

on filling the vacancies that already exist. Unfortunately, the Judiciary Committee is moving at a glacial pace toward that end. It has only held two circuit court hearings this year. Before that, it hadn't held a single one since last September. We have no indication that it is going to pick up the pace. There are several outstanding nominees who have been sitting in committee who meet the chairman's criteria. Until they are treated fairly, the majority will find our cooperation increasingly hard to come by.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I understand that my distinguished counterpart has a right to do this, an absolute right. I don't question that right. We will just have to schedule the hearing at a different time, if they don't want to have the hearing. I will, though, briefly comment, quoting Majority Leader Lott from years past. When we go home to our respective States, there are a lot of issues. Every State has the same issues: housing problems, high gas prices, doing something about global warming. When is the last time anyone went home and somebody said to you: Boy, are you guys going to do something about those judges? As Senator Lott said: The question never comes up.

Senator LEAHY, chairman of this committee, and I have said before, this Judiciary Committee has wide-ranging jurisdiction over a lot of issues, most of which are extremely difficult to deal with. He does a remarkably good job. I am very proud that he is the chairman of the Judiciary Committee. But he and I said we would do our utmost by the Memorial Day break to confirm three more circuit court judges. I think it was three; I don't remember the number. We did our utmost. Senator LEAHY did his utmost. But it was slow walked by the Republicans on the Judiciary Committee. So we are at a point now where finally we had two circuit court judges reported out of the committee last week. We are going to vote on those as soon as we can. We have fulfilled our commitment, so no one needs to talk about commitments not being fulfilled.

Again, I didn't invent the Thurmond rule. It was invented by long-time Senator Strom Thurmond, at one time chairman of the Judiciary Committee. He said that after June 1, he felt it was appropriate not to rush into appointing more Federal judges. We have not said that the Thurmond rule is in place. But some said we should have it in place. It is well after June 1, and Senator LEAHY and I are still committed to taking care of more circuit court judges. We are going to do that. I am sure there will be opportunities to take a look at some trial court judges. But we are doing our very best.

I admire and appreciate the work of Senator LEAHY.

Mr. LEAHY. Will the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. REID. Yes, I will.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I ask through the Chair, did the majority leader not hear the distinguished Republican leader say they don't want to give consent to these hearings that the majority may want? I was wondering if the distinguished majority leader was aware of this discussion on May 15 of this year about this judgeship act. First, I quote Senator SESSIONS, a noted Republican:

My comments on the judges' bill, as a member and Ranking on the Courts Subcommittee, we did have hearings several years ago but not recently.

Then we heard from Senator KYL, the distinguished deputy minority leader:

So what I would like to do, Mr. Chairman, is just recommend that you take our colleagues up on the suggestion that we have a hearing to validate the requirements.

At which point Senator COBURN, another Republican, said:

If we're going to fix it, let's fix it right. Let's have a great hearing. Let's bring the GAO in, let's bring the Conference in, and let's find out [how] to do it right.

And then Senator GRASSLEY, another noted Republican said:

That is the purpose of a hearing, and that's why it is very important that we give this adequate study. I ask the distinguished leader, was he aware of the fact that this hearing was being held after four senior members of the Republican caucus asked me to have the hearing?

Mr. REID. I say to my friend, in response to his question, yes. And the Senator from Vermont followed the advice of his colleagues and had someone from the General Accounting Office testify. I appreciate that.

I ask that we have the vote now. Members have been waiting.

RENEWABLE ENERGY AND JOB CREATION ACT OF 2008—MOTION TO PROCEED—Continued

CLOTURE MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, pursuant to rule XXII, the clerk will report the motion to invoke cloture.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, hereby move to bring to a close debate on the motion to proceed to Calendar No. 767, H.R. 6049, the Renewable Energy and Job Creation Act of 2008.

Harry Reid, Max Baucus, Barbara Boxer, Amy Klobuchar, Benjamin L. Cardin, E. Benjamin Nelson, Maria Cantwell, Patty Murray, Bernard Sanders, Daniel K. Akaka, Robert Menendez, Ron Wyden, Debbie Stabenow, Blanche L. Lincoln, Patrick J. Leahy, Richard Durbin, Sheldon Whitehouse.

Mr. SPECTER. Mr. President, I have sought recognition to discuss my vote against cloture on the motion to proceed to H.R. 6049, the Energy and Job Creation Act of 2008.

H.R. 6049 would revive important tax provisions that expired at the end of

2007 and extend provisions that are set to expire at the end of 2008. I support extension of the R&D tax credit, teacher expenses deduction, tuition deduction, accelerated depreciation for leasehold and restaurant improvements, the renewable energy tax incentives, and many other important provisions in this package.

In addition, the bill includes a provision that I introduced, S. 814, which would allow attorneys to deduct reimbursable court costs and expenses in the same tax period in which they are paid or incurred. I strongly support this provision and have urged Chairman BAUCUS and Ranking Member GRASSLEY to include it in this bill.

While the House bill, H.R. 6049, does not address the alternative minimum tax, AMT, it is my understanding that a Baucus substitute amendment will include a 1-year AMT "patch," without offsets, to prevent millions of additional taxpayers from being hit by the AMT as a result of bracket creep. I support the AMT "patch" so long as it is not used as an excuse to raise taxes elsewhere by adding offsets. The AMT revenues on millions of taxpayers were never intended to be collected.

Despite the positive elements of this legislation, there are still significant issues that must be addressed. The main sticking point between Democrats and Republicans is whether temporary extensions of tax relief should be offset with permanent tax increases elsewhere. Following that process year-in and year-out means that permanent tax increases must be enacted so that taxpayers can maintain the current tax structure. On April 23, 2008, I, along with 40 other Republicans, wrote to Finance Chairman BAUCUS to support "enacting a 2008 AMT patch and extending the various expiring tax provisions without offsetting tax increases." It would be my preference to see the tax extenders package passed without offsets.

As it relates to the renewable energy tax incentives, it is difficult to understand why the House bill and the anticipated Baucus substitute would require offsets when the Senate has already spoken clearly on the issue. On April 10, 2008, the Senate voted 88 to 8 for an Ensign/Cantwell amendment to the Foreclosure Prevention Act to extend the renewable energy tax incentives without offsets. Pennsylvania is among the leading producers of wind energy east of the Mississippi River. The thousands of Pennsylvanians employed in the alternative energy industry and those interested in clean, renewable sources of energy for their homes are looking to Congress to provide clarity and certainty on this issue. Without immediate action, it is widely believed that investments will decline significantly throughout the second half of 2008.

On June 10, 2008, the Senate failed to invoke cloture on the motion to proceed to H.R. 6049 by a vote of 50 to 44. That vote, and the vote which occurred

today 52 to 44, demonstrate that Senate Republicans need to be included in the process of drafting the bill. An open amendment process is important for this bill to proceed. Republican amendments must be allowed. However, an open process is threatened by the Majority Leader's standard operating procedure of "filling the tree" and filing cloture to cut off further amendments and debate.

On May 21, 2008, the White House issued a Statement of Administration Policy which states that the President's senior advisers would recommend a Presidential veto of this bill in its current form. It is my hope that in light of today's vote, leadership on both sides will work quickly to bring up this bill in a bipartisan manner that will allow the Senate to work its will and pass legislation that can be quickly signed by the President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the motion to proceed to H.R. 6049, the Renewable Energy and Job Creation Act of 2008, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from New York (Mrs. CLINTON), the Senator from Massachusetts (Mr. KENNEDY), and the Senator from Illinois (Mr. OBAMA) are necessarily absent.

Mr. KYL. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Arizona (Mr. MCCAIN).

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 52, nays 44, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 150 Leg.]

YEAS—52

Akaka	Durbin	Murray
Baucus	Feingold	Nelson (FL)
Bayh	Feinstein	Nelson (NE)
Biden	Harkin	Pryor
Bingaman	Inouye	Reed
Boxer	Johnson	Rockefeller
Brown	Kerry	Salazar
Byrd	Klobuchar	Sanders
Cantwell	Kohl	Schumer
Cardin	Landrieu	Smith
Carper	Lautenberg	Snowe
Casey	Leahy	Stabenow
Coleman	Levin	Tester
Collins	Lieberman	Webb
Conrad	Lincoln	Whitehouse
Corker	McCaskill	Wyden
Dodd	Menendez	
Dorgan	Mikulski	

NAYS—44

Alexander	Craig	Hutchison
Allard	Crapo	Inhofe
Barrasso	DeMint	Isakson
Bennett	Dole	Kyl
Bond	Domenici	Lugar
Brownback	Ensign	Martinez
Bunning	Enzi	McConnell
Burr	Graham	Murkowski
Chambliss	Grassley	Reid
Coburn	Gregg	Roberts
Cochran	Hagel	Sessions
Cornyn	Hatch	Shelby

Specter	Thune	Warner
Stevens	Vitter	Wicker
Sununu	Voinovich	

NOT VOTING—4

Clinton	McCain
Kennedy	Obama

The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 52, the nays are 44. Three-fifths of the Senators duly chosen and sworn not having voted in the affirmative, the motion is rejected.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I enter a motion to reconsider the vote by which cloture was not invoked on the motion to proceed to H.R. 6049.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The motion is entered.

VISIT TO THE SENATE BY JAPANESE PARLIAMENTARIANS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I have spoken with the Republican leader about this. We have the opportunity to greet some Japanese parliamentarians. Senators INOUE and STEVENS have worked for many years to develop a relationship with the Japanese parliamentarians and have been extremely successful. I hope Senators in the Chamber will say hello to our colleagues from Japan.

RECESS SUBJECT TO THE CALL OF THE CHAIR

Mr. REID. I ask unanimous consent that the Senate have a short recess subject to the call of the Chair.

There being no objection, the Senate, at 2:51 p.m., recessed, subject to the call of the Chair, until 2:59 p.m., and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. CARPER).

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. LANDRIEU). The Senator from Minnesota is recognized.

BURMA

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Madam President, yesterday I came to the floor, along with Senators HARKIN, GRASSLEY, and others, to talk about the devastating floods the Midwest has experienced, and no one would know more than the Presiding Officer about the tragedies these types of natural disasters can cause for everyone in those communities and for the infrastructure.

But today I am here to talk about something a little different, about how another country, the country of Burma, has dealt with this. I come to the floor today to call attention to the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Burma more than 6 weeks after the deadly storm that wreaked widespread death and destruction throughout that region.

When Cyclone Nargis struck the Irrawaddy Delta on May 2, the international community's attention was captivated by the catastrophic loss of life and the ensuing dangerous and deplorable conditions faced by 2.4 million Burmese who survived the storm.

In the days immediately following the storm, the United States, the U.N., and other nations and organizations applied strong pressure on Burma's ruling Government to allow all international aid workers to enter disaster areas and provide medical and humanitarian aid to survivors. The 16 women

Senators who are united in the Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues on Burma sent a letter to the U.N. Secretary urging him to convince the Burmese Government to allow disaster relief assessment teams into the country and lift restrictions on international humanitarian organizations. When the Burmese Government finally consented and pledged to allow international aid workers to enter the country, I believe many of us hoped the full-scale recovery process had begun and that we could turn our attention elsewhere. Sadly, this was not the case. The situation in Burma remains perilous, and the 2.4 million storm survivors need our attention now more than ever.

I recently met with representatives from the local Burmese community in my State who have been personally impacted by this deadly natural disaster, the most deadly in their country's history. Minnesota is home to thousands of people from Burma, including the largest U.N. concentration of refugees who have been victims of religious and ethnic persecution under Burma's military regime. As with so many immigrant and refugee communities in our Nation, the members of Minnesota's Burmese community maintain extensive ties to their country, and the storm and its aftermath has been a particularly painful period. Too many members of this community are still waiting after 6 weeks to hear from grandparents and cousins and sisters and brothers. They do not know if they are alive.

I met with the leaders of their community in order to listen to the information and reports they were receiving from friends and relatives caught in the middle of an ongoing disaster. The stories I heard were heartbreaking. Over 100,000 people are believed to have lost their lives during and after the storm. Tens of thousands are still missing, and millions are homeless and without adequate food or fresh water. This disaster was nearly of tsunami proportions; however, it affected one small country, which time and time again refused our help.

The local Burmese with whom I met told me how difficult it is to get basic information and stay in contact with their family members in the disaster areas. One woman told me she still has not been able to locate her sisters in Burma. Others expressed their fears that the Burmese regime would never admit the need for outside help or allow the aid that entered the country to reach the areas it was needed the most. They feared that unless the international community remained vigilant and refused to accept the Burmese Government's conditions and control over humanitarian aid, the plight of the people would grow weaker while the regime's grip would grow stronger.

Casualties from the Burma cyclone, as I mentioned, are nearly on the same scale as the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004. But in that instance, the impacted countries accepted and even

asked for international aid. With the military regime in Burma, they have tried to shut the world out. While the outpouring of donations, relief supplies, and aid personnel from around the world has been substantial, only a fraction of available international aid is reaching the storm's 2.4 million survivors. U.N. officials have reported that aid groups are unable to provide 1.1 million survivors with sufficient food, clean water, and shelter, while trying to prevent a second wave of deaths from malnutrition and disease. Of the 1.3 million people who have received some form of help, the U.N. found they only have had access to inconsistent levels of assistance. Yet the Burmese regime continues to raise bureaucratic obstructions to the help waiting helplessly offshore.

Those international recovery workers who have been allowed to enter the country, and even Burma's own aid donors and relief organizations, are facing roadblocks in accessing the disaster regions to provide aid, leaving hundreds of thousands of survivors to fend for themselves. We have seen news reports that survivors have been forced to drink from dirty canals and to go for days without food. Many are turning to Burmese monks for help due to the Government's inaction—the same monks who faced a brutal military crackdown last fall for their peaceful prodemocracy demonstrations.

According to aid officials, in a normal recovery effort, 6 weeks after a disaster—and you think about 6 weeks after Katrina in your home State of Louisiana, Madam President—survivors should be on the road to recovery and thinking about what they need to do to restart their lives. In Burma, 6 weeks after the storm, many survivors still didn't know how they were going to find food, water, or shelter on a daily basis.

We are now receiving reports that the Government is forcibly closing aid camps and forcing homeless survivors to return to devastated villages. They are being told to rebuild their homes, but they haven't been given the assistance to do so.

The representatives of the Burmese community I met with in Minnesota understand that the cyclone, and its aftermath, is more than a natural disaster, it is a political disaster. It is a disaster made far worse, far more deadly, because of the repressive military regime that controls the country. The Burmese people have been repressed and impoverished by their own Government for years. The regime's lack of response to the cyclone disaster just highlights how bad the human rights situation is. Rather than focusing on ways to help the millions of Burmese struggling to survive, the regime instead used the chaos of the storm's aftermath to quietly extend another year the detention of Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of Burma's democracy movement, who has been detained at home on and off for 12 of the last 18 years.

What would be an appalling and inexcusable action in any other nation facing similar circumstances comes as little surprise to anyone who has been following the events in Burma over the last few years. But it wasn't always that way. In fact, the current political conditions in Burma are ironic and tragic, especially when we consider that this country produced one of the great statesmen of the modern world—U Thant. As Secretary General of the United Nations from 1961 to 1971, he worked so hard to promote international human rights and to bring peace to troubled regions of the world. In an address to the General Assembly commemorating the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, U Thant said that in the age of jet plane and satellites circling the globe, “the world is fast becoming a community, a community with common interests and common aspirations. Gone are the days when each nation was an island unto itself. Today, questions of human rights are a matter of international concern.”

Unfortunately, the Government in Burma wants to stay an island unto itself and doesn't think the world should concern itself with the human rights of its people. The military regime's neglect and abuse of its own people challenges our traditional notions of national sovereignty and non-interference. The indifference of Burma's military regime has generated an international debate about humanitarian aid and the need for stronger international law to deal with cases where national governments fail or refuse to provide adequate aid.

In recent years, the international community has come to recognize that a government has a fundamental responsibility to protect its own people and that we have a responsibility to take action with humanitarian intervention when a government fails in that responsibility.

Two weeks ago, U.S. Navy ships loaded with aid supplies and equipment withdrew from Burmese waters after repeated unsuccessful attempts to deliver their vital cargo that could save thousands of lives. U.S. officials have said they will return only when Burma's leaders change their minds and allow them to offload their supplies in Burma's ports. But we cannot simply turn away from the Burmese people and allow the Burmese regime to continue to sacrifice thousands of lives in order to protect its own security. We must use all available means to compel the regime to allow full aid supplies and personnel to enter the disaster areas and to stay there until survivors are ready and able to begin rebuilding their lives.

At the end of the meeting with our local Burmese, I pledged to them that I would take their stories to Washington and do what I can to bring attention to the plight of the people in their country as we use our influence to bring about immediate and long-

term constructive change. The rebuilding process in Burma will take years, and it is imperative that in the weeks and the months to come, we don't lose our focus or our commitment or our obligation to assist the Burmese people. So I will continue to work with my colleagues to draw attention to this situation and to continue to provide every available opportunity to call attention to it. This is our moral responsibility.

Madam President, I yield the floor, and 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. BROWN. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mr. BROWN. I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

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

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. BROWN. Madam President, in the last 16 months, I have held some 100 roundtables across my State where I invited some 65 Ohio counties of the 88. I invited a cross section of people, 15 to 20 people from a community, to sit down and talk about their hopes, dreams, and ideas for working together, the Federal Government with local government, businesses, labor organizations, schools, and others.

I have met with a number of workers and small business owners, community leaders, and teachers. I heard over and over, as the Presiding Officer has, about the economic anxiety facing families in the State. I have done these roundtables from Bryan to Steubenville, from Ashtabula to Hamilton. Nowhere is this anxiety felt more acutely than among displaced workers and Ohio families struggling to make ends meet.

Fundamentally flawed trade agreements and Bush economic policies have crippled communities in too many cases and devastated far too many families. Since January 2001, Ohio State has lost 200,000 manufacturing jobs. Since that time, the Nation has lost 3 million manufacturing jobs. When one loses a manufacturing job, especially if it is a plant shutdown in a relatively small community—this is not happening only in Cleveland and Dayton and Youngstown and Toledo; it is happening in Tiffin, Defiance, Portsmouth, and Chillicothe—if it has 300 workers, it means fewer police officers because of what happens to taxes. There aren't as many people working and businesses and individuals who are paying city income tax or county tax. It means teacher layoffs, police, and fire layoffs. It means services from the community to support families are not what they were prior to the plant closings.

Clearly, a big reason is our trade policy, the NAFTA-CAFTA model, PNTR

with China, which has caused the outsourcing of millions of jobs. It is bad tax policy and Bush economic policy. We obviously need to change direction. That is not going to happen with this President. It is not going to happen with the filibusters going on in the Senate right now. But what we can do something about immediately is to help those Ohio families and Louisiana families with unemployment insurance. It is the only economic lifeline so many families have.

Unemployment compensation is insurance. It is called unemployment insurance. It is not a giveaway. It is not welfare. It is individuals paying in while they are working to an insurance plan. The reason it is called insurance is, if they lose their jobs, it is insurance against the loss of the job. They have earned this money. Yet an awful lot of people, most of my friends on the other side of the aisle as well as the gentleman sitting in the White House, seem to think that unemployment insurance is a giveaway, a welfare program, something that people want to game the system and don't want to work. They want to stay home, watch TV, and collect unemployment insurance.

The fact is, we should reward work. People want to work. But hundreds of thousands of Ohioans and millions all over the country have seen their unemployment expire, and they are asking for an additional 13 weeks to get them through the day. Many of these are single parents. Many people, if they have lost a job, lose their health care, and they need a little bit of help.

Extending unemployment benefits is not only the right thing morally to do for these families, it is also a good economic stimulus package. The Presiding Officer knows that when we were earlier trying to figure out how we could do a stimulus package to get the economy going, the single best way is unemployment insurance extension, because that puts money right into pockets immediately. The mechanism of government is already in place so we extend to them their unemployment which had run out. We already know how to do it. It is people who will spend the money on daily living—on food, clothes, books for their kids, paying the rent, paying heating or cooling bills. That is why it is so important.

I have letters I have received in the last few weeks from people in Ohio, individuals, most of who are unemployed. Sometimes they are writing for a neighbor or family member. Usually they are writing for themselves saying: Please extend unemployment insurance.

It is clear that all of us are getting these letters. Members of Congress in the House and Senate are receiving tens of thousands of letters, so it is crucial. In my State, in the last 7 weeks, we have seen a GM plant, 2,500 workers, is going to close near Dayton. We have seen DHL, a company in southwest Ohio that delivers packages,

talking about literally shutting their operation down. That is 7,000 jobs in Wilmington, a community of 13,000 people. Imagine what it does to them. There is a company in Geauga County in the northeast part of the State that announced layoffs of hundreds of workers. Continental Airlines is laying off 3,000 workers, not only in Ohio but mostly in its hubs in Newark, Houston, and Cleveland. That is why this is so very important.

It is not a giveaway. It is unemployment insurance. It will be an effective economic stimulus to get the economy going. It is all about thousands of Ohioans, hundreds of thousands of people across the country, thousands of people in my State saying simply: I am trying to find a job. I am working to find a job. I haven't found a job yet, but I need an extension of my unemployment benefit.

Shawna from Akron wrote to me:

We are facing losing our house, our car, and much more. I beg you to work for an extension of unemployment benefits.

Patricia and David Troy, a small community north of Dayton, wrote:

My husband is one of 334,000 unemployed Ohioans.

Brent from West Chester, not far from Cincinnati, wrote:

We need our benefits to be extended or families won't be able to make it.

Nicole from Huron, a town near Lake Erie in northern Ohio, writes in the most direct terms:

Please help us.

This is something we can do. It is not going to solve our economic problems, but it will help an awful lot of families. It will, in part, be a stimulus for the economy. There is no reason we should not do it.

I ask my friends on the other side of the aisle to support the extension of unemployment benefits, and I ask the President to change his mind and sign this legislation. It will matter for the country, for States, communities, and especially for families.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mrs. MURRAY. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, over the last 8 years, American families have watched as the price of everything from gas to groceries has gone up and up while the value of the dollar has gone down and down. Last month, they got more bad news. Employers cut jobs for the fifth straight month, bringing the total number of people looking for work to 8.5 million. It was the worst 1-month jump in unemployment in 22 years. That means that more of our workers are losing paychecks, even as they need money to pay for electricity,

fuel, and food. It comes on top of the mortgage and credit crisis in which millions of families have watched their primary source of wealth, their homes, plummet in value.

Americans are looking to us for help, and we have to take action immediately. We have a proposal before us that would offer some relief by extending unemployment insurance for an extra 3 months. That would have two benefits. It would ensure that Americans, while they are looking for work, will still be able to put food on the table and fill up their gas tanks, and it will give our economy an immediate boost because that money will be spent quickly. This same measure passed the House overwhelmingly last week, because Members on both sides of the aisle realize that we have to move quickly. I am concerned that now Republicans are more interested in blocking our progress on anything than actually taking meaningful action for the American people. Instead of working with us, Republicans have filled endless hours on the floor with speeches complaining about problems but not offering any solutions. Instead of focusing on the concerns of working families, President Bush threatened to veto this bill, and then he left on a tour of Europe.

The American people are hurting. They have had enough of political games at their expense. I truly hope the President and his Republican allies will join us in supporting this very important measure to extend unemployment insurance.

AMERICAN AEROSPACE JOBS

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, I turn now to another example of how the President's priorities are hurting working families, and that is the administration's decision to send 44,000 American aerospace jobs to Europe. Within the next couple days, the Government Accountability Office is going to issue a ruling on a decision regarding a defense contract. It is Boeing's first protest of a defense contract in three decades. Boeing is challenging the Air Force's choice to award a \$35 billion contract to supply the military's next generation of aerial refueling tankers to a European company, Airbus. We are all now awaiting the GAO's ruling because it was clear there were some major flaws in that contract.

Ever since the Air Force announced in February that it had awarded the contract to Airbus, the Air Force has insisted there were no mistakes and the Airbus tanker cost less. Yet we have already learned that is not true.

Last week, the Air Force admitted to making a critical error when it calculated the operating cost of the two tankers. It is now acknowledging that the Airbus plane actually cost tens of millions of dollars more.

That isn't news that surprises us, but it is further evidence that we have to get more answers from the Pentagon before we, Congress, allow this contract to become a reality. That is why

I have come to the floor this afternoon. While the GAO decision is important, it won't even come close to addressing all of the questions that have been raised about this contract. That is because the GAO's role in this process is very limited. It can examine whether the Air Force followed the letter of the law in the selection process, but it cannot look at anything beyond that. So even if it is obvious to them that the Airbus tanker costs more, that it is less safe, or it doesn't meet the Air Force's needs, the GAO can't take any action. That is our job. That is Congress's job. We have to get answers to the questions that have been raised about this deal.

This is one of the largest contracts in our history, and it is incredibly important. Our tankers refuel planes and aircraft from every single branch of our military. As long as we control that refueling technology, we control our skies and our security, and that is extremely important to our national security. We have to make sure we are making the best decision for our taxpayers and for our servicemembers. That is Congress's responsibility.

I am especially concerned because when you compare Boeing's 767 with Airbus's A-330, the 767 is clearly a better plane. Compared to the 767, the Airbus tanker is a lot larger, it is less efficient, and it is more expensive to operate. According to the Air Force itself, the A-330—the Airbus tanker—ranked lower than the Boeing 767 in survivability, which is our ability to make sure that our warfighters who are flying those planes are safe. The Airbus tanker ranked much lower than the Boeing plane in keeping our men and women who are flying them safe.

Yet although I have asked the Air Force to explain its decision on this tanker numerous times over the last 3 months, I have been stonewalled again and again on answers. No one has explained why the Air Force would ask for a medium-sized plane and then go out and choose a much larger design which is going to cost billions of dollars more in just fuel and maintenance.

No one has explained why we would buy a plane that is so big that we are going to have to rip out and replace hundreds of runways, ramps, and hangars around the globe in order to land that plane.

No one has explained why we would not buy the safest possible airplane for our servicemembers.

Perhaps most importantly, no one can explain why we are giving a multi-billion-dollar contract to a company that has made no secret of its desire to dismantle our U.S. aerospace industry.

For years, the foreign governments that own Airbus have flooded it with illegal subsidies in order to compete with Boeing. In fact, the A-330 is a result of that subsidized system. The U.S. Trade Representative is so concerned that our Government has accused the EU of unfair trade practices before the World Trade Organization. It

makes absolutely no sense to me that we would accuse Europe of illegally subsidizing Airbus and then turn around and award it a \$35 billion contract of U.S. taxpayer money. It is especially troubling because the consequences to our national security and our economy will be huge.

A report by the nonpartisan Economic Policy Institute shows that Boeing would create at least twice as many American jobs as Airbus. In other words, we stand to lose as many as 14,000 jobs right here in the United States by sending this contract to Airbus. With those jobs that we lose, we lose the knowledge and we lose the expertise that helped us create our global military strength and has made the United States the world leader in aerospace technology. Yet no one has explained why we would let that slip away.

Not only am I very troubled that I haven't been able to get answers to these questions, but this month the Air Force gave us new reason to be concerned. About 2 weeks ago, the Defense Secretary forced out the Air Force Secretary, Michael Wynne, and its Chief of Staff, Michael Moseley, after finding systemic problems in the service that led him to have a serious lack of confidence in their leadership and in their oversight. Mr. Wynne and General Moseley blessed this Airbus contract. Clearly, we in Congress—those who represent the taxpayers of this country—need to look at this deal more closely.

Congress is entrusted by the American people with the responsibility to look out for our taxpayers and to be a check on this administration or any administration. When it is clear that the administration has gone in the wrong direction, we—Congress—have to step in. Now is one of those times. We owe it to our taxpayers and to our service men and women to make sure we buy the right plane. This contract is too important.

So I am here this afternoon on the floor of the Senate to implore my colleagues to stand with me and continue to demand that the Air Force justify this decision.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LAUTENBERG). Without objection, it is so ordered.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to a period for the transaction of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

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

VERMONT STATE HOUSING AUTHORITY

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I congratulate the Vermont State Housing Authority, VSHA, on 40 years of excellence. This organization, which came into existence with a creative spark as the first statewide housing authority in the country, continues to find new and innovative ways to use Federal housing programs to find affordable homes for Vermonters.

Reaching this milestone should bring great pride to the visionaries that created the system in 1968, including Governor Phil Hoff, and to the 40 years of staff, board members and leaders that have ensured that the statewide mission of VSHA has been carried out on a daily basis.

The VSHA executive director, Richard Williams, has been at the helm of the VSHA for more than half its lifespan, working since 1984 to expand the reach of the organization, develop and maintain properties and move people out of the cold and into their own homes. It takes a man of great conviction to accomplish what he has done, and it takes a great team to deliver on the mission he and the board created. Richard was recently quoted saying, "We are proud of what we've been able to accomplish for Vermonters over the past 40 years, but the challenges have never been greater. We're inspired and motivated by the knowledge that our services are needed more than ever."

One of VSHA's primary responsibilities is administering the Department of Housing and Urban Development's, HUD, Section 8 Voucher Program in Vermont. During the past 40 years, the VSHA has worked to increase the number of vouchers available to Vermonters in all corners of the State. This has been increasingly important as the Federal resources for the programs many of our Nation's most vulnerable populations depend upon have been shrinking and poorly prioritized. The number of low- to moderate-income Vermonters seeking affordable housing, including those with disabilities, the elderly and returning veterans, continues to climb. Fortunately for Vermonters, the VSHA is constantly recognized by HUD as one of the Nation's most well run and effective housing authorities—giving hope to those that might have lost hope in virtually every other government system.

Not only has the VSHA worked to assist people in finding affordable apartments, but they have also helped many Vermonters pursue their dreams of homeownership. It gives me great pride to say that VSHA's Homeownership program has given more than 80 low-income Vermont families the opportunity to become homeowners. This dynamic program works to improve self-sufficiency by converting Section 8