

Separate studies by scientists at NASA and at the University of Washington predict increasing frequency of severe wildfires.

The Park City Foundation in Utah predicted an annual local temperature increase of 6.8 degrees Fahrenheit by 2075, which would cause a total loss of snowpack in the Park City resort area. This would result, obviously, in thousands of lost jobs, tens of millions in lost earnings, and hundreds of millions in lost economic output.

In the coastal zone of the Pacific Northwest, erosion inundation and ocean acidity are all major threats. More than 140,000 acres of coastal Washington and Oregon lie within 3.3 feet of high tide. Sea-level rise of 4 feet or more is entirely plausible by the end of the century.

Ocean acidification caused a 70- to 80-percent loss of oyster larvae at an oyster hatchery in Oregon from 2006 to 2008. Wild oyster stocks in Washington State have also failed as weather patterns caused more acidic water to rise to the surface at the shore. This is an industry worth about \$73 million annually.

For Hawaii, the rapidly changing climate presents a unique threat. Tourism and agriculture, among Hawaii's top economic sectors, are each distinctly vulnerable. Changes in precipitation, erosion, ocean warming, and acidification will irreversibly alter Hawaiian ecosystems, home to about one-quarter of all threatened and endangered species in the United States.

For example, we know that warm enough water causes corals to bleach. Bleaching is a technical term that I won't go into right now. Bleaching can help coral survive short-term stresses, but in response to persistent ocean warming, bleaching signals the start of a long-term downward spiral toward the death of the coral and the reefs, the incubators of the oceans.

Perhaps no other region of the United States is experiencing the effects of climate change more dramatically than Alaska. Alaska is, of course, supposed to be cold. The animals and plants have adapted to that, and so have the people.

Since the 1960s, however, Alaska has been warming twice as fast as the rest of the United States. Annual air temperature has already increased by 3 degrees Fahrenheit. Winter temperatures are up 6 degrees.

According to the draft assessment highlights, Alaska is seeing—and this is a graph of the sea ice:

Earlier spring snow melt, reduced sea ice, widespread glacier retreat, warmer permafrost, and dryer landscapes.

By mid-century, summer sea ice could disappear altogether. As in the Great Lakes, less ice along the Alaska coast means more severe coastal erosion without the ice to buffer the shores from storms. Most of the permafrost in Alaska is tens of thousands of years old, but it too is disappearing as the Alaska climate warms. Permafrost

is a natural wonder whose loss threatens structures such as buildings, roads, as well as plants and wildlife that have adapted to the frozen tundra. Thawing permafrost buckles roads and air strips, causing costly disruptions in transportation.

It appears, as we take this tour of the country, that there is only one region that isn't yet awakening to the effects of climate change, and that is here, Capitol Hill. History is calling out to us to meet our duty, and the call is loud and clear, but we are sleep-walking. It is time to wake up. The public has every reason to want to grab us and give us a good shake. An AP poll out in December found that 83 percent of Democrats, 77 percent of Independents, and 70 percent of Republicans accept the reality of climate change and understand that it will be a serious problem for our United States.

A recent poll conducted by Yale University and George Mason University found that a large majority of Americans, 77 percent, say climate change should be a priority for President Obama and for all of us in Congress. But we snooze on, listening to the lullabies of the polluters.

Carbon pollution from fossil fuels is threatening our future, and unless we take serious action to scale back the pollution, the consequences are looking increasingly dire all across our country. It is time to hear the alarms, to roll up our sleeves, to get to work, and to do what needs to be done. It is time, indeed, to wake up.

I yield the floor, and I suggest 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.

Ms. CANTWELL. 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.

PAYCHECK FAIRNESS ACT

Ms. CANTWELL. Madam President, I come to the Senate floor to join my colleagues on the women's side of the Senate who will be coming to the floor this morning, along with Senator MIKULSKI—and I thank her for her leadership—to talk about pay equity and the issue of equal pay for equal work.

I am proud to stand here on what is the 4-year anniversary of the historic Lilly Ledbetter legislation that we were able to pass. What an unbelievable moment that was, to work for what is equal treatment for women in our court system. Lilly Ledbetter went across the Nation and came to Congress and communicated very well to many Americans on this issue that sometimes you could be discriminated against and not even know it until your retirement, which was the case with her. Yet the legal system failed to take any action at that point. So we

passed the Lilly Ledbetter legislation to make sure that in our court system women could find out and have those remedies brought before our system and fight for equal pay.

My State of Washington has been a leader in increasing the minimum wage. We have a minimum wage that is indexed to inflation, and I am proud of that. But pay disparity continues to persist between men and women, and that is why I am here, to urge my colleagues to help close this gap. We are here to advocate for the Paycheck Fairness Act because full-time working women still earn 75 percent of what their male counterparts earn for the same job, according to a report by the Economic Opportunity Institute.

While the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act was a step forward, we need to pass this additional legislation to help end pay inequity and take the next steps toward helping women. The Paycheck Fairness Act will help us move toward closing the gap between men and women, and it does the following things: It requires employers to provide justification other than gender for paying men higher wages than for women; it protects employees who share the same salary information from potential retaliation from their employers; and it provides victims of pay discrimination the same remedies available to victims of other kinds of discrimination, including punitive and compensatory damages.

This bill also helps create outreach programs for employers to help them understand this issue and to help end pay disparity. I certainly look forward to the passing of this legislation because closing this gap means women in my State will be able to afford 13 more months of rent or 39 more months of family health insurance premiums, according to an estimate by the National Partnership for Women and Families.

We have to level the playing field so these kinds of estimates are not just projections but they are realities. We can't support the status quo while the economic security of women and families is undermined. One-third of families headed by women in my State are in poverty. This can be attributed, in part, to policies that perpetuate lower pay for women. So we must end unequal pay practices and level the playing field.

It is in this spirit of fair play that we ask for the passage of the Paycheck Fairness Act. I know Senator MIKULSKI and others who have fought hard on this legislation will be here to speak this morning, and I am proud we are sponsors of the Paycheck Fairness Act that was introduced just last week. Today, almost 50 years after passage of the Equal Pay Act and 4 years after the passage of the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, we still need to hit another giant milestone in helping women get fair pay in America.

We made a big step toward all this with Lilly Ledbetter's leadership, but now we need to pass this new legislation. It was an important milestone

that will help women be confident they will be treated fairly in the workplace and to make sure they continue to have access to the courts. Whether they are an engineer or a lawyer or a police officer, women should not have to earn less doing the same job as a co-worker. That is why we need to pass this Paycheck Fairness Act today.

I want women who grow up in the United States of America to know there is no doubt they will earn the same pay they deserve for their work. That is what our country is all about, and that is why we are going to work hard this session to pass this legislation.

I thank the President pro tempore, I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Ms. STABENOW. 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.

Ms. STABENOW. Madam President, I am so pleased to be joining colleagues in celebrating the anniversary of the passage of the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act and to move on to what we need to do on full paycheck fairness with the passage of the Paycheck Fairness Act.

I wish to start by thanking our leader, the dean of the women in the Senate and the House, the longest serving woman, who is Senator BARBARA MIKULSKI. She has led us through the Lilly Ledbetter legislation and is now leading us as we move forward to the next step in making sure women receive equal pay for equal work. Her extraordinary leadership is something that has touched every woman, every man, and every family in America. I wish to thank her for her leadership, as well as the efforts of all my colleagues.

It has been nearly 50 years since President Kennedy signed the Equal Pay Act into law—a law that made it illegal for an employer to pay women less than men for the same work. With the stroke of a pen, he ushered in a new era of opportunities for women and the American economy as a whole. In those 50 years, many millions of American women entered the workforce and we have truly changed the nature of employment in our country, including in the Senate, where we now have a woman sitting as the distinguished Acting President pro tempore, and we have 20 women who are a part of leading the country through the Senate, with 7 of us now chairing committees.

I remember coming to the Senate in 2000, when it was the first time we had enough women to even sit on every committee in the Senate. Imagine that. It was the first time our experiences, our voices, our backgrounds, our values, and our priorities were represented on every committee. So we have come a long way since that time 50 years ago, but there is more to do.

In 1963, women were often very limited in the jobs we could participate in. There were outrageous working conditions and limitations that made absolutely no sense. Today, nearly 40 percent of full-time managers in our country are women. I am proud to look around my great State and see two of the great universities in our country—the University of Michigan and Michigan State University—both led by women presidents. We are seeing women moving up in every area. We have made great strides, but we also know pay for women continues to be unequal, even though we have seen strides being made. That is why the Paycheck Fairness Act is absolutely critical.

This bill gives women tools to negotiate better pay and it stops employers from using workplace gag rules to prevent women from discovering their pay is actually less than the pay of the men working beside them. It strengthens the remedies women can use when they are discriminated against and ensures that discrimination based on sex is treated the same as any other kind of discrimination in the workplace.

Four years ago this week, we passed the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act that overturned the Supreme Court's decision limiting the ability of women to get justice when they were discriminated against. At that time, Lilly Ledbetter did not know for a couple decades that she, in fact, was being paid less than the men she not only worked with but supervised. When she went to the Supreme Court, they said: You can't come before the Court. You have no standing because you should have done that 20 years ago. But 20 years earlier, she didn't know.

We have fixed that loophole in the law, but now we need to go on and completely revamp and be focused on putting in place all the tools available to women to keep the promise of the law that was passed 50 years ago, which is equal pay for equal work.

In my State of Michigan, women are paid only 74 cents on every dollar that a man makes. Even though we have made strides, we are still at 74 cents of what a man makes. And women are either participating as the sole breadwinner in their families now or part of a two-parent family trying to hold things together and make ends meet.

It is not fair to the family that one of those who are working is only getting 74 cents on a dollar of what males in the workplace are getting. Over a lifetime, in Michigan that 26-cent difference equals over \$½ million that women are losing because we don't really yet have equal pay for equal work in every part of our economy.

When we look at this, it becomes very much about whether women are going to be able to pay their mortgage, their rent. When you walk into the store, the grocer doesn't say: You only have to pay 74 percent of the cost of this because you get paid less. The last time I looked, we pay the same for gas,

food, rent, or the mortgage, and yet too many women find themselves disadvantaged because they are not being paid equally for their work. That is just not right. Everybody knows it is not right.

The Lilly Ledbetter Act took an important step 4 years ago in overturning a situation that the courts I believe inaccurately, unfairly decided as relates to women. But the Paycheck Fairness Act gives women the tools they need legally to be able to remedy unequal pay situations and have the confidence that we are going to truly enforce equal pay for equal work in this country.

Fifty years ago, Congress and the President came together and agreed that women should get equal pay for equal work. Right now, we need to reaffirm that. We need to make it real for all women in every part of our country who are working hard to make ends meet, to take care of their families, and to be able to move forward and realize their dreams. Passing the Paycheck Fairness Act is going to bring us closer to that reality.

I again thank the senior Senator from Maryland for her incredible leadership in bringing us to this point with the Lilly Ledbetter Act and now taking the next step, which is to realize the dream of 50 years and longer in America, which is to fully benefit from the ideas, the strengths, and the talents of every individual and to make sure they are equally paid for what they are worth.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Maryland.

Ms. MIKULSKI. Madam President, I rise to speak on the Paycheck Fairness Act. I would ask how much time is remaining.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. There is 17 minutes remaining.

Ms. MIKULSKI. I ask unanimous consent that we extend for another 15 minutes.

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

Ms. MIKULSKI. Madam President, I join with my colleagues you have already heard from—Senator CANTWELL of Washington State, Senator STABENOW of Michigan—and today I know other Senators will be coming to the floor to say: We want to finish the job. We want to finish the job that started 50 years ago when Lyndon Johnson introduced the first of three civil rights bills that were designed to change America.

In the mid-1960s, there was turmoil. Change was in the air. People wanted equality. They were marching on the streets, they were pounding on the tables, and they were organizing in civil disobedience. Dr. King marched on Washington and Lyndon Johnson was laying the groundwork for the famous Civil Rights Act that would open the doors for minorities. But the very first bill he introduced was to guarantee

equal pay for equal work for women. He did that as the first bill because he thought that would be one of the easiest to pass.

Well, 50 years later we are still being redlined, sidelined, pink-slipped because we fight for equal pay for equal work. Every time we make an advance, they bring in the lawyers—the corporate lawyers—who then hide behind small business exemptions, and they fret on how it will wreck the economy of the United States.

Well, I know what wrecked the economy of the United States, and it wasn't women wanting equal pay for equal work. That is not what brought us fraud, scams, and greed in the mortgage market. That did not cause the great collapse of the banks. We didn't cause that. Their hubris and greed did. But when they bring in the lawyers, we have to pass legislation.

Four years ago, the first bill that we passed during the Obama administration was the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act. It repaired the right of women to address pay inequality in the courts. What it did was correct a misinterpretation by the court on what is the statute of limitations when women seek redress.

But let me tell you that the fight continues. The fight continues now. The reason we need the Paycheck Fairness Act is the fact that women continue to be discriminated against and economically harassed and punished if they even ask: How much do the guys get paid?

So if you are standing at the water cooler or if you go to your human resources and say: What do I get—if Georgette asks: What do I get, and she wants to know what George gets, she could be punished. She could be fired. She could be penalized. She could be isolated for being too aggressive. Haven't we heard that? Too uppity—my God, daring to ask what George gets paid. Well, the Lillies, the Georgettes, and everybody who gets up every day and takes pride in their work, does the job they were hired to do, they want to get the pay they have every right to. So our legislation will keep employers from retaliating against employees who share information about pay.

Remember how Lilly Ledbetter's bill got triggered? Lilly was working at Goodyear, doing a good job, even promoted. But guess what, finally some men, some great guys—and there are great guys—came and said: Guess what, Lilly. We get a better deal than you do. That is how Lilly Ledbetter found out, and when she went to ask, she was punished. So our Paycheck Fairness Act would keep employers from retaliating against employees who share information.

It will also close a loophole in the current law that allows employers to use just about any reason for paying a woman less than a man by requiring that the reason be unrelated to sex and it has to be job related. The fact is that

they will say: Well, we pay George more because you really should be 5-foot-8 to do the job, and most women might only be 5-foot-6. Well, have you seen those title IX gals lately? Anyway, they always invent the reasons. That is where, instead of solving the problem, they bring in the lawyers. They always bring in the lawyers. Now we are bringing in the votes, and what we want to say is that we want to close that loophole.

We also want to improve the remedies available for victims of discrimination by simply putting the Equal Pay Act on par with other laws to combat equal treatment.

Everyone wants to say what this bill is about. They all have opinions. It is not about politics; it is about a pay gap. It is not about only gender; it is about an agenda. What is our country? Are we going to be fair with each other in the marketplace? This bill is about our families, it is about our economy, it is about bread-and-butter decisions.

So what are the consequences of paying equal pay for equal work? No. 1, it will put more money in the family checkbook. More money in the family checkbook means more spending in the economy. It is actually good economic policy in the real economy. Now, it might result in lower executive compensation, but it will result in fair compensation to the women who work. As we know, women now are really a significant part of the workforce, and we should be paid equal pay for equal work and not harassed when we want to ask questions, and close the loopholes to make sure they don't make up phony excuses.

This is very, very important. When we look at it, 50 years—50 years—after Lyndon Johnson introduced his legislation, we are still at 77 cents for every dollar a man makes. For women of color, it is even less, and for Hispanic women, it is only 60 percent. That is not enough.

So we want to change the lawbooks so we can put more money in the family checkbook and more money in our economy and make sure that the dream of 50 years ago that was started by Lyndon Johnson we rectify in the passage of this legislation, which I hope we do expeditiously between now and Mother's Day.

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

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

Mrs. BOXER. 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.

Mrs. BOXER. Madam President, I wish to thank the Senator from Maryland, who has been such a remarkable leader on all of these issues. We have so much work to do, as she has outlined, and I will add a few specific cases to what she said.

This is the 4-year anniversary of the Lilly Ledbetter law, and we were able

to push it forward, and it was the first bill President Obama signed in his first term. I think that said a lot about its importance.

Because Lilly Ledbetter is pretty well known in the country, we know her story. You can imagine the feelings she had when she found out that after all the work she was putting in, simply because she was a woman she was getting paid less than the men doing the exact same thing. And, yes, thank you to the men who respected Lilly Ledbetter enough to let her know. There was a notice in her locker that essentially informed her that she was working for way less than they were. Over the course of her lifetime, it was a huge amount of money that made a huge difference.

When Lilly tells the story, you can just see the anguish in her face. And she, of course, went all the way to the Supreme Court trying to get redress. Finally, the Court decided, and they said: You know what. You have a really good case, but you didn't move forward fast enough. You were supposed to come and file this lawsuit much sooner.

Well, she didn't know much sooner. She couldn't have filed the lawsuit. And that is what led to our corrective legislation, so that in the future a woman who has faced pay discrimination will have her day in court and will have the time necessary to proceed with the court case and get justice. The court had said she had to file from the minute the discrimination started, but Lilly didn't know she was being discriminated against until years later. So thank goodness this Congress and the President remedied that.

But we have unfinished business. We have a bill called the Paycheck Fairness Act, and I hope that all will get involved as well because the fact is that women, after all the progress we have made, earn 77 cents for every dollar earned by a man. We women in the Senate are fortunate in the sense that is one battle we don't have to wage because a Senator is a Senator is a Senator. Imagine if they had a rule saying men Senators get this and women Senators get that. People would say something is very wrong with this picture. But that is the way it is on the outside. It is undercover. People do not know about it, but women who do the same job as a man on average will make 23 cents less.

You could say: Seventy-seven cents for every dollar—is that really a lot? Let me tell you, it is a lot. Over a lifetime it is about \$434,000 less that she will have at the end of her career.

This pay gap persists across all occupation and income levels. A Bloomberg analysis found that women earned less than their male counterparts in 264 out of 265 major occupation categories. Women earned less than their male counterparts in virtually all of the occupation categories. So the wage gap clearly hurts women, but it also hurts their families. Think about families

where the major wage earner is a woman. Those children and grandchildren will feel the pain.

Of course the economy is hurt because there are fewer dollars circulating in the economy. A woman is going to spend a lot of the money she earns right out there, supporting her family, going to the store, organizing visits to camps and vacations, and all that money helps the economy.

I am going to close this by reading a couple of stories, real-life stories. A woman from California had an identical advanced degree as her husband. She landed the exact same job as her husband but at a different worksite. The woman's husband was offered the \$5,000 more in starting salary for the same job with the exact same resume.

A health care worker in Long Island discovered she had been earning \$10 an hour less than her male colleagues with the same experience. When she brought this up to her superiors, she was reprimanded for asking about the wage gap.

That goes to what Senator MIKULSKI said. Imagine the nerve of someone finding out they were paid \$10 an hour less and trying to find out why, and for that she is reprimanded, put in her place.

Then a female employee for a major corporation in Florida was told when she was hired that if she disclosed her salary to other workers, that would be grounds for dismissal. She soon realized that her male counterparts made more than she did but she did not have any written proof. A fellow female employee at the company was told that because her husband picked her up from work in a nice car, she did not need to get a salary increase.

We need to pass the Paycheck Fairness Act. It closes loopholes that have allowed employers to avoid responsibility for discriminatory pay. It prohibits employers from retaliating against employees who share salary information with their coworkers, and it puts gender-based discrimination sanctions on equal footing with other forms of wage discrimination such as race, disability, or age, so women would be eligible for the same remedies available to other victims of discrimination, such as punitive damages.

It is simply a matter of fairness. Every American deserves equal pay for equal work. We have to end this practice of shortchanging half of our country—more than half of the people are female. This means we are hurting our country, we are hurting their families.

In 2010, Senate Republicans filibustered our efforts to proceed to this bill. All we wanted to do was proceed to it and get an up-or-down vote. We faced a filibuster. In June 2012, Senate Republicans blocked us again. We are calling on them in a spirit of fairness and justice to work with us in this Congress and give all the women of America the same chance for success as their male counterparts. Remember, \$400,000-plus over a career is a tremendous amount

of money for people. That can make the difference in having a decent retirement. We heard today that the vast majority of Americans, if they lost their job, have no savings at all. It is not as if we are paying people lavish salaries. Let's make sure, whatever the salaries are, that they are fair, that they are equal to each other. If a woman is doing the same job, much as a Senator, as a male, they get the same pay. It is simple. It should not be a problem.

If there is a filibuster, I will never understand it. I will say this. No woman in America today will understand why anyone would filibuster such a bill—equal pay for equal work. And no man in America who loves a woman, be it their mom or their aunt or their wife or their daughter, would understand it either. Let's hope we get to a vote on this measure.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Alaska.

Mr. BEGICH. Madam President, I thank my colleague from California for making those important remarks. I am also here to talk about the Paycheck Fairness Act for a few minutes, if I could. As she said in her last remarks, it is very important to note the last few times this issue has come up it was filibustered. We did not even get to the bill. So hopefully, according to the new rules we agreed on here and coordinated in a bipartisan way, we will get to the bill and we will debate it on its merits, not on whether it should proceed. Let's see how that works. Again, I thank her for coming down here today.

I rise here on the anniversary of the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009 to lend my support to the next bill we need to pass, the Paycheck Fairness Act. I thank Senator MIKULSKI for organizing this important discussion.

Four years ago I entered this Chamber fresh from Alaska. Madam President, you are fresh from North Dakota. I probably sat right there during that debate in 2009. I was finishing my second term as mayor of Anchorage and was excited to take on the new challenges in the Senate on behalf of all Alaskans. I am honored to say one of my first votes in the Senate as a new Senator was the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act. I was proud to add my support to the cause.

At the same time it was—and is—disheartening to continue hearing about pay inequity as a major economic problem, that there are still drastic wage gaps for women, that women on average still earn about one-fifth less than their male counterparts.

We all know the numbers. That is why I have cosponsored Senator MIKULSKI's Paycheck Fairness Act each time it was introduced. It provides women with the tools to close this long-standing gap. Her bill is an important companion to the Lilly Ledbetter Act, which kept the courthouse door open to demand justice over pay discrimination.

This was a crucial victory, but we must continue the fight and finish the job by passing paycheck fairness. At its core, the bill is really very simple: It says employees and employers can share wage information and that discrepancies in pay must be based on experience and qualifications—not on gender.

What is more fair than that?

Unfortunately, my State is not a leader on pay equity. In Alaska, women earn 78 cents for every dollar paid to men. Unless that changes, Alaska women will earn \$623,000 less than men during their working careers. This pay gap has harmed the families of roughly 155,000 women in the Alaska workforce. Women in Alaska have higher rates of economic insecurity than men: In 2010, women working full time not only earned lower average wages but also were more likely to live in poverty—more than 10 percent of Alaska women compared to about 7 percent of men.

Women in Alaska make up 47 percent of the state workforce and nearly half of them are married mothers who are the primary wage earners in their families. When they earn less than men, that burden falls on the entire family—including about 112,000 Alaska children who are dependent on their mother's earnings.

The State's highest-paying industries—including manufacturing, natural resources and mining—are mostly dominated by men. Jobs such as miners, mobile heavy equipment mechanics and electrical power line installers pay much better than State average wages, but few women are getting those jobs.

Our Alaska Department of Labor puts it bluntly: "Women seem to be funneled into lower-pay occupations."

Listen to these numbers. If the gap between men's and women's wages in Alaska were eliminated, each full-time working woman could suddenly afford to pay for 2 more years of groceries, buy 3,700 more gallons of gas or pay the mortgage and utility bills for 8 more months.

So on this 4th anniversary of the signing of the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, I say to my colleagues on both sides of the aisle: Let's finish the job and pass the Paycheck Fairness Act. As I said, it's so simple. The bill will close loopholes in the Equal Pay Act and establish stronger workplace protections for women.

In the real world there should be nothing complicated or controversial about this, but sometimes we wonder where we are; it is not always the real world. As I said at the beginning of my comments, hopefully the issue of filibuster will not be part of this equation, that we actually get on the bill, have the debate, and people can vote up or vote down, amend it or not, and determine where we stand on this issue.

I am from a household where we were raised by a mother, the six of us. My father died when I was 10. She survived raising four boys, which is a miracle in

itself, and two girls. The problem was not the girls, it was the boys. But she raised six of us at a very young age. Hopefully some would consider us productive parts of society. But when I saw what my mom had to struggle through, what she had to earn to make sure we had food on the table, make sure we had opportunities in our lives, it is clear to me that this is not a complicated issue. This is a simple fairness issue.

I hope my colleague on the other side, again, would allow it to come forward. We will debate it and then we will vote on it, and the American people, Alaskans, will see what we think of fairness in the sense of a paycheck for a woman working the same job—equal job as a man does.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Indiana.

THE ECONOMY

Mr. COATS. Madam President, breaking news. Just a short time ago the Bureau of Economic Analysis issued its report for the fourth quarter of 2012 in terms of our economy. I am sorry to say that the report said we have contracted—not gained, but our economy contracted—during this fourth quarter, 0.1 percent at an annual rate last fall.

Here we are, about 3½ years from a deep recession, and in normal recessions recovery occurs at a significant rate. That is what gets people back to work. That is what gets our economy moving again. This is the growth we need to address our fiscal situation. Yet after nearly 3½ years of stumbling along and bumping along in the most tepid recovery since before World War II, we now learn that despite some of the optimism that has been projected lately that things are getting better, things are growing, and unemployment is going to start coming down, we get this distressing report that in the fourth quarter, the quarter where we all go out and buy Christmas presents and spend money at the end of the year, that fourth quarter contracted; it did not grow.

The average rate of growth following recessions is about 4 percent growth per year. Sometimes it has been 6, 7, and even 8 percent. The average rate we have had as a Nation following the previous recession has been around a 2-percent level or even a little less. So, this is not good news for the American people. This is not good news for all those hoping to get back to work. This is not good news for those hoping to raise money to pay for their mortgage or try to keep their house or provide for their children's education going forward. This is not good news for the American people. I think it says a lot about our failure here in Congress to do what most people understand we need to do and that is to get our fiscal house in order.

There is a cloud of uncertainty settled over the American economy over

the last 3½ years that is destroying the hopes and dreams of young people and middle-aged people and those nearing retirement. They are worried about their savings, their ability to pay their bills, and their ability to maintain meaningful employment.

If we are going to get our fiscal house in order, we need to do some fundamental things. One, we need to summon the will to address this problem—this challenge—and define it as the No. 1 challenge facing the Congress and have the political will to do something about it. Doing something about it means we start with having a budget. It has been 1,372 days since the Senate passed a budget. That is nearly 4 years. This is completely irresponsible. To deny the American people the transparency of how we are spending taxpayers' dollars and how we are addressing this fiscal situation we are in which drives us into more debt and more deficit is totally irresponsible. As I said, it starts with passing a budget.

Every Hoosier family and every business in Indiana knows they cannot be successful and financially sound without creating a budget on which to operate. Restaurants and coffee shops have budgets, Little League Baseball organizations have budgets, and our communities, States must have a budget in terms of how much we are able to spend.

The reason a budget is so important is it forces us to determine how we spend the revenue we have in a sensible way without having to go and continue to borrow and drive ourselves more deeply into debt. There are a lot of things we would like to do. Everyone has their priorities, their interests, such as, education, medical research, more funding for social programs, more defense funding, funding for transportation needs, paving roads, and repairing bridges. It goes on and on. We all have those priorities. These are things we would like to do, but we have not faced the fact that we cannot do everything we would like to do. We have to do the essential things and prioritize our spending at a time when we don't have the revenue to do everything we would like.

It is no different than a family with financial difficulties sitting down and saying: Our annual trip to Disney World cannot happen this year. Dad's paycheck is not bringing in the kind of money it used to. Maybe they are not in the financial position to be able to do what they would like to do, therefore, they have to make some changes and adjustments. Maybe instead of Disney World, they decide to go to Brown County State Park, which, by the way, is a great place for family vacations. Priority decisions are the kind of decisions families have to make when they don't have the revenue to do everything they would like to do.

We also have a legal duty—and personally I think a moral duty—to present to the American people a budget plan indicating how we are going to

spend their taxpayer dollars. Section 301(a) of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974 states—and this is the law of the land—“On or before April 15 of each year, the Congress shall complete action on a concurrent resolution on the budget for the fiscal year beginning on October 1 of such year.”

When we passed that law, we didn't say Congress may pass a budget or that Congress has the ability to avoid having a budget. The word “shall” means we shall have a budget. Yet the failure to bring forth a budget under the leadership of this Senate for 1,372 days—nearly 4 years—has created even more dysfunction in an already dysfunctional Senate. It has helped lead to a broken appropriations process.

Last year, we did not pass a single appropriations bill through the Senate, which left us with what we call continuing resolutions. Continuing resolutions essentially fund the Federal Government on autopilot at previous levels without the type of scrutiny and oversight that would be administered through the regular appropriations process. This is no way to govern a country. We are not fulfilling our duty to the people we represent and, most important, it hinders any attempt at real spending reform.

The Republican-led House has passed a budget annually and fulfilled their duty. We have failed in fulfilling our duty. They have presented their priorities to the public. They have described how they will rein in spending, save programs from collapse, and reform the tax system. They are being heavily criticized because they have a budget out there which tells the American people what they are going to do, and some of it is painful because we don't have the money to do everything we would like to do.

People like to be able to come home and promise them everything they ask for. We don't have that luxury. Perhaps we never did, but we did it anyway. No longer do we have the luxury of being able to even think that. So all the criticism goes to the House because they want to cut this or they want to modify that or the priority decision is for one thing over another thing. In the mean time, the majority and the administration just sit back and say: We are not going to put out any numbers; therefore, you cannot criticize us. We will just go along criticizing the other team.

I know PAUL RYAN is again working with Speaker BOEHNER on a 10-year budget plan to put our country on a path to a balanced budget. They will be heavily criticized for that, but they are stepping up to their legal responsibilities and stepping up to the moral responsibilities we have to do the job we were elected to do. I mean, that is why we were sent here. The Senate is going to have to get the will to make these tough choices, which we have been avoiding for years, or the market is going to force us to act. The more we prolong the challenges we face and the