

bipartisan basis to get legislation that addresses the concerns. It is time to move forward. I urge my colleagues to support the legislation.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont is recognized.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I want to talk on a number of issues, but I would tell my friend from North Dakota, I very strongly disagree with him about this Keystone XL Pipeline. For those of us who are concerned about global warming, and all of the destruction that is currently taking place because of global warming, and will increase in years to come, this Keystone XL project is exactly what we should not be doing.

EXTENSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the period for morning business be extended until 7 p.m., with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

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

OMNIBUS APPROPRIATIONS BILL

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, before I get to the Keystone issue, I want to suggest that at this particular moment, at the very end of the congressional session, before the end of the year's work, it is a strange moment in Congress because you have, behind closed doors, negotiators from the House and the Senate—Republicans and Democrats—trying to put together large and complicated bills, and the concern I have—and I speak only for myself, but I think other Members in the Senate feel the same way—is we are suddenly going to be given a fait accompli, a complicated and long bill with many implications, many very important provisions, and then we are going to be asked to vote on it with not having had much input into the bill or even the ability to digest it fully and know what it means to our constituents.

Let me touch on some of the issues that concern me, and let me also say that what I am going to be referring to are reports in the media. I do not know what will be in the final product. I am not sure anybody does. But here is some of what the media is reporting that might be in the payroll holiday tax bill—or what might not be in it, for that matter.

One of the issues I believe very strongly about is that at a time when the middle class is disappearing, when poverty is increasing, and when more and more Americans understand that the wealthiest people are doing phenomenally well, and yet their effective tax rate is the lowest in decades—an issue Warren Buffett keeps reminding us about—that it is almost definitely going to be the case that while we continue to cut programs or raise revenue

from the middle class and working families, the wealthiest people in this country will continue to avoid paying anymore in taxes. So we have a situation where the effective tax rates on the wealthiest people in this country are the lowest in decades, and yet, once again, as we talk about deficit reduction we are going to cut this program, we are going to cut that program, and yet the wealthy—millionaires and billionaires—are not going to be asked to pay one nickel more in taxes. I think that is wrong, and people should understand that in all likelihood that is exactly what will happen again.

Furthermore, we have major corporations, companies on Wall Street, oil companies that in recent years have made billions of dollars in profit and yet have, in some cases, believe it or not, not paid one nickel in Federal corporate income tax because of a wide variety of loopholes.

We have a situation where we are losing tens and tens of billions of dollars—a hundred billion dollars—a year because of all kinds of tax havens which exist in the Cayman Islands, Bermuda, other countries. Large corporations, wealthy individuals can shelter their money, not pay taxes, and then the result is revenue declines in the United States, and my friends in the Republican Party suggest: Cut this, cut that, go after Social Security, go after Medicare, go after Medicaid, go after education, go after environmental protection. Yet once again—once again—the wealthiest people in this country will not pay a nickel more in taxes, large corporations will continue to enjoy huge tax loopholes.

Second of all, as somebody who believes it is absolutely imperative this country transform its energy system away from fossil fuel, away from greenhouse gas emissions, and moves to energy efficiency and sustainable energy, I am very concerned that in the legislation we will be dealing with today or tomorrow—or Sunday or whenever—there will not be an extension of important programs for renewable energy.

One of the most important is the 1603 renewable energy extender. This is a Treasury grant program which helps provide financing for renewable energy projects by converting an existing tax credit into a grant.

This one program, which costs barely more than \$1 billion, has leveraged \$23 billion in private investments. It supports 22,000 renewable energy projects in all 50 States of our country. It has created up to 290,000 jobs. If we do not include the 1603 program in legislation, it will expire at the end of this year. What we have seen, time and time again—whether it is wind, whether it is solar—is, if we do not extend these programs, investments in these technologies significantly decline, we lose jobs, we lose our ability to compete internationally in terms of becoming a leader in sustainable energy.

I hope very much what I am hearing in the media and other sources is not

correct. I hope, in fact, the 1603 Treasury grant program is included in any legislation that we vote on. That is an issue of major concern to me.

We have today a declining middle class. We have 50 million people who have no health insurance. We have a lot of elderly folks who, despite Medicare, pay a great deal of money out of their own pockets for health care. What I am hearing—again, I do not know what will be in the final package, but what some media reports suggest is, there are proposals out there to increase Medicare income-related premiums by 15 percent, starting in 2017, and also that there are some ideas out there which would decrease the income at which beneficiaries pay these income-related premiums to \$80,000 for an individual and \$160,000 for a couple. What this would mean is that older people will have to pay more for health care. In some cases they cannot afford to do that. I hope very much that does not happen.

When we talk about Medicare in this country, we have to talk about the overall health care crisis, which is not only that 50 million people are uninsured, it is not only that health care costs for all health insurance companies are soaring—or virtually all of them—but we have to ask why it is in the United States of America we end up spending almost twice as much per capita on health care as do the people of any other country.

Yesterday in my office I had a member of the Australian Parliament. In Australia, all people have health care as a right. Prescription drug coverage is largely covered by the government. Their costs for prescription drugs are much lower because their national health care program negotiates prices with the drug companies. Yet in our country the situation is very different.

What we want to do is not ask middle-income people to be paying more for their health care at a time when many of them are paying already more than they can afford. So the changes in Medicare which I have been reading about are something that concern me very much.

There is another area out there which I think will have profound implications for our economy. The House Republican leadership passed a bill recently as part of this conference negotiation going on now to slash unemployment insurance in half and cut up to 40 weeks of unemployment benefits. If this legislation were to become law—and I certainly hope it will not—it could lead to the loss of 140,000 jobs and hundreds of thousands of unemployed workers, who lost their jobs through no fault of their own, losing their benefits.

Here we have a situation where, in real terms, 25 million Americans are unemployed or underemployed, long-term unemployment is the longest on record, we have more people who are experiencing long-term unemployment than at any other time we can remember, and the solution our Republican

friends want to bring about—after fighting to make sure millionaires and billionaires are not asked to pay more in taxes—is to slash unemployment insurance in a very significant way.

Now, there is another issue dealing with employment above and beyond unemployment insurance; that is, that the House Republican bill, the ideas that they are bringing into the conference, would freeze Federal employee pay through 2015, and over a period of years reduce the civilian workforce by 10 percent, cutting some 200,000 decent-paying jobs.

Now, let's be clear. For Federal employees there has already been a pay freeze for the last 2 years. Those are the nurses in our Veterans' Administration hospitals. Those are people who are making \$30,000, \$40,000 a year. There is now a proposal to once again extend the freeze to them.

This is a real cut in real wages because inflation is going up for our Federal employees. But what concerns me equally is not only the impact this freeze would have on Federal employees, it sends a signal to every employer in America who says: Well, yes, I know you guys have not gotten a wage increase in a number of years. I know that I have asked you to pay more for health insurance. Yes, we have cut back on your pensions. But guess what. In Washington, the Congress says they are going to once again, for the third year, freeze Federal pay. In fact, they are going to ask Federal employees to pay more, too, for their pensions, which means a cut for many Federal employees. Well, if the Federal Government can do it, it says to private employers all over America so can they.

One of the points President Obama has been making and why he last fought for a middle-class tax cut is that he wants to put more money into the hands of working families. I understand that. I agree with that concept. But what is the sense of providing tax breaks for the middle class on one hand—a concept which I support—

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator's time has expired.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent for 2 additional minutes.

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

Mr. SANDERS. What is the sense on one hand in saying, we need to put money in the hands of the middle class through a tax cut, and, on the other hand, send a green light to employers all over this country who will now look at the Federal Government and then say to their employees: Hey, the Federal Government has frozen wages for a third year, cut back on pension programs, and we are going to do that as well.

Lastly, but not least, for whatever reason, my Republican colleagues in the House have put into this mix of a payroll tax holiday a demand that the Keystone XL tar sands project be completed; that the President be forced, as

I understand it, to make a decision on this within the next several months.

The reality is that among many other factors, the inspector general of the State Department is currently investigating whether the State Department acted inappropriately in appointing a particular company to do the environmental study which, amazingly enough, given the fact that I think they had a conflict of interest, ended up in a very positive light.

So the inspector general is now looking at a conflict of interest issue in terms of the environmental study which will take a bit of time. Furthermore, I think many of us understand that at a time when greenhouse gas emissions are rising rapidly in this country and all over the world, at a time when virtually the entire scientific community tells us that global warming is an enormously significant problem for the future of our planet, at a time when we are seeing increased floods and droughts and extreme weather disturbances, anyone who has studied the issue understands that in terms of global warming, the Keystone XL tar sands pipeline is a very dangerous project.

Producing energy-intensive tar sands oil emits 82 percent more carbon pollution and contributes more to global warming than conventional oil, according to the EPA.

With that, let me conclude but just suggest that I think we need to be discussing publicly some of the issues that we may be voting on in a very short period of time.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alabama.

FEDERAL DEFICIT

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, we will be voting, I understand, on three pieces of legislation from the House. One is a massive omnibus bill that would include 9 of the 13 appropriations bills that should be brought up individually and voted on individually, with amendments on each one. They have all been cobbled together now at the end of the year in one giant omnibus bill, with only a few hours for us to review their contents.

In addition, there will be a vote to offset certain emergency expenditures—in other words, pay for these new expenditures with savings elsewhere in the government rather than borrow the money for it—add to our debt for it. A third vote will be, in effect, to fund and appropriate the money that would be so offset or spend it by borrowing it if it is not offset.

I would just share with my colleagues one particular thing. The Presiding Officer, Senator WHITEHOUSE, is on the Budget Committee, and our staff has looked at these budget numbers. I would just advise my colleagues—I believe they should vote to offset the additional expenditure. This is the reason: The Budget Control Act

enacted this summer was part of an effort where Republicans said: We will raise the debt limit, but we want you to cut spending. We need to cut back on spending because we have had a series of deficits the likes of which the Nation has never seen before. We have to do better. We need to reduce spending.

Our Democratic colleagues resisted. So when it was finally done, it was a \$900 billion-plus reduction in spending, which was to occur over 10 years. Plus, the committee of 12 was supposed to find \$1.2 trillion more if they could. If they could not, there would be an automatic cut of that. So it would be about a \$2.1 trillion savings over 10 years.

Experts have told us we need at least \$4 trillion in savings over 10 years, not \$2 trillion. But it was a step in the right direction, and that was the best that could be done under the circumstances. So the bill was passed. What I want to say is that under that legislation, it was discovered that this year—the current fiscal year, that began October 1—we were going to spend \$1.43 trillion instead of the \$1.5 trillion we spent last year. So there was a lot of heartburn and complaining. We are only cutting \$7 billion out of the discretionary portion of our budget, not Social Security and Medicare, but other programs that are going up every year: food stamps, college loans, Pell grants.

So we were going to cut at least the discretionary accounts by \$7 billion, from \$1.50 trillion to 1.43 billion. But I have to say, we are not going to achieve that. Just as has so often been the case, we promise reductions in spending but do not get there. You would think that we could find \$7 billion. You would think that is not too much to ask this government, that has been increasing spending at a substantial rate, to reduce spending a little bit.

In fact, in the first 2 years of President Obama's administration, non-defense discretionary spending went up 24 percent, a dramatic increase. So to reduce spending and try to get this huge deficit under control is not too much to ask, in my opinion. Indeed, we are borrowing 40 percent of every dollar we spend. This year we will spend about \$3.6 trillion and take in about \$2.2 trillion or \$2.3 trillion. That is just not any way to do business.

This will be the third straight year that has happened. So we were looking for some improvement. I would just say to my colleagues, this is one little offset, \$8 billion in additional spending, and it will determine whether we have any reduction in spending or whether, in fact, contrary to our promises this summer, we will spend more this year than last year.

These are the numbers as we have calculated them from the Budget Committee staff. The regular appropriations would be this year \$1.43 trillion, but they have added to it disaster and other spending of \$11 billion, which