

just referred to, almost 100 amendments, none of which related to the legislation at hand. Two more jobs bills passed the Senate but are wasting away in the House. All four of these bills are commonsense efforts to spur innovation, investment, and hiring by private companies. All four had a proven track record of creating jobs. The message the Republicans have sent is clear: They care more about partisan politics than they do about putting Americans back to work.

Later today, Democrats will talk about our plan to reduce the jobs deficit, a problem just as critical to Americans as our budget deficit. We hope our Republican colleagues will join us to tackle the problem. So far, they have put politics first.

I don't know what it will take for Republicans to get the message that people in Nevada and across the country care more about jobs than any other issue. It is the most important issue on which Congress should focus. Instead, Republicans are focused on the one thing Americans don't want to change: ending Medicare as we know it. It is wrong that Republicans are trying to end Medicare as we know it. The American public does not support this.

The vast majority of Americans say they oppose the Republican plan to balance the budget on the backs of seniors by killing Medicare. The number amongst seniors and Independents is sky high in opposition to the Republican plan to change Medicare as we know it. There is no mystery to why they oppose it. The Republican plan to end Medicare would put insurance company bureaucrats between seniors and their doctors. It would raise drug prices from day one. It would increase the cost of cancer screenings and treatments for 7 million seniors and do a lot more damage to our Medicare recipients.

Seniors cannot afford this dangerous plan nor can America. The Senate can't afford to waste any more time. It is our job to create jobs. It is time for Republicans to leave Medicare alone and let us get back to work creating jobs.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 11 a.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with the time equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees, with the majority controlling the first half and the Republicans controlling the second half.

Under a subsequent order, each side will have the full 45 minutes.

The Senator from Iowa.

AUSTERITY DISCONNECT

Mr. HARKIN. Madam President, I wish to pick up a little bit again in my remarks on what the majority leader was just talking about; that is, the lack of focus on jobs in this country.

I am disturbed by the growing disconnect between Washington's obsession with austerity and retrenchment and cutting and slashing and the disconnect from that with the dramatically different needs, priorities, and anxieties of ordinary working Americans. The so-called chattering class here in Washington has persuaded itself that the biggest issue is the budget deficit. But Americans outside the Beltway are most concerned with a far more urgent deficit, the jobs deficit, and their concerns are well founded.

Our Nation remains deeply mired in the most protracted period of joblessness since the Great Depression. Real unemployment is close to 16 percent. Tens of millions of people who are employed are increasingly anxious about being able to hold on to their jobs and to make ends meet.

The American people get it. They want to get this economy moving again, and they know the best way to reduce the budget deficit is to help 25 million unemployed Americans get good, middle-class jobs and become taxpayers once again. With the private sector engine sputtering, there is an absolutely critical role for the Federal Government in creating demand and preventing a double-dip recession.

We have to wonder, is Washington listening to working middle-class Americans? Is Washington listening to the legions of unemployed and the underemployed who are desperate for solutions to their plight? Sadly, I think the answer is, no, Washington is not listening.

Many of our political leaders are treating the jobs crisis as yesterday's news. They are putting deficit reduction above all else. They are demanding extraordinary—in fact, unprecedented—cuts to government funding and government investment. It is akin to a bidding war, driven by the hysteria of the auction rather than the value of the lot: Let's cut \$1 trillion. No, \$1.5 trillion here. No, I have \$2 trillion over here. How about \$4 trillion? It is akin to a bidding war to see how much we can cut government funding and investment.

I have to ask, has Washington lost its mind? Don't we realize these Draconian cuts are the economic equivalent of applying leeches and draining blood from a sick patient? Don't we realize this will make both the jobs deficit and the budget deficit far worse?

Of course, we must act aggressively to bring deficits under control. But we have to do this in ways that continue to create more jobs while also improving the long-term competitiveness of the American economy.

We have reached the point of maximum danger in the fragile economic recovery. We are at the point of maximum danger. Employment growth is weak and threatens to stall out altogether. Businesses remain reluctant to invest and hire for the simple reason that there is not sufficient demand for goods and services. All those unemployed and underemployed people are only spending enough to make ends meet. If they are getting unemployment compensation, they are barely making ends meet. There is no excess money. The middle class is tapped out, with stagnant incomes, insecure jobs, high levels of mortgage, and high levels of consumer debt. The threat of a double-dip recession is far too real, and the fear of more unemployment also hangs right over tomorrow's horizon.

In this context, to insist that we slash Federal funding by trillions of dollars is beyond foolish. It is government malpractice. It flies in the face of everything we know and have learned about how economies work.

Two weeks ago, Federal Reserve Chairman Bernanke stated the obvious. He warned us:

A sharp fiscal consolidation focused on the very near term could be self-defeating if it were to undercut the still-fragile economy.

Again I ask, is anyone listening? The alarm bells are ringing all over America.

Recently, the Federal Reserve Bank of New York published an online article about what it called "the mistake of 1937." What is that all about? The New York Fed was referring to the premature fiscal and monetary pullback in 1937 just as the economy was beginning to get its legs to get out of the Depression. That premature retrenchment was a historic mistake. It killed the recovery then in progress and sent us back into the Great Depression for another almost 4 years until it was finally ended with the stimulative spending of World War II.

Paul Krugman, the Nobel Prize-winning economist, says that in important ways we have already repeated the mistake of 1937. We have taken our eyes off of what should be our No. 1 priority—creating jobs—and we have pivoted to an obsession—again I repeat, an obsession—with deep, short-term budget cuts which by their very nature will destroy jobs and weaken the economy.

Let me cite another glaring example of the disconnect between Washington and the rest of the country. Here in Washington Republicans assert that the Recovery Act was a failure. Why do they claim that? Because they claim President Obama promised the Recovery Act would reduce unemployment to 8 percent and because that has not happened, it was a failure. We have researched this. The Republican talking point on this President Obama promise has no basis in fact. Independent fact checkers in the media have tried to find such a promise or a statement by President Obama, and they have come up empty.