



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 112th CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

Vol. 158

WASHINGTON, WEDNESDAY, JUNE 13, 2012

No. 89

House of Representatives

The House was not in session today. Its next meeting will be held on Friday, June 15, 2012, at 10 a.m.

Senate

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 13, 2012

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable KIRSTEN E. GILLIBRAND, a Senator from the State of New York.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Eternal God, give to us today the measure of grace we need to obtain Your promises. Lead our lawmakers to so embrace these promises that they will accept Your guidance, obey Your word, and walk in Your way. Lord, give them the grace so to run that they may reach their goal and so keep the faith that they may be true to You to the very end. Make them wise with Your wisdom, strong with Your strength, and pure with Your holiness.

We pray in Your sacred Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable KIRSTEN E. GILLIBRAND led the Pledge of Allegiance as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

APPOINTMENT OF ACTING PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will please read a communication to the Senate from the President pro tempore (Mr. INOUE).

The assistant legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, June 13, 2012.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable KIRSTEN E. GILLIBRAND, a Senator from the State of New York, to perform the duties of the Chair.

DANIEL K. INOUE,
President pro tempore.

Mrs. GILLIBRAND thereupon assumed the chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

FLOOD INSURANCE REFORM AND MODERNIZATION ACT—MOTION TO PROCEED—Resumed

Mr. REID. I move to proceed to Calendar No. 250, S. 1940.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to Calendar No. 250, S. 1940, a bill to amend the National Flood Insurance Act of 1968, to restore the financial solvency of the flood insurance fund, and for other purposes.

SCHEDULE

Mr. REID. The Senate will continue to debate the farm bill today. We have a couple of votes lined up. We expect to have those this morning.

NOT TO COMPROMISE

Last week, in a moment of candor, House Republicans, led by Representative CANTOR, admitted they have given up legislating until after the election. Although there is far more work to be done, they have said they are going to have a timeout. I repeat, there is so much to be done—especially building on 27 straight months of private sector job growth—Republicans in the House are lurching from one recess to the next long recess. They don't take short ones, they take long ones. Last week's unscripted moment was a window into today's Republican Party—a party that obviously cares more about winning elections than creating jobs.

Then a couple of days ago we had another frank assessment of the Republican agenda. Former Florida Governor Jeb Bush said Monday that his father, George H.W. Bush, and Ronald Reagan would not fit into today's Republican Party. He went on to elaborate about some of the issues in which they are simply headed in the wrong direction. Governor Bush said today's GOP is defined by "an orthodoxy that doesn't allow for disagreement."

He is right. The Republican Party no longer has room for moderates or anyone unwilling to march in lockstep with the radical tea party. That is apparent every day on Capitol Hill—more so in the House than in the Senate, but it has now infected the Senate. It was obvious from the first weeks of this Congress that the House was taken over by extremists with no desire to work for the sake of the economy and

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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no concept of the meaning of compromise—and legislation is the art of compromise.

But over the last year and a half it has become clear that Republicans in the Senate are also in thrall to the tea party. We see the extremism in this Chamber—I have just mentioned that—where Republicans have blocked or stalled most every jobs creation measure we have brought to the floor. We see it on the campaign trail, where Mitt Romney told a crowd he opposes hiring anymore teachers, firefighters, and police officers. Putting more teachers in the classroom used to be a goal Democrats and Republicans could agree on. But all over the country, things are happening just as happened in Nevada a couple of days ago, where the school district—let's see, it must be about the third or fourth largest school district now in the country, the Clark County school district, with well more than 300,000 students—indicated they were going to lay off 1,000 teachers. But as a result of not filling some positions because of retirements, they were able to have to only lay off about 400-some-odd people. It is happening all over the country.

Sending more cops out on patrol used to be something that—I can remember when JOE BIDEN was down here fighting for his COPS Program. Police departments in Nevada loved the opportunity to get more people on the street. That is the way it was all over the country. We used to fight to get more cops on the street. Now we are doing everything we can to stop the layoffs, and we can't do enough because we can't get a bill passed over here to help. Hiring more brave men and women to fight fires and save lives used to be a goal Democrats and Republicans could agree on. Not now.

Because of global warming, there are fires raging all over the West. I spoke to Senator BINGAMAN from New Mexico yesterday. That fire in New Mexico is 400,000 acres and, he said, we have another fire that has broken out of only 40,000 acres. On the news this morning out of Colorado, one person has been killed, scores of buildings and homes burned to the ground. The tankers they are using to fight these fires are old. One of them crashed in Nevada last week, killing the pilots.

But today's radical Republicans have another agenda—not hiring more cops and not doing something to stop the teacher layoffs, but their goal is to drag down the economy because it is good for their politics. They believe the more horrible the economy is, the better off they are going to be in November. They love bad news.

We still have the fact that even though there were more than 8 million jobs lost during the Bush administration, we have been fortunate to bring back 4.3 million of those jobs. But we could have done so much more with the jobs measures we have brought before this body that were lost on procedural grounds over here.

Yesterday Governor Bush said his father and President Reagan—neither of whom could win a Republican primary today—both “sacrificed political points for good public policy.”

I believe that. I was not a pal of Ronald Reagan's. I met him and worked with him. But Paul Laxalt—who retired, and I ran for his spot—was his pal, his friend. Ronald Reagan would not put up with what is going on here today, because there is no question that with Ronald Reagan the country came first, not elections.

I have great admiration for the first President Bush. I have in my private possessions a couple of handwritten notes he wrote to me. He would not put up with what is going on today. He was a pragmatist. He wanted to get things done for our country. He wasn't an ideologue. He was conservative. Certainly no one is better qualified to be President than the first Bush. He was a Congressman, head of the CIA, head of the Republican National Committee, the Vice President, Ambassador to China. He was interested in his country, not elections. He was a Republican, but we could work with him.

Today's Republicans aren't interested in good policy and, obviously, they aren't interested in creating jobs. They are too obsessed with defeating President Obama. That is their No. 1 goal. But don't take my word for it. The minority leader said so himself. This is what he said:

The single most important thing we want to achieve is for President Obama to be a one-term President.

That is a quote.

America is battling its way back from the greatest recession since the Great Depression. And although we have created 4.3 million private sector jobs, there is so much more to be done.

I just left a meeting with people interested in infrastructure. We have 70,000 bridges in America that need repair and replacement. Not 700, not 7,000 but 70,000. The highway bill is hung up over in the House someplace. They aren't focused on jobs because they are too busy checking the political scoreboard.

Will the Chair announce the business of the day.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, leadership time is reserved.

Under the previous order, the following hour will be equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees, with the Republicans controlling the first half and the majority controlling the final half.

MR. REID. Madam President, I note the absence of a quorum.

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

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader is recognized.

THE ECONOMY

MR. MCCONNELL. Madam President, tomorrow, the President plans to deliver a speech to once again tout his favorite approach to the economy. I say that because aides to the President say we should not expect much new in the speech. We can expect more of the same: More government, more debt, and higher taxes to pay for it all.

According to news reports, some Democrats are starting to get a little wary of this approach. A number of folks who worked in the Clinton administration have suggested something more positive. But others are pleading with the President to double down on the message that government is the answer.

So far it appears as though the hard-left wing of the party has the upper hand. As liberal columnist E.J. Dionne suggested recently in the Washington Post:

Let's turn [Reagan's] declaration on its head. Opposition to government isn't the solution.

Opposition to government was and remains the problem, and that is precisely what the President appears to be doing—doubling down on the same government-driven solutions that have kept the private sector mired in what some are calling the worst recovery ever.

These folks have so much faith in government that they seem blind to any failure or excess. They make no distinction between the things government has done well in the past and the things it does not do well now.

They have no limiting principle whatsoever. This is their logic: If you like the Hoover Dam, you should support bureaucrats making higher salaries and better benefits than the taxpayers who are paying for them. If you like the Transcontinental Railroad, you should support a \$1 trillion stimulus bill that has been more effective at creating punch lines for late night comedians than it has at creating jobs. If you like the GI bill, they believe you must also embrace a debt-to-GDP ratio that makes us look like Greece.

These folks seem to have no limiting principle whatsoever when it comes to the growth of government. They have blind faith in it. It is the only thing they ever seem to want, and they are completely out of touch.

The President wants you to believe the reason we are in this economic slump is because States and local governments have been laying off government workers. But what he does not tell you, and what the American people will not hear him say tomorrow, is that since the recession began, for every government worker who has lost a job 11 private sector jobs have been lost—for every government worker who has lost a job 11 private sector jobs have been lost.

Another thing you will not hear the President say is that public sector unemployment is just over 4 percent—unemployment among public workers, just over 4 percent—while all other private sector industries are at least twice that. So government employment is not the problem. It is the private sector that is suffering, and it is the private sector where we need to focus our policies.

So the battle lines are clear: After 3½ years of failure, Democrats in Washington have one suggestion: more of the same. The President can repackaging it however he wants tomorrow, but that is what it amounts to: more government, more debt, and fewer jobs—and that is not what Americans want.

Republicans have refused to go along with this approach, and we will continue to oppose it until the Democrats recognize what most Americans already seem to know: government is not the answer to what ails us; government is not the answer to what ails us. It does not mean government does not do some things well. It means government has its limits, and we have reached them.

I saw a story line this week about a high school in Utah. It said the school has been fined \$15,000 for selling carbonated drinks. The school has been fined \$15,000 for selling carbonated drinks. Why? Because Federal nutrition guidelines say the school cannot sell sugary drinks during lunch hour. Students could buy them before lunch and drink them during lunch, but they cannot buy them during lunch and drink them during lunch. The government will not allow it.

Madam President, we are not talking about the Transcontinental Railroad. We are talking about a government that has no sense of its own limits under the constitution and a President who does not seem to be willing to embrace anything that does not start and end with a government bureaucrat calling the shots.

It is time for a change, and here is what I would suggest: One, the Democrat-led Senate should pass a budget. It has not done so in 3 years. Two, the Senate should take up the 28 job-related bills the House Republicans passed that are collecting dust on the majority leader's desk. Three, we should pass comprehensive tax reform; and, four, entitlement reform. This Nation will not be able to get out from under the mountain of debt we have without addressing the out-of-control spending related to these programs. They are simply unsustainable.

As I said yesterday, without Presidential leadership, it simply cannot happen. The same failed policies are not going to cut it. The only question is whether Democrats in Washington are capable of seeing that.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from California.

Mrs. BOXER. Madam President, what is the speaker situation? Do I have

some time now to respond to the Republican leader?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Currently, the time is under control of the Republican leader for the next 27 minutes.

Mrs. BOXER. OK. I would ask if I could have 2 minutes just to respond to my friend.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, we are going to divide time; are we not?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Yes.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, I suggest the Senator from California use Democratic time, and the time on this side be reserved.

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

Mrs. BOXER. Madam President, I ask that I be allowed to speak on the Democratic side's time for up to 5 minutes.

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

Mrs. BOXER. Madam President, I thank the Republican leader.

It just stuns me when the Republican leader comes to the floor and has his "blame Obama" moment every day that he can. I thought this one was over the top. It is as if President Obama came in and everything was great and suddenly things are not going well.

Excuse me, I was here. I know. I remember when we had surpluses under Bill Clinton and the Democrats, and the Republicans turned it into deficits as far as the eye could see.

I cannot forget that because I remember a time when there was discussion about whether we were even going to have U.S. Treasuries anymore because we were not going to have debt anymore when Bill Clinton was President, and the Democrats set us on that right course. We had a balance between investments in our people and fair taxes so that the top 1 percent paid a fair share, and everybody did well.

Madam President, 23 million new jobs were created with Bill Clinton. Then George W. comes in. Two wars go on the credit card, tax breaks to the wealthiest few—the millionaires and billionaires—on the credit card, and suddenly we have a crisis: No regulation of these sophisticated securities.

My friend in the chair, the Acting President pro tempore, knows well what happened: no oversight, derivatives, new kinds of securities, taking a beautiful home ownership ethic we had in this country and gambling on it. What happened? The worst crisis since the Great Depression.

Who comes into office? President Obama takes the oath. The unbelievable crisis he inherited and the unbelievable debt he inherited and the unbelievable budget deficit he inherited was just unbelievable. An auto industry was going to be gone.

My friend Senator MCCONNELL has a right to his opinion, and I respect it so

much except he avoids telling the facts about how we got where we are. The American people do not suffer from amnesia. They understand this. They saw this President, this young President come in, faced with jobs bleeding 800,000 a month. Yes, he turned it around. Yes, he did, in fact, promote a rescue of the auto industry. We would have been the only great economy that did not have one if it was not for his courage. Yes, a couple of courageous votes on the Republican side joining with Democrats—that was a good moment. Yes, as Mitt Romney said: Oh yeah, they could have gone busto, bankrupt. We did not feel that way here. The President did not feel that way.

So all of this Obama bashing on the floor of the Senate is going to continue because Senator MCCONNELL is a very straightforward person, and he said—and I quote not the exact words, the sentiment, close to the exact words: Defeating President Obama is the highest priority of the Republicans. We are seeing that play out on this floor. I pledged that I would come here when I could to straighten out the record.

So let's be clear. This President took over in the worst of times since the Great Depression. There have been millions of jobs created—not enough. I will say this: If this economy sputters, this economic recovery we are in sputters, and has a hard time because of the depth of the crisis originally—the fact that the housing crisis still continues, the fact that there are problems in the global marketplace in Europe, and all of these factors—I want to say this: I want the person in the Oval Office to be a person who understands what is happening, and that is President Obama, who relates to working people, who relates to the middle class, who is not building an elevator for his cars in San Diego. That is how I feel.

Every time there is an attack on this President, I am going to come down here and tell the truth to the American people.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Texas.

Mrs. HUTCHISON. Madam President, I heard the remarks of my colleague from California, and I just cannot let the record stand that President Obama took over in the worst circumstances of our time. Really? The debt of this country was around \$10 trillion when President Obama took office. In just 3½ years, that debt has almost doubled. We are now over \$15 trillion and will soon be hitting the \$16 trillion debt ceiling limit in just 3½ years. We are in a debt crisis not from the previous administration, we are in a debt crisis because we are spending too much, we are borrowing too much, and the President keeps talking about more taxes.

Just last Friday, the President came out and said: "The private sector is doing [just] fine." It is government that is in a crisis. Well, yes, government is in a crisis. The private sector

is not doing just fine, and the government crisis is not caused because we are losing government jobs.

The government crisis is caused because we are spending too much, and we are going into debt that is unsustainable in this country.

For the millions of Americans who are out of work in this country, the President's assessment of the private sector must be like salt poured in a wound. My goodness, we have seen job numbers of over 8 percent unemployment since the President took office. The last 3 months have been not so good. We are still over 8 percent, and we went up a little bit to 8.2 percent in May.

So to the nearly 13 million Americans who are unemployed and the millions more who are underemployed or have left the labor force altogether because they have lost hope—Mr. President, things are not fine, and the private sector is not fine in this country, and the middle class is bearing the brunt.

On top of the unemployment rate for those who are in poverty conditions, the people who hold jobs are also losing ground. On Monday, the Federal Reserve reported that the median net worth of American families fell 39 percent between 2007 and 2010. We have not seen these levels since 1992.

During the same period, incomes also dropped sharply. Average household income fell 11 percent to \$78,500, down from \$88,300. The hardest hit? Families in the rapidly diminishing middle class. While these statistics are troubling, there is a concern that cannot be measured in dollars and cents; that is, that families are losing faith in a secure future. There was a time when every generation had a better quality of life and expected a better quality of life for their children than their parents had. That is not the case today.

In 2010, 35 percent of families said they did not have a good idea of what their income would be just for the next year. That was 31.4 percent in 2007, 35 percent now. So the number of families who are losing the faith that their children are going to have a better life than they have had is diminishing.

How could they be confident? The job creators in the private sector are the ones under siege. I cannot believe the President of the United States is so off base as to say the private sector is doing fine. Just this week, the National Federation of Independent Business released its monthly survey of small business optimism. Survey results continue to be historically low and consistent with the subpar performance of gross domestic product.

According to this survey, levels of hiring and spending remained depressed in May. We all know that. More important, so did plans for the future. The same report states that expectations for increasing future sales continued to be weak in May, far below readings recorded in any other similar period since 1973.

Many small business owners are reluctant to expand their businesses or hire more workers. Small business owners who expect the economy to further deteriorate outnumber those who think there will be an improvement. Small businesses are our Nation's primary job creators. Small business provided 55 percent of all jobs in the private sector.

Small business has created two of every three net jobs in the United States since the early 1970s. So I would say to the President of the United States, it is small business that is the economic engine of America, not government. That is the fundamental disagreement we have with this administration.

We must spur the private sector to create income, growth, and security in this country. The private sector is not doing fine. What should we be doing to help Americans get back to work? We need to address what is causing the uncertainty. Why are businesses not hiring? Because government spending that serves to crowd out the private sector is increasing. There are tax increases being talked about by the President constantly.

So they are looking at looming tax increases, burdensome regulations that they see coming by the bills, such as this, out of the U.S. Government. Those regulations hamper job growth in this country.

Then, on top of all that, on top of the talk of new taxes, on top of the burdensome regulations our small businesses face every day, in bigger numbers every day, it is the health care law that was passed 2 years ago this December.

If we want people to be hired, we cannot saddle our entrepreneurs and small businesses with new taxes, more regulations, and the cost, the overwhelming burden of the Obama health care plan.

President Obama, in an interview yesterday, dismissed questions from a small business owner about the negative impact of the health care law and what it is already doing to small businesses. Anybody who has paid their part of insurance, if they are lucky enough to be covered, knows that the premiums have increased and the coverage has decreased in anticipation of the Obama health care law, adding the new burden and cost on insurance companies, hospitals, doctors.

The costs of doing business in health care are increasing in anticipation of that health care law taking full effect in the next year. I have heard so much opposition in my home State when I travel around from small businesses that are just throwing up their hands and saying: I cannot provide the government-approved health care for my employees, which is going to mean I will have a new tax burden for every one of them as they then have to go on the government plan and fend for themselves.

Even families are going to have to do it or they will have to pay a tax. It is

not just a good plan, it is the government-approved plan. So if they provide 35 percent of their employees' premiums, which is what they can afford, but the government requires more than that, they will still have to pay the fine. The small businesses are saying: I am going to pay the fine because that is my only alternative. Those with more than 50 employees, will have costly new Federal regulations to comply with. The financial penalty is so great we are seeing businesses stop at 49 so they will not have more workers and therefore have a bigger responsibility.

I received a letter from a small business owner in Arlington who said it best: "Did Congress and the President know they were going to freeze our country's businesses' ability to help grow this economy when they passed this bill?" I will point out that not one Republican in the House or Senate voted for this bill in Congress. So I would have to say to my small business constituent in Arlington: This was the Democrats in Congress and the President's bill. Not one Republican would support it because of the fear of exactly what is happening; that is, small business owners are losing faith that they will be able to grow, and that is what is causing the economic crisis we are in with unemployment over 8 percent.

A small business owner in Corpus Christi, TX, who has 34 employees told my office that his company's cheapest option for health insurance would boost premiums by 44 percent over last year. How can they do it? It is happening everywhere. I hear it everywhere I go. Clearly, this is not the incentive our economy needs right now.

We need government to get out of the way of the job creators in this country not block their path with miles of regulations, new burdens and costs—new regulations, new costs—and then the talk of new taxes which is prevalent everywhere.

Our best hope is that the Supreme Court will see this has a constitutional problem. Then we can start again and take a step-by-step reform. That will do what all of us want to do. Everyone in Congress and the President had the same goal; that is, to have more Americans with affordable coverage and options.

But that is not the bill that was passed, and it is why Republicans could not possibly support it, because they saw the burdens on families, on businesses, and they knew it was not going to encourage hiring, which is what we need in this country. We have a chance to start a process that will be positive. We need to do something to spur small business in this economy.

One thing that could be done, which is in discussions right now, is the Keystone XL Pipeline, which would create a \$7 billion, shovel-ready, privately funded project that would transport over 700,000 barrels of oil from Canada

to the United States. It has been estimated it would create 20,000 construction jobs and as many as 100,000 jobs at refineries and other businesses.

By the way, we would be trading with a friendly partner, Canada, so we would not have to import more from unfriendly parts of the Middle East, and we would also be able to know that these are privately funded jobs, not one government cent. In fact, it would create taxes being paid to the government because people would be working, and that is the way we should be growing our revenue in this country.

But the President suggested a different solution. He said the answer is not to spur the private sector because they are doing just fine. He said let's spend more money bailing out the States because they are having a hard time. They are having a hard time. We can do something for the States, and it is not bailing them out with more borrowed Federal dollars that will continue to weigh down the dollar itself. No. We can do something for State governments; that is, stop sending Federal mandates that we do not pay for that we require them to do, put a moratorium on Federal mandates on States today. Let's start repealing these Federal mandates we are requiring States to absorb. It is killing their economies.

Medicaid and the lack of flexibility in Medicaid is the biggest expense most States have. It is a Federal mandate unpaid for and inflexible, not the choice States could make to cover the people who need the help. We can help the States but not at the expense of our dollar and our debt.

So the President is suggesting more spending and bailing out States, and we are offering a solution that says let's create jobs in the private sector. Keystone XL is ready to go right now, private sector, 100,000 future jobs, not one penny from the Federal Government.

Let's take these Federal regulations and let's put a moratorium on them right now and free our small businesses to be the entrepreneurs that built this country. It was the entrepreneurs who built this country in freedom. This country has been a magnet for people coming from all over the world because they could do their research in freedom. They could grow in freedom. They could keep the fruits of their labor and give their kids a better chance than they had, which they could not get in their home country. That is what built this country.

We can get right back there, but it is not by borrowing more, spending more, taxing more, and regulating our small businesses out of existence. We can do something positive, and it is time we got started.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Georgia.

Mr. ISAKSON. Madam President, how much time remains?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Ten minutes.

Mr. ISAKSON. Madam President, I, too, wish to rise and talk some about the President's statement of last Friday but from maybe a different approach than one might imagine.

The President said he thought the private sector was doing just fine. I was driving in the car when I heard the statement, and the statement took me back because I feared the President might not actually know how the private sector truly was doing.

Twelve weeks ago, I spent a week on the road doing townhalls, knocking on doors, visiting with Georgians. I come to the floor to provide some information to the President that maybe the private sector isn't doing that well, and maybe there is something we can do about it—this administration and this Senate—because right now we are doing nothing and America is languishing because of problems, some of which are our making.

The private sector, by definition, is everybody other than the government sector; at least that is my definition. Let me talk about everybody other than the government sector for a minute and why they are not doing very well. Let me talk about the homebuilder I met in Valdosta, GA, who talked to me about the fact that he had just sold a home he built. I said that is great; house sales are getting better. He said, the only problem is I could not get an appraisal for what it cost me to build the house, so I am selling it, but I am selling it at a loss. Part of that is because of the regulation and oppression that is on appraisers right now because of a fear of appraisal fraud.

Or the tomato farmer I talked to from Bainbridge, GA. He talked about the indignation he had when the Labor Department promulgated a rule—they did not end up passing it—that would have said you have to be 18 years or older to work on a farm, even if it was your family farm—an overreach of the Department of Labor that, fortunately, they pulled back, but the type of overreach that causes people to retrench, not build and expand and move their business forward.

Or the 81-year-old community banker I talked to yesterday on the phone, from Calhoun, GA, who had a significant amount of his savings invested in stock in the community bank he had been a part of so much of his life, which is now under a cease-and-desist letter from the FDIC and is being managed under what is called a cease-and-desist order, which means the FDIC is basically running the bank, or limiting its parameters. The bank is slowly but surely dissipating its capital base until it gets to 2 percent and then the Feds will come in and close the bank and transfer its assets to a bigger bank and give them an 80-percent loss share guarantee, and the bigger bank will foreclose on the property and move forward.

In fact, what was intended by Dodd-Frank to reduce too big to fail and empower banks has done the opposite; the

bigger banks have gotten bigger, the smaller banks have become fewer, and American banking and capital investment is less.

Or the hospital I visited in Thomasville, GA, which just finished its completion, the Archibald Center—a great center. They were talking about the difficulties they were having with employees and the fear they had that the NLRB mini-union ruling on Specialty Health Care was actually going to become the law of the land through regulation, where micro units within a facility could actually unionize, where just nurses in the emergency room, or in the ICU, could unionize, and everybody else would not. Can you imagine a hospital, department store, or a manufacturer with a union in the shoe department, a union in the nursing department, a union in the lumber department, a union on the loading dock, micro unions throughout the organization? You could not function; you couldn't cross-train, you couldn't manage. You would weight the playing field between management and labor in favor of labor and to the detriment of the investor who made the investment.

I could go on and on. It is those visits that I have talked about, the people in those cities I have talked to in Georgia, people in the private sector—they are not doing well. And it is for fear of overregulation and of uncertainty. If we can do anything to empower our economy in the short run in America, we can call time out and say enough is enough.

As I told a member of the administration 2 weeks ago, the administration, I think, wants to eliminate risk. Our job is not to eliminate; it is to mitigate risk. If you eliminate risk, you take the power of investments in the private sector, entrepreneurship, and capital risk, you take it out the window. You can't eliminate risk, but you can mitigate risk. So let's get back to mitigating risk, making sure we have a safe workplace, but where capital investment can be made. Let's make sure we mitigate risk in banking, but not so much that we choke out the small family banker. Let's make sure that agricultural workers are safe, but that the son of a farmer can work on his father's own farm. Let's make sure we are not overreaching so far that we are making the private sector's plight worse than it is today.

My message to the Senate and to the President of the United States is that the private sector is not just fine. Though it may not all be of the government's making, part of it is. We are making it worse. We are trying to run a country based on the three-legged stool of legislative, judicial, and the executive branch, on a two-legged stool of regulation through the executive branch and judicial regulation through the judicial branch—cutting out the legislative branch. Do you know what happens to two-legged stools? They fall over. The private sector is falling over, and it is, in part or in whole, because of us.

I hope the President understands that there is a private sector that pays the taxes and makes America work—a private sector that is hurting—and we can help the private sector. Let's put our nose and shoulder to the grindstone, and let's move forward in these months leading up to the election and change some of the overregulation and empower the private sector, not accept that we think it is doing just fine.

I end with this, the front page of the USA Today. Average family wealth net worth in the United States has declined 39.4 percent, back to the level of 1992, which simply means the private sector has lost 20 years of accumulation, equity, and investment in the economy of the last 3 years. That is unacceptable. It is why we have the depression we have in this country. We need to get our shoulder to the grindstone, make it work, and let the private sector be just fine again because of an empowerment of the private sector, entrepreneurship, and capital investment.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Madam President, we have six Senators, including the occupant of the chair, the Senator from New York, on the floor today in the majority time to discuss the jammed bipartisan Senate highway bill.

I heard my colleague from Georgia talk about how we are doing nothing and America is languishing. One of the things we are doing nothing on is passing a highway bill that should not be complicated. But it is jammed up by the House Republicans and, as a result, people in Rhode Island and elsewhere are suffering. I will be here throughout our majority period. I think the Senator from Minnesota and the Senator from New Hampshire were here first, so I yield to them.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Minnesota.

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Madam President, I thank the Senator from Rhode Island for his leadership in bringing us all together. We have to get this transportation bill done. This is a bill that passed the Senate with 74 votes. So we are here today to say to our colleagues over in the House and to ask our colleagues on the Republican side in the Senate to ask the Republicans in the House to get this bill done.

Cold-weather States, such as Minnesota, it is sometimes said, have two seasons: the winter season and the construction season. This kind of delay can be crippling. We have a much smaller window of time to get these projects done.

We have people waiting in traffic. We ask the House, why are we making them wait? We look at the cost when we delay construction projects—the cost to taxpayers. Everybody knows if you wait too long to work on a project, and you are doing something on your house and you wait years to get it done, the costs go up.

We ask our friends in the House, why are they allowing this to happen and making this delay? Look at contractors, construction workers, and engineering firms. They need consistency. Why is the House making them wait?

Look at Caterpillar, a business that employs 750 people in my State. They make road paving equipment and have a manufacturing facility. I was there addressing the employees. They gave me a pink hat. There are people working all over that company. They want more jobs, and they want to make things in America, and they want to export to the world. We are not going to be able to do that if we don't have the roads and bridges that can take our goods to market. We ask the House of Representatives, why are we making these private employers wait? The bill makes critical reforms to our transportation policy.

Last week the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released a report announcing that 58 percent of high school seniors said they had texted or e-mailed while driving in the previous month, and 43 percent of high school juniors said they do the same thing. This bill includes provisions to help prevent texting while driving, and incentives—the two of us together, Madam President, worked on the graduated driver's license standards in this bill.

Why are we making the parents of America wait while their kids are texting while driving? It makes reforms in the bill to transportation policy, reduces the number of highway programs from over 100 to about 30. So the Republicans in the House—how can they explain that they are making America wait to reform and make these programs less duplicative? It defines clear national goals for transportation policy, and it streamlines environmental permitting.

Why would you make America wait? That is what we are asking the House of Representatives today. Nobody knows better than Minnesota what happens if you neglect roads and bridges: The 35-W bridge crashed down in the middle of a river 6 blocks from my house.

So we ask the House of Representatives, why are you making the people of America wait?

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from New Hampshire.

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Madam President, I am pleased to join my colleagues in talking about why it is so important to pass this transportation bill. I thank Senator WHITEHOUSE for organizing this effort.

In New Hampshire, we understand what Senator KLOBUCHAR was saying, that it is important to get this bill passed so we can get our construction season underway. We have a limited amount of time. In only 17 days, this Nation's surface transportation programs are going to shut down unless Congress acts to reauthorize them.

In March, nearly three-quarters of this Senate voted to pass a bipartisan, long-term transportation bill that maintains current funding levels and avoids an increase in both the deficit and in gas taxes. This legislation is important as we look at roads and bridges and mass transit that are going to have support. It is important as we look at the jobs in the construction industry and manufacturing businesses that depend on our transportation system.

In fact, the Federal Highway Administration estimates that for every \$1 billion in highway spending, we support about 27,000 jobs. I was pleased last week to see an overwhelming bipartisan majority in the House vote to reject policies that will cut spending on roads and public transit by one-third. If that had passed, an estimated 2,000 New Hampshire jobs would have been lost. I think that vote sends an important signal to members of the conference committee that there is a strong bipartisan majority in both Houses of Congress to support funding for crucial investments in our transportation network.

I call on the House to work with the Senate in a similar bipartisan manner, as we did in the Senate, to pass transportation policies that put Americans back to work and generate economic growth. We have seen it in New Hampshire, where we have 29 construction projects that are going to be on hold if we cannot get transportation legislation passed here. We have seen it with Interstate 93, one of our main corridors going up and down the middle of our State, which has been delayed because of the delay in passing this transportation bill.

If we are unable to set aside election year amendments, unable to set aside this partisan politics and come together to do what is right for our country and our economy and pass a transportation bill, it will be putting this country in a very difficult situation.

The Congressional Budget Office has projected that the highway trust fund will run out of money next year—sometime in 2013. We are not exactly sure when. But that will mean funding to States will face drastic cuts without any reauthorization to shore up that revenue. And were the highway trust funds to run out of money, projects in this country would grind to a halt; it would decimate jobs in the construction industry. We cannot afford that.

Investing in transportation creates jobs and creates the conditions for our small companies to succeed. It should not be an issue about politics or partisanship. I urge our colleagues on the House side—because they are the ones holding this up—to come together and pass a transportation reauthorization bill.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Maryland.

Mr. CARDIN. Madam President, I join Senators SHAHEEN and KLOBUCHAR, and I particularly thank Senator

WHITEHOUSE for bringing us together. Senator BOXER was on the floor earlier talking about the transportation conference committee, and Senator BEGICH is also here.

We are all here because of the urgency of the conference report being presented to us so that we have a multiyear reauthorization of the transportation programs of this country.

Let me point out, I know a lot of times our constituents are confused as to why legislation cannot move here. Clearly, the holdup in passing the surface transportation reauthorization is the Republicans in the House of Representatives. They are blocking a bill that has broad support from the industries that are affected by it, from the public, and from both Democrats and Republicans here in the Senate.

We passed a consensus bill. It is not even bipartisan, it is consensus. We were able to get the right balance between public transportation and transit and highways and bridges. We have the proper balance between how the money is controlled at the State level and how it is controlled at the local level. We have worked out a reform of our transportation programs to do this in a most efficient way. That bill is being held up for one reason and one reason alone; that is, the politics of the Republicans in the House of Representatives. They believe they can score political points by blocking any legislation from moving.

Let me underscore the points my colleagues have mentioned. This bill is all about jobs. It is all about rebuilding America and saving and preserving jobs.

On Sunday I was in Cumberland, MD, talking about the first Federal highway, the national highway that was built over 200 years ago, which was the first subsidized road in America. That brought jobs to our communities. It connected the East with the expanding Nation. Quite frankly, this Transportation bill connects our Nation, and it is important for jobs. In the western part of Maryland, we have the Appalachian highway that we need to complete, the north-south highway. That will affect jobs in Pennsylvania, Maryland, and West Virginia. That is what this is about here.

A short-term extension costs us jobs. Last month we lost 28,000 jobs as a result of not being able to pass a multiyear surface transportation program. We lose the construction season, as my colleagues have pointed out. And quite frankly, we have the bill before us. We have the votes to pass it.

So what we are asking today is that the Republicans in the House release this bill, allow us to move forward so we can create jobs for America and continue the economic expansion for America that we need through modern transportation. That is what this is about, and that is why we are here today, to remind our colleagues, the Republicans in the House—the extremists who are holding up this bill—this

is a bill that is important for our Nation. Let's move forward with the people's business.

With that, Madam President, I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Alaska.

Mr. BEGICH. Madam President, I would like to thank my colleagues for coming to the floor and especially thank Senator WHITEHOUSE for organizing all of us to come here to speak on an issue that is really the core of what we do here: to figure out how to build infrastructure for this country so our private sector can have the infrastructure to work from and play off of. But let's be very blunt and very honest about what is happening. This Transportation reauthorization bill passed this body with 74 votes. It was a bipartisan effort, hard fought, with incredible debate, encompassing many different issues. Now it sits in a conference committee with House Members, led by the Republican majority over there, not wanting to move forward.

Let's be very blunt about this. Not only do we have that bill over there, we have the VAWA bill, the FDA bill, the postal reform bill, and they are all just piling up over in the House. People wonder why the economy has been struggling this last month. Well, all the business that we should be doing and that we are doing here on the Senate side—we are passing stuff—is all piling up over there on the House side.

Actually, I did what we were calling "Begich Minutes," give or take a few seconds. I went to the middle of the Capitol and described this incident of where we pass a bill, and then I physically pointed to the House side to show where the bill is now stalled. We have a small group within the Republican majority over there that is holding the Speaker hostage, literally, because they want to cut the Transportation bill by over one-third, which would devastate the infrastructure of this country.

Let me say from my own experience—and I know Senator WHITEHOUSE has heard this, and others have as well—as a former mayor, I was in charge of the metropolitan planning organization for our community of Anchorage, which maintained at that time approximately 45 or 48 percent of the population of the State. We were in charge of managing the road money. Every time Congress delayed their action or were ineffective in getting their work done, as a mayor, I had to put projects off, stall projects, and hold contracts and tell contractors they couldn't get to work. That created uncertainty, which at the end of the day does one thing: It costs more money. And the people who pay for that are the taxpayers.

So they sit over there in the House. I saw a comment that they want to do another extension. Well, we have had nine extensions. For people who don't know what extensions are, it is where

the Congress says: Well, we will extend this bill for another week, another 2 weeks, another month. But these extensions create more uncertainty and add more cost. Every time you hear the word "extension" from the other side, that just means you—the taxpayers of this country—are paying more in taxes. That is what that means, pure and simple. "Extension" means you pay more for a project that should have been on the board and moving forward.

We have a bipartisan bill, with 74 Democrats and Republicans on the Senate side having voted for it. It is now lingering in conference.

We are now in the midst of the construction season. In Alaska—and I know my colleague from Minnesota, who has joined us, will know about this—the construction season is short. We need to have contracts let in early spring in order to construct in the summer and be completed by September or October because the asphalt plants close. When the asphalt plants close, you can't put asphalt on the streets. It is very simple. We have a very limited time. So the contracting community is frustrated and angry because they do not get the certainty they need to hire the people. They can't get them to work.

So I plead with the folks on the other side, the extreme folks in the Republican majority over there who are holding the Speaker hostage on this issue, let's do what is right for America. Let's make sure these jobs, these 3 million jobs that could be retained and added, move forward. In an economy where every job makes a difference, we are talking here about 3 million jobs. Let's move this forward. Let's quit the politics.

What is amazing about this—and I heard Senator WHITEHOUSE say this more than once—if the Speaker of the House would just allow the Senate bill to go to the floor for a vote, I can guarantee what will happen: Democrats and a group of Republicans will support that bill and pass it. But that is not the issue. We have a very small subset of the majority of the Republicans over in the House who have told the majority leader he is not moving anything—nothing, zero—because they are not betting on America like we are. We bet on America. We are betting on the right things. What they want to do is to cripple this country for their own political gamesmanship.

I have to say—and I would bet every one of my colleagues here would say the same thing—that when I go back home to Alaska, I hear how fed up people are with this. They are frustrated by the inability of Congress to do its work. And I have told my folks back in Alaska that the Senate is doing its work. We are passing bipartisan bills. But they get jammed up by a small group of extreme Republican tea party folks who believe the best way to solve problems is to do nothing and to let this economy falter.

So I hope Members will come to their senses over there. I can say that my

Congressman, the Republican from Alaska, is working hard to get this bill passed. He is on the conference committee. He is one of the Republicans who would vote with Democrats to get things done on this Transportation bill. Why? Because he likes building things. I like building things. But there are some other folks over there who have no interest in helping to build this country and make it a better place.

So, again, I yield my time. I hope folks on the other side in that extreme group will get some sense knocked into them. Maybe the American people will do it. I hope so.

Madam President, I yield the floor at this point for my friend from Minnesota.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Minnesota.

Mr. FRANKEN. Madam President, I thank the Senator from Alaska and the Senator from Rhode Island.

I wish to emphasize the need to pass a long-term reauthorization of this surface transportation bill. It is time for Congress to do its job. Thanks to the leadership of Senators BOXER and INHOFE, this body passed a bill with 74 votes. Actually, it probably would have been 76 votes, but Senator KIRK is back at home recovering—and we wish him very well—and Senator LAUTENBERG couldn't vote that day. I think he was at the funeral of a friend. So it really would have been 76 votes. Unfortunately, our colleagues in the House were not able to pass a comprehensive reauthorization bill and were only able to join a conference committee after passing yet another short-term extension.

So I will repeat myself: It is time for Congress to do its job. As the Senator from Alaska, my good colleague, was just saying, the summer construction season is now upon us. In Minnesota, that is when we know we can build roads and bridges and light rail, because in November and December it gets cold and snowy.

State departments of transportation have already canceled projects because the House has failed to act. We have already lost thousands of jobs because, for whatever reason, the House will not pass a bill that received unanimous bipartisan support in the Environment and Public Works Committee and 74 votes in the Senate as a whole.

Speaker BOEHNER has said the House may just pass another short-term extension. But all of these extensions have whittled away at the highway trust fund—whittled it down to a dangerously low balance—and any further extension would put it in danger of going bankrupt.

This should not be controversial. This should not be partisan. Transportation and infrastructure have not been in the past. The Senate consensus bill simply maintains the current level of funding for our transportation system and streamlines many programs to make sure those investments are put

to the best possible use. This is infrastructure that we need to stay competitive in our global economy.

Minnesota is ready to make these investments. Whether we are talking about maintaining our bridges so they are safe, expanding the new light rail system in the Twin Cities, or reducing congestion on our highways, these are projects that will create jobs now and strengthen our economy well into the future, as infrastructure always does.

On August 1 of this year, we in Minnesota will mark the fifth anniversary of a tragedy in our State: the collapse of the Interstate 35-W bridge in Minneapolis. The collapse killed 13 people and injured 145. That tragedy should have been a wake-up call in America and in this body. Bridges should not collapse in the United States of America.

If that was a wake-up call, the House seems to be content to have hit the snooze button and ignore the problem. Well, we cannot wait any longer. There is no reason not to pass this bill. Frankly, the Senate bill is the conservative solution. It is paid for, it consolidates many Federal programs, and it streamlines project reviews—all things that I have heard colleagues in the House ask for. The House negotiators need to work with Senator BOXER and Senator INHOFE and the rest of the Senate conferees and come to an agreement both the House and the Senate can live with. If they can't or won't, Speaker BOEHNER should—as the Senator from Alaska just said—just take up the Senate bill and give it an up-or-down vote.

Let's prove to our constituents that we can come together and do what is right. Let's pass a bill that will create jobs for workers in our States and build prosperity for our future. It is time for Congress to do its job and pass a transportation bill without any more delay.

I thank my colleagues, and I yield back to my colleague, the Senator from Rhode Island.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Madam President, I thank the Senators on our side who have come here today during the majority time block to express their support for moving forward on the highway transportation bill.

Not all of them have had the chance to speak because time was short, but I wish to have the RECORD reflect that in addition to Senators KLOBUCHAR, SHAHEEN, BEGICH, CARDIN, and FRANKEN, who did speak, and myself of course, Senator GILLIBRAND is also here but presiding. Senator STABENOW was here but could not wait. Senator MARK UDALL is here. Senator CONRAD was here. We are all here because we are very concerned about what is going on with the highway bill.

We had a March 31 deadline in order to get things done by the summer construction season that we have heard so much about. We made the deadline.

Not only did we make the deadline, we made the deadline with a bipartisan bill, one that was unanimous among both parties in the Environment and Public Works Committee and we brought it to the floor and we got it passed, 75 or more Senators supporting it. The House did not do its job. It did not have a bill. It could not pass a highway bill.

For folks who have been around here longer than I have, the failure to pass the highway bill is telling. This is not like getting an A on a chemistry test. This is like showing up for class, and they failed at that very simple task. So they asked for an extension. We probably should not have given it. We probably should have forced the vote then. But we did. We gave them an extension on the theory that, in good faith, they would come through. We knew the extension would cost jobs. The extension has cost jobs. Out of over 90 projects slated for this construction season in Rhode Island, about 40 are going to fall off because of the delay. Those are real jobs in Rhode Island, a State that needs them, and that is true across the rest of the country. Wherever winter falls, this predicament exists. So that is why so many of my colleagues were here.

Now we are closing in on the end of the extension we gave them. It will end June 30. I am here to urge that we give no further extensions. It is either govern or get out of the way to the House of Representatives. If they can't pass a highway bill of their own, let the Senate bill come up for a vote. It is bipartisan. It is supported by manufacturers. It is supported by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. It is supported by road builders. It is supported by environmentalists. It is supported by labor. It is a good bill. It had a great process, wide open, on the Senate floor. There is no excuse for not taking up that bill. I agree with Senator BEGICH. If that bill comes up, Democrats and Republicans together will give it a massive majority in the House, and people will be put to work.

One place where I think we all ought to be able to agree on both sides of the aisle is that Federal spending is actually helpful and does create jobs in building our roads and bridges. We don't expect Americans to repair the road in front of their house. We don't expect Americans to go and build bridges for themselves. It is a government job to build roads and bridges. The jam-up Speaker BOEHNER and Majority Leader CANTOR have created on this is costing probably hundreds of thousands of jobs right now in this country. Why they are doing it, their motive, that is not for me to say. But the practical effect is that jobs are being lost by unnecessary delay, created by Republicans in the House, which they could get rid of by simply calling up the bipartisan Senate bill and giving a free vote on it, letting it pass, and putting Americans to work.

I yield the floor. I thank the distinguished Senator from Utah for being

patient as I went over my time a little bit.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Utah.

Mr. HATCH. Madam President, I thank my colleague.

Last week, I discussed some unfinished business that remains for Congress and the President to address. Specifically, Congress must take up a number of tax-related matters in very short order.

When I discussed this tax agenda last week, I referred to this chart. Things have not changed since then. As this chart shows, the tax extenders, which are overdue by almost one-half year, are not alone on Congress's to-do list.

We need to resolve the death tax. Death tax relief expires at the end of 2012. We need to prevent the 2013 tax hikes. As I noted earlier, we have the so-called tax extenders that are right there, and we have to address the alternative minimum tax—or AMT—the second one on that list. The issue of the AMT is what I would like to address today.

Thirty-one million American families will be caught by the AMT or are already caught. Yet Congress has done nothing to address the AMT. The alternative minimum tax is a stealth tax on 27 million families. Approximately, 3.9 million families paid the AMT last year, and they may not be surprised if it hits them again this year. But for the other 27 million American families set to be ensnared by the AMT, this represents a significant and stealthy tax increase.

The AMT burden is, in fact, far broader than just the 31 million American families who are in its sights. Nearly double that number—60 million American families—must fill out the AMT worksheet to determine whether they owe an alternative minimum tax. While not as bad as paying the tax itself, the task of compliance is just another time-consuming, government-imposed challenge for Americans families they don't need to have.

To get some idea of the magnitude of the AMT's reach, consider this chart. It breaks down, State by State, the number of American families hit by the AMT.

When I speak of those now being caught by this tax, I am referring to those families who make estimated tax payments and who are scheduled to make their second payment tomorrow.

Last year, 3.9 million families were hit by the AMT. I think this was 3.9 million too many, but it is considerably better than the more than 31.1 million who will be hit in 2012.

The reason we are threatened by such a large increase this year is that over the last 11 years, Congress has passed legislation to temporarily increase the amount of income exempt from the AMT. Unlike many other provisions of the Tax Code, the AMT exemption amount is not automatically adjusted for inflation. These temporary exemption increases have prevented millions

of middle-class American families from falling prey to the AMT, until now.

While I have always fought for these temporary exemptions, I believe the AMT ought to be permanently repealed. One reason to pursue permanent repeal is the uncertainty that the AMT creates for taxpayers when Congress must revisit and adjust it every year.

Unfortunately, a permanent fix does not appear to be forthcoming. Congress has yet to undertake any meaningful action on the AMT. President Obama has proposed permanently patching or maybe even repealing AMT. Yet what he gives with one hand, he takes away with another.

He has proposed to pay for an AMT fix with this so-called Buffett tax. The thing is, the Buffett tax is nothing more than a new alternative minimum tax. The solution to the alternative minimum tax problem surely can't be an alternative minimum tax.

Moreover, the revenue generated by the Buffett tax—in spite of the suggestion by the President that this tax on the rich could pay for all things good—would not come close to providing the revenue necessary to address the AMT in a meaningful way.

Despite assurance from the President and his allies that AMT relief is an important issue, nothing has actually been put forward as a serious legislative solution for this year. There has been no Senate committee markup or floor action for tax extenders, the AMT patch, death tax reform or even preventing 2013 tax hikes.

This year is about half over, and all we have is talk about the need to address the AMT, but a theoretical discussion is not a substitute for real action, as anyone making a quarterly payment today will attest to.

Everyone seems to agree something needs to be done—and done quickly—but the discussion does not go any further from there. We are out of time. The second quarterly AMT payment is due. Today, taxpayers across the country are under a legal requirement to pay their estimated tax. They will use the form depicted on this chart right here—“2012 Estimated Tax.” Though I hope otherwise, I expect I will be here again when the third payment comes due saying basically the same thing.

A question remains about whether people who should be making an estimated tax payment tomorrow actually will. Most of these 31 million taxpayers subject to the AMT do not even know they are subject to the alternative minimum tax, so they will not be making that estimated tax payment tomorrow, even though they should. If one fails to pay sufficient estimated tax or have a sufficient amount of wages withheld on a timely basis throughout the year, then one can be subject to interest and penalties. This is an awful spot for Congress to put the American families in.

It is also worth recalling that the IRS cannot just flip a switch and have

its systems in place for an AMT patch. This is not done overnight. It takes months. The Congress's failure to act on a timely basis could actually delay the processing of 2013 refund checks perhaps by even a few months.

The failure of Congress to promptly enact an alternative minimum tax fix would have a cascading effect on our system of tax administration. Software providers and tax preparers would struggle to keep up.

One of the issues holding back an AMT fix is that many on the other side insist that, unlike new spending proposals or extensions of existing spending programs, AMT reform should happen only if it is revenue neutral. That means any revenues not collected through reform or repeal of the AMT must be offset by new taxes from somewhere else.

Notice that I said “not collected” rather than “lost.” This distinction is important for the simple reason that the revenues we do not collect as a result of AMT relief are not truly lost. The AMT collects revenues it was never supposed to collect in the first place. If we offset revenues not collected as a result of AMT repeal or reform, total Federal revenues over the long term are projected to push through the 30-year historical average and then keep going.

Originally conceived as a mechanism to ensure that high-income taxpayers were not able to eliminate their tax liability completely, the AMT has failed. The AMT was originally created back in 1969, with just 155 taxpayers in mind—155—a mechanism to ensure that high-income taxpayers were not able to eliminate their tax liability completely. The AMT has failed completely. On the one hand, as IRS Commissioner Everson told the Finance Committee in 2004, the same percentage of taxpayers continues to pay no Federal income tax.

On the other hand, the AMT is projected to bring in future revenues it was never designed to collect. At least 31 million middle-class families are now in the AMT's crosshairs, and that was never meant to be. That is quite a change from 155 rich people who never paid any taxes. It should serve as a cautionary tale for those who believe today's tax increase proposals will remain limited to the so-called wealthy.

During the 2008 campaign, President Obama advocated for a permanent AMT patch. His budgets have maintained that position. While permanent repeal without offsetting the AMT is the best option, we absolutely must do something to protect taxpayers immediately, even if it involves a temporary solution, such as an increase in the exemption amount. Of course, if we do that, we are going to be in the same fix next year, and I will again be making the same points.

This coming Friday—June 15, 2012—taxpayers making quarterly payments are going to once again discover that the AMT is neither the subject of an

academic seminar nor a future problem we can put off dealing with. The AMT is a real problem right now. If this Congress was truly serious about tax fairness, it does need to stand and take action.

I would like to take a few moments to address another matter of importance.

A conference committee is currently meeting with the goal of producing a transportation bill. As I said at the public meeting that was held last month, ensuring that local communities have a strong voice in the transportation decisionmaking process is a priority of mine. There are many ways this can be achieved, but one particularly effective method is through the implementation of environmental streamlining.

Negotiations are still ongoing, so I do not want to go into too much detail. Yet environmental streamlining is something that will benefit my own home State of Utah and every other State that is currently forced to comply with redundant and oppressive red-tape when engaging in transportation projects with the Federal Government.

The highway trust fund, which funds many transportation programs, currently has more money coming out of it than is going into it. While there are many who want to deal with bloated and unfocused spending by raising taxes, I disagree. If revenues do not meet outlays, then we should not be punishing the American taxpayer; rather, we should be reevaluating spending priorities.

In addition to examining what Congress spends money on, we need to ensure that money being spent is spent efficiently. Currently, governments at the Federal, State and local level spend considerable resources complying with Federal regulations designed to protect the environment. Given that many of these regulations have accumulated over time, I am confident that we can scrape many of these barnacles off the ship of state without harming the environment.

Both the Senate and the House recognize the truth of what I am saying, and both bills currently in conference reflect this sentiment. Both contain provisions designed to streamline or simplify the environmental reviews with which transportation projects must comply. In particular, I am appreciative of the efforts shown by Chairman MICA of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee for his role in highlighting the importance of environmental streamlining within the conference committee.

Madam President, I inquire how much time I have remaining.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. There is no controlled time. The Senator has the time.

Mr. HATCH. I do not want to infringe on my colleagues. Let me just say this: I am appreciative of the efforts shown by Chairman MICA of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Com-

mittee for his role in highlighting the importance of environmental streamlining within the conference committee. I hope the rest of my fellow Senate conferees are carefully reviewing his suggested language. I know all of us want to do all we can to expedite project delivery times while minimizing redundant costs. Chairman MICA is clearly eager to engage on this topic.

President Obama has talked in the past about the importance of funding shovel-ready jobs. All we are asking is when there is a shovel-ready job to move forward without undue or unnecessary environmental reviews.

I close with an appeal rooted in my role as ranking member of the Finance Committee. The highway trust fund is currently on a path to insolvency, and the Senate bill does not change that. By working with our colleagues in the House we can make sure taxpayer money is not wasted on redundant and unnecessary compliance and regulation. Despite current policy being green in the environmental sense, it does not mean we have to sacrifice being green in a budgetary sense.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. COONS). The Senator from North Dakota.

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I come to the floor to discuss the amendment that is pending to kill the Sugar Program in the United States. My colleagues should know that the domestic sugar industry employs 140,000 people in this country. If there were ever a jobs-killer amendment, it is the amendment that is going to be offered to kill the U.S. Sugar Program.

In advancing that amendment, a series of claims have been made about the U.S. Sugar Program that I believe are false. First of all, it is said that the Sugar Program has a high cost for taxpayers. That is false. It is said that it keeps sugar prices artificially high. That is false. It is said that the Sugar Program drives the confectionary industry out of the United States. That is false. It is said that the Sugar Program impedes imports into the United States. That is false. It is also said that consumers will benefit from eliminating the Sugar Program. I believe that is false as well.

Let's take each of these arguments in turn. First is that it has a high taxpayer cost. Here is the cost, according to the Congressional Budget Office, of the Sugar Program for 2013 to 2022. The cost is zero. It is hard to get lower than zero. Maybe the square root of zero would be lower. But those who say there is a high cost to taxpayers are just wrong. It is false.

The second claim is that it keeps sugar prices artificially high—false again. This chart shows the average retail sugar price in major countries around the world. Here is the United States way down here, 59 cents. The global average is 67 cents. The developed country average is 73 cents. We

are below the global average, and we are below the average of developed countries. So the claim that it keeps sugar prices high is false again.

The third claim is that the Sugar Program drives the confectionary industry out of the United States. Wrong again. Here is what is happening to the U.S. chocolate and nonchocolate confectionery production in the United States since 2004. Do you see the trend line? It is up. More production not less production.

These are facts, and facts are stubborn things. Let's go to the fourth claim, that this Sugar Program impedes imports. This is maybe the biggest whopper of all. Here are the facts: The United States, in the period from 2008–2009 through 2010–2011, is the biggest importer of sugar in the world. So this program is impeding imports into the United States? If it is, it is not doing a very good job of it because the United States is No. 1 in imports of sugar in the world.

Before we get to the final assertion, let's look at what other countries, poor countries that produce sugar are saying to us about our Sugar Program. The argument made on the Senate floor is we are hurting poor countries with our Sugar Program. Maybe we ought to listen to what those poor countries say. Here is their organization, the International Sugar Trade Coalition, that represents sugar producers in 17 developing nations in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Central America, and South America. Here is what they say:

The U.S. sugar policy contained in the Farm Bill passed by the Senate Agriculture Committee is important to sugar producers in developing nations because it provides a guaranteed level of access to the United States sugar market at fair, predictable prices. Attempts to weaken this policy through amendments on the Senate floor would not only harm U.S. farmers but also poor growers from developing countries where sugar is a key economic driver.

These are the poor countries that produce sugar who are saying to us: Keep your Sugar Program because not only does it benefit you, but it benefits us.

Let me go further in their letter:

Ending the sugar program would reward only a handful of large food companies and agricultural superpowers like Brazil, while punishing some of the world's poorest economies.

It goes on to say:

This was what happened when the European Union radically altered its sugar policy, and thereby lowered standards of living in places like Guyana, Fiji and Mauritius where there is no agricultural alternative to sugarcane. Sadly, Saint Kitts and Nevis had to stop sugar production altogether after 300 years as a result of the EU's reforms.

Let's not make that same mistake.

Finally, on this notion that consumers are going to benefit by eliminating the Sugar Program—really? Let's look at the facts. The green line is the trendline on retail sugar prices. That trendline since 2010 is going up.

Here is what the wholesale price of sugar has been—flat. Do you see the disconnection? Wholesale prices flat, retail prices up. The fact is that sugar is such a small part of the cost of finished products that it has almost no bearing whatsoever on retail prices of a candy bar, the box of cereal, or any of the other things that sugar goes into.

The record is so clear on the facts that I urge my colleagues to oppose the amendment being offered to kill the U.S. Sugar Program, to kill 140,000 good jobs in this country, to kill \$19 billion of economic activity in this country. It would be a profound mistake not only for us but for the poor countries in the world that produce sugar, that are calling on us to keep our Sugar Program because not only is it important to U.S. farmers, it is important to their farmers as well.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the next 10 minutes be provided to Senator UDALL of Colorado and then 5 minutes for Senator GILLIBRAND of New York.

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

Mr. CONRAD. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Colorado.

Mr. UDALL of Colorado. I thank Senator CONRAD. He is always gracious and compelling, and I appreciate the strong case he made for his point of view.

I rise as I did yesterday, and I will continue to do so, to highlight why it is so important that we extend the production of the tax credits, or PTC as it is known, for wind energy. Senator BENNET from Colorado joins me, feeling the urgency of the moment. Members of both parties have agreed that the PTC is vital for continued economic growth in our country. Put simply, the PTC means good-paying American jobs. The longer we wait, the more American jobs we can expect to be lost in the coming months and weeks ahead.

When I go home, Coloradoans say to me it does not make any sense that we would not extend the production tax credit. So over the next couple of weeks I am going to come to the floor every day to talk about how the wind production tax credit affects each State across the country, to drive home the point that real American jobs will be lost if we do not take this commonsense step.

The PTC has meant economic growth in Colorado. We have a favorable business climate in Colorado, and we have tremendous wind resources. In fact, if we harness the wind potential that is there, similar to the wind potential that is off the shores of the State of the Presiding Officer, there is enough wind power to go way beyond our needs. In Colorado's case, 25 times over the State's electricity needs could be met if we harness and harvest that wind.

That is an amazing statistic. It is generated by the National Renewable Energy Lab, which we are happy to host in Colorado, a flagship of energy research, development, and innovation.

I hope I will not have to say too many days in the future what I said yesterday: The strong growth in the wind sector is at risk. Thousands of jobs, as you can see in this chart of Colorado, have been created across my State, all the way from Pueblo in the south central portion of the State, to Greeley, Fort Morgan up in the northeast, to Yuma County way out in the eastern part of the State.

These are quality jobs. These jobs support families and communities. I want to put a face on these families and these communities. I want to talk about Derek Palmer. He lives in Greeley, up here in the northeastern part of the State. He has three children and a wife. He graduated from the University of Northern Colorado in 2011 with a degree in business management, and he has worked at the Windsor manufacturing plant—it is a Vestas plant that manufactures wind blades—for the past 9 months. He left an excellent managerial job in the service industry and joined Vestas, in large part because of the strong benefits package that is there for his wife and kids. He loves working there. He is patriotic, and he is helping our country become energy independent. Because of our inaction, thousands of jobs like Derek's are in jeopardy. This industry deserves some certainty, some stability, and so do countless families like Derek's in Colorado and all over the country. So if we don't act, I fear dire consequences.

The CEO of Vestas—I think you have met him, Mr. President—says that he expects the wind market in the United States to fall by 80 percent if the PTC isn't extended. Eighty percent is a huge number. That is 80 percent fewer jobs, 80 percent fewer families pulling themselves out of this recession, and 80 percent less investment than we have today, all because we are not active, all because we are not taking the right steps for it.

As I close, this is not a partisan issue. Both Democrats and Republicans, Senators and House Members, agree that we need to extend this commonsense tax credit. There are bipartisan bills to extend it. I led an effort with six Democrats and six Republicans here earlier urging us to extend the PTC. The solution is simple. We just need to extend the PTC ASAP. We need to do it. Let's do it as soon as possible.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New York.

Mrs. GILLIBRAND. Mr. President, I would like to commend the chairwoman of the Agriculture Committee and the ranking member of that committee for their dedicated effort to move the farm bill to the floor to discuss our Nation's agricultural policy and for their leadership in championing so many issues that help America's and New York's farmers.

I rise today because I really want to make clear to the American people just what is at stake and at the heart of

this farm bill. It is about a growing economy for our family farms and for our small businesses. It is about reviving rural communities and rebuilding a thriving middle class and the opportunity for all of those who are trying to get there. It is about the health of our agricultural industry, the jobs it provides, and the health of our families whom it helps to feed. But from the amendments that are being filed today from across the aisle, you would not know it. There are some trying to use this bill to roll back protections for the air we breathe and for the water we drink. There are some who want to use this bill to expand concealed-carry laws for weapons. We are even seeing attempts to bring in the divisive politics from the Wisconsin recall and inject it right into the debate on the Senate floor on farm policy.

This bill has so much potential to create jobs, to help our farms thrive, to protect our farmers and small businesses from natural disasters, to feed our children, and to feed our at-risk seniors. But if we are ever going to reach that potential, we can't afford to get bogged down in these dead-end fights that are meant only to score political points.

Worse yet, there are Draconian cuts being proposed by some that will take even more money away from those who are the greatest in need. They want to take money away from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, better known as food stamps, which literally will result in children going to bed hungry in this country. These amendments simply do not meet the fundamental founding principles of this Nation or who we are as Americans. In this day and age, in this country, as rich as we are, to accept hungry children, hungry families, hungry seniors is unacceptable.

This farm bill started out with a \$4.5 billion cut to food stamps over 10 years. These cuts must be restored. While I fought against these cuts with 13 of my colleagues from both sides of the aisle, others are still actually advocating for additional, much more extreme cuts. They could even cut SNAP by almost half.

If you have heard from families living off of food stamps, as I have, you know this is something no one strives for. Most have never imagined that they would be on food stamps or that they would need that kind of support. But many have been dealt a very bad hand in this economy, and through no fault of their own they are finding they are in need. Food stamps are often the last resort for those who are just trying to keep the lights on, put food on the table for their kids, and find their way back to that paycheck they desperately want to be earning.

Among all the families relying on food stamps at historical rates, we are now seeing veterans and their families. I can tell you that our veterans and their families have already suffered a lot. For these troops who are coming

home, they are coming back into a very tough economy and are unable to find the jobs they need. And we have to imagine these children of our vets who have already suffered so much, and now they are being faced with not knowing from where their next meal will come.

For any parent watching this debate today, I just want to ask one question. Has your child ever said to you: Mommy, I am still hungry.

Well, I can't imagine what a mother would feel like if she could not hand her child some food. I can't imagine what a mother would feel like if her child said that to her every single night. That is exactly what we are talking about today in this farm bill. As a mother and legislator, watching children suffer, watching America's children not having enough to eat is something I will not stand quietly by and watch.

Under this bill, nearly 300,000 families in New York will become food insecure, and what that translates to is \$90 a month that they will have less money to put food on the table, and what that translates to is that it is the last week of the month. That \$90 pays the grocery bills every single week. What do these families do when they don't have enough money at the end of the month? Despite not being responsible for the economic crisis our country has faced, we will be asking these families to share a disproportionate amount of the burden being placed on them.

We know that food stamps are such a good investment into our economy. For every dollar we put into food stamps, we get \$1.71 back into the economy. Even one of the best economists, Mark Zandi, said: "The fastest way to infuse money into the economy is through expanding the SNAP/food stamps program." These food stamps pay salaries for grocery clerks and truckers who haul the food. The USDA estimates that 16 cents goes right back to the farmer.

I know my time is expiring, but I have 13 bipartisan cosponsors for this amendment, and the list keeps growing with the support from the AARP, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, and all of those who are fighting on the front line for hunger.

Our amendment will restore the SNAP funding back to the \$4.5 billion that has been cut, and it will pay for the food our kids so desperately need. Every child in America deserves to be fed. Every child in America deserves to reach their God-given potential. We need to restore these cuts to ensure that.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Pennsylvania.

Mr. TOOMEY. Mr. President, I rise to discuss a particular amendment—perhaps a couple of amendments—on the farm bill, specifically the amendments to the sugar portion. There are a number of titles, it is a big, complicated bill, and there is a great deal of discus-

sion about the many reforms that are contained in this bill.

There is one very glaring exception. There is one huge program that has no reforms whatsoever in the underlying bill, and it just so happens to be in, in my view, one of the most egregiously flawed programs in the entire agricultural sector, maybe in government as a whole, and it is the Sugar Program. This is a program which systematically forces American consumers to pay much more than the global price for sugar. It is a huge transfer of wealth from consumers, including the poorest American consumers, to a handful of wealthy sugar producers. It is completely wrong, it is ill-conceived in the first place, it is perpetuated in this bill, and I think that is just unconscionable.

Some of the specific ways in which the existing program has the government completely manipulating the market for sugar include explicit limits on how much sugar can be produced domestically. There is a de facto government-imposed price floor on sugar rather than allowing the price to reflect whatever supply and demand would lead to. It puts strict limits on how much sugar can be imported without forcing Americans to pay taxes on those imports in the form of duties. It mandates that the government purchase excess sugar and then sell it at a loss to ethanol producers. All of these are features of the existing sugar policy, and all of them are left completely unchanged by this bill. So it is screaming for some amendments to provide some commonsense reforms to this very badly flawed program.

Let me be very clear. At the end of the day, the net effect of all of these machinations in which the government manipulates the market for sugar is that U.S. consumers end up paying much more, often about double the going rate that everyone else in the world who doesn't manipulate their markets pays for sugar.

By the way, that should be reason enough to end this program entirely, but there are other reasons. For instance, the existing sugar policy—as I said, unchanged in this bill—is absolutely costing us jobs in the United States. That is not even disputable. It is, on balance, a job killer. It is costing us jobs today specifically in manufacturing—the manufacturing of products that include sugar, of which there are many.

Here is a simple observation from the CEO of a candy manufacturer in Pennsylvania who uses sugar as an import. He points out: These sugar subsidies artificially inflate the price of one of the staples of the candy industry and force us, and any other companies, to choose between absorbing the higher costs, passing the costs on to consumers, or producing elsewhere.

The fact is that some people inevitably choose to produce elsewhere.

The next chart illustrates a point that has been made by the U.S. Depart-

ment of Commerce. We are not just making these things up. Many U.S.—essentially sugar-consuming producers—manufacturers have already closed or relocated to Canada, where sugar prices are less than half of the United States. Why? Because Canada chooses not to have a ridiculous sugar program. So we lose jobs as manufacturers go to Canada, use market-priced sugar at much lower costs to produce candies, and then import them into the United States.

The next chart quantifies this. It is very simple. For every job that is protected somewhere where they are growing beets or cane sugar, three manufacturing jobs are lost. Again, these are statistics from the Department of Commerce. This is very clear. This is not really refutable.

The final chart illustrates this in another way. The Canadian Government has figured this out, and they advertise the fact that they have a huge competitive advantage because they choose not to create an artificially high price for sugar, and as a result they are constantly trying to persuade manufacturers to move up to Canada where they can have lower costs. By the way, for many of these companies, the cost of sugar in the United States is the single biggest cost they pay.

The other point that we should stress and that I would like to underline is that not only do we lose jobs systematically because of this program, it also hurts consumers. Think about it. Everybody consumes sugar. There is sugar in so many products that it is impossible to avoid this inflated cost. It should be seen as equivalent to a tax. It is as though the Federal Government is imposing a tax on sugar. It doesn't work literally that way, but it has that economic effect. It is completely equivalent. Who gets hit the hardest? It is the lowest income Americans. It is as regressive a tax as we can have. Think about that. Wealthy people devote a small percentage of their income to food. They have plenty of money to spend on other things. If you are a low-income American, then you necessarily are devoting a large part of your income to food, and so much of it is artificially inflated in cost by our own Federal Government. This is what is so egregious about it.

The GAO said in 2000 that the existing sugar policy forced Americans to pay \$2 billion in additional food costs. And if we use their same methodology and we move it ahead to today, AEI projects that those costs are now \$3.5 billion. This is a simple straightforward transfer of wealth from low- and middle-income and ordinary American consumers to a handful of wealthy producers. It is as simple as that.

There is one other feature. There is also an ongoing risk to taxpayers. Because of that feature I alluded to earlier in which the Federal Government buys what is deemed to be excess sugar and then sells it at a loss to ethanol makers, CBO projects this will lose \$193

million for taxpayers over the next decade.

We have an amendment that would address this, the Shaheen amendment. I think Senator SHAHEEN has actually offered more than one amendment on this topic, one would repeal the entire program. I salute her. I agree with her. I support that. My understanding is that we will soon be voting on a motion to table that amendment. I think it is quite unfortunate that Senator REID would choose to take this amendment off the table, so to speak, to put it aside. A vote to table the amendment is, of course, a vote to kill it. I think we ought to be passing this amendment and end the practice of forcing American consumers to transfer this wealth in this fashion.

But I wish to also stress that I am concerned about the process that has gotten us here. I am concerned that Senator REID has intentionally chosen an amendment that is going to be very difficult to pass. As strong as its merits are, from my point of view, I know it is difficult to get a majority in this body to support the full repeal of this program. I hope we can succeed in that, but I don't know that we can. If we cannot, Senator SHAHEEN has another amendment that I have joined her on which would push back some of the excesses of this program—push us back to where we were back in 2008, prior to the most recent farm bill. The amendment makes some modest changes and just scales back some of these excesses. I certainly hope we get a chance to vote on that. If we can't pass full repeal, we have every right—and I would argue every responsibility in this body—to try to at least improve on what is such an egregiously flawed program.

Again, I would underscore the fact that the current bill is silent; in other words, it perpetuates, it continues this spectacularly flawed program that is so unfair to American consumers. We will have an opportunity to vote later today on a motion to table. I hope we defeat the motion to table so we can take up this amendment and do away with this program. But failing that, it is very important that we have an opportunity to at least amend the program.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Hampshire.

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, I am pleased to join my colleague Senator TOOMEY to talk about what truly is an egregious oversight in the underlying farm bill we are considering.

This morning, the Senate is going to have the opportunity to vote on an amendment that would repeal the Sugar Program. As Senator TOOMEY has pointed out, I submitted several amendments. One would reform the Sugar Program. The one we are going to vote on this morning is the one to actually repeal the program. I, as does Senator TOOMEY, hope we will get a vote on both, but I certainly hope peo-

ple will vote against the tabling motion to repeal the Sugar Program.

The underlying farm bill we are considering reforms almost every farm program we have. Every farm group has had to sacrifice with this farm bill so we can reform these programs. Unfortunately, there is one glaring exception to these reforms; that is, the Sugar Program.

We need to reform the sugar subsidy because it costs consumers and businesses \$3.5 billion each year in the form of higher prices. That is almost double the world average. We can see on this chart—which shows sugar prices over the last 30 years since 1981. This is the world price for sugar, and that is the U.S. price. We can see demonstrated very graphically—no pun intended—that we in America are paying almost twice what the world price is for sugar. It also costs us about 20,000 jobs every year. We are doing all this—we are affecting consumers and hundreds of thousands of jobs—to benefit fewer than 5,000 sugar growers. To benefit those 5,000, all of us are paying more, and we have been paying more, as this chart clearly indicates, for the last 30 years.

How does the subsidy program work? Senator TOOMEY did a great job of explaining it, but it essentially manipulates the market. It controls how much sugar is grown in the United States. It restricts how much sugar comes into the United States from outside the country. It sets a floor on sugar prices by providing a government guarantee to sugar growers on what they are going to get paid, and it requires the government, in some cases—this is what is truly outrageous—it requires the government to buy sugar off the market and then sell it to ethanol plants at a loss to taxpayers. The proponents of this program say it doesn't cost us any money? What our amendment would do is phase out this outdated program over the course of a couple years.

I wish to respond to some of the claims we have heard from those who support this Sugar Program. The first is that it doesn't cost taxpayers any money. That is if we ignore the fact that consumers are paying out of one pocket; they may not be paying as taxpayers in taxes, but they are paying out of the other pocket as consumers. But, in fact, that is not even accurate when it comes to taxpayer dollars. A recent study by Iowa State University showed that the program costs \$3.5 billion a year to consumers in the form of higher prices, and the Congressional Budget Office estimates this program will cost taxpayers directly in the coming years. CBO has scored this amendment as saving millions of dollars for taxpayers in the next decade. So repealing the Sugar Program, according to CBO, will save millions for taxpayers in the next decade.

Those who support the Sugar Program also claim prices just aren't that high and that consumers actually ben-

efit from the sugar subsidy. That is absurd. We can see graphed out very clearly what consumers are paying. Consumer groups, such as the Consumer Federation and the National Consumers League, support our amendment because the sugar subsidy costs consumers and businesses \$3.5 billion a year.

Subsidy supporters cite a study which was paid for by the sugar industry to support their data. That is not accurate. Using data from USDA shows a very different story, because for wholesale prices which represent two-thirds of the sugar bought by businesses in the United States, the effect of the Sugar Program is obvious, and it is hard to argue with this drastic difference as displayed on the chart. What we have is a hidden tax that is designed to benefit a small powerful interest group. Again, studies have found that consumers are paying a cost to the tune of \$3.5 billion a year.

The supporters of the sugar subsidy also say this program doesn't get in the way of job creation. This is an argument that just doesn't hold up when we look at the facts. Multiple studies have found we are sacrificing hundreds and thousands of jobs by keeping sugar prices high. In 2006, the Department of Commerce found that for every job protected in the sugar industry, three were lost in manufacturing. A recent study from Iowa State University found that we are sacrificing 20,000 new jobs created every year due to the sugar subsidy program. So we are losing 20,000 jobs every year because of the sugar subsidy. There is no evidence sugar reform is going to hurt job creation; in fact, it is going to help. We have a small business in New Hampshire, a family-run business called Granite State Candy. They have been doing very well. They would like to expand, but because of the high cost of sugar they are having trouble thinking about how they are going to pay for that.

There is nothing more definitive than the illustration Senator TOOMEY showed earlier today and that I showed yesterday on the floor which is from a Canadian brochure designed to attract businesses in the confectionery industry to come to Canada. It points out how much less they are going to pay. Here it is. It points out how much less businesses are going to pay for sugar in Canada and how much more beneficial it would be for companies to do business in Canada rather than the United States. It says very clearly:

Consider these hard facts: Sugar refiners import the vast majority of their raw materials at world prices. Canadian sugar users enjoy a significant advantage. The average price of refined sugar is usually 30 to 40 percent lower in Canada than in the United States. Most manufactured products containing sugar are freely traded in the NAFTA region.

If one needs any other evidence, that is it. It is clear we are losing those jobs.

I strongly urge my colleagues to vote against tabling this amendment today.

This may be our only chance to reform the Sugar Program in this farm bill. Tabling this amendment would be a vote to support special interests, those fewer than 5,000 sugar growers, at the expense of over 600,000 employees in the food industry and millions of consumers.

Thank you very much. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. LAUTENBERG. Mr. President, I rise to speak against the Paul amendment No. 2182, which would cripple the food stamp program. I have to tell my colleagues that there is an aura of wonderment around here that says: Look, let's cut food stamps for hungry families and for little children. We have the agri companies to take care of, the agribusinesses, to make sure they can feed their children.

The most fundamental test for any family is to put food on the table—to make sure their children get the nutrition they need. When tough economic times hit, families can find themselves struggling to meet their most basic needs. The food stamp program was created so that even in the toughest of times, children in this country do not go to bed hungry.

Here is a picture of a child reaching out for food—the old story about models on cereal programs, talking about satisfying the brother's hunger with the old remarkable display of what it is that comes to the fundamentals and taking care or letting families who need help get some, especially in this area.

It is appalling that our Republican colleague from Kentucky has proposed an amendment to cut more than \$300 billion from a program that is a lifeline for many families. These harsh cuts would punish families who need help the most. We are debating a bill that contains billions in support for big agricultural companies, but instead of targeting the subsidies they get from the Federal Government—from the taxpayers—Republicans say we ought to cut programs for hungry children. I wonder if those who want to cut the food stamp program would participate in a real way and say to their little children, say to their family: Look, just to show we are serious, just to show we care, we will limit the amount of food we are going to give our children, the amount of food we are going to give the elders in our household, to show we are serious about this.

Hungry children didn't cause the recession or the deficit. Cutting food stamps will not solve our debt problem. But hungry children don't have lobbyists, so programs such as food stamps end up on the Republican chopping block—heroic, muscular men and women who say: We want to make our country fiscally sound, so let's take the food stamps away from people who could be starving.

The Paul amendment would cut support for food stamps by almost 45 per-

cent next year alone. The consequences could be devastating. The consequences would be devastating.

The numbers are staggering: More than 46 million Americans, including 800,000 people from my State of New Jersey—we are a State that has about 9 million people—are dependent on food stamps to make it through the month. Half of them are children.

When you look at this placard, can you imagine telling a mother that she has to tell her kids they have to do more with less food so maybe other businesses—agribusinesses—can continue to get subsidies?

Republicans should have to tell these families: We are not going to cut corporate subsidies. No, no; we have to do that. We have to make sure the rich will not pay more in taxes. So please understand, as we take food off their tables, we say to our kids: Eat less, get thinner, get trimmer. Stop doing your homework because you are too tired or stop complaining because you do not feel well when the food quantity is not sufficient.

On average the Food Stamp Program provides assistance of just \$1.50 per meal—a buck and a half. There is not much there to cut. The Republicans who are so eager to cut food stamps from children should try living on \$1.50 per meal for the next month. Let them then report how it feels, how their kids survived with less food than they need. Then we will see how eager they are to cut the food stamps.

The Republican approach would hurt those with the least to protect those with the most. That is not what this country is about. Too many of America's families are still struggling. Too many parents are still looking for work. Too many of our children are still hungry. The food banks across the country are getting evermore attention and visits.

Republicans should offer them help, show some heart. This is not an accounting organization. We are not here to just balance the books. Yes, we have to balance the books. I come from business, and I know what they have to do. But that means we would not be servicing our democratic structures, the people in our society who need help. Republicans should offer them help. Instead, they offer them deeper poverty and greater hunger.

The bottom line is this: At a time when 50 percent of food stamp recipients are children, it would be a moral stain on our country's character to cut this program. That is not what America is about, and that is not why any of us serve.

The children who would be harmed by reckless cuts cannot speak for themselves. But we should not need to hear their crying voices to know what is right. I urge my colleagues to listen to their consciences and defeat the Paul amendment.

I conclude by saying how disappointing it is to see a \$4 billion reduction to the Food Stamp Program in

the farm bill. I am proud to join Senator GILLIBRAND in offering an amendment to reverse these cuts. We are going to try to make that happen.

With that, Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

AMENDMENT NO. 2393

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, I rise today in opposition to an amendment that would eliminate the Sugar Program, and I urge my colleagues to table it at this time.

As we continue our work on the farm bill, as we debate these amendments, I think my colleagues should keep in mind at every moment that this proposal contains \$23 billion in cuts that we have brought together on a bipartisan basis, and two-thirds of those cuts—\$16 billion—is on only 14 percent of the bill; that is, the farm programs. Two-thirds of the cuts: \$16 billion on the farm program.

This bill is supported by 630 conservation groups, nutrition groups—a number of them. Obviously, they would like to see changes. People want to make things better. But if we do not get this bill done, you can imagine what is going to happen to school hot lunches and the like.

Unfortunately, eliminating the Sugar Program would actually hurt jobs in America. I know Senator CONRAD was here earlier putting the facts out, but people need to know the facts. This is a zero-cost program that supports 142,000 jobs and generates nearly \$20 billion in economic activity. This is the kind of value we are looking for.

I believe we need to be doing everything we can to maintain programs that are working for our farmers in an efficient way—programs that are supporting jobs and putting dollars into our economy, especially those programs that do not cost money.

Most of us can appreciate the value of a strong farm safety net. During our discussions in the Agriculture Committee, I worked with Chairwoman STABENOW and other members of the committee to make sure the bill provided for that safety net so the livelihoods of our farmers cannot be swept away in the blink of an eye by natural disasters and market failures and because, you know what, we as a country do not want to be dependent on foreign food like we are dependent on foreign oil.

The Sugar Program has played its own key role in shielding farmers from risk—albeit it is a different and more predictable kind of risk they face. I am talking about the risk of competing against heavily subsidized sugar from foreign countries.

Let's put it this way: If you do not like being dependent on foreign oil, you are not going to love being dependent on foreign sugar. Past U.S. trade agreements have already opened our domestic market to foreign sugar. Over the last 3 years, the United States, on average, has been the world's largest

sugar importer, supplying nearly one-third of our total sugar needs.

Since 1985 we have had 54 sugar factories close due to sustained low prices. Once these jobs are gone, they are gone forever. This is why we need to continue the Sugar Program in the 2012 farm bill—one that supports American sugar beet and sugar cane producers while ensuring an abundant supply of sugar for consumers and manufacturers.

We must continue this program. Look at what has happened. The average global retail price for sugar is 14 percent higher than it is in the United States. In other developed countries, the average price is 24 percent higher than it is in the United States.

Some people have blamed farmers for the high cost of sugar foods in the grocery store. But look at the numbers. For example, a \$1 candy bar has about 2 cents' worth of sugar in it. A \$3.50 carton of ice cream has about 10 cents' worth of sugar. So ending the Sugar Program is not the solution that will keep food prices competitive. It is the opposite.

This is an important program for our country. If changes are to be made to it, the answer should not be to eliminate it. That is why I ask my colleagues to join me in tabling this amendment as we work together in the future to make sure we preserve American jobs.

The sugar industry supplies American jobs. Just ask the people in the Red River Valley in Minnesota and North Dakota.

Thank you very much, Mr. President. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, I thank my colleague from Minnesota for her comments. This is an amendment that has come up on a regular basis—always started from New Hampshire, always defeated by the Senate.

I encourage my colleagues to table Reid amendment No. 2393. This measure is known as Senator SHAHEEN's amendment to phase out the Federal Sugar Program.

First, I would like to commend Chairwoman STABENOW and Ranking Member ROBERTS for their work on the underlying bill. They proved that the Agriculture Committee is able to take a serious look at the farm bill programs and improve what is working while cutting what is not.

The Sugar Program is an excellent example of what works in the farm bill. Since its early years, the Sugar Program has evolved to ensure that beet and cane growers can continue to provide the United States with a safe and reliable source of sugar products. I underscore "reliable" because sugar is a unique commodity. Not only are sugar crops extremely limited in their seasons, but an added component is that both sugar beets and cane must be processed immediately after harvest. Processing involves what is essentially a refinery.

In Wyoming we have three facilities that process sugar, all of which are grower owned and operated. People can always tell its October back home when the large piles of sugar beets begin to appear outside the sugar plants. Workers race to produce raw sugar before the beets go bad. Any number of complications can spoil the crop and put the sugar refineries out of business.

Such unique conditions produce risk that is not common with other agricultural commodities. Because much of the year's sugar is produced in such a small window, a sugar program is needed to stabilize the price of sugar through the entire year. This policy benefits the very people who opponents of the Sugar Program wish to protect.

With stability in the sugar markets confectioners, food manufacturers, and beverage makers have a steady supply of quality sugar without wild price swings. Not only are U.S. sugar prices stable under the program, but the United States offers sugar users some of the lowest prices in the developed world.

I also wish to add that the U.S. Sugar Program works to ensure that other nations have access to sugar markets. Some claim the U.S. Sugar Program is a protectionist policy. This could not be more false. Mr. President, 17 of the largest sugar exporting countries in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Central America, and South America have all expressed support for the U.S. Sugar Program.

As a matter of fact, the United States is the second largest net importer of sugar behind only Russia. The program is operated to ensure that we fulfill our trade obligations, especially within the WTO, and continues to provide a sugar market for developing nations wishing to export their product.

Finally, the U.S. Sugar Program has been run for the past 10 years at zero cost to the U.S. taxpayers, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture predicts it will remain that way in its current form for at least 10 more. As other colleagues have mentioned, this is all while the U.S. sugar industry has helped to generate nearly \$20 billion in annual economic activity in our country.

Wyoming offers just a few examples of how much of an economic impact the sugar industry has on rural communities across our Nation. As I mentioned, the growers and local communities in my State own the plants that refine the raw sugar we use every day. Those plants produce jobs and keep economic activity local. With all the inherent risks in sugar production, these communities are able to continue providing the United States with a safe and reliable supply of sugar for the United States.

The U.S. sugar policy not only helps growers but keeps prices low for consumers. Some American food manufacturers will claim that it is the price of sugar causing them to shed jobs or

move overseas. However, sugar represents only a small portion of the input costs that go into food production. Instead, it is the cost of labor, environmental standards, and regulatory burdens that play the biggest role in whether U.S. firms can compete with food markets overseas. In recent years, U.S. candy production has actually gone up, and the U.S. Sugar Program has played its role by keeping prices stable.

With that, I ask my colleagues to table amendment No. 2393 and keep the programs that work in this farm bill.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Idaho.

Mr. CRAPO. Mr. President, I rise today to support and underscore the points just made by Senator ENZI in support of the U.S. Sugar Program, which, as he indicated, has operated successfully at no cost to the American taxpayers, consumers, or food manufacturers.

As you know, the sugar beet industry is very important to my State of Idaho, bringing in approximately \$1.1 billion in revenue every year. History has shown that grocers and food manufacturers do not pass their savings from lower ingredient prices along to consumers.

For example, from the summer of 2010 until now, producer prices for sugar have dropped nearly 20 percent. In fact, the U.S. Sugar Program remains crucial because other nations are implementing trade-distorting subsidies for their otherwise uncompetitive sugar industries. The world sugar price, as is so often debated in these Halls, suffers from government-backed dumping that protects sugar producers overseas to the detriment of American sugar producers—hence, the need for the U.S. Sugar Program.

Consumers in the rest of the world pay, on average, 14 percent more for sugar—in the developed world, 24 percent more—than American consumers pay. In America, sugar is a readily available and affordable product.

Critics of U.S. sugar policy make the argument that the program causes disastrous shortages in U.S. sugar supply, which flies in the face of reality. U.S. farmers and producers have proven themselves, time and again, to be the most efficient in the world, but they cannot be left alone to face a trade market undermined by foreign government manipulation.

Nothing could be further from the truth, and the latest numbers released by the U.S. Department of Agriculture underline that. The USDA now estimates that there is enough sugar surplus to give every man, woman, and child in this country nearly 12 pounds of sugar on top of what they already consume. This is enough surplus sugar to fill the Capitol Dome 55 times.

I strongly encourage my colleagues to oppose any attempts at repealing this program. At risk would be 142,000 American jobs generated by the U.S.

sugar-producing industry. Many of these jobs would be lost to subsidized foreign producers who are generally less efficient and less reliable and produce sugar far less safely and responsibly than American sugar producers.

I support Idaho's sugar beet growers as well as sugar growers throughout the country. I am committed to ensuring that they have access to the tools they need to produce an affordable and abundant sugar supply.

The bottom line is not only is this program not a cost to the U.S. taxpayer, it generates revenue to help us reduce our deficit. These are the kinds of programs we need to protect American producers.

I encourage all of my colleagues to oppose the Shaheen amendment.

Mr. INOUE. Mr. President, I oppose the amendment offered by Senator SHAHEEN and others which would phase out the Federal Sugar Program. I would like to share some of my personal history with my colleagues. My grandfather and grandmother emigrated from Japan to work at McBryde Sugar Company on the island of Kauai in 1899. In my office here in Washington, I have a framed copy of the contract on which my grandfather, Asakichi Inouye, placed his "X." The contract includes a photograph of this brave young man and his wife and a little baby boy they are holding, my father.

Nearly a century later, Asakichi Inouye's grandson is proud to be representing the State of Hawaii in the United States Senate. With exception of one, all of Hawaii's sugar plantations are now closed. The Hawaiian Commercial and Sugar Company, HC&S, remains operational on the island of Maui and employs nearly 800 employees. HC&S is Hawaii's largest provider of raw sugar, producing approximately 200,000 tons each year. In addition to the growing and milling of sugarcane, HC&S produces raw sugar, specialty sugar, molasses, and the generation and sale of electricity to help provide power across the island.

I am proud to represent the men and women in Hawaii who still work directly or indirectly for the sugar industry, and their families. These agricultural workers, who are among the world's most productive, have enjoyed collective bargaining for decades and are rewarded for their productivity with good wages, with some of the best health care benefits in the country, and with generous benefits for insurance and retirement. Their safety and their health are bolstered by some of the strictest worker protection rules and highest environmental standards in the Nation, and possibly in the world.

These workers, many of whose families have been in sugar for three or four generations, lead comfortable, but by no means extravagant lives. They can put their children through college and can look forward to a decent retire-

ment, but they are far from wealthy in the monetary sense.

The U.S. sugar policy has ensured American consumers with dependable supplies of reasonably priced sugar, adhering to U.S. standards for food safety and quality. Consumers in other developed countries pay on average 24 percent more for their sugar than American consumers. The U.S. Sugar Program provides no subsidies to American sugar producers. For the past 10 years, the policy has operated at zero cost to taxpayers, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture predicts it will remain at zero cost for the next 10 years, to 2022. In the absence of a U.S. sugar policy, it would eliminate or severely damage the no-taxpayer-cost U.S. sugar policy, and, among other things, shift American jobs overseas. Hawaii's existing sugar producer could potentially close, forcing my constituents to lose their livelihood.

If the U.S. sugar policy were eliminated, our U.S. market would be flooded with subsidized sugar from the world dump market that is less reliable and less safe. The U.S. market would collapse, and efficient American sugar farmers would be driven out of business. Job and incomes losses would devastate rural economies where sugar is grown and harm urban economies where sugar is processed.

Further, if the U.S. sugar policy were eliminated Americans would have to cope with less reliable, less safe, more costly, foreign sugar. American consumers demand consistent quantity and quality. In other words, when consumers go to the grocery store to purchase sugar, they expect a high-quality product that is safe and contaminant free and identical with every purchase. They also expect to find such products on the shelf whenever they want to buy them. This is exactly what the American consumer gets from the U.S. sugar industry—so much so that we take it for granted. Further, in many of these countries, producers operate with labor, environmental, and food safety standards or enforcement that is much less than what American producers routinely meet. Accordingly, I urge my colleagues to table Shaheen amendment.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I now withdraw my motion to proceed to S. 1940.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The motion is withdrawn.

AGRICULTURE REFORM, FOOD, AND JOBS ACT OF 2012

Mr. REID. Mr. President, it is my understanding that we are now on S. 3240,

and the motion to recommit with a second-degree amendment numbered 2339 is now pending. Is that right?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator is correct.

The clerk will report the bill by title.

The bill clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 3240) to reauthorize agricultural programs through 2017, and for other purposes.

Pending:

Reid (for Stabenow/Roberts) amendment No. 2389, of a perfecting nature.

Reid amendment No. 2390 (to amendment No. 2389), to change the enactment date.

Reid motion to recommit the bill to the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry, with instructions.

Reid amendment No. 2391, of a perfecting nature.

Reid amendment No. 2392 (to (the instructions) amendment No. 2391), to empower States with programmatic flexibility and predictability to administer a supplemental nutrition assistance block grant program under which, at the request of a State agency, eligible households within the State may receive an adequate, or more nutritious, diet.

Reid amendment No. 2393 (to amendment No. 2392), to phase out the Federal Sugar Program.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I move to table amendment No. 2393. I ask for the yeas and nays on that motion to table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There is a sufficient second.

The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Missouri (Mrs. McCASKILL), the Senator from West Virginia (Mr. ROCKEFELLER), and the Senator from Virginia (Mr. WARNER) are necessarily absent.

Mr. KYL. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Illinois (Mr. KIRK).

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 50, nays 46, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 119 Leg.]

YEAS—50

Akaka	Gillibrand	Nelson (NE)
Barrasso	Harkin	Nelson (FL)
Baucus	Hoeven	Pryor
Begich	Inouye	Reid
Bennet	Isakson	Risch
Bingaman	Johanns	Roberts
Blunt	Johnson (SD)	Rubio
Boxer	Kerry	Sanders
Cantwell	Klobuchar	Schumer
Cardin	Landrieu	Stabenow
Chambliss	Leahy	Tester
Cochran	Levin	Thune
Conrad	Lieberman	Udall (CO)
Crapo	Menendez	Udall (NM)
Enzi	Mikulski	Vitter
Feinstein	Moran	Wicker
Franken	Murray	

NAYS—46

Alexander	Carper	Cornyn
Ayotte	Casey	DeMint
Blumenthal	Coats	Durbin
Boozman	Coburn	Graham
Brown (MA)	Collins	Grassley
Brown (OH)	Coons	Hagan
Burr	Corker	Hatch