

for patent reform. We got that done too.

The President knows as well as we do we are happy to work with him whenever he is willing to work with us. If he turns his back on that good-faith offer, as we expect he will this year, we will remind people the problems we face are not about what Congress may or may not do in the future but what this President has already done—what has already happened.

Let the President turn his back on bipartisanship, let the press cover every futile speech and every staged event, but we intend to do our jobs. We invite him to join us.

I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 4 p.m. today, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with the time equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees, with the first 30 minutes controlled by the majority leader or his designee and the second 30 minutes controlled by the Republican leader or his designee.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Illinois.

BIPARTISAN COOPERATION

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I listened to the speech just given by the Republican leader of the Senate. He expresses a sentiment Americans share; that it is time for us to work together in the Senate and the House, across the board in Washington, and solve the problems which American families face every single day.

I agree with him completely. Unfortunately, the record does not reflect the level of cooperation which the American people are expecting. It was hardly a month or two into the Obama administration when the Republican leader announced that his highest priority was to make certain Barack Obama was a one-term President.

It is difficult to establish a working relationship when the first words out of a Republican leader's mouth are: We are going to defeat you. Then, as we addressed the largest issues of the day, time and again, we found little or no bipartisan cooperation. I think back to the important, historic debate on health care. If there was ever a moment when we should have come together with a bipartisan solution, it was that moment.

Despite the best efforts of Senator BAUCUS, the Democratic Finance chair and others, we were unable to even get

a core group of Republicans to join us in this conversation about containing the overwhelming increase in the cost of health care. At the end of the day, after one of the most painfully long and rancorous debates in Senate history, not one single Republican Senator would vote for health care reform—not one.

The same thing held true when it came to Wall Street reform. Many of us felt the recession we are currently coming out of was created by mismanagement and greed at the highest levels of our financial institutions. Many of us were angered by the fact that we were called on, with a political gun to our heads, and told, if we do not pass a bailout program for the biggest banks in America, our economy will crater and the weakest, poorest people in America will suffer the most.

That was our choice, our Faustian choice given at that moment. Many of us were determined to never let that happen again. So we put together a Wall Street reform bill. Senator Chris Dodd of Connecticut, now retired, led the effort on the Democratic side, and we tried to come up with a bipartisan bill. We worked to do it. He was masterful in his day and did everything in his power to make it a bipartisan bill. Yet at the end of the day, not one single Republican would vote for Wall Street reform—not one.

Now, on the campaign trail, we hear from Republican candidates that they are going to repeal Wall Street reform. They are going to repeal health care reform. They are not creating an environment that is conducive to the level of cooperation of which Senator MCCONNELL earlier spoke.

I hope he is right; that even in this Presidential election year, we can find some common ground. There are several items which are immediately before us which require it: First, the extension of the payroll tax cut. This is a cut that helps working families across America and helps the economy. It will expire at the end of February if we do not reach a bipartisan agreement to extend it, along with unemployment benefits.

Secondly, postal reform. Many of the suggestions that have been made by the Postmaster General about saving money at the post office create real hardship in States such as Illinois, where some nine different mail processing facilities would be closed, closed in areas where I, frankly, could never justify it because they do a volume of work, do it well, and perform a valuable function. We have a chance. By May 15, the deadline which the Postmaster General agreed to in my office—by May 15, if we enact legislation signed by the President to save money and keep the post office running in the right direction, then we can avoid some of these onerous cuts and choices we have heard about.

But the burden falls on Congress, Democrats and Republicans, to achieve it. I hope we can.

CUBA AND HAITI

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, last week, I had the opportunity to visit two island nations near our shores, Cuba and Haiti. Each is facing enormous problems—in Cuba, how to reform a Communist dictatorship of over half a century into a modern democratic member of the community of nations, and in Haiti how to rebuild from a devastating earthquake of 2 years ago in a nation already one of the poorest on Earth.

I concluded the trip more optimistic about Haiti, despite all its challenges, than Cuba, which quite simply appeared frozen in time in an ideology which should be cast aside for a more modern view of how to progress in the 21st century.

Let me start with Cuba. I am no fan of the Castro regime, but I am also no fan of the foreign policy of the United States. When I look back at what we tried to achieve for over 50 years in Cuba, any honest, objective analysis will have to tell you we did not achieve our goal. Fidel Castro is not a casualty of old age. He is still there, and his brother now reins as his successor in Cuba.

Despite some notable achievement in this nation of Cuba, in areas such as health and education—and I saw firsthand as I traveled around some of these achievements—the government has maintained a grip on this island which is unfair to many of the people who live there.

Political opposition is swiftly and harshly repressed, often with severe prison sentences and deeply troubling harassment. Those pursuing greater political freedom of government accountability at times even find their young children threatened, as was sadly noted in the New York Times on Sunday.

In this most recent incident, Maritza Pelegrino Cabrales found herself repeatedly harassed by government officials for associating with the Ladies in White, a group of wives, mothers, and daughters, of political prisoners. Incredibly, state security officers threatened to take away her 5- and 7-year-old daughters.

Other brave Cubans, such as Oswaldo Paya, who collected thousands of signatures on a petition calling for modest political change, found himself and his colleagues harassed and in some cases jailed. Tragically, the petition process for change was actually called for in the Cuban Constitution. He was only following the Constitution of his country, and he ended up being harassed and many who supported him arrested.

Nonetheless, under President Raul Castro, there has been some modest reform, the conditional release of some political prisoners, and some economic reform. There has also been some serious oil exploration underway off the coast of Cuba. I wanted to go to Cuba for the first time to visit that part of

Cuba, other than Guantanamo, to see what changes had taken place, to see what preparations the Cuban Government had made for offshore oil drilling within 50 miles of the State of Florida's coast, to see if the United States and Cuba could work together on potential environmental concerns related to such offshore drilling, to see if the 50-plus years of U.S. isolation were having the intended affect of creating a climate of political and economic reform.

Most important, I wished to talk to the Cuban Government about a 62-year-old American development worker, Alan Gross of Maryland, who has been imprisoned by the Cuban regime for more than 2 years. Gross was sentenced to 15 years for bringing Internet equipment to Cuba for the island's small Jewish community—15 years for bringing equipment to Cuba which any American could purchase at Radio Shack.

Fifteen years in prison, can anyone imagine that in today's world? That is a fact in Cuba. I sat for 2 hours with Mr. Gross. I am grateful the government let me do that. I did not know him in advance. I had heard a lot about him, but I took the measure of a man who is living under the most trying circumstances during that 2-hour meeting.

Alan Gross is no spy. He is no terrorist. He is no threat to Cuba or its future. He is a humble and kind man. He was not trying to overthrow their government. He was simply trying to expand communications and openness in Cuba. Now, while his family suffers in his absence back home, he languishes in a Cuban military hospital, a prisonlike atmosphere.

He told me what happened when he came to Cuba. He said: Understand, I used my American passport with my name and flew in on a Cuban-owned airline, landed in Havana and took every piece of equipment I was bringing in through Customs and stood there while they took each piece out of the box and inspected it. At one point, the Customs official said to him: What is this?

He said: It is a router.

He said: I am not sure you can bring it in.

At which point, Gross said: Then keep it. Just give me your name. I will come back and claim it as I leave the country.

The man said: No, wait a minute. Maybe if I charge you a duty you can bring it in.

Gross said: How much is the duty?

The man said: How much did it cost? Because it is 100 percent we are going to charge you.

He said: It cost \$100.

The duty is \$100 then.

He paid the \$100 and all the equipment passed through Customs, right on the table, inspected piece by piece. He brought it into the country. He stayed at a Cuban hotel. They knew where he was and his travels were well known,

as most travels are, to the Cuban Government. Then they arrested him and said he was guilty of trying to overthrow the government. It is hard to say with a straight face that Alan Gross was some agent of a government trying to overthrow the Cuban Government.

He languishes now over 2 years because of these accusations. They have taken away his shoes. He said at one point he could not have shoestrings because he might try to hang himself. It took him 7 months to convince them to allow his wife to bring him dental floss. He uses the dental floss for shoestrings. They took away his iPod. He has no access to music, and he sits there day after weary day. He told me his routine. It is a routine which I would find hard to imagine for any long period of time. He gets up at 6 o'clock. He is in a room with two other prisoners. He has mapped out a course on the floor he has measured that he walks every morning, back and forth and back and forth, for an hour and a half.

He says: If I do that route 500 times, it is the equivalent of 5 miles. So I walk that back and forth every morning when I get up. Then I get a little breakfast and listen to Cuban news. Finally, in the afternoon, they get a chance to go outside—1 hour outside. He says: They have some rebar hanging over a patio, and I do pullups to try to keep myself in decent physical condition.

He is suffering from a deteriorating back problem, which causes partial paralysis in his right leg. They wanted to treat him with chemotherapy, but he refused. I find it hard to imagine how chemotherapy could apply to that situation. He is a man who has other medical issues of arthritis and other problems, gout and other conditions, which do not make for a very comfortable life and, of course, the wear and tear on his mind from being separated from his family for so long.

I was very moved by my discussion with Alan Gross—his bravery and particularly his warmth toward the Cuban people. I said to one of the ministers of the government afterwards: You ought to sit down and talk to this man. He doesn't hate Cuba or the people of Cuba. He certainly wasn't coming in to overthrow your government. He would come back to America and say we need a better, stronger relationship between our two nations. Much different than some might expect.

I appealed to the Cuban Government when I was there—twice, three times, in fact—to consider a humanitarian release of Alan Gross, to show some compassion for this man, to show a gesture that could help improve relations between our two countries that have seen enough division and animosity.

I know our Interests Section under the Chief of Mission, John Caulfield, has worked tirelessly on this issue as well. Sadly, the Cuban Government seems determined to keep Alan Gross as a pawn, an innocent hostage in the endless and dated standoff between our

two nations. I hope I am wrong in that conclusion, but I left Cuba feeling this poor man was a victim of international horse trading which has been going on for five decades. I hope the government will show compassion and mercy to Mr. Gross and let him come home after 2 years of imprisonment.

Recently, President Raul Castro released over 290 political prisoners, including some Americans. Alan Gross was not included. He should have been. There is still a chance—a chance for the Cuban Government to do the right thing for Alan Gross and do something that will allow us to say there is real progress when it comes to dealing, at least in this instance, with a man who I believe has been falsely accused.

I hope there are some in the Cuban leadership who are tired of the old way of doing things—tired of decades of isolation and worn-out slogans blaming the superpower United States for every problem in Cuba, tired of a system of political and economic isolation that has nothing to do with the United States anymore and a system that keeps its people from joining the community of nations and sharing the many impressive talents of the Cuban people.

Nonetheless, while deeply troubled by Cuba's political repression and the impasse on Alan Gross, I continue to believe we should look for new ways to establish a relationship with Cuba. I believe that dramatically opening Cuba to the world at large, and America in particular—the ideas and the energy of the American people—is the best way to bring real and lasting change to that island. We have tried isolation for more than 50 years with, at best, mixed results.

It became clear to me during my visit that some of the hard-liners who were part of that revolution back in the 1950s are still in power and still clinging to their old ideology. It is time for something new in Cuba, and it is time for something new in our policy—a new diplomacy with Cuba. There are a lot of people who disagree with me on this issue in this Chamber and on the outside, including many of my close friends. But ultimately we have the same goal: We want real freedom in Cuba and we want to work to make sure the United States has a friend 90 miles off our shore. I hope that day is near.

Mr. President, I then visited Haiti. It was my third trip to that poor country. It is the poorest nation on our side of the globe. And, of course, the poverty preceded an earthquake of a little over 2 years ago. It is a flight of about 90 minutes from Miami, but in many ways it is a world apart. Its proud and kind people have suffered unimaginable misfortune, both at the hands of repressive dictators and from Mother Nature.

The history of Haiti is fascinating. They overthrew slavery, took control of their nation, and for almost 50 years waited for the U.S. Government to recognize them as a nation. Because we

were divided in our country over the issue of slavery, it was too hot to handle. It was an issue we wouldn't touch until the Civil War began. Abraham Lincoln was President, and he recognized the Republic of Haiti for the first time as a sovereign nation.

Two years ago, the world showed an outpouring of generosity and humanity to help this country when it was devastated by an earthquake. As you travel around Port au Prince, as we did last week, you can still see the rubble, you can still see the pancaked buildings where so many people died. Thousands responded, donating time and endless efforts, and they still do.

The plane from Miami to Port au Prince was loaded with Americans—many of them wearing crosses around their necks, tee shirts advertising the charitable causes they were supporting—headed to Haiti to help. That spirit of giving has sustained the Haitian people through a very difficult time. Former Presidents Clinton and George W. Bush helped raise money for those efforts and the rebuilding efforts that followed.

Today, more than half of the 1 million displaced persons have left the camps in Port au Prince and around the Island of Haiti and found homes. Believe me, their homes are modest by American standards. To walk into an 8-foot-by-8-foot room and have the woman there tell me time and again that four or five people live in that room is hard for many Americans to imagine, but for these Haitians it is an improvement over where they were before.

Many of the changes in Haiti are fragile and there is a great deal of work to be done, but improvements are real. I recommend to those who go to Port au Prince to visit one project—several, actually, but one in particular—a group called GHESKIO, in partnership with the Centers for Disease Control. This group is showing what can happen with a modest, small investment by the United States.

Many years ago, I worked to pass legislation known as the Paul Simon Water for the Poor Act. It was not funded at any great level, but it was an opportunity to have some money available for developing nations around the world to find portable, clean, safe drinking water. How important is that? Right now, Haiti faces the threat of a cholera epidemic, which literally kills innocent people, and it is because they do not have safe drinking water.

But smack dab in the middle of Port au Prince, at this GHESKIO project, Dr. Deschamps—an amazing woman, who took me on a tour—pointed to the ground to a little piece of equipment and said: This is our well, and you built it with the Paul Simon Water for the Poor Act.

She said: We had to drill down 600 feet, but we found crystal clear water, and we bring it up, put it in a holding tank, treat it with chlorine, and we provide water for 100,000 people.

I asked her: How much did it cost to build the project? She said \$25,000. Imagine, \$25,000. Think of the cost in human terms, not to mention economic terms, of a cholera epidemic and the suffering that would follow.

This is a lesson for us in America, to learn that small contributions in the right places can dramatically change lives in the poorest places on Earth. The people in that camp and those who are served know the American people cared enough to let them drill a well which gives them safe water for their children and families. We can and should do more, even with our limited means.

We witnessed a group called Partners in Health led by a fellow by the name of Dr. Paul Farmer, an inspiring man whom I read about and have come to know personally. He continues to extend the reach of care and health care to the poorest people on that Haitian island. We visited one of his camps, where literally the day after the earthquake they went into a hospital and found 40 children in a hospital ward unattended. Because of the earthquake, people fled and died in the process, but these kids survived. It was Dr. Paul Farmer of Partners in Health who brought them in.

About one-fourth of these children are special needs children who could not survive were it not for his leadership. They are there being fed and cared for and clothed because of the kindness of this man and the wonderful volunteers who are part of his organization.

We went back to a project I visited years ago with Senator Mike DeWine from the State of Ohio. He and his wife Fran invited me down to meet Father Tom Hagan of Philadelphia, who in 1985 went down to Haiti with a group of students from Lafayette College and decided this was where he needed to spend the rest of his life. He created a group called Hands Together, and now that organization literally educates and feeds hundreds of poor children and elderly people in Haiti.

It is refreshing and rewarding to go see this work and to realize that amidst all the storm and fury of our political debate there are good people, many from our own country, who do such amazing things with little or no recognition. Father Tom Hagan of Hands Together in Port au Prince, in one of the poorest sections, is a living example of that.

I wanted to thank our own embassy staff, our Ambassador Ken Merten in Port au Prince. This is his third or fourth assignment in Haiti. He and his wife love Haiti. They speak Creole. He is a wonderful representative of the United States and works tirelessly to help these poor people.

We had a meeting with the new President of Haiti, President Martelly. I didn't know what to expect, Mr. President. Here is a man who made his name as a punk Reggae rap star and got elected President. So I didn't know

what I was going to find when I walked in the room. But what I found was a bundle of energy leaping off the couch and saying: Let's get these things done. Cut through the redtape. My people need it and they need it now. What a dramatic, positive change over some of his predecessors, and I was happy to meet with him.

Then, Prime Minister Conille, a medical doctor from Haiti who was working in the United Nations in New York making over \$200,000 a year as Chief of Staff to former President Clinton in his role as envoy from the United Nations to Haiti, gave up that post in New York to take the job of Prime Minister in Haiti for \$35,000 a year. This is a medical doctor and a wonderful man who clearly has no separate personal agenda. He just wants to help the people of this island.

I left Haiti very heartened by my meetings with those two individuals. Their energy, determination, and thoughtfulness give me hope for Haiti—a nation that needs so much more. They recognize Haiti will never be on the full path to recovery and long-term stability without educating its people and employing them and bringing the kind of leadership and foreign investment so that their nation can grow. We in the United States should support that effort.

I am going to urge Chairman JOHN KERRY of the Foreign Relations Committee—a committee on which the Presiding Officer and I serve—to advance the Haiti Reforestation Act. That is an issue which was brought up by many of the leaders we met with. I introduced it originally with Senator SUSAN COLLINS and Senator KERRY some months ago. We want to tackle one of Haiti's most entrenched, long-term problems, which has a spillover effect on a lot of key issues such as agriculture and the flooding that can hit this poor nation.

The last night we were in Haiti, in our room, there was a violent thunderstorm. The lady who ran our gathering place in the inn came to me and said: I will guarantee you in the morning there will be press reports that two or three people drowned and died because of this rainstorm. It is not uncommon in Haiti. That is why reforestation is part of the solution to that terrible problem.

I want to make sure my colleagues understand how important our involvement is. I asked how many groups had come down recently from Congress to visit Haiti. I was told that my colleague, Senator MARK RUBIO from the State of Florida, had been there a few days before. I know Senator BILL NELSON has spent time there with his wife making the right contacts and stopping in this nation. But for those in the Senate and House, of both political parties, who are looking for an opportunity to see where a small amount of American taxpayer dollars is making a huge difference in the lives of some of the poorest people in the Western Hemisphere, that hour-and-a-half trip

from Miami to Haiti is worth your time.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

AUTHORIZING APPOINTMENT OF ESCORT COMMITTEE

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Presiding Officer of the Senate be authorized to appoint a committee on the part of the Senate to join a like committee on the part of the House of Representatives to escort the President of the United States into the House Chamber for the joint session to be held tonight at 9 p.m.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Georgia.

Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. ISAKSON. I would further ask to be recognized as if in morning business.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

THE BUDGET

Mr. ISAKSON. We are back. Tonight, I understand, the Presiding Officer and I will be sitting together at the State of the Union event, which I am pleased to do. It is always a historic and seminal moment in our legislative process when the President of the United States talks about and lays out his plans for the future.

From watching this morning on television and from reading some of the accounts of what is thought will be said tonight—I don't know what is going to be said yet—one of the overriding themes is going to be that of fairness. I think that is an important point for us to focus on in a second, particularly with regard to our spending, our debt, and our deficit, about what is fair to the American people.

Last night—and I brought some notes—I did a telephone townhall meeting back to Georgia. We had thousands of people listening in on the call. I was able to take 17 questions in the course of an hour and one of the questions was from Fred in Barnesville, GA. Fred is a small businessperson. He asked this question: Senator, you were a small businessman; I am a small businessman. We had to operate within a budget. Why is it the U.S. Government doesn't have a budget? I think today is the 1,000th day we have been operating without a budget.

That was a fair question. So if we want to talk about fairness for a

minute, my contribution to fairness is going to be: What is fair to the American people, the American businessman, the American employer, the American employee? Let's think about it for a second.

A budget is a guide by which we try to live under. It is an appropriation of our priorities for the future based on what we think we will need to accomplish our goals. But if we are without a budget, then we have the tendency to do what America has done over the last 3 years; that is, exponentially increase its debt and its deficit. What that has done is put a pall on the recovery and a pall on the economy.

I would suggest the fairest thing we can do in the Congress and the fairest thing the administration can do is to see to it that we have a budget submitted, that it come to the floor of the House and Senate, that it be adopted, and then, more important, that we change our pace around here and live within that budget.

I have some suggestions as to how we do that, but first and foremost I urge the White House to submit a budget this year. I understand, from this morning's announcements, it will be delayed until February 13. That is fine with me. But the quicker we get it to us, the better we are. Then, let the Budget Committees of the House and Senate act, and let us end up with a framework—not just for 1 year but, as the Presiding Officer knows, for 10 years—because we forecast out those budgets and those complications of those budgets for 10 years.

But we have a broken system. We also have a broken will to do what is most important for the American people when it comes to spending their money. I wish to suggest how we change our habits and become a fairer legislative body and a fairer governing body for the American people.

Senator JEANNE SHAHEEN and I introduced a bill 1 year ago called the biennial budget. It amends the Budget Control Act of the United States of America and changes the way we do business. It portends that, in the future, instead of appropriating and budgeting for 1 year, we will do it in 2-year cycles, and we will always do our appropriating and our budgeting in the odd-numbered years so, in the even-numbered year of reelection, we are doing oversight and fiscal responsibility.

I think everybody in this room will admit we make an effort at oversight, to a certain extent, but practically speaking not near the oversight the American people have to do.

It is ironic that our country, our people, our families, our retirees, our business folks, our employees the last 4 years of the recession have sat around their kitchen table lots of times. They reprioritized what they could afford and what they couldn't. They reallocated their resources to take care of their family and their children and they have been frugal and they have been conservative because they have

to. They can't deficit spend. They can't borrow themselves into oblivion. They can't print the money and they can't write the checks. Don't you think the government of the people who are having to do that ought to have to at least live under the same set of circumstances?

We need for this room to become a big kitchen table, big enough for 100 people of good will to sit down together. We need a White House that will submit a budget we can then argue about and set the priorities of this country and try and put a governor on what we are spending, try and put some type of accountability for where we are going, try and forecast into the future what it is the American people can expect of all of us.

So when tonight the President talks about fairness, I hope one of his quotes will be: It is only fair to expect me, the President, to submit a budget to the Congress, and it is only fair for me, the President, to expect the Congress to act on that budget—because, after all, everything else flows from that. In the absence of budget responsibility, budget restrictions, budget projections, and a calculus for the future, we are spending without any governor or guide. It is akin to trying to drive from here to Alaska without a roadmap. I couldn't get there. I would probably have a wreck. I would probably run off the road because we don't know where we are going and we don't know how we are getting there.

Unfortunately, of all the institutions in America, there is only one that doesn't know where it is going and how it is getting there, and that happens to be the government of the United States of America.

So my message, this day of the State of the Union and this statement of fairness, let's be fair to the American people. Let's ask of ourselves what they are having to ask of themselves because of high deficits and high debt. Those living on fixed incomes are seeing interest rates of 0.25 percent—almost negligible. Markets have been flat in terms of investment. Real estate values are down 33 percent nationwide. I saw last night in Tampa, where the Presidential debate was, it is 52 percent. The worst it got post-1929 was 31 percent.

We have the most significant, serious financial crisis in the history of the United States of America, and it is impacting our families and our people.

So let's ask of ourselves, let's ask of our President what every American family has had to ask of itself—sit around our kitchen table and budget and prioritize. I would submit Senator SHAHEEN and I have a roadmap that works for process. It says do it in 2-year cycles, so we are committed to spending in 1 year and we are committed to savings, efficiency, accountability, and repealing out-of-date programs the other year.

Wouldn't it be a great change in the body of politics for you and for I to be