

First, we must improve and reform our education system, from kindergarten through 12th grade, so we produce the skilled workers of tomorrow. Plus we need to train more scientists, engineers, and mathematicians so we do not risk falling behind China, India, and other global competitors.

All three of these executives—all of them—believe we must reform our immigration system to stay competitive. The brightest students from around the globe come to the United States to take advantage of our world-class universities. Unfortunately, our broken immigration system forces most of those students to go back to their home countries, where they compete with American companies. We should be keeping the best here, where they were educated, so they can build companies that employ U.S. workers.

Of course, we must simplify and streamline our broken tax system, lowering rates but eliminating loopholes so everyone pays his or her fair share, including corporations.

This is what three successful CEOs told us we should do to create jobs for American workers. I know these are big issues. They are complicated and politically divisive. We cannot tackle them all at once. But they are not the only solution. These three CEOs we met with last week said there are smaller, more manageable issues we can tackle right now. There are things we can do to help create jobs right now.

Mother Teresa urged us to “be faithful in small things because it is in them that your strength lies.” Putting Americans back to work can and should start with the small things.

This is what these three successful CEOs told us we should do to spur hiring:

First, reauthorize a program that gives grants to the technology companies that are inventing new products, such as the electric toothbrush or body armor for soldiers, so these innovators can continue to grow and hire. That is what we tried to do with the small business innovation research legislation. The Republicans stopped it.

Second, they said we should modernize America’s air travel system to make it safer and more efficient to fly American skies. That is what we tried to do when we reauthorized the Federal Aviation Administration, which is lost in the Republican-dominated House.

Third, we must reform our patent system and clear a 3-year backlog of applications. The next laptop computer or iPod could be in that pile, just waiting to be taken from the basement to the boardroom. That is what we tried to do with the America Invents Act. The House passed a version of our bill, but the person—for example, Senator COBURN—said he is going to stop this bill because it doesn’t have the payment system that was a good idea. We all thought that here. We voted for this 95 to 5. But, again, it has been stopped by the Republicans; that is, our patent system.

That is 580,000 jobs just for patents and FAA, and there are tens of thousands of jobs with small business innovation. These are commonsense steps we can take today. Each would help put people to work across the country. That is not just what the Senate says, that is what business leaders say. Here is the catch. Congress has already taken up, as I indicated, all three of these measures. Not one has become law. Why? Republicans have killed or stalled all three of these important pieces of legislation—legislation business owners say they need to put more than ½ million Americans back to work.

Putting Americans back to work must be our most important debt-reduction strategy. Democrats know it is critical that we reduce the deficit and pay down the national debt, but we will never balance the budget with 14 million people out of work.

Democrats know how to balance budgets. Remember, when Democrats in Congress helped President Clinton balance the budget in 1998, unemployment was 4.5 percent. Now, unfortunately, it is twice that. That is why we must do two things at once: reduce the deficit and do whatever it takes to get American workers back doing what they need to do to bring in a paycheck. The business leaders we spoke with support this two-pronged approach. Democrats and Republicans do not have to look hard to find common ground; we only have to be willing to admit it when we see it.

I met with the President earlier today. We had a productive meeting. My Republican counterpart will meet with the President this afternoon. I hope my Republican colleagues will put the economy ahead of politics and join us to create jobs and set aside their desire to please the tea party and defeat President Obama. This is the way forward. Neither party should confront this crisis alone, and no one will be successful unless we confront it together.

We owe the country our commitment to do at least the small things. Again I repeat Mother Teresa when she said it is in them; that is, the small things, that our strength lies. And they, in turn, will inspire faith that the big things will follow.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

THE DEBT CEILING

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, a little later today, I will sit down with President Obama to discuss his request to raise the Nation’s debt ceiling. When I do, I intend to make a request of my own. I intend to ask the President what he is prepared to do, outside of raising taxes, about the massive deficits and

debt that have accumulated on his watch. I will tell him what Republicans are looking for in this debate: to cut spending now, cap runaway spending in the future, save our entitlements from bankruptcy, and get our economy moving. I will tell him the truth about requests by some in his party that we increase spending and raise taxes as a way of solving the debt and jobs crisis that precipitated the President’s request to raise the debt limit in the first place: Not only are they counterproductive from the standpoint of an economic recovery, they are also politically impossible since Republicans oppose tax hikes and Democrats have already shown they will not raise taxes in a down economy either.

Let’s start by taking both proposals off the table and focus on what can actually pass Congress and what will actually spur the private sector in our future and create jobs. Those who are calling for tax hikes as a part of these debt discussions either have amnesia about the fate of similar proposals just 6 months ago when Democrats controlled both Chambers of Congress by very large margins, as well as the White House, or they are acting in bad faith since we all know that including massive job-killing tax hikes would be a poison pill.

Let’s move past the tax hikes, talk about what is actually possible, and let’s talk about what has and has not worked over the last 2 years. On this second point, this much is clear: If government spending were the answer to an economic slowdown, we would be in a boom time right now. Instead, we are facing record deficits and debt and a seemingly endless stream of bad economic news. Despite massive spending increases by Democrats, millions have lost their jobs.

The problem is that Washington spends too much. That means Democrats are simply going to have to make the kinds of tough choices about Washington’s budget that most other Americans have been forced to make about their own budgets over the past couple of years.

Last week, President Obama told a group of people he was prepared to bring down the deficit by trillions of dollars but refused to list any of the ways he was willing to do it. All he did was list the things he refused to cut. This weekend, the President proposed even more deficit-financed spending disguised as what he calls investment. You really cannot have it both ways.

At some point, the President needs to realize that the reason our debt has skyrocketed 35 percent over the last 2 years and that our annual deficit is now three times greater than the highest deficit the previous administration ever ran is that spending has spiraled completely and totally out of control and that the big-government policies of the last 2 years simply have to change. Consider the failed stimulus bill when Democrats passed it. They said it was a one-time cash infusion that was supposed to keep unemployment below 8