that is also similar to the President's proposal, as both of our plans would employ a variable market rate that, as with a mortgage, doesn't change over the life of an individual student's loan. The President said he opposed a bill that didn't lock in rates. Ours gives students the certainty that the President agrees they should have. So if the President were serious about getting this done, he would have spent that time on Friday ringing up Senators to see how we could bridge our relatively small differences, not having a press conference and bashing Congress. This is one issue where both parties can find quick agreement, but only if Washington Democrats have the will to do so. Young Americans already have enough to worry about. They don't need Washington creating even more problems for them.

The youth unemployment rate for 20- to 24-year-olds is over 13 percent. In Kentucky it is more than 14 percent. Once many students graduate from college, they face a highly uncertain future. So the President has a choice to make: Does he want to push some campaign issue for 2014 or does he want to address the problem here and prevent this rate increase?

Mr. President, 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 the time equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with the majority controlling the first half.

The assistant majority leader.

STUDENT LOANS

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I listened carefully to the statement made by the Republican leader. He talked about the issue of increased costs for colleges, saying the tuition is going up, and we have a student loan issue coming up with interest rates perhaps doubling. It was interesting when the Republican leader said the root cause of the problem is ObamaCare.

Well, it turns out, if we listen to the statements and speeches from the Republican side of the aisle, if a person's car won't start: ObamaCare. Too many popups on your computer: ObamaCare. Basically, it turns out that every problem in America can be traced to ObamaCare. ObamaCare, of course, is the health care reform act.

The health care reform act said, incidentally, that students in college can stay on their parents' health insurance plan until they reach the age of 26: ObamaCare. It also said those who are receiving prescription drugs under Medicare will pay less: ObamaCare. It went on to say you cannot discriminate against people when it comes to health insurance if they have a pre-existing medical condition: ObamaCare. So what we hear from the Republican side of the aisle: Any problem we have in the Midwest including too much rain in the Midwest: ObamaCare. It reaches the point where it strains credibility.

Here is what the problem is. On July 1, the interest rates on subsidized loans double—double—from 3.4 percent to 6.8 percent if we do nothing. The Republicans in the House of Representatives said they have a better plan. It is a plan which the Republican leader in the Senate just spoke to. We are going to move the interest rates—we are going to peg them to the 10-year Treasury bill, and the next thing we know it turns out the interest rate coming out of the Republican bill in the House is higher than 6.8 percent. In other words, if we did nothing as opposed to the Republican plan, students would be better off.

But we have a better idea. We are going to do our best to make sure we preserve the 3.4-percent interest rate on subsidized student loans. Is it important? It is critically important.

Look what is happening to students across America today. A lot of young people listen to their parents, listen to their teachers, and all their friends who say, Go to college, get a degree. It

is good advice. Then they sit down to figure out what it is going to cost and it turns out to be pretty expensive. As I look back on my college education—I won't tell my colleagues what my student loans were; they will date me—I was scared to death when I ended up with this huge student loan at the end of law school when I accumulated it all together. At the time I said to my wife, I don't know if we will ever be able to pay this back, it is so big. It was \$8,500—\$8,500 for college and law school—but it was more than half of my first year's income, to put it in perspective.

Now look at what students are faced with. The average for-profit college costs \$30,900 a year in tuition fees. These for-profit schools I will talk about in a minute are the most expensive schools in America. They are the ones trying to lure students into their schools. The biggest ones are the University of Phoenix, which has more students than the combined enrollment of all the big 10 universities; Kaplan University, which is owned by the Washington Post; DeVry University out of Chicago; and a variety of others. They can't wait to see these students coming out of high school and to sign them up for these for-profit schools, the most expensive schools in America. There is something else involved in those schools. They have the highest student loan default rates. They charge the students too much for tuition and they offer them too little by way of education and training. A lot of kids drop out, and even those who finish can't find a job. They default on their student loans for these for-profit schools. But take a look at the cost of education in general. Most students, unless they are lucky, with parents who have a lot of money in the bank, have to borrow money, and if they have to borrow it, the question is, What do they pay when it comes to the interest on the student loans? Private loans—not the government loans but private college loans—can have interest rates up to 18 percent. So unless a person has taken a course in consumer economics or business in high school, that person may not know what the difference is between 3.4 percent interest on a loan and 18 percent interest. Believe me, it is dramatic. Students are faced with this reality.

The question obviously is what is Congress going to do about it? If we are going to continue keeping the interest rate at an affordable level—3.4 percent for student loans—then we are going to have to take action before July 1. If we do nothing, it will double. If we do nothing, students will pay thousands of dollars more in paying off their loans.

How big is student loan debt in America? Student loan debt in America is larger than credit card debt. It is over \$1 trillion. It is one of the fastest growing areas of debt in America. As students get encumbered by this debt, obligated by this debt, many don't realize what they are up against.

This is not like any other loan a person can take out. Any loan a person takes out for a car or a house or to buy a washer and a dryer is dischargeable in bankruptcy. If a person's finances go completely in the tank and that person goes to a bankruptcy court, those other loans go away, but not student loans. There are only four things that cannot be discharged in bankruptcy: taxes owed to the government, alimony, child support, and student loans. What it means is the decision made by the 19- or 20-year-old about debt to go to school is a decision for a lifetime. It is going to stick with that person for a lifetime. When the parents sign on as guarantors on these student loans, or grandparents, they are on the hook too. If the student ends up dropping out of school, with plenty of debt and no diploma, they are in a bad situation. They still have to pay off the loans.

What we are trying to do on the Democratic side is to keep the interest rate on these loans as low and affordable as possible. I think that is only reasonable. Why make it any harder for these students and their families? The Republican side, sadly, more than doubles the interest rate on student loans. That is a worthy debate. I know the side I will be on. I think most Americans know what side we should all be on: to try to keep the cost of these loans closer to being under control; to try to keep the interest rate at the 3.4-percent level.

Senator JACK REED of Rhode Island recently introduced the Student Loan Relief and Refinancing Act which would prevent the interest rate hike by moving Federal student loans back to a market-based rate as it was prior to 2007. Senator REED's bill would offer adjustable interest rates for Federal student loans and parent PLUS loans—with a cap of 6.8 percent for subsidized loans and 8.25 percent for unsubsidized and parent PLUS loans. Rates would be set every year based on the 91-day Treasury bill, plus a percentage determined by the Secretary of Education to be necessary to cover program administration and borrower benefits. The bill is revenue neutral. The bill will help current borrowers by allowing those stuck with high fixed-rate Federal student loans to refinance their loans into a new variable rate loan with a cap. Many students signed up for loans that were a bad deal and they want to change them but they are stuck with them, so this Reed bill gives them a chance to refinance.

Congress should consider a long-term interest rate fix, but we need to act quickly to stop the interest rates from doubling on July 1. We have a good short-term path that will extend the current 3.4-percent interest rate for 2 years. The bill is fully paid for by closing three tax loopholes.

Senator McCONNELL was on the floor here complaining that we are doing Tax Code changes to keep the interest rates low. Well, here are a couple of the changes he was complaining about.

Our proposal would include a tax on the oil and gas companies from tar sands so they would put more money into the oil spill liability trust fund. That is one of the things Senator McCONNELL said is not appropriate. The other one would close a tax loophole that allows non-U.S. companies to reduce their U.S. tax liability on income from their sales in the United States. I do not think that is unreasonable, particularly if the money we are getting from that will help subsidize a low-interest rate on student loans.

This bill is a temporary solution, I understand. But it is going to save students in States like my State of Illinois a thousand dollars—at least a thousand dollars—by keeping the interest rate low in terms of what they will pay back over a lifetime.

The complicated proposal that came out of the House of Representatives—the Republican proposal—as I said, will more than double the interest rates students are going to face. Parents are going to have to have a higher liability on the loans they sign up for for the students in their family, and that, to me, is not a good outcome either.

There has been a proposal that has been pushed by some of my Republican colleagues—Senators COBURN, BURR, and ALEXANDER—which would adjust interest rates annually for both subsidized and unsubsidized loans, and it would be, like the House Republican bill, an increase of 3 percent over the 10-year Treasury rate. There are no caps, incidentally, on where that interest rate is going to go. So the students could have a liability much greater in the future.

Here is what it boils down to: If you believe education is important—and I think everyone does—if you believe college education is a ticket for a better life and a better opportunity to contribute to this country—and most people do—we want to make sure it is affordable for students from working-income homes and middle-income homes. That is why we want to keep this interest rate low. The Republican proposals—all of the Republican proposals—dramatically raise the student loan interest rate beyond the level the Democrats are pushing for.

We have heard a lot of comment on the floor. There will be a lot of debate on the floor about a lot of other issues—the IRS and other things such as that. They are all worthy issues worth talking about. But if you talk to the average family in my home state of Illinois or around the country, they are going to tell you that something like a student loan debate is much more important to them.

We want to be on the side of working to help middle-income and those families who are working for a living, to give those families a chance to send their sons and daughters to college to have a better life in the future and not burden them with a loan that is impossible for them to pay back.

I want to close by saying a word about one category of schools I mentioned earlier, the for-profit schools. We have in our country not-for-profit schools that include private colleges and universities as well as public colleges and universities. Then there is a for-profit sector of higher education. I mentioned the leaders earlier—the University of Phoenix, Kaplan, and DeVry. Those are three of the biggest in the United States.

Currently, our Federal Government is subsidizing these for-profit schools in ways most taxpayers would not believe. Right now what these schools are bringing in is 75, 80, 85, and 90 percent of their revenue directly from the Federal Treasury. In other words, students come in and turn over their Pell grants, sign up for their government loans, and all of this government money flows into these for-profit schools.

Many of these schools offer valuable courses, but many of them are worthless. Many of them, unfortunately, burden these young people with debt and offer them nothing by way of education or training so they can have a better life. As a result, the students end up with a mountain of debt they cannot pay back and they default on the debt. Here are the numbers to keep in mind: There are three basic numbers which explain the for-profit education industry in America.

Twelve. Twelve percent of high school graduates go to for-profit schools.

Twenty-five. Twenty-five percent of all the Federal aid to education goes to for-profit schools; over \$30 billion a year to for-profit schools. They would be the ninth largest Federal agency if you took for-profit schools in the private sector by themselves; over \$30 billion. They would be the ninth largest, but they are private companies, for-profit companies.

The third number to remember is 47. Forty-seven percent of all the student loan defaults are by students in for-profit schools. That number tells the story. These poor students are being loaded with debt, and they are being given an education that is not worth it. At the end, they cannot pay back their debt and they default on those debts. That is the reality of where we are today. In a few weeks—July 1—if we do nothing, interest rates on loans at all schools for government loans are going to double. If we do something, we can continue to protect students. But, in addition to that, we have to do something about higher education and what is happening there. It is not just the for-profit schools, many of which are ripping off these students. It is the overall cost of higher education. It is going beyond the reach of average families across America.

I look back to my own life experience and, thank goodness, I had a chance to borrow the money and go to school, get an education, and end up, as I say, with a full-time government job. But the

bottom line is, other people deserve the same opportunity. And if you are not from a wealthy family, you should be able to borrow the money to be able to get through school and make a success of your life.

Let's do our part here. Let's stand behind the working families. Let's support the Democratic approach, which will keep the interest rates at 3.4 percent. Let's reject the Republican approach that would more than double these interest rates on these students and their families. Let's give these young people a fighting chance to get a good education and an opportunity to prosper in this great Nation.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

REMEMBERING REVEREND ANDREW GREELEY

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, last week we lost a Chicago original. Father Andrew Greeley was a Catholic priest in Chicago and a man of great accomplishment.

He was a best-selling author, college professor, newspaper columnist, and a sociologist at the University of Chicago. Most importantly, according to Father Greeley, he was “just a priest.”

Andrew Moran Greeley was born in Oak Park, a suburb west of Chicago. By the time he was in second grade at St. Angela Elementary School, he knew he wanted to be a Catholic priest.

After being ordained, he served as an assistant pastor at Christ the King Parish in Chicago and studied sociology at the University of Chicago. He was released from archdiocesan duties to pursue his academic interests in 1965, but he remained a priest in good standing the rest of his life.

Although he never led a parish, Father Andrew Greeley regularly filled in at Saint Mary of the Woods Church in Edgebrook. He would lead mass, preach, hear confessions, and officiate at weddings and baptisms.

But what brought Andrew Greeley international recognition was his work as a writer, an author. He built an international assemblage of fans over a career spanning five decades.

Of the 60 novels Father Greeley wrote, some were considered scandalous with their portraits of hypocritical and sinful clerics. But he also wrote more than 70 works of nonfiction, often on the sociology of religion. His clear writing style, consistent themes, and celebrity stature made him a leading spokesman for generations of Catholics.

Father Greeley enjoyed being a sociologist and a commentator on current

affairs. For much of his career, he divided his time between Chicago and Tucson, AZ, where he taught at the University of Arizona.

He also achieved prominence as a journalist, writing a weekly column for the Chicago Sun-Times and contributing regularly to American and international publications.

His weekly columns touched on all sorts of issues. From critiquing the Catholic Church to the war in Iraq, Father Greeley was unapologetic in his “tell it like it is” Chicago style.

In July of 1986, Father Greeley wrote the first of many columns in the Chicago Sun-Times about allegations of sexual abuse by Roman Catholic priests. His thoroughly honest and powerful reporting alerted the Nation to this scandal way ahead of many others. It forced the Church to acknowledge that it had a problem and a problem it had to solve.

His opposition to the war in Iraq and a war on terror was so deep-seated that he compiled his writings and published them in a book. It was meekly titled: “A Stupid, Unjust, and Criminal War: Iraq 2001–2007.” He gave me an autographed copy of that book.

Needless to say, Father Greeley rarely thought twice about holding back from saying what he thought.

He was criticized by his early critics for “never having had an unpublished thought.” But his ability to convey his opinion was also what made him successful in connecting with readers all over the world. He had a popular approach to writing that interested people on issues they normally would not connect with.

He attended Quigley Prep in Chicago, received his Licentiate in Sacred Theology in 1954 from Saint Mary of the Lake Seminary in Mundelein, and was ordained in 1954 as well. He continued his love of learning by earning a master’s degree in 1961 and a doctorate in 1962 with a study on the effect of religion on the career paths of 1961 college grads.

His scholarship led to his longtime position as a senior researcher on the staff of the university’s National Opinion Research Center, which surveys American opinion on religion and other issues.

Later in life, after finding success as a novelist and published sociologist, Father Greeley created a foundation to help inner-city kids with a \$1 million grant to distribute money to Catholic schools in Chicago with high minority enrollments.

Father Greeley’s other lifelong love—besides the Church, his family, and his writing—was the great city of Chicago. He was a classic example of what Chicagoans call a “lifer”—someone who never felt at home anywhere other than the Windy City. Father Greeley was fond of the different architectures and sculptures atop ordinary buildings around Chicago, places the common working people lived, but which were adorned with beautiful handmade