

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

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded; I ask unanimous consent that we reserve the Republican time and that I be able to speak for 2 minutes.

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

EXTENSION OF UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I want to speak about the unemployment situation in my home State of New York. By mid-March, 54,000 people will lose their benefits if we don't move forward with the short-term extension of unemployment insurance. That is tragic. It is virtually inhumane.

I have been around my State meeting with people who are looking for work. You look into their eyes and you feel their pain. Many of them are middle-class people who have had very good-paying jobs. Many of them have lost their jobs. Many lost their jobs more than a year ago and they have spent every day, 7 days a week, looking. I met a woman in Rochester. She was No. 2 in human resources for a big company. Her job was her life. She has been looking for 2 years and can't find a job. I plead with my colleague from Kentucky and all of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle—while we are debating a larger bill to extend unemployment benefits, we must allow this to go forward.

We must allow this short-term extension to go forward for the sake of those people who lost their jobs, through no fault of their own, and they are desperately looking for work, but in this awful economy they can't find it.

According to The Hill newspaper, New York is affected No. 1 by this. It is vital, vital, vital that we move this forward. I plead with my friend from Kentucky to reconsider and let the short-term extension move forward. We have done it before under the same conditions we have asked for this time.

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 Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.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

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I suggest the absence of a quorum and ask that the time during the quorum call not go against the morning business time of either side. I ask that the time now being used in morning business be equally divided.

Mr. BUNNING. Madam President, reserving the right to object.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Kentucky.

Mr. BUNNING. I wish to understand what the Senator from New York is trying to do.

Mr. SCHUMER. Will the Senator yield?

Mr. BUNNING. Sure.

Mr. SCHUMER. I am just trying to equally divide the quorum call. I asked unanimous consent that I be allowed to speak for 2 minutes.

Mr. BUNNING. And that was granted.

Mr. SCHUMER. And we go back and everyone get their full allocation of morning business, and that was granted. There was no intention of a quorum call to be taken between either side.

Mr. BUNNING. But that is the normal procedure.

Mr. SCHUMER. I understand.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to now use time from morning business on this side.

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

UNEMPLOYMENT AND COBRA EXTENSIONS

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, right now, families across my home State and the entire country want nothing more than to see us come together and pass meaningful help for the people they see struggling every day. They want to see help for people such as their neighbors and friends and family members who, through no fault of their own, have found themselves out of a job and who, despite their best efforts, are unable to find one today. They want help for the seniors in their communities who are being turned away from doctors because of devastating cuts in Medicare reimbursement rates, or all those who are struggling to afford health care because they lost a job and are now facing the impossible task of affording care on their own.

Americans understand that during these difficult times people need help to make ends meet. They understand there needs to be a lifeline for people who never thought they would need assistance from the government but who now have nowhere else to turn. But what Americans and those in my home State of Washington do not understand is why Washington, DC, cannot seem to deliver; why, when they make hard choices every day in their own lives to support their families and help those in need, Washington, DC, cannot do the same; why, at a time when needs have never been greater, the only words they hear out of Washington, DC, are "gridlock," "stalemate," and "standstill."

Today we have a clear-cut example to show the American people what is

wrong with Washington, DC; that is because today one single Republican Senator is standing in the way of the unemployment benefits of 400,000 Americans. One single Republican Senator is blocking an extension of COBRA benefits for 500,000 Americans. One single Republican Senator is forcing doctors to take a 21-percent cut in Medicare reimbursement rates that could force seniors to be turned away from the Medicare coverage on which they rely. One single Republican Senator is blocking an extension of critical highway funds that has construction workers and transportation employees at home today and that has cut critical payments to struggling States. One single Republican Senator has put posturing before people, politics before families, and point scoring before the needs of struggling Americans.

The legislation we are trying so hard to pass is very straightforward. It is aimed at helping real families with real problems they face every day, and the consequences of it being blocked by one single Republican Senator are just as real.

The bill we are trying to pass includes an extension of unemployment insurance that, by the way, in my home State hundreds of thousands of individuals rely on to buy groceries and to pay their mortgages and to help pay for school for their kids. For years, these benefits have been routinely extended in tough times. And times, by the way, have rarely been tougher than they are now. But today families in every single one of our States are sitting around their kitchen table trying to figure out how they are going to make it through the weeks and the months ahead without these payments.

This package we are trying to pass also includes an extension of COBRA, health care for workers who lost their jobs through no fault of their own, and health care benefits that come with it. In my home State, thousands of unemployed workers have the ability to see a doctor solely because we have provided this important assistance. It is a provision that is critical because health care is often the single biggest cost that unemployed workers face. In fact, you should know on average a monthly health care premium payment to cover a family costs over \$1,000, which represents about 80 percent of the average unemployment check.

Another vital health care measure included in this bill we are trying to pass is a provision that would overturn a staggering 21-percent cut in payments to doctors who accept Medicare patients. Just yesterday my office heard from a doctor in a small community in my State, Poulsbo, WA, who is one of very few in the region who is taking new Medicare patients. He said he feared just what this cut would mean for him and his practice. He told my staff this cut would limit his ability to continue serving the needs of seniors in his area.