

move our country forward, and they are many. But he has also been clear that now is the time to continue to invest in health care and energy and education reform to ensure our long-term strength and prosperity.

I come to the floor today to talk specifically about the need to invest in education. Investing in education is one of the most certain ways we can create jobs and strengthen our economy well into the future. Education means economic recovery, and in this global economy a good education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity, it is a prerequisite for success. Ensuring quality education for every American is essential to our future as a nation.

The President and this Congress made a downpayment on that commitment in the Economic Recovery Act we passed last month. That bill meant help for students in Washington State—my State—who are struggling to afford and attend college and students across the country. It means serving more K–12 students' needs. It means the ability to restore the education cuts our States are facing. It means keeping teachers in their jobs and our class sizes down.

Those investments we made in the economic recovery package are going to not only help create jobs, they are going to help our teachers and our parents in our communities keep their jobs while they modernize education for today's students. Those students are going to be tomorrow's highly skilled workforce, so we need to make this investment to stay strong as a nation. That economic recovery bill made a downpayment on our students' future. The next step we have to take is our budget, to help improve education for our kids and for all.

The budget we are going to be seeing puts a long-needed emphasis on preparing students for the jobs of today and tomorrow, with the focus on science, math and technology skills and equipment. It focuses on 21st century skills and early childhood education. It talks about career and technical education and accessing and affording higher education, which includes 2-year colleges and technical training.

So let me talk a minute about the budget and its details. The budget creates a 0-to-5 plan, which will continue to increase funding for Head Start, Early Head Start, and the child care development block grants. It encourages State and local investment in early education to help get information to parents about quality child care programs, including important home visiting programs for parents with young children.

The budget will make important investments in preparing and supporting great teachers and school leaders for our schools. It will allow students to achieve their college dream by making critical funding to raise the Pell grant in this time of need, and it continues

the new American Opportunity Tax Credit, which will help families across the Nation afford tuition.

The budget also makes a 5-year, \$2.5 billion investment in a new Access and Completion Incentive Fund to ensure that low-income students complete college. We know that only about 50 percent of our students who start a college education in this country complete it. We have to do a lot better than that because almost all of our good-paying jobs today require a credential beyond high school.

I come to the floor today to say that now is not a time to sit back and just worry. Now is a time to be bold and make the critical investments in our country that are so long overdue. Nowhere is this clearer than in education. I applaud the President for making his commitment clear, and I pledge to work with him and every one of my colleagues who are willing to ensure that ours becomes the greatest education system in the world.

Now let me say a word about some of the criticism we have been hearing from our friends on the other side of the aisle. I have heard a lot of talk about this budget "taxing" too much. Well, they must be reading a different budget than I am. President Obama's budget would not raise taxes on 95 percent of Americans. I think that is important, so let me say it again. Ninety-five percent of Americans will not see their taxes raised under this plan. In fact, too much of the tax burden in this country is being borne today by our working families, and President Obama is working hard to fix that. Nine of ten working families will see their taxes go down with his budget plan.

The President's Making Work Pay credit—\$400 for individuals and \$800 for families—is extended under his budget plan. That credit cuts taxes for 95 percent of our working families. It cuts taxes for 95 percent of our working families.

The American Opportunity Education Tax Credit is going to help our families pay for college by providing a \$2,500 credit to offset the cost of tuition and related expenses, and it makes the credit partially refundable.

Finally, the budget increases eligibility for the refundable portion of the child credit.

Those are just three ways this administration is focusing on tax relief for those who need it most—our working families. So while we are hearing a lot—and we will continue to hear a lot, no doubt—from our friends on the other side about "taxing" too much, it is important that we all look at the facts and not buy into the rhetoric.

After 8 long years of budgets that left our American families behind, I look forward to working with President Obama and a bipartisan group in Congress to move forward and invest in the future strength of this Nation. We have a lot of great challenges ahead, but I believe we can and we will overcome them by working together, making

some tough choices, and investing in the best resource we have—the American people.

I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. VITTER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. VITTER. I ask unanimous consent the majority's remaining time be preserved and I be allowed to proceed with remarks under the minority time.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

AUTOMATIC PAY RAISES

Mr. VITTER. Madam President, I rise again to discuss the issue of automatic pay raises for Members of Congress. As I said in our debate on the omnibus spending bill last week, I think this system of automatic pay raises—pay raises for Members of Congress on autopilot, without the need for any legislation, any debate, any vote—is truly wrong and truly offensive. I believe it is in the best of times, but I believe it is triply wrong and offensive right now as Americans all over our country, who have to work hard in the real world, face dire economic challenges and conditions.

I rise again to urge us to act, to do the right thing, to rebuild confidence among the American people by changing this system and no longer having automatic pay raises for Members of Congress. I proposed doing this as an amendment on the Omnibus appropriations bill. After some difficulty in getting my amendment even recognized and debated and voted on, I finally was able to do that and we had a meaningful debate. We had a vote. It was a close vote. Unfortunately, from my perspective, I fell a little bit short in terms of agreeing to the amendment. It was defeated 52 to 45. But in that process we did have an important debate and several other Members came forward and expressed support for the concept—most notably the majority leader, Senator REID. In fact, the very day after I finally secured a debate and a vote on my amendment, the day after that Senator REID introduced his own freestanding bill to get rid of automatic pay raises, at least after the next one scheduled, and to do away with that process.

Obviously, I completely agree with that concept. That is the whole impetus for my work, along with Senator FEINGOLD of Wisconsin and my other coauthors, Senator ENSIGN and Senator GRASSLEY.

During the debate on this issue, Senator REID went further. He spoke on the floor in support of this effort. He said several things:

I agree with Senator VITTER that cost-of-living adjustments for Members of Congress should not be automatic. That is why I introduced a freestanding bill last week that would do just that.

In addition, in the same time on the floor, Senator REID said:

If there are people who don't want to agree to this tonight, assuming the Senator from Louisiana is that person, I will bring it up some other time. I am committed to doing this.

Again:

I will bring it up some other time. I am committed to doing this.

I objected to bringing that freestanding bill up then because it clearly would have drained votes in support of my amendment away from my amendment and helped defeat it. In fact, we saw how close that vote was. But now that that vote is over, I applaud Senator REID for his offer:

I will bring it up some other time. I am committed to doing this.

I am here to say that this time, right now, these next 2 weeks, is a perfect "some other time." We are clearly in a bit of a lull in terms of floor activity, this week and next week, before we begin an important debate on the budget. The majority leader is looking for things to take up our floor time. We are clearly in a light period. So what better "some other time" than right here, right now? In that spirit, and in the spirit of cooperation to move forward, I sent the majority leader a letter last Thursday and I expressed these thoughts and I asked him to bring up his freestanding bill, or mine, or any freestanding bill to end pay raises for Members of Congress being on autopilot on the Senate floor as soon as possible. As I pointed out, this clearly has support to move this through the process, through the Senate in the near future.

It does not have unanimous support. Any issue such as this never would have unanimous support. But it has the support of over 60 Members of this body.

Why do I say that? It is simple math. On the vote on my amendment I obtained 45 "yes" votes. In addition to those 45 votes, there were 20 Members, including the distinguished majority leader, who voted against my amendment, saying that the only reason they were doing that was to not burden the omnibus spending bill with the amendment. They said on the record, they are for the concept and Senator REID introduced a freestanding bill in this body and he has coauthors to that freestanding bill in that number—20. It is simple math. If you add 45 and 20 you come up with 65, well over a filibuster-proof number, well over the 60 votes required to not only move this bill through the Senate but move it through in a fairly expedited, efficient, quick process.

The perfect time is now. We are clearly in 2 weeks of relative lull before the debate on the budget. The majority leader clearly is looking for im-

portant business to bring to the floor, particularly since cram-down and other issues are not being brought to the floor this week as planned. What better time to come together in a bipartisan way, to rebuild the confidence of the American people and to get this done, passing it through the Senate. Again:

I will bring it up some other time. I am committed to doing this.

The distinguished majority leader.

Again I ask the majority leader in a spirit of bipartisanship, of cooperation, of reestablishing the confidence of the American people in Congress by doing away with this offensive practice—pay raises on autopilot without debate, without legislation, without a vote, without even a line item in an appropriations bill which we can try to change through amendment—let's change that wrong and offensive practice.

I urge the distinguished majority leader to look at my letter of last Thursday, to consider it carefully, to understand that we have established through his bill, through my vote, 65 votes in support of doing away with this on the Senate floor. So let's act. With 65 votes we can act, we can be successful, and we can do it in a very efficient manner. What better time to do it than right now?

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mrs. BOXER. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BEGICH). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mrs. BOXER. What is the order, please?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. There is 7 minutes remaining in morning business.

AIG BONUSES AND THE BUDGET

Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, I rise to talk about a couple issues. The first is to add my voice to the outrage over the bonuses to people who to say don't deserve it is an understatement. I used to work on Wall Street a very long time ago. You got a bonus when you did something good, when you brought business in, when you did well for the company, not when you brought the company down. It is disgusting, disgraceful. We are hearing outrage from all quarters of society, which means we are going to do something about it. I wanted to make sure I am on the record as saying the bonuses ought to be returned voluntarily and, if not, they ought to be taxed as close to 100 percent as we can get. I will be supporting that.

It is time to change the culture in corporate America. If you are going to turn to taxpayers for help, then don't squander their money. Work to pay it

back as fast as you can and get back on your own. It is such an obvious point. I wish to praise the President for being clear on this point.

I also came to talk about the upcoming debate we will be having on the budget. I was a long-time member of the Budget Committee and then moved off to take other assignments. But I have always respected the work of that committee because the budget is truly a roadmap to the priorities of a nation. When we look at a budget, surely there will be certain items in it we may not want to agree with. We may want to trim it here and there. I don't agree with everything in the Obama budget. There are a few I will work to change. In general, at this time when we are suffering so economically, the priorities laid out are good for America and good for the State of California. I wish to talk about a couple of these priorities.

We know the Obama administration inherited an economic nightmare from George Bush's administration: 4.4 million jobs lost in the last 14 months; an unemployment rate that is soaring—in my State it is in double digits—12.5 million Americans unemployed, and a Federal debt that is going upward very quickly.

What is so interesting to me is that when Bill Clinton handed over the keys to the White House to George W. Bush, our budget was actually in a surplus. We actually had discussions in my household about the fact that the debt is going down so fast, we may not have the opportunity to buy any more Treasury bonds. Let's not forget what happened in 8 years. A budget surplus turned into outrageous deficits. The economy took a terrible turn for the worse. The debt began to soar.

Now we have a new President who ran on a platform of change. As I watch my colleagues on the other side of the aisle, save a few, they are fighting for the status quo. My belief is, if you fight for the status quo, that is not a passive act. It is a hostile act. Because the status quo has to change so we can relieve some of the pain in America. What President Obama does with this budget, very wisely, is to continue the economic stimulus he started with his economic stimulus bill.

He focuses on three priorities: education, health care, and clean energy. Everyone knows—and I know my friend in the chair has a young son—what President Obama said is true. Countries that outteach us today will outcompete us tomorrow. His young son and my grandchildren, if they don't get the education they deserve, will not have a chance to get that dream we had the opportunity to get in our generation. For every dollar invested in education, there is a \$4 to \$9 return in higher earnings, higher employment rates, less crime, less welfare, and in better health. The Obama plan will double the number of children served by Early Head Start and will expand Head Start. He will provide resources