

Mr. ALEXANDER. At our summit on Thursday, there were a number of good ideas about reducing health care costs that the President seemed to share with Republican Members who were there. There was some obvious irritation on the part of the majority leader and others when we said things such as there is \$½ trillion worth of cuts in Medicare, which there are. Our real objection to it is that the cuts are not used to save Medicare, which is going broke, but spent on a new program—\$½ trillion in new taxes. There is \$½ trillion in new taxes.

As I have just said, they tend to increase premiums for millions of Americans. There are premium increases. There is a deficit increase.

It is true the CBO has said that what was presented to them didn't increase the deficit, but what was not included in what was presented was paying doctors to serve patients in the government program we call Medicare. That is like having a horse race without the horses. How are you going to have a comprehensive health care bill and not include within its costs paying doctors to serve patients in the government program? When you put it in, the deficit goes up.

Then there is a problem of the passing off to States these expanded Medicaid costs without paying for them. I know as a former Governor—and I see the former Governor of Virginia in the chair—I struggled with that every single year. All the Governors are today in both parties. They don't want us sending them a bill for expanded health care. They can't pay the bills they have. We shouldn't do that. If we want to expand it, we should pay for it. That is another part of the bill.

So I came to the floor today to, No. 1, express my appreciation to the President for inviting us Thursday. It gave us a chance to show who we are and what we are for. I thought it was a good discussion. I believe there are 8 or 10, maybe a dozen different good ideas Senator COBURN and people on both sides of the aisle suggested. There are some differences between those ideas but, basically, they represent a way to move forward to reduce health care costs. That is what we ought to do. We don't do comprehensive very well in the Senate. Comprehensive immigration failed of its own weight. Comprehensive economy-wide cap and trade seems to be failing, again of its own weight. Comprehensive health care is very difficult to pass. That shouldn't be a surprise to any of us. This is a very big, difficult, complicated country with people of many different backgrounds and, in my judgment, we are just not wise enough for a few of us to rewrite the rules for 17 percent of our economy.

I think the American people have tuned into that. They want us to fix health care, but they want us to reduce costs. Again, we on the Republican side are ready to set that goal and, as we said 173 different times on the Senate

floor the last six months of last year, we have offered 6 steps to move toward that goal. Maybe the President can think of six more. Maybe we can think of six more. We did that with the America COMPETES Act. We asked the national academies: What are the 10 steps that can help us become more competitive as a country? They gave us 20, and we passed most of them. In clean energy, we are coming together on nuclear power, offshore drilling, and energy development. Those are steps toward a goal that would be a more sensible way for us to work.

In the meantime, the unpleasant truth is, the current bill being considered—will cut Medicare, not spend it on Medicare—will raise taxes, and it will, as I have tried to demonstrate with respect to the President, raise individual premiums because of the one-size-fits-all government mandates and tax increases.

Finally, I commend to my colleagues today's editorial from the Wall Street Journal detailing how the Massachusetts health care plan has unexpectedly caused premiums to rise over the last couple years and what lesson there might be in that for us.

I yield the floor and 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. BAUCUS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

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#### CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is now closed.

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#### TAX EXTENDERS ACT OF 2009

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to the consideration of H.R. 4213, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 4213) to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to extend certain expiring provisions, and for other purposes.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Montana.

#### PRIVILEGES OF THE FLOOR

Mr. BAUCUS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the following staff be allowed the privilege of the floor during consideration of the pending bill: Randy Aussenberg, Aislinn Baker, Brittany Durell, Dustin Stevens, Greg Sullivan, Max Updike, and Ashley Zuelke.

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

AMENDMENT NO. 3336

(In the nature of a substitute)

Mr. BAUCUS. Mr. President, I now call up my amendment by number and urge its consideration.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will report the amendment by number.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Montana [Mr. BAUCUS] proposes an amendment numbered 3336.

(The amendment is printed in today's RECORD under "Text of Amendments.")

Mr. BAUCUS. Mr. President, Martin Luther King, Jr., once said:

Life's most urgent question is: What are you doing for others?

Pretty much all of us came here to the Senate to work on that urgent question. Pretty much all of us came here to help other Americans.

On a number of levels, the legislation before us today is urgent legislation. The legislation before us today is urgent because it would prevent millions of Americans from falling through the safety net.

The legislation before us is urgent because it would extend vital safety net programs that expired yesterday.

The legislation before us is urgent because it would put cash in the hands of Americans who could spend it quickly, boosting economic demand.

The legislation before us today is urgent because it would extend critical programs and tax incentives that create jobs.

The legislation before us today is urgent because it is important that we here can do this for other Americans.

Since the recession began, more than 7 million Americans have lost their jobs. The unemployment rate remains nearly 10 percent. For Americans without a job, this great recession is a great depression. If you do not have a job, it is a depression.

Last week, with a solid bipartisan vote, we passed legislation to help create jobs. We can and should do more, and by extending this package of vital provisions we can do just that.

The provisions in this bill are important to American families. They are important to communities that have suffered a natural disaster. They are important to businesses competing in the global economy. They are important to furthering America's commitment to energy independence.

The need is urgent. Yesterday many of these important provisions expired. Millions of Americans are being put at risk. The expiration of these provisions has left gaping holes in the safety net.

Among the provisions that expired yesterday are these: expanded unemployment insurance benefits; COBRA subsidies to help people keep their health insurance; a provision that keeps folks right at the poverty line from losing their benefits; the small business loan program; the temporary measure to prevent a 21-percent cut to doctors under Medicare; the Flood Insurance Program; the Satellite Home Viewer Act.