

knew when the President was going to give his State of the Union Message. But it happens it is on tomorrow. So we have the State of the Union tomorrow night. We have the retreat tomorrow. We are not going to have any legislative issues here unless the Republicans have agreed. We are not going to interfere in any way with their retreat. These are extremely important. The two caucuses can move alone and not be bothered by other things. It is very important. We are going to do the same next week. I think what we have done in the last year or so has been important. We used to do these retreats on Fridays, but with schedules such as they are, not many people showed up, or not as many as we wanted. With the new schedule of having votes on Tuesday and Thursday, in fact, it causes people to want to be here on Wednesday.

I look forward to working with the Republican leader and others in coming up with a glidepath to finishing these matters as quickly as we can. By virtue of some cloture motions I filed, we are scheduled for votes in the morning. I want to do everything I can to avoid that and will maybe put those over until Thursday or maybe try to get rid of those votes today would be the best thing we could do.

I am happy to yield to my friend the Republican leader.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader is recognized.

THE ECONOMY

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, a year ago this week, millions of Americans were looking to Washington with the hope that always comes with a new beginning. In the midst of a terrible economic downturn, a new President was vowing to meet our problems head-on. Americans hoped for every success, but in the 12 months that have passed since then, Americans have not seen the improvements they were hoping for. Far from it. Since last January, nearly 3.5 million Americans have lost their jobs and nearly 3 million have lost their homes. Americans are still struggling, and they are looking to Washington for the policies that will right our economic ship.

To their credit, the President and his allies in Congress tried to do something about our economic situation. Unfortunately, their policies missed the mark, and 2009 was another very difficult year. Americans waited patiently for the administration and Congress to implement policies that would create the conditions for creating jobs, growing businesses, and helping struggling middle-class families weather the recession. Instead, they got policies that vastly increased government spending and put a crushing amount of

debt onto the Federal credit card. Then Americans looked on in disbelief as the administration spent almost an entire year—an entire year—pursuing a closed-door, partisan health care plan that would have raised their taxes and their health insurance premiums and slashed Medicare for seniors in the middle of a recession.

By the time November came around, Americans had clearly run out of patience—not with the President, whom they like, but with the administration's policies. They rejected a trillion-dollar stimulus bill that was supposed to stop unemployment at 8 percent but did not. They rejected a budget that will double the national debt in 5 years and triple it in 10. And they rejected a health care plan that would have led to higher costs, lower quality, and massive new government spending. The American people have spoken clearly. They want a new policy direction.

This is why some of the comments we have been hearing in the administration about its plans for the year ahead are so distressing. The lesson of the last year should be crystal clear: Americans are not happy with the administration's approach. They are tired of the spending, debt, and government takeovers. They want a step-by-step approach to our problems, not grand government experiments and schemes. Yet some in the administration seem to believe that the message of Virginia, New Jersey, and Massachusetts is something entirely different. They seem to think the voters are frustrated at nothing in particular, that they are just angry in general. The proper response to these elections, the administration seems to think, is to retool its message to make people believe it is finding new ways to help the economy, even as it continues to pursue the exact same policies as before. One of the President's top advisers insisted over the weekend, for example, that the administration will continue to pursue its plan for health care even as it works to retool its message on the economy. This is a clear sign that the administration has not gotten the message; that it has become too attached to its own pet goals; that it is stuck in neutral when the American people are asking it to change direction. And then the administration said over the weekend that Americans will not know what is in the Democratic plan for health care unless and until it is passed. That is precisely the problem. Americans do not want to have to learn about what politicians in Washington are doing to their health care after the fact. They want to know the details before the changes are approved, not later.

Americans are not frustrated in general; they are frustrated with an administration that insists on taking them in a direction they do not want to go and which does not seem to be interested in acknowledging the direction in which Americans actually want to go.

These are some of the signs that the administration has not gotten the message. But it is not too late. Tomorrow night, the President will deliver his State of the Union Address. It is my hope that he deals not in a retooled message but in a changed direction and that he advances it with the same kind of enthusiasm and intensity that he attempted to advance his health care plan.

Here are some of the things the President could do tomorrow night:

First, put the 2,700-page Democratic health care bill on the shelf and leave it there. The best first step we could take in righting our economic ship is to take this job-killing and tax-increasing monstrosity off the table once and for all and move toward the kind of step-by-step approach Americans really want.

Second, declare that taxes will not go up at the end of the year as scheduled for millions of American families and businesses. Even some Democrats are calling on the President to do this. Struggling small businesses are asking themselves whether they can hire new workers. The prospect of a massive tax hike makes it far less likely that they will.

Third, return unused TARP money and put it toward paying down the deficit. Taxpayers who bailed out the banks last year are wondering why their money is still laying around unspent. Money that has come back to the Treasury should be used to pay down the deficit, not used on new spending programs.

Fourth, job programs. The stimulus was sold to the public on the promise that it would hold unemployment at 8 percent. A year later, unemployment is at 10 percent, its highest level in a quarter century. At a time of trillion-dollar deficits, the President should direct unspent stimulus funds to pay down our debts right now, rather than have the money spent on questionable projects 9 years down the road.

Fifth, no more debt. Later this week, the administration, with an assist from Democrats in Congress, plans to increase the amount of money available on the Federal credit card by nearly \$2 trillion. In other words, they want to increase the amount of money we can borrow by an amount equivalent to what it cost to pay for the entire Federal budget 10 years ago.

Sixth, explain to the American people how the Federal Government will end its ownership of auto companies, insurance companies, and banks. Americans do not think the U.S. Government should be one of the largest shareholders of GM, Chrysler, and AIG.

Seventh, energy. Nuclear power is one of the cleanest, most efficient sources of energy. The President should commit to expanding it. Until these clean green sites are up and running, he should allow the States to drill for oil and natural gas off their shores, if they want to.

These are just a few concrete things the President could do to show the