

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. He has 1 minute remaining.

Mr. THOMAS. I thank the Chair.

Mr. SCHUMER. I yield the 1 minute to the Senator from Michigan.

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

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from New York.

Every economic indicator we want to go up is going down, and every one we want to go down is going up. The Senator and I have worked together on one of the most critical issues that affect Americans, their pocketbook and quality of life, which is access to prescription drugs. I share the concern that we do not see the focus on the economy and what needs to happen in the economy. The Schumer-McCain bill, now in the House of Representatives, which would lower prices for prescription drugs, is one very important piece of that economic puzzle. When we see that more people are lower income, their health care costs are rising, I appreciate his leadership on that issue.

Mr. SCHUMER. I thank the Senator for her leadership as well.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Wyoming.

SENATE AT A STANDSTILL

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, it is interesting. I wanted to visit a little bit about where we are on the floor and the fact we are not moving. We have been in the same place for 4 weeks.

I understand the frustration of the folks on the other side of the aisle. I recognize, too, that we are in the full swing of an election year. It is blame-game time, where we all stand up and blame the President for what is going on when there is no effort on the other side of the aisle to move off where we are and take up some of the issues we ought to be addressing.

We talk about prescription drugs. Prescription drugs is not on the floor because the leadership has not moved from where we are to make time to get it up here. I get a little exasperated, using all this time for political comments when there are no ideas of what to do coming from the other side of the floor.

Actually, that wasn't why I came here, but I have to tell you it is pretty frustrating to continue to hear that sort of thing—blaming the President when these folks have no idea what they want to do and no suggestions, no leadership coming from the Senate. What are we going to do about it?

What we have done is continue to work on two bills for about 4 weeks now. Homeland defense is one of the most important issues we have before us, and it has been stalled. Although we have differing views on how it ought to proceed, that is fine, that is part of the system here. We ought to take a vote on those views and move forward, but instead of that, we have had stalling on the other side, no chance to vote

on amendments, simply wanting to always vote on cloture, which is what we are faced with today.

The unwillingness of the majority leadership to allow votes on certain amendments has created a standoff. We keep hearing about what else you want to talk about over there, but we won't move off where we are. It is pretty frustrating. It seems as though that is the political moment. We have to really get down to what it is.

The same thing is true of Interior appropriations. It has been on the floor for 4 weeks. Yet we can't seem to move it to get some of the things done. For those of us in the West, it is very important—public land fees and, so on, in which we are so involved. Maybe even more important than that, the more immediate issue, there is some drought relief in this bill. There is something on forest fire suppression. We can do those things. But have we moved? No.

We continue to stall and to have votes on cloture, which does not resolve the issue. All we need to do is have a vote on the amendments. If you don't like the amendments, have a vote to table them. That is where we ought to be. That is the system.

To get up and start spending all of our time blaming the President for an economic slowdown that began under the Clinton administration, according to all the people who are familiar and knowledgeable about it, is to be a little tiresome, when we have an opportunity to move forward. There are a lot of things we ought to be doing in the relatively short time we have left.

Obviously, homeland defense is one that has to be done.

We need to debate the Iraq resolution, which is going to take some time. We need a CR if we are going to adjourn on the 19th of October. We have an energy bill which we ought to move forward. We talked about pharmaceuticals and Medicare. We could have done something in our committee, but the majority leader pulled it out of the committee. We will not have time to accomplish these items as long as we remain on the pending bills.

It seems to me it would be very frustrating to want to spend the time blaming the President for the economy when the Senate is not doing what we can and moving forward.

I will not take any more time. We ought to look at what we are accomplishing instead of trying to put the blame on everybody else when we have not succeeded in doing what we ought to be doing. I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Missouri.

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, I understand the distinguished Senator from Michigan would like 5 minutes so she can then assume the Chair. I will be happy to defer to her for 5 minutes, if I can then be recognized after her and have the attention of the body. I will be happy to accommodate her.

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

THE ECONOMY

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, I thank my friend for his courtesy this morning, and I appreciate the opportunity to speak for a few moments before assuming the Chair. I did want to follow up on the discussion this morning on the economy. A few minutes ago, I indicated that every economic indicator that should be going down is going up: job losses; health care costs; foreclosures; national debt; interest rate costs; Social Security trust fund raid. Every part of the economy we wish to be going up is going down: economic growth, down; business investment, down; the stock market, down; retirement accounts, down; consumer confidence; minimum wage.

We have a very disturbing situation. I wish to speak for a moment about one piece of the economy that is so critical in the quality of life of American families and American businesses which are struggling to pay the costs. Let me speak to one piece of the economic record of the last 18 months, and that is that workers' payments for health insurance is soaring.

We are seeing that the cost of insurance to cover a family has gone up 16 percent, and the cost of an individual has gone up 27 percent, over one-fourth increase in their costs. The costs are going up. Their savings are down, their investments are down, and at the same time, we are seeing the biggest part of the reason for that health care cost going up as a result of the cost of prescription drugs.

We are seeing overall prescription drugs going up over three times the rate of inflation. This is a critical part of the economic pie, the costs for consumers right now. It is not inconsequential. It is not like buying a new pair of tennis shoes or "Gee, I would like to have a new coat." This is life-saving medicine, the difference between life and death, or whether a person goes into a nursing home or is able to live at home. I am very concerned about this. What is the response?

We in the Senate have been focused on Medicare prescription drug coverage and lowering prices for everyone. We have been successful in passing a bill that, in fact, lowers prices and creates more competition in the marketplace once a patent expires. But what is the response of the pharmaceutical industry within this context, with the struggles that are going on for families, businesses, and farmers across the country? What is their response right now? A new PR campaign, not putting the millions of dollars into lower prices and making prescription medications available, lowering the premiums for small businesses. They have gone on a huge PR campaign.

We are seeing ads that I find, I have to say, absolutely outrageous. One says: "Pray for a Miracle." It uses the picture of a child who, obviously, is deathly ill. It says: "Pray for a Miracle," because they say generic drugs will never cure him.