

Dakota and across the land, new efforts are being made to address the need for greater awareness, the need for greater education, the need for greater prevention, the need for greater response. And it is only if we as Senate leadership ensure that the people of this country recognize the importance of making this a higher priority will those needs be addressed throughout the Nation.

So I commend those who are taking the floor this morning to once again draw attention to these needs, draw attention to our need to respond, and to draw attention to the important priority it ought to have as we consider public policy.

#### ONGOING JOB CRISIS

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, 18 months ago, a group of 450 economists, including 10 Nobel laureates, made it clear that because the White House put the narrow interests of a few ahead of our Nation's economy, its jobs plan would fail. It would fail to create jobs, it would fail to lift wages, and it would fail to bring down our deficit.

The warning was clear. Now the record is undeniable. In the last 3 years, we have lost 1.6 million private sector jobs. The last time the economy took this long to replace jobs lost in a recession was the Great Depression. Mr. President, 2.7 million manufacturing jobs have been lost, and many sent overseas on a one-way ticket. Unemployment has increased 40 percent, and today 8 million Americans are out of work. And 1.7 million have been out of work for 6 months or longer.

That is horrible news for a couple that is hoping to retire, a family that is trying to put a child through college, or anyone who has been living from paycheck to paycheck.

But this situation touches all Americans, including those who have jobs today. That is because the weakness in the job market has undermined wage and salary growth. Real household income has dropped 3.4 percent since 2001. Adding to the squeeze, college tuition is up, gas prices have risen to all-time highs, and the cost of health care has risen by 45 percent since 2001.

Middle-class families are beginning to believe that the deck is stacked against them, and for good reason. The CBO recently confirmed what many of us have been saying for the past few years: The President's economic plan rewards wealth and punishes work by shifting the tax burden onto the shoulders of middle-class families. Even with middle-class families bearing more than their fair share of the tax burden, the country is looking at years and years of record deficits and debt.

This past weekend, I traveled around South Dakota, meeting with people and going door to door. More than any time in my memory, people tell me they need two or three jobs—not to get ahead, not to save for a house or their child's education, but simply to make their monthly bills. Many good manu-

facturing jobs have left the State, and it is getting more difficult to find full-time jobs that pay a wage good enough to raise a family.

Recently, I received a letter from a young woman in Lake Andes. She has done everything right. She went to college, got a master's degree, and got advanced skills that could help move our economy forward. But because there are so few good jobs, she has been out of work now for months. Just to get by, she has applied for lower skilled work. But often she is passed over for those jobs because employers worry that she is overqualified. What does it say about our economy that someone with real skills, willing to work hard, cannot get a job?

Out in our small towns and farming and ranching communities, the story can even get worse. I have been visiting these communities for more than 25 years. There is nothing more gratifying to me than to see a family farmer or rancher raise their children, teach them how to farm, and then pass their land down to them. That is why we led the fight to create an exemption in the estate tax to allow families to pass from one generation to the next the farms they have lived on for generations before. But too many family farms are getting swallowed up.

More often, children are forced to leave the communities they know and the families they love to find work in other places. They don't want to leave, but they cannot find work good enough to allow them to raise a family. So the way of life their families have enjoyed for generations is being lost. These families have been struggling for years, watching all they have worked for slip away from them. Yet when they look to Washington, they do not see their Government fighting for them, or even hearing them at times. The administration continues to say the economy has turned a corner. When these families look ahead, they don't see a corner, they see a cliff, and they are worried they are going to fall off.

Americans do not want to wait until after the election to do something. They need help now. I am glad we extended the middle-class tax cuts. Middle-class families need relief. Previous tax cuts were unfairly skewed to the very wealthiest of Americans. This was the right thing to do. It will probably help those people who are struggling, but there is much more that we need to do.

First, we need to pass a real jobs bill, one that puts top priority on creating jobs at home, closes corporate tax loopholes, and ends the incentives that encourage companies to ship American jobs overseas.

Second, we need to extend the unemployment benefits. Every week, another 85,000 Americans exhaust their unemployment benefits. They should not be punished because the economic policies that are in place have created the longest jobs slump since the Great Depression.

Third, it is time to raise the minimum wage. Today, the minimum wage is \$5.15 an hour, and it is worth less than \$3 when using 1968 wage indicators. Americans who work at the minimum wage for 40 hours a week, 52 weeks a year, still fall \$5,000 short of the poverty line. No American who works full time, 52 weeks a year, should live in poverty. In the time we have left this year, we should increase the minimum wage to \$7. It will not lift every working family out of poverty, but it will move millions of minimum wage workers closer to the life of security and dignity they deserve.

Fourth, we need to pass a Transportation bill that would provide needed infrastructure improvements across the Nation.

Fifth, we need to help workers whose jobs have been outsourced overseas to get back on their feet.

Finally, we need to pass the renewable fuels standard. In South Dakota alone, a renewable fuels standard would create 10,000 jobs and revitalize the rural economy. By reducing reliance on foreign oil, families would be less vulnerable to high energy costs.

It looks as though this Congress will end having failed to take strong action on behalf of American working families. Unfortunately, the leadership has stood in the way of commonsense proposals that would create jobs and improve the lives of working people.

Republican opposition to legislation designed to create jobs and help workers would be troubling at any time, but considered together, at a time when working families continue to feel the effects of a 3-year-long jobs slump, their stubborn opposition demonstrates a troubling indifference to the needs of American middle-class families.

Americans still dream of a better life. They still dream of a better future for themselves and their families. We have a responsibility to give Americans a chance to make that dream real. But it is time we tell Americans who are struggling that help is on the way. We are not helpless. We can create jobs, lift wages, and stop the outsourcing of the American workplace. All it takes is leadership.

Americans have been looking to Congress to provide the new direction of economic leadership they need. We have 1 more week before the Senate recesses. The American people are demanding action, and we have an obligation to deliver it.

I yield the floor.

Mr. REID addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Will the Senator allow me to make an announcement?

Mr. REID. Yes.

#### RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved that has not been used.