

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.

This innovation is now found in every Marine's individual first aid kit, as well as products used by U.S. Armed Forces and law enforcement agencies.

Other innovations include a system that protects tactical wheeled vehicles against rocket-propelled grenade and a crane that better transfers containers between ships.

In December 2011, Mr. Lawrence retired after 45 year of service, which began at the U.S. Naval Research lab while he was in college. He has played an important role in the protection of our country and the well-being of our troops.

Dedicated civil servants such as Mr. Lawrence are the lifeblood of the federal government. I admire their patriotism which drives them in their daily work. Too often, their service to the success of the United States does not receive the proper recognition it deserves.

This has been recently exemplified in the systemic problems associated with processing necessary paperwork prior to the disbursement of retirement benefits to all federal employees. Earlier this month, the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee investigated problems within the Office of Personnel Management surrounding the processing of retirement and survivor benefits. Too many of our recently retired federal employees—the current estimate is more than 62,000 people—are waiting for more than year to receive earned retirement benefits.

We are not holding up our end of the bargain with people who commit to public service to their country. To make matters worse, this is not the first time the Congress and OPM recognized the current processing system is broken. I am committed to helping resolve the issue with the current OPM system. But, frankly, the current OPM system, which doesn't have very good technology—when they have invested in technology resources, they have actually come up with goose eggs—is now currently processing these retirement requests with old-fashioned paper and pencil. It makes no sense.

As a matter of fact, there are a number of agencies—the Department of State and others—as they send over the retirement information on an employee to OPM, over 50 percent of the information they send over in terms of the case is not complete. So not only is this a problem at OPM, but this is a problem in terms of OPM being able to enforce the other 88 Federal agencies actually doing their job.

I believe we need to tackle and fix this problem to ensure that retired Federal employees, such as Mr. Lawrence, who have faithfully served this great Nation, are able to enter retirement and receive that for which they worked so hard.

I hope my colleagues will join me in honoring Mr. Lawrence for the excellent work he has done, and I hope they will join me in making sure that when

Federal employees retire, they get their retirement benefits in a timely and efficient manner.

I yield the floor and thank my colleagues for their courtesy.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to enter into a colloquy with the Senator from Kansas for as much time as we may consume.

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

CHILD LABOR IN AGRICULTURE

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, this week the Gallup poll came out with a survey that said 85 percent of small businesses in this country are not hiring. They just are not hiring. When asked why, 50 percent of those small businesses responded that it was the health care law and complying with Federal regulations that were preventing them from hiring. Well, there probably isn't any better example of the overreach, overkill, and excess when it comes to regulations than the Department of Labor regulation on child labor in agriculture. It was put out and public comments were invited on the proposal last September.

Since that time, numerous Senators and outside interest groups have requested a 60-day extension due to the timing of the harvest season, but the Department of Labor only extended that comment period for 30 days. Then 30 Senators—led by the Senator from Kansas who authored the letter—sent a letter that many of us signed onto, basically asking the Secretary of Labor, Hilda Solis, to withdraw those proposed regulations that limit the ability of farmers and ranchers to hire young people to work in agriculture. In February of this year, the Department of Labor announced plans to repropose a portion of the regulation on child labor in agriculture interpreting the “parental exception.” But what is interesting about it is there have been multiple efforts made to try to get a response to the letter, and the Department of Labor didn't respond to a letter from 30 Senators.

It strikes me that with all of the issues that were raised in that letter and the impact this would have on the very heartland of our country and the ability of farmers and ranchers and their families to sustain themselves and to contribute to feeding the world, it seems they would at least have the courtesy of responding to the points that were raised in that letter. But we have not yet received a response to that letter sent by the Senator from Kansas, Senator MORAN, and 29 other Senators who signed onto that requesting a response to the various issues that were raised. We will get into those in a minute. It strikes me as certainly odd, and perhaps I would have to say demonstrating an arrogance, a power to not respond to 30 Senators who, on behalf of their constituents, raised

some issues that are very important to the economy of the heartland of the Midwest and the people I represent, and I know the Senator from Kansas represents.

When you look at what they are proposing and the prescriptive nature of that, the detail they go into in restricting the ability of young people to work on family farm and ranch operations, you have to say: What were these people thinking and what world do they live in? Because there seems to be a parallel universe to think that all of these various regulations and restrictions they would impose on young people working in agriculture wouldn't undermine the very fabric, the very nature, the very foundation of American agriculture.

Farming and ranching is inherently a family enterprise. Young people have contributed for generations in helping that family farm or ranch operation survive and prosper. They contribute. They grow up in that business, and in many cases they take it over. It is amazing to me, and incomprehensible, to think that bureaucrats in Washington, DC, could tell family farmers and ranchers how to run their operations with the kind of detail and the incredible prescription of these regulations and the very activities they would curtail for young people.

I wanted to engage my colleague from Kansas on this subject. As I said, he was the author of the letter that was sent, along with many of us—30 Senators in all—asking the Department of Labor to withdraw, in raising a number of points about various aspects of these regulations. And, as I said, we will touch on those in a minute.

I would ask my colleague from Kansas if he thinks that 85 pages of regulations, which is what this proposal is—do we need 85 pages of regulations that tell family farm and ranch operations and young people who work on those family farm and ranch operations how to go about their business? Is it necessary? Do we have to get this bureaucratic and impose these kinds of regulations, these kinds of costs and these kinds of burdens upon American agriculture at a time when—as I mentioned before—there are so many other costs associated with doing business in this country imposed by the government? The ObamaCare, the health care law, and as I mentioned earlier, the Gallup poll was mentioned by half of the small businesses who said it is one of the reasons why they are not hiring. All of these other regulations, many of which come from the EPA, but certainly the Department of Labor in this particular case is guilty of making it more difficult and more expensive to do business in this country and certainly inhibiting the very nature and, from an operation standpoint, the very way that a family farm or ranch operation conducts itself.

I ask my colleague from Kansas his thoughts on this and whether he thinks