

I have expressed my concern that the Postal Service is rushing to close rural post offices, and I have asked the Postmaster General to find alternatives to this effort.

Many people aren't aware that, in rural America, nearly 90 percent of postal facilities are owned by private parties and leased to the Postal Service, rather than the Postal Service owning those facilities itself. Across the nation as a whole the Postal Service leases more than one-third of its facilities.

Without the Postal leasing program, the Postal Service would not be able to meet its mandate of universal service. It would not be able to provide mail service to huge swaths of our nation in rural America. By partnering with the private sector, the Postal Service has facilities and provides service without the enormous expense of constructing, owning and maintaining its own buildings.

More than 40 of the postal facilities in Montana are leased by the Postal Service. In all, more than 3,000 private property owners lease facilities to the USPS across America. Without the Postal leasing program, the infrastructure to serve many parts of America either would simply not exist or would require massive expenditures on building facilities that the Postal Service cannot afford.

As the Postal Service explores options about the future of rural post offices across America, I urge it to look carefully at the leasing program and to realize the role it plays in saving money and providing universal mail service. Both of those roles are critically important. So as we make the tough choices about the how we can preserve rural post offices, I hope that the Postal Service will continue to consider the leasing program as part of its future.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

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

RESTORE ACT

Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, this week marks the somber anniversary 2 years ago, on Friday, April 20, 2010, of an explosion on the Deepwater Horizon oilrig in the Gulf of Mexico which took 11 lives and triggered the worst oilspill in American history. We still remember the families of those who were lost and those who were injured on that fateful day. We are forever grateful to

the thousands of volunteers and relief workers from all over the world who responded in the wake of this disaster.

In Mississippi, like other Gulf States, the BP oilspill caused immeasurable damage not only on the shoreline but also to all sectors of our economy. Misperceptions of tainted seafood and oil-covered beaches devastated our seafood and tourism industries. Local businesses already challenged by a difficult economy were crippled by the disruption in market demand.

The moratorium that the Obama administration put on drilling cost our economy critical jobs related to domestic energy production and its associated support industries. The administration's delays on drilling permits are still stalling job creation along the gulf coast.

Many of my colleagues and I have come to the floor in recent weeks to talk about a better energy policy, specifically to offer solutions to lower gas prices. The administration's slowdown of domestic energy production keeps us dependent on foreign energy providers, ultimately hurting Americans at the pump.

There is no doubt that the residents of Mississippi and other Gulf States are resilient and have persevered through unprecedented circumstances. But there is work left to do. I urge all of my colleagues to remain committed to the coast's full recovery. I applaud the Senate's recent bipartisan passage of the RESTORE Act as part of the Transportation bill. It is imperative that coastal communities have the resources they need to rebuild and revitalize.

Under the provisions of the RESTORE Act, local officials will have the ability to prioritize the economic and ecological projects that are most critical to their own recovery. Local communities are in the best position to make these decisions, and needless government redtape should not stand in the way. Directly distributing Clean Water Act fines would ensure that the affected parties are compensated accordingly.

The RESTORE Act is an encouraging step forward for all Gulf Coast States.

I urge the House of Representatives to show the same support for the gulf coast in passing this important piece of legislation. Both parties can agree that the revitalization of our Gulf States is a priority and that providing local perspectives is vital to our recovery efforts. The disaster that occurred 2 years ago was an extraordinary tragedy with long-term consequences, and we cannot forget about the needs that persist.

The gulf coast provides one-third of the seafood harvested in the continental United States. The gulf coast is home to 6 of our country's 10 largest commercial ports. Mississippi and all Gulf States make up a vibrant part of this country, and the residents and businesses there are key contributors to the national economy.

There is no doubt that keeping our gulf strong is vital to our national interest, and part of that would be the passage of the RESTORE Act.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maryland is recognized.

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, I concur with my friend from Mississippi on the importance of passing the RESTORE Act. It is in our transportation reauthorization bill, and it is an important part. It not only helps the Gulf States but all the States that border oceans in this country. It is an important part of the bill that we worked out in a consensus manner in the Senate.

I take this time and ask unanimous consent that I may speak as in morning business.

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

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION ACT

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, we need to pass a long-term transportation reauthorization bill. The Senate has done this. The Senate passed its bill 2 months ago by a very strong margin of 74 to 22. I call it a consensus bill and not a bipartisan bill, because we went beyond bipartisan. This bill came out of the two committees of jurisdiction, the Banking Committee and the Environment and Public Works Committee, by a unanimous vote. The Finance Committee dealt with the financing provisions.

This bill gives us predictability in transportation funding. Here is the problem: The other body, the House, is currently working on a bill that would basically be a short-term extension of our transportation program. We need a long-term commitment as to the Federal partnership in transportation. We need that for many reasons. We need it for predictable funding so our local governments can commit to do the types of transportation programs that are necessary for our safety, necessary for economic expansion, and necessary for our communities.

We are missing the construction season by the failure to enact a long-term transportation reauthorization plan. Major projects cannot be planned—whether it is to replace a bridge, major maintenance programs, new highways, or expansion of our transit systems.

This translates into jobs. We are in a recovery. We all want to do everything we can to maintain and expand job opportunities in this country so our economy can recover at a quicker pace. The transportation reauthorization bill that passed the Senate is responsible for 3 million jobs.

In my State of Maryland, 28,700 jobs are connected to the passage of the transportation reauthorization program—21,000 in highways and over 7,000 in transit.

The Senate bill, as I pointed out, was a consensus bill. It was done in the finest manner of legislating. I compliment Senators BOXER and INHOFE on the Environment and Public Works Committee, on which I serve, for marshaling this bill through. There were

numerous challenges in the Senate, and a number of committees had to consider it and, of course, there was floor consideration. During that entire process, we maintained the consensus and the balance that is important.

Let me point out that here you have a bill that invests in transit and roads and bridges. We were able to reach a compromise to make sure that both priorities were preserved in the transportation reauthorization bill.

I authored an amendment, with Senator COCHRAN, that dealt with local input into the transportation decisions. We had the right balance between the Federal Government's partnership working with our States but allowing the locals to have input particularly on transportation enhancement programs. We have reform in our bill that consolidates a lot of specific programs into broader programs, providing greater flexibility, but still maintaining accountability on the Federal partnership.

During this most recent work period, when we were off for Easter and Passover, I visited various parts of Maryland. I was down in western Maryland, Appalachia country. I heard firsthand how important reauthorization of this transportation bill is to the economy of western Maryland. This is a rural part of our State. They need to build a north-south highway that will connect Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Maryland. The bill we passed—the transportation reauthorization bill—contains some very important provisions to allow that highway to be constructed. It provides toll credits so Pennsylvania can complete an important segment of this north-south highway. It also contains a stronger match so that it makes it more feasible that we can move this highway to completion. The completion of the north-south highway means jobs and hope to the people of that region of America. It is very important to get that done. It will mean jobs. They told me—the companies that are directly dependent upon that highway being constructed—if we don't pass a multiyear reauthorization bill, that project gets delayed. Once it is delayed, we lose job opportunities.

I also spent part of the work period visiting other parts of Maryland. I was a few miles from here at the Metro Command, at the Carmen Turner facility in New Carrollton, where they operate the bus and rail command center for the Nation's transit system, which is both bus and rail in this area. It is the Nation's system. The Federal Government depends upon this, upon the Washington transit system. Many people who work in the Capitol come to us through the transit program. It is true in all of the Federal facilities.

That is an aging system. The rail system needs to be repaired. It is the second busiest rail transit system in the Nation. It is in desperate need of repair. Without predictable funding, major projects will be delayed. I will

give you a list of some of the projects we need to do for the Washington metro transit system:

Overhauling the Landover and Southern Avenue bus maintenance shop in Prince George's County, MD; improving perimeter security at the Bladensburg bus garage, also in PG County; complete the design and construction of 10,000 feet of test track at Greenbelt that is needed to test the new, safer 7,000 series railcars due to arrive in 2014.

I remind my colleagues that we had a tragedy on the transit system here not too long ago. There was a study done as to improvements that need to be made, including replacement of railcars to safer cars. These changes need to be done to improve safety of people who depend upon the transit system in this region. Also we need to continue to implement systemwide switch testing and replacement needed to comply with the National Transportation Safety Board's safety recommendations following the June 2009 red-line crash. All of that will be delayed. Yes, safety will be put at risk if we do not pass a reauthorization of the transportation program.

It is interesting that one part of my State is very rural, which I visited, and the other part of the State is urban, and it is important to that region. It is important to the entire country. We need to get this done. Every State is impacted by bridge replacement, highways, and transit.

The Maryland Department of Transportation tells me that due to the uncertainty, they are planning on a 20-percent reduction in the projects that would otherwise be done in this year. That will have a huge impact on our workforce—a huge impact on our economy.

As I am speaking, the House is taking action. It is going to pass a short-term extension. That is not good enough. That doesn't solve the problem. That doesn't give us the predictability or allow us to complete the north-south highway in western Maryland, or make the improvements we need to in the WMATA system, or in any State, to be able to move forward with transportation projects. That is not good enough. We need to do more.

However, I am pleased to see the House taking some action. I urge that as soon as they complete action, let's get into conference and resolve the differences between the House and Senate and get a bill back on the floor as quickly as possible. We did our work. We passed a bipartisan consensus bill. They are passing a partisan bill in the other body. They are delaying things again. That is not good.

Let's get together and complete a conference as quickly as possible. Let's get Americans back to work building roads and transit systems that are vital to the continued economic recovery of this Nation.

With that, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CARDIN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. RUBIO. I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

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

Mr. RUBIO. Mr. President, I think this is topical to the item we are debating, which is to proceed to the Violence Against Women Act, and I wish to take a moment to highlight a couple of egregious examples around the world where young girls and women are being threatened by violence in what remains a scourge throughout the planet, and then I will focus on here at home as well.

On April 17—and this is a pretty shocking incident—about 150 Afghan school girls were poisoned after drinking contaminated water. It appears by all signals that it was a deliberate contamination of the water. They are blaming this on conservative radicals who are opposed to female education. So there is evidence to suggest that 150 girls from Afghanistan were poisoned because they went to school. This is happening in the 21st century.

A new report from the Human Rights Commission on Pakistan says there were 943 Pakistani women killed in 2011 and they were killed for "honor." Of the 953 victims, 93 were minors. Around 595 of the women killed in 2011 were accused of having "illicit relations," and 219 of them were accused of marrying without permission. Again, this is the 21st century we are talking about where these things are happening. In fact, this same report, in 2010, says there were 791 honor killings of women in Pakistan.

Here is one that is really disturbing and very sick. In South Africa, a group of young males in Soweta were filmed raping a 17-year-old who was believed to be mentally ill. In fact, the term "rapevideo" was trending on Twitter in South Africa on Wednesday. It is estimated by some organizations that a woman is raped every 26 seconds in South Africa. There is a report with regard to this specific Soweta rape that the men promised the girl 25 cents if she kept silent.

Let's turn to our hemisphere for a moment, where, tragically, of the 25 countries around the world with the highest homicide rates for women, 14 are in Latin America and the Caribbean, according to a recent survey by a Geneva-based research organization called Small Arms Survey. The three most dangerous countries for women were El Salvador, Jamaica, and Guatemala, respectively.

As a region, a U.N. study found in 2011 that the Americas, including the United States and Canada, were ranked

second only to Africa for female homicide rates. While females represent only 10 percent of the murder victims in the Americas, the sheer level of violence in the region, particularly in Latin America, puts women at risk.

Here at home, I was honored a few weeks ago to sign a letter, along with Senators KIRK, BLUMENTHAL, and CORNYN, which we wrote to about 40 organizations back on April 12 to inform them that the parent company of the Village Voice publications they advertise on owns backpage.com, an online classified advertising Web site linked to dozens of child-trafficking cases in this country. We asked these companies, charitable organizations, and public, educational, and cultural institutions to work together to use their economic influence to stop this from happening, to stop this online child sex trafficking that is being facilitated by sites such as these.

I want to report to my colleagues today that there has been some progress. This letter is already having an impact. We have had representatives from two of the recipients of the letter respond that their companies will quickly act to end their advertising on the Village Voice publications.

The fact is what I just outlined now is happening here in the United States of America. I highlighted things happening around the world, and I highlighted a case of something we can be doing right now here in the United States.

The reason I come to the floor on occasion to speak about human rights violations that are happening around the world and in our own country is to remind us that atrocities are not just things that happened in history, they are happening today. If we just open a newspaper and open our eyes, we will find modern-day atrocities that rival things we have read about in history. Things we might believe are unimaginable or impossible are occurring in this century. Here in our country, we have instances such as this, where it is estimated that up to 300,000 children could potentially be at risk—300,000 people, young women, children, et cetera, in our hemisphere—to become victims of human trafficking. Part of that happens here in our own country. So we have an obligation to focus on these issues.

I will continue to use this forum and any opportunity I get to highlight human rights abuses that are happening across the world and in our own country because awareness is always the first step toward confronting these issues. The notion that one can somehow get away with this without condemnation encourages people to do more of it, encourages people to think they can get away with it, encourages people to think it may even be culturally acceptable. It is not culturally acceptable for any civilized people to stand by and watch human beings being enslaved, trafficked, abused, or

targeted. We cannot stand by silently—and I am not claiming anyone in this Chamber does this—and argue that it is culturally acceptable to carry out an honor killing of a woman because she got married without permission. That is outrageous and it is absurd. It has no place in our world.

If this Nation is to remain a leader on human rights, then those of us who serve it have an obligation to use forums such as this to call attention to egregious examples, such as those I cited today, and to condemn them in the loudest voice possible. So in the weeks and months to come, I hope to continue to come to the floor and provide not just examples of abuses happening around the world but also examples, such as the one I finished with today. That is an example of how we can, working across the party aisle in this Chamber, work collaboratively to do something about it. This letter to the advertisers on backpage.com in the Village Voice is just one example of the things we can be doing to ensure we condemn and put a stop to some of these most heinous practices.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. LIEBERMAN. Mr. President, before I proceed to the Senator from Missouri, I want to thank my friend from Florida for his principled and passionate statement. He speaks from his own experience—his family's own experience in leaving a dictatorship in Cuba and coming to the freedom of this country, but he speaks more broadly from the depths of American history and American experience. We are a very different nation. We are different from our beginning because we defined ourselves not by our geographical borders but by our values and the values expressed in the Declaration of Independence about those human rights, that life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are the endowment of our Creator. Those rights, obviously, were not just the endowment God gave the people of the United States but all human beings anywhere on this planet. It is what makes us a great nation. I think the extent to which we hold to that principle that was the motivation for our founding is one by which we can measure ourselves day by day.

I really appreciate that the Senator from Florida has committed himself both to the upholding and the application of the principle of human rights, the sanctity of human rights, and America's role in protecting them, and to persistently continue to come to the floor to speak of particular cases where that principle is being violated. I happened to be on the floor for the postal reform bill, but I wanted to take this opportunity to thank him for his very compelling statement.

I yield the floor to my friend from Missouri.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri.

POSTAL REFORM

Mrs. MCCASKILL. Mr. President, I spent a lot of my childhood in a very small town in Missouri. From the time I was about 3 years old until the fourth grade, I lived in a town called Lebanon, MO. My dad was a life insurance salesman and sold life insurance, in fact to many of the soldiers at Fort Leonard Wood, and my mother's family had the corner drugstore about a block off Main Street in Lebanon, MO.

I have fond and vivid memories of my childhood in Lebanon, and one of them was the trip I would take whenever I was hanging out down at my family's drugstore. This was my great-uncle and great-aunt who had raised my mother, so they were like my grandparents. He was the pharmacist and she ran the lunch counter at the drugstore, and I would go with my great-uncle on his run to the post office. We would walk up 2 blocks and go into the post office. I even remember how it smelled. I remember how it looked. I remember what happened there. My memory is that it was a gathering place, that I would have to tug on my great-uncle's coat and say, "Let's go, Uncle Tom. Let's go" because he would invariably find people at the post office with whom he needed to visit. It wasn't a big place, but it was a very important place in Lebanon, MO.

I rise today to talk about an amendment that will save that sense of community for dozens of rural towns in Missouri. I am very aware, as a former auditor and someone who spends a lot of time looking at our budgets and trying to figure out the numbers, of the crisis we have in terms of the fiscal sustainability of our Postal Service.

I commend the work of the committee on which I am lucky to serve with Senator LIEBERMAN as the chair and Senator COLLINS as the ranking member. It is one of the places where we have maintained strong bipartisanship in the Senate. In fact, I believe Senator LIEBERMAN's committee could serve as a role model for other committees on how to work in a bipartisan way. And I commend Senator CARPER and many others—Senator BROWN of Massachusetts and also Senator MERKLEY—who have worked on this amendment, also, trying to find a way to save these rural post offices.

I know we have a problem here, but when we look at the numbers, closing rural post offices doesn't help. It is 1 percent—less than 1 percent—of the budget. It is less than 1 percent of the amount of savings we need to save out of the postal budget. So in 167 different communities in my State, something that is essential far beyond the bricks and mortar to those communities would close all in the name of less than 1 percent. That doesn't make sense to me.

The strength of our Postal Service has been that it is reliable, that it is affordable, and that it goes to the very last mile. What will we lose in these communities if we shut down these

post offices? Senior citizens would lose a place where they can depend on getting their prescription medicines. Many of these communities have no pharmacies—in fact, most of them don't—and they rely on the mail for their drugs. Small business owners would lose a shipping location. The small business owners in these rural communities depend on that post office to take packages to and to receive packages from. I think this is a sacrifice we should not make. These post offices are worth fighting to save.

When I go home and meet with Missourians and when I get outside of St. Louis and Kansas City and Springfield and Columbia, almost every single time, someone walks up to me and talks about their post office. They feel strongly that it is the one symbol they have in their community that makes them viable as a community, and I would hate to see them lose it.

I believe we should look at the closure of these post offices as a very last resort. Frankly, to me, it looks knee-jerked because it doesn't appear to me to be very thoughtful. I have not been able to get the post office to even give me the rhyme or reason as to why some of these post offices are closing. Very few of them save a significant amount of dollars.

This amendment would impose a 2-year moratorium on rural post office closures to allow the Postal Service to enjoy some of the reforms that have been put in this bill in a very thoughtful and thorough process by Chairman LIEBERMAN and many of his colleagues. It would also say after 2 years that there is a specific list of transparent criterion that must be considered before a post office could be closed.

First, it would have to ensure that seniors could retain the same access to their prescriptions they receive in the mail, that seniors and those with disabilities would have the same access to postal services they currently do, and make sure small businesses are not financially harmed by a rural post office closure.

This is not kicking the can down the road. This is being more thoughtful about preserving the part of the Postal Service that defines it. I am hopeful this is not a Republican or a Democratic issue. I am hopeful this is a rural issue.

We all know the last mile is the most expensive. Throughout the history of our country, government has stepped in and done a little more to give services the last mile. No business model in the world works when you have to take services that last mile down that one road, all the way down to a house at the end of the road sometimes several miles. It didn't work for electricity, so we did things to help with rural electric co-ops. It didn't work for phones, so we did the USX fund to help with phones. It didn't work for broadband, so we stepped in and have done things to assist with broadband. Now we are going to say to these rural commu-

nities: The last mile is not as important. These post offices are not as important. We can make due without it.

I think that is a big mistake, and I hope we can save these rural post offices. This is very important in my State, and I want young girls who are growing up in these small communities to have the same warm and fond memories of the local post office that I carry with me every day.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. LIEBERMAN. Mr. President, I thank Senator MCCASKILL for her statement. What is interesting, this is one of those cases where maybe we appreciate something more than we would every day when we think it may disappear. It is true of institutions as well as people. There is no question that post offices, both in rural areas and small towns—and I will say for Connecticut, in neighborhoods and cities—that the post office has played an important community-building role. But beyond that, in a tough time economically, a lot of people depend on those post offices for their mail, for their prescription drugs, and for the business interactions they need. But here is the other side of it, which my friend from Missouri knows very well.

We have 32,000 post offices in America. If we consider them to be retail outlets, which they are, that is more retail outlets than Walmart, Starbucks, and McDonald's combined. But we are talking about necessities. So we are very concerned that post offices not be closed in a precipitous manner if some have to be closed.

So as my friend from Missouri knows, we put language in this bill that doesn't stop the process of review but forces the Postal Service to consider other options, such as consolidating post offices within a reasonable distance, reducing the number of operating hours, for instance, and permitting a contractor or a rural carrier to provide retail services in the communities served by the post office.

We also allow an appeal to the Postal Regulatory Commission, and I know there are other amendments that will come in to strengthen that part of the bill.

We have to find a balance between the financial pressures on the post office—which, if unresponded to, will take it down—and the continuing dependence that millions of American people, including in small towns and rural areas, have on the post office.

Just a final word. Some of our colleagues have come to the floor and spoken about the post office as if it was in its entirety a relic which has no purpose anymore because of the Internet. Obviously, the Internet is affecting the volume of first-class mail. But the fact is today—I repeat, every day 563 million pieces of mail are delivered by the Postal Service, as you said, consistent with the promise of universal service anywhere you are, anywhere your business is.

Incidentally, that capacity to deliver to the last mile is one of the great, unique, irreplaceable assets of the Postal Service, so irreplaceable that big private sector companies such as FedEx and UPS depend on it. People depend on the Postal Service increasingly for packages too. I maybe have a limited horizon, but I still can't conceive of an Internet that can transport a package from one place to another, and a lot of those packages are needed by the recipients, including, particularly, prescription drugs.

So I thank my friend from Missouri. I say that Senator COLLINS and I would like to work with her. I think we can find a way without doing damage to the purpose of the bill to accommodate the concerns about the preservation of rural post offices, and I look forward to doing so.

I might add this for the information of Members who haven't said this yet today: Yesterday, both cloakrooms hotlined—in the vocabulary of the Senate—a request to every Senator to indicate whether they have an intention to file amendments. At this point, we have a list of over 50 amendments that have been filed. Senator COLLINS and I, Senator CARPER, and Senator BROWN are working to try to reduce that to a number that can be the basis, I hope, of a bipartisan agreement to go ahead and debate those amendments and vote on them.

We have a cloture vote that probably will occur tomorrow, unless vitiated, which will critically determine whether we have the 60 votes that say we can go forward. If we get those 60 votes, I think we can come to an agreement on a number of amendments, have a good, open debate, both sides, and then pass this bill.

If we don't pass this bill or if we don't achieve the 60 votes tomorrow, it is not as if nothing is going to happen to the post office. The fact is the deficit will continue to build, and let me be more specific.

A while back the Postmaster General issued a notice, which he was required to do, saying that as of May 15, less than a month from now, he would have a list of mail processing facilities—not post offices but mail processing facilities—which are candidates for closure. I believe he will close some on or about May 15 unless there is movement on this bill.

So I hope we can reason together; that we can agree on a good, balanced, representative, bipartisan group of amendments and, most of all, that we will not block the bill from being taken up for the lack of 60 votes to grant cloture and stop any attempt at a filibuster.

Mr. President, I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant editor of the Daily Digest proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

PAT SUMMITT

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, today, the University of Tennessee, where I was once President, announced that our basketball coach, Pat Summitt, is resigning after 38 years in that position. Women's college basketball will never be the same without Pat Summitt and women's college basketball would not be the same were it not for Pat Summitt's 38 years of leadership. There will be much said about her winning record, and it is an astonishing accomplishment: 1,098 wins in basketball, more than any other coach, man or woman, in the sport; 8 national championships; in the Southeastern Conference, 32 Southeastern Conference titles, 31 straight trips to the NCAA tournament. But the statistic I always valued most, especially when I was president of the university, was every single one of Pat Summitt's athletes who have completed their eligibility with her have graduated from the University of Tennessee. That is over 38 years. So she has a remarkable record, for which we all are very grateful.

It is hard for people outside Tennessee to understand how much Pat Summitt has become a part of the lives of so many citizens in our State. She actually was asked by the university to take over the basketball program when she was in her early twenties. This was in 1974. Back then, many women's basketball games were played with three women on one end and three women on the other end, offense and the defense.

She changed all that in a big-time way. When I say women's college basketball would not be the same without her, I mean that because almost every women's coach in America would attest to the fact that Pat Summitt has played a role, either an important model or personal role in their development. Even before big games, she would have over to her house in Knoxville the opposing team and the opposing coach. She always had time for community events in Knoxville, despite her busy schedule as such a winning coach. She is a terrific person individually and a great model.

She taught many of us in Tennessee the game of women's college basketball. She was so upfront and personal about it, with her famous stare, which could stare anybody down, and her discussion of these extraordinary athletes she had and what their pluses were and what the things were that they had to work on, that we all felt we not only knew her, but we knew the athletes as well.

I have enjoyed watching Pat Summitt's team for many years. I made a point to watch three of her games in person this year in Knoxville. I arranged my Senate schedule around it because I feared this might be her last season. She announced last year that she has Alzheimer's disease and she is now devoting herself to fighting

that disease. So I am sure she will be as accomplished in some appropriate way in the next stage of her life as she has been in the last 38 years.

I wanted to come to the Senate floor and say, on behalf of all the people of our State, that women's college basketball will never be the same without Pat Summitt, and women's college basketball would never be what it is today if it weren't for Pat Summitt.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. LIEBERMAN. Mr. President, I rise to thank my friend for his moving and eloquent statement, as a Senator from Connecticut, a proud fan and admirer of UConn women's basketball, with the great coach Geno Auriemma. No one appreciates someone such as Coach Summitt more than those who have competed against her, including Coach Auriemma and the great players in the University of Connecticut women's basketball history.

She sets the standard and she has set the standard. I join my colleague in his praise of her, and with some confidence, wishing her well in the future.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I thank Senator LIEBERMAN. I think it is appropriate, and most fans of women's college basketball would agree, that the first two Senators on the floor to commend Pat Summitt would be the Senator from Tennessee and the Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. LIEBERMAN. It is fortuitous and I cannot believe it is accidental.

Mr. ALEXANDER. I thank the Senator for his generous remarks. I know Pat would as well.

Mr. LIEBERMAN. If Geno Auriemma were here, he would have at least echoed what I had to say and added some great stories and words of tribute because I know the respect that Coach Auriemma has for Coach Summitt.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant editor of the Daily Digest proceeded to call the roll.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MERKLEY). The Senator from Minnesota.

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

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

Mr. FRANKEN. I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business for about 20 minutes.

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

POSTAL SERVICE REFORM

Mr. FRANKEN. Mr. President, I rise today to talk about the importance of the Postal Service to Minnesota and to urge my colleagues to make thoughtful changes to strengthen S. 1789.

The Postal Service has proposed a cost-cutting plan that would close or consolidate nearly 3,700 mostly rural post offices. This plan will eliminate

thousands of jobs in communities across the country and will leave many residents and businesses without direct access to the Postal Service. Of course, that includes Oregon, the Presiding Officer's State.

In Minnesota, 117 post offices are on the closure list. That includes the post office in Calumet, MN, a town of 367 people in northeastern Minnesota. I have heard from the mayor of Calumet, John Tourila, about the hardship that closing the post office would have on his community. He told me about disabled residents who can't get a driver's license and how important it is that they are able to walk to the post office. He also told me about an elderly couple in the town. The husband has Alzheimer's, and he and his wife take a walk every day, hand in hand, to the post office.

When the Postal Service held a public meeting in Calumet to discuss the proposed post office closure, over 70 residents showed up. That is a lot. That is about one-fifth of the town.

These are the stories I hear when I travel across Minnesota, especially in rural Minnesota. Post offices are the center of so many communities. They serve as the gathering place and a source of information. Individuals and businesses rely on the Postal Service to receive medications, paychecks, absentee ballots, equipment, and even livestock. If the Postal Service's closure plan is implemented, it will have a devastating impact on rural Minnesota.

The Postal Service has also proposed to close 250 processing facilities. Five of Minnesota's processing facilities are on the block. Under the Postal Service's plan, all of the mail processing activities currently taking place in Duluth, Bemidji, Mankato, Rochester, and Waite Park would be moved to the Twin Cities.

For anyone who hasn't driven around Minnesota, let me explain what that means. When someone in Bemidji, MN, sends a birthday card to her neighbor or a local small business sends an invoice to a customer a few streets away, that letter will be sent more than 200 miles south to the Twin Cities to be processed before it is sent 200 miles back north to Bemidji.

That doesn't make any sense. During Minnesota winters when roads are impassable, that is going to mean severe mail delay. It is going to drive business away from these communities.

The processing centers in Rochester and Duluth are also on the list. These are the third and fourth largest cities in Minnesota. Duluth is over 150 miles away from the Twin Cities. Closing these processing centers will significantly impact local businesses and will drive business away from the Postal Service. One important example is the Duluth News Tribune. This one business distributes over 2 million pieces of mail annually through the Postal Service. Last year, they paid the Postal Service well over \$400,000 for these

services. If the Duluth processing center is closed, the Postal Service will no longer be able to guarantee overnight delivery of local newspapers. The Duluth News Tribune is going to have to find a different way to deliver their papers—the daily paper. That will cost both the businesses and the Postal Service a lot of money.

I have heard from hundreds of Minnesotans and met with postal workers, mayors, concerned community members, and business leaders who rely on the Postal Service. What they all agree on is that we need a strong and financially sound Postal Service. They understand that tough choices need to be made and that some cuts are on the way. But not like this, not by closing five of Minnesota's seven processing facilities and forcing the workers to move to the Twin Cities if they want any hope of keeping their jobs, not by closing nearly 3,700 post offices to save less than 1 percent of the budget, not by slowing down mail so much that it will basically render it useless for many businesses.

The Post Office is in the Constitution. It is in the Constitution. It has been around since the beginning of our country. There is a reason for this. For centuries, universal service has been at the heart of the Postal Service's mission. It is the mission that is described in the Constitution. No matter where people live—be it in Minneapolis or International Falls, MN—people count on the Postal Service delivering their mail. The Postal Service gives us a connection to the outside world. Somehow we have lost sight of that.

Senators LIEBERMAN, CARPER, COLLINS, and SCOTT BROWN put forward a bill to reform the Postal Service. I wish to thank them all for their important work moving this bill forward. S. 1789 would refund overpayments the Postal Service has made to the Federal pension program. It will also reduce the requirement that the Postal Service prefund retiree health care benefits. I am very supportive of both of these provisions. It could save the Postal Service over \$15 billion over the next 2 years.

However, I believe the bill can be strengthened to maintain delivery standards and better protect rural post offices. I have been working with a group of my colleagues, including the Presiding Officer, led by Senator SANDERS, to improve the bill. I wish to thank Senators CARPER and LIEBERMAN for working with us.

The managers' amendment addresses some of our concerns. Most importantly, it would require the Postal Service to retain regional overnight delivery standards. This will protect many processing facilities. Importantly for Minnesota, it will likely keep the Duluth processing facility open.

But the substitute still doesn't do enough to protect rural post offices. I have introduced an amendment with my friends and colleagues, Senators

TESTER and LEVIN, that will give communities the opportunity to fight to prevent the closure of their local post offices and processing facilities.

Right now the Postal Regulatory Commission can review post office closure decisions, but it can only issue advisory options. Our amendment would give the commission authority to reverse post office and processing facility closure decisions. That would guarantee that individuals and communities impacted by closures would have real recourse. I urge my Senate colleagues to support our amendment.

We need to make thoughtful changes to S. 1789 and we need to act now. Last December, I joined with a number of my Senate colleagues in pushing the Postmaster General for a 5-month moratorium on postal closures. The moratorium is now running out and the Postal Service is not waiting. It can't. On May 16, the Postal Service will close thousands of post offices and hundreds of processing centers. We need to act now.

Mr. President, I wish to now change the subject to speak about a topic that hits close to home for many Minnesotans.

(The remarks of Senator FRANKEN pertaining to the introduction of S. 2295 are printed in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

Mr. FRANKEN. Mr. President, I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

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

TRIBUTE TO COACH PAT SUMMITT

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I noted earlier the very eloquent exchange between the Senator from Tennessee and my colleague from Connecticut, Senator LIEBERMAN, on Pat Summitt's resignation as the coach for women's basketball at the University of Tennessee. I wanted to comment very briefly at the opening of my remarks on Pat Summitt—like Senator LIEBERMAN, a fan of UConn women's basketball team, a rival to the University of Tennessee, deeply entrenched rival, enthusiastic and stalwart rival—in recognition of her enormous contribution to women's sports.

As a coach, leader, and mentor Pat Summitt transformed women's athletics in America fundamentally and forever. Her passion for excellence and her fight for fairness made her a force on and off the court. In a cause larger than herself, she achieved recognition for women's basketball, not just for her

own team, and enriched the lives and careers of countless women.

Although her team was a rival of the University of Connecticut and I rooted against her when she played us, I wish her every good thing in the years ahead and admire her continued courage and fortitude.

NCAA ACADEMIC PROGRESS RATE

Mr. President, I want to speak on another basketball topic, one that is serious to the University of Connecticut and to my State where we have some wonderful student athletes—we do. The University of Connecticut has great student athletes. Connecticut residents have watched with pride as the UConn Huskies, both the women's and men's teams, have brought home numerous basketball championships.

I am a strong believer that success in the classroom must accompany success on the court. I support efforts by universities and the NCAA to develop rigorous academic standards for student athletes. I believe schools failing to meet these standards should be penalized. But I also believe these standards must be applied fairly, not capriciously or arbitrarily.

Regrettably, the NCAA's application of its own rules appears to be arbitrary, unjust, and unfair against the UConn men's basketball program. Last October, the NCAA adopted new standards that determined a school's eligibility based on 2- or 4-year average academic progress rates, so called APRs. These standards set a high bar for performance, but unfortunately they did not provide schools with a phase-in period for the new rules.

Because these standards are based on several years of data, it is possible a school could be retroactively punished for actions that occurred before the rules were implemented. That is exactly what has happened to the UConn men's basketball team. Those players have been told they will not be eligible to compete in the 2013 postseason, including the Big East tournament and March Madness, because of the APR scores from the 2006 to 2010 academic years.

None of the players from those seasons remain on the UConn team now. This severe punishment falls on players who are clear of any substandard academic performance. In fact, UConn's recent student athletes have demonstrated exemplary academic performance. The team's academic progress rate for the 2010 to 2011 academic area was nearly perfect. The team's academic progress rate for the fall 2011 semester was, in fact, perfect.

Instead of commending this improvement, the NCAA is ignoring it. The NCAA is basing its 2013 eligibility decision on data from the 2006 to 2010 academic years. If they had included the scores from the 2010 to 2011 academic years, UConn's average would be high enough to meet the NCAA's new standards.

UConn's administrators, coaches, and student athletes have placed a strong

emphasis on academic performance. The school and students have worked hard to meet these standards and to improve academics. They have demonstrated laudable success. Instead of this progress being acknowledged, it has been ignored by the NCAA, and these student athletes have been harshly punished for their predecessors' actions, not for their own.

I have written—joined by my colleague from Connecticut, Senator LIEBERMAN—to the President of the NCAA, Mark Emmert, raising these objections. We have been joined by other colleagues of the delegation. I ask unanimous consent that letter be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

DEAR PRESIDENT EMMERT: We write to express our concern with the implementation of the National Collegiate Athletic Association's (NCAA's) new structure for the Academic Progress Rate (APR). As currently implemented, we believe this structure will have unfair negative ramifications for our academic institutions and their students.

As you are aware, last October the NCAA Board of Directors adopted new standards (four year average of 900 or two year average of 930) that institutions must meet in order to qualify and participate in NCAA post-season championship events. These standards were made effective immediately and were to be applied to student-athlete academic performance that had already occurred.

We appreciate and support the NCAA's pursuit of new standards as a means to improve academic achievement. We are dismayed, however, that the NCAA based eligibility for the 2013 NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament on data from the already completed academic years of 2009-10 and 2010-11. As a result, student-athletes and their institutions were given no phase-in period, no opportunity to adjust to the new standards, and no chance to avoid the penalty. We are deeply concerned that with this action the NCAA is ignoring the reality that more current data are now available to determine an institution's most current APR for purposes of determining eligibility for the 2013 Tournament. Using the most current, available data would remedy the existing unfairness.

While we understand and support the goals of ensuring quality educational opportunities for student-athletes and the need for strong sanctions for failure to meet those goals, we have misgivings about the retroactive implementation of the penalty. In particular, the NCAA appears to have imposed an overly harsh and unfair penalty by imposing APR sanctions retroactively for conduct and circumstances that had already occurred. By including previous years in a rolling four year average, it should have been clear at the time of adopting the new standard that some universities would be unable to avoid the new penalties—even if the university had achieved a stellar score in the most current year. Due to this rule's retroactive application, student-athletes, who are not in any manner culpable for the APR performance that is the basis of these new penalties, will be punished.

The uncompromised commitment to the academic success of student-athletes remains the paramount responsibility for any academic institution engaged in intercollegiate athletics. With this obligation in mind, we support necessary and reasonable measures that condition participation in intercollegiate post-season events on a requisite

level of academic progress or achievement by student-athletes. However, and no less critical, the process for developing, adopting and implementing regulatory type measures that will be applicable to all academic institutions must be grounded in fundamental fairness. Only then will the regulatory structure appropriately address the institutional responsibility for academic success without penalizing innocent individual student-athletes.

With the enactment of the new APR penalty structure, however, we believe the NCAA has failed to meet this important standard. The NCAA has the means to address this matter at its upcoming meeting of the Committee on Academic Progress on April 23. We therefore call on the NCAA to review and modify the APR rule this session to remove its retroactive application. Such an approach would be a sensible and fair way to resolve this matter while ensuring tough standards and penalties to ensure future compliance.

Thank you for your consideration of our concerns.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. This letter expresses our outrage and frustration with this process. It is a process that may be well intentioned. Its goals may be laudable. Raising academic standards must be done, and I support that effort enthusiastically and passionately. But the application of any rule must be fair, and applying them arbitrarily and unjustly undermines the credibility of the cause that is sought.

As we say to President Emmert of the NCAA: The present performance, current data, and facts as they now are on the ground, on the court, in the classroom are the ones that should be operative and determinative. To deny this team an opportunity to demonstrate its excellence on the court as well as in the classroom and punish it for the failures of past teams is simply unfair and arbitrary. I hope its decision will be changed.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. LIEBERMAN. Mr. President, I thank my friend and colleague from Connecticut for his words. I stand with him in this cause. You can say this is parochial, but it is obvious that we are all—both of us and most everybody in Connecticut are very proud of our UConn basketball programs, both the men's and the women's. But there by the grace of the NCAA go every one of our colleagues and their teams.

Everybody understands and agrees that there has to be academic standards. As Senator BLUMENTHAL said so well, these standards are being unfairly applied to the University of Connecticut men's basketball program in this case because they have been punished essentially already and they have corrected the shortcomings. They have had what might be described as a perfect record in terms of players achieving academic—the threshold standard.

To keep them out of the NCAA tournament next year is unfair. Frankly, in a direct sense, it hurts the University of Connecticut in terms of the revenues it needs to continue to produce not only good basketball but great aca-

demic offerings. It also deprives basketball fans around the country of a competition with all the best teams in it. And it has, for our program at the University of Connecticut, consequences beyond next year. In my opinion, this is cruel and unusual punishment.

I am very glad to be joining with Senator BLUMENTHAL. He has taken the lead on it, but I stand arm in arm with him and the other members of the Connecticut congressional delegation. We are going to push forward until we get this unjust decision overturned.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LEVIN). The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

(Mr. CASEY assumed the Chair.)

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. WHITEHOUSE). Without objection, it is so ordered.

MATT RUTHERFORD'S SOLO SAIL

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, I just had a very wonderful phone call from a young Matt Rutherford, a 31-year-old man. I have spoken about him on the floor on a couple of occasions. He just made it safely home on his boat, the St. Brendan. He just crossed the finish line, coming out of the Atlantic Ocean into the Chesapeake Bay.

For those of you who have not followed this story, about 309 days ago young Matt Rutherford, on a 27-foot sailboat—a 36-year-old sailboat to boot—left the Chesapeake Bay on one of the most audacious adventures ever undertaken. It has never been done before. He sailed his little boat out of the Chesapeake Bay. He sailed it in the Atlantic Ocean, up around Newfoundland, Labrador, by Greenland, and sailed that little boat through the Northwest Passage, from the Atlantic Ocean over to Alaska. He has been certified now as the first person to ever do so solo in a small sailboat.

He sailed around Alaska. He sailed it from Alaska down to Cape Horn. Mind you, he is by himself on a 27-foot boat. He rounded Cape Horn and came up the east coast of South America, sailed up through the Caribbean, and is back, as of just a few hours ago, into the Chesapeake Bay—solo, nonstop, all by himself. He never touched land in all these days. He will set foot on land this Saturday at a homecoming in Annapolis at the National Sailing Hall of Fame dock in Annapolis, this Saturday around noontime. I am sure it will be a big welcome for Matt Rutherford.

To add frosting to the cake of what he did—which, again, is an incredible, incredible adventure—he did it to raise funds for CRAB, Chesapeake Region Accessible Boating, which is an organization that helps people with disabilities, including wounded warriors from our armed services who have service-connected disabilities, to get them out

on boats that will teach them how to sail, to let them know they too can participate in that recreational activity.

So to Matt Rutherford, who has done something that has never been done before, welcome back. I am glad you are safe. I am glad you made it OK.

To those of you who want to catch up on this incredible, incredible journey—I mean, think about Robert Peary going to the North Pole. Think about Roald Amundsen going to the South Pole. Think about Sir Francis Chichester sailing around the world in the Gypsy Moth IV, who, by the way, stopped once, or Joshua Slocum, who was the first person to sail solo around the world. Think about Sir Edmund Hillary climbing Mount Everest. These are the kinds of people whom Matt Rutherford now stands alongside of in sailing solo. You can go to the Web site to catch up on this. It is www.solotheamericas.org. To think about him sailing all the way around by the North Pole, all the way down, almost, to the South Pole, back up to America again—nonstop, never touched land, never stopped, and did it solo in a small 27-foot sailboat—it is one of the great adventures of our time—of any time.

So I am happy he is back and he is safe and will be back on dry land this Saturday.

REBUILD AMERICA ACT

Mr. President, as chair of the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, I have come to the floor on a number of occasions over the last year to express my concern about the distressed state of the American middle class. I do so again today in order to share with my colleagues my ideas for how we can rebuild the middle class in America and make our economy work for those who work for a living.

Over the past year, while Washington has been gripped by a fear of budget deficits, I gave speech after speech here on the Senate floor pointing out an even more serious deficit: the deficit of vision in Washington, our failure to confront the current economic crisis with the boldness earlier generations of Americans summoned in times of national challenge.

By this economic crisis, I do not just mean the current economic downturn. Instead, I am referring to the economic crisis that has taken place over the last 30 to 40 years that has resulted in a shrinking middle class, rising inequality in our country, a weakened economy, and a sense that the American dream is slipping away. This is the fundamental challenge—the fundamental challenge—facing our Nation today: rebuilding the American middle class.

Altogether, I now have chaired five HELP Committee hearings on the crisis of the middle class. Last year my State staff visited all 99 counties in Iowa to gain greater insight into the challenges facing working Americans. During these events, I have heard from

a diverse array of Americans, including economists, employers, union members, community college students, and everyday, hard-working, middle-class families. Not surprisingly, we found that more and more people are struggling just to make ends meet. Their jobs are insecure, their savings and pensions have shrunk, and they see an economic system that is rigged in favor of the very rich and the powerful.

At a hearing last June, I invited Amanda Greubel, a social worker in her local Iowa school district, to share her story with the HELP Committee. During her testimony, she defined what it means to be in the middle class in this way:

My husband and I didn't have dreams of great wealth. We never expected to have summer homes or expensive cars or vacations on the Riviera. We chose careers that inspire us, knowing that we would never make six-figure salaries. All we have ever wanted is security and a little comfort . . . to know that our bills are paid, our needs are met, that we can have a getaway every now and then, that our children can pursue higher education without the burden of student-loan debt, and that someday we can retire and enjoy our final years together in the way we choose. . . . When I think back over our adult lives, it strikes me that we did everything we were always told to do in order to have the American dream. . . . We did everything that all the experts said we should do, and yet still we're struggling. When you work as hard as we have and still sometimes scrape for the necessities, it really gets you down.

That was Amanda.

Unfortunately, those of us in Washington have not listened enough to people such as Amanda. People such as Amanda do not feel this way because of factors such as “globalization” or “technology change.” Indeed, harnessing those developments has helped to make the U.S. economy the envy of the world.

Instead, the crisis of the middle class can be traced largely to unwise policy choices made here in Washington. For starters, for the last three decades, too many here in Washington have bought into the failed economic doctrine that says if we give more and more to the very wealthy and to the largest corporations, then prosperity will somehow trickle down to the rest of us. That idea has utterly failed to work for the American people. It is time we get back to policies that are premised on how our economy really works. A strong, vibrant middle class with money in their pockets to spend drives the economy forward because, very simply, businesses will not make things if they do not have any customers.

As Mr. Nick Hanauer, a very successful private sector investor, put it in a recent Business Week column:

Rich business people like me don't create jobs. Middle-class consumers do, and when they thrive, U.S. businesses grow and profit.

So what is the best way forward? Instead of the slash-and-burn approaches of the past year and the failed economic doctrines of the past few dec-

ades, we need a way forward that rebuilds the middle class by reflecting the hopes and the can-do spirit of the American people, people such as Amanda Greubel.

To meet the great challenge of our day, restoring and revitalizing the middle class, after having a number of hearings last year, as I said, and countless visits with people throughout my State, I recently introduced sweeping legislation called the Rebuild America Act. It now has a number, S. 2252. This legislation provides comprehensive solutions to rebuilding the American middle class.

Some will say it is too bold and too ambitious, but I disagree. The sweep of this legislation is commensurate with the extraordinary challenge it addresses. The bill aims to rebuild the middle class in four broad ways: creating jobs, investing in the future, helping families, and bringing balance back into our tax system. Let me touch briefly on those four principles.

One, we need to create jobs for all Americans, including for groups of Americans such as people with disabilities who have been especially hard hit by the recent recession. With the official unemployment rate over 8 percent, and some unofficial measures as high as 17 percent, the middle class will continue to lose ground.

When jobs are scarce, workers do not have the leverage to demand fair treatment, paychecks stop growing, or even fall, and even people who are fortunate enough to have a job become fearful of losing it. People have less discretionary money in their pockets or the confidence to spend it. In the absence of robust consumer demand, businesses choose not to expand or invest.

Secondly, we must invest in our future. Not only will investing in our infrastructure help create badly needed jobs in the short term, these investments will lay the groundwork for sustained economic growth in the long term. So my bill tackles this challenge head on by providing for robust new investments in America's infrastructure, including, of course, time-tested things such as roads and bridges, energy efficiency systems, also rebuilding and modernizing our public schools, rebuilding our manufacturing base in America.

In addition, there is also the investment in the human infrastructure: helping prepare great teachers, providing better pathways to good jobs for workers, job retraining so that the old jobs that are now gone, we can now take those workers and retrain them for the future jobs, to ensure that current and future workers will have the education and skills they need to be successful and to be in the middle class.

Three, we need to do more to help middle-class families succeed. It is time for us in Washington to wake up to the harsh reality that middle-class families have been living in for the last few decades. Unfortunately, the programs and policies that helped create

the middle class have been either intentionally discarded or have fallen victim to neglect.

For example, the real value of the minimum wage has declined for the last four decades, dragging down all workers' paychecks. In 1968, that was the height. That was when someone making the minimum wage had the highest purchasing power ever since we had a minimum wage—1968. Since that time, it has fallen in real terms. If, in fact, the minimum wage had kept pace just with inflation from 1968 to today, the minimum wage would be slightly over \$10.30 an hour. Right now the Federal minimum wage is \$7.25 an hour. So think of it this way: The same class of people that was making the minimum wage in 1968 is basically the same class of people making the minimum wage today: young people, minorities, people in businesses that are just starting, people who are not highly educated, new immigrants to this country, for example. So the same people who are making the minimum wage then are the same kind of class of people making the minimum wage today.

But think about it this way. That same class of people today—today—has 30 percent less buying power than that same class had in 1968—30 percent less. Think about that. That same person making the minimum wage today is making 30 percent less than his or her counterpart in 1968.

So what my bill does is basically over a stage raise that minimum wage and then peg it to inflation in the future so we do not have that erosion again in the future. Also families and workers have seen basic rights, such as the right to organize and to bargain collectively, eroded. It is harder and harder all the time for people to organize and join a union in this country.

The right to overtime pay has been eroded under the Fair Labor Standards Act. So a lot of these things have been eroded by misguided regulations, bad court decisions, and years of lax enforcement.

The fourth part of the bill. It is essential that we put balance back in the economy through a balanced tax system that will help reduce our deficit, get our fiscal house in order over the longer term. To do so, among other provisions, my bill includes a tax on Wall Street trades, often called a financial transaction tax. At just 3 cents per \$100 dollars in trade value, that would raise \$350 billion over 10 years.

Again, you might say, well, is this something now? No. We had a transaction tax, a financial transaction tax, in this country until 1966. Then it was done away with. Well, that is again one of the reasons why we have seen this terrible inequality grow in our society where more and more of our wealth goes to fewer and fewer people.

A small transaction tax would do two things. It would raise money. It would also discourage a lot of the spinning and the churning of transactions on

Wall Street whereby some of these traders make hundreds of thousands of dollars a day, megamillions of dollars a year, but not adding much to our economy at all. So it's a small transaction tax.

In addition, the bill requires high-income taxpayers to pay their fair share. Well, sort of like the Buffett rule that the present occupant of the chair, the distinguished Senator from Rhode Island, championed the other day that we voted on here. It got voted down on party lines. I do not understand this, that we cannot even ask those who have the most in our society to pay their fair share.

Well, just because we lost the vote on the Senate floor the other day does not mean we have to give up on it. I am sure the Senator from Rhode Island, Mr. WHITEHOUSE, is going to continue his efforts, as he always has, to make sure that we have more fairness in our tax system. So that is in our bill also.

Restoring balance and fairness to the Tax Code is critical to the success of our economy and is critical to the rebuilding of the middle class in America. So in sort of broad strokes, that is my Rebuild America Act, S. 2522.

Over the last few years, the American people have heard from too many of us politicians and talking heads that our country is broke, that we can no longer afford the investments that make for a strong middle class. You know, that is sort of the premise of the Ryan budget in the House, cut and slash. The premise is one that has been in favor around this town for far too long. Here is the premise. The premise is that we are broke, the United States of America is broke and we cannot afford to do these things.

This is false. The United States of America remains a wealthy Nation. We are the wealthiest Nation in the history of the world. We have the highest per capita income of any major country. So one might reasonably ask: If we are so rich, how come we are so broke? Think about that. If we are the richest Nation in the history of the world, if we have the highest per capita income of any major country, then why can we not afford to invest in our infrastructure, invest in better teachers, make sure our kids get a good education without a mountain of debt on their heads? Why cannot we invest in making new energy systems that are cleaner and more productive for the future?

We can. We can do these things. The problem is not that we are broke, the problem is that because of actions or inactions by this government over the last 30 years, America's wealth has not been spread among our people in a reasonable way. The wealth has been concentrated in fewer and fewer hands. And the middle class in the meantime has been decimated.

I submit that there can be no sustainable economic recovery to America, no sustained return to fiscal balance, without the recovery of the middle class. That is exactly the aim of the

Rebuild America Act. It is comprehensive. Yes. Ambitious. Of course. But it rises to the challenge of our time.

I urge my colleagues to join me in advancing this legislation and doing all we can to restore the American middle class. It is the fundamental challenge of our time.

I yield the floor and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

POSTAL SERVICE REFORM

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, the U.S. Postal Service is a fundamental part of our Nation's history and what it means to be an American. In fact, it was actually talked about in our Constitution.

Nationwide, the Postal Service employs 550,000 Americans, and it serves as the linchpin of an industry that contributes over \$1 trillion to our economy. I have heard from a number of businesses in New Hampshire—one being Goss International in a neighboring community, which has been a major competitor in the area of printing presses, and now they are making wind turbines, or parts of wind turbines. They are very concerned, as is a company called Polaris Direct, about what is going to happen to our Postal Service and are we in Congress going to resolve this issue.

In New Hampshire, the Postal Service provides thousands of jobs, as well as a critical economic connection for many of our rural communities, which are not often in some areas of New Hampshire connected to the Internet, so they don't have high-speed broadband, and the Postal Service is their connection with much of the outside commerce and community.

Today, as we know, the Postal Service is facing a fiscal crisis that threatens its future. We should all be concerned about Draconian proposals that seek to slash 220,000 good jobs, close 3,700 post offices, and make mail delivery slower across America. The bill before us today attempts to avoid the worst of these outcomes, and I commend all of the bipartisan managers of the legislation, including Senator LIEBERMAN, Senator COLLINS, and Senator CARPER, for their tireless work to save the U.S. Postal Service.

I was proud to join a group of 28 Senators who pushed for important changes to the bill in an attempt to better protect rural post offices, develop new sources of business, and maintain the reliable and timely service Americans have come to expect. Some of these changes have been incorporated into the legislation, and I think they are an important step toward improving it.

With that said, I think we have more work to do. I know there are a lot of

people in this body who wish to see us debate a number of amendments related to the bill and try to make changes to improve the work already done. Rural communities rely on the Postal Service, and I think Congress and this Senate should improve the legislation to make sure that people have a real voice in the process when their post office is threatened.

If we don't act, the Postal Service could go bankrupt or could be forced to make devastating service cuts. So while this legislation is not perfect, I urge my colleagues to vote for cloture tomorrow so we can consider relevant amendments and make sure this important American institution, the U.S. Post Office, is saved for all Americans who so desperately need the services it provides.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia.

Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to address the Senate as in morning business.

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

AFRICA

Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, I rise to speak to the Senate, but in a broader sense to the American people and, in particular, to the young people of America. An Internet posting went viral a few weeks ago, by a group called Invisible Children about Joseph Koni in Uganda, the Central African Republic, Congo, and the South Sudan.

As a member of the Africa Subcommittee of the Foreign Relations Committee and one who travels to Africa quite frequently, I have just returned from a trip to meet, in part, with our special forces and U.S. advisers who have been deployed in those countries to help assist in the search for Joseph Koni.

I wish to share with the Senate the information about what America is doing, what Joseph Koni has done, and how important our commitment is to Central Africa and to see to it that this evil man is brought to justice. Joseph Koni is under indictment by the International Criminal Court today, but for 26 years he has roamed Central Africa with his Lord's Resistance Army, killing, raping, and maiming the African people. By some estimates, Joseph Koni has abducted 66,000 children into his army and young women as sex slaves. He has displaced over 2 million Africans into camps, and they have had to be displaced because their villages were destroyed and their families disrupted. He has killed untold tens of thousands of people. He is by any stretch of the imagination an evil person. Invisible Children's posting, which went viral on the Internet, has caught the attention of America's youth, because they see the damage that has been done to the youth of Africa, and they want to know what America is doing.

I am proud to include in my remarks what America is doing, and has been

doing even before the posting went viral on the Internet and most people didn't know who Joseph Koni was. Our President deployed 100 special advisers to the Central African Republic, in the Sudan and Uganda, about 2 months before this posting went viral. I met with them in a private, secured briefing, a lot of which I cannot talk about but a lot of which I can.

Because of U.S. technology, U.S. resources, and the commitment of these individuals, we are assisting to a much higher level in the intelligence that we are gaining on Joseph Koni. A lot of people think Koni is in Uganda. He isn't there and hasn't been there for 5 or 6 years. He is somewhere near the Central African Republic, where it is extremely easy to hide. We thought Vietnam had jungles. You haven't seen foliage until you've seen the Central African Republic, the Sudan, and the Congo. There is no electricity, no roads, no paths, and no listening devices. Intelligence is all human intelligence. We are fortunate to have great intelligence operatives over there and great resources there, and we are gaining more and more information.

I commend our forces also in what they have done in an amnesty program. They dropped leaflets in villages that are known to house some of Koni's workers and cronies. They drop leaflets that offer amnesty for anybody who leaves Koni, comes back to their village, and gives information to our forces, the Ugandan Army, and the African Union Army as to where Joseph Koni might be. We are getting closer all the time. We are not there yet, but thanks to the assistance of our foreign-deployed individuals, the commitment of our country, the commitment of Uganda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic, and the new country of South Sudan, we are going to close that noose and stay until the job is finished, because Joseph Koni needs to be brought to justice. He is an evil man who has killed and raped far too many people and maimed far too many people, and Africa is too good a friend of the United States for us not to offer the necessary assistance.

My message to the American people and our youth is we are doing our job. Joseph Koni hasn't been caught, but we are in pursuit. I commend Senator KERRY, the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee; Senator COONS, chairman of the Africa Subcommittee; and Senator LUGAR and myself have joined together to support legislation that will be introduced in the Senate to include Joseph Koni, or information leading to the arrest and conviction of Joseph Koni, in our rewards program that we offer mostly now for terrorist capture. That will be an incentive for more information to be brought forward so that the noose will grow tighter.

It is time for Joseph Koni to be brought to justice, and the United States is making every effort to assist in that process in Central Africa.

My other reason for going to Central Africa is equally important. I was accompanied by members of CARE. CARE is a tremendous nongovernmental organization that delivers humanitarian aid, assistance, education, knowledge, and technical assistance to countries around the world and, in particular, in the nation of Africa. It was the second time I traveled with CARE; the first time was 10 years ago to Ethiopia, where I saw CARE's outreach in terms of basic education and improvement and enhancement of educating young Muslim women.

On this trip, I got to see what they are doing firsthand in the city of Gulu on the border with the Congo and Northern Uganda—an area that 5 or 6 years ago, because of Joseph Koni, had been destroyed, people were displaced, everybody was in hunger, and there was a lot of violence. It is now a beautiful village. Granted, it is not a village such as you and I might know, Mr. President—thatched huts with thatched roofs, mud huts with thatched roofs, small enclaves of African citizens eking out an existence in a very difficult part of the world.

Because of what they are doing in their project, known as the village savings and loan, they are bringing about microeconomics in Africa, and they are empowering women. The village savings and loan program is a very simple program that teaches basic economics and capitalism to these villages. Groups form together, they are given a strongbox, literally like the ones that used to be on the stagecoach in the old "Lone Ranger" days. In that box, each of the women will make contributions of the money that they have into the strongbox, and they get a passbook savings account just like the occupant of the chair and I used to get when we were in elementary school a long time ago. Then they make loans out of that money they save to other people in the village to start businesses, whether it is making beads, using the shea tree to make shea butter, or doing boutique cloth, or whatever it may be. As those industries develop, those cottage industries develop, the money they make goes back into the savings and loan to be reinvested in other plans.

We met a young lady who was making beads, and I bought about 12 strands. My wife and grandkids love them. She makes beads for a German distributor in Europe. It is unbelievable what you can see being developed because of what CARE is doing. They are empowering African women and families and are bringing about the principles of economics that you and I enjoy and appreciate, and they are uplifting people who need that with empowerment, so they can be sufficient on their own, so they can rise up economically and educationally.

I also visited with the CDC folks delivering PEPFAR and health care and better awareness and better testing to identify those with AIDS, to get our retrovirals distributed to those mothers who are pregnant, so their babies

can be born without AIDS and live a happy life. One of our great challenges now in Africa—it used to be that the challenge was what we did with all the children who died because they were born to a mother with AIDS. Now we see what we can do to keep them through their life because they live a normal and happy life. And their mother, although infected with AIDS, because of the U.S. technology and retrovirals, and the CDC is providing them with a lifetime of drugs and an opportunity to live as normal and productive a life as possible.

It was great to go with CARE and to see U.S. tax dollars deployed and helping uplift the nation, uplift the people, help solve the greatest scourge on the continent, which is AIDS and its spread, and help people to be able to reinvest in themselves. CARE is a great nongovernmental entity that happens to be housed in Georgia, which is helping all over the continent of Africa, and they are empowering women and African citizens, and they are making their plight in life better, and they are reducing the amount of Federal assistance we will provide in the years to come because they will be more productive, which is the payback you want to see from foreign assistance dollars when they are invested.

As far as Joseph Koni is concerned, America knows he is a bad man, that he is indicted by the International Criminal Court, and America is making the investment of intelligence and manpower to assist the Central African Republic, Uganda, the Congo, and the South Sudan to pursue him until he is captured. He needs to be brought to justice for the evil and terror he has contributed to the continent of Africa.

I was proud to go and see America's investment of our best, our men and women in harm's way in Africa who are looking for him and providing the assistance necessary to bring him to justice.

With that said, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio is recognized.

Mr. BROWN of Ohio. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Georgia. I so appreciate Senator ISAKSON's comments about Africa. He is lucky enough to represent the CDC, which is one of the greatest organizations in human history, which has made such a difference in health care for low-income people in this country and around the world and, frankly, not just low-income people but what we call the public health of this country. Few achievements are greater than the achievements of public health, whether it is eradicating smallpox internationally—we are both old enough—the Presiding Officer may not be—to remember kids that we knew from grade school who were afflicted with polio and the fear of every parent that their child might get that, and the CDC and the public health system in this country removed that threat with vaccines and all that.

THE EXPORT-IMPORT BANK

Mr. President, I rise briefly for 4 or 5 minutes to talk about one way that companies in my State grow and create jobs, and that is by selling their products around the world. President Obama set a goal to double exports from the United States in the next 5 years. I am part of the President's advisory council. There is a handful of Senators and a few Members of the House of Representatives who are part of this advisory committee, along with many business leaders in the country, CEOs of large companies, presidents and CEOs of small companies, small businesses, too, to advise the President.

Earlier today, I joined with Fred Hochberg, president of the Export-Import Bank of the United States, and Eric Burkland, president of the Ohio Manufacturing Association in Columbus, to discuss the need to reauthorize the Export-Import Bank.

Ohio has had quicker increases in job growth than other States. We are coming back; our unemployment rate is now lower than the national average, but it is still far too high. Too many Ohioans want to work and cannot find jobs. Some have jobs but are not working full time or their pay has been cut or is stagnant. Manufacturing is gaining nationally, adding 470,000 jobs since January 2010. To put that into historical perspective, for 12 years, from 1997 to 2010—12-plus years—we saw a manufacturing job loss in this country every single year from the year before, with fewer factories, fewer workers, and less manufacturing. But since early 2010, we have seen almost every single month, in Ohio and across the country, job growth in manufacturing. It is still not enough. It is positive, but we are not out of the woods yet. I fear we take a step back if Congress fails to reauthorize the Export-Import Bank.

We know that Ohio manufacturers and small businesses can compete with anyone in the world, from Zanesville to Springfield, to Ashtabula, to Toledo; American manufacturers can compete with anybody in the world if there is a level playing field.

We know how to make things in Ohio. When we stamp “made in Ohio” on a product, we know it was made with pride and by some of the most efficient, progressive companies in the world, and some of the best workers in the world.

Exporting is tough, especially for small businesses. Fewer than 1 percent of the Nation's nearly 26 million small businesses export their products. Very few small businesses are able to export for a whole host of reasons.

I hear from small business owners who want to expand and who want to get access to foreign markets, but they can't secure private financing due to the credit risks associated with some overseas investments. One of the most important resources to help small businesses and midsize manufacturers to boost their exports is the Export-Import Bank.

Ex-Im's mission is simple: It facilitates exports and contributes to job creation in the United States. It does it through loans, through guarantees, through insurance. It fills in gaps through trade financing at no cost to taxpayers. The market sometimes doesn't deliver in these situations. The Ex-Im Bank can fill in some gaps and help companies that have the ability to grow and export to actually do that.

The Ex-Im Bank generates revenue to the U.S. Treasury. Yet despite this record of success in exports, jobs are at stake because Congress cannot agree to the Ex-Im reauthorization. The Ex-Im Bank's lending authority expires May 31. We know companies that export products create jobs, pay higher wages, and are more likely to remain in business. Export-supported jobs linked to manufacturing already account for an estimated 7 percent. One out of fourteen of Ohio's total private sector jobs, 1 out of 14 Ohio workers are linked to export. More than one-fourth of manufacturing workers in Ohio depend on exports for their jobs—the eighth highest among the 50 States.

We need to do a better job in ensuring that America's small businesses have access to that global market. The Ex-Im Bank helps. It provides credit that otherwise wouldn't be available to turn export opportunities for businesses into increased jobs, higher wages, and increased sales.

In 2011, the bank worked with almost 100 Ohio businesses to support more than \$400 million in export sales. According to the National Association of Manufacturers, Ex-Im supports 290,000 export-related jobs. More than 8 percent of Ex-Im's transactions supported small businesses last year.

Renewing the bank's charter should be a cause all Senators support, just like the 25 times the Senate has overwhelmingly reauthorized the agency since its establishment in 1934. Think about that. Since 1934, time after time after time, this body has unanimously or overwhelmingly reauthorized—kept going—the Export-Import Bank—but not today, for whatever reason. Perhaps it is the same reason as when the Presiding Officer's Buffett rule was on the floor of the Senate this week that a number of Senators said no to moving forward. I don't know if it is because the Republican leader has said he wants President Obama to fail or if it is just this rigid philosophy that there is no positive role for government.

Whether it is the highway bill, the Buffett rule or the Ex-Im Bank, we know at least that the Ex-Im Bank works, and it is strongly supported by the chamber of commerce, the National Association of Manufacturers, and the machinists who testified in our Banking Committee this week. It is supported by all kinds of people who want to see this economy grow. Unfortunately, a number of my colleagues, for whatever reason, don't want to move forward.

This is a matter of American jobs. It is a matter of competitiveness. We had

a trade deficit with China of \$295 billion in 2011, meaning every day we buy about \$800 million more in goods from China than we sell to China. The first President Bush, some years ago, said that \$1 billion in exports or imports could translate into 13,000 jobs. When we have a \$295 billion deficit, with one country alone last year, one can see the kind of job loss it means. We know China's Export-Import and development banks provide as much as \$100 billion in export credits each year. That is three times as many new export credits as the U.S. Export-Import Bank does.

So we know, even with reauthorization, that China still does way more of this than the United States. Yet we are unilaterally disarming if we allow this May 31 date to come and go and the Ex-Im Bank reauthorization expires. It makes no sense for our manufacturers, for our big and small companies, and it makes no sense for our workers and our communities that will all be hurt if we don't do that.

It is time to end the delay. It is time to reauthorize the Export-Import Bank.

I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BENNET). Without objection, it is so ordered.

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION ACT

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. First, I want to thank my colleague, Senator CARDIN, and just recently Senator BROWN of Ohio, for referencing the highway bill.

The state of play on that at this point is that the House has just passed another extension. We passed an extension back at the end of March that extended the existing highway program to the end of June. What that bill did is cause significant job loss because not knowing for sure what the highway plan will be means that jobs will fall off the list of the departments of transportation around the country. So a further extension to September—which just passed the House 1 hour ago—just makes the situation even worse.

The solution to that problem is to make sure the House and the Senate appoint their conferees so we can get to conference quickly on that bill and get out a lasting authorization.

So I want to again thank Senator CARDIN for spending some time on the floor this afternoon on that subject. We will keep the pressure on until we actually have a highway authorization as we go through these different procedural hurdles.

CLIMATE CHANGE

I came to speak on the floor about an issue that many in Washington would prefer to ignore; that is, climate changes that are being caused by our

carbon pollution. Nature keeps sending us messages about what is happening out there, and in Washington we continue to ignore those messages. But they keep on coming.

Every week for the past 15 months I have distributed in our caucus, as the Presiding Officer knows, a quick thumbnail summary of the week's Climate News.

The stories from this week include that "Temperature Variations"—which relate to the extra energy put into the climate by the warming weather—"Could Lower Life Expectancies of the Chronically Ill." That is one story.

Another is a new report from the NOAA that "Coral Risks Extinction Due to Climate Change." More than 50 coral species in U.S. waters are likely to go extinct by the end of the century, and the experts cited human-driven releases of carbon dioxide as a key driver of the ocean's warming and acidification that is causing these extinctions.

A third is, "Tree Diseases Likely to Spread as Temperatures Rise." According to a new report by the U.S. Forest Service, forest diseases are expected to spread more quickly in the western U.S. as climate change warms the region's forests.

The fourth is a recent study published in the journal *Nature*, which finds that rising carbon dioxide levels drove temperature increases at the end of the last Ice Age. At the end of the last Ice Age, atmospheric CO₂ concentrations rose 80 parts per million. Over the past 100 years, CO₂ concentrations have risen roughly 100 parts per million. So the effects are linked very closely to climate.

Other news, as reported in the *Providence Journal* on March 30, said: The winter's warm air temperatures have helped drive up water temperatures in the Gulf of Maine, in line with a continuing trend, and the warm waters could result in lobsters molting their shells earlier than usual and ocean algae blooming ahead of schedule.

Jeffrey Runge, a biological oceanographer at the University of Maine and a researcher at the Gulf of Maine Research Institute in Portland, told the paper that the Gulf of Maine water temperatures have been rising gradually since at least the 1870s, but the increase has been pronounced in the last decade or so.

Moving from the North to the South, we have Professor Emeritus Orrin H. Pilkey, a professor of geology at Duke University, who wrote in the *Charlotte Observer* on March 25 that new peer-reviewed research demonstrates that sea level rise and storm-surge elevations could be greater along much of the U.S. coastline than has been predicted. His opinion piece went on to say that North Carolina, Washington, California, Louisiana, Florida, and Maine have convened sea level rise panels that estimate a sea level rise of 3 to 5 feet by the year 2100.

A new study has come out from the Center for Biological Diversity con-

firmed the link between massive oyster die-offs in the Pacific Northwest and ocean acidification caused by carbon dioxide emissions. The release reports that each day the oceans absorb 22 million tons of carbon dioxide pollution from cars and industry, setting off an unprecedented chemical reaction that since the Industrial Revolution has made the world's oceans 30 percent more acidic.

Just this morning in the Senate, Senators BINGAMAN and MURKOWSKI held a bipartisan hearing on the devastating effects of sea level rise on coastal communities. So it is good that some leaders on both sides of the aisle are starting to talk about the terrible consequences of climate change.

However, the special interests who control so much of what goes on around here and who deny that carbon pollution causes global temperatures to increase and deny that melting ice caps will raise our seas to dangerous levels still have a stronghold. Dr. Pilkey, writing in the *Charlotte Observer*, warned that the deniers' influence is, tragically, starting to influence local planning decisions, despite what he calls "new studies that predict higher than previously predicted sea level rise and storm-surge levels in coming decades." He concludes:

Preservation of the status quo (including real estate prices) may prevail on our coasts, but in a democratic society such as ours, the state has no right to shield citizens from unpleasant environmental realities.

In the face of so much evidence constantly, daily, of a changing climate, we have special interests working overtime in Washington to propagate a myth. This myth is that the jury is still out on climate change caused by carbon pollution. So with the jury still out, we don't need to worry about it or even take precautions.

This is simply outright false. Virtually all of our most prestigious scientific and academic institutions have stated that climate change is happening and that human activities are the driving cause of this change.

On October 21, 2009, I think all of us in the Senate received a letter from virtually every leading scientific organization in the country, stating:

Observations throughout the world make it clear that climate change is occurring, and rigorous scientific research demonstrates that the greenhouse gases emitted by human activities are the primary driver. These conclusions are based on multiple independent lines of evidence, and contrary assertions are inconsistent with an objective assessment of the vast body of peer-reviewed science.

Contrary assertions are inconsistent with an objective assessment of the vast body of peer-reviewed science.

So the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the Chemical Society, Geophysical Union, Institute of Biological Sciences, Meteorological Society, Society of Agronomy, Society of Plant Biologists, Botanical Society, and on and on it goes of the scientific community signed up for this.

It is, of course, not just the scientific community that knows that the jury is not in fact still out; that knows that in fact the verdict is in and that it is time to act. The insurance industry is alarmed about our inaction and has started to take action, holding a press conference with myself and Senator SANDERS not too long ago.

Marsh & McLennan, one of the largest insurance brokers in the world, called climate change “one of the most significant emerging risks facing the world today.” The insurance giant AIG has established an Office of Environment and Climate Change to assess the risks to insurers in the years ahead.

It is not just the insurance industry. It is our intelligence community, it is our military services, many of our electric utilities, some of our biggest capitalists and investors all recognize that the jury is not still out; that in fact a verdict is in, and we should act.

Unfortunately, Governor Romney once wrote:

I believe that climate change is occurring. I also believe that human activity is a contributing factor.

Under the pressure of the Republican primary, he has changed his views and now claims: “We don’t know what’s causing climate change on this planet.”

Well, that runs contrary to the evidence. More than 97 percent of the climate scientists most actively involved in publishing on this issue accept that the verdict is actually in on carbon pollution causing climate change and oceanic changes—97 percent. Think of that in terms of your own life if you were relying on expert opinion.

If you had a child who was sick and you went to a doctor and they said: She is pretty sick and she needs treatment, you thought: Well, let’s be prudent and let’s get a second opinion. So on you went and got a third opinion and a fourth opinion. Let’s say you were just a wildly determined parent, and you went and got 99 more second opinions so that you had 100 opinions of doctors, and 97 of those 100 doctors said: Yes, your child is ill and you need to do something about this.

How foolish would you be if you did not pay attention to the 97 percent and you allowed the 3 percent to sway your judgment and not take action to protect your child. Well, it looks as if Governor Romney is with the 1 percent when it comes to the economy for the middle class, and he is with the 3 percent when it comes to the science of carbon pollution.

This is not very debatable stuff. The basic principle that carbon dioxide traps heat in the atmosphere and traps more of it as its concentration increases was determined in 1863, at the time of the American Civil War. There is nothing new about this.

In the early 1900s it became clear that changes in the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere could account for significant increases and decreases in the Earth’s annual average

temperatures, and that carbon dioxide released from what we call anthropogenic sources, manmade sources—primarily then the burning of coal—would contribute to these changes. This is well-established stuff, and the effects are measurable.

Over the last 800,000 years, until very recently, the atmosphere stayed within a bandwidth of 170 to 300 parts per million of carbon dioxide, 170 to 300 parts per million. That is the bandwidth, and that is a measurement. That is not a theory. We know that. We can find ancient bubbles in ancient ice and measure, and there are different ways that scientists do this, but it is measurement.

Since the Industrial Revolution, we have burned carbon-rich fuels, also in a measurable way. Now we know we burn up to 7 to 8 gigatons a year. That is the release. A gigaton, by the way, is a billion with a “b” metric tons. When you release that enormous amount of carbon into the atmosphere, it is predictable that it would have a result, and, indeed, it is having a result. We now measure carbon concentrations climbing in the Earth’s atmosphere—again, a measurement, not a theory. The present concentration exceeds 390 parts per million. For 8,000 centuries we were in a bandwidth of between 170 and 300, and in recent years we have veered out that bandwidth. We are at 390 parts per million and climbing.

The increase has a trajectory—there is nothing very new about plotting trajectories either. Children do that in school, soldiers do that in the field, corporations do that to plan their businesses, and scientists do that. We do that every day. If you follow the trajectory of our carbon pollution, it predicts 668 parts per million at the end of this century and 1,097 parts per million at the end of the next century. Those carbon concentrations are not just outside the bounds of 8,000 centuries but of millions of years.

It is coming home to roost particularly in our oceans, which is a matter of real concern to me as a Senator from the Ocean State. In April of last year, a group of scientific experts came together at the University of Oxford to discuss the current state of our oceans. Their workshop report stated:

Human actions have resulted in warming and acidification of the oceans and are now causing increased hypoxia.

That is when there is not enough oxygen in the water to sustain life.

Studies of the Earth’s past indicate that these are the three symptoms . . . associated with each of the previous 5 mass extinctions on Earth.

We experienced two mass ocean extinctions, 55 and 251 million years ago. Last year at Brown University in Providence, RI, paleobiologist Jessica Whiteside published a study demonstrating that after the earlier extinction 251 million years ago, it took 8 million years for plant and animal diversity to return to preextinction levels. We also know that in the lead-up

to those extinctions, scientists have estimated that the Earth was emitting carbon into the atmosphere at the rate in the first one of 2.2 gigatons and 1 to 2 gigatons per year, respectively. You recall we are currently releasing at the rate of 7 to 8 gigatons per year.

We are taking some very dangerous chances with our planet. We have very solid information that is the product of measurement and not theory about the changes that are already underway. It is a continuing disgrace that in this building and in this Chamber, we are unable to do anything about this issue because of the continuing power of a small group of special interests who are controlling the debate, who are interfering with progress, and who are putting us all at risk.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. MORAN. I ask unanimous consent that I be allowed to address the Senate as in morning business.

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

POSTAL SERVICE REFORM

Mr. MORAN. Mr. President, I am here this evening to express concern about the developments of the day in which I thought we were going to be addressing the issue of postal reform with the goal of making certain that this Senate, this Congress makes decisions in short order that would preserve the financial viability, the future of postal delivery and the Postal Service of the United States. I am concerned now because apparently the process has been put in place by which virtually no amendment can be offered to the 21st Century Postal Service Act of 2011.

On two occasions I voted to proceed to this piece of legislation. It is an important one, in my view. The idea of reforming and improving the opportunity for the financial viability of the Postal Service is important to the country. It matters to the Nation. We have an obligation under the U.S. Constitution to provide postal service. It matters in the sense that there are many items that are transported in commerce on an ongoing daily basis in which the Postal Service is the method by which that transportation occurs, by which we certainly deliver mail and packages. Shipping occurs in the United States as a result of the viability of the U.S. Postal Service. It is important, in my view, especially to me as a Kansan.

One of the things that is pending in the absence of reform, improvements, and financial stability in the Postal Service is the potential demise of many rural post offices across Kansas and around the country. In my view,

and I have expressed this to the Postmaster General, the U.S. Postal Service on many occasions has made a decision that I think, while it may save a few dollars, reduces the service the Postal Service provides and ultimately hastens the day in which the Postal Service has even more challenges remaining viable. One of those was the decision by the Postal Service to close many rural post offices across the country, 130-plus in Kansas.

We have had attendance at more than 90 of the community meetings that revolve around the potential closing of a post office. I have expressed great concern in the committee. I serve on the Committee on Homeland Security, in which this bill originates. During that markup and debate, I expressed concern then and expressed concern on several occasions to the Postmaster General that there is no basis for making an intelligent decision about which post office should or should not be closed. In fact, when citizens across Kansas and across the country attend one of these community meetings, their question to the representative of the Postal Service is, What can our community do? What can I do to make certain our post office remains open and we have the opportunity to receive and have mail delivered from here at the U.S. post office in our community?

In working with the committee, provisions were added to the 21st Century Postal Service Act that create criteria by which these decisions would be made and the community has an opportunity to appeal should the decision be adverse and those criteria not met.

In my view, the Senate should not delay any longer addressing the issue of what we do to make certain the Postal Service is and remains viable today and in the future. It matters, as I say, for a series of reasons but certainly to me as a Kansan who is concerned about what happens to the community, its senior citizens, if there is no longer postal service provided.

I know there are some in the Senate and in the House of Representatives and across the country who want to make certain the Postal Service is operated as a business. I certainly support that concept and believe we ought to do what is necessary to improve the business environment by which the Postal Service conducts its business. There is a long list of those. Some of them are addressed in the legislation that I hope remains pending here in the Senate.

But there is another reason in addition to the need to provide service to Americans that we need to address this issue. I want to make certain the decisions we make today eliminate the need that there ever would be a call upon the taxpayers of the United States to provide taxpayer dollars to support the Postal Service.

I am here this evening to encourage my colleagues but particularly the majority leader to work to find an agree-

ment by which amendments can be offered to this bill so that we do not lose the opportunity we have this week and next to address this issue of making certain we make changes to the Postal Service that allow it to be successful.

I am concerned that, as I understand it, there is no agreement yet that would allow Members of the Senate to offer amendments to this legislation. While the provisions of this bill are important to me and important to Kansans, I also recognize the importance to every Member of the Senate to be able to offer legislation, to have debate, to make certain that our rights are protected. I know that particularly in a sense as a member of the minority, as a Republican in the Senate, but I know that even more as a member of a minority called rural America. I do not want to lose the opportunity in the Senate for me to be able to speak on issues that are important to my constituents and to be able to offer amendments to legislation that is important to a minority of Americans called rural America.

What I am troubled by and what I want to see addressed is the legislation that is pending. I do not want it to disappear because there is no agreement for Members of the Senate, all 100 of us, majority and minority, to offer amendments. So I am asking the majority leader to work with Senators to make certain their amendments are available for consideration in this legislation. Don't put me and other Senators, who care about this legislation, in the position of not being able to support moving forward because the rights of some Senators have been violated in their ability to offer amendments to this piece of legislation.

Again, this matters. The Postal Service desperately needs our attention. The American people who are served by the Postal Service desperately need our attention. We need to set the stage today in which the taxpayers of the United States are protected from any future calls for support for the U.S. Postal Service. We need to make certain in that process, as we pursue this legislation, that the ability of those who live in rural communities, where it is very difficult for the Postal Service to be financially viable, to have access to the Postal Service is not trampled on by the desire to see that only those post offices that are financially viable individually are the ones that remain. In fact, I remind my colleagues that the Postal Rate Service Commission in their study said we could close 3,700 post offices in the United States and save less than .7 percent of the money necessary to put the Postal Service back on a financially sound basis.

This legislation is important. The concepts that are contained in it matter to me as a Member of the Senate who represents a very rural State, Kansas. But I also know how important it is to make sure we do not lose our ability to offer amendments on this legislation or legislation in the future.

Please, Mr. Majority Leader and other Senators, please come together to make certain those rights are protected so this legislation can be fully considered by the Senate.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. HAGAN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

MORNING BUSINESS

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

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

TRIBUTE TO JUDGE G. WIX UNTHANK

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, I rise today in honor of a man who has made a great contribution to our Nation's judiciary system and to his native Commonwealth of Kentucky. The man of whom I speak has valiantly served in the line of duty and justly served in almost every level of our Nation's court system. He is a pioneer in the legal discipline, a patriot through and through, and a dear friend: the Honorable Judge G. Wix Unthank of Harlan County, KY.

Judge Unthank has announced his retirement and will soon bang the gavel for the last time on June 1 of this year, ending a six-decade-long legacy in the legal field. Although his official day-to-day job may be coming to an end, his public service is most likely far from over. Judging by the colorful life he has led thus far, I trust that his passion for the law and the legal system will lead him back inside the familiar walls of the courthouse for many years to come.

The Honorable Judge Unthank is a solid testimony to the attainment of the American dream. G. Wix Unthank proved that with hard work and ambition you can accomplish truly anything. He was born in the small Harlan County, KY, town of Tway in 1923. His father, Green W. Unthank, and mother, Estelle Howard Unthank, were both teachers in the Harlan County school system. Between the two of them, they spent 68 years in the classroom inspiring young men and women to achieve great things. The emphasis placed on education in the Unthank household rubbed off on young Wix, and he graduated from Loyall High School in Harlan County with the class of 1940. That same year he enlisted in the U.S. Army and proudly served in World War II.

Not even having been on this Earth for two decades, the young Mr.