

But, Mr. President, we have our own stories to tell—true stories—true stories of average Americans whose lives have changed for the better because of the Affordable Care Act, true stories of families that can rest easier knowing insurance companies can never again put profits first and people second.

Take the story of a couple from Henderson, NV. I went to high school there. Their names are Jane and Brett Thomas. These are real stories. This story is true.

Jane wrote to me recently to say she is “ecstatic”—that is her word—to be saving \$1,200 every month on a top-of-the-line family insurance plan thanks to ObamaCare.

For years Jane was locked into her job as a school teacher because she, Brett, and their two teenage children needed guaranteed health insurance, and it cost a lot.

But Jane was able to quit her teaching job to spend more time with her children and help her husband at the family small business. Jane says the Affordable Care Act has literally changed her life and the lives of her loved ones. This is what she wrote:

Everyone on the news keeps talking of all the people the law has hurt.

An editorial comment from me: Koch brothers’ lies.

I will go back and start over:

Everyone on the news keeps talking of all the people the law has hurt, but I thought I should share our joy. The best part is our insurance covers so much more and pays better on every front. . . . I can’t thank you and your colleagues enough for fighting for people like me and my family.

Republicans may need tall tales and outright lies to convince people that ObamaCare is bad for them, but Democrats do not have to make things up. We have the support of lots of people, including a Nobel Prize-winning economist, not “OilCare” magnets who are trying to benefit their businesses by spreading lies about things that do not matter to them.

Millions of real Americans, like Jane and Brett Thomas, are benefiting from ObamaCare every day. Their premiums are lower. Their prescriptions are cheaper. They cannot be denied a policy or discriminated against. Their benefits cannot be cut off because they get sick or reach some arbitrary cap that some insurance executive dreamed up. They are no longer locked into jobs they do not love or do not need because they cannot get insurance anywhere else.

The Koch brothers are spending hundreds of millions of dollars telling Americans that ObamaCare is bad for them. It is easy to do if you have no conscience and are willing to lie, like they are, through the ads they are promoting. But the Koches should stick to what they know—the oil business—the oil business—where they have made their multibillions of dollars. The truth is simply more powerful than any myth, any legend or any false political ad.

GROUNDHOG YEAR

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I said I would talk about what we are doing here today. You talk about “Groundhog Day.” This is groundhog year. The Republicans in the Senate refuse to allow anything to take place.

Prior to our noon break yesterday—every Tuesday Republicans meet and Democrats meet—one of the senior Republicans came to me and said: Harry, are you going to have amendments? I said: Of course we are going to have amendments. We have talked about amendments on the veterans bill. I have had Republicans come to me and say: Let’s try relevant amendments. So I said: Fine. Come up with some. They said: How many? I said: I don’t care.

The first amendment is what they have been doing all along. They offer an amendment that has nothing to do with this bill, the veterans bill. It is partisanship at its best. It is obstruction at its best.

We got cloture on this bill. Virtually everybody voted to allow us to start debate on this bill. But that is only a subterfuge. The Republicans obviously have no intent of doing anything for the veterans as outlined in this bill.

The chairman of the Veterans’ Affairs Committee has worked for months coming up with a bill that is good—a bipartisan proposal. Republican proposals are in this bill.

One of the Republican Senators here came and talked for some length yesterday about ways he would like to improve the bill. Offer amendments. He is not going to be allowed to do that.

The bill advanced yesterday should be bipartisan—a measure that would help the veterans who have given so much to defend our country. As I indicated to my friend, the Republican Senator, before their lunch: Sure, let’s look at relevant amendments. Why not? It is the right thing to do. But the first amendment the Republicans demand is an unrelated issue on Iran.

Everyone knows that there are negotiations taking place between the United States, the European Union, and others to prevent Iran from having a nuclear capacity. I have said many times—I will repeat it here today—we will not let Iran have nuclear capabilities. The sanctions that we have put in place have brought them to the bargaining table.

You would think that if there was any validity to what the Republicans are trying to do, the organization that is more supportive of Israel than any organization I know—AIPAC—said publicly they do not want a vote on this now—publicly. They do not always put stuff out in the press, but that is what they said.

The audacity of what they are doing is an effort to stall, obstruct, as they have done. This is, I repeat, not “Groundhog Day,” not groundhog month—groundhog year. The Republicans have been doing this on every issue. It does not matter if it is an issue that 90 percent of the American people support.

Republicans say they want to help veterans—a strange way of showing it. We introduced a bill that would do just that. Republicans immediately inject partisan politics into the mix, insisting on amendments that have nothing to do with helping veterans.

So I am terribly disappointed again—no surprised. What are we doing here today? Nothing, nothing.

Under the rules, they have 30 hours postcloture and they can sit around and do nothing. That is what they do all the time. We have spent months and months sitting around doing nothing because of procedural roadblocks put up by the Republicans.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

IRAN

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, there is a broad bipartisan majority in the Senate that would like to vote on Iran sanctions. The dilemma we have here is that the majority leader does not want this vote to occur. So I would like to start this morning with a few words about an issue that should be of grave concern to all of us; that is, the threat of a nuclear-armed Iran.

It is no exaggeration to say that this is one of the significant foreign policy challenges of our time and one we simply have to get right. That is why a strong bipartisan majority has sought to pass legislation in the Senate that puts teeth into the negotiations that have followed November’s interim agreement. The challenge we have had is the majority leader does not want us to vote on it. It could be that he is afraid it will actually pass. Republican Senators—and hopefully some Democratic Senators as well—are going to continue to press the majority leader to allow a vote on this legislation before these negotiations end.

The Nuclear Weapon Free Iran Act is a perfectly reasonable bill. This is a Menendez-Kirk bill. It does not disrupt ongoing negotiations. It simply provides an incentive for Iran to keep its commitment under the interim agreement. It says that if Iran does not keep its word, then it will face even tougher sanctions at the end of this 6-month period. In other words, it does not disrupt the negotiations at all, even though the big—sort of the high leader, the Supreme Leader in Iran says he is not paying any attention to these talks. Nevertheless, it does not disrupt these talks, which seem to be going nowhere.

But it does say at the end of the 6-month period: You are going to get tougher sanctions if nothing comes of the discussions. It puts teeth into the talks that are already taking place. It is a recognition of the success we have already had as a result of prior sanctions. After all, there is a good reason

to believe sanctions are what brought the Iranians to the table in the first place. They were hurting. So it stands to reason that if the Iranians break the interim deal, they should get tougher sanctions. If nothing happens, we should send a message: You cannot keep talking forever. Something will happen at the end of the interim period.

That is especially true given the fact that we are actually running out of tools here short of the use of force. This bill is the best mechanism we have to keep the Iranians at the table until we get the right outcome and to ensure they are sticking to their end of the agreement. We should not fall victim to Iran's efforts at public diplomacy.

Let me repeat that a strong bipartisan majority in both Houses of Congress agrees with this approach, so there is simply no good reason for the majority leader to prevent a vote on this crucial legislation. He is gridlocking the Senate, preventing the Senate from working its will on a bill that enjoys broad bipartisan support, makes elementary good sense, and is the best hope we have to prevent a nuclear-armed Iran. There is no excuse for muzzling the Congress on an issue of this importance to our national security, to the security of Israel, our closest ally in the Middle East, and to international stability more broadly.

I know many active members of AIPAC—the majority leader mentioned AIPAC. They want to have this vote. They will be coming to Washington next week from all over the country. I will bet this is a vote they want to have.

This is a rare issue that should unite both parties in common purpose. There is no question that it would if the majority leader would simply drop his reflexive deference to a President whose foreign policy is focused on withdrawing from our overseas commitments, a foreign policy that at worst poses a serious threat to our own security and that of our allies.

So once again I call on the majority leader to allow the Congress, allow the Senate to serve its purpose and express itself in our Nation's policy toward Iran. Let our constituents speak on this all-important issue on which so many of us in both parties actually agree.

In the Joint Plan of Action, the President made clear that he opposes additional sanctions. Why don't we let Congress speak? Let Congress have a voice. Let's stand together for a forward-deployed, ready, and lethal force that makes our commitments real in the eyes of friend and foe alike. Let's hold Iran accountable—actually hold them accountable. Let's do the right thing—approve this legislation and send it to the President's desk. The clock is ticking. The time to act is now.

CHANGE IN POLICY

Mr. MCCONNELL. Earlier this year I came to the floor to pose a simple question about President Obama's final years in office: Did he want to be remembered as a hero to the left or as a champion for the middle class? That is the question. I asked the question this way because for the past several years the left has basically had its run of this White House. During that period the politically connected and the already powerful have clearly prospered. But what about the middle class? They feel as though they have been shut out altogether as household income has plummeted and families who were struggling to pay the bills have gotten left behind by a President and a party who claimed to act in their name.

So I wanted to know: Did the President plan to continue down the same ideological road he has taken us on or would he change course and embrace effective proposals that would make a real difference in the lives of middle-class Americans? Would he reach across the aisle to jump-start job creation and make the economy work for the middle class again?

Well, over the last few months we appear to have gotten our answer. Once more, the real concerns of ordinary Americans have been pushed aside in favor of the preoccupation of the political left. Yet again we have seen the truth of the old saying that a liberal never lets the facts get in the way of a good theory. Once again we have seen how liberal policies end up hurting the very people they claim to help.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the debate over the minimum wage. As a recent CBO report made clear, the President's bill basically amounts to a terrible real-world tradeoff, helping one group of low-income Americans by undercutting another group of low-income Americans. How is that fair? Americans are crying out for jobs. Job creation is the top issue in our country. Our unemployment and underemployment rates have remained abysmally high more than half a decade after this President took office. What is the White House's solution? A bill that might sound good in theory but could cost as many as 1 million jobs, according to CBO.

The Congressional Budget Office released another report, this one on ObamaCare. There is a similar story: 2.5 million fewer Americans in jobs thanks to ObamaCare; huge disincentives to work thanks to ObamaCare. That is what CBO says.

Of course, Washington Democrats—the same folks who promised you could keep your health plan if you liked it—told Americans not to believe their own eyes, that ObamaCare would simply liberate them from jobs. ObamaCare would simply liberate them from jobs. It is just unbelievable, especially when we consider that the law's medical device tax alone is projected to kill as many as 33,000 jobs and that 60 percent of business owners and HR pro-

fessionals recently surveyed said ObamaCare will negatively impact jobs. As a member of that group recently put it, "Small businesses have an incentive to stay small" under ObamaCare. That is because ObamaCare can punish businesses that choose to hire more workers.

In my home State of Kentucky, the tension between the priorities of the left and the needs of real people is on full display. That is because the Obama administration has trained its sights on some of our most vulnerable citizens. One administration adviser actually used the words "war on coal" to essentially describe what the administration is doing or, in his view, probably should be doing to hard-working miners who just want to put food on the table.

Those were his words, not mine. Here is why: Because according to liberal elites in Washington, these folks are standing in the way of their theories. A practical approach that actually takes the concerns and anxieties of those people into account would promote clean energy even as it acknowledged the real-world benefits of traditional sources of energy.

My point is this: The administration has broken faith with the middle class, and it has stirred up strong emotions, especially among those who actually want to see a better life for those struggling to make it in our States. Almost everyone feels let down. A lot of folks are very angry.

It is a real tragedy, not only because of the missed opportunities and the human cost of these policies but also because when the President ran for office, he promised a very different approach.

It is tragic because the very folks he has talked about helping are the ones who seem to suffer the most under his Presidency.

It is tragic because it appears as if he has answered the question I posed in January: that he is prepared to double down on the left and throw in the towel on the middle class. How else can you explain the obsession with all of these peripheral ideological issues at a time when Americans are demanding good, stable, high-paying jobs and a new direction, at a time when folks' wages are stagnant but their costs always seem to be rising, at a time when younger Americans seem to be resigned to a harder life than their parents had? How else can you explain why the President has refused to sign off on projects such as Keystone Pipeline that would create thousands of jobs or why he refuses to push his own party to join Republicans and support trade legislation that could create even more jobs?

This cannot be the legacy the President really wants to leave, but it is the legacy he will be ensuring for himself if he does not change. There is still time to alter the course. There is still time for the President to acknowledge that there is no reconciling the demands of his base and the concerns of the middle class. It is one or the other.