

Here is the deal, and I will close. Senator REID was exactly right. If we don't do this bill, our entire transportation program expires at the end of March. That is 1.8 million jobs directly impacted by this bill. In the bipartisan bill we have worked out, we not only protect those jobs, but we create up to 1 million new jobs because we have added a very important piece, the TIFIA piece. So we have made that a major program which has cost very little because the way money is leveraged, it will leverage local funds, State funds, private funds. That means we could see up to 1 million new jobs.

As we leave here today, the good news is that we have made sure that millions of working Americans will be able to count on the payroll tax cut. That is good. We make sure that so many of our unemployed workers can know they will continue to receive unemployment and that our senior citizens know their doctors will not run away from them when they come in with their Medicare card. We have done a good thing on that.

There are things in that bill I don't like. Certainly it was a compromise. We met each other halfway. In the highway bill, we have done that as well. So I am ever so grateful to the leadership in the Senate because they could easily have said: Well, we had a cloture vote, and it went down. Let's forget the bill.

But we are all working together. We knew we had to take this step to get to the next step. So we are at that step. We will come back, and we will begin in earnest to dispose of amendments. I hope we will have a list from the staff of maybe 15, 20 amendments that are not controversial that we can move forward on and then get to some of the difficult issues.

In closing, I urge my colleagues on both side of the aisle—why do we need to have a birth control amendment on a highway bill? Why do we have to have foreign relations amendments? I serve on that committee, Foreign Relations, and I am proud of it, but we shouldn't be bringing controversial, unrelated amendments to the highway bill because 2.8 million jobs are hanging in the balance.

But I leave here with great optimism. A couple of days ago I said I didn't see a path forward for the highway bill and the transit bill. Today I see a very clear path forward. If we all continue to work together, we are going to be proud and we are going to make everyone, from the Chamber of Commerce to the AFL CIO and every group in between that has joined in a coalition of 1,000 organizations—they are going to be happy, and, most of all, the American people will be happy, because we have to fix those bridges and those highways, and we have to make sure our people have alternatives so they can get into transit.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Hawaii.

PAYROLL TAX CONFERENCE REPORT

Mr. AKAKA. Mr. President, I reluctantly supported the conference agreement because it is absolutely essential that we extend the payroll tax holiday and unemployment insurance benefits. The stakes are too high to do otherwise for our economic recovery and for millions of Americans struggling to make ends meet. We cannot abandon them or reverse progress during this difficult time.

However, I strongly oppose the decision to pick the pockets of Federal workers yet again just to offset the cost of 10 months of unemployment insurance benefits. I am not opposed to offsetting the costs, but I believe shared sacrifice is essential and a simple matter of fairness and decency. Unfortunately, once again, rather than asking millionaires and billionaires to pay their fair share of taxes, some of my colleagues insisted on taxing America's dedicated middle-class public servants.

Future Federal employees will be required to pay an additional 2.3 percent of their income toward their pensions. That means most employees will pay a total of 3.1 percent of their salaries, and that is in addition to the 6.2 percent they pay for Social Security retirement benefits. This agreement effectively lowers the Federal pay scale by 2.3 percent going forward, and this comes after Federal wages already have been frozen for 2 years. Under this agreement, future congressional employees—all of our staffs, who often work long hours for us and are underpaid—will pay more toward their pensions at the same time as we cut their pension benefits by more than one-third. These are permanent changes made to fund just 10 months of unemployment benefits—not a good investment in our Nation's future.

Some of my colleagues would have you believe that Federal employees are overpaid, and that simply is not true. In many critical fields, the Federal Government struggles to compete with the private sector to recruit and retain the skilled people our Nation needs: experts in cyber security and intelligence analysis, doctors and nurses to care for our wounded warriors, accountants who protect taxpayers during billion-dollar defense acquisitions. These are just a few examples. Federal employees handle incredibly complex work. On paper, an analyst might compare the salary of a nuclear submarine mechanic to a car mechanic. We all depend on the important work car mechanics do, but clearly we used to recruit the most sought-after mechanics possible to be our nuclear sub mechanics, and we need to pay them enough to retain them. As the income gap in this country widens and so many hard-working Americans face increasing economic insecurity, I am proud that the Federal Government still pays most employees a living wage.

Many private sector employers are scaling back or eliminating pensions.

Just this week, General Motors announced plans to suspend pension benefits for nearly 20,000 employees who have been with the company for more than 10 years. Long term, this unfortunate trend will rob millions of Americans who have worked hard all their lives of the security retirement they earned and deserve. This trend, tragically, is bound to increase poverty among senior citizens in the coming years.

Some of my colleagues want to follow the private sector and eliminate or dramatically reduce the Federal pension.

Today, this conference agreement will, unfortunately, take the first step in that direction. But I call on my colleagues to prevent the Federal Government from joining this race to the bottom. I fear this shortsighted attack on Federal workers will repeat itself. Every time we need an offset to fund anything, I expect there will be another proposal to cut Federal pay, pensions or other benefits. We must stop and help to protect our Federal workers.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Massachusetts.

NOAA

Mr. BROWN of Massachusetts. Mr. President, I appreciate the comments of the Senator before me. I wish to rise to inform colleagues and the public of some highly disturbing information that I have just learned about a broken agency within our Federal Government, something actually that Senator CARPER and I have been working on. I know he will have great interest in this issue. I am talking about the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, NOAA.

We all know Washington does not spend our money wisely, the money they collect from individual citizens. They do not spend it wisely. But sometimes it is worth highlighting examples of the corruption and waste that is actually taking place in the Federal Government.

Yesterday morning, I contacted the Commerce Department inspector general to request a copy of their report on NOAA's purchase of a \$300,000 luxury boat. It would be bad enough if they purchased this boat with taxpayer dollars, but they did not. They paid for it with money that should belong to our struggling fishermen. They paid for it out of fines fisherman pay into the pot when they mistakenly catch the wrong kinds of fish. Those dollars are supposed to stay in the fishing community to help the fishermen.

I would like to point out—this is the boat. This is a photo of the actual boat that was purchased. For a government vessel, I would say that is pretty flashy. Let's take a look inside this boat. This is a fully appointed bar, the latest onboard entertainment systems, the leather furniture complete with the

ice check and tackle rack. I think anyone would love to have a boat such as this. NOAA has this boat.

Furthermore, the fines fishermen have been paying are putting fishermen out of business. These stories will break your heart. This story breaks my heart. It is something I speak about regularly when I am with my fishermen in Massachusetts. Let me describe the situation to people who are listening in the gallery and also people who are watching.

NOAA levied totally unreasonable fines against our fishermen. They used that money to buy themselves a luxury boat.

What else did the IG investigation find? Here we go:

According to the IG, NOAA had no reasonable official use for this boat. Let's start there. They didn't need it. Period. They had some story about needing an "undercover vessel" to sneak up on whalewatching vessels. Imagine that—armed Federal agents sneaking up on school groups and tourists trying to learn about nature. The IG found this to be as ridiculous. NOAA officials wanted this useless luxury boat. Then they invented a reason to buy it with fishermen's hard-earned dollars.

So why did NOAA go to such lengths to "manipulate" and "violate" the government purchasing rules to get this boat? NOAA already has many boats and more cars than it has agents, so why add this to the inventory? They apparently didn't need it for official purposes. We know that because the IG says that it was never—I repeat—never—used for official business.

The sad truth is that it was a fishermen-funded party boat for bureaucrats, Mr. President. That's right, while fishermen in Gloucester and New Bedford are struggling to put off foreclosure or mourning the loss of their livelihood because of NOAA's overzealous enforcement, the NOAA office was living the good life on their dime.

NOAA officials used the boat for the following: Trips to dockside restaurants; Hamburger and hotdog BBQs and alcohol-fueled parties and with family and friends; "Pleasure cruises" at high rates of speed, with beer consumed on-board; Even though Federal rules ban non-employees from being on vessels, a NOAA supervisor even told a subordinate that his wife was welcome to "kick back and watch TV" on the boat; They filed expense reports and reimbursed themselves for these trips.

What excuse did NOAA employees give for this behavior? They needed to do all these things to maintain the recreational appearance of this "undercover" boat . . . that was never even used for the "undercover" work that it was supposedly purchased for.

Mr. President, let's be serious: A booze cruise is a booze cruise. One NOAA officer decided to take his family on a weekend trip to a posh resort. He took the undercover NOAA party boat to get there, but he was untrained

in how to operate it and blew out a \$30,000 engine. Rather than turn back and write the taxpayers a check, he simply abandoned it and took a marked NOAA law enforcement boat the rest of the way to their resort. Nothing could get between this NOAA employee and a good time. When asked about that incident, the NOAA employee lied to the IG and said there was no family on board. That was just one of many instances of NOAA employees deliberately misleading the IG.

Another NOAA officer used the undercover NOAA boat to take his wife to lunch in Seattle. On this trip, the boat engines stalled in a shipping lane because the boat ran out of fuel due to another operator error. The guy didn't know how to switch the tanks. So they were stuck drifting in a dangerous shipping lane. The officer and his wife apparently found the situation comical. I don't think that the fishermen in New Bedford or Gloucester or Fall River are laughing. Again, the money that belonged to our hard-working fishermen is paying for all this. I cannot fathom that type of behavior, especially in this tough time when we are all in a fiscal emergency.

To this day, no one has been held accountable. No one has been disciplined, fired or even reprimanded for anything having to do with this boat.

As we see today, NOAA has a culture of corruption that has created a chasm of distrust between the agency and the fishing industry. That trust is something that absolutely needs to be reestablished.

I would like to take 1 more minute. My question is addressed to the President—not the Presiding Officer, the real President, President Obama, and to Dr. Lubchenco. What does it take to get fired from NOAA? We have the abusive treatment of fishermen resulting in the decimation of the fleet; investigations motivated by money, shredding parties destroying 75 to 80 percent of the required documents before an investigation, lying to the IG, discouraging cooperation with the IG, misleading Members of the Congress, the \$300,000 party boat purchases, \$12,000 in party boat expenses paid with fishermen's fines, a \$30,000 engine destroyed by a NOAA employee on his weekend vacation and no one is held accountable.

This needs to change. Accountability starts at the top. NOAA's leadership needs to change. I am calling one more time to have President Obama fire NOAA Administrator Jane Lubchenco, and if not now, when? If for not this, then for what? What does it take to get fired at NOAA? Our fishermen and the American taxpayers deserve better from the Federal Government.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Virginia.

FEDERAL EMPLOYEES

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I thank my colleagues on the other side of the

aisle. I know we have been switching back and forth. As someone who has the opportunity to preside more often than not on these kind of days, I know they are anxious to speak as well. I will only take a couple moments. I appreciate their courtesy.

A little earlier today we passed a conference report that extended the payroll tax cut. While I am glad the payroll tax cut was extended, I voted against that conference report because, unfortunately, we did not pay for that tax cut. I believe we could have found ways to pay for it—a surcharge on millionaires, tying this to a means test so it could have been more coordinated. But also in that action for those parts of the legislation that we passed that we did pay for, things such as unemployment benefits, we once again targeted a group that I think for too many in Congress becomes the payer of first resort, not payer of last resort; that is, our Federal employees.

Over the last year and a half or so, I have continued a tradition that was started by a colleague, Senator Ted Kaufman from Delaware, where on an occasional basis I come down and recognize the service of Federal employees who, too often, again as we have seen in recent debates, receive the brunt of lots of comments when in reality they are good folks who keep the operations of our Government working, who patrol our streets, catch the terrorists, and in some cases just recently I recognized a Federal employee who actually helps keep the Senate operating on a regular basis.

As we think about how we get our debt and deficit under control and pay for the programs that we will continue to initiate, we need to make sure we have a shared burden approach, where we look both to programs that have outlived their usefulness and the revenue side. Yes, I know Federal employees will make their contribution as well, but as we have seen from their pay freeze, from the threat of repeated furloughs over the last year and a half, and now adding to their pension contribution for new Federal employees, that burden is not always shared with all.

TRIBUTE TO JOSEPH LAWRENCE

I am continuing the tradition of recognizing great Federal employees.

Mr. President, today I am pleased to honor a recently retired great federal employee, Joseph Lawrence. He most recently served as the director of transition in the Office of Naval Research within the Department of Defense.

During his time there, he oversaw a \$1 billion research and development portfolio responsible for developing science and technology solutions to problems discovered during war game exercises conducted by the Marine Corps and the Navy.

For example, Mr. Lawrence oversaw the development and delivery of a new type of dressing that can be applied to a battlefield wound to prevent bleeding during transportation to a hospital.