

Fortunately, Americans looking for work have been able to rely on unemployment insurance to get them through the tough times. But for 1.3 million people, no deal; 20,000 are veterans returning from wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

At the end of last year, only a few days ago, Congress failed to extend unemployment emergency insurance for Americans who have been looking for work for more than 6 months. We have never in the history of our country had long-term unemployment such as today—never in the history of our Republic. Yet we are turning 1.3 million people away. Are they going to be the next ones sleeping on some street—wherever they come from—trying to stay warm?

For many Americans these benefits make the difference between being able to live a decent life—not a good life, a decent life—and going hungry or becoming homeless.

Let us go back to 2012. In 2012 unemployment insurance helped 2.5 million people, including 600,000 children, from going into the rolls of poverty. We don't have all the results from last year. These families live in red States, blue States, Republicans, Democrats, or Independents. We shouldn't turn our backs on them.

In the past, we have worked together. Did we complain when President Bush came to us? Unemployment was nowhere near where it is now. There were enough long-term unemployed, and we automatically together extended those benefits. Not today. We are not doing it because we can't get the Republicans to help us. We have reached out the hand to hardworking Americans struggling to get by.

I would hope we can get a few Republicans to join DEAN HELLER of Nevada, a conservative Senator. Join with DEAN HELLER, a junior Senator from Nevada, and help get this legislation passed.

In the latest round of emergency assistance, George Bush was the person who signed that bill. At the time the unemployment rate was about 5.5 percent. Today in Nevada and Rhode Island—the State of Senator JACK REED, who will speak—it is about 9 percent.

The long-term unemployment rate today is more than double what it was at the time that we let emergency job assistance expire. Senator HELLER understands. I am troubled that most of Senator HELLER's Republican colleagues, according to what we are hearing in the press, callously turned their backs on the long-term unemployed.

I am saddened. I hope that we can get them to move over and help us to help these people who need it so very much. Failing to restore emergency assistance would not only be a crushing blow to the long-term unemployed, it would be a blow to our economy.

Americans use their unemployment benefits to buy food and fuel at local gas stations, to pay their landlords or to purchase for a child a winter coat.

That is why for every dollar we spend on unemployment benefits, I repeat, the economy grows by \$1.50. This investment in our fellow Americans is one of the most effective ways to spark and sustain an economic recovery.

Last night the senior Senator from Texas, a Republican, asked that we delay this vote until today. I was pleased to do that. He called this a serious issue, and he is very correct. The senior Senator from Texas is correct. This is a serious issue. It is as serious to people outside Nevada as it is to those people from Nevada who have been out of work for so long. People from Nevada have written and called my office, calling and begging for a little more time.

For every job that is available, there are three that are unemployed in America. We Democrats stand united in support of this extension. Republicans need to take this seriously as well as we.

I hope Republicans remember that during hard times, that during times of high unemployment—regardless of who is in the White House or who led this Chamber—Congress is always willing to put politics aside and put American families first.

Mr. REID. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican leader is recognized.

UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I indicated to the majority leader I was going to ask unanimous consent, which I am prepared to do at this point. I have to admit, I am a little surprised at the fervor with which the majority is dedicated to reviving the expired emergency unemployment benefits after they ignored the issue all of last year. I am sure there are many on my side who would like to see these additional weeks of benefits extended if—as the Speaker of the House indicated he supported—we could find a way to extend them without actually adding to the national debt.

To that end I would like to propose that we be allowed—my side be allowed—to offer an amendment to pay for these benefits by lifting the burden of ObamaCare's individual mandate for 1 year and take care of our veterans who were harmed by the recently agreed-to budget deal while we are in the same amendment, and once that is disposed of we can have an actual de-

bate on this issue and an amendment process in the Senate, which hasn't happened very often in recent times.

Therefore, I ask unanimous consent that if cloture is invoked on the motion to proceed to S. 1845, all postcloture time be yielded back and the Senate proceed to the consideration of the bill and that my amendment with Senator HATCH be the first amendment in order and that there be up to 1 hour of debate on the amendment divided in the usual form; that following the use or yielding back of that time, the Senate then proceed to a vote in relation to that amendment. I further ask unanimous consent that following the disposition of that amendment, it be in order for the majority leader or his designee to offer an amendment and it be in order for the leaders or their designees to continue to offer amendments in alternating fashion, which used to be the way we did business around here.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. REID. Reserving the right to object—and I appreciate how candid my Republican counterpart is and I say that seriously—I do speak with some, or I try, though I am not real good at speaking with a lot of fervor, as everyone knows—but I feel very strongly about this issue. For people who are unemployed and can't find a job, it is a tough deal. I have, fortunately, always had a job. I can't say the same for my family, especially my dad. So I do speak with as much fervor as I am capable on this issue.

The reason I mention I am glad my friend is being so candid is—listen to this—no one can in any way dispute my facts. For every \$1 spent, we get \$1.50 back. That doesn't add to the deficit. So as I see this picture from the consent request, I am seeing that we are going to take away ObamaCare, which 9 million new people have and are signing up at the rate of thousands every day. We are going to take away their benefits, in some form or fashion, and we are going to trump the bipartisan agreement we have with MIKULSKI and ROGERS. They are coming up with an omnibus bill. I know my friend has already stated he initially was against the budget deal, but I would bet that is addressed in this deal MIKULSKI and ROGERS will come up with—this helping of veterans.

So this is a guise to obstruct, as has been happening during the 5 years President Obama has been President of the United States, and I object with as much fervor as I can.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, over the past several days, we have seen a number of stories about how Democrats plan to spend the year gearing up for the November elections by making an issue out of economic hardships faced by Americans; in other words, instead of working on reforms that would actually help people overcome the challenges so many of them

face in this economy, Democrats plan to exploit those folks for political gain. It is pretty amazing when you think about it.

We are now in the sixth year—the sixth year—of the Obama administration. We all know the stock market has been doing great, so the richest among us are doing fine. But what about the poor? What about working-class folks? What about folks who work in industries liberals don't approve of, such as coal? How many of these Americans have been doing well during the Obama economy?

Record numbers of them are having a perfectly terrible time. One indicator is the growth of the Food Stamp Program. Consider this: Since the President took office, the number of Americans who have signed up for food stamps has literally skyrocketed—skyrocketed. It is up almost half. Nearly 4 out of 10 unemployed Americans are trapped—literally trapped—in long-term unemployment. What is worse, the poorest Americans are the ones who have often had the hardest time recovering in this economy.

Yes, the President took office in the midst of an economic crisis. No one disputes that. But for many Americans, a terrible situation seems to have only gotten worse over the course of this administration. For the President to turn around and try to blame his political opponents for the suffering we have seen out there takes a pretty good amount of nerve. It also assumes a collective case of national amnesia. It would take a collective case of national amnesia to reach those conclusions because, remember, these are the same folks who gave us the stimulus, who gave us tax increases, who gave us ObamaCare, and all of it was done in the name of helping the little guy, in the name of greater equality.

What has it given us? It has given us this mess we have in our country: record numbers of long-term unemployed, record numbers on food stamps, people losing their health care plans, others seeing the premiums shoot up when they can least afford it, and now another call, one more call, for a government fix.

Washington Democrats have shown almost no interest for 5 years in working together on ways to create the kind of good, stable, high-paying jobs people want and need. This is a real disservice, first and foremost, to those who are struggling the most out there—from the college graduate who suddenly finds herself wondering why she has huge student loan debts but no prospects of work to the 50-year-old dad who has worked his whole adult life but suddenly can't find a job that meets either his needs or his potential. Yet this administration's proposed solution is just to slap another bandaid from Washington on it and call it a day.

Yes, we should work on solutions to support those who are out of work through no fault of their own, but

there is literally no excuse to pass unemployment insurance legislation without also finding ways to create good, stable, high-paying jobs and also trying to find the money to pay for it. So what I am saying is, let us support meaningful job creation measures and let us find a way to pay for these UI benefits so we are not adding to an already completely unsustainable debt.

Unfortunately, the administration seems almost totally disinterested in solutions that don't put government in the lead, and it seems nearly incapable of working with those who don't share that belief. That, in many ways, is precisely why we are in the situation we are in—because it is only when one believes government is the answer to all of our problems that we talk about unemployment insurance instead of job creation and the minimum wage instead of helping people reach their maximum potential.

It is time to get away from “temporary government programs” and give the American people the tools they need to drive an economy that truly works for them and for their families. We could start with one of the real bright spots in our economy; that is, energy, a field that is poised to help our economy create literally millions of jobs, if only the administration would get out of the way.

Another area in which we should be able to work together is health care. By almost any metric—affordability, accessibility, even the ratio of cancellations to enrollments—this law has imposed more pain and more distress than many had ever thought possible. Centrists, moderates, conservatives, just about any sensible person outside the congressional Democratic leadership in Washington has long understood this. But now even the left is starting to come to grips with the painfully obvious fact that the law it fell in love with can't possibly work.

Last week one of the great pooh-bahs of the left admitted that “ObamaCare is awful,” calling it “the dirty little secret many liberals have avoided saying out loud.” I don't agree with that man on much else, including his broader ideas on health care, but it is good to hear a grandee of the left at least admit this isn't working.

His words point to a larger truth, that the President's amen chorus had ample opportunity to speak truth to power when it mattered and that most—most—chose to remain silent. For that the law's apologists have left the American people to pay the price.

Let me read part of a letter I recently received from Jennifer Bell, a constituent of mine in Hopkinsville. This is what she said:

I have less coverage than I did before. I didn't get to keep my policy that I was happy with. Every dollar I have to pay more is a dollar taken from my family. I never thought that in America we would be forced to purchase something we cannot afford. We worked hard to get where we are. Now we are being forced to pay more in order to pay for somebody else's insurance. How is that fair?

I hear you, Jennifer. Everyone on this side of the aisle hears those concerns.

Here is something else. Many Kentuckians are finding ObamaCare is about more than just higher premiums and cuts to Medicare. It is also about a lack of access to doctors and hospitals. One of the most leftwing papers in my State recently ran a big story about how many ObamaCare coverage networks exclude—exclude—so many of the hospitals my constituents want to use.

A few weeks ago, the majority leader basically said criticisms of ObamaCare amounted to jokes. He might like to think this is all some joke, but the constituents who have been writing me about the consequences of this failed law don't see it that way.

I know this must weigh heavily on our Democratic colleagues. I know they can't see so many Americans hurting because of decisions they made and feel absolutely nothing.

Let me say this to our colleagues on the other side of the aisle. It is a new year and a time for new beginnings. If you are ready to work with us, we are here. Together we can start over on health care. Together we can give the American people the kind of health care reform they deserve—reform that can lower costs and improve the quality of care.

But as with solving the problems of joblessness and unemployment, it is something we can only do together.

I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

EMERGENCY UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION EXTENSION ACT—MOTION TO PROCEED

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of the motion to proceed to S. 1845, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to Calendar No. 265, S. 1845, a bill to provide for the extension of certain unemployment benefits, and for other purposes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there will be 30 minutes of debate equally divided and controlled in the usual form.

The assistant majority leader.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, on the side supporting the pending motion, there is 15 minutes under the unanimous consent agreement and a similar amount of time on the other side. If all time is used, I would notify Members our rollcall vote will be about 11 o'clock.

I ask unanimous consent that on our side, supporting the motion, I be allowed 5 minutes, Senator REED of Rhode Island 5 minutes, and Senator KLOBUCHAR of Minnesota 5 minutes.