

that when an unsafe product is recalled it is actually pulled from the shelves and not sold to unsuspecting families.

These provisions will help give parents the confidence to know that children are safe and reduce the risk of injury and death for all Americans. That is why every major consumer advocacy organization in the Nation supports this bill.

I hope my colleagues, my Republican colleagues, will follow suit by quickly agreeing to allow us to move to this bill. It is a shame we haven't been able to do it now and work today on amendments relating to it. We should debate it, do amendments, and move forward as quickly as possible and send it to the President.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

HOUSING CRISIS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, last week the Senate squandered an opportunity to bring timely help to homeowners rather than propose a bipartisan plan targeted at those most in need. Our friends on the other side proposed a plan that would have helped some by increasing monthly mortgage payments on everyone else who owns a home. They checked the political box, knowing their plan wouldn't have broad bipartisan support. Then we walked away from the problem, leaving it unaddressed. It is my hope this week to bring our friends back to the table so the two parties can work together on addressing a crisis that did not go away over the weekend. America's economy is indeed slowing. A lot of families are struggling, and we need to work together without any more political posturing to help families most in need without harming other families or our long-term economic health.

Last week, Republicans proposed a variety of measures aimed, first of all, at helping those who need it most. The Treasury Department is already working on a number of major lenders to see what can be done by keeping certain mortgages from driving families from their homes. Republicans support these efforts to help families, not bailouts for banks and speculators who are losing money on a bad financial bet.

Many families that are making their payments on time are worried about the value of their properties going down, or of the crime rate going up in places where the foreclosure rate is high. To help them, Republicans are proposing a major tax credit for people who buy foreclosed homes in hard-hit areas, provided they intend to live in them.

State and local housing financing agencies are well-positioned to help families that are on the verge of foreclosure. That is why the Bush adminis-

tration has proposed that State and local entities issue \$10 billion in tax exempt bonds and then use the proceeds to refinance mortgages that are most at risk.

The centerpiece of the Democrat plan to aid struggling homeowners is to let bankruptcy judges refinance the terms of their mortgages. This, as I have indicated and as the Chicago Tribune editorialized over the weekend, might temporarily help some. But it would also lead to higher monthly mortgage payments for everyone else.

In California, where the housing crisis is most acute, mortgages for families that are making their monthly payments on time would potentially go up by nearly \$4,000 a year. Homeowners in New York and some other States would potentially see payments go up by nearly \$3,000. Homeowners in Oldham County, KY—to bring it home to my State—would see their monthly payments go up \$2,100 a year.

It is not fair to penalize those who do make their payments in an effort to help those who can't. This is a principle Republicans are proud to defend.

Republicans believe the best way to ensure the long-term economic well-being of all homeowners and to create new opportunities for future homeowners is to stimulate the economy, help people keep their jobs, and to help workers keep more of what they earn.

That is why, in this economy, the Senate should act quickly to remove any fear that families have about paying the looming AMT tax. We know we will patch the loophole that puts this target on the backs of millions of middle-class taxpayers. Let us reject the political posturing and patch it now, without raising taxes, so families have one less thing to worry about.

In this economy, the Senate should also remove any uncertainty about the future status of tax credits that have helped millions of American families over the last few years.

We should extend the child tax credit which saves 44 million families an average of about \$2,500 annually.

We should extend a ban on the marriage penalty so young couples don't get hit with a tax just for wanting to start a family.

We should extend the research and development tax credit, which is one of the most effective tools we have in keeping America at the leading edge of technology and in creating and retaining high-paying, high-quality jobs.

We should extend renewable energy and energy efficiency tax credits, which are a proven incentive for increasing the use of wind, solar, biomass, and other alternative forms of energy and a sure way to lower our dependence on foreign sources of energy. And we should do this too without raising taxes.

Next week, as we debate the budget resolution, we will see very clearly the vision our friends on the other side have for America's economy—a vision of higher taxes, so Washington can

spend more of Americans' tax dollars, more regulation, and more litigation.

At a time of economic uncertainty, this approach would be a grave mistake. In the coming weeks, Republicans will offer a different vision based on a strategy for maintaining our Nation's long-term economic strength and competitiveness.

This is a debate we obviously are anxious to have.

Hopefully, as the majority leader indicated, we will have an opportunity to revisit the housing issue with some kind of agreement that is fair to both sides and gives us an opportunity to actually accomplish something in this important area.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, you can't bring back to the table someone who never left. My friend, the distinguished Senator from Kentucky, says he would hope we would come back to the table. We never left.

Procedurally, we have a unique situation here where you have to move to proceed to a piece of legislation. In years past, it was fairly easy, just move toward it, and then you got into a position at that time where you started legislating. If people wanted to offer amendments, they would do that. But since we have gotten into the majority, the Republicans basically have prevented us from doing that.

Our legislation is so concise and direct, so easy to understand. The President has tried to work through the Treasury Department. They have come up with a couple things that deal with less than 3 percent of the people in trouble, less than 3 percent, and it is all voluntary.

Our legislation has five issues. Our plan helps families keep their homes by increasing preforeclosure counseling funds. What does this mean? We, in our last legislation, put \$200 million in that legislation to allow people to have counselors. They help a great deal. The reason we did that, in a time of foreclosure, panic around this country, the President cut funds, for example, in Nevada, for these nonprofit counselors, by 70 percent. You should be increasing them. He cut them. That money is gone. Our legislation calls for more money to keep people in their homes so they can have some counseling.

Our legislation expands refinancing opportunities for homeowners stuck in bad loans. President Bush, in his State of the Union Message, called for a proposal to allow a process to go forward where you would have bonds to work on homes that were being foreclosed upon and homes that would soon be foreclosed upon. We support that. That is in our bill.

Our legislation provides funds to help the highest need communities purchase and rehabilitate foreclosed properties, CDBG moneys going to these communities that really need to do something about these homes.