

All of that said, these are the kinds of problems I was talking about—problems which can be addressed if committees are given an opportunity to operate. Had the committee had an opportunity to vet this legislation, we could have also fully examined the offsets my colleagues are using to pay for this EUC extension. These are also problematic.

The main pay-for in this bill is the use of what is called pension smoothing, which is little more than a budget gimmick but an especially pernicious budget gimmick when repeated. It has the potential to do real harm to pension plan funding levels, threatening the future retirement security of American workers.

Since the great recession of 2008, pension plans have struggled to regain their footing financially. The drastic drop in interest rates forced many plans to dramatically increase their pension contributions to keep pace. In 2012, at the historic low point for interest rates, Congress essentially gave pension plans 4 years of funding relief to get through the worst period of low interest rates. Congress did this by allowing pensions to fund their plans as if interest rates were higher than they really were.

But we can't indefinitely pretend that interest rates are artificially high and contribution levels artificially low. Reality still matters. The reality is that, although still low by historical standards, interest rates are no longer at rock bottom and pension funding needs to gradually adjust to market rates just as current law provides.

Put simply, we should avoid additional pension smoothing because it permits lower pension funding, and poor pension funding is bad pension policy. Pension funding remains a serious concern, and this is not the time to make it easier to underfund pensions. Doing so is worse than just kicking a can down the road. This can of pension underfunding will explode on American workers in the form of underfunded pensions that will somehow have to be rescued either through painful cuts in benefits, much higher PBGC premiums, or taxpayer-funded bailouts. There is no other way around it.

The other major offset in this bill is the extension of customs user fees. This is also problematic. Traditionally speaking, offsets in the trade space are reserved for legislation that actually extends trade programs, such as the Generalized System of Preferences or the African Growth and Opportunity Act. If we start using these offsets in other areas, we won't have anything left over when it comes to extending these important programs.

Both of these offsets—pension smoothing and customs user fees—fall under the jurisdiction of the Senate Finance Committee, just like the underlying UI extension. Once again, had the committee been given an opportunity to consider these issues, it is likely that these offsets would not have been used.

As we can see, there are a number of problems with this bill that could have been considered and addressed had the Finance Committee been allowed to do its work. And it should have been allowed to do its work. Other problems could be addressed if there were a fair and open amendment process here on the floor. Sadly, it doesn't appear that we are going to get that either as the Senate Democratic leadership appears poised to once again try to force a major piece of legislation through the Senate without giving the minority an opportunity to offer amendments.

Before our next vote on this legislation, I think we will see a number of amendments filed, many of which would likely improve the bill. Others would address the more pressing need to stimulate the economy and create jobs.

I personally have amendments that would do both. For example, I have an amendment that would repeal the ObamaCare tax on medical devices, which enjoys bipartisan support in both the House and the Senate and would prevent further job losses in one of our most important U.S. industries.

I have another amendment that would repeal the ObamaCare employer mandate. I am sure my colleagues on the other side of the aisle would deem this out of bounds, but they shouldn't. After all, the Obama administration seems pretty intent on delaying the employer mandate; it has already been delayed for 2 years. If the mandate is that harmful to implement, why don't we do away with it altogether and ensure that it doesn't cost us any more jobs and further requests for unemployment benefits?

One amendment I have would help to ensure that the retroactive EUC benefits do not threaten program integrity. Specifically, it would require States, as part of their EUC agreements, to certify that paying retroactive benefits will not lead to an increase in fraud or overpayments.

These are just some of the amendments I may offer to this bill, and all of them, in my opinion, would be improvements. But it doesn't look as though we are going to be able to offer amendments in the greatest deliberative body in the world—and I am saying that pretty sarcastically at this time. I know many of my Republican colleagues have amendments they would like to offer as well. Yet my friends on the other side of the aisle don't want to have a real debate about these issues. Instead, they are content to let the majority leader fill the tree and block any and all Republican amendments from coming up for a vote. One can only wonder what they are afraid of. Presumably the majority has the votes to defeat any amendments the minority wants to offer. Where is the harm in having a real debate? Where is the harm in having an open amendment process? I can only conclude they are worried that some of the votes they would have to take

would be difficult politically. Indeed, preventing difficult votes seems to be priority No. 1 for the current Senate majority.

At this point, it appears they have the votes to pass the bill. I assume we will be through with this process this week. Yet, while the Senate debate over unemployment insurance may be coming to an end, I can only conclude that the process failures we are seeing in this Chamber will continue as we move on to the next item of business, which is, in my opinion, very unfortunate.

This week's debate over EUC is just the latest example of what is wrong with the Senate these days. Sadly, it doesn't look as if things are going to get better under the current leadership. These are important issues. We really need to let the Senate operate the way it always has, and let's quit playing these games of power play.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. HEITKAMP). The Senator from Kansas.

(The remarks of Mr. ROBERTS pertaining to the introduction of S. 2191 are printed in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

Madam President, I note the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. CASEY. Madam President, I rise today to speak about an issue which should be under the category of "unfinished business," and is a priority for the American people, and that is unemployment insurance. In this case it is emergency unemployment compensation and the trauma so many people have lived through—not just over weeks—over the last few months, and which, of course, was preceded by a very difficult economy.

The bill that is before the Senate is bipartisan, and that is good news and the way it should be. It is a bipartisan bill to provide what can only be described as an essential lifeline for individuals who have been out of work. Millions of people have been out of work in the so-called long-term unemployment category. This lifeline is often directly connected to the life and daily struggles of middle-class families who rely upon this program to stay afloat as they seek work.

Sometimes I think there is a misconception—or some may want to make this argument in a deliberate way—that somehow emergency unemployment compensation is for people who are out of work but not looking for work. In fact, these are folks who are

looking for work day after day and week after week. I would have preferred a longer-term agreement rather than just the 5 months that are proposed in the agreement. It is very important that we have finally reached a point where we can pass a measure that will provide protection and support for folks as they look for work.

Thursday we had a procedural vote which was bipartisan to move the bill forward. Thankfully, this week the Senate will be voting on the bill itself. We hope the House will follow suit and provide this kind of much-needed boost for those who are out of work.

The numbers are staggering. For example, when we look at the numbers in Pennsylvania, almost 75,000 people immediately stopped receiving unemployment benefits when the emergency unemployment compensation expired on December 28. I can't even imagine what that was like for an individual or for an individual and his or her family—3 days after Christmas, right in the middle of the holiday season. It is supposed to be a time of joy. It is a time when families are spending lots of time together in ways they cannot often do during the year. To have their unemployment run out on December 28 had to be horrific for those individuals.

Between December 28 and March 15—in addition to the 75,000 I mentioned for Pennsylvania—over 110,000 Pennsylvanians lost their benefits. Through May—the bill would go to June 1 and be retroactive to December 28—it is estimated that 158,400 Pennsylvanians and almost 2.8 million Americans will have lost their emergency unemployment compensation. They are the folks who have been hurting and will be hurting unless we take action, and they are the ones, of course, who will benefit if we take action.

Unemployment insurance doesn't just provide an economic relief to that individual and his or her family. It is also an economic jump-starter. For example, in 2012, Mark Zandi, a respected economist—I will say for the record he has roots in Pennsylvania, but he is respected across the board—said that for every dollar of emergency unemployment compensation, there is \$1.52 in new economic activity. It is that old “spend a buck,” and what do you get for a buck? In the case of emergency unemployment insurance, you spend a buck and you get a buck fifty-two in return. I don't care what market you are in. That is a pretty good return—especially when it is helping people so substantially. This is about providing that lifeline for those families at a time when they really need it, and it is also about the economic benefits for the rest of us. A lot of people have heard these numbers as well—analyses that specifically focus on the extension of benefits in 2014. They have also indicated—by using other data—the impact it has on the economy.

I will give an example. The Economic Policy Institute has estimated that extending unemployment benefits in 2014

would generate \$37.8 billion in economic activity. That is the impact for this year as found by the Economic Policy Institute—\$37.8 billion.

This is about all of us. This is not about a group of people over here we hope to help. That is a wonderful sentiment. This is about whether they are going to have an opportunity—just a fair shot—to have a chance to get back into the economy and back into work. It is also about the rest of us in another way as well. It is about whether we are going to make sure everyone has an opportunity for that fair shot. Of course, it is also about the rest of us because we benefit when this program continues because of the economic boost and the \$1.52 for the buck you spend on it, as well as the \$37.8 billion of activity.

We have heard about the numbers and the rationale for continuing this program, both of which I would argue are not just compelling but urgent. But what about the real people. There are two people in my hometown—one I had spoken to in the past and the second person was someone I had never met before. I just want to give an example of these two individuals and their lives in Scranton, PA, where I live—Lackawanna County—which has a very high unemployment rate.

The first person is Joe Walsh. Joe has lived in my hometown all of his life. He was a tradesman for 40 years, so he had a very specific skill that allowed him to work and support his family. He worked as a superintendent for 14 years, and in 2008 the company he worked for needed to downsize, and he lost his position and immediately went on unemployment insurance. He worked on and off over the years for contractors who needed temporary workers, but he was unable to find anything steady, which is a story we have heard too often.

On December 28 of 2013—the day I mentioned before—Joe exceeded his unemployment insurance benefits and has not received any support since then, but he continues to look for work and file his claims. Joe is married and has three grown children. He says he feels “lucky” because his wife works and is able to keep their household afloat during a very difficult time.

Joe is 63 years old, and for all of those years and all of those decades he has had a skill and work ethic that allowed him to work. He said that if he had a mortgage now, he would not be able to survive. He finds it difficult to find the kind of work he had before—tradesman work, which requires a skill.

The second person we had a press conference with is someone I met in our neighborhood—we go to the same church—Vera Radice. Vera has spoken to me before about her circumstances. Over the years she was with several banking institutions. She was employed steadily from February of 1995 until July of 2014. She was doing good work for all of those years for two different banking institutions.

She has a Bachelor of Science degree from Cookstown University and an associate's degree from Luzerne County Community College. She has the education you often need to find the job you want, and she has almost 20 years of experience. Now she is left with volunteering and looking for work. She has attended all of the CareerLink workshops in Lackawanna County. She spends at least 3 days a week at CareerLink searching for work over and over.

These are the people—and not just tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands, but literally millions of others across the country—who are in the same situation as they are. It is time we did the job we were elected to do and put this emergency unemployment compensation program back into place and give people a fair shot—nothing else. They are just asking for a fair shot to find work so they can support their families, be a part of the economy, a part of this country, and the world of work they were so much a part of for most of their lives.

I would like to see all of us come together in a bipartisan fashion and get this passed and get it to the House. I hope our House colleagues are listening not just to my voice but, more importantly, I hope they are listening to the voices of people who they represent—the Veras and Joes of the world.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREEMENT—EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. REID. Madam President, I now ask unanimous consent that today at 2:15 p.m. the Senate proceed to executive session to consider Calendar Nos. 532 and 683; that there be 15 minutes for debate equally divided between the two leaders or their designees; that upon the use or yielding back of that time, the Senate proceed to vote with no intervening action or debate on the nominations in the order listed, with 2 minutes for debate equally divided in the usual form between the votes; that all after the first vote be 10 minutes in length; that the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table, with no intervening action or debate; that no further motions be in order to the nominations; that any statements related to the nominations be printed in the RECORD; that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action and the Senate then resume legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. REID. Madam President, we also hope to reach agreement on another