

Above all, the young people and all participants agreed we should work more on children's issues and less on other things.

During these meetings, I promised to put people's ideas up on the walls of my office so every lobbyist who comes in can see what the people of Washington really care about. As people got ready to leave at the end of the evening, I asked them each to take one idea back to their local neighborhood or their community and make it happen.

The posters from these meetings are in the mail to my office in the Russell Building, and they contain very specific ideas. I encourage all of you to come by my office next week and read what people have to say.

I think you will find, as I have, that it is time to put our young people at the top of our priority list. It is time to find a way at every level to focus our schools on preparing all of our children, not just a few, for tomorrow. You will see, as I have, that people from all walks of life understand as adults we have a responsibility to give our children a strong start in life. There is much we can and much we must do to make this happen in our country today.

Not too long ago, at a hearing in Washington, DC, I heard a businessman talk about what he saw in our country today. So often we hear that Government should act more like a business. He said that any business that wants to be here in the future invests in their most important resources. He said America is acting like a business that does not plan to have a future.

I agree. It is like we are having a fire sale in our country. Children are our growth capital. They are our new physical plant. They are our inventory.

We cannot stop investing in kids now and hope to have any future in this country. This is the strong and loud message I heard from people all over my State, from all political stripes, from all ages, and all walks of life.

I was listening, and I will be working over the next months and years to put children back at the top of our Nation's agenda. I hope we can work together as adults to make that happen. Our children are worth it, our communities are worth it, and our country is worth it.

I yield the floor.

Mr. THOMAS addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

THE STATE OF THE ECONOMY

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, we had reserved 30 minutes this morning for our freshman focus to talk about some of those things that are of great importance to American families, to talk about the economy, to talk about jobs, to talk about increasing wages and returns to American families.

I would like to start with three areas that I think are important, even

though it is not directly involved. One has to do with how we get facts out, so that we can make decisions based on facts. Another is just to comment a little on the broader question of whether we want more Government in our lives, more Government in business, or whether we want to release the private sector to be able to create jobs and, finally, to talk a little bit about the facts as related to the idea put forth by the President that "this is the best economy in 30 years." The facts do not substantiate that.

First, let me say that it is almost a paradox, it seems to me, where we have the technical ability in this country for everyone who is interested in the world, for that matter, to know precisely what is going on every day and to know it at the time it goes on. Compare that, for example, to the ability to know what happened in your Government 50 years ago or 100 years ago when people in Wyoming did not know what the Congress had done for 3 weeks or a month—maybe they did not care. But now we have the facilities to do that. We know that if Gorbachev stands up on a tank somewhere, we see it the instant it happens. We have the ability to know that. Yet, we find ourselves, I think, in a time where most people are less able to sort out the information and bring it down to facts than we have had for a very long time.

What is happening, of course, is that the political arena is filled with spinning and posturing and seeking to make things look different than they are. I understand that, and it is not the unique province of anyone. But I am not sure that we can really sustain a Government of the people and by the people and for the people, unless the people have some facts. Part of that is our responsibility, of course. We have to sort through the stuff and come out with facts. But I have to tell you, Mr. President, that I guess I have never seen a time like there is now, where you hear something in the media, you hear something from the White House, or you hear something from this place and say, gee, I wonder if that is the case.

Second, let me talk a little bit about the idea of increasing the economy and the growth. I think there is not a person in here who would not be for that. I think it is interesting, and it just happens that my friend from New Mexico just spoke a few moments ago about his perception about how to do it. It clearly defines the greater debate that goes on in this country and that goes on in the U.S. Senate—that is, do you seek to get more and more Government involved? Do you have a tax arrangement where you tell people what they can do and encourage them to do it and get more regulation? Or do you, in fact, seek to release the private sector so that the economy can grow? Could you agree with the notion that the role of Government generally is to provide an environment in which the private sector can prosper? That is the great debate that goes on.

The Senator talked about bringing this debate back in. Let me remind my friends on the other side of the aisle that that has been the debate for a year. We have been talking about balancing the budget. Why? So you can reduce interest rates and increase the economy. We have talked about regulatory reform. Why? So that businesses can prosper and you can create jobs—good jobs, so that there is some growth in take home pay. That has been the debate.

Unfortunately, my friends have objected to everything that we have tried to do. They objected to regulatory reform, and the White House threatened to veto it. They objected to a balanced budget amendment, and they threatened to veto it at the White House. Tax relief and capital gains, so that people can invest, so you can do something with your farm when you sell it and pass it on to your kids and create a stronger economy. So the option will be—and that is fine, it is a legitimate discussion. Do you want more Government, or do you want to release the business sector so it can create these kinds of things?

Third, let me talk very briefly about the economy and the differences in views on that. The President has indicated in his State of the Union and at other times that this is the best economy in 30 years. Well, let us take a look at it. During 1995, the economy grew at 1.4-percent annual growth rate. In the previous decade, it grew at about 3.5 percent. In the last quarter of last year, it was .9-percent growth rate.

The economy has been weaker every year than it was the last year of the previous administration. It is not a matter of blaming. That is just fact. The growth recovery in terms of jobs. We have talked about 8 million jobs. If you break it down into hours and part-time jobs, it comes out to be less than half of that. For the same period in the 1980's, it created 8 million jobs.

So this has not been a time of growth, a time of economic prosperity; particularly, it has not been for families. The stock market is doing pretty good. That is fine. Those are corporate profits. But the problem is, I think, you find when you have to pay your stockholders, of course, in order to get the money to operate, you have a cost of regulation that is exorbitant and going higher, and you are squeezed in the end. But who gets squeezed? The workers. Furthermore, you do not have a growth rate that is traditionally where we have been, and you do not have competition for jobs. Salaries do not go up because competition causes salaries to go up.

We have to be honest about where we are. The fact is, it is not the best time in 30 years. It is not even as good a time as we had 5 years ago. More importantly, what do we do about it to get families into a position where salaries reflect a growing economy, or where families can have more of their own money to spend on their own kids'

education and spend it as they choose? That is what it is all about. That is what this debate is about. That is what a balanced budget is about—to be financially and fiscally responsible, and also to reduce the interest rates so that the economy will grow.

That is what tax relief is about—middle class tax relief, which the President promised when he ran. He has never delivered. That is what \$500 per child is about, so it goes to families. That is what regulatory relief is about. It is not a matter of regulation and specifics. It is a matter of being able to grow an economy where there are jobs and prosperity. That is what our agenda is about, Mr. President.

The final argument, of course, will be that basic argument of do you follow the suggestion that says it is the Government's task to regulate these, and let us get more government, more regulation and more involved? Or do we release this dynamic private sector to create jobs.

Mr. President, I yield the floor to the Senator from Pennsylvania.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Pennsylvania is recognized.

WHERE AMERICA IS GOING

Mr. SANTORUM. Mr. President, I thank my colleague and my friend from Wyoming for his leadership on this freshman focus, a time where freshman Members of the Senate have an opportunity to get up and talk about issues of importance to the country from a perspective of those of us who are relatively new in this body. I think he is right on target to talk about the issue of the economy and where this country is going.

We have a President who is running around the country talking about how this is the healthiest economy that we have seen and we are doing great and everything is fine. It actually reminds me of another President in an election year 4 years ago, who was going around the country trying to convince the American public that the economy was fine and everything is great and this is a healthy economy and we are moving forward. The American public, frankly, did not buy it.

The reaction was very simple: What country is he living in? What country is he leading? Does he not have any understanding of what is actually going on in the economy, what we are dealing with here, that in fact the statistics show that, out of recessionary years, this economy is the slowest growing economy since the 1950's? This is not a robust economy.

The Senator from Wyoming was right on target as to why this is not a growing economy. It is the same reason that the previous President had problems saying it was a growing economy, and that is because this President and the previous President raised taxes on the American public. They took more money out of their pocket and sent it here to Washington. It had a real effect

on their take-home pay and had a real effect on their ability to be able to provide for themselves and their families. That has a ripple effect through the economy, from consumer confidence and their willingness to consume to the real issue of just paying bills.

I think we may be seeing a repeat here. I know many of us who are in this Chamber now were here as Senators or Representatives during the 1993 Budget Act, when President Clinton went out and said we have to raise taxes and we said this is going to have an effect. It is the same type of tax increase that was put forward in 1990. Many Republicans—I was in the House at the time—many Republicans fought it and said President Bush at that time was making a mistake; it would hurt the economy and drag the whole economy down and this country down. A lot of us believed it would bring the President down. It did.

Then 1993 comes around and President Clinton did not learn from the mistakes of President Bush and pushed forward through another tax increase—and, I might add, more entitlement programs, more regulation, more on people's backs. Many of us said, "Learn your lesson from 1990. That is not going to help the economy. That is not, in the long run, going to balance this budget." He said, "No, we have to do it." They did it.

As a result, coming out of this recession in the early 1990's, we have had one of the slowest recoveries in history. Job growth, yes. We have had jobs. But I think if you talk to most of the people, the kind of jobs being created are not the kind of jobs that will support a family. You hear Members on both sides of the aisle talking about that. The reason is oppressive regulation, oppressive taxation.

Almost 25 percent of the income of the average family in America goes just to pay taxes to Washington, DC. That is a peace-time high. By the way, I like to compare that to what it was back in 1950 when the average American family—same family, average-income family—did not pay almost 25 percent of their taxes to the Federal Government; they paid 2 percent of their income to the Federal Government in taxes. Now it is almost 25 percent.

Do we wonder why people feel squeezed, why they do not feel they have the opportunities to provide for a family anymore, why both husband and wife have to work? If you are a single parent, what do you do? You work two jobs and you struggle to provide for your children.

What we do here is what they did 3 years ago: Put even more taxes on the American public. We believe that is not the answer. We have stood up this year and said the answer is not to take the American public for more, not to regulate the American public more, but to put Government on a diet so we can allow the folks back home to take a little bit more out of their paycheck for their own use, not Government use.

So we proposed this irresponsible thing. People got on the floor and said this was such an irresponsible thing to let people keep more of their own money to help provide for their families. As the song goes, "That's my story and I'm sticking to it." My story is that American families should keep more of their money.

We are going to continue to push for a tax cut for American families. We will continue to push for a tax cut to create growth and opportunity in capital gains and helping small business people, because creating jobs is the real answer here. Creating good quality jobs is the real answer here. Growth is the answer—not further taxation, but liberating people. Money should go out and be invested in capital resources so we can create more high-quality jobs in this country. We will continue to push for that.

We will continue to push for regulatory reform so Government does not stifle the creativity of Americans by regimenting them into some model that we believe in Washington, DC, is the best for everyone. We are going to go out and do the things that are necessary to make this country prosperous and moving forward.

I just hope that the President will come to the realization that tightening the belt here in Washington ever so slightly—and frankly, that is all we are talking about in this balanced budget—tightening the belt here in Washington so we can give just a little bit more to working families is not cruel. It may be cruel to some bureaucrats in town, but it is not cruel to American families. It is not cruel to Americans who want good-paying jobs, outside in the private sector, not just here in Washington.

I am hopeful we can somehow come to an agreement that this is not the healthiest economy, that the spin doctors of the campaign of 1996 for the President are not going to win the day to try to convince the American public what they know is not true, that this economy is booming and healthy and the best it has ever been. We should get down to trying to address the real economic insecurity that American workers have, the real problems of raising families in this country, and do something about it on a bipartisan basis in this Congress.

I am hopeful we can do that. We should be able to do that. I am looking forward to the opportunity to make that happen. I yield the floor.

Mr. INHOFE. I thank the Senator from Pennsylvania. I ask unanimous consent that the period for morning business be extended by 10 minutes.

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

THE ECONOMY

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, this has been a very enlightening morning listening to both Democrats and Republicans refuting this myth that seems to