

doing a good job. I can't find anybody around the country who thinks we are doing a good job. But I say to my colleagues, let's start moving stuff through that actually changes things, that is actually going to make a difference. One does not have to agree. Vote it down. None of these are trick amendments. None of these are meant to be political amendments. They are just straightforward, good-government amendments we ought to consider. If one disagrees, disagree. Fine. But let's not not vote on them and let's not quit making attempts to try to fix what is wrong in our government.

HUD's oversight of housing is a disaster. When we have this many properties year after year on this list, why would we not want to fix that? It is not that we don't want to fix it. It is we do not want to give somebody an opportunity to put out the real reason our country is in trouble. The real reason is us. We have not done our jobs. We have not done the oversight. We have not cleaned up things. We can have great arguments and great discussions and great debates but to not have the debate at all means we deserve every bit of that 85-percent lack of confidence in what we are doing.

Tomorrow, I hope I will be able to offer the rest of these amendments. I will work. I have talked with almost every one of the managers on the amendments. None of them are controversial. Some they may disagree with and want votes on, others can be accepted. But to not move forward and then say it is taking too long to get the bill, when we are here ready to work, is not an excuse the American people are going to buy anymore.

Ms. SNOWE. Mr. President, I am pleased to support the permanent change to interstate weight limits for Maine and Vermont, an issue I have worked on for more than 10 years. I could not be more pleased with the inclusion of this commonsense legislation that puts large trucks back where they belong—on the highway.

Regrettably, the current treatment of truck weights on interstate highways is a glaring example of a provision of law that creates both safety hazards on secondary roads and tangible barriers to job growth at a time when the Nation's unemployment rate remains above 9 percent and Maine's mill towns are struggling to thrive, and I hope this bill is a step towards a solution to this glaring disparity. The Senate's consideration of this remedy is long overdue. The patchwork exemption policy that currently exists has penalized Maine and created a serious inequity that has burdened our commerce with needlessly onerous and costly regulation.

The language included in this appropriations bill mirrors legislation that Senator COLLINS and I have introduced together since 2001. Indeed, this simple change has taken more than a decade to implement. It is my hope that this Congress, and this bill will finally re-

solve a longstanding inequity that has granted other States the same privilege that Maine requests—the ability to shift truck traffic to conflict-free highways where commercial traffic can efficiently travel without increasing the danger to pedestrians and drivers at crosswalks and intersections.

Maine Department of Transportation engineers have certified on a number of occasions that Maine's interstate bridges are safe to carry 100,000-pound, six-axle trucks. The bridges along the interstate are in good condition, and the impact of fatigue caused by these trucks is likely near zero. The State estimates that a permanent change to weight limits would reduce pavement costs by more than \$1 million per year. It would also reduce bridge rehabilitation costs by more than \$300,000 per year.

In addition, the pilot program implemented in 2009 demonstrated significant safety improvements when these large trucks returned to the highway. There were 14 fewer crashes—a 10 percent improvement—involving six-axle vehicles, even with increased traffic volume on Maine's interstate system. In fact, there were no fatal crashes on the interstate during the pilot program, and five fewer injuries on secondary roads.

Maine's Department of Transportation collects fatal accident data regarding large trucks, and more than 96 percent are on secondary roads, not the interstate, including the portion of I-95 that has a permanent exemption. Crash rates for Maine trucks on secondary roads are 7 to 10 times higher than on interstate highways.

Trucks belong on the highway, but interstate weight limits are inconsistent across State lines, and shippers are forced to use secondary roads to move goods through States still restricted by weight limits established in the 1950s. For example, in the 122 miles between Hampden and Houlton, ME, a common route for shippers, these legal 100,000-pound trucks are forced to pass by 9 schools, 270 intersections, and more than 3,000 driveways.

Maine's highways are particularly suited for six-axle truck traffic, as most of the interstate system was designed to carry freight—including munitions and heavy equipment—to and from the former Loring Air Force Base. Time and time again, the Maine Department of Transportation has stated that it endorses an increased weight limit, and Maine's roads can safely manage heavier trucks with six axles. If a State's chief highway engineer can certify the safety of a route, and the condition of a road, a State should have the flexibility to change its weight limit on interstate highways.

The significance of this permanent change cannot be overstated. Maine's secondary roads will be significantly safer when trucks are returned to the highway with stop lights and pedestrian interactions. I thank my colleagues for their continued support of this measure.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wisconsin.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. KOHL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent the Senate proceed to a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

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

THE JOBS ACT

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, my colleague from Oklahoma was addressing the frustration that exists on the part of the American public with this Chamber for not doing its job. I must say, on that point, we are in complete agreement. I hear in every townhall, in every conversation with constituents, the question of why is it that when what we need most in this Nation are jobs, this Chamber, the Senate, is unable to hold a debate over a jobs bill? Just last week we had a debate not over a jobs bill but whether to proceed to the jobs bill. Unfortunately, it was defeated, not because the majority did not want to get to the bill but because the minority opposed it and invoked a 60-vote hurdle, a hurdle that was never routinely used in this Chamber in the past.

The fear of debating a jobs bill in this Chamber by my colleagues is irrational. The American people want us to wrestle with creating jobs. Have people not gone out and talked to their constituents? Do they not know the unemployment rate in this Nation? Do they not hear from fathers and mothers who are worried about keeping shelter over their family or worried about their mortgage, their rent, their utilities?

I do not understand how anyone could say: Let's not have a debate about jobs on the floor of the Senate. Yet it was a unanimous "no" vote from across the aisle when we proposed having the debate over the jobs bill. I think it is so important that all of us in this Chamber who actually receive a paycheck understand the challenge and the plight of American citizens who either are working part time in multiple jobs trying to make ends meet or who have lost their job and are completely unemployed.

Over the past 10 years, we have lost 5 million manufacturing jobs in this country. Over the last 10 years, we have lost 50,000 factories in this country. Working families are in a tremendous crunch. I thought I would simply share some stories from back home because there does not seem to be many people listening to folks back home and their concern that this Chamber debate and produce a jobs bill and get it to the President.

Jerry from Linn County says:

I was laid off in April, 2009. It took me 2 years and 2 months to find a contracting job. I appreciate having a job, however I have no

benefits, no holiday pay, no vacation pay, no medical or dental coverage. My wife recently suffered a badly broken leg. We have no insurance. Her injury required surgery and a hospital stay. Now we are in danger of losing the house that I bought in 1993.

I am told that my contract has been renewed for another year. That will bring us to May of 2012. Then I have to leave for three months before I can return. I am given no promise of being able to return to work there.

That is Jerry's story that he sent in to share.

Virginia from Hillsboro writes:

In February 2010, my department at my company was advised we would be laid off after transitioning our job duties to a replacement staff in India. It felt like quite a blow.

Prior to the layoff, the company had not given us raises for 3-4 years, even though they were reporting profits. Half of our department was laid off within a few months.

I filed a TAA petition to attempt to attain additional funds or schooling for the people at our department, but it was denied.

The year before I was laid off, my daughter, who lives with us with her son, changed jobs and then was laid off from the new job. Four months after my layoff, my husband was advised the rest of his department is being laid off after their job duties were transitioned to an off-shore site; hopefully, he will have work until March.

My daughter, myself, and my husband are all looking for work.

We moved my mother up with us three years ago, so now we have four generations living in our home. I have no idea what will happen if none of us can find work. My husband served his time in the Army and he and I have always worked full-time, steady jobs. It feels like we're being punished for spending our lives working to take care of our family and to keep a roof over our heads.

I read in the papers this morning that things are improving in Oregon, but, honestly, I don't see it. Americans are hurting.

Americans need jobs! We want to work and need to work! We are not lazy—we are innovators and always have been! We need to regain our pride in our country, help each other and quit focusing on greed.

That was Virginia from Hillsboro. And if you didn't catch the beginning, her letter started by saying that she and her team were laid off after training replacements in India to take over their jobs. This terrible economy is resulting in multiple generations of her family without work.

Julio from southwest Portland says:

I am 31 years old with my first baby on the way and I can honestly tell you I am nowhere where I thought I would be at this point in my life. Upon graduating high school, I joined the Navy. I did a 6-year enlistment. My mother was a housekeeper and my father was an ordained minister and they were unable to help me with the expenses of higher education, so I took full advantage of the GI bill once I was honorably discharged in 2004.

I completed my degree in three years and nine months and graduated with a bachelor's in business management and a minor in economics. I strongly felt that as a 6-year veteran of the Navy, with a degree in business, and being bilingual, that I would have no problem finding employment.

Unfortunately, I had the misfortune of graduating just as the financial world collapsed in 2008. Three years later, I work two jobs and still make less than \$30,000 a year.

I have interviewed for several great jobs, but due to the same amount of people applying for the same position I have lost out to individuals with a great amount of experience.

I know I can do well, but in our current environment I feel as though I don't even have a chance. Anything you can do to create better paying jobs in Oregon would be greatly appreciated.

That was Julio from southwest Portland.

These stories that are coming from our single parents, coming from our husbands, our wives, are coming from folks who are taking care of their parents. They are coming from folks who are trying to take care of their children, and you can feel the sense of frustration. You can feel the sense of panic in this economy.

Last week this Chamber debated whether to have a debate about creating jobs. My colleagues across the aisle said, no, we will not let the jobs bill come to the floor. I must say I am extraordinarily frustrated that at this time in this economy, with so many Americans hurting, my colleagues are unable to summon the connection to the challenge of the American family so that we can have a full debate on this floor on a jobs bill.

These families that are writing, as you can tell from the letters, served their country. Several of them were in the service. They played by the rules. They worked hard. But they have been let down again and again by a political system that has protected tax breaks for the wealthy over creating jobs and opportunities for working families.

I hope we will have another chance to decide whether to debate a jobs bill, and I hope every Member of this Chamber will say yes to taking and shutting down tax breaks, \$20 billion a year for oil companies that are stashing that money in the bank and not creating a single job with it, and instead take that \$20 billion and put it to work on energy retrofits, which is, according to every economist, the best bang for the buck we could possibly have in creating jobs. You cannot outsource a single bit of the labor, and virtually all of the products are made right here in our economy, from the pink cotton candy insulation to the double-paned windows to the caulk. That is just one example of the kind of conversation we should be having.

We should be having a conversation about whether we should be helping our school districts hire teachers. Some will agree, some will not, but let's have the debate. If someone wants to propose an amendment and say we don't want to help our school districts, we can do something better to create jobs, let's have that debate. Let's not sit on our hands when American families are suffering. Let's get to work and create jobs that the families across America need.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BENNET). The Senator from Tennessee.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Are we in morning business?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Yes.

EDUCATION REFORM

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I am delighted the Senator from Colorado is in the chair when I speak. I want to speak on a subject where he is the foremost expert on the day-to-day operation of school systems. He will appreciate and understand what I am about to say in ways that many people will not.

Yesterday I had a telephone conversation with a member of an editorial board of a prominent newspaper in this country who asked me this question. She said: Senator ALEXANDER, how can you and the National Education Association possibly be together on the teacher evaluation question? How can you justify that? Then she said: When has the NEA ever done anything to encourage the evaluation of school teachers? That is a good question. Both questions are good questions. What she was referring to, of course, was the draft announced yesterday by Senator HARKIN and Senator ENZI, who are the ranking members of the Senate committee that handles education.

It included a provision on evaluation of teachers and principals. At my suggestion, and that of others, but contrary to the suggestion of a number of people, it does not include an order from Washington that all 15,000 school districts have a teacher and principal evaluation system. It does not include a definition of what it should be, and it doesn't include the opportunity for the Education Secretary, whoever it may be, to then issue a number of regulations defining what a teacher and principal evaluation system would be in Denver or in Maryville or in Nashville. What it does include is the following: For the first time it specifically allows a State to spend its title II money that is the \$2.5 billion of Federal funds that goes to States. It allows that money to be spent to design and implement a principal-teacher evaluation system that is related to student achievement.

In my view, that is the holy grail of public education. If we could ever figure out how to do that and to get everybody to do it, I think it would do more than any other single thing we could do to help our children learn what they need to know and be able to do, except some law that would make everybody better parents, and I don't know how to pass such a law. So that is the first thing the Harkin-Enzi draft includes about teacher and principal evaluation.

In Tennessee, for example, that would mean there would be about \$41 million this year that could be spent for that purpose. There are about 63,000 teachers in Tennessee, so that is about \$660 per teacher per year of Federal funds that could be used to design and implement a teacher and principal evaluation system related to student achievement. This is the first time that has been specifically allowed.