Mr. NICKLES. That would be my expectation.

Mr. CONRAD. I think that is important, just so the Senator is here and prepared to move forward with her amendment. It is also important to say, Madam President, that we won several important victories today and that we anticipate a string of additional victories tomorrow that will allow us to conclude our work at an even earlier point.

On a serious note, I thank the chairman and his staff for working cooperatively throughout the day. We are very hopeful that we will be able to end this sometime Friday morning, everybody having had a chance to debate and offer important amendments. That does not mean they need to offer every amendment. We hope Senators will show restraint. We hope Senators will eliminate duplication so that we can hold down the number of votes in vote-a-rama.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arkansas is recognized.

IRA WITHDRAWAL

Mr. PRYOR. Madam President, in the year 2000, there were 38 million families in this country who owned an individual retirement account or participated in an employer-sponsored retirement savings plan. Since then, unemployment has climbed to 8.3 million people, with more than 1.9 million individuals unemployed more than 6 months.

Six months without work is a long time, and it is enough time for people to lose their homes, give up their health care, run through their savings, and ruin their credit for many years to come. I know this because I hear from people in Arkansas who have gone from living the family dream, to living off of their families, and eventually living off of Government help.

To add salt to the wound for many unemployed Americans, those individuals who are fortunate enough to have an individual retirement account are penalized a minimum of 10 percent if they withdraw funds from their account.

Recognizing that some significant events might require people to withdraw money from their retirement accounts earlier than expected, Congress has on previous occasions provided exceptions to the 10-percent early withdrawal penalty; for example, buying their first home or maybe even sending their children to college.

I am offering a commonsense amendment that could make a real difference for individuals who have invested in their IRA but have exhausted all of their unemployment benefits while searching for a job.

I am asking Congress to make another exception because our job creation figures continue to disappoint, economic growth continues to linger, and our manufacturing jobs continue to leave the country. I think these are significant events as well.

My amendment is a sense of the Senate and allows individuals who have exhausted their unemployment benefits a one-time withdrawal of up to $15,000 from their IRAs, tax free and without penalty, within 1 year after their unemployment benefits end.

In many cases, my amendment would free up enough money for a few months of rent or mortgage payments, child care expenses, groceries, and other living expenses.

Regardless of what you believe, regardless of your party affiliation, we cannot dismiss these new numbers by the Bureau of Labor Statistics that indicate the average length of unemployment in this country is at a 20-year high.

We cannot expect Americans to be patient as they watch their bills pile up, and we cannot tell these families to keep their fingers crossed any longer while we do nothing to help them. After all, this money in their IRA accounts is their money. Imagine a family whose breadwinner is now on the unemployment rolls, and he or she has this retirement nest egg sitting there and they have some real needs in the family but they cannot touch their own money without penalty or paying taxes on accessing that money.

Madam President, I ask my colleagues to express their support tomorrow for the individuals who are in a tough position because of tough times and allow them to use funds from their own IRAs without penalty.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Louisiana is recognized.

SURVIVOR BENEFITS

Ms. LANDRIEU. Madam President, I thank the floor manager. It has been a long day, and perhaps we have made some progress and the hour is a little late. I am going to speak just on two amendments of mine that I will offer and which will be voted on tomorrow.

I will take the time tonight to speak at some length about these amendments because our time will be so limited, unfortunately, because of the rules under which we are operating.

Before I do, let me restate for the record that I intend to vote against this budget. It is not a budget that will put America on the right course. This is a budget that will turn a stream of red ink into a raging river that will threaten to wash away Social Security, and this is according not to the Democratic spin room or Democratic operatives, this is according to Alan Greenspan, who testified before the Budget Committee last week and basically said because of the choices President Bush and the Republican leadership are making in this budget, adjustments will have to be made to Social Security.

He could have gone on to say—and I am sure he will in further speeches—that adjustments are going to have to be made to education and the Federal contribution to education. We are going to have to make adjustments to housing initiatives in this country, and we are going to have to make adjustments to the contributions we make to colleges and universities because if this budget goes into law, the country will basically be on a course to bankruptcy because the debt is rising so high.

We have been attacked by terrorists. We have a war now that is costing us hundreds of millions of dollars. We have passed a major education initiative that the President himself said he wanted to fund, and the economy has, in many instances, tanked, contrary to all of our hopes and expectations.

Yet the plan is for tax cuts every day, always deeper and greater, which is threatening to wash away a lot of things that are important to people in this country. One of the things we cannot fix because of this blind adherence to tax cuts for people who earn over a million dollars is a survivor benefit for our military personnel.

There are a lot of issues for which we could fight. I want to show this document. It is from the Military Officers Association: Fighting for Fairness. The public is going to have a hard time believing this, so I am going to try to go over it as simply as I can. In 1972, our Government promised the spouses of people in the military—now, most of the spouses would be women but not all of them would be women. Most are women. Our Government promised them if they would contribute a certain amount of money into a special fund, after the member of the service passed away, they could provide a nest egg for their spouses. These are spouses, and everyone is familiar with this. These women—millions of them—move every 2 years, generally. They move themselves, their children, and most do it with a smile and joy on their face because they are committed to helping the country, and they are supporting their husbands who are protecting us every day.

We promised to give them what we call a survivor's benefit. But we have failed to live up to that promise. We have, instead, said even though we said we would do that, we decided to save money so we could give money, as the Senator from Oklahoma said, to the millionaires who need tax cuts in this country. We said instead of making the promise to these individuals, we have another priority, and that is to give people who make over a million dollars tax cuts because they need it. But we cannot give spouses of the people in the military their full benefit.

It gets worse because the document we gave them actually doesn't mention the offset. I am going to submit it because I want to make it clear that this is the document our military signed, and it will be read for the RECORD. Nowhere in here did it talk about an offset. An offset is, when the spouse gets to be 62 years of age, instead of receiving the benefit that her husband put aside specifically for her, thinking that