

political advantage? How do I look good? How do I accomplish what I want to accomplish for me or my State? I think it is important that we understand there is no State in this country that can be healthy if our country is not healthy—if the country isn't economically healthy, if it is not socially healthy. If it is not, then we have not done our job.

My apologies to the leader for putting him in this position. It is with a very intended sense of commitment that I want us to try to pay for this. I understand there is disagreement in that regard, but I look forward to trying to solve this problem, and if we can, I look forward to having the debate as it goes forward.

I yield to the majority leader.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

Mr. REID. I say to my friend from Oklahoma, he has not put me in an awkward position at all. We would have been happy just to vote on this.

That being the case, what I will do—and I alert everybody we are not going to rush this, so people will have time to get here—I move to table the motion to proceed.

I ask for the yeas and nays.

Mr. COBURN. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. KYL. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Georgia (Mr. ISAKSON).

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. SHAHEEN). Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 59, nays 40, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 106 Leg.]

YEAS—59

Akaka	Franken	Murray
Baucus	Gillibrand	Nelson (NE)
Bayh	Hagan	Nelson (FL)
Begich	Harkin	Pryor
Bennet	Inouye	Reed
Bingaman	Johnson	Reid
Boxer	Kaufman	Rockefeller
Brown (OH)	Kerry	Sanders
Burr	Klobuchar	Schumer
Byrd	Kohl	Shaheen
Cantwell	Landrieu	Specter
Cardin	Lautenberg	Stabenow
Carper	Leahy	Tester
Casey	Levin	Udall (CO)
Conrad	Lieberman	Udall (NM)
Dodd	Lincoln	Warner
Dorgan	McCaskill	Webb
Durbin	Menendez	Whitehouse
Feingold	Merkley	Wyden
Feinstein	Mikulski	

NAYS—40

Alexander	Brownback	Cochran
Barraso	Bunning	Collins
Bennett	Burr	Corker
Bond	Chambliss	Cornyn
Brown (MA)	Coburn	Crapo

DeMint	Johanns	Sessions
Ensign	Kyl	Shelby
Enzi	LeMieux	Snowe
Graham	Lugar	Thune
Grassley	McCain	Vitter
Gregg	McConnell	Voinovich
Hatch	Murkowski	Wicker
Hutchison	Risch	
Inhofe	Roberts	

NOT VOTING—1

Isakson

The motion was agreed to.

Mrs. McCASKILL. I move to reconsider the vote.

Mr. BROWN of Ohio. I move to lay that motion on the table.

The motion to lay on the table was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. REED. Madam President, even though we have made an extraordinary advance in health care reform, we still have millions of Americans who are without jobs and in need of unemployment insurance. We are in a situation that requires action.

Early this month, we were able to pass a 30-day extension by a vote of 78 to 19. It was overwhelmingly adopted, but it was not quickly adopted because of the delay and the procedures imposed upon the process. We might in this Chamber understand the nuances of rules and procedures, but for the people who have been without work for up to a year or more, the nuances escape them. They need help. The reality is, on April 5 this extension will expire. We will not be in session, so we are here today to continue the work that we must do as Members of this Senate.

We have already passed in this body a year-long extension along with some other tax provisions—again, under the leadership of Chairman BAUCUS. That provision is over in the House, and it is unlikely to move today or tomorrow. The House sent us a provision for another 1-month extension. That is bottled up. But, again, all of these legislative initiatives do not put the check in the mail for those who are without work.

That is what we have to do. We have to pass another extension, at least to get us from April into next month and beyond. Of course, I think the year-long extension until the end of this calendar year is the right approach. It has already been adopted, and I hope we can return and embrace that proposal.

If we do not move, at a minimum, for a temporary extension, approximately 1,200 Rhode Islanders will start losing their benefits each week starting April 5. By the end of April, three-quarters of 1 million unemployed workers across the Nation will lose their benefits.

This is at a moment when we are beginning to see some economic traction, some reports of progress in labor markets. Just today it was reported that

initial unemployment claims fell by 14,000—a number much larger than the experts expected. Now we are in a very difficult moment when we look at the good news being that “the claims fell.” But that is a prelude to the point we have to achieve: when not only the claims fall but the jobs start growing and growing and growing.

We have come a long ways since President Obama took office: 700,000 people a month who were losing their job—with huge, catastrophic, ramifications throughout the economy. That is beginning to turn around. But until we are back to a robust employment situation, we cannot ignore people who need help through the unemployment compensation system.

I believe the major point at this juncture between the two sides is the issue of how do we pay for this, its cost. We have adopted, as Democrats, what was ignored and then dismissed by Republicans, which is the concept of pay-go, of paying for government activities either by revenue increases or by offsetting reductions. But we have always understood that in emergencies these pay-go rules properly can be suspended; that we can go ahead and deal with an emergency.

Frankly, this situation we are in today, that is triggering all this concern—and rightfully so—of the deficit is not something that was created by President Obama. He walked in with a \$1.3 trillion deficit—in sharp contrast to President George W. Bush, who walked into office with a \$5.6 trillion surplus over 10 years. That was not the result of just the economy humming along, that was the result of very difficult choices that were made in this body and in the House of Representatives under the leadership of President Clinton and, once again, under the leadership of my colleagues such as MAX BAUCUS.

But that surplus, that opportunity of a robust employment picture where unemployment was around 5 percent, that was the legacy of President Clinton. Frankly, the legacy of President Bush is significant deficits and significant unemployment and financial crisis. More debt was added in that administration—\$3 trillion—than all previous administrations combined, from George Washington all the way up to George W. Bush.

So this deficit is a real problem. But a lot of it was the result of decisions that were made by that administration to finance activities not through pay-go but through just piling it on the deficit. Tax cuts were not paid for, and the tax cuts were skewed in the nature of a progressive tax to the wealthiest. Iraq, Afghanistan—none of those wars were paid for through offsets or anything else. The prescription drug program, Part D, was not paid for. It was, again, added to the tab of future generations. It is interesting, today we

have actually tried to fix that with the passage of the health care bill by closing the doughnut hole.

So at this moment, when we face a true employment emergency, when people say: Well, we are now going to insist upon complete offsets, it misses what was done casually and repeatedly during the Bush administration for areas that you could argue were not true emergencies. Now we face a critical emergency. In my State of Rhode Island, we have a 12.7 percent unemployment rate. If we do not start supporting and turning that around, it will get worse rather than better. We have never in recent history—going over several decades—ever suspended emergency unemployment benefits when the unemployment rate was at least 7.4 percent or higher. We are at nearly 10 percent unemployment nationally, and in some States—again, in Rhode Island, it is close to 13 percent. Until we lower joblessness significantly, we are still in an employment emergency.

The other aspect of this, too, is unemployment compensation is one of the major activities for stimulating the economy. The bang for the buck is significant. There is \$1.90 of economic activity for every \$1 invested in unemployment insurance. It makes sense. People need the money to go to the store to buy food for their children. They need to pay for the gas to look for a job. That money will come in and be multiplied in the economy.

The irony, too, of trying to use, in some respects, the stimulus money to pay for the unemployment is it is basically taking away money we have designed to get the economy moving and spending it for a program that will also help the economy move. But you are going to get a lot less bang for the buck in terms of decreasing our overall commitment to that economic activity in the country.

So we have to move. I would urge an immediate extension of the unemployment compensation legislation to give us a chance to return and work with our colleagues in the House for the legislation that will at least guarantee an unemployment extension until the end of this calendar year. But we have to move. We have to act. We should do so now.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Montana.

UNANIMOUS-CONSENT REQUEST—  
H.R. 4851

Mr. BAUCUS. Madam President, I would like to follow up a little bit and address the same subject addressed by my good friend from Rhode Island, Senator REED.

Just a little reminder first. On March 10, the Senate passed legislation to extend both tax provisions and safety net programs through to the end of 2010.

That legislation included \$34 billion worth of tax cuts, an extension of unemployment benefits, an extension of COBRA health benefits for laid-off workers, and several other items. That legislation was also partially paid for. The Senate bill differs from similar legislation passed by the House, and we have not yet had a chance to reconcile these differences—one bill in each body.

In the next couple weeks, however, several of these programs will expire. Beginning April 5, some laid-off workers will begin losing their unemployment benefits. That is not long from now. Workers laid off after March 31 will lose the 65-percent tax credit currently available to purchase temporary health insurance. After March 31, doctors will see 20 percent reductions in their reimbursements under Medicare.

We should not let these programs expire. Today, we should extend them for a month, at least, while we try to meld the Senate and the House versions into one bill that the President can sign.

I think all of us can recall 2 days at the beginning of this month when Congress did let these programs temporarily expire. It was not our finest hour. I hope we will not do the same this month.

So I ask, what is holding us up from keeping these programs in place? There is no controversy about whether to extend the programs for 1 month. Both Republicans and Democrats have proposed doing that. Both propose extending the programs for at least 1 month until we get the yearlong bill resolved. There is only an honest disagreement over whether to provide offsets for this bill.

Most Republicans believe the package should be fully offset. My good friend from Iowa offered an amendment to do just that. Most Democrats believe unemployment benefits during a recession when we have seen unemployment rates rise to double digits signify an emergency and need not be offset.

We are still in a very dire situation. In a moment, I will propound a unanimous consent request that seeks to resolve these differences. We should do that. Clearly, we should for the benefit of thousands of Americans who are struggling as a result of the downsizing that has occurred across our Nation in this recession.

They are the ones bearing the brunt of our failure. They are the ones bearing the brunt of our inaction and of our—to be honest—partisan differences. It is astounding to me we just cannot get together for the sake of people who otherwise will lose their unemployment checks, who will not have the benefit of COBRA health insurance, and seniors who are in jeopardy because their doctors are not going to get paid for Medicare. There is no one to blame but us.

The COBRA tax credit has helped millions of unemployed workers and

their families afford health care while looking for a job. Without this assistance, the average family would need to pay \$1,100 per month to keep their health insurance, which is simply unaffordable for most unemployed workers. This provision would extend the COBRA tax credit through April 30 to ensure newly unemployed workers can also receive assistance in affording their health insurance.

Unemployment insurance benefits have helped millions of Americans stay afloat after they have lost their job. We want them to keep those benefits, at least for awhile. Folks who lose a job then face an economy that has few and sometimes no options for returning to work in their community and in their chosen field. In fact, I read recently that there are five people looking for every single job opening—five, at least five—in America.

Approximately 1 million workers—that is about 200,000 per week—will lose their benefits in April alone. Not only will this cause them and their families untold hardship—just think of it, no job, no unemployment insurance—it will also cause important money to stop flowing through their communities, and that could very well lead to an immediate application for food stamps.

Unlike last month, when the program lapsed for just 2 days because of the upcoming recess, the programs will lapse this time for at least a week. The State agencies will have absolutely no ability to keep their programs up and running. They will have to terminate benefits.

Over 6 million workers are depending on extended benefits and they are distraught. Yet again, this debate is going down to the wire, causing them unnecessary stress, unnecessary anxiety. They have already been through enough. They deserve better. They deserve our support.

Unemployment benefits are used for basic necessities—food and shelter—while the laid-off worker seeks a new job. These benefits are critical to a worker and his or her family and to the economies of the community. I hope we do what is right and find a solution to help the people whom we work for.

Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of Calendar No. 323, H.R. 4851, to provide a temporary extension of certain programs; that the bill be read three times, passed, and the motions to reconsider be laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. COBURN. Reserving the right to object, I wish to ask the chairman of the committee a question.

Mr. BAUCUS. I yield.

Mr. COBURN. Is this bill you have just called up and asked unanimous consent to move forward on paid for?