

services history will certainly report with great support. I thank him so much. I thank Senator KENNEDY very much.

Mr. KENNEDY. I thank my friend from West Virginia. That is what that previous hour was about, and why it was so important, because it was about preserving this institution. I know I speak for all of us, I think pretty generally across both sides of the aisle, in saying that there is no individual who is more dedicated to the preservation of this institution and the magnificent framework in which our Founding Fathers had conceived of it. It was really that issue that was talked about in that previous hour.

It is important, as all of us go through the process of pressing our own views and our own vision about the future of this country, that we hear the clear and persuasive and knowledgeable voice, the voice of history, that speaks about the institution and its importance to the American people. That is what we just heard with the exchange of the Senator from West Virginia. That is why I was so pleased to have an opportunity to listen. I just wish the other 98 Senators had that opportunity to be so informed as well. I thank the Senator for his kind words.

Mr. BYRD. I thank the Senator again. I feel pretty well today. I have had the flu over the weekend, but I am glad I came to the Senate today.

Mr. KENNEDY. I think you got your message across pretty well.

Mr. BYRD. I thank the Senator and I thank all Senators.

Mr. KENNEDY. I thank Senator BYRD.

Mr. President, I know we are in the morning hour of business; am I correct? I would like to be able to speak continuously. Do we have a time limit? I would like to be able to speak until I conclude.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. There is no limitation.

PENSIONS, RECONCILIATION AND EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, as Congress meets for a final session before we adjourn for the holidays, we should be focused on the true meaning of Christmas and the special thoughts that Americans of many faiths have at this time of year regarding their families, their friends and neighbors, and the rest of humanity.

Christmas is a season of great hope—a time of goodwill and special caring for others. That's what we should remember as we celebrate the birth of Christ, and the glad tidings of great joy that came to us that day.

There are those in America who urge the return of the word "Christmas" to this holiday season. I believe that Christmas is more than a word. It is a belief in a power far greater than ourselves. It is a belief in the possibility of lives full of hope and fulfillment. It is a belief that each of us has a sacred ob-

ligation to care for one another and to help those in need—to lend a hand to the least of those in our midst.

But I am sad to report, that is not what we are seeing in Congress this week.

As families across America struggle to make ends meet with higher health costs, higher college costs, higher gas prices, higher heating costs, and higher housing costs, Congress is about to make things worse for them.

Millionaires will be given tens of thousands of dollars in new tax breaks, but Medicaid cuts could mean that 22 million poor Americans will face a reduction in help from that lifesaving program and two million others may lose their health care entirely.

Proposed budget cuts would mean that 750,000 poor preschoolers who are eligible for Head Start won't be able to get into the program.

More than a quarter of a million poor Americans could lose their food stamps, and could face hunger. These cuts are proposed just as the Department of Agriculture reports that 38 million Americans face hunger, an increase of 5 million in 5 years.

Hundreds of thousands of children could lose their child support because of Republican proposals to cut enforcement against delinquent fathers.

Three million poor children could be left behind in school. They won't get the quality teachers and after-school help and supplemental services they need to catch up and succeed.

Hundreds of thousands of airline workers—the ones who are helping us get home for the holidays—could see their pensions hanging in the balance, and millions of other Americans could lose their pensions, too.

That is what is at stake in Congress this Christmas. Are these actions consistent with the spirit of this holiday season? Rather than debate whether the word "Christmas" should appear in our stores and on our greeting cards, shouldn't we be living out the hope that came from the first Christmas and do more for our fellow citizens than greater tax breaks for the rich and greater hardship for the poor and struggling middle class?

As Christian leader Reverend Jim Wallis said last week:

The Bible does not condemn prosperity. It just insists that it be shared.

So I would hope that those in Congress who seek to lavish more tax breaks on the privileged few at the expense of the rest of America will reconsider—not only at Christmas, but throughout the year.

Otherwise, what we face this week is a Republican plan in which billions of dollars will go from programs that assist low income families and senior citizens into the pockets of the already wealthy.

The provisions in the House bill that would cut the tax rate on capital gains and dividend income are particularly unfair, because more than 86 percent of the tax benefits will go to taxpayers

with incomes above \$100,000 a year. Nearly half the benefits—45 percent—will go to taxpayers with incomes over \$1 million a year. The average millionaire will save \$32,000 a year from these tax breaks for capital gains and dividends. In stark contrast, families with incomes less than \$100,000 would receive an average tax cut of only \$29.

This is by no means the only outrageous provision in the Republican plan—just the most costly. There are others. Republicans in the House propose a \$5 billion tax break for financial services companies doing business in foreign countries. This provision actually creates a tax incentive for these huge corporations to invest abroad instead of in the United States.

The spirit of Christmas should compel us to take another path. We should start investing in the health and well-being of all families. The average family is being squeezed unmercifully by stagnant wages and ever-increasing costs for the basic necessities of life. The cost of health insurance has risen 59 percent in the last five years. Gasoline is up 74 percent. College tuition is up 46 percent. Housing is up 44 percent. The list goes on and on, up and up—and paychecks are buying less each year.

The economic trends are very disturbing for any who are willing to look at them objectively. The gap between rich and poor has been widening in recent years. Mr. President, 37 million Americans now live in poverty, up 19 percent during the Bush Administration. One in six American children lives in poverty and 14 million children go to bed hungry each night. Long-term unemployment is at historic highs.

The silent slavery of poverty is not so silent anymore. Katrina focused the Nation's attention on the immense hardships that low-income Americans face each day, and presented us with an historic and challenging opportunity to find better ways to lift up the most vulnerable among us.

This is Christmas. Surely, the American people deserve better.

In the Senate, we did our best to respond to the needs of average Americans by helping to expand access to a college education. We cut the fat out of bank profits and put it back where it belongs—helping students afford the cost of college. Our bill included a virtually unprecedented increase in need-based aid—over \$8.25 billion over 5 years.

All together, it provides \$12 billion in new aid and additional benefits for needy children who have the ability to go to schools and colleges all across this country—bipartisan, unanimous, out of our committee and on the floor of the Senate, all in jeopardy this afternoon. Hopefully, our good chairman, Chairman ENZI, will be able to fight for those provisions. But that is now in jeopardy from those who believe that tax breaks are more important than our children's future. Americans know that education is the great equalizer. When young people work hard,

study, play by the rules to be well qualified academically, they should be able to attend college. The cost of public college tuition fees has skyrocketed 46 percent since 2001. That leaves the lowest income students at 4-year public colleges with an average of \$5,800 in unmet need.

Too many qualified students, 400,000 each year, do not go to a 4-year college. They can't afford it. They have the academic ability to succeed in those schools and colleges. They will not do that, and they cannot do that because of the finances. Almost 200,000 do not attend even a community college.

This is not acceptable, and we should be able to do better.

In addition, the Republican plan, as we found in the bill funding education and health care, will cut funds for public schools for the first time in a decade, leaving 3 million children behind. It provides no new funds for afterschool programs. It strips funding for technology in our schools.

The bill covers even less of the cost of meeting the educational needs of students with disabilities. Instead of meeting our promise to parents and communities to do more, we are doing less.

Remember when we passed the IDEA program, we said we would establish that the Federal Government would get 40 percent to pay for disabled children and that we expect the States and local communities to pick up the difference. Now we are retreating.

We have attempted, under the leadership of Senator HARKIN, to be able to meet that responsibility. And now we are finding that 18 percent is slipping and going in the wrong direction rather than helping States, local communities and parents, particularly the parents that have disabled children.

It leaves Pell grants frozen in place for the fourth year in a row, even as college costs are soaring.

That is in the Republican proposal.

The Republican proposal cuts job training, even as the number of good jobs is shrinking, and fails to provide adequate increases for programs to ensure worker safety.

We have 161,100 unemployed workers in my State of Massachusetts. Yet funds for unemployment insurance offices and to help unemployed workers with job-seeking are being cut.

The proposal cuts job training, even as the number of good jobs is shrinking. We have 73,000 jobs that are going, that are vacant by employers all over our State. But we are missing is the linkage between training these workers so they can get these jobs and so they will be taxpayers contributing to their community and making a difference. We are cutting back on that program.

The House bill cuts the child support enforcement program by \$5 billion over 5 years, resulting in a \$24 billion reduction in child support collections over the next ten years. The House bill will reduce child support collections in Massachusetts by \$140 million over the

next five years. This is an enforcement program to make those who have an obligation to children take personal responsibility and help their children grow and learn. The House bill cuts this necessary and successful support program.

There are currently over 13,500 children in Massachusetts waiting for child care. Do you know what? We are cutting back the number of Child care subsidies for low income families. Who knows how many more thousands of people will not work because they cannot provide and look after their children any longer.

Does that particularly make sense with regard to the child and the parent in terms of the family? Clearly, it does not.

Funding for unemployment insurance has been cut by \$141 million, and funds for programs to help unemployed workers with job seeking have been cut by \$89 million, even in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, with 8 million Americans unemployed.

We know those within the administration would like to pretend Katrina never existed and the devastation that took place in Mississippi and New Orleans never happened. Those people should disappear, deny that those States are part of the United States of America. We are one country. We do have one history. We are one Nation. And now we pretending, evidently, that disaster never took place.

Finally, I want to go into the area of health care. We live in an era of medical miracles. This is the life science century. We have had the mapping of the human genome, the DNA, the sequencing of the gene. These breakthroughs which were unheard of 10, 15, 20, 30 years ago, bringing together the latest new technologies in engineering, with the latest in terms of the possibility of research—and the possibilities are virtually unlimited in our lifetime—to see major breakthroughs for new cures for multiple sclerosis, cancer, diabetes, Parkinson's disease, and Alzheimer's disease.

What do we do after the Congress and Senate doubled the NIH budget? We see the possibilities, but we are basically cutting back on those possibilities and cutting back for giving help and assistance to our fellow citizens.

Finally, I am deeply concerned about what is happening to the millions of our fellow citizens who are looking to retirement and looking to pensions. We know there is effectively a three-legged stool for retirees. If you look at what has happened to their savings, they have been effectively eviscerated, wiped out because of the sudden increased costs that working families have been affected by. If they had been in the 401(k)s, they have had virtual stability and very little growth in recent years.

The last major part is the pensions, and 700 companies have dropped their pension plans, and an estimated \$8 billion in future benefits has been lost to

American workers in the period of the last 5 years—\$8 billion that has been paid in by American workers who sacrifice; who say: No, we will not take more wages to provide for our family now, we want to put something aside for when we require. No, we will not take that extra money so we can have a little vacation. We will put it aside. We need those resources. We will put it aside for another day. No, we will sacrifice in terms of additional time. We will work overtime, and we will contribute into the pensions, \$8 billion in the last 5 years—and those numbers are going to continue unless we pass a pension bill.

We can't get in conference with the House of Representatives. Do you want to know why? Because House Leadership is holding a bill effectively hostage in the House of Representatives.

What are you going to tell those airline workers? You talk about abuse of power and abuse of authority. It is absolutely outrageous.

The Senate moved toward a pension bill last month. We passed that with two dissenting votes—not everything that Senator ENZI would have wanted, not everything that I would have wanted, certainly not what a lot of others would have wanted. Our leaders in this, Senators MIKULSKI, TOM HARKIN, JEFF BINGAMAN, and many others, bipartisan in nature, Republican and Democrats alike, got together and passed that legislation under the leadership of Senator ENZI, and we are being effectively stonewalled.

The House could have engaged in a bi-partisan process. But instead they chose to forge ahead with a bill that has no Democratic support and that threatens our manufacturing companies, cutting off benefits for workers whose plants close; leaves older workers without protections when their companies switch to new plans; and leaves workers at the mercy of conflicted investment advice. That is why they are unable to pass legislation this year.

I urge members of the House to take a page from the Senate's book. It is not too late to reach a consensus on a bill that can be passed quickly with Democratic support.

We are talking about the holiday season. We are talking about the Christmas time. Hundreds of thousands of workers, retirees of airline companies, see their retirement on the line.

That includes the retired mechanic, Randy Daly, of Apple Valley, MN, who spent 40 years as a mechanic at Northwest Airlines. At 61, he thought his best years were ahead of him. But now he has learned, if his company's pension plan fails, he stands to lose over 40 percent of his retirement benefits. Most of his fellow retirees fear a similar fate.

Our airline companies are under tremendous financial pressure from terrorism, the recent catastrophes of Hurricane Rita and Hurricane Katrina, and increased jet fuel costs. Some of these

companies have filed for bankruptcy. The list goes on, as the Senator from West Virginia knows.

The whole challenge is for many manufacturers, the hundreds of thousands of workers in companies such as Bethlehem Steel, LTV, many of the coal and other companies where workers have paid the price and lost their pensions. We should not be waiting more time for the brink of failure before we act. This legislation helps nearly millions of workers and retirees. We should not at this time turn them down.

In the pension bill we also included the key reforms to respond to the Enron, the WorldComs, and other corporate scandals where employees were forced to invest in company stock at a huge risk and then lost it all while the employers walked away with huge pension security packages.

Finally, we address the women's retirement security with provisions from the Women's Pension Protection Act, which was bipartisan. The Senator from Maine, Senator SNOWE, myself, and many others, recognized the particular challenges women have in terms of the pension issue.

American workers and their families expect Congress to protect their hard-earned pensions. Americans expect Congress to help them send their children to college, not make it more expensive at a time when workers need more and more skills. Americans expect Congress to increase, not cut, education and job training. Americans expect Congress to help secure health care, not cut health care assistance. Americans expect more from us. Americans deserve better, especially at this Christmastime.

Mr. BYRD. Will the Senator yield?

Mr. KENNEDY. I am happy to yield.

Mr. BYRD. Mr. President, I thank the Senator for the speech he made. I am glad I stayed and listened to his speech. It is one of his finest speeches. It is a speech made in the true spirit of Christmas, too. The Senator, once again, stands for the poor, the downtrodden, those who cannot be here to speak for themselves.

I thank the Senator for this speech. He is truly in my book one of the great Senators for all time. We have not always agreed. We have not even liked each other in long ages ago, times past. But that is in the past. I think so highly of this Senator. I am glad I stayed here to hear this speech. It was certainly thoughtful. It was needed at this time. I congratulate the Senator. Tomorrow, I may speak a little bit on the same subject—not as eloquently as he has but certainly along the same line.

I hope I can do that.

Mr. KENNEDY. I thank the Senator for his kind words and for his typical graciousness. I am so glad we had an opportunity to have a brief celebration at your recent birthday. It is good to see the Senator up, as always, in fighting trim and fighting form.

I am grateful for the Senator's comments.

Mr. BYRD. I thank the Senator.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

ACCENTING THE POSITIVE

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, I have a few issues to discuss in morning business. First, I desire to be more positive than what we have been hearing. It makes one depressed to hear the negative discussions. There are quite a number of positive things happening in this country. Perhaps we ought to talk about them.

We have had the extraordinary growth in gross domestic production, growth in the economy over the last number of months, particularly in the last month, 3.5 percent growth. We have had more jobs than we have had for a very long time. We have more people working than we have had for a very long time. Certainly there are always issues we can talk about. The fact is we are moving forward on these issues. We are doing the things that need to be done. Indeed, we should.

I am sometimes a little distressed that we seem to think the Federal Government is in charge of everything that affects our lives. That probably is not the case. We are also dealing with a great deficit. Yet we want to talk constantly about how we need more money for this and more money for that, more money for all these things. We are in a country where we have several levels of government. There ought to be some division of responsibility. That is our system. We should have somewhat of a limited Federal Government, we are not into every issue. It is disappointing to hear that everything occurring to everyone is a responsibility of the Federal Government.

We also ought to understand when we have some sort of effort to reduce taxes, that helps increase the economy. We have seen more revenues when we have less taxes. The economy grows. There is more investment and we create jobs. Those are good things. Occasionally we ought to talk about that.

I understand a person opposed to the administration wants to talk about the bad stuff. I will primarily talk a little bit more about Iraq and the situation we are in there. It has been an issue for all of us, and tends to be something we are all very much concerned about. However, the discussions lately have changed somewhat. That is a good thing.

Almost no one is suggesting that U.S. troops ought to remain in Iraq forever. We hear all the views, people talking about this point of view, that point of view. But since the beginning, there was the notion that we have a job to do, and as soon as that job is finished we need to get out. That is not a new topic.

I have to admit completing the job can be defined differently by different people. However, the fact is almost everyone at the same time suggests that the troops need to remain in their cur-

rent numbers until the insurgency is suppressed. Most everyone agrees with that.

In the beginning, some of the folks in the House of Representatives were making the point to get them out of there now, get them out in 6 months, but they have moderated that and are saying, yes, we need to change what we are doing; we need to complete our job. We see more and more people wanting to do that. The administration has been talking for some time, of course, about reducing the number of troops in the process of doing that but not setting a date.

My point is it is interesting, and the media has something to do with this, to try to show the differences, but the fact is there is quite a bit of similarity among the things that people are saying with regard to Iraq.

Few people agree with the idea of increasing the number of troops. There is some talk about that. But that is not generally agreed to. Of course, almost no one agrees the troops ought to be pulled out immediately at a certain time.

My point is there seems to be great differences between the critics and the administration. But when they look at it, everyone is pretty much on the same side. We need to finish our job, reduce our troops there, turn it over to the Iraqis as soon as possible. The time to do that, the way you do that, there is an area for difference, but that is a common argument.

I am trying to say, finger-pointing aside, regarding the debate over whether we should begin to gradually have a withdrawal of troops, there is no debate over that. How you do it, of course, there are different views. There is no disagreement as to bringing the news into the political process. I think it is exciting that this week there will be an election and we will see what kind of bringing there is into that process.

So I guess I am kind of pleased that even though we have differences of view—and that is perfectly legitimate—I am finding there is less difference in the policy between the people who have disagreement than there might have been in the past.

Obviously, the war on terrorism is being fought overseas in Afghanistan and Iraq. Of course, fundamentally, it has changed the environment that has given rise to the Islamic extremism that brought about the attacks, and so on. In a broad sense, that is exactly why we are there. It is one to bring justice back to the perpetrators, but also to change the conditions in the Middle East. I think that basically is beginning to happen: the introduction of a stable democracy and freedom, a democracy that is shaped on the basis of what Iraqis want. We are not imposing on them the same kind of system we have here necessarily; for instance, that there has to be endless discussion on the floor. We are not saying that. There are great steps being made in de-liberation there.