

today, better than most economists predicted—not good enough but decent. So it is not all bad news. But I am not satisfied hearing that things are simply better than expected. Nevada, similar to every other State, is still hurting, and our job is not to beat expectations, it is to beat unemployment and beat back the deficit. We cannot assume we are back to normal every time we hear encouraging news. We don't have that luxury because it is not true. We can't let our guard down and we can't waste any more time on symbolic votes.

The fight to repeal the patients' rights enshrined in the health reform law is behind us now. The arguments have been made, the votes have been counted, and similar to the majority of the American people, the Senate has decided the law of the land is better than the broken system it replaced.

I don't wish to spend a lot of time talking about health care because the vote speaks for itself, but I will say this. Those who want to deny Americans the right to afford a healthy life had their say in 2008, when President Obama was elected on the promise of change. They had their say in 2009, when we first passed this law. They had their say in 2010, when we finalized it. Now they have had their say in 2011, when they tried to repeal it. Each time the votes fell on the side of patients, patients' rights—more rights, not fewer. The Senate voted each time to put people, not insurance companies, in control. The Senate voted each time for health, not sickness. So it is time to move on.

Let's talk about jobs. We are on a jobs bill right now, the Federal Aviation Administration authorization. The Aviation Modernization Act, which is this bill, is to bring to America modern air travel, travel into the 21st century. This legislation will create hundreds of thousands of jobs—not hundreds, not thousands but hundreds of thousands. That is why we are fighting so hard for this legislation. It is a bipartisan piece of legislation. It is not a Democratic bill. It is not Republican. It is a bipartisan bill. The same bill passed the Senate unanimously last year. So I hope we come together in the spirit of compromise we all promised and finish it as quickly as possible. This bill alone will not eradicate unemployment, but it will help. It is going to move us further toward that goal, and the quicker we pass it the quicker 280,000 Americans will breathe easier by knowing a good, consistent paycheck is on the way.

We are all concerned about the deficit. There is nothing more important than creating jobs, though. We can never have a healthy economy when we have 15 million people out of work. We can never have a balanced budget when we have 15 million people out of work.

The deficit is something that is very important. Jobs, as I indicated, will work toward solving that problem, but it is not the only way to strengthen

our economy. We also need to keep digging out of the fiscal hole we inherited over the last decade. In the short term, we can responsibly cut spending. In the long term, we can cut our deficit. There are some things we have to be careful to avoid, such as jeopardizing the full faith and credit of our great country. That is what will happen if we don't raise our Nation's debt limit. If we don't act, if we allow the country to default on our legal obligations, we will send our economy into default for the first time in its history. That will certainly not save a single job or save a single home from foreclosure or encourage the domestic and foreign investment we need to grow. It will be just the opposite. Each of these steps is an important stride toward recovery. Together, they are a powerful leap forward.

We might be on the right track and heading in the right direction, but we still have a ways to travel. Let's avoid the temptation to get distracted and derailed. Let's keep driving toward that goal. If we work toward putting people back to work, soon Nevada and every other State will not just read good news in a headline here or there, they will see it before their eyes—in their workplaces and in their wallets and throughout our country.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

CENTENNIAL OF RONALD REAGAN'S BIRTH

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, this month we celebrate the 100th anniversary of the birth of Ronald Reagan, our Nation's 40th President. He was born in a second-story apartment above a tavern in small-town Tampico, IL, on February 6, 1911.

The values he learned there he would carry with him throughout a long and momentous life—from the radio announcer's booth, the Hollywood sound stage, and the union leader's negotiating table to the Governor's mansion, the White House and the world.

One hundred years after his birth, 30 years after his inauguration as President, and only 7 years after his passing, it is already widely acknowledged by both sides of the aisle that Ronald Reagan was a great man and a great President. His role in ending the Cold War, with America victorious and the forces of Marxism-Leninism, as he so eloquently put it, "on the ash heap of history," has been assured. You could almost say we are all Reaganites now.

But oh, how so much has changed. For when Ronald Reagan was still a force actively shaping history, and not yet a part of it, he had many fewer friends.

One opinion writer in 1986 made his disdain clear when he wrote this:

It seemed to us, the carping critics, that this man was not terribly bright, not terribly thoughtful or well informed, not terribly honest, and in most other ways not up to the most important job in the world.

But it seems a lot of people just did not understand Ronald Reagan's vision at the time—not just his Communist adversaries, not just his political opponents here at home, even those in his own party, and on his own staff sometimes failed to see the strength of the man's commitment to freedom—or his courage in seeking it.

I can think of one prominent example: The words that we now think of as Reagan's most powerful utterance as President were almost never spoken. On June 12, 1987, Reagan traveled to what was then West Berlin to make unmistakably clear his commitment to increasing freedom in Soviet-dominated Eastern Europe. As the draft of his prepared remarks was circulated through the many byzantine layers of bureaucracy that come with the modern presidency, one little phrase kept getting edited out.

Virtually the entire foreign policy apparatus of the U.S. Government was opposed to what Reagan wanted to say. His Secretary of State, his National Security Adviser—they told him he would embarrass his host, West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl. They said he would anger and provoke Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev. They warned he would arouse false hopes among the East Germans unlucky enough to live on the wrong side of the Berlin Wall.

It finally got to the point where Reagan had to have a confrontation with his own deputy chief of staff. "I'm the president, right?" he is reported to have asked. "So I get to decide whether the line about tearing down the wall stays in?" When assured that he was, and he did, Reagan said, "Then it stays in."

Only after pulling rank on his own staff this way did Reagan finally address the crowd of 20,000 gathered at the Brandenburg Gate and issue his famous declaration, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall."

Two years later, Germans East and West did exactly that, presaging German unification and the fall of the Soviet Union. A piece of the Berlin Wall is preserved today at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library in Simi Valley, CA, to remind us of the power one man's words can have.

Ronald Reagan once said, "We don't have to turn to our history books for heroes; they are all around us." That is true even if you don't know where to look. Thirty years ago some dismissed Reagan as a man of no great importance. With hindsight it is much easier to see him for the giant figure in history that he was.

And while we are thankful that, for most of us, Ronald Reagan's vision and accomplishments are still within living memory, his life, his vision of a freer America and a free world, and his accomplishments to achieve that are most assuredly in the history books.