

to bear a higher portion of the tax burden than what he or she receives in income. However, I know that certain taxes are regressive, even if our overall system is not.

In contrast, many Americans think the only fair tax system is a progressive one. The more you make, the more you ought to pay. I can understand this and I do not necessarily disagree with it, within reason.

On the other hand, I believe that a strong case can be made that a proportional tax system is the fairest tax system. Many of my fellow Utahns agree with this idea. I have received thousands of letters over the years asking why we should not have a flat tax that requires citizens to pay a fixed proportion of their income in taxes. Conceptually, I think they are correct.

Even though many Americans like a progressive tax system, I think they might be shocked to see just how progressive ours has become. I mentioned before that the top one percent of income earners received 22 percent of all income in 2006. However, this group paid 40 percent of all income taxes paid in America. Almost twice the proportion paid as earned. This is not just progressivity. This is progressivity on steroids. And it is harmful and unfair.

And, we are not just looking at the top one percent to see this problem. The top 10 percent of income earners received 47 percent of all income, but they paid 71 percent of all tax. Again, this is way beyond what I believe fair-minded people would call a reasonable amount of progressivity.

However, this is not the worst of it. In fact, this is only half of what I will call the equitable taxation equation. This is because so far, we have only talked about the half of the equation that raises money from taxpayers. What about the other half of the equation, where the money is spent?

In a 2007 study, economists at the Tax Foundation looked at both the tax side of the equation and the spending side. Their findings are very interesting. Using total Federal taxes rather than just income taxes, the study found that the top 20 percent of income earning households paid on average \$57,512 in Federal taxes.

However, the average Federal Government spending received by these households was just \$18,573.

The lowest 20 percent of income-earning households, on the other hand, paid an average of just \$1,684 in Federal taxes, but received an amazing \$24,860 average per household in Federal Government spending.

Another way of saying this is that the top earning 20 percent of households received 32 cents in Federal Government spending for every dollar in Federal taxes paid, while the lowest earning 20 percent of households received \$14.76 in Federal Government spending for every dollar they paid in Federal taxes.

Plain and simple, this means the top-earning fifth of Americans get back

only a third of what they pay in taxes while the bottom-earning fifth are receiving a bounty of nearly 15 times what they pay. This is redistributionism gone wild.

And this study takes into account all Federal taxes, not just income taxes. If the study included only the Federal income tax, the amounts would be skewed even farther because the income tax is much more progressive than are other Federal taxes.

Moreover, this study used tax-and-spending numbers from 2004. Our tax system has become more progressive since then. It is very apparent to me that our tax system is very progressive already. And when it is viewed in this larger context, along with the Federal spending, it is nothing short of ultra progressive.

So the question I have for my friends and colleagues on the other side of the aisle is this: just how progressive is progressive enough? I realize that some will not be satisfied until we reach a total redistribution where there is no more rich or poor among us. And while that idea might sound really fine, it would create total havoc to our government and our society, and I think we all know it.

How far can we take this idea of progressivity before the system collapses of its own weight? Our tax system, and indeed our entire system of government, depends on the voluntary cooperation of its citizens. An underlying if unstated foundation of the American government is the idea that the great majority of us will work hard, take care of our families, willingly if grudgingly pay our taxes, cooperate with the law, and do our best to make it all work.

What happens to our society if those who are in the top 25 percent, who are now paying 86 percent of the general cost of government, see that their burden is about to grow ever bigger, and that they soon may be part of only 10 or 15 percent who are carrying all the rest of us?

Where does incentive go as we approach this situation? Is there a tipping point where hard-working and successful Americans will say: Enough is enough. I am no longer willing to be a chump and carry the load for everyone else. Why don't I also stop pulling and get in the wagon and get the free ride?

We have already seen a strong movement toward removing more and more lower-earning Americans from the income tax rolls. The Making Work Pay credit and other refundable tax credits give cash back where no taxes have been paid. They serve as a negative income tax.

According to the Tax Policy Center, for calendar year 2009, the number of Americans who are not subject to the Federal income tax exceeds 43 percent. This number will likely grow significantly as a result of the enactment of the Making Work Pay credit earlier this year. If the President and his fol-

lowers in the Congress have their way, there will be millions more who will be allowed to stop pulling and get on the wagon to be carried by the few who work.

This means that the number of American households that contribute nothing to our general cost of government, to our defense, and to the thousands of programs that are funded by the income tax is approaching 50 percent. Asking fewer and fewer to carry more and more of the load is dangerous in a free society. We are approaching that point where the majority can simply vote for higher taxes to fund higher spending with no personal cost to them. When that happens, our representative Republic is in grave danger.

There are lots of good economic reasons why we have to be careful about raising taxes too high on those who are bearing the burden of the cost of government. I will talk about those at another time. The one I am talking about today is a simple one, but it is the scariest to me.

The simple fact is that there is a limit on how much we can ask successful people to contribute to the cost of general government, just as there is a limit to how few people will be willing to pull a wagon that gets heavier each time we let someone leave the ropes and climb on board for the free ride.

Ideally, we should all have to carry our own weight. While this may not be possible or practical, we surely cannot expect a willing but diminishing minority to continue to pull a heavier and heavier wagon up a steeper and steeper hill without a breakdown. I urge my colleagues to think carefully before going along with an idea that loads more of a tax burden on the few who seem to be able to afford it. If we go too far down this path, we are all going to end up in a ditch.

Madam President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. SHAHEEN). The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business for up to 15 minutes.

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

#### HEALTH CARE REFORM

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Madam President, over the last several months I had the exceptional honor of serving as a temporary member of our HELP Committee—Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions—where I joined a truly remarkable group of Senators as we wrote and fought through and refined and ultimately passed our part of legislation that will begin to fundamentally

transform our broken health care system. During that period, Senator KENNEDY could not be with us, but we certainly felt his spirit and his presence and the tradition of service to this issue that he has embodied through that time. I think he would be proud of the Affordable Health Choices Act we brought out. I certainly am.

This bill, in combination with the work now being done in the Finance Committee, will guarantee quality, affordable health coverage for all Americans. It will protect Americans against back-breaking medical costs. It will expand access to vital preventive services. It will fight fraud and abuse in public and private health insurance plans. It will help retirees with the high cost of coverage. It will improve the quality of care through fundamental delivery system reforms. It will build a 21st century health care workforce. It will provide a new voluntary insurance plan, a different choice for long-term care. Most importantly, it will bend—maybe even break—the cost curve. In short, we stand at the dawn of the most significant improvement of our health care system that our country has ever seen. My only regret is how remarkably, staggeringly, embarrassingly late we are to this task. We often talk about the health care reform efforts of 1993 and 1994 and how startling it is that it has taken us 15 years to return to such a paramount issue for our people. But as we all know, the debate over reforming health care goes back decades and decades.

Let's take a quick trip back in time. From a 1992 New York Times article: "Health Care Costs Dampen Hiring." This at a time when our national health care costs were \$850 billion a year. Now they are \$2.3 trillion a year; then, \$850 billion a year.

This could be the first recovery crippled by medical costs. Employee benefits—health insurance in particular—have become so explosive that manufacturers are increasingly coping with weak demand by cutting payrolls, not overtime. . . . Health care costs, increasing at more than twice the rate of wages, have made benefits so expensive it would be surprising if companies were not responding. As they find other ways to avoid paying benefits—the growing use of contract workers, for example—they often say instead that they are merely giving employees some flexibility.

That was 1992. We could have that same discussion today, only we would have to multiply the number by three.

Here we are back in 1988 when the New York Times reported: "Soaring Health Care Costs." At this time, instead of \$2.3 trillion a year in health care costs, we were spending \$500 billion.

The article says:

Health care amounts to 11.1 percent of gross national product in the United States,—

Now, of course, we are over 18 percent.

—a bigger share than in any other advanced country.

That didn't change.

In 1987, Americans spent \$500 billion on health care, 9.8 percent more than the year before.

Those trends have continued.

This year, spending on health care is expected to rise by 8.2 percent, more than double the inflation rate. And despite many efforts to slow health care spending, it is expected to grow by another 9.1 percent in 1989. . . . The average jump in premiums could hit 30 percent in 1989. But at the same time, we're getting less for it.

Further back to 1979, 30 years ago when our annual expenditure was less than one-tenth of today. Today, \$2.3 trillion; then, \$200 billion. The article says:

HEW Secretary Patricia Roberts Harris said the quality of American health care does not justify its price tag of more than \$200 billion a year. Harris said health costs represent nearly 10 percent of the gross national product, the total value of goods and services produced in this country each year. The federal share of health costs will exceed \$50 billion next year, including \$30 billion for Medicare and \$12 billion for Medicaid, and will claim 12 percent of the Federal budget.

But for the passage of 30 years and for all of those numbers getting bigger, you could say the same today.

Finally, last, but not least, from a 1955 New York Times article. This article predates me. I was born in October of that year. Here is what it says:

As it does each year without fail, the government declared again this week that it is time to do something about the rising cost of medical care.

Let me repeat that:

As it does each year without fail, the government declared again this week that it is time to do something about the rising cost of medical care. Last year, the Nation's medical bill ran over \$10 billion.

It is now 25 times as much, and you could say the same thing.

It was an increase of \$3 billion since 1948. Of this sum, only about 25 percent was covered by some form of prepaid health insurance. In human terms, this meant that the American had to scrap his budget, dig into savings or go into debt, to pay some \$7.5 billion for doctors, hospitals, dentists, nurses, and the myriad physical accessories of medical care.

These words, from February of 1955, when one-fifth of the Members of this body were not yet born, could not be truer today.

In human terms, the American had to scrap his budget, dig into savings or go into debt to pay for doctors, hospitals, dentists, nurses, and the myriad physical accessories of medical care.

How little we have changed.

Fifty-four years later, astoundingly, despite all of this time and all of this trouble and all of this tragedy, this is still a game to some people, a political game. Fifty-four years later, health reform still faces opponents who will do whatever they can to delay or derail the reform process, turning what is our most desperate domestic political crisis into political theater.

Last Friday, one of our colleagues on the Republican side told a group of conservative activists:

If we're able to stop Obama on this, it will be his Waterloo. It will break him.

Think about that for a minute. One hundred thousand Americans die every year because of avoidable medical errors, and the response from the other side is "let's find a way to break the President of the United States." More families now go into bankruptcy because of health care costs than for any other reason; families across this country who lose everything. And the response: "Let's find a way to break the President of the United States." We watched Detroit crumbling under the weight of its health care costs, and General Motors, one of our fabled companies, fail. And what is the response? "Let's not fix it. Let's find a way to break the President of the United States over this."

We have a health care costs tsunami bearing down on us, one that truly could break the fiscal back of this country, but do they want to deal with it? No. They want to play politics to break the President of the United States. We have an insurance industry that turns on you when you have the nerve to get sick, denying you care and denying you coverage. They call it medical loss when they have to pay for you. Across this country people suffer. When they are sick, when they are down, when they are hurt, when they are at their weakest, their own insurers turn on them and try to interfere with their health care and try to deny them payment and coverage. What is the response from the other side? "Let's try to find a way to break President Obama."

This is not President Obama's Waterloo. This is not one man's battle. This is a war in which millions and millions of Americans are casualties every day: the child whose insurance policy carves out from her coverage the asthma care she desperately needs; the doctor whose office spends more time fighting the insurer over claims and authorizations than delivering health care; the small business owner whose employees are like family for her and who can no longer afford to cover their health care; the elderly retiree who falls into the Medicare prescription drug doughnut hole; the diabetic who cannot obtain a policy at all from anyone because he or she has a preexisting condition.

This should not be a political battle of right versus left. It is truly a battle of right versus wrong. I have come to the floor countless times now to share Rhode Islanders' personal and family tragedies, their sorrows, and their frustrations with our present health care system. My constituents share their stories with me at community dinners across Rhode Island, in our senior centers, at coffees, and as I walk the main streets of towns across our State.

Earlier this year, I launched a health care storyboard on my Web site where Rhode Islanders can share their experiences and ideas for health care reform. In just a few short months, literally hundreds of Rhode Islanders have written to me to share their ideas and experiences. Those stories are fraught with

anguish, pain, frustration and, too often, tragedy. They break your heart. They break your heart to read. Rhode Island is a small State. If we have it happening hundreds and hundreds of times, in the Presiding Officer's State of New Hampshire and across this country, it has to be happening thousands of times, tens of thousands of times, hundreds of thousands of times every day.

With all that suffering going on, with all the risks to our country of the perils of the costs coming at us from our health care system, if the other side can't care about the merits and substance of health care reform—if you cannot care about the merits and substance of health care reform, if, for you, it is just political theater, if all it is, is a way to “break” the President of the United States of America, in a time of domestic and international crisis, if your goal is to break the President rather than do something about health care, if that is how little you care about health care, then you can't care about the merits or substance of anything else because there is nothing domestically that is as important to our country as health care reform. If you cannot care about that and deal with us on the merits on that, then you can't care about anything.

What is really frustrating about this is for these Rhode Islanders, tormented by our health care system, and for their millions of fellow Americans across the country, who have those same experiences, there is a better way. We are working toward it. We can find it, and we can make it happen.

We have to do better, we can do better, and we will do better with this legislation than 47 million uninsured and millions more teetering on the brink, one paycheck away from losing their insurance, one illness away from losing their insurance. We can and we have to and we will do better under this legislation than 100,000 Americans dying every year because of avoidable medical errors and because, among other reasons, we have the worst health care infrastructure, information infrastructure, in health care than in any other American industry except the mining industry. We can make this better. We can do better and we have to do better and we will do better than health care outcomes for Americans that are at the bottom of all of our industrialized competitors—at the bottom; with all of our capabilities as Americans, our ingenuity and our entrepreneurship, we are at the bottom of developed nations in health care outcomes for our people, and we pay twice as much as they do to get there.

America can do better than this. Beginning with the work of the HELP Committee, we are on our way. Let's not squander the opportunity and the responsibility this day presents. Let's not be distracted by calls for delay or appeals to the pettiest political instincts this Chamber could express.

As I see it, we are about 55 years late already. We don't need further delay;

we need to get this done. Year after year, Americans have had the same complaints about their health care system. We have it within our power, under the leadership of this President, to make it happen, and we will.

I thank the Chair and yield the floor.

#### ARTS IN CRISIS PROGRAM

Mr. REID. Madam President, today I stand to recognize the outstanding efforts of the Kennedy Center in addressing the crisis facing our art organizations across this country. Under the leadership of their talented president, Michael Kaiser, the Kennedy Center has established a unique outreach program that will help cultural organizations throughout Nevada and our Nation weather the economic downturn.

Every Member of this body knows of the economic hardship facing American families and businesses. The art community is not immune. In Nevada, the Las Vegas Art Museum recently closed its doors due to financial troubles when donations dried up. The museum had been operating since 1974 and was a staple for art enthusiasts in the region. Unless help is provided to our cultural organizations, I am afraid this scene will continue to be rehashed throughout the country.

Considered the “turnaround specialist” in his industry, Mr. Kaiser knows a thing or two about struggling arts organizations. When the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra was struggling after Hurricane Katrina, Mr. Kaiser helped keep their organization performing. When the Dance Theater of Harlem was struggling, Mr. Kaiser helped reopen its school. When the New York City Opera needed restructuring, Mr. Kaiser's recommendations helped the Opera thrive. These are just a few examples of high-profile success in Mr. Kaiser's career as an arts administrator.

Now, Mr. Kaiser wants to use his talents to help struggling arts organizations across the country. The “Arts in Crisis” program offers free consultation from the Kennedy Center's experts about budgeting, fundraising, marketing, and other aspects vital to a struggling organization. Whether by phone, email, or in-person visits, the Kennedy Center's talented staff freely gives of their time and talents to help preserve America's cultural establishments. I am confident that this unique program will enable struggling arts organizations to emerge from the economic downturn stronger than ever.

I urge every arts institution that is struggling during this difficult time to take advantage of Mr. Kaiser and this exceptional team of experts. I know that the arts in Nevada will benefit from the Kennedy Center's sound advice and I look forward to Mr. Kaiser's visit to my State.

#### HEALTH CARE POLLS

Mr. KYL. Madam. President, a spate of new polls reveal that, while Ameri-

cans want health care reform, just as all of us in Congress do, most of them oppose the plan put forward by President Obama, disapprove of his handling of health care, and have serious concerns about the cost of his plan and how it would affect the quality of their own health care.

For example, a Rasmussen poll released July 22 shows a full 53 percent of voters oppose the health care legislation “working its way through Congress.”

A July 17 Zogby poll backs up these findings, revealing that a full 50 percent of Americans disapprove of the health care bill introduced in the House of Representatives and endorsed by President Obama.

A July 20, USA Today/Gallup poll shows that 50 percent of Americans disapprove of the President's overall handling of this issue.

These findings dovetail with polling that indicates Americans are very wary of the projected costs of the President's health care plan.

Zogby's July 17 poll shows that 59 percent of Americans say the President's proposals, including health care, call for too much government spending.

And a whopping 78 percent of U.S. voters believe it is at least somewhat likely that taxes will be raised on the middle class to cover the cost of health care reform, a July 16 Rasmussen poll tells us.

Nearly half of respondents—44 percent believe “government-managed coverage” will increase—not decrease—the price of health care, according to a July 21 Public Strategies Inc/Politico poll. Only 27 percent think a government-managed health care system would lower costs, while 29 percent said prices would remain the same.

Americans' concerns about how the President's plan would affect health care access and quality are reflected in this same Public Strategies/Politico survey.

Asked by pollsters “what effect a government-managed health care coverage option would have on access to health services, 40 percent said it would make the situation worse, 38 percent said it would make it better, and 22 percent said it would remain the same.”

Asked what effect the President's plan would have on the quality of health care, “42 percent said it would make health care worse, 33 percent said it would make it better, and 25 percent said it would not have an effect.”

We, in Congress, have heard Americans' concerns about the President's proposed health care reform for weeks now—and these concerns were not allayed at all when the Director of the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office told us that these reforms would actually increase, rather than decrease, costs, and drive our Nation more deeply into debt.

That statement, along with congressional Democrats' plan to raise taxes