

is troubling to a lot of people when we see committee members in such a rush to pass this legislation before the Congressional Budget Office even has a chance to fully estimate its cost. On something as important to the American people as health care reform, cost and effectiveness should be a higher priority than speed.

But even if we decided this bill was the right reform, another question arises: How would we pay for it? Most people don't walk onto a car lot, pick out the most expensive model, buy it, and then figure out how they are going to pay for it. Even if they wanted to, the car salesman wouldn't let them. We need to take the same approach here.

The proposal we have seen is full of creative new ways to spend taxpayer dollars, but it offers little in the way of offsetting the cost of the overall bill. We will have to either charge the money to the national credit card or, more likely, raise taxes on working families—in other words, more spending, higher taxes, and even more debt. So far, some of the taxes under discussion include a tax on soft drinks and juice boxes, the creation of a new tax on jobs, and new limits on charitable donations. But this would just be the beginning. The HELP Committee bill would be hugely expensive by any reckoning, and no one has a plan to pay for it. This isn't a very good start as far as health reform is concerned.

Americans are also right to wonder how these changes would affect the family budget. Will the HELP Committee's so-called reforms raise the health insurance costs for millions of families and businesses at a time when they are already struggling? This isn't a scare tactic or a theoretical question. Not only does the CBO estimate suggest the final bill is far too expensive, but we also have the example of States that have tried some of the proposals it suggests. Shouldn't we look at the experience of these States to determine whether we want to replicate these proposals nationwide?

Take Kentucky, for example. Many of the same concepts embraced by the HELP Committee bill were tried 15 years ago in my State—with disastrous results. Instead of reforms that were promised, Kentuckians were left with higher expenses and fewer choices for health coverage. Instead of more affordable care, one report estimates that 850,000 Kentuckians faced dramatically higher premiums. Instead of increased competition, about 50 insurance companies stopped offering individual insurance, leaving only a handful of private insurers and a government-run plan that wasn't affordable for taxpayers. After years of failure, many of these so-called reforms were repealed but not without significant damage to the Commonwealth. While the market has rebounded some, Kentucky's small businesses and families tell me that a lack of competition in the health care market continues to keep prices high. Shouldn't this experience figure into our consideration?

When it comes to our approach on legislation as costly as health care, we should learn from our experience with the stimulus. Democrats rushed that bill on the grounds that we needed it to jump-start the ailing economy. Yet a few months later we are already hearing outrageous stories of abuse and the unemployment rate actually continues to rise.

When it comes to specific proposals within any so-called health care reform bill, we should learn from the experience of Kentucky. We should not be rushed into enacting so-called reforms that cost taxpayers trillions and could increase premiums to consumers.

Americans indeed want reform, but they want us to do it right. They do not want a blind rush to spend trillions of dollars they and their grandchildren will have to pay for through higher taxes and even more debt.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader.

HEALTH CARE REFORM

Mr. REID. Madam President, if you will indulge me, it appears appropriate and necessary to briefly summarize the sorry state of health care in America today.

Nearly 50 million people in the greatest country and the largest economy the world has ever seen lack the fundamental ability to stay healthy or care for a loved one. Nine million of those people are children. Eight million fewer people who in 2003 had health insurance through their jobs can say the same today. Among those between 18 and 64, the State of Nevada has the second highest rate of uninsured citizens. Health care costs an average family more than twice what it did at the start of this decade. Half of all Americans who file for foreclosure do so because they can't afford both a house and their health care. More than half of all Americans who file for bankruptcy do so because health care is too expensive. More than half of all Americans skip doctor visits or treatments they need to stay healthy because it is too expensive.

Those fortunate enough to have health care pay a hidden tax just to cover those who don't. If your family has insurance, you pay at least \$1,000 more for it than you would need to if other families had their insurance. If you are like about everybody I know and not in absolutely perfect health—if you have a history of anything from heart disease, to high cholesterol, to hay fever—your insurance company can force you to pay exorbitant rates or deny you coverage altogether. Insurance companies call these preexisting conditions. Everyone else calls them tragedies.

I know I am not telling the American people anything they do not already know. They know it better than any statistics can say. They struggle with these challenges every morning when

they wake up and when they go to bed at night, second-guessing the agonizing decisions they made that day about what to sacrifice to stay healthy.

I said I thought it would be appropriate to go back to the basics for the benefit of our Republican colleagues. Their lack of interest in an open and candid debate, their lack of interest in coming to the negotiating table with productive proposals makes it painfully evident they need to be reminded of the reality of this crisis.

By any measure, these are serious problems, and serious problems deserve serious efforts by serious legislators to develop serious solutions. Our Republican colleagues think things are just fine the way they are. Why shouldn't they? They like the status quo. They are the ones who created the status quo. In fact, this is hard to comprehend. Just yesterday, the Republican leader in the House of Representatives said the following: "I think we all understand that we've got the best health care system in the world." When we have 50 million people with no health insurance, is that the best health care system in the world? When we have 9 million children with no health insurance, is that the best health care system in the world? Is it the best health care system in the world when today there are 8 million people fewer than in 2003 who have health insurance through their jobs? Is it the best health care system in the world when people between 18 and 64 in the State of Nevada have the second highest rate of uninsured citizens? I don't think so. Is it the best health care system in the world when the health care cost for the average family is more than twice what it was at the beginning of this decade? Is it the best health care in the world when more than half of all Americans skip the doctor visits they need or the treatments they need because they cannot afford them?

The Republican leader in the House of Representatives is saying, "I think we all understand that we've got the best health care system in the world." I think he better go back and check that out. He said that to a room of reporters. I doubt he would say the same with a straight face to the millions of Americans who have to skip routine medical checkups or live just one accident or illness away from bankruptcy or wonder if they will live long enough to fight through the redtape. We have heard President Obama talk about the death of his mother and how she fought as strongly as she could to get the health care she needed. She lost that battle.

What about the Republicans in the Senate? We talked about the Republican leader in the House. How have they approached the crisis? I am sorry to say they have only subscribed to more of the same stalling strategy that the American people are tired of. Republicans have introduced 400 amendments to the health care bill that is in

the HELP Committee, 400 amendments, and they say they have more to come. Here is a sample of some of their serious amendments: two amendments would force doctors to spy on each other, multiple amendments just to change the names of sections in the bill, and many amendments that simply would give greedy insurance companies the ability to deny coverage whenever they feel like it. Each of the 400 amendments says something different, but in truth they all say the same thing—no. They are designed to slow the process to a halt.

I am not making this up. Look at this newspaper today, Rollcall: "Senate GOP Still Saying 'No.'" Listen to what the story says. This is more than just a headline.

Though Senate Democrats have handed them defeat after legislative defeat this year, Republicans say they plan to continue trying to slow down the Democratic agenda on the Senate floor as much as possible. "Democrats need to know when they bring [bills] up, we're going to extend the debate as long as we can—even if we can't win it—so that their people back home know that they're voting for this junk, [said one Republican Senator]. And we're going to see it on everything."

The stalling on everything. How is that for moving this country out of the problems we have? "They plan to continue trying to slow down the Democratic agenda on the Senate floor as much as possible."

Republicans waste the time of the American people in the morning and in the afternoon complain that government is inefficient. What do I mean? We have wasted the whole week with 60 hours of wasted time on two postcloture time blocks. It is just as they said, they are just stalling for time. During that period of time, we could have moved to appropriations bills, we could have moved to many things.

I have Senators come to me. There is a bipartisan bill—Senator KERRY has worked with Senator KYL—dealing with Pakistan. It is essential that we do that. But because of what is going on here on the Senate floor with Republicans stalling, we can't get to that. I have been asked by Democrats and Republicans to do something about drug importation. We don't have time to go to it because of the stalling. The Senate GOP is still just saying no. They complain about the government being inefficient? The only inefficiency I see in Washington today is the Republican caucus in the House and the Senate.

Again, our health care system is in serious distress, and serious problems deserve serious efforts by serious legislators to develop serious solutions. That is why we are committed to lowering the high cost of health care, ensuring every American has access to quality, affordable care, and letting people choose their own doctors, hospitals, and health plans. We are committed to protecting existing coverage when it is good, improving it when it is

not, and guaranteeing health care for the millions who have none. I don't think doing nothing is an option because the cost of doing nothing is far too great. We must pass health care reform this year.

As we said at the start of this Congress, the start of the work period, and the start of this debate, we will continue doing the best work with Republicans—we will work with them. They have a place at the negotiating table, and they should take it. We will work hard to do a bipartisan bill. But in order for this bipartisan process to work, Republicans must demonstrate an interest in legislating, not this:

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I hope the American people who are watching talk to their Republican Representatives in the House and their Senators and say this isn't right.

Despite what we have seen in recent days, such cooperation is not out of the realm of possibility. Here is an example of what it looks like when Republicans and Democrats work together with each other instead of against each other and against the interests of the American people. Yesterday, Wednesday, a group called the Bipartisan Policy Center proposed a thoughtful and thorough plan for stemming this country's health care crisis. The group is led by three former Senate majority leaders—I have worked with all of them—Bob Dole from Kansas, Howard Baker from Tennessee, and Tom Daschle from South Dakota. I would mention about Tom Daschle, I think most people recognize he is a man who knows more about health care than just about anybody in America today. He has written a book, among other things. Together, Tom Daschle, a Democrat, and Senators Dole and Baker, Republicans, served a combined 80 years in the Congress. They know a thing or two about working across the aisle and getting things done. They know our job is public service, not lip-service. I may not agree with every part of their plan, but that is not the point. The point is, they have a good-faith effort. They have avoided the temptation to distract each other with misrepresentations and misinformation about the real problem. They have put people ahead of partisanship and were able to find common ground.

I encourage Republicans in Congress to read the Bipartisan Policy Center's report. Even if they do not support its conclusions, I hope they take to heart its authors' motivations. Baker, Dole, and Daschle—serious problems deserve serious efforts by serious legislators to develop serious solutions. The time for partisan games is long over. It is time to get serious about fixing our health care.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will now be a period for morning business for 1 hour, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each, with the time divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees, with the majority controlling the first half and the Republicans controlling the final half.

The Senator from New Jersey is recognized.

THE RECOVERY ACT

Mr. MENENDEZ. Madam President, this February, Congress passed and the President signed a historic recovery package, setting the stage for the creation of 3½ million jobs and making critical investments to strengthen the 21st-century economy. We all agree that legislation has not ended the most serious economic crisis since the Great Depression. Americans know what this administration inherited and the time it will take to get out of it. Hundreds of thousands of Americans continue to lose their jobs every month, quality health care is still far from affordable for far too many, and we still have a dangerous dependence on foreign oil that threatens our safety, our wallets, and our planet at the same time.

But the optimism we feel is real. Quick action on our part has contributed to bringing the economy back from the brink of absolute collapse. There are green shoots in this economy, and the Recovery Act has fertilized them. It has cut taxes for working Americans; it has made education more affordable; it has jump-started urgent investments that will make our commutes faster and our air cleaner, investments such as repairing crumbling bridges and highways and building high-speed transit and light rail, investments that will pay off over the course of generations. The hundreds of thousands of Americans who are going to work this morning because of the Recovery Act can tell us in no uncertain terms that the legislation is working. It is creating jobs, making responsible investments, helping workers damaged by this crisis.

But in the face of these tremendous efforts, some are questioning the effectiveness of these investments. They have decided to attack the entire recovery process by jumping to conclusions, distorting the facts, and spreading outright falsehoods—all because of their failed George Bush-style ideology that created this crisis in the first place.

There have been some who have commissioned their own report, a report which picked a conclusion first and