

Across Pennsylvania this issue comes up all the time when I talk to people in our State. If you look at it in terms of the Nation, there are nearly seven times the number of Americans without health insurance today as there were in 2000. Families USA is an organization that analyzes health care in the country, and then they focus specifically on a particular State. The most recent report of Families USA finds that nearly 3 million Pennsylvanians under the age of 65 were uninsured for some period of time in 2007 and 2008. The overall number of Pennsylvanians without health insurance is growing faster than the nationwide average.

So we have a major challenge on our hands with regard to health care, and the President has been very focused on making sure health care is a major component of this budget. We are going to be talking about the specifics of that in the days ahead.

The President also made a strong commitment to energy independence. We all know it is important. We know it is an urgent priority, and we have talked a lot about it—year after year of talking and not acting, year after year of explaining the problem instead of putting the solutions into law, into the budget, into the programs we know can work.

Energy independence is not just a nice thing to do, it is not just another way to go about heating our homes and powering our economy. Energy independence is essential for our national security. The more we ignore it, the less safe we are. The more we ignore energy independence, the more the terrorists have an increasing advantage over us. We have to deal with this this year as well. We are dependent for oil on some of the most politically unstable areas of the world. We know that, but we can't just acknowledge that, we have to act on it.

This budget addresses the need for investments in clean energy that will help us combat global warming and create the new green jobs of the future—not just any jobs, the green jobs that will pay wages on which you can sustain a family.

This budget, with regard to energy, builds on the investment we made through the recovery and reinvestment bill we passed not too long ago, for renewable energy, energy efficiency and conservation, electric grid modernization, and low-carbon coal technology, which is so important for our transition to this new energy economy.

I wish to conclude today by addressing the issue of education. We know that the challenge we have with regard to education is a lifetime of challenges, and we have to think about education as a continuum, a continuing series of challenges we have to face as Americans.

We cannot say we want a growing economy or higher GNP growth or a skilled workforce to compete in the world economy—we cannot really say

that with any degree of truth or integrity unless we are willing to make investment in children in the dawn of their lives. As Hubert Humphrey said a long time ago—he talked about how the test of government is how we treat those in the dawn of life, the shadows of life, and those in the twilight of life. When he spoke of the dawn of life, of course he was speaking of our children.

The United States of America today has no prekindergarten education policy beyond the important program of Head Start. But we have to not just make the funding commitment to Head Start, which has been so important to our economy and to our children and our families, we have to do more than Head Start. We need a full commitment to prekindergarten education—early learning. President Obama understands that. He campaigned on it. He promised the American people he was going to work on it, and he put it in his budget. It is so critically important to make this a priority in our budget. But he knows that making sure a child has access to early education and health care and the promise of a bright future will not reach fulfillment unless we invest in higher education as well. Access to higher education and the opportunities it affords is one of the fundamentals of what makes this country strong. I really believe his commitment on higher education is a seminal part of his budget.

But I really believe also that when President Obama talks about education, he is not just talking about it in some abstract form. When he focuses on the needs of our children, it is not an abstraction—not only because he is a husband and a father but because President Obama believes, as I believe, that every child in America, no matter where they live, no matter who they are, no matter who their parents are, every child in America is born with a bright, scintillating light inside them. It is up to us, those of us who are elected officials, who are given power to help people, who are given power to get things right in this country as best we can, it is up to us to make sure that whatever that light is inside a child, it burns ever brighter, that that child's full potential—if it is unlimited or if it is much more limited—whatever that potential is, whatever the brightness of that light is, we have an obligation here to make sure that potential, that light burns brightly. I really believe what President Obama has tried to do on education speaks directly to that obligation we have as Members of the Senate or Members of Congress.

We have a lot more to talk about in the days ahead. We have a lot more challenges to face as we face the challenge not only of passing a budget but of making sure these programs work for people. But in the end, this is about people. It is about Trisha Urban and families who face the impossible challenge of having health care for their family. It is also about a lot of families in Pennsylvania and across the country

who lost their homes, may have lost their jobs, and have lost their hopes and their dreams.

I believe with all my heart that this budget is one of the ways we speak to their concerns, one of the ways we do our best to speak to the worries they have about their own future, one of the ways we give integrity to the promise we have when we say we are working here to make sure the families of America can reach their potential: that children's lives will be better than their parents' lives. There are many people worried about that basic feature of American life.

This budget is not perfect. We will continue to work on it. I and others will have amendments, but President Obama has put us on a path to make the investments in health care, education, and energy; to cut the deficit in half; to provide tax relief; and also by making those investments to put us on a path not just to getting our economy out of the ditch and back on the road but making sure we are making the investments to grow our economy in the future—to create jobs, to create opportunity, and to create a future for our families and especially for our children.

We have a long way to go, but I really believe President Obama—working with leaders such as Chairman CONRAD here in the Senate and others in the House as well to make sure we are on that path to fiscal responsibility—is on the path to investing in priorities such as health care, education, and energy. If we work together, we can reestablish the kind of economy we used to have and reestablish and reenergize the priorities the American people elected us to work on. I know we can do that together, but it is not going to be easy. We look forward to the challenge. We look forward to working with President Obama.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The legislative clerk proceeded to call roll.

Mr. ENZI. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. GILLIBRAND). Without objection, it is so ordered.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

NATIONAL SERVICE REAUTHORIZATION ACT

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of H.R. 1388, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 1388) to reauthorize and reform the national service laws.