

class first and leaves tired leftwing ideas where they belong—in the history books. And when the President is ready to work with us, he should know we will be here waiting for him. We have always been here, actually, and many Members of his party, with other helpful ideas, have been here too, waiting for him—Democrats with smart ideas the President has not been willing to consider so far.

All he needs to do is pick up the phone. If he is willing to actually work in a serious way with Members of both parties, we will send him some things to sign with that pen too.

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 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.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent the order for the quorum call be rescinded.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

THE MINIMUM WAGE

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, earlier this month we commemorated the 50th anniversary of President Johnson's declaration of "unconditional war on poverty." That war on poverty was a massively successful initiative. It helped tens of millions of Americans lift themselves out of poverty, reduced hardship, empowered people to build new opportunities for themselves and their future.

We see some of the residue of this. Today, food stamps ensure that children do not go to bed hungry at night. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act insisted that all children, regardless of background, can learn and have an equal opportunity for education. Legal Services helps people with limited resources seek protection from exploitation. Low-income families fight poverty in their own communities by helping to lead community action agencies. The war on poverty and the Great Society encompassed a tremendous list of achievements that I cannot even begin to do justice to today.

However, we know we still have more work to do. Too many of those success-

ful programs and policies have been reduced or rolled back under subsequent Presidents and Congresses. What is more, our economy has changed in fundamental ways, with decades of waste, stagnation, and rising income inequality.

Now we must urgently turn our attention to policies that will ensure that working families can still get ahead in America. We must recognize that tens of millions of working Americans struggle to put food on the table, a roof over their head, and pay their bills every month. This is a fundamental failing of our economy. It is something we not only have a moral obligation to fix but we have the ability to fix. We can do so first by raising the minimum wage, one of our Nation's simplest and most effective means of lifting working families out of poverty.

I am so pleased President Obama has taken the first step in this effort. Last night at the State of the Union, he announced he would issue an Executive order that will require future Federal contracts to provide wages of at least \$10.10 an hour to our Nation's contract workers for the Federal Government. I applaud President Obama's bold step to ensure that the Federal Government is a leader in promoting good jobs that pay fair wages. I think most Americans would agree that taxpayer dollars should not support companies that pay poverty wages. This Executive order is a strong step in the right direction. But now we in the Congress have work to do, to raise the minimum wage for the rest of American workers.

Again, I am so grateful for President Obama taking a strong leadership position, as he did last night, in calling for Congress to expeditiously work to increase the minimum wage.

We need to agree in this country that if you work hard and play by the rules you can earn enough money to support your family, keep a roof over your head, put some money away for a rainy day, have a secure retirement. The minimum wage played a critical role in doing that, which is why Presidents and elected leaders from both parties in the past have supported fair increases in the minimum wage. From time to time, we adjusted the minimum wage on a bipartisan basis to help working families keep up with inflation and the changing economy. But recently we have heard a new and disturbing set of talking points from our friends on the other side of the aisle. They claim that raising the minimum wage does not actually reduce poverty. They argue the minimum wage workers do not come from poor families or that no one stays at a minimum wage job long enough to be trapped in poverty.

Those all sound good on the talk shows, but the facts simply prove those statements are not true. The fact is a majority of people who would benefit from an increase in the minimum wage come from low-income households. Many of them have been trapped in

jobs at or near the minimum wage for years and years at a time. Indeed, when you listen more closely, the offensive underlying premise of all these arguments is that anyone can rise out of poverty if they just work harder.

Tell that to Nereida Castro of Des Moines. She and her husband both work minimum wage jobs in the fast food and construction industries. They have five children to support. But Nereida says they live day to day because of their bills and expenses. She said her family "has to limit many things to give to our kids to only make rent, to cover expenses. We have to limit everything."

A raise in the minimum wage would allow her to "live a life where I don't feel like I'm drowning."

Tell that tale about "you just have to work harder" to Nancy Salgado, 27-year-old single mother with two kids, ages 2 and 7. She worked at McDonald's for the past 10 years but makes only \$8.25 an hour. That is the minimum wage in her own State of Illinois. She struggles to be able to pay for necessities such as milk and shoes for her kids. She recently confronted the president of McDonald's USA, saying:

I'm a single mother of two. It's really hard for me to feed my 2 kids and struggle day to day. . . . Do you think this is fair, that I have to be making \$8.25 an hour when I have been working at McDonald's for 10 years?

For Senators and Representatives sitting comfortably here in Washington to preach to working mothers such as Nancy, struggling hard to get ahead, working 10 years at McDonald's—to tell them they are not working hard enough, that is beyond offensive.

No one disputes that hard work is a big part of the path out of poverty, but you also need a basic foundation of economic security to start building that better life. How are you supposed to pay for a community college course on \$7.25 an hour? How are you supposed to find a better job when you are standing in line at a food bank because your wages won't cover all your household expenses, and neither will your food stamps? How are you supposed to build a better life for your kids when you can't even find them safe childcare while you are at work? They just can't get ahead if their job traps them in poverty.

It has not always been this way. We used to agree that minimum wage works. People who perform some of the most difficult and essential jobs in our society should not have to live in poverty. The minimum wage kept families above the poverty line in the 1960s and 1970s. In today's dollars, a minimum wage worker in 1968—when the minimum wage was 120 percent of the poverty line—took home \$10.71 an hour or \$22,000 a year working full time.

Since the 1980s, the minimum wage has not kept up. Today the minimum wage is about 80 percent of the level of poverty. This is how far we have come down. The same family whose breadwinner worked at a job making minimum wage in 1968—look at where they

are—would be way below the poverty line today. It is no wonder working people have to turn to the safety net of food stamps and all other kinds of things just to help them get by.

A recent study found that our taxpayers have to pick up the tab for millions of working families to the tune of about \$240 billion a year for food stamps, Medicaid/CHIP, earned-income tax credit, and temporary assistance to needy families. I wish to make it clear that these are not people sitting at home watching TV. These are people who work, but they are making minimum wage. What we want and what they want is not to have the Government and the taxpayers pick up the tab. They want to be able to support themselves with the jobs they have.

We have to rectify this. My legislation, the Minimum Wage Fairness Act, which I introduced—along with Majority Leader REID and Congressman GEORGE MILLER on the House side—will raise the minimum wage to \$10.10 an hour in three annual steps and will get it above the poverty line by 2016 for the first time in over 20 years. That is what we are talking about—getting this minimum wage up.

I look forward to working with my colleagues in the Senate on both sides of the aisle sometime soon so we can bring this bill forward. I hope we can do it on a bipartisan basis and recognize it is indeed time to get families—working families—out of poverty by paying them a decent minimum wage.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. HEITKAMP). The Senator from Washington.

STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, last night President Obama laid out an optimistic vision for a great nation that must never stop working to become even greater.

When the President gave his first State of the Union in February of 2009, our economy was losing over 700,000 jobs a month. Wall Street firms had collapsed and taken Main Street businesses with them and economists were not sure how deep it would go or if it would tip from a great recession into a true depression.

Families across the country were huddled around kitchen tables talking late into the night trying to figure out how they were going to stay in their homes or send their kids to college or even put food on their table. People who had gone to work every single day of their adult lives and had not had to update their resume in 20 years didn't know how they were going to pull their lives together if they got that pink slip. Workers who had jobs they thought were secure were panicking knowing that if things continued to go wrong, nobody was truly safe.

A lot has changed in 5 years. It has not been perfect. It certainly has not been smooth. We were not able to do

nearly enough, and we still need to do far more.

Last night President Obama was able to talk about the progress we have made since he inherited the greatest economic crisis since the Great Depression. He was able to talk about the 46 months of straight private sector growth, about an unemployment rate that has come down from dangerous heights. He talked about the work that still remains to help millions of workers still trying to get back on the job.

He articulated a vision not just for bolstering our still fragile economic recovery but also for continuing the great American tradition of leaving our children with a stronger nation than the one we inherited from our parents—a vision of a country that makes sure every child has an opportunity to work hard, contribute to their community, and succeed to the best of their ability. He spoke of a country that doesn't just have economic growth at the top that may or may not trickle down but that has broad-based prosperity built from the middle out and a vision of a country that offers workers and families the stability and security they expect when they put in a lifetime of hard work.

President Obama talked about ways he is going to make this year a year of action, and I know that is what the American people are expecting. Some of that will come through executive action and public-private partnerships, but a lot of what we need to do depends on us in Congress.

Over the past few years Congress has been lurching, as we all know, from crisis to crisis, stumbling from one artificial deadline to the next, and too often engaging in petty partisan bickering instead of solving problems for the families we all represent.

At the end of last year, House Budget Committee Chairman PAUL RYAN and I worked together to show the American people it didn't have to be this way. When we sat down together in a budget conference that Democrats had been trying to start for 7 months, we faced an awful lot of skepticism. Many people were hoping we could reach a deal and avoid another crisis. However, they were far more confident that this budget group would not succeed where so many others had failed.

Chairman RYAN and I decided to listen to each other. We searched for common ground and we made some compromises. We knew we were never going to agree on everything, but we didn't think that should mean we couldn't agree on anything. We wanted a deal, not a fight, and we were able to put partisanship aside to do the right thing for the American people.

Our 2-year budget deal was a step in the right direction. We proved that bipartisanship was possible in this divided government, that Democrats and Republicans could break through the bitterness and rancor and work together and reach an agreement. That

deal rolled back the damaging across-the-board cuts and prevented a government shutdown. It moved our country forward, but we can't stop now because the vast majority of Americans understand our economy simply is not working the way it needs for people like them.

We need to do more to expand economic opportunities for the families and small business owners and communities across the country who are looking to us to get this right. They see the wealthiest Americans and biggest corporations continue to take advantage of an unfair Tax Code filled with special interest loopholes and giveaways. They see fewer and fewer opportunities for workers to find a job or earn enough for a stable middle-class life or send their kids to college. They watch as their government cuts back on critical investments in long-term and broad-based economic growth, and they want more than partisan bickering from their elected representatives. They want real action.

We will spend a lot of time over the next few months talking about many of the policies President Obama talked about last night, but I wish to focus on a few he mentioned that impact women and their economic opportunities in particular.

We need to face the reality that working women across the country—and working moms in particular—are struggling to find work that pays a living wage at a time when they are balancing being both the breadwinner and caretaker in so many families. When we talk about creating opportunity in America, we need to focus on the fact that women continue to be paid 77 cents for every \$1 a man earns, and they make up two-thirds of all minimum-wage workers. We need policy changes that focus on all workers but also help women catch up if we are truly going to create economic opportunity that expands the middle class and strengthens all of our families.

I was very glad to hear President Obama announce last night that he will be raising the minimum wage for Federal contractors. We need to build on that to give millions more women and men in this country access to a raise and make sure that working hard and having a job is rewarded. This is something we will be moving on in Congress in the near future, and I am hoping Republicans decide to put politics aside on this and work with us to get this done.

I was also very glad to hear President Obama double down on his commitment to a national preschool initiative that would not only help our youngest children and pay dividends in future economic growth but would empower millions of women who would be able to go to work and give back to their communities. This is not just a policy for me, it is personal. It is what got me into politics in the first place, and it is something that has driven me ever since.