

I stand ready to work with the Majority Leader, with Senator DASCHLE, with my committee leadership, with Senators BYRD and GRAMM, with the Budget Committee and all my colleagues to find a way to bring this bill up as soon as possible.

Mr. BYRD. Will the Senator yield?

Mr. BAUCUS. I am happy to yield to the Senator.

Mr. BYRD. I thank the distinguished Senator for his remarks on this very important subject. I sat and listened to them. I found them to be very illuminating, very interesting, very informative and refreshing.

I have been around a good many years. I didn't realize all of the steps, the lengthy process, the consumption of time that is required from the alpha to the omega of planning and completing the highway. This has been most edifying to me as I have listened. I thank the Senator.

I recommend to all Senators that they read in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD the statement that has been made today by Senator BAUCUS. He sits on the authorizing committee, and he has had an opportunity because of the jurisdiction of that committee over highways, he has invested many years in the study of this subject matter, and it is a real privilege to have him part of the Senate. I thank him for imparting to me, and I am glad I took the time and sat here and listened to him.

This vast knowledge—I am sure he could speak all afternoon on this subject without notes. I thank him. His comments have been very helpful. I hope all Senators will read these remarks in the RECORD and that Senators will join in cosponsoring the Byrd-Gramm-Baucus-Warner amendment.

If the Senator will allow me 10 more seconds, I ask unanimous consent that the following three Senators be added as cosponsors to the Byrd-Gramm-Baucus-Warner amendment numbered 1397 to the bill S. 1173, the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1997: Senator DODD, Senator BINGAMAN, Senator THURMOND.

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

Mr. BYRD. I thank the distinguished Senator.

Mr. BAUCUS. I thank my good friend from West Virginia. Nobody has worked harder on this issue than he. We all owe him a tremendous debt of gratitude for his very fine work.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

A SEARCH FOR TRUTH WITH AN INDEPENDENT COUNSEL

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I rise today to call attention to a serious

and deeply troubling crisis in our country. This is a crisis of confidence, of credibility, and of integrity. Our Nation is indeed at a crossroads. Will we pursue the search for truth, or will we dodge, weave, and evade the truth?

I am, of course, referring to the investigation into serious allegations of illegal conduct by the President of the United States—that the President has engaged in a persistent pattern and practice of obstruction of justice. The allegations are grave, the investigation is legitimate, and ascertaining the truth—the whole truth, and nothing but the unqualified, unequivocal truth—is absolutely critical. The search for truth is being led by a highly capable former Solicitor General of the United States and a former judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit, Kenneth Starr.

Mr. President, I am deeply troubled today because Judge Starr's pursuit of the truth is being undermined every step of the way, every single day, in the press by those whose sole mission is to attack and impugn the court-appointed independent prosecutor and the congressionally created process. These attackers are not the journalists or the broadcasters.

Mr. President, what troubles me the most here is that these reckless attacks and ruthless onslaughts are being carried out by the closest advisers to the President of the United States.

Just this past Sunday on Meet the Press, Paul Begala, Assistant to the President, accused Judge Starr of leaks and lies and called him "corrupt." That is not a paraphrase, that is a direct quote. He actually used the word "corrupt." The smear campaign is being orchestrated by the White House.

Obviously, I can't vouch for the truth or falsity of the obstruction-of-justice charges against the President. But what I can tell you is that the assaults on Judge Starr, the character assassination against the court-appointed independent prosecutor, is authorized and approved by the President of the United States. And it should stop.

The White House and the First Lady have announced that the President's problems are nothing more than a "vast right-wing conspiracy." As many commentators have pointed out, this so-called conspiracy is so vast and so broad that it encompasses both the media and a White House intern.

But I would like to point out today that the vast and broad conspiracy just got bigger. Apparently, this vast right-wing conspiracy is so sweeping and so pernicious that, in 1993, it compelled a Democrat-chaired Ethics Committee in a Democratic-controlled Congress to appoint Judge Kenneth Starr to help investigate whether Republican Senator Bob Packwood should be expelled from the U.S. Senate.

Mr. President, let me refresh the recollection of the Senate regarding the 3-year Packwood investigation, which began in late 1992 and ended with

Senator Packwood's resignation in 1995.

I was the vice chairman, and later the chairman, of the Ethics Committee during that investigation. As everyone will recall, that investigation was a very sensitive, personal and serious matter. It involved the allegation that Senator Packwood had "engaged in sexual misconduct" and "attempted to intimidate and discredit the alleged victims, and misuse[d] official staff in attempts to intimidate and to discredit."

During this lengthy investigation, Senator Packwood objected to the Ethics Committee's review of his personal diary entries in the fall of 1993. The committee proposed a process where the diaries would be reviewed by an independent hearing examiner who would serve two functions: First, the examiner would review the diaries to ensure that the committee would see all relevant and probative information. Second, the examiner was asked to protect the privacy interests of Senator Packwood, his family and friends.

The Ethics Committee had to choose a person who was fair, impartial, prudent, and trustworthy. Someone who wouldn't be on a vendetta against Democrats or Republicans; someone who had earned the clear respect of both parties; someone with the highest integrity; someone with a clean track record; a man with sound credentials, who was above reproach. And the Ethics Committee chose such a man.

They chose a man who was the son of a Baptist minister, a graduate of Duke University Law School, a former clerk for Chief Justice Warren Burger. The Ethics Committee—chaired at the time by a Democrat in a Democrat-controlled Congress—chose a man who was the former Solicitor General of the United States, a former judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals.

That man was Kenneth Starr.

Let me tell you who was on the committee at that time. The committee was chaired by my colleague from Nevada, DICK BRYAN. The Republicans on the committee included myself, Senator CRAIG and Senator BOB SMITH of New Hampshire. The other Democrats were my dear colleagues, Senator MIKULSKI of Maryland and the current minority leader, Senator TOM DASCHLE.

The matter was not quiet and secretive. The entire U.S. Senate knew who would be called upon to exercise impartiality, discretion, and judgment in a highly important and highly sensitive matter. We actually discussed this matter on the floor of the Senate because there was a needed Senate action to enforce the subpoenas. Senator Alan Simpson referred to Judge Starr as "a splendid man," and "a man of judgment, honesty, integrity, and common sense."

Senator ARLEN SPECTER stated, "Many people have spoken about

[Judge Starr's] integrity, and the committee has already endorsed his standing. . . . If Judge Starr makes a judgment, that is the judgment. That is it."

My colleagues on the other side didn't object or dispute that notion. For example, Senator JOHN KERRY, of Massachusetts, voiced the consensus opinion when he declared on the Senate floor that "Judge Starr is certainly a neutral party."

And, it didn't stop with the Democratic-chaired Ethics Committee and the Democrat-controlled Congress. In 1994, the U.S. District Court in the District of Columbia had to choose someone to serve as a special master to help enforce the Ethics Committee's subpoena for the Packwood diaries.

The court had to choose a man who was fair, impartial, prudent, and trustworthy; again, someone who wouldn't be on a vendetta against Democrats or Republicans; again, someone who had earned the clear respect of both parties, and someone with the highest integrity, who was above reproach.

The court chose such a man, Mr. President. It chose the former Solicitor General of the United States and a former judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals, Kenneth Starr.

So, today, we examine the White House's ludicrous, self-serving claim of a "vast right-wing conspiracy" and find that the conspiracy has ensnared even more than we would have ever imagined. The "vast right-wing conspiracy" can now count as members the Democrat-chaired Ethics Committee in 1993 and the then Democrat-controlled Senate. And, lest we forget, the conspiracy can also count the Federal District Court for the District of Columbia as one of its members.

My point here, Mr. President, is simple: The attacks on Kenneth Starr are unfounded and unproductive. The attacks are, in fact, unconscionable.

Let me point out, as far as this crazy conspiracy theory is concerned, most people would agree that the Senator from Kentucky has fairly solid conservative Republican credentials. If somebody were engineering a "vast right-wing conspiracy," I think I might have gotten wind of it. Furthermore, let me point out that I don't know Ken Starr. I do not recall ever meeting him in my 14 years in Washington. If he were a fire-breathing Republican ideologue, one would think that, as active in Republican politics as I have been over the last 15 years, I might have run into him someplace along the line.

The crisis in the White House is a crisis for our entire country. The crisis will only be resolved by a fair and sober search for the truth. It is clear from the record that Judge Starr is the right man for this job. I think that it is important for the President and his people to stop this smear campaign. Let Ken Starr do his court-appointed job and let the American people learn the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

Mr. KENNEDY addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Massachusetts.

THE DEMOCRATIC AGENDA

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I strongly support the legislative priorities announced today by President Clinton, Vice President GORE, Senator DASCHLE, and Congressman GEPHARDT.

These priorities contain a number of major Democratic initiatives to protect Social Security and to help working families across the country on key issues such as jobs, education, health care, and the environment. And I look forward to their enactment this year.

One of the pillars of our Democratic agenda is a commitment to raise the minimum wage by 50 cents in each of the next 2 years. Our proposal will increase the minimum wage from its current level of \$5.15 an hour to \$5.65 an hour on January 1, 1999, to \$6.15 an hour on January 1 in the year 2000. In 1996, after a hard-fought battle in the last Congress, we raised the minimum wage by comparable amounts with no adverse effects whatever on the economy. The scare tactics about lost jobs proved to be as false as they are self-serving.

A recent study by the Economic Policy Institute contains documents that the sky hasn't fallen as a result of the last increase. Raising the minimum wage does not cause job loss for teenagers, adults, men, women, African Americans, Latinos, or anyone else. Twelve million Americans benefited from raising the minimum wage, and they deserve the increase that we are proposing.

To have the purchasing power it had in 1989, the minimum wage today would have to be \$7.33 an hour. That figure is still well above the level that we are proposing. That fact is a measure of how far we have not just fallen short but actually fallen back in giving low-income workers their fair share of our extraordinary economic growth.

In the past 30 years, the stock market, adjusted for inflation, has gone up by over 100 percent while the purchasing power of the minimum wage has gone down by 30 percent. We know who these minimum wage workers are. Sixty-percent are women. Nearly three-quarters are adults. Half of those who would benefit work full time. Over 80 percent work at least 20 hours a week. They are teacher's aides, child care providers. They are single heads of households with children. They are people who clean office buildings in countless communities across the country working 40 hours a week, 52 weeks a year.

Minimum wage workers earn \$10,712 a year, \$2,600 below the poverty level for a family of three. Low-income workers don't just deserve a wage; they urgently need a raise. Nationwide, soup kitchens, food pantries, and homeless shelters are increasingly serving the

working poor—not just the unemployed.

In 1996, according to a recent U.S. Conference of Mayors study, 38 percent of those seeking emergency food aid held jobs, up from 23 percent in 1994. Low-paying jobs are now almost the most frequently cited cause of hunger. Officials in 77 percent of cities cited this factor.

The American people understand the unfairness of requiring working families to subsist on a subpoverty minimum wage.

I look forward to the early enactment of the increase we are proposing. Twelve million working Americans deserve a helping hand.

In good conscience we cannot continue to proclaim and celebrate the Nation's current prosperity while consigning millions who have jobs to live in continuing poverty. No one who works for a living should have to live in poverty in the United States of America.

The second pillar of the Democratic agenda is the Patient's Bill of Rights on health insurance.

Few issues are more important to all working families than quality, affordable health care. Every family needs and deserves good medical care when a loved one is ill. Every family that has faithfully paid its premiums to its insurance plan deserves to receive the benefits the plan has promised. The American family knows that this promise is broken too often because unscrupulous insurance companies put profit ahead of patients.

In movie theaters across the country today audiences erupt in spontaneous cheers when the character portrayed by actress Helen Hunt explodes in frustration over the callous treatment that she and her son received from her managed care plan. The movie "As Good As It Gets" has been nominated for major academy awards.

But managed care today isn't receiving any awards, and neither is Congress for our lack of needed action to end these flagrant abuses.

The problems are obvious. Insurance company accountants should not be allowed to practice medicine. It is time to guarantee women the right to see a gynecologist. No breast cancer patient should be forced by health insurance plans to have a drop-by mastectomy when hospital care is needed. No patients with a rare or dangerous disease should be denied the right to be treated by a specialist. No child's health or very life should be at risk because a parent feels forced to drive past the nearest emergency room to a more distant hospital that is the only hospital covered by the group plan. No doctor should be subjected to gag rules, financial incentives, or financial penalties to prohibit or discourage them from giving patients the best medical advice. Reasonable review procedures should be available to anyone denied coverage or treatment by their insurance plan. Patients with an incurable