

destroying Medicare than creating jobs.

The Small Business innovation research bill is a good piece of legislation too. That also died in the Senate last month under a pile of unrelated amendments. The bills the Senate passed this year reauthorizing the Federal Aviation Administration and reforming America's patent system were good legislation also. They would have created or saved about 480,000 jobs. It made it out of the Senate alive but now languishes in the Republican-controlled House. Will the Economic Development Authority suffer the same fate? I hope not.

Here, 24 hours ago, I presented to the American people in the Senate a myriad of amendments that have been filed in regard to this legislation. A lot have been offered but more filed. I read about 40 of them dealing with different types of endangered species, the lesser sand dune reptile. I don't remember what it was, but all kinds of nonrelated amendments. Global warming. Post office reform. As I said, almost 100 amendments, and I read 35 or 40 of them here yesterday, having nothing to do with this legislation. Nothing.

I hope we don't have another bill that is blocked, the fourth this year. If they do that, it would be clear they are more interested in this rightwing ideology than creating much-needed employment. Of the 90-plus amendments, I repeat, only one of which my staff was able to find had any germaneness to the bill, and that is one the chairman of the committee, Senator BOXER, would agree to anyway because it was offered by Senator INHOFE.

This is an important piece of legislation. This legislation will put hundreds of thousands of people to work. So today's vote is again about priorities. Americans have been very clear, job creation is their No. 1 priority, their No. 2 priority, and their No. 3 priority. Democrats share that priority. Republicans obviously don't.

We will never stop bringing jobs bills to the floor, and we will never stop fighting the other side's obstructionism to try to get them passed. Again, Republicans have a different priority, it appears, and that is ending Medicare. And that is too bad. They have worked hard to block three bills that could have created and saved hundreds of thousands of jobs during tough economic times, but they pushed even harder for their ideological plan to kill Medicare as we know it.

The Republican plan would put insurance company bureaucrats between seniors and their doctors. Every senior would pay \$6,400 more for health care in the first year alone. It would force more than 7 million seniors to pay more for cancer screenings, wellness checks, and treatments beginning next year.

Americans have been clear about this too, very clear. They have resoundingly rejected this ideological plan to hurt seniors. Republicans think it is a

bad idea. Democrats think it is a bad idea. And, of course, the Independents think it is a bad idea. All polls show this.

Unfortunately, I haven't heard a shred of evidence that my Republican friends here in Congress are getting the message on Medicare that the American people have gotten. Today they will have a chance to show the American people once again whether they have heard the message on jobs. I hope they have, because so much is at stake. And America is watching.

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#### RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

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#### KENTUCKY COAL MINERS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, yesterday I came to the floor to report that there were several miners in my State trapped in a mine as a result of floods. I want to start today with an update on that situation.

I am happy to report that all three were rescued after spending 14 hours trapped in a Bell County coal mine. They were all reunited with their families last night, which is great news. Their families were waiting for them at the West Cumberland Baptist Church, and we are certainly glad this particular story had a happy ending.

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#### DEBT REDUCTION

Mr. McCONNELL. This morning, I wish to say a word about the upcoming vote on the debt ceiling and the bipartisan negotiation surrounding it, to reiterate why we are having these talks and what they ought to achieve. But first, a little context.

Right now, ratings agencies are threatening to downgrade U.S. debt, putting us on red alert that the kind of economic crisis we are seeing in parts of Europe could very quickly happen right here.

We know that failing to do something significant about our fiscal problems would be a serious drag on jobs and our economy. That is why, over the past several weeks, I have come to the floor of the Senate and spoken at press conferences, with a now familiar refrain: The time to act on significant reforms is right now. And I have been crystal clear about what qualifies as significant.

Above all, it means doing something to strengthen and preserve our long-term entitlement programs, so we can actually keep our promises to those who have been paying into these programs for years, and so these programs don't end up consuming every single dollar we take in. Entitlements are the biggest drivers of our debt. By definition, they have to be a part of any plan to lower the debt.

This is hardly a controversial view. Everyone from the President on down has said that entitlements must be reformed if we have any chance at all of reining in our debt and strengthening our long-term fiscal health.

In fact, 3 months ago, 31 Senate Democrats signed a letter to the President urging him to put together a plan to reduce the deficit, a plan they said they hoped would include entitlement changes, 31 members of the Democratic conference right here on the other side of the aisle, including the occupant of the chair.

As the occupant of the chair put it recently, "I think it's absolutely clear that we have to redesign our entitlement programs."

Here is how Senator DURBIN put it a few weeks ago: "We have serious economic problems ahead of us if we don't have some reform in both Medicare and Social Security."

This was from former President Bill Clinton after the recent congressional election in New York: "I don't think that the Democrats or the Republicans should conclude from the New York race that no changes can be made in Medicare," he said, "[or] that no changes can be made in Social Security . . . that no changes can be made that will deal with this long-term debt problem."

Here is President Obama's lead negotiator on the debt talks, Vice President BIDEN, from last January: "Everybody talks about we have to do something about Social Security and Medicare, and we do."

Here are the two chairs of the President's debt commission, Erskine Bowles and Alan Simpson, in a recent op-ed in "Politico": "A credible plan must address the growth of entitlement spending . . ."

Here is the President himself, about a month after he took office: "To preserve our long-term fiscal health we must . . . address the growing costs in Medicare and Social Security."

And, as for me, I have been clear on this same point in public and in private from the moment I stepped out of a meeting with the President and other Members of Congress at the White House on May 12.

So it is not exactly a groundbreaking observation that if these discussions are to mean anything they have to involve entitlement reform since no one believes we actually get at our fiscal problems without it. This is what serious people expect and are hoping for out of these talks.

The moment requires, as I have said for weeks, three things: Real cuts in spending over the short term; that is, over the next 2 years—not more spending increases or "freezes"; real cuts over the medium-term; that is, over the next 10 years with enforceable caps on spending; and meaningful reforms to entitlements, which are the major drivers of our debt. That is the definition of a significant package.

Some Democrats are insisting that they will only agree to cuts if Republicans agree to raise revenue. That is