

job-centered policies, amendments that deserve not just a vote but bipartisan support. For example, an amendment from the junior Senator from South Carolina would eliminate ObamaCare's 30-hour workweek rule, which is hurting Americans' take-home pay in our already depressed economy.

One of our Members from Utah is putting forward an amendment to repeal ObamaCare's job-destroying medical device tax. A good number of Democratic Senators have joined us in the past to get rid of this job killer, and they deserve the opportunity to help us eliminate it once and for all.

The senior Senator from North Dakota has an amendment that would speed approval of the Keystone Pipeline. This is a project that would create thousands of jobs right away, and it is just a no-brainer. Senate Democrats need to join Democrats across the country who have already endorsed this commonsense initiative and help us pass it.

I personally plan to file an amendment that would give Congress the ability to stop EPA's back-door national energy tax and would also keep unelected bureaucrats from blocking desperately needed jobs in Kentucky by sitting on surface mining permitting. Remember, this administration's anti-Kentucky policies have helped bring about a depression—that is a depression with a capital D—in many Kentucky coal counties. It is about time they started having a little compassion for the coal families who just want to put food on the table, and that is exactly what my amendment aims to do.

So these are just a few of the many proposals Republican Senators will be putting forward this week. They represent the kind of solutions our country needs right now to finally emerge from this awful economy—real solutions that focus on creating well-paying jobs, increasing take-home pay, training a world-class workforce, and breaking a seemingly endless cycle of chronic high unemployment.

As I have indicated, we have tried the Washington Democratic approach for years now. We know that it just hasn't worked. We know their new agenda isn't serious, that it is nothing more than an ObamaCare distraction strategy. We know this because Democrats actually told us it was created by their campaign committee, that it was designed to appeal to their base.

So if the Democratic majority is finally ready to get down to business and create jobs, this is a moment to prove it. This is the moment to drop the endless campaigning. This is the moment to work with us to actually create jobs and help the middle class, and this is the moment for legislation that would do just that.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there will be a period of morning business for one hour. Senators are permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with the time equally divided between the two leaders or their designees, and the majority controlling the first half of the time.

The Senator from Illinois.

FILING DEADLINE

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent the filing deadline for first degree amendments to H.R. 3979, which is the legislative vehicle for the unemployment insurance extension, be at 2:30 p.m. today, April 1.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. DURBIN. I listened carefully to the statement just made by the Republican leader, Senator McCONNELL of Kentucky, in which he promised concrete ideas, real hope, change, job-related approaches, free enterprise—giving free enterprise a chance, trying to deal with putting America back to work. Then he gave us three examples.

I might say to the Senator that I am familiar with all three because none of these are new. We have heard them over and over from the Republican side of the aisle. I will not go through each one of them. A couple of them relate to the Affordable Care Act. It is interesting to me that the House of Representatives has voted—I believe 45 times—to repeal the Affordable Care Act. The Senator from Kentucky said we have to get back to free enterprise ideas.

Let me tell you about the free enterprise idea when it came to health care. Before the passage of the Affordable Care Act, the free enterprise idea was this: If you and your family were unfortunate enough to have a sick baby, if your wife was a cancer survivor, if your child had diabetes, the free enterprise answer was: We will raise the cost of health insurance to the point that you cannot afford it or we won't even offer it. That was the free enterprise idea on health insurance for millions of American families.

There was another free enterprise idea out there in health care as well. It said: We are going to sell you health insurance policies that just protect you up to a certain amount of money. If tomorrow you are in a terrible auto accident, if the day after tomorrow you are diagnosed with cancer and face millions of dollars of radiation, surgery, and care before you can get your life back together again, be my guest to pay for it yourselves. That is why medical bills are the number one driver of bankruptcy in America today. That is free enterprise at work. But we said, let's put some sensible rules for the

road in here, so that families who buy health insurance have the promise that they will have peace of mind when they face these life threatening struggles which families face every day.

So we passed the Affordable Care Act and not a single Republican—not one—not a single Republican would join us in that effort. We rejected the free enterprise approach to health care and said let's have something that basically respects families, basically respects the needs we all have to have protection when somebody in the house is sick. Not a single Republican would support us, and they never have since.

The bill we passed isn't perfect. Changes will have to be made. I have said that from the start, although I supported it. But not a single Republican has been willing to sit down and work on bipartisan compromises and changes—not one. It is take it or leave it, and they want to walk away from it.

We are not going back to those old days. I can guarantee them that the American people will never return to their idea of health insurance because it was fundamentally unfair, it was too expensive, and a lot of Americans didn't have a fighting chance to ever have health insurance once in their lives. Things have changed. The reports are in, and the reports are telling us that dramatic things are occurring. As the Affordable Care Act's initial enrollment period closes, at least 9.5 million previously uninsured people have gained coverage. Some have done so through the marketplaces created by law, some through private insurance, others through an expanded Medicaid. Incidentally, Medicaid has been expanded in about half of the States.

Listen to this: The increased coverage from the Affordable Care Act so far amounts to substantial progress toward one of the law's principal goals. It is the most significant expansion of health care coverage since the creation of Medicare and Medicaid 49 years ago.

The Republicans want to return to the "good old days," and they want to tell these people being uninsured is really better for you. It is the free enterprise system.

That is not good enough, I say to my friends on the other side of the aisle. What we have here is an opportunity for families for the first time in their lives to have health insurance coverage.

Has there ever been a moment in your life where you had a sick baby and you were in the hospital waiting room and you had no health insurance? I have. It happened when I was in law school. I remember it to this day, sitting there with my wife and baby with a number in my hand waiting to see who would walk through that door and be the doctor for my baby. You will never forget that as long as you live. That shouldn't happen to anybody. Everyone should have the peace of mind of health insurance coverage, and that is what this bill does. If the Senators on the other side want to return to the

“good old days” of no coverage, I can just tell you, America is not going back.

We are not going back to the days when families with kids graduating from college had no health insurance while they looked for a job. We protect those families until the kids reach the age of 26. We are not going back to the days when struggling senior citizens can't afford to pay for their prescription drugs because of the so-called doughnut hole. We are not going back to that day. We are going to move forward as a Nation.

Is this bill perfect? Of course not. Should it be changed for the better? Yes. But let's not lose sight of what we have achieved and what we can achieve if we work together.

THE MINIMUM WAGE

When it comes to the creation of jobs, there is something else I want to say. I believe that people who get up and go to work every single day, who work hard for a living and are not lazy at all, should not be living in poverty. That is it—a basic statement. If you want to go to work, work hard 40 hours a week, you should not be living in poverty in America, and that is happening because the minimum wage is \$7.25 an hour. Do the math. It is less than \$16,000 a year to live on. Who could do it? Well, some people try and struggle paycheck to paycheck.

Yesterday in Chicago, IL, Gloria came to the microphone in the Federal Plaza and told the story of working a minimum-wage job. She has two kids and lives in a homeless shelter—40 hours a week on minimum wage and living in a homeless shelter. Come on. This is a better Nation.

Would I pay 10 cents more for a hamburger so Gloria would have enough money to have the dignity to live in her own place with her children? You bet I would, and I wouldn't think twice about it. We ought to have respect for people who work in this country. Raising the minimum wage to \$10.10 an hour is our show of respect for the people who get up and go to work every darn day. They are on the buses of New Jersey in the morning. They are on the trains of Chicago in the morning. They just dropped the kids off, and they are hoping that they are going to be safe because it is a neighbor and it is the best they can do for daycare. There wasn't a lot in the refrigerator when they left their house. They are hoping to pick up something before they get home. They go to work every day, and they know that struggle is going to be repeated over and over.

The free enterprise system is the best system in the world, but there are moments when we need to step in as the American family and set some standards, set some goals.

UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION BENEFITS

The same thing is true for unemployment compensation. We finally have a bipartisan approach to this in the Senate—five Democrats and five Republicans. We have worked out a plan we

are going to pass, I think—let's keep our fingers crossed. We are going to pass an extension of unemployment benefits.

What do these benefits mean? It means if you are out of work—some people who work for 20 years in the same place, lost their jobs, now they are trying to find another job—we are going to help you keep your family together while you are looking for that job. How much money are we talking about here? The average is \$300 a week.

How long could you get by on \$300 a week? It would be tough, wouldn't it, to pay the rent, mortgage, utility bills, food, clothes, shoes for the kids, cell phone—you need that to find a job, don't you—300 bucks a week. Well, we have a chance to pass a bipartisan bill on unemployment compensation for a 5-month period to cover these folks, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Republican JOHN BOEHNER, says: Forget it—dead on arrival. Won't even take it up; won't consider it. I think he's wrong, and I think it is unfair, and I think these people deserve a fighting chance. They want to become part of the free enterprise system again, and our giving them a helping hand in time of need is what every family expects and what they usually offer when asked to help. But instead, what Speaker BOEHNER has said is: No way, you are out of it. You are out of work. You are out of luck. I don't buy it.

There have been times in my life and in the lives of most people when neighbors, friends and relatives, and even the government came in to give a helping hand. For me it was government loans when I went to school. I couldn't have done it without it. I think it has paid off. It sure has in my life. Ultimately the voters have the last word about whether Speaker BOEHNER's approach against unemployment compensation is the right way to do it.

There is another bill we are going to take up next week—pay equity. My wife and I have been blessed with a daughter and a son. They are both in the marketplace and both are talented. We are so proud of them. There is no reason why a daughter should be paid less than a son for the same work, but it happens every single day.

We have to establish a standard in America of equal opportunity and mean it, equal opportunity when it comes to daughters and sons and women and men in the workplace. It is not too much to ask.

The first bill President Obama signed into law as President was the Lilly Ledbetter Act. I remember this woman. She worked in Alabama in a tire factory. After she had been there more than 10 years, she finally realized she was doing the same job as the man standing next to her but paid less every single day. She had enough of it so she brought a lawsuit against the company. The Supreme Court turned her away so we had to change the law, and the President signed the Lilly Ledbetter Act into law to make sure women had a fighting chance.

We now want to move it to a new level and make sure that pay equity for those in the workplace is an American dream come true. We can do that. The free enterprise system is good, but, listen—let's be honest about it—in some aspects it doesn't reach the goals we want in terms of equal opportunity in this country.

I also want to make a point about the whole question of affordable care. I happened to have met a man by the name of Ray Romanowski. He was in a health care clinic in Chicago. He is 62 years old and has been a part-time worker and musician most of his life. For the first time in his life Ray Romanowski has health insurance. He has a Medicaid card. He was patting his wallet, and he said: I can't tell you how good I feel now that I finally got this health insurance.

There are some people who don't understand Medicaid. Medicaid is health insurance for low-income people in America, and millions depend on it every single day. Recently some Republicans made statements discrediting the Medicaid Program. Let me set the record straight: Medicaid is successful. It has been a lifeline for millions of people, and especially for children. My friends on the other side of the aisle find it easy to discredit a government program. As Senator MCCONNELL said earlier, we tend to look to the government. Well, we do when there is no place else to look. In this case, these individuals had no chance for health insurance without government's help. Over 54 million people benefit from Medicaid, and it is not surprising that interest in this program grows when our economy is struggling.

Before the Affordable Care Act, two out of three people on Medicaid were pregnant women and children—36 million of our most vulnerable citizens. Medicaid also serves the disabled. It has been a lifeline for those who have a low income and are disabled. Before the Affordable Care Act, almost 3 million people were covered by Medicaid in Illinois and over 50 percent of all births were covered by Medicaid. Since the Affordable Care Act was signed into law, over 210,000 people in Illinois have signed up for Medicaid, and thousands more who are eligible are in the process of finishing up their paperwork, and that is a success.

According to 2011 data, 65 percent of all office space physicians in Illinois would take Medicaid patients. Nationwide the number is 70 percent. This argument that new Medicaid patients won't have a place to go for care is wrong.

I see that Senator HARKIN from Iowa, chairman of our HELP Committee, is on the floor. He was one of the real leaders when it came to the determination of the Affordable Care Act and how many people would be covered. I will yield the floor to him in 1 minute, but before I yield, let me say this: The Affordable Care Act is making a difference. For people in the low-income

category, Medicaid means when they walk into a hospital facing a medical emergency or need for care, they will not walk away leaving bills behind them. Their bills will be paid by the Medicaid system, and that is part of what we are trying to achieve—the personal responsibility that every person, every family, and every business will have a responsibility to have health insurance and an opportunity for an affordable alternative.

The free enterprise system is a strong system. The free enterprise system created unfairness and injustice when it came to health care, which we are addressing with this Affordable Care Act.

I yield the floor for Senator HARKIN and thank him for his leadership on this issue.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, I want to thank our majority whip again for telling it like it is and what is happening with health care in America today. We have come too far to turn back. We have made tremendous changes in the way people are going to access the health care system in America because of the Affordable Care Act.

Look, we all admit there were mistakes made. Were there glitches? Yes. But we went from a system where people were excluded from getting health care, and Senator DURBIN talked about them. There are various people with preexisting conditions, kids and people who had no access to health care whatsoever, and now they are covered. That is a huge leap in this country. We made some mistakes, had a few glitches, and we worked those out.

Our friends on the other side say: No, ditch the whole thing. Get rid of everything. Turn the clock back. I agree with the Senator from Illinois, people don't want to turn the clock back. They want to move ahead. They are getting covered more than ever before with affordable coverage they have never had before and we are not going to turn the clock back. I thank the Senator.

MINIMUM WAGE

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, I want to take the time this morning to talk about an issue that has been brewing for a long time and is going to come to a head in the Senate sometime in the next several days, I hope, and it is one which compels us to do something, and that is to raise the minimum wage in the United States of America. We have waited too long to do this, and so we have to act on it as soon as possible.

I wish to point out some of the data and some of the statistics confronting us right now. First of all, why should anyone be afraid of voting to raise the minimum wage? The American people are way ahead of us on this. Let's look at the polling data.

This chart shows the results of a poll to increase the minimum wage to \$10.10

an hour. It shows that 73 percent of all voters want to raise the minimum wage, and that 90 percent of Democrats, 71 percent of Independents, and even 53 percent of Republicans say we ought to be raise the minimum wage. The vast majority of American people want to do this.

This is again a chart from across the country. We have Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, my State of Iowa, Kentucky, Mississippi, Wisconsin—52 percent, 73 percent, 61 percent, and 54 percent. The vast majority of Americans in these States say: Yes, we need to raise the minimum wage, so it is not just one part of the country.

Small business owners support raising the minimum wage. A poll done of small business owners shows that 57 percent say we should raise the minimum wage as opposed to 43 percent. Small businesses get it.

The voters say that raising the minimum wage will help the economy. This comports with over 600 economists—including what several Nobel prize economists have said—who say that raising the minimum wage will boost aggregate demand and raise the GDP in America. The economy will benefit.

Well, you know what. The American people get it. They may not understand all of the intricacies of economics and economic analysis, but they get it. Of those who were polled, 56 percent believe it will help the economy, 22 percent said they don't know, and only 21 percent say it will hurt the economy. The vast majority of Americans understand in their bones that raising the minimum wage is going to help the economy. Why? Because they know it will put more spending power in their pockets.

When people in lower wage jobs get more money, what do they do? They don't go to Europe, they don't buy private islands and private jets, they spend it in the local economy, such as Main Street, where the small businesses are. Again, the American people get it.

Why should we be concerned about this right now? The minimum wage has not kept up with average wages. In 1968, the minimum wage was 53 percent of the average wage in America. Today it is 36 percent of the average wage in America, which is a tremendous decline between those who get the minimum wage and what the average wages are in America.

Since 2009, the last time we had an increase in the minimum wage, let's look at what happened to the things that low-income people have to spend their money on. As I said, they are not renting private jets and they are not going to fancy restaurants to eat, but they do have to spend money on electricity, rent, auto repair, food at home, childcare, and mass transit. So the minimum wage has gone up 0 percent since 2009. Electricity has gone up 4.2 percent, rent has gone up 7.3 percent, auto repair has gone up 7.6 percent,

food at home has gone up 8.8 percent, childcare has gone up 11.7 percent, and mass transit has had a 18-percent increase. If you are a minimum wage worker, all of your costs have gone up, but your income has basically stayed the same.

Here is another thing the American people get; they understand this. CEOs get big raises. Since 2009, the last time we had an increase in the minimum wage, CEO raises have gone up 23 percent, 14 percent, and 5 percent, which is about 40-some percent. Minimum wage has stayed the same. Those at the top keep getting more and more and more, but low-income workers get nothing. They keep falling further and further behind.

How are we doing compared to other countries? We always say, we are doing all right. What are we doing compared to other countries? Here is an example of the national minimum wage rate in nominal U.S. dollars. Right now the United States is third from the bottom. There is Portugal, Spain, and there is the United States. Look at who is ahead of us: Austria, Japan, Canada, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Ireland, Belgium, France, Luxembourg, and Australia. Australia's minimum wage is \$16.34 an hour in U.S. dollars. France's minimum wage is \$11.98, Ireland is \$11.16; New Zealand is at \$10.96 an hour. We are way behind other countries in what the minimum wage is.

Here is who benefits: Twenty-eight million workers will get a raise if we raise the minimum wage. Fifteen million women, thirteen million men, four million African-American workers—I will have more to say about that—7 million Hispanic workers, and 7 million parents will get a raise. Again, that is not just minimum wage workers. Almost everyone who makes less than \$10.10 an hour—and many who earn just above \$10.10—will get a raise. It will not just be those who are making \$7.25, there will be a lot of other people who will also get a raise.

That is another thing I have heard from my Republican friends. They say: Well, there are a lot of people who are making up to \$40,000 a year and families will make more money. That is true. Raising the minimum wage will not just help people who are in poverty. It is true that it helps to get them out of poverty, but it also helps low-income families. Let's say there are two workers in the family and they are both low-income workers. They are making above the minimum wage, but they are low income. Perhaps you have a family with three kids and the breadwinner makes a decent income of \$30,000 and the other makes minimum wage; that family too will get an increase.

Here is what happens: About 21 percent of workers in America will get a raise, and almost everyone has family income of less than \$60,000 a year. Eighty-three percent of workers who will get a raise under my bill are in