

FLORIDA VOTING ROLLS

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I call to the attention of the Senate the potential disaster in the making with regard to the Presidential election in the State of Florida. Everyone in the country knows what we went through 4 years ago in the Presidential election. It ended up being the difference of 537 votes that then cast Florida's electoral votes to decide the national Presidential election.

To the great surprise and dismay of many registered voters who arrived at the polling places ready to cast their votes 4 years ago, they were told their names had been struck from the voting rolls because they were convicted felons, when, in fact, they were not. They had a similar name, like John Doe or Jane Doe, that was on a list of 100,000-plus convicted felon names that had been sent out to the 67 county election supervisors. They had struck these names.

Members of the Senate, we have a disaster in the making again. The State of Florida has now sent out a list of 48,000 convicted felons whose names are to be struck from the voting rolls when, in fact, the matches are not guaranteed. To the contrary, several election supervisors have already received the list and noticed, in fact, they have employees in their own offices who were to be struck. They are not convicted felons.

We simply cannot allow this to happen. This raises questions about our ability to cast our vote in a Presidential election.

Mr. REID. Will the Senator yield?

Mr. NELSON of Florida. I certainly yield to the distinguished Senator from Nevada.

Mr. REID. I appreciate very much the Senator bringing this matter to the attention of the Senate and the country.

I have strong views that if someone has been convicted of a crime and has fulfilled the terms of the sentence by that court and completed their probationary period or period of parole, that person should be able to vote. If a sentence is too short, give them longer sentences. But if someone, in effect, has been punished and completed their terms of punishment—retribution, call it whatever you want—that person should be able to vote.

It should be a national law that when someone completes the terms of their imprisonment, parole, probation, they should be able to vote. It is unfair to people who are trying to get back on their feet to not be able to be part of the American system. That is what we want them to do. We send them to prison to be rehabilitated. Part of their rehabilitation is the ability to vote.

Would the Senator acknowledge there is some merit to my statement?

Mr. NELSON of Florida. The Senator has pointed out an underlying principle of fairness. Florida is only one of seven States that has a process whereby a

convicted felon has to restore their voting rights.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator's time has expired.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, 1 additional minute.

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

Mr. NELSON of Florida. I thank the Senator.

I conclude by saying to the Senator from Nevada, it is important. This is another principle that is about to be violated; that is, the principle of the right to vote—that if you are a registered voter, and you get to the voting precinct, you find you cannot vote because your name has been mistakenly struck because it happens to be a match with the name of a convicted felon under another Florida law.

So what I have done is filed a friend of the court brief, an amicus curie, along with the CNN suit against the State of Florida that says the public ought to have a right to inspect those voting rolls and those lists of 48,000 names to be struck.

The State of Florida says, under a law, the public cannot inspect those records and copy them. I hope the suit will be successful in declaring the law unconstitutional and remove this cloud from our ability to vote.

Thank you, Mr. President.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator's time has expired.

The Senator from the great State of Iowa.

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, how much time do I have?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator has 8 minutes.

Mr. HARKIN. I thank the Presiding Officer.

HAMMERING THE MIDDLE CLASS

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, what we see happening in America today, after 3½ years of this administration, is what I call the middle-class squeeze, a squeeze which has been tightened incredibly by the policies of the Bush administration. The truth really is, it is not so much they are being squeezed, the middle class is actually being hammered.

Think about it. Since Mr. Bush took office in January of 2001, nearly 2 million private sector jobs have been lost, putting downward pressure on wages and salaries. There has been some job growth over the last couple of months, but just since the passage of the 2003 tax bill, 11 months ago, our economy created 1.2 million fewer jobs than the President's own Council of Economic Advisers predicted would be created without the tax bill. We have 2 million fewer jobs than what they predicted if they passed the tax bill.

Now, again, there have been a few jobs in the last couple months. Of course, when the glass is dry, a drop of

water seems like an ocean. That is what we have had. We have had a couple drops of water. We have had a couple months of job growth, but you don't judge an administration by 2 months, you judge it by 4 years, and over 4 years we have lost almost 2 million jobs. That is not even the half of it.

Family income has fallen 2 percent. Housing prices have increased 18 percent. Health insurance premiums are up 50 percent. Utility bills are up more than 15 percent. Credit card fees have doubled. And, in large measure, because of the Bush tax cuts and their negative impact on our State budgets, college tuition, under the Bush administration, is up a whopping 35 percent.

Do you know who pays college tuition? The middle class. Meanwhile, as the middle class gets squeezed, Mr. Bush's base has never had it so good. I refer my colleagues to an article in yesterday's Wall Street Journal titled "U.S. Led a Resurgence Last Year Among Millionaires World-Wide." This article, in yesterday's Wall Street Journal, reports that the number of North Americans with over \$1 million in financial or liquid assets increased by 13.5 percent last year, and their assets increased by 13.6 percent. At the same time, the wealth of the ultra-high net worth individuals—those with over \$30 million in assets—grew to a total of \$2.5 trillion.

In the last 3 years, corporate profits are up over fourfold—62 percent over the past 3 years—but private wages are actually down. When we look at all compensation, private wages are less than one-third of normal growth.

It says in this journal article that the number of millionaires in the U.S. is up, as I said, 14 percent—actually 13.6 percent—and that "the U.S. and Canada together added more new millionaires last year than Europe, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East combined."

Well, so much for the Bush tax breaks for the wealthy. That is exactly who they are helping. Clearly, the President's policies—tax cuts for the rich, lower taxes on investment income—are working for those at the top, but it is not working for those on Main Street. This administration is ignoring Main Street. It might be listening to Wall Street, but it is ignoring Main Street. Quite frankly, what Main Street is telling us, loudly and clearly, is that their No. 1 concern is economic security.

In the State of Iowa and across America, despite all the happy talk about the economy, people fear losing their jobs, their retirement, their health care. They are also worried about losing their right to time-and-a-half overtime. With the Labor Department's new overtime rule, people will be obligated to work 45, 50, 55, 60 hours a week with zero additional compensation. That is what is happening to the middle class.

Basically, it is hitting women more than anyone else. This is one group disproportionately harmed by the proposed new overtime rules. Why? Because the fact is, women tend to dominate in retail services and sales positions that would be particularly affected by this new overtime rule.

Married women increased their working hours by nearly 40 percent in the last 30 years. Consequently, their contribution to family income has also risen. So you have the squeeze on the middle class, which is now seeing the administration taking away their right to time-and-a-half overtime.

I have not even mentioned the discrimination against women in the workplace in terms of wages. Millions of women are working in female-dominated jobs, as social workers, teachers, childcare workers, and nurses, with equivalent skill, effort, responsibility, and working conditions as similar jobs dominated by men, but these women are not paid the same as their counterparts in the male sector.

This is wrong and it must end. That is why I introduced the Fair Pay Act in April 2003 to make sure women who are in these jobs are treated fairly and equitably.

In summary, this President, George W. Bush, has presided over the largest job loss of any President since the Great Depression. Yet he remains wedded to policies that are making the problem worse for the middle class. His administration has praised the outsourcing of jobs as something good for our economy. This administration opposes any increase in the minimum wage. They oppose extending unemployment benefits. They are trying to take away the overtime rights of millions of American workers. This administration has done nothing to help equalize pay for women in the workplace.

It all adds up to one thing: The middle class in America is getting hammered. It is time for a change. It is time to change our economic course. It is time to quit squeezing and hammering the American middle class.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from the great State of New Jersey.

Mr. CORZINE. Mr. President, may I inquire how much time I have?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senator has 8 minutes.

Mr. CORZINE. Thank you, Mr. President.

Mr. President, before I begin, let me compliment the Senator from Iowa for addressing a topic on which I also want to speak. I think "hammered" probably is the right term for what is happening to the middle class as opposed to "squeezing." That would be more reflective of the real desperation that many families feel.

Twenty-five years ago, generally, one member of a family was working. Now it takes two just to get by. Real wages

are not growing in this economy. I think the Senator from Iowa points out very clearly how that is so painful in the lives of middle-class Americans.

Particularly apt is his reference to this overtime pay, which absolutely goes to the heart of the middle class. The idea that we are trying to squeeze down or hammer down the ability to generate real earnings for working Americans is just inconceivable.

I think the efforts of the Senator from Iowa are absolutely remarkable. We need to make sure America understands what is going on with regard to putting pressure on the earnings of the middle-class. That is what makes America great. It always has. It built America.

As one can see from this chart, average weekly earnings are up 1 percent during the time the President has been in office. Those are the lost jobs about which the Senator spoke. In the last 4 months, real wages for working Americans have gone down. We saw another statistic yesterday that indicated they are declining.

In that context, as the Senator from Iowa pointed out, college tuition costs are up. He said 35 percent. The numbers depend on how one calculates it. We have near 30 percent. Family health care premiums are up 36 percent. Gas prices are up 28 percent. At least in New Jersey, there have been property tax increases of 7 percent-plus every year under this administration's leadership. All we are doing is transferring tax breaks to those who are already doing well, the 13-percent increase in millionaires who got the tax cuts, while the property tax on middle-class folks has gone up. That is why people don't feel comfortable. That is why polls tell people the economy is not working, even though we have seen some statistics in the last 3 to 5 months that indicate it is working.

It is not happening for the breadth of America. People don't focus on averages; they focus on what happens in their lives. By the way, speaking of averages, if we put together the 500 times earnings that CEOs make versus the low-wage earner in a company, we will come out with a nice average. But what happens to the bulk of the people working at the company? They are not seeing wage growth. They are not seeing their income going up with these kinds of numbers. It translates into a "hammering." The Senator from Iowa picked the right term.

My effort today is to focus on dependent children and elderly family members because that is another part of where the squeeze is actually happening. It is real. Under this President, we have seen increases in childcare for a two-child family go up \$2,050 over the last 3½ years. For each individual child, it is about \$6,000 a year to maintain childcare. Today, 65 percent of all mothers who are in the labor force have children under the age of 6. We have two partners working in a family to try to make ends meet, and

childcare costs are going off the charts. That is the squeeze. That is money that comes out of their ability to have a positive quality of life.

There is a lot to be done. We had a bipartisan bill, the Snow-Dodd proposal, to increase the welfare proposal by \$6 billion worth of additional funding for childcare. Instead, we are getting proposals from the administration to cut 300,000 kids from childcare. It makes no sense. This is a fundamental area. When talking about family values and the importance of helping out communities, lifting them up and making ends meet, childcare is fundamental. We have one group of folks who want to actually invest in it so that we can make the quality of life for Americans better, and we have another group that wants to take away that ability and has cut 300,000 children from receiving childcare. That makes no sense.

Only 1 in 10 children who are eligible to receive Federal assistance today are actually receiving it because they don't have the resources to match against the demand. That doesn't fit with this picture where we are seeing real earnings not going up and the cost of living for the middle class going up and childcare costs going up and we are not doing anything but cutting what we do here.

Then is the issue of taking care of the elderly, making sure you have family care, a sick spouse, taking care of a senior, mothers and fathers who are retired. It is an incredible burden on all families, particularly if both partners in the family are working. Estimates are that there are about \$250 billion worth of services provided by families to their own families that have no recognition in our national accounts, no recognition by our Federal Government in providing support for it. And 80 percent of home care services are provided by family caregivers. That is good. That is a real family value. But what are we doing to support them, and how does that fit into this whole process of a middle-class squeeze? It is an important topic that is completely underdescribed.

Let me tell you a story about a lady in Monmouth County, N.J. Her name is Bernadette Discon. She starts her 20-hour day at 3 in the morning. She works from 3 to 7 a.m. doing medical transcription in her home. She wakes her husband who has advanced dementia, and drives him to daycare. It costs \$55 a day for her to do that—no support, no help at all. She also has the responsibility of taking care of her 85- and 87-year-old mother and father. Neither drives. Neither is able to take care of themselves completely. One must use a walker. Bernadette works all day after she drops off her husband. She returns home at 6 o'clock, goes back to transcription work from 7 to 11 at night, trying to make ends meet. This is the kind of story that is actually happening. Her wages are going up 1 percent on average across this country. And she is having to deal with the

kinds of family care problems we talked about that actually happen with childcare.

It is not right that America is not addressing some of these social needs while we are seeing these kinds of costs go up. That is why we on this side of the aisle—as well as Senator JOHN KERRY—are talking about a middle-class squeeze because it is real in people's lives. It is not the same as what is happening to the GDP or whether you are seeing disposable income which takes in dividends and capital gains at the high end and mushes them together and comes out with an average result.

What we need to do is look at what is actually happening in the lives of working men and women. Bernadette Discon's story is real. It shows how the pressure impacts on an individual's life. If she had kids, college tuition is going up 28 percent. She is paying 30 percent more for gas. That puts real pressure on a family.

It is time to recognize that economics is more than just statistics that are announced on Friday morning at 8:30 to say whether employment is up or down. It is the quality of life that goes with those statistics. A lot of people are feeling squeezed. As the Senator from Iowa said, a lot of families are feeling hammered.

It is time for a change, and it is time to recognize the reality of what is happening in the lives of middle-class Americans.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Utah is recognized for up to 15 minutes.

ECONOMIC STRENGTH

Mr. BENNETT. Mr. President, I intended to come to the floor to speak about Iraq. I will do that. But I must make a comment or two about the speeches that have preceded mine with respect to the economy and what is happening.

I remember 4 years ago when the Presidential election was in full heat. One candidate said the prosperity that we have been experiencing is starting to slow down, and the economy is showing signs of being at the end of the business cycle and heading toward a recession. His political opponent said he was trying to talk down the economy for political purposes.

Well, it turns out he was right. We started a slowdown in the economy in the last two quarters of 2000. We ended up with a recession in the first three quarters of 2001. He was not trying to talk down the economy just for political purposes. He was telling the truth. This was, of course, Governor George W. Bush of Texas.

The fact is, the economy is doing extremely well, and there are those who are trying to talk it down for political purposes. This is the fact, no matter who is elected President. Whether it is George W. Bush, JOHN KERRY, Ralph Nader, or the Libertarian, or whoever

else may be out there seeking the Presidency, he or she will inherit an extremely strong economy come January of 2005. And whoever it is, if it is not George W. Bush, will take credit for that strength and say: See, because I got elected everything is now wonderful.

In fact, the business cycle does not operate that way. The business cycle does not pay attention to election days; it pays attention to long-term policies put in place. We had the recession in the beginning of 2001 because of economic pressures that built up in the nineties. We have the recovery now taking hold in 2004 that will come into play through the balance of this year and strongly into next year because of policies that were put in place over the last several years. You cannot turn the economy around by a single election. You have to put policies in place and see them go forward.

It is very interesting to see those particular items President Bush's opponents are now focusing on to say this is terrible, this is terrible, this is terrible. They have changed now because the items they used to be focused on as the bellwethers of economic activity have turned positive. They cannot use the old measuring sticks they said were so important to make the case that the President's economic plan is a failure because those measuring sticks have all turned positive and now indicate the President's policies were the right ones, so they pick up new measuring sticks and find an opportunity to blame President Bush.

I am fascinated to know that the increase in property values in New Jersey in the last few years is President Bush's fault; that when the New Jersey officials increase property taxes to go along with that increase in property values, it is President Bush's fault, and so on and so on. We will hear more of that in the months to come. Let us remember that the economy responds to a whole series of pressures. No President can wave a magic wand and create jobs, as one candidate is promising to do. Let us realize on that measure, which the President's opponents no longer use, jobs are being created now at a faster rate than the President's opponent is promising he would do if he became President. If you like the rate that the Democratic presumptive nominee is proposing for job creation, you have to like the record of George W. Bush because jobs are being created at a faster rate right now than that proposed rate.

Well, Mr. President, I rose to discuss Iraq, and I will do that in the time I have remaining. How much time do I have?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator has 10 minutes remaining.

IRAQ

Mr. BENNETT. Mr. President, there is an old statement which has become

enshrined in our society now as the alcoholic's prayer. It goes like this:

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

I suggest that as we face the world today as the world's strongest power economically, militarily, culturally, educationally—in almost every category—we should view our responsibilities through the prism of the alcoholic's prayer: Grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change, the courage to change the things we can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

As I listen to the debate on Iraq, as I listen to the partisan and political comments, many of them well-meaning and properly addressed, I pray for the third leg of that saying—the wisdom to know the difference between the things we can change and the things we cannot because many of the things being raised with respect to our situation in Iraq are things we cannot change. Many of the complaints are against things we can change, but we are not because we are wallowing in complaint and self-criticism when we should be moving ahead.

Let me give you an example. The first question we need to address with respect to our military activity in Iraq and elsewhere in the region is this: Are we engaged solely in a military exercise with respect to Iraq or are we, in fact, in a world war against terrorism? We need the wisdom to get the answer to that question and know the difference because the difference is vast.

I am one who believes that we are, in fact, engaged in a worldwide war against terrorism. We must have the serenity to accept the fact that war is not going to go away if we ignore it. There are many who say there is no connection between Saddam Hussein and 9/11; therefore, we should spend all of our time going after those who dealt with 9/11 and not pay any attention to Iraq. Well, that may have been a legitimate argument prior to the time we went into Iraq, but it is now irrelevant because we are there. We are there because this body, with over 70 votes, gave the President our support for going in there; and the United Nations, by a unanimous vote in the Security Council, gave the President support to go in. This body and the United Nations overwhelmingly, along with the House of Representatives, said this is the right thing to do. We did it, and we must accept the fact that we are there, and complaining about maybe we made a mistake doesn't change the reality that we are there.

I am one who thinks we made the right decision. I am happy that David Kay, the inspector for weapons of mass destruction who went into Iraq, thinks we made the right decision. When I talk to audiences in Utah, I say: How many of you know that David Kay discovered there were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq? Everybody raises