

Today we are scheduled to conclude that debate on this important piece of legislation. It fundamentally is a bill which will substantially reduce overwhelming dependence on foreign sources of oil. It would move us toward energy independence. It strengthens our national security, and it helps reduce the cost of living for American families and businesses.

Moving toward that energy independence is not only possible, but it is the key to reducing the energy prices that people feel every day when they fill up their cars with gas, when they cool their homes, or other times of the year when they heat their homes. The high energy prices affect people in their everyday lives.

I believe energy independence can be achieved, but a first and very important major starting point will be to make sure we bring more of America's energy to American consumers. That is what the bill does by allowing deep sea exploration in the Gulf of Mexico.

As I mentioned, we have a cloture vote this afternoon, and I expect the final vote on the Energy Security Act hopefully sometime tomorrow.

There are a number of different issues before us as we continue to move and produce meaningful solutions to the problems facing Americans—and that is what we will continue to do.

#### ORDER OF PROCEDURE

I ask unanimous consent that following the remarks by myself and Senator REID, Senator HAGEL be recognized for 30 minutes.

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

#### RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

#### 109TH CONGRESS

Mr. REID. Thank you very much, Mr. President.

Very difficult thing to get anything out of this . . . Congress. They don't want to do anything for the people. They are awful anxious to do things to the people, and they have done a lot of things to the people . . . and it's beginning to hurt.

That is a quote of Harry Truman.

Again:

Very difficult thing, to get anything out of this . . . Congress. They don't want to do anything for the people. They are awful anxious to do things to the people, and they have done a lot of things to the people . . . and it's beginning to hurt.

Those are the words of Harry Truman in 1948. He was referring to the 80th Congress, but those remarks are directly in tune with the 109th Congress.

Like the "do-nothing Congress" of 1948, it is "very difficult" to get anything out of this Republican Congress. The things they are doing are "beginning to hurt."

Look at national security. The majority's rubberstamping of President Bush in Iraq has made America less safe and emboldened our enemies such as Iran, North Korea, and al-Qaida. For the third week in a row, Iraq and the Middle East are plunging further into crisis, and what is the response of this Republican Congress? The estate tax, repeal of the estate tax.

Look at our economy. The majority's reckless fiscal policies have created a \$9 trillion debt, placing a birth tax on our children and our children's children. In recent years, the poor have gotten poorer and the rich have gotten richer, and the middle class have been squeezed.

What is the response of the Republicans? Repeal the estate tax—hundreds of billions of dollars to go to a small group of Americans, a very small group of Americans, a country with 300 million people. This repeal of the estate tax may affect 10,000 people—less than two-tenths of 1 percent of the American people.

Look how divided America has become. The majority's focus on issues such as marriage and flag desecration has divided our country and distracted this body from more pressing concerns, problems in health care, ignoring global warming, energy and gas prices.

I appreciate the distinguished majority leader saying he believes we should move to energy independence—and we certainly should. I support this drilling bill. President Clinton supported it. It allows drilling in the gulf coast. And it is important because it allows coastal restoration—and money goes to that. But it has little to do with energy independence.

With energy and gas prices and the rising cost to the middle class, what is the response of the Republicans? Repeal the estate tax.

There are just 15 legislative days left this year. Everyone knows that Mondays and Fridays are not voting days in this Republican Senate. That leaves us with 3 days this week and 12 when we return. What is the response of the Republicans today in the U.S. Senate? Move to repeal the estate tax. Fifteen days ahead of us, and behind us 19 wasted months. The truth is this Republican Congress is actually worse than the famous "do-nothing Congress" of 1948. That Congress worked almost a month longer than we have.

Republicans ought to be ashamed of their dismal record, but it is clear from press reports that they are not. I got up to read the Washington Post yesterday morning and was really appalled when I read a quote from the House Republican leader in which he actually bragged about how little this Congress has done.

I quote:

Republican leaders shrug off the "do-nothing" charge.

"You get used to hearing that nonsense," said House Majority Leader John Boehner (R-OH).

He went to say:

As for beating the 1948 Congress' record for lethargy, he joked, "Most Americans will be pretty happy with that."

I don't know what his congressional district is like and how people feel there, but in the rest of the country, that is not how they feel. Americans aren't "happy" that they are paying hundreds of dollars more for gasoline—sometimes every month—because this Republican Congress refuses to pass relief measures and won't investigate the surging profits of big oil. Exxon is going to make \$40 billion net profit this year—\$40 billion; British Petroleum, the best year they have ever had.

They will not be investigating the surging profits of big oil because this administration is the most oil-friendly administration in the history of the country.

This Congress doesn't have the political will necessary to rapidly make us more energy independent. And what is the Republican response? Repeal the estate tax for two-tenths of 1 percent of the American people, the richest of the rich.

Americans aren't "happy" that our troops are in the middle of a civil war in Iraq because the Republican Congress won't demand the President change course.

That is the law which passed on a bipartisan basis. The law, as we speak, is there should be a change of course in Iraq. The law says that the year 2006 will be a year of significant transition in Iraq. Not happening.

I get a report on my way to work every morning from my stalwart staffers. I talked to Nathan this morning on the way to work. He said:

Senator, I don't know where to start with Iraq. We know at least four American soldiers have been killed, as mentioned on page A10 of the Washington Post. It doesn't make the front page anymore.

The death and destruction of Iraq, as Nathan said, is hard to keep up with. In the past 24 hours, scores dead. Today, there were a dozen Iraqis beheaded. In the last month alone, 1,200 Iraqis have been killed, murdered. We tried to offer the military in Iraq a strategy for success, but Republicans chose instead to rubberstamp the President.

What is the response to date to all these problems? Repeal the estate tax. We have spent more time on repealing the estate tax than any other one issue for the entire Congress, in this Senate. It should be clear who the majority favors. We have spent all this time on less than .2 percent of the American people, costing the country hundreds of billions of dollars.

Americans are not happy this President has worn down, exhausted, overstretched our military. In a paper I don't read very often, the Washington Times today reported that the military is in a state of disrepair. If you are not on the front lines, you are using equipment that does not work, equipment that is in need of repair. As Senator JACK REED has said for months and months, we have a military infrastructure that is failing. The soldiers are

fighting valiantly. The Washington Times reports our military is showing the wear of 5 years of war.

Rather than doing the Defense appropriations bill, we are going to work on the estate tax repeal. Think about that. The Defense appropriations bill should take a few days. Readiness levels for the Army are at lows not seen since Vietnam as virtually no active nondeployed combat brigade is prepared to perform its wartime mission. The Army has asked for \$17 billion in emergency funds, but the President has not submitted that. His military leaders in the field have said \$17 billion is what we need.

We do not hear anything from the President on this except "repeal the estate tax." Can anyone imagine that? Rather than doing what we should do to help our valiant soldiers, we are going to move this week to repealing the estate tax. Talk about dangerous incompetence from the administration and Congress, as well as making us less safe.

America is not happy with our borders remaining unsecure 6 years after September 11, but this Republican Congress cannot pass comprehensive immigration reform. Rather than the President pushing on this—he says he is in favor of it—we still have this bill in the House that makes a felon of everyone, including health care workers, preachers, Catholic priests, and undocumented people in this country.

What is the answer to that in the Senate today? Repeal the estate tax, giving hundreds of billions of dollars to a few of the richest people in the world.

Contrary to Majority Mr. Leader BOEHNER, Americans are not happy with this Republican Congress which has bowed to the radical right and refused to override a Presidential veto of legislation to allow our best and brightest scientists to explore the promise of stem cell research. On the news today it was reported Prime Minister Blair is going to California to do a deal with the State of California to do stem cell research in Great Britain. We have farmed out hope for the most desperate of the sick, people who have suffered injuries, who are paralyzed from the neck down, the waist down.

And what is the answer of this Congress, this Senate? Repeal the estate tax. Contrary to what my friend says, the majority leader in the House, Americans are not happy. This Republican Congress has concentrated all its efforts on the well-off, well-connected few and done nothing to assist America's middle-class families who are struggling to pay the rising costs of health care, education, energy, with paychecks that keep shrinking. If you are college educated in America today, you have lost 5 percent of your earning power under this administration. What is the answer of this Senate, led by the Republicans? Repeal the estate tax.

Americans are not happy this Republican Congress has virtually ignored the health care crisis. I have talked

about stem cell research. That is only part of it. Forty-six million Americans have no health care. During this administration, 1 million people every month have been added to the roll of those who have no health insurance, and millions of others have inadequate health insurance. The Republicans have sat on their hands for 6 years as millions and millions have lost their insurance, while companies such as Ford and General Motors, companies that used to drive this economy, staples of the U.S. economy, have been crippled by the rising costs. What are we doing to help them? We are being asked to repeal the estate tax.

Americans are not happy with this Republican Congress that has pushed its investigation of the President's manipulation of Iraq intelligence until after the election. We were promised—promised—we would do all five investigations. No way. Nine months after Democrats sent the Senate into a closed session over this issue, it has been announced the Republican-led Intelligence Committee will not complete its work before November. And I bet they don't do it even after that. Vice President CHENEY will not let them. He runs the Intelligence Committee; we all know that.

The only conclusion to draw is that the investigation is too embarrassing to Republicans to make public before the November 7 election. What is the answer? I repeat, repeal the estate tax.

Even though my friend Congressman BOEHNER thinks Americans are happy, Americans are not happy with this Republican Congress's cynical plan to play politics with minimum wage and pensions later this week. For 10 years, American workers have waited for the Republican Congress to raise the minimum wage. Isn't it interesting, even though it is in a convoluted legislative package—and that is an understatement—when we said there would be no congressional pay raises until the minimum wage is increased, they are suddenly interested? During the 10 years that poor Americans have been waiting for a wage increase, Congress has given itself \$30,000 in pay increases. In that time, the cost of everything—from gas to housing to heat—has gone up. And the answer of the Republicans? Repeal the estate tax.

The Federal minimum wage has stayed the same, \$5.15 an hour. For someone earning \$10,000 a year, it is hard to live. Oprah did a story on that. Maybe that is one reason—in addition to Congress not further getting pay raises—for this bill. This issue is about to catch up with them. But they are afraid to come forward on a straight minimum wage vote. They stick it in with everything else. To think they have stuck the minimum wage package into the estate tax repeal. The majority does understand that elections are just around the corner and they are about to pay the price for ignoring America's workers. In a most transparent and cynical trick, Republicans

have offered to give America a raise if, and only if, their wealthiest friends also get billions of dollars in tax breaks. It is such an unbelievable ploy, let me say it again: Republicans are threatening to deny a \$2.10 raise for 11 million Americans unless they can give away hundreds of billions to less than .2 of 1 percent of the American people. The \$2.10 raise is over a period of years. It should be immediate. The \$2.10 an hour raise occurs if the richest of the rich get billions of dollars. It is political blackmail that reeks of desperation. It should fail. The estate tax has been defeated before in the Senate. Democrats have been willing to deal with the estate tax and change it. We are willing to do that.

Now Republicans have backed off and only about 80 percent agree. This is the most contemptuous election year trick I have ever seen. It has nothing to do with giving workers a raise and everything to do with providing Republicans political cover. Everything we have done in this Senate has been directed toward repealing the estate tax.

We had a deal we worked for a year on a conference on pensions. It was all done. They were ready to sign the papers. It was a bipartisan agreement. It is gone because of the estate tax. Now we have a freestanding bill on pensions coming to the Senate.

To make matters worse, Republicans are willing to put the defense of our Nation on the back burner. I talked about the deterioration of our military. It was recorded in the news today all over the country. I read it in the Washington Times. The Senate has not acted on a Defense appropriations bill even though the President's own military leaders have said they need an emergency supplemental appropriation of \$17 billion to take care of the equipment that has gone to pieces as a result of the war.

The Defense appropriations bill funds our national security policy and includes money for our troops and our equipment and determines how we address our national security challenges around the world. What are they doing? Not the Defense appropriations bill, but how can they get to the meat of repealing the estate tax?

With all the problems we have in this country, where are their priorities? We see what their priorities are. In a time of war, one would think this bill would be priority No. 1, that we would do everything in our power to ensure the Senate has ample time to debate and pass this important legislation, but Republicans are threatening to jeopardize Senate passage of this bill so they can focus on their million-dollar friends. It is an insult that the American people can see through, as they can see through the tricks Republicans are playing with the pension bill.

As I indicated, the conferees have worked to reconcile this House pension bill for more than a year. They basically have completed it, and now the wealthy few are ahead of the retirement security of millions of working

Americans, further evidence that America needs a new direction. Cry as they might, Republicans cannot escape the record. History will record this as the do-nothing Congress of 2006 and it will be forever, most likely, the 1948 do-nothing Congress. No one is happy about this situation, contrary to what Republican leaders say.

We have 15 days left. I respectfully suggest to the other side it is time to get to work on the real problems, not the estate tax.

Mr. DURBIN addressed the Chair.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senator from Nebraska is next.

Mr. REID. I have not yielded the floor. I still have the floor.

I yield for a question.

Mr. DURBIN. I see the Senator from Nebraska, and I will not take much time, but I would ask a question of the Senator from Nevada.

The Senator from Nevada has been in the Congress as long as I have. We came together in 1982. We have seen a lot of things happen. I ask the Senator from Nevada if, in his time in serving in Congress, he has ever seen a worse special interest bill than this bill which would repeal the estate tax which affects about 2 families out of every 1,000, families who are the wealthiest in America, that the Republican leadership in the House and Senate insist we have to reduce their taxes before we can ever consider giving an increase in the minimum wage to 11 million workers who get up every morning and go to work? For 9 straight years, the Republican leadership in the White House and Congress has said to these hard-working Americans, no pay raise. Now—now—comes the deal. The Republicans have finally said: OK, all right, our conscience has finally gotten to us—or maybe it is the fear of losing our congressional pay raise—but now we will consider the minimum wage pay raise as long as you will cut the taxes on the wealthiest people in America as part of the bargain.

Has the Senator from Nevada ever seen a worse special interest bargain in 24 years?

Mr. REID. I say to my friend, the distinguished minority whip, the time we have spent on this Senate floor dealing with estate tax, think what we could have done in energy, health care, education, the debt, but they are spending it on this massive debt increase. Hundreds of billions of dollars we will increase the debt—this year's deficit—the debt over the next 10 years. I have never seen anything like it.

Mr. DURBIN. I would like to ask the Senator from Nevada this—and he goes to the point. It is not just the basic injustice and unfairness of saying you will not give the hardest working, lowest paid Americans any increase in their hourly wage unless you give the wealthiest Americans a tax break that, frankly, only but a few of them have asked for.

I ask the Senator from Nevada, the outcome of this deal—if they pull it

off—will increase the debt of America, will increase the money we have to borrow from China and Japan and Korea and Saudi Arabia, will leave a greater debt for our children so the Republican dream of reducing the estate tax for the wealthiest people in America will come true. Does the Senator from Nevada think that increasing America's debt, cutting taxes in the midst of a war, is sound evidence of fiscal conservatism?

Mr. REID. This increases the national debt by hundreds of billions of dollars. I ask my friends on the other side of the aisle, how could you let this happen? I say that. I plead: How can you let this happen?

We will try to stop it. We would like a little help. How can you let this happen? I am really troubled. I cannot understand how they would even have the audacity to bring this up: a \$2.10 increase over 2 or 3 years—it is not all at once—and a massive, immediate cessation of the richest of the rich having to pay basically any taxes on their estates.

Mr. DURBIN. Last question I would like to ask the Senator—

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The time of the minority in morning business has expired.

Mr. REID. I will use my leader time.

Mr. DURBIN. I ask the Senator from Nevada to yield for one further question. I thank the Senator from Nebraska for his patience.

We have struggled long and hard over the last several months to ask the Republican leadership in the Senate to bring up the issues, the bills, the laws that people care about: reducing the cost of gasoline for working families and businesses and farmers in Nevada, Illinois, Texas, and Nebraska; working on doing something about the 46 million uninsured Americans; dealing with the issues that we face when people cannot afford to send their kids to college; dealing with the real security of America so we live up to the 9/11 Commission recommendations to make America safe.

I will ask the Senator from Nevada, in closing, as we have asked time and time and time again, to bring up the real issues that count, such as an increase in the minimum wage, is it not a fact that, instead, the Republican leadership has pushed aside the real issues, such as money for our troops, pushed aside the energy program which we need for America, and said, instead: We are going to have a parade of constitutional amendments that are extreme—many of them—and then we have to always come back to repealing the estate tax? It is a higher priority to them than anything I have mentioned.

Mr. REID. Legislative heaven, obviously, for the Republicans in this Congress is the estate tax.

Mr. DURBIN. I thank the Senator.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Nebraska is recognized.

Mr. HAGEL. Thank you, Mr. President.

#### MIDDLE EAST—A REGION IN CRISIS

Mr. HAGEL. Mr. President, the Middle East today is a region in crisis. After 3 weeks of escalating and continuing violence, the potential for wider regional conflict becomes more real each day. The hatred in the Middle East is being driven deeper and deeper into the fabric of the region, which will make any lasting and sustained peace effort very difficult to achieve.

How do we realistically believe that a continuation of the systematic destruction of an American friend, the country and people of Lebanon, is going to enhance America's image and give us the trust and credibility to lead a lasting and sustained peace effort in the Middle East?

The sickening slaughter on both sides must end, and it must end now. President Bush must call for an immediate cease-fire. This madness must stop. The Middle East today is more combustible and complex than it has ever been. Uncertain popular support for regime legitimacy continues to weaken governments in the Middle East. Economic stagnation, persistent unemployment, deepening despair, and wider unrest enhance the ability of terrorists to recruit and succeed.

An Iran with nuclear weapons raises the specter of broader proliferation and a fundamental strategic realignment in the region, creating more regional instability. America's approach to the Middle East must be consistent and sustained, and it must understand the history, the interests, and the perspectives of our regional friends and allies.

The United States will remain committed to defending Israel. Our relationship with Israel is a special and historic one. But it need not and cannot be at the expense of our Arab and Muslim relationships. That is an irresponsible and dangerous false choice.

Achieving a lasting resolution to the Arab-Israeli conflict is as much in Israel's interest as any other country in the world. Unending war will continually drain Israel of its human capital, resources, and energy as it continually fights for its survival.

The United States and Israel must understand that it is not in their long-term interests to allow themselves to become isolated in the Middle East and the world. Neither can allow themselves to drift into an "us against the world" global optic or zero-sum game. That would marginalize America's global leadership, our trust and influence, further isolating Israel, and it would prove disastrous for both countries, as well as the region. It is in Israel's interest, as much as ours, that the United States be seen by all states in the Middle East as fair. This is the currency of trust.

The world has rightly condemned the despicable actions of Hezbollah and