

We must provide for our children by supplying the tools they need to succeed—most importantly, a quality education. But evidently House Republicans don't see the need for us to invest in education because their budget slashes tens of billions of dollars in funding for schools and rolls back Federal financial aid to college students.

The Koch-Ryan budget breaks the promise to seniors we have had in existence since the Great Depression. It would be the end of Medicare as we know it. Health insurance premiums for seniors would skyrocket as would their prescription costs.

Finally, a Ryan-Koch budget breaks a promise to every American family that we in the Federal Government have given them; that by working hard and playing by the rules, they can get ahead. That isn't what the Ryan-Koch budget would allow.

What do the Republicans propose to do with this money they cut from Medicare, Medicaid, and education? They will create more tax breaks for corporations and the wealthy, but it is more than that. It is some of the things not written—these holes in the budget that we have heard before. We know they want to whack Social Security. They are just afraid to put it in writing. The Koch budget would cut the corporate tax rate to 25 percent and lower the top individual tax rate for America's highest earners.

I guess what I would say to the House Budget Committee and all the House Members—Democrats and Republicans—isn't \$80 billion personal wealth of the Koch brothers enough? I think most everyone would say, yes, it is enough, but not the Koch brothers. They want more. They are the richest people in the world. Individually they are only fifth, but put them together and they are the richest in the world.

Under this budget I have talked about, middle-class families would pay about \$2,000 a year more in taxes, but the rich would pay less. Democrats believe in growing the economy from the middle out, but the Republicans are still trapped in the trickle-down economics based on handouts to the super-wealthy and special interests.

Perhaps the Ryan-Koch budget is summarized best by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities' Robert Greenstein: "More poverty and less opportunity." That is what their budget is all about: more poverty, less opportunity.

So whether it is current law such as the Affordable Care Act or much needed legislation such as comprehensive immigration reform or an overhaul of the tax system, I ask my Republican colleagues to work with us for a better America.

RECOGNITION OF THE REPUBLICAN LEADER

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

DELIVERING REAL PROSPERITY

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, the Democratic majority led us to believe

the Senate would be discussing jobs this week, but it seemed to be a pretty one-sided discussion.

Republican Senators came to the floor to talk about our innovative ideas to create jobs and grow opportunity for all Americans. As for Senate Democrats though—well, they wouldn't even stand to call for votes on the jobs proposals.

I think this reflects a growing divide in the Senate between a Republican Party focused on the middle class and a Democratic Party that is obsessed with November 4.

That is very disappointing for America. The American people need two serious political parties in this country. But at least our constituents can be assured of one thing: Republicans are laser-focused on delivering real prosperity to the families who have struggled so much in this economy. It is the impetus behind basically everything we do, and it is the impetus behind the numerous jobs proposals Republican Senators are rolling out this week.

For instance, several Republican Senators will take to the floor again today to talk about energy's potential for driving growth and American job creation and why the government needs to stop holding Americans back from sharing in the energy boom. I also plan to join and discuss my own amendment that would fight back against the President's war on coal jobs. I am looking forward to that colloquy.

But right now I wish to talk about another jobs proposal Senator PAUL and I have again introduced: national right-to-work legislation. It would allow American workers to choose whether they would like to join a union, and it would protect the worker from getting fired if she would rather not subsidize a union boss who fails to represent her concerns and priorities. It is such a commonsense proworker proposal. According to one survey, about 80 percent of union workers agree that employees should be able to decide whether joining a union is right for them. One obvious benefit is increased take-home pay for workers who choose to keep the hundreds of dollars that would otherwise be taken from their paychecks by union bosses. There is a huge opportunity component here as well, because most unions operate on a seniority system with pay raises often based off the amount of time the worker has spent at a company rather than on her performance. Well, I think an American worker deserves an opportunity to earn more money if she works hard. I think she deserves the opportunity to rise through the ranks and put more money in her pocket if she is determined to do it. That is real paycheck fairness.

These are bedrock American values—core workers rights that should never be denied to our constituents, especially in a terrible economy such as this one. Many of Kentucky's neighboring States have gone right-to-work

with great success, and I hope Kentucky will join them soon. I recently read an op-ed that laid out how much we could have gained over the last decade if we had. It noted that private sector jobs have grown about 15.3 percent in right-to-work States compared to just 6.9 percent in Kentucky; manufacturing had expanded three times faster in right-to-work States and compensation had grown about 14.2 percent compared to just 4.3 percent in Kentucky.

So I am encouraged by the members of Kentucky's legislature who continue to fight for right-to-work legislation. Kentuckians shouldn't be subjected to that kind of prosperity gap any longer, and neither should millions of other Americans struggling across our country. I believe they should have a more equal chance of finding work in every State, and they should no longer see their communities failing to secure new investment because their State hasn't passed right-to-work. That is just one more reason why I believe in our national legislation too.

So I am asking our Democratic friends to join Senator PAUL and me in standing up for workers rights and a stronger middle class to join us in passing right-to-work legislation.

Let's be honest. After more than 5 years of economic misery under their watch, that is the least Washington Democrats can do for the American people. Unfortunately, I suspect we will hear a lot of excuses instead about why Washington Democrats cannot or won't stand with us in this fight. No matter what they say, though, the American people will know the truth: It is because big labor bosses have such sway over today's Democratic Party and because big labor bosses aren't about to give up their perks or their vise grip over American workers.

Well, big labor bosses should know that Republicans are determined to fight for American workers, American jobs, and a stronger middle class, even if the bosses work against us every step of the way. Right-to-work is a smart way to get America on the path to real recovery, and it is critical to empowering workers and giving them more freedom.

I commend Senator PAUL for his leadership on this legislation and for his long-time advocacy on this issue. I hope our colleagues on the other side of the aisle will prove me wrong by working together to pass important job initiatives such as right-to-work for the American people.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

PROTECTING VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS AND EMERGENCY RESPONDERS ACT OF 2014

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of H.R. 3979, which the clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

An act (H.R. 3979) to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to ensure that emergency services volunteers are not taken into account as employees under the shared responsibility requirements contained in the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

Pending:

Reid (for Reed) Amendment No. 2874, of a perfecting nature.

Reid Amendment No. 2875 (to Amendment No. 2874), to change the enactment date.

Reid Amendment No. 2876 (to Amendment No. 2875), of a perfecting nature.

Reid Amendment No. 2877 (to the language proposed to be stricken by Amendment No. 2874), to change the enactment date.

Reid Amendment No. 2878 (to Amendment No. 2877), of a perfecting nature.

Reid motion to commit the bill to the Committee on Finance, with instructions, Reid Amendment No. 2879, to change the enactment date.

Reid Amendment No. 2880 (to (the instructions) Amendment No. 2879), of a perfecting nature.

Reid amendment No. 2881 (to Amendment No. 2880), of a perfecting nature.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the time until 10 a.m. will be equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees.

The Senator from Louisiana.

Mr. VITTER. Thank you, Mr. President.

I rise to discuss and present amendment No. 2931 to the bill before us. This is a germane amendment. It is all about the substance of the bill before us and it is a fully bipartisan proposal, since all of the substance of this amendment was actually contained in the President's most recent budget submission.

The amendment idea is very simple: It would prohibit unemployment insurance and disability double-dipping. Those are two different things. One is about somebody who is temporarily unable to find work, still looking for work, clearly able to work. That is unemployment insurance. Disability is fundamentally different, somebody who is disabled and because of that disability cannot work on a long-term basis.

So, as President Obama has proposed, as many Republicans have proposed, this would simply prohibit an individual from receiving both of those benefits at the same time, and would save about \$1 billion over 10 years. That is President Obama's own estimation.

To fully present and consider this, I would ask unanimous consent that it be in order for me to offer my amendment No. 2931.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there objection?

The majority leader.

Mr. REID. Reserving the right to object, Mr. President, we have had millions of people over the last many months who have lost their unemployment benefits. In most instances it is real tragic. Many of the people who lost these benefits are past middle age.

Because of the recession they lost their jobs they had for a long time and they cannot find work.

We have read into the RECORD the tragic stories about people using their Social Security to try to save their son's home. We have the woman who is couch surfing. She said, "I didn't know what the term meant. Now I know." They have had to struggle without extended unemployment benefits.

The senior Senator from Rhode Island has negotiated a bipartisan fix to this. It has basically given the Republicans everything they asked for. Everything is paid for. There is no disagreement as to the pay-fors. It hasn't increased the deficit at all. In fact, it would stimulate the economy significantly.

We have been told by economist Mark Zandi, JOHN MCCAIN's chief economic advisor when he ran for President, we have been told by him and others that unemployment benefits stimulate the economy quicker and faster and more efficiently than any other thing we do, because they are desperate for money and they spend it.

But in spite of the bipartisan agreement negotiated with Senator JACK REED, Senator HELLER from Nevada and other Republicans, we have the vast majority of Republican Senators doing the same thing they have done for a long time. They respond in their usual way. When they face a bill they are trying to kill, they try to change the subject—diversion.

Now already on this piece of legislation before the Senate today we have more than 24 amendments that have been filed by Republicans dealing with ObamaCare alone, in spite of the fact—in spite of the fact—that yesterday it was announced that there are 7.1 million people who have already signed up. That doesn't count the 14 State exchanges that will get another 900,000, it is estimated, plus the 2-week extension in which hundreds of thousands more will sign up.

They are tone deaf. They have got to go to some other issue. But they cannot. There are more than two dozen amendments on this bill alone dealing with ObamaCare, repealing it in different ways.

Several other amendments have been singled out that we have before the body to attack the administration's efforts to protect the environment. The protests of Republican Senators to the contrary notwithstanding, these amendments show that the other side of the aisle is not serious about unemployment insurance benefits. They are more concerned about protecting the Koch brothers. This is the behavior of Senators who want to kill something, who want to kick up enough dust so they don't get blamed for what they are trying to do. What are they trying to do? Kill extended unemployment benefits.

So I object.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The objection is heard.

The Senator from Louisiana.

Mr. VITTER. Mr. President, I am going to repeat my request, because apparently the majority leader, based on his comments, didn't understand it.

I have an amendment that is about unemployment insurance. I have an amendment that is germane to the bill. It is not about ObamaCare, not about EPA, not about the Koch brothers. I have an amendment that is a proposal contained in President Obama's last two budgets. My amendment has nothing to do with any of the comments and objections he makes. For that reason I am trying to clarify that, and I would again ask unanimous consent that my germane amendment proposed by President Obama in his last two budgets be in order, and it be in order for me to offer my amendment No. 2931.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there objection?

Mr. REID. Reserving the right to object, I clearly understood the diversion-and-delay tactics of my friend from Louisiana, and I object.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The objection is heard.

Mr. VITTER. Well, Mr. President, reclaiming the floor, I think it is very unfortunate. I don't know why it is diversionary to talk about the substance that is before us in this bill. That is not changing the subject, I would say through the Chair to the majority leader; that is talking about the subject. I don't know why it is delaying anything to consider an amendment during the time set aside for this bill. That is not delaying anything. That is doing the business of the Senate by bringing valid ideas to the floor and offering them as an amendment, and I don't know why it is Republican obstructionism to have an amendment that is a proposal contained in President Obama's last two budgets.

So again, I would make the point that everything the majority leader said in objecting to my being even able to present my amendment for a vote doesn't apply to my amendment. It is complete nonsense. It is just talking past the substance of this amendment which is about unemployment insurance reform and which is a bipartisan proposal and which is included in the President's last two budgets.

This is an important and common-sense reform. It is common sense because eligibility for the two programs we are talking about is mutually exclusive. It is apples and oranges. Disability is designed to assist folks who are physically or mentally unable to work for a significant period of time, sometimes permanently. Unemployment insurance, in contrast, is intended to replace some of the earnings for those individuals who become unemployed and are unable to find work temporarily.

It is an oversight, a technical imperfection in the law, the fact that some limited number of folks can double-dip and get both at the same time. This is widely recognized on a bipartisan basis.

On the Republican side, of course, I have this amendment. Senator COBURN, my colleague from Oklahoma, has had similar proposals. Senator PORTMAN, my colleague from Ohio, has had similar proposals.

On the Democratic side, there is no higher ranking Democrat I can possibly cite than President Obama. The President has included this reform—exactly this reform—in his last two budget proposals. I have never heard any articulation from any Democrat or any Member of the Senate why this reform doesn't make sense.

The majority leader, while objecting to my even being able to present this amendment for a vote, offered no such rationale. He talked past it. He talked about the Koch brothers and he talked about EPA and he talked about ObamaCare, instead of talking about my germane, commonsense bipartisan reform amendment to this bill, which has been included—this proposal—in President Obama's last two budgets.

So I find this very unfortunate, but I am going to continue to fight for a vote on this amendment. It will improve the bill, whatever you think about the bill. This will improve it. This will save \$1 billion over 10 years. This will clear up the double dipping which was never intended and contrary to the fundamental different purposes of the last of the two programs, and this will advance a proposal that has been included in President Obama's last two budgets.

With that, I will return to promote this amendment, but for now I yield the floor and 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.

Mr. BROWN. Mr. 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.

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for up to 10 minutes as if in morning business.

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

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, it has been more than 3 months since 2 million Americans and nearly 60,000 people in my home State of Ohio and tens of thousands of people in the Presiding Officer's State of Massachusetts—overwhelmingly most of whom have worked day in and day out for most of their lives—have had their unemployment benefits expire simply because the House of Representatives and the Senate have failed to act.

This body has tried to act a number of times and a number of times it has been filibustered. We could not get 60 votes to move forward. The House of Representatives has seemed, frankly, indifferent to these 2 million people.

Think about who these people are. This is about unemployment insurance.

It is called insurance for a reason. Insurance means they pay in when they are working, they get benefits when they are laid off, but they must be seeking work to qualify and earn—and I underscore earn—those benefits. They are not given those benefits. They have earned them. They have paid into the unemployment insurance program and they get assistance when they lose their jobs.

Every day and week we fail in this Congress because of Republican filibusters and cold indifference in the House of Representatives to extend these benefits, more Americans slip into poverty. People are not getting rich from unemployment insurance. The average unemployment check in Massachusetts and Ohio and across this country is about \$300, which helps to keep their head above water, avoid foreclosure, put gas in their car, look for work—as they are required to do so they can receive unemployment—and just keep their family going and reduce poverty.

When they don't get unemployment benefits, they are not spending that money in their community. When they do get these benefits, they are spending money at the local grocery store in Chillicothe, they are going to the local shoe store in Portsmouth or Gallipolis, they are going to the car repair shop in Toledo or Lima. They are putting money in the economy which generates economic activity which grows jobs.

Extending unemployment is not just right for families in Dayton, Akron, Springfield, OH, and Springfield, MA, it is right for the economy because it puts money into the economy and helps to create jobs.

Forget about the statistics. Forget about the numbers—60,000 people in Ohio and 2 million people across the country—and instead listen to what this does for individual lives. I have three or four stories from people around my State. Lori from Montgomery County, which is in southwest Ohio and the Dayton area, writes:

I have worked my entire life, until I lost my job last summer. I now spend 4-5 hours a day looking for jobs, but the positions in my field are limited.

I'm told I'm either over or under qualified. My unemployment benefits aren't much, but it's enough to keep a roof over my head, and allow me to make car payments, so that when I did get a job interview, I have a car to get me there. Please don't let me down.

Robert from Belmont County, which is on the West Virginia line near the Ohio River in eastern Ohio, writes:

I lost my job in 2012 when my employer, a steel mill, shut down. I was unemployed for more than a year before finding another position.

I was there for two and a half months before being let go due to the down economy—not enough time for a new claim to get me by.

I have a family to support and now that the extension is gone, what am I to do until I find a good job to support my family? Do the right thing. Many lives are depending on it.

The first person said, "Please don't let me down," and the second person

from Belmont County said, "Do the right thing."

Scott from Union County, which is in central Ohio where they are doing a little better overall but still going through tough times, writes:

I was laid off from my job at the beginning of this year. I had only been there for six months, and it was a godsend for me.

I don't have a college degree, but I was given a chance to show I could do this job, even though a degree was required.

We went through a round of layoffs in October. My job was saved at the time, but then our company closed its doors in January.

Now I have nothing.

Zero income. Zero outside help, and a non-existing savings—not because I didn't save, but because I didn't make enough money to save anything the last few years.

I joined the military out of high school, and used my GI Bill to put myself through some college. But soon enough, I was just in a mountain of debt from school, and needed to work full-time.

I wasn't able to save money because I couldn't afford to pay my student loan debt.

While I'm writing you, I'm sitting here watching my son play, and he is so happy. But he doesn't know why his dad is so sad—nor should he ever.

I am begging you to get this figured out soon.

These are veterans and people who have struggled and worked all their lives. They are people who have never had it easy, but they do what is asked of them. As President Clinton used to say, they play by the rules. They take personal responsibility for their lives.

The Senate, because of the filibuster, has turned its back on these workers. The House of Representatives, because of its indifference, has shrugged these workers off. It is wrong. It is important that this Congress—the House and the Senate—pass the extension of unemployment. The President eagerly awaits signing this legislation because it will matter to workers in Middletown, Ravenna, Mansfield, and Shelby, OH. This legislation is important not only to my State but all over this country.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, I applaud my colleague from Ohio for his stories from his home State on the families who have been dramatically impacted by the broken bridge between a lost job and the next job. Indeed, in my home State there are about 26,000 folks who are affected in this manner. We can think of it as the space between two jobs, as a chasm—a chasm that threatens the success of every family. They are hoping to make their payment on their light bill. They are hoping to make their rent payment or their mortgage payment. But they have to make it to that next job, and savings run thin, particularly when savings are very hard to come by when our economy is generating fewer and fewer living-wage jobs.

In the last recession of 2008, 60 percent of the jobs lost were living-wage jobs. But of the jobs we are getting

back, only 40 percent are living-wage jobs. Indeed, that means millions of families have gone from a strong foundation—the ability to raise children, to buy a modest home, perhaps take an annual vacation, perhaps to save a little bit of money to help send their kids to college—to struggling and chasing minimum wage or near minimum wage jobs, part-time jobs, and jobs that often have no benefits. All of those wrestling with this situation aren't going to have a big pile of savings to get from one position to the next.

That is why, during periods of high unemployment, we have created a longer unemployment insurance bridge to get them successfully to that next job. When people fall into the chasm between one job and the next, it is not just the family that is hurt; it is not just the worker who is hurt. Our entire society is impacted. It is impacted in several ways. First we have the situation where people go through foreclosure, and that is devastating to the family, devastating to the children, and certainly it also impacts the value of every home on the street. We have the situation of families who lose their home, who lose their rental home and become homeless. It isn't just the parents who are impacted. The children are deeply impacted, and they go through a traumatic event. That is certainly a terrible situation to endure and mal effects throughout. Indeed, of those 26,000 families in Oregon, right now there is a couple sitting at their kitchen table trying to figure out just how many meals they are going to skip in order to make their next rent payment, or they are struggling with how long they can defer a health care bill while they make their mortgage payment. These are tough decisions.

This is why we developed a bipartisan agreement under President Bush that during periods of high unemployment, we would have a longer bridge to the next job. The logic is very simple. The logic is that during periods of high unemployment, the average time between jobs is longer and the chasm is wider, so people need a longer bridge to get there. This is a program that automatically pulls itself back in, retires itself, as the unemployment rate drops. As the unemployment rate drops, the number of extra weeks become fewer and fewer. That is why there is so much logic behind it. That is why there was no partisan divide.

Today we are going to vote, again, on whether to keep this logical, bipartisan, self-retiring, critical bridge in place, and I hope we have a broad bipartisan vote to support it. Then we need to say to the House of Representatives: This is not another bill we can lock in the basement and throw away the key. This is a fundamental piece of legislation that affects the welfare of our families, the health of our economy, the strength of our communities, and it merits a vote on the floor of the House of Representatives. It is certainly a reasonable expectation that

everyone in America should see where their Congressman or their Congresswoman stands on such a vital economic strategy for individual families and for the broader community.

So let us not disappoint those 26,000 families in Oregon. Let us not disappoint those 1.7 million families across America that have counted on problem-solving common sense rather than partisan warfare to address this issue.

Thank you, Mr. President.

I note the absence of a quorum.

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

The assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. 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.

CLOTURE MOTION

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, hereby move to bring to a close debate on the substitute amendment No. 2874 to H.R. 3979, an act to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to ensure that emergency services volunteers are not taken into account as employees under the shared responsibility requirements contained in the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

Harry Reid, Jack Reed, Patrick J. Leahy, Thomas R. Carper, Elizabeth Warren, Tammy Baldwin, Edward J. Markey, Christopher A. Coons, Tom Harkin, Cory A. Booker, Tom Udall, Kirsten E. Gillibrand, Barbara Boxer, Angus S. King, Jr., Christopher Murphy, Al Franken, Bernard Sanders.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on amendment No. 2874 to H.R. 3979, an act to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to ensure that emergency services volunteers are not taken into account as employees under the shared responsibility requirements contained in the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Texas (Mr. CRUZ).

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 61, nays 38, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 96 Leg.]

YEAS—61

Ayotte	Heinrich	Nelson
Baldwin	Heitkamp	Portman
Begich	Heller	Pryor
Bennet	Hirono	Reed
Blumenthal	Johnson (SD)	Reid
Booker	Kaine	Rockefeller
Boxer	King	Sanders
Brown	Kirk	Schatz
Cantwell	Klobuchar	Schumer
Cardin	Landrieu	Shaheen
Carper	Leahy	Stabenow
Casey	Levin	Tester
Collins	Manchin	Udall (CO)
Coons	Markey	Udall (NM)
Donnelly	McCaskill	Walsh
Durbin	Menendez	Warner
Feinstein	Merkley	Warren
Franken	Mikulski	Whitehouse
Gillibrand	Murkowski	Wyden
Hagan	Murphy	
Harkin	Murray	

NAYS—38

Alexander	Fischer	Moran
Barrasso	Flake	Paul
Blunt	Graham	Risch
Boozman	Grassley	Roberts
Burr	Hatch	Rubio
Chambliss	Hoeven	Scott
Coats	Inhofe	Sessions
Coburn	Isakson	Shelby
Cochran	Johanns	Thune
Corker	Johnson (WI)	Toomey
Cornyn	Lee	Vitter
Crapo	McCain	Wicker
Enzi	McConnell	

NOT VOTING—1

Cruz

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. On this vote the yeas are 61 and the nays are 38. Three-fifths of the Senators duly chosen and sworn having voted in the affirmative, the motion is agreed to.

Cloture having been invoked on amendment No. 2874, the motion to commit falls as being inconsistent with cloture.

The Chair further announces that amendment Nos. 2878, 2877, and 2876 also fall as they were not in order to be offered and their pendency is inconsistent with the Senate's precedents with respect to the offering of amendments, their number, degree, and kind.

The Republican whip.

Mr. CORNYN. Before we can have a real debate on how to fix the U.S. economy, which is experiencing the slowest recovery following a recession of any time since World War II, we have to agree on what the problem is and what we are actually trying to solve.

On this side of the aisle, we believe the problem is a shortage of full-time jobs, and we believe our main economic priority should be to facilitate or to create circumstances under which the private sector can create more full-time jobs. That is why we have offered a series of amendments to the pending legislation that would help do that. It would help grow the economy and help get people back to work—not just pay people who are, unfortunately, unemployed but actually help create jobs so they can find work and help provide for their families, which is what the vast majority of people want to do.

Currently, we have pending about 70 different amendments from this side of the aisle that would actually improve the underlying legislation. Among

other things, our amendments would repeal job-killing taxes, improve congressional safeguards against overregulation, and restore the traditional 40-hour workweek, which is a particular subject of concern to organized labor, which recently sent a letter to the White House and said that ObamaCare was incentivizing employers to take full-time work and make it part-time work. They called it a nightmare.

We also need to modernize our work-training programs. I have traveled to a number of locations in Texas, for example, where, as a result of the shale gas renaissance, we have had a number of manufacturing companies move back onshore because of this inexpensive energy supply, creating thousands of new jobs, and there are thousands more to come.

Thank goodness our community colleges are working with industry in these areas because what we find is that when people graduate from high school or maybe even college, they don't necessarily have the skills to qualify for these good, high-paying jobs. If there is one aspect we ought to all be able to agree on, it is that we need to modernize our work-training programs so that we can help people gain those skills so they can earn a good income as a result.

We also need to expedite natural gas exports, and that is not only for economic reasons and job-creating reasons at home. We have seen Russia using natural gas—and the stranglehold it has on Ukraine—as a weapon. One of the things we can do to help the people of Ukraine and to help our allies in Europe is to provide a long-term source of energy through another route other than through Russian pipelines.

We also should approve the Keystone XL Pipeline, which will complete this pipeline from Canada all the way across the United States. The terminus would be in southeast Texas, where that oil would be refined into gasoline and jet fuel and create a lot of jobs in the process. Then we need to consider proposals that would incentivize American businesses, small and large, to hire veterans.

I have been discussing these amendments all week, and I have been calling on the majority leader to allow these amendments to come to the floor and to provide an opportunity for a vote. As I said, there are now currently more than 70 different amendments and ideas that have been filed that are just waiting on the majority leader, who is the one who basically has complete discretion over whether or not those votes will actually occur. We have been imploring him to allow a vote on these amendments, but it appears—and I don't know if there is really any other conclusion you can draw—the majority leader has a different priority. His top priority, it appears, is for show votes on bills that either aren't going to go anywhere, because they are not going to be taken up by the House of Representatives, or that really treat the

symptom rather than solve the underlying problem.

As we read in the New York Times and elsewhere, it is the intention of the majority leader and the Democratic leadership in the Senate to schedule a series of show votes that basically are designed to change the subject from the failed policies of this administration—notably ObamaCare. Of course, one of those is going to be to make it easier for the trial bar to file class action lawsuits when it comes to gender pay disparity, something that is already against the law. The majority leader and his allies are going to lift the cap on damages and subject small and large businesses alike to class action lawsuits.

You don't have to take my word for it. All you have to do is read the New York Times. Here is what they reported last week:

The proposals have little chance of passing. But Democrats concede that making new laws is not really the point. Rather, they are trying to force Republicans to vote against them.

For that matter, the majority leader himself has acknowledged that these ideas were developed in collaboration with the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, the political arm of our Democrat friends in the Senate.

So it is pretty clear what is happening here. This is not a majority leader—or a majority, for that matter—in search of solutions to the problems that plague our country, particularly slow economic growth and high joblessness, and the highest percentage of people who have dropped out of the workforce since World War II. This has nothing to do with helping the American people. What it does have to do with is making proposals that would actually make the economy worse.

For example, the Congressional Budget Office said the proposed minimum wage increase—a 40-percent increase in the minimum wage—would likely destroy ½ million to 1 million jobs because the money has to come from somewhere. Small businesses, if they are going to be forced to pay 40 percent more for their workforce, are going to have to cut somewhere else, and what they are going to cut is jobs.

Needless to say, notwithstanding the fact that we are seeing the majority leader and the majority party engaged in pure political posturing, what they are actually proposing is going to make things worse, not better.

There is also the so-called Paycheck Fairness Act, which really should be called the “Trial Lawyers Bonanza” bill. This is nothing more than a gift to the trial bar. As I said earlier, gender-based pay discrimination was outlawed a half century ago. It is illegal already. President Obama, more recently, signed something called the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act just a few days after taking office in January of 2009. Here is what he said at that time. In 2009, he said that the Ledbetter act “ensures equal pay for equal work.”

If that is true—and I believe it is—then why offer this additional legislation, unless it is purely a political exercise designed to posture and perhaps distract people from the things they are upset about, such as ObamaCare, leading into the midterm elections. We are now being told that unless we pass the so-called Paycheck Fairness Act, or the “Trial Lawyer Giveaway,” employers will be able to discriminate against women. Well, that is nonsense. That is not true. I don't know how you can say it any more strongly other than to call it the lie that it is.

Even before the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act equal pay for equal work has been the law of the land since the 1960s. As the Wall Street Journal once observed, the Paycheck Fairness Act should really be called the “Trial Lawyer Paycheck Act” because that is who would benefit from this bill were it to become the law of the land.

Of course, as I mentioned a moment ago, the majority leader doesn't really expect this to pass. It is part of this false narrative we have heard before, and we are going to hear it again, that somehow this is really about fairness and gender discrimination, when it is about nothing of the kind. It is solely about politics. It really is a cynical attempt to distract people from what are the most important things we could do as a Senate, which is, again, to create circumstances under which the economy would grow and jobs would be created by the private sector so people could find work and they could provide for their families. That is what we ought to be doing.

Our Democratic friends claim this political agenda they announced last week, in conjunction with the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, is all about giving Americans a fair shot. Yet the majority leader is refusing to give them a fair shot at finding a full-time job, and he is refusing to give my constituents in Texas—26 million of them—an opportunity to get some of their ideas heard and voted on on the Senate Floor.

As I said once, and I will say it again, there are more than 70 different amendments that have been filed to this underlying legislation that would actually provide a solution rather than a political stunt which will do nothing to solve the underlying problem. The purpose of these amendments is to help millions of people who remain unemployed or underemployed, including the 3.8 million Americans who have been unemployed for more than 6 months—3.8 million Americans out of work for more than 6 months.

This legislation does nothing to help those people, other than perhaps to help pay them for a period of time they are continuing unsuccessfully to find work. There are also 7.2 million Americans who are working part-time who would like to work full time.

If the majority leader wants to argue our amendments are a bad idea, let him do it. We will have that debate on the

merits. If he wants to promote alternative options for growing the economy and creating jobs, we will be happy to consider those and perhaps even agree with him on some of them. But to simply refuse to allow a vote on these 70-some-odd amendments is a profound insult, not to us but to our constituents and the millions of Americans who continue to suffer through the longest period of high unemployment since the Great Depression.

We can do better. We need to do better. The American people deserve better than this cheap political stunt.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. HEITKAMP). The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. REED. Madam President, we have before us a bipartisan piece of legislation designed to provide very limited assistance to millions of Americans who have lost their unemployment compensation benefits. On December 28, the long-term unemployment insurance benefits terminated. At that point it was 1.3 million Americans; today it is 2.3 million Americans, and it is growing.

Since December 28, we have, on a bipartisan basis, been endeavoring to bring to this floor for a final vote a 5-month extension, some of which—in fact, with each passing day more of which—is retroactive rather than prospective. This bill is designed to help people.

In fact, this bill will provide them the benefits they were receiving based upon their work record because the only way you can receive unemployment insurance benefits is to lose a job through no fault of your own and continue to search for a job.

These are working Americans. The benefits we are talking about are roughly \$300 a week. What does that do? For some people it helps them keep their home. It pays the rent. For some others it provides food for their families. For others it provides them the ability to have a cell phone that is plugged in, literally, because they need one when they get, they hope, the offer for a job interview or for a job. So contrary to doing nothing to help Americans, this does a great deal for people who have earned these benefits through their toil and effort and their continued efforts to look for jobs.

We have an obligation, a great obligation to increase the growth in this country, and to do it in a way that will allow people to find jobs. In my home State of Rhode Island, there are at least two applicants for every job—in many cases, three applicants. There is a disconnect in many cases between the skills they have had over decades of work and the skills that employers are looking for today. And we have to address that.

But, to prevent this legislation from going through is to deny millions of working Americans the support they need to get through a very difficult period. That is why, on a bipartisan basis, we have come together. We have 5

months fully paid for. This is a fiscally sound piece of legislation which benefits men and women across this country based upon their work record. I don't think there is a more important thing we can do at this moment, and to delay it would be a disservice to the people.

I think something else is important too. When we talk about economic growth, let us recognize this legislation will help growth in the United States. There have been estimates if we had a full-year extension of the unemployment insurance program it would generate 200,000 jobs. Those are significant numbers. That is roughly about 1 month's job growth over the last several years. If we don't do this, then we won't get that growth.

So not only is this a fundamentally sound, fair, and thoughtful thing to do for millions of American families, it is also good for our economy. It does provide the growth my colleagues are talking about when they say we have to grow this economy.

There is much more that we could do. Many of my Republican colleagues, who have come to provide their insights and support, have suggested longer term ways in which we could deal with the unemployment crisis—better training programs, et cetera. Indeed, we have a bipartisan Workforce Investment Act reauthorization that is in the HELP Committee that I hope we can get to the floor quickly because we have to reform our overall job training program in this country. As I go out and talk to businessmen and women in Rhode Island, they say there is a disconnect between the skill set many people have and the skills they need for their workplace.

There is another aspect of this situation. The long-term unemployed numbers in this country today are twice as high as they are typically when we have ended unemployment benefits previously. We have a significant problem and a growing problem of the long-term unemployed.

Again, we will wait for the data to be conclusive and decisive, but my sense is, going back to Rhode Island, many of these individuals are in their middle ages—they are 40 and 50 years old. They have worked for 20 years. They have good work records, but the skills that employers are looking for right now are not immediately those skills that they have. Of course, there are job training options available, but all of these things require support. Again, if you are juggling family responsibilities and trying to get job training, that \$300 a week benefit check you have earned through your previous work is very helpful as you prepare yourself for a new job.

This legislation can't be delayed any longer. This is not about some political demonstration or some political messaging point; this is about getting aid and assistance to 2.3 million Americans today. And that number will grow with each passing day. It is about helping

people who earned this benefit through their work.

I can't think of anything more important that we can do—and do it in a timely and prompt manner. That is why I hope we can move forward as quickly as possible on a bipartisan basis with fully paid for legislation which is fiscally responsible, which will provide assistance for millions of deserving Americans and in addition provide further stimulus to our economy.

A final point. Why does this provide a stimulus to the economy? Because these types of benefits go to a former worker, someone looking for work, and they go right back in the economy. This is not a sophisticated tax break that will allow someone to put some money aside for a rainy day. This goes right to the families, right to the economy—to the local grocery store, to the local gas station for the repairs of a car, to pay for daycare that is necessary for children—to do those things that will go right back and stimulate further growth in our economy.

For reasons both of fundamental fairness and individual recognition that these people deserve a break in a tough economy and the very real fact that this dramatically benefits our overall economy, I think we have to move.

I am pleased and proud that we have had the support of our colleagues on both sides of the aisle to move forward procedurally. I hope we can finish this debate promptly, move this over to the House, and then begin to work with the House so they recognize the same reality that on a bipartisan basis we have recognized here.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

Mr. BARRASSO. Madam President, yesterday President Obama held an event at the White House to talk about his health care law. The President said:

The debate over repealing this law is over—the Affordable Care Act is here to stay.

That is what President Obama said yesterday. Of course, last October President Obama said his health care law was “the law of the land.” Then he went ahead and changed or delayed the law more than 20 times after that—on his own, without coming to Congress. If it is the law of the land, how does he get to change the law of the land 20 times?

Back on March 6, President Obama said the Democrats' health care law is “working the way it should.” Well, if the law is working the way it should, why do people in Wyoming keep telling me how bad the law is for them personally?

Just the other day I heard from a woman in Rawlins, WY. She wrote:

My husband has been self-employed at a small truck driving company servicing the oil and gas fields in [Wyoming] for over 13 years. We have always purchased individual healthcare coverage for our family of five. We currently pay \$906.87 for that coverage.

She said:

The lowest priced ACA Bronze plan will increase our premium to \$1359 per month, an increase of \$452 per month—an amount we cannot currently absorb. This is not affordable. Why is [President] Obama doing this to us?

That is a good question. Why are Democrats here in Washington doing this to families such as this woman's family in Wyoming? Why does President Obama think his law is working the way it should?

Well, the Senate Democratic majority leader, Senator REID, said here on the floor of the Senate back on February 26 that the law is going great. The majority leader said, "Despite all the good news, there's plenty of horror stories being told." He went on to say: "All are untrue, but they're being told all over America."

"All are untrue," he said here on the floor.

The majority leader added that all of the stories were "made up from whole cloth, lies distorted by the Republicans to grab headlines or make political advertisements."

Why does Senator REID think this woman in Rawlins, WY, is making up a story out of whole cloth?

Remember, the President also said that if you like your insurance, you can keep it. He said that if you like your doctor, you can keep your doctor. He said people's health care costs were going to be \$2,500 lower by now. So the President has said a lot of things that turned out not to be accurate. Now the President says his health care law is here to stay.

Given the President's history, I think it is fair to get a second opinion. As a doctor who has practiced medicine for 25 years, taking care of families in Wyoming, I come to the floor to tell you that I bring my medical experience, along with my colleague's experience, Senator TOM COBURN from Oklahoma. He and I have put together a report that looks at some of the promises Democrats have made about the law and some of the things Republicans have said about it. The report is called "Prognosis." It came out April 2014 and is available today on Senator COBURN's Web site at www.coburn.senate.gov or on my site at www.barrasso.senate.gov.

What we have done is come out with a report going through three different previous reports that, as doctors, we have put out watching the health care law as it has been developing. Each of the reports—one called "Bad Medicine," one called "Grim Diagnosis," and one called "Warning: Side Effects"—was released between 2010 and 2012. We grade ourselves now on how the predictions we have made over the last 4 years have turned out.

In the first prediction we made—report No. 1, "Bad Medicine"—we warned that millions of Americans could lose their health insurance plans.

The headlines all across the country show that over 5 million Americans did, in fact, get letters that they lost

their health insurance plan—health insurance which they liked, which worked for them, something they chose and they lost because the President said it wasn't good enough. He said he knew more about what they needed for themselves and their families than they did. So we predicted 4 years ago that millions would lose their health insurance plans, and millions did.

We warned that the law's new mandates would increase health costs and obviously increase the cost of insurance. That original diagnosis is confirmed as well.

Like the letter I just read from the family in Rawlins, WY, families all across Wyoming and all across the country are seeing incredible increases in the cost of their insurance. They are paying more, and in their opinion they are getting worse insurance—the President said better; I say worse—because they are having to pay for a lot of things that they don't need, don't want, and will never use. Yet the President says he knows better than they do about what kind of insurance they need and what is best for them and their families. They are also being faced with higher copays, higher deductibles, and higher out-of-pocket costs.

We warned additionally that short-term fixes threaten seniors' long-term access to care.

That is actually exactly what happened. The health care law took \$500 billion out of the Medicare Program—a program to take care of our seniors—not to strengthen Medicare, not to help our seniors, but to start a whole new government program for other people. For those 14 million Americans on Medicare Advantage, a program for which there are advantages—preventive care, coordinated care, things one would want—well, that has been dramatically hurt by the President's decision to take money away from the very popular Medicare Advantage plan.

We warned that patients with pre-existing conditions would still face care restrictions.

I listened to the President's speech. I read editorials written by colleagues on the other side of the aisle as recently as last week that said people with preexisting conditions are all being protected. That is not true. We know of patients who because of their condition have had to leave the State in which they live to get specialty care in other States. And when they lost their insurance and bought insurance through the plans of their State, their children with cystic fibrosis seeking specialty care in Boston are excluded from doing that under the plan because the insurance was bought in the State in which they live and the insurance they got did not cover any out-of-State physicians. So children have been hurt by the President's health care law, and we can identify those young victims of the President's health care law.

We warned that the individual mandate would fail with the IRS as an enforcer.

The IRS even admits they don't have a whole mechanism put together to make sure the mandate to fine Americans for not buying a government-approved product would be collected by the IRS.

We warned that new IRS taxes would harm small businesses.

That initial diagnosis is now confirmed. Small businesses are impacted all across the country by additional expenses and costs, making it much harder for them to provide insurance to their workers. Many looking at this are saying that it might be cheaper to pay the fine than to do what we would like to do and have done in the past, which is provide insurance that worked for those employers and their employees but perhaps doesn't meet the President's recommendations of what many people say is much more insurance than they will ever need, want, use, or can afford.

The second report we came out with a number of years ago is called "Grim Diagnosis." In that, we went through a number of concerns we had about the health care law after the initial report "Bad Medicine."

"Grim Diagnosis" provided warnings that the employer mandate would lower incomes and result in hundreds of thousands of jobs being lost.

We are still watching that one very carefully because we do know that with the employer mandate, there have been stories of businesses with 50 employees saying: We are going to have to get below 50. We are not going to hire more people. We have to get below that number.

The President is working to maybe make that a higher number, but no matter where that number line is drawn, people are finding that from a business standpoint, there are advantages to being below a certain number of employees and then not having to comply with the expensive mandates of the law.

We warned that the law included a risky insurance scheme that would cost taxpayers dearly.

That original diagnosis is confirmed as well with something called the CLASS Act. Folks who looked at it carefully on both sides of the aisle called it a Ponzi scheme—a Ponzi scheme—that would never work, could not be afforded. They said it was something Bernie Madoff would even be proud of. Yet the Democrats forced it into the health care law in spite of warnings against it.

Our final report was called "Warning: Side Effects," released in 2012. We started talking about the side effects of the health care law. We warned that the law includes hundreds of billions of dollars of tax hikes.

Well, that has been confirmed. All one has to do is look at the list of new taxes brought on by the health care law. It goes on and on with one new tax after another. These are taxes on real people that get passed on to others if they are applied to a business, totaling

\$1 trillion in gross tax increases over the next 10 years, from 2013 to 2022.

We warned that the new insurance cooperatives would waste taxpayer dollars.

That is exactly what this report confirms. It goes State by State, where we see significant wasting of money, as reported in the Washington Post and in USA TODAY.

We warned that the medical device tax would stifle innovation.

That original diagnosis has been confirmed as well. We see the medical device tax, which, when we talked about it as part of a budget amendment, there was bipartisan support for repealing it. Why aren't we voting to repeal it when it matters, when we could actually get this repealed? The Senate majority leader continues to block a vote on that.

So I come to the floor, the day after the President held his "mission accomplished" speech at the White House, to say that the prognosis for this health care law continues to be grim, the points we have made throughout continue to be true, and the people all across the country are experiencing it day-to-day.

They are experiencing it in their lives. They are experiencing it when they try to continue health insurance that works for their family. They are paying more out of pocket. Their premiums are higher. They may not be able to keep the doctor they had and liked. They may not be able to go to the hospital they had gone to previously.

It is interesting that in the State of New Hampshire where there are 28 hospitals, 10 of them are excluded—10 of the 28 hospitals in the State of New Hampshire are excluded—from the insurance being offered on that State's exchange to be sold in that State. Even the doctor who is the chief of staff of one of those hospitals—well, her insurance does not permit her to go to the very hospital where she is the chief of staff. Is this what the Democrats had in mind when they passed this health care law, people paying more in premiums, people losing their doctors, not having access to the hospitals in their community, higher copays, higher deductibles? That is what the American people are facing.

It is time for the President of the United States to acknowledge the pain that his health care law has caused people across the country. I know he watches the polls, and the polls continue to show that for every one person who says they may have been helped by the health care law there are more than two people who say they have been harmed.

People knew we needed health care reform in this country, and they knew the reason. People knew what they wanted. They wanted the care they need from a doctor they choose at lower costs.

This health care law has failed to deliver to the American people what they

wanted, what they asked for, and instead is trying to deal day-to-day with something the Democrats in this Senate and in the House shoved down the throats of the American people.

Thank you. I yield the floor.

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

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

Mr. COONS. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for up to 30 minutes as if in morning business and to engage in a colloquy with the Senator from Maine.

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

Mr. COONS. Madam President, I come to the floor again today to talk about good jobs and how we can work together in a responsible and bipartisan way to create high-quality and lasting middle-class jobs. All of us hear from our home States about how they want us to work together to produce for America today and America tomorrow.

As someone who worked for 8 years for a manufacturing company in the private sector before going into public service, I can tell you we can win in manufacturing. We can learn from our competitors, we can strengthen our workforce, we can strengthen our access to foreign markets, and we can strengthen our access to credit. We can do all of it and we can compete and win in advanced manufacturing in the United States.

One of the aspects of my own experience in the private sector that has stayed with me is that more of our manufacturing employment was in Germany than any other single country, and that often seems unlikely given that Germany actually has higher labor costs, labor protections, environmental protections, and in many ways a higher cost of doing business than almost any other advanced country. So how is it possible they are so successful? In fact, more than twice the percentage of their GDP is in manufacturing than is the case in the United States.

Why would we fight for manufacturing jobs? Why would we fight to emulate Germany's example? Because manufacturing jobs are great jobs. As the Presiding Officer and our colleague from Maine know, manufacturing jobs are high skill, high wage, high benefit, and have a positive impact on their surrounding community. They also need something. They need ongoing R&D, cutting-edge research, continuous improvement and innovations in order to remain at the cutting edge of productivity.

What we are going to talk about on the floor today is a bill that learns from the lessons of our most successful

European competitor, Germany. Germany has more than 60 manufacturing hubs located all over their country. These manufacturing hubs are in places where universities are doing cutting-edge technical research and companies are beginning to deploy these new technologies in manufacturing and the workforce that are needed to acquire the skills to be successful in these new areas of manufacturing all work in coordination. That is something we can, by working in a bipartisan way here in this Senate, advance, and advance rapidly, here in the United States.

The Senator from Maine and I are going to talk about a bill—the Revitalize American Manufacturing and Innovation Act—which has 14 cosponsors and is an indication of its broad base of bipartisan support. It has long been led by Senators BROWN of Ohio and BLUNT of Missouri, a bipartisan team, and to that they have added a great initial leadership team with Senator STABENOW, Senator LEVIN, Senator REED, and Senator SCHUMER, all Democrats, as well as Senator GRAHAM, Senator KIRK, Senator COLLINS, Senator WICKER, and Senator BOOZMAN, all Republicans. Most recently our wonderful colleague, Senator ANGUS KING of Maine, an Independent, has joined us.

This bill has been endorsed by folks ranging from the National Association of Manufacturers to the U.S. Conference of Mayors to the United Auto Workers, and many more organizations at the national and local level, which is another indicator of how diverse its support is from across the country and many different sectors. This is a bill I have reason to hope can not just get a lot of endorsements from the private sector and not just a lot of endorsements from cosponsors here in the Senate but can actually move through regular order to be taken up and considered by the committee of jurisdiction, to be taken up here on the floor, and actually signed into law by the President of the United States. I am hopeful that could happen partly because this is good policy.

There are already a number of hubs that have been established by Federal agencies spending money that has already been authorized and appropriated for specific research areas where the Department of Energy and the Department of Defense need to do work to develop cutting-edge manufacturing capacity in the United States.

I think if this law gets taken up on a bipartisan basis and is improved, refined, and debated in committee and here on the floor, we actually have a shot at advancing a process that will be wide open and will allow elements of the Federal Government, in partnership with the private sector, to leverage cutting-edge research and deploy whole new technologies across this country.

I am excited by it, and I know my colleague is as well. I will briefly state why Senator KING is a great colleague

to join all of us who have served as sponsors on this bill. He has previously worked in the private sector in clean energy. He has previously served as the Governor of the State of Maine and worked closely with the University of Maine and has a sense of how publicly funded research at a cutting-edge university, investment in workforce skills, and the deployment of new and innovative technologies in clean energy can work together to grow manufacturing, grow job opportunities, and grow our economy.

I invite my colleague to address his experience in Maine and why he has joined this broad group of cosponsors on this promising and bipartisan manufacturing bill.

Mr. KING. I thank my colleague from Delaware for his leadership on this issue. He has been indefatigable. He has been very strong on this issue. I think it is one of the most important issues that faces us.

I am not an economist; I am a country lawyer from Maine, but one of the things I know about any economy is you can't build an economy by taking in each other's laundry. Somebody somewhere has to make something, and that is the basis of wealth creation. Somehow in the 1980s, 1990s, and the early part of this century, we sort of lost sight of that and manufacturing took an enormous hit. We lost 32 percent of our manufacturing jobs in the decade from 2000 to 2010. We lost 42,000 factories—not people, 42,000 factories. Manufacturing was literally withering away in this country.

I think a lot of people sort of wrung their hands and said: Oh, well, I guess that is just the way of the world. It is all going to Asia, China, and Mexico. It is going to low-wage countries, and that is just the way it works.

The problem is, as my colleague from Delaware pointed out, Germany has gone in the opposite direction, and their country has the same standard of living, the same labor standards, the same employment cost levels, and yet 20 percent of their economy is based upon manufacturing; whereas, it is only 10 or 11 percent in this country. So that tells me it is not impossible. It tells me there is an opportunity here and that we can't just lay back and say: Well, I guess that is going to go away. Woe is us. That is never the way to seize the future.

Why do it? The Senator from Delaware said it: Better pay. In Maine, in looking at the data, employees in manufacturing on average make twice as much as employees in other areas—twice as much. There is a tremendous difference in pay, and of course a better difference in benefits. There is also a bigger multiplier for manufacturing. Manufacturing creates more jobs down the line and around a manufacturing facility. It is important for national security.

We are in danger of losing our industrial base, which is part of our national security infrastructure. If we can no

longer make things—whether it is destroyers at Bath Iron Works or jet airplanes or uniforms or boots or other things that are necessary to support our national security apparatus—we are in trouble, and that is a danger to our country. That is a national security danger because if we are dependent upon other countries that may or may not be our friends for essential components of our national security infrastructure, that is a very dangerous and risky place to be. That is not often talked about, but the maintenance of manufacturing jobs in the United States is a critical part of our industrial base and a part of our national security strategy.

Manufacturing allows for more exporting. It brings money into our country. Eighty-three percent of the exports from Maine come out of the manufacturing sector, and that is bringing money into our country rather than sending it out to other countries.

Also, I think it is very important to remember that this is a way of dealing with what I think is one of the most serious issues of our time, which is income inequality. It is the widening gap between those at the top and those at the bottom, and what is really a concern is the stagnation, and, in fact, the decline of the American middle class.

Manufacturing was the path into the middle class for our parents and grandparents. The manufacturing resurgence after World War II—by the way, part of that resurgence was based upon the GI bill, probably the greatest economic development program ever fostered by any government anywhere in the world—which helped to create the middle class is in danger. One of the ways to preserve and strengthen the middle class—and to deal with this problem of income inequality—is more manufacturing and more of those good jobs.

This is the 100th anniversary of one of the most amazing and transformative actions in American corporate history. The year was 1914 when Henry Ford doubled the pay of all of his workers. Everybody was astonished. His competitors were aghast. The advocates of unbridled capitalism said: How can he do this? Henry Ford was a genius in many ways. But one of his insights was he wanted his workers to be able to buy his products, and one of the problems in our economy today is a lack of demand. The people of the middle class don't have enough income to buy the products and it becomes a downward spiral. It is a lack of demand that is truly at the heart of the weakness of the current economy, and it is because people don't have good enough jobs and they are not being paid enough.

Henry Ford realized if he paid his workers more—and, by the way, that munificent sum in 1914 was \$5 a day, but it was a doubling of what the rate of pay was everywhere else in American society at that time. That was a huge breakthrough intellectually, economically, and socially for this country.

OK. We talked about the losses. There is some good news. In the last 2½ years we have gained 500,000 jobs. We lost 6 million in that decade, but now we have gained 500,000 back. So something is happening. A lot of different things are happening. The low price of natural gas I think is helping to rejuvenate manufacturing. I know it is in Maine. I think there is more innovation happening around the country. People are realizing—I have talked to manufacturers who have been offshore and have come back because they said the offshore factory was a little cheaper, the labor costs were less, but the hassle factor was higher, and what I have learned is I can control costs, I can control transportation, I can control time limits better if the manufacturing is in the United States.

So what do we do? What do we do if we want to increase manufacturing? We can't wave a wand here in Washington. We can't say, well, go out and create jobs. We have to create an atmosphere where we can create jobs.

When my little girl Molly, who is not so little anymore, was in the third grade, I used to teach her things with pneumonics. I would say the three Xs or the three Ys or whatever. In this case, if she were here and she were still in the third grade, I would say it is the four Ps, Molly. It is the four Ps that are going to make this happen. The first is a plan. Nothing happens without a strategy or a vision or a plan. This bill has a vision of how to link innovation and the American economy and manufacturing in such a way as to create and rejuvenate this sector. A plan—we have to start with a plan or a vision.

The second P is partnerships, and this bill is based on partnerships. Nothing good happens without partnerships. It is based upon linking the academic world with the manufacturing world with government; putting those partnerships together, mostly universities and manufacturing, to create innovation, to create new jobs, to create new ways of building wealth. We don't have to look much further than Silicon Valley in California. That is a perfect example of a natural born innovation hub built around several knowledge factories: Stanford University, University of California, University of San Francisco. Knowledge factories, together with manufacturers, created one of the greatest hotbeds—probably the greatest hotbed—of innovation, creativity, and new wealth creation in the history of this country and perhaps in the history of the world. We want to create these kinds of hubs all over the country, putting together the academic community and the business community to develop the capacity for innovation and creativity.

I should mention—it is not part of this bill, but the other thing I think we have to do a lot of thinking about is the skills gap. I got a call right after my election from a chamber of commerce director in southern Maine and

he said: Senator, we want you to come down and talk about jobs.

I said: Oh, OK. I will. And I was prepared to talk about how to create jobs and add jobs.

He said: No, no, it is not that. The problem is we have 500 jobs and we can't fill them. These are good-paying jobs in manufacturing, and we can't fill them because the people we need aren't available with the skills we need. There is a mismatch.

I believe one of the things we have to do around here is think hard about all the programs—I think there are something like 59 different Federal job training programs—how to integrate them, coordinate them, and focus them on business-ready jobs, not 10-years-ago jobs but the jobs of today. Therefore, I think the coordination and cooperation between business and the job training infrastructure has to be much closer than it is today.

That gets me to S. 1468. I think it is a wonderful idea. One of the best parts of it is that it is bipartisan. This is an idea that is supported—SHERROD BROWN and ROY BLUNT were the spearheads of it, and then we have people such as ROGER WICKER, the Senator from Mississippi, and the Senator from Delaware; we have a good bipartisan group from around the country geographically and across party lines. This is what we have to do. Why is it so important? Because what drives new manufacturing jobs is innovation.

When I was Governor of Maine, somebody gave me a cap and on it it said "innovate or die." Bill Gates once famously said: Every product we make today is going to be obsolete in 5 years. The only question is whether we make it obsolete or someone else does.

Innovation is the heart of this economy. That is why we have to put together the knowledge factories with the production factories—the knowledge factories, the universities, such as the University of Maine, that has the advanced composites lab that has created amazing new ways to deal with composites. One of their creations is the bridge and a backpack. The bridge and a backpack is a composite system which I have seen in action. They are long tubes made of fiberglass. You spread the tubes out, fill them with concrete, mold them into the shape you want, and in about 3 or 4 days you have a bridge, and you put the deck over it. It is a wonderful system. It came out of the University of Maine and now it is being used across the country.

The other piece I like about this is that it isn't a government program. Government is the catalyst, the convener, the pulling together of these hubs, and that is, I think, our function. We shouldn't be doing it. We shouldn't be steering it, but we should be launching it, and that is what this bill is all about. Does it solve all the problems of manufacturing? Of course not. There are dozens of things we have to do in order to support this industry, whether

it is tax reform, job training or innovation hubs and more support for R&D. All of those we have to do, but I think this is one of the most important, and we don't have to guess about it. It works in Germany. They have twice the role for manufacturing in their economy as we do. It works. So let's see what we can do here with the same idea.

I compliment the Senator from Delaware and the others who have led this bill, and I am delighted to be able to tag along. I think this is a great idea. It truly can make a difference, and I think we will see that difference in the coming years.

I yield the floor.

Mr. COONS. Madam President, I thank my colleague from Maine for sharing his personal experience both as Governor and for his work and partnership with the University of Maine and their composites center and his understanding of the importance of a modern, skilled workforce in order to take advantage of the work we are hoping to catalyze through this bill.

I wish to summarize across three large areas. This bill, if enacted, would take advantage of linkages, leverage, and labor in a way that would grow lasting middle-class jobs. All of us want to work together to find a way to give American workers and families a fair shot, to give them a fair shot at the kind of middle-class quality of life that dominated over the last 50 years. As my colleague said, it was because of the GI bill and its investment in education, it was because of innovation and competitiveness, and it was because of a skilled workforce that we were able to dominate the world in manufacturing for much of the last 50 years of the last century. If we are to seize this moment and regain our global leadership not just in the productivity sector of our manufacturing but also in the base, in the employment of our manufacturing, we have to do the sorts of things this bill imagines.

We have research being done in national labs, in federally funded national labs—fundamental research. That is wonderful. We have applied research on composites being done at the University of Delaware and at the University of Maine and every other State university that does higher research. We have manufacturers trying to take advantage of new technologies and new opportunities. This bill will link them all together to create regional hubs that allow the researchers, the private sector, and the new employees to all come together.

It also, as my colleague mentioned, leverages private sector funds. Every one of the four hubs announced to date is a more than a 1-to-1 match; 2 or 4 or, in one case, 8-to-1 match of private sector dollars to public sector dollars.

Last, it invests heavily in training and in skills and making sure the workforce is ready as these new technologies get out there.

I wish to describe the reach of some of these linkages and partnerships for a

moment. Let me take a second and take a walking tour, if I could, of the four hubs that have been finalized so far.

For example, the one in Youngstown, OH, deals with 3D manufacturing. This is a relatively new, cutting-edge technology that radically alters the scale of early stage manufacturing and what is possible in terms of prototyping, and then, I think fairly soon, what is possible in terms of customized, unit-by-unit manufacturing. It has enormous promise. But if we are going to stay competitive globally in manufacturing, when there is something new invented in the United States, we have to also make sure it is made in the United States. So this is the sort of hub that makes that possible.

There are four hubs, and I will mention them briefly: the one in Ohio, the one in Raleigh, NC, the one in Detroit, and the one in Chicago. But they don't just engage the universities and the workforce and the companies right in that immediate community. They benefit from national networks. For example, General Dynamics and Honeywell are two of the very large national footprint firms partnering with the Youngstown hub. Universities from Arizona State to Florida State are collaborating in the wide bandgap semiconductor work in Raleigh, NC. Researchers from the University of Kentucky, the University of Tennessee, Notre Dame, and Ohio State are partners with the hub that is in Detroit. There are researchers from Boulder, Indiana, Notre Dame, Louisville, Iowa, Nebraska, UT, Austin, and Wisconsin that are partnering with the hub in Chicago.

So what are these hubs? Are they just some diffuse academic teams that share names and a little bit of data with each other? No. If there were, for example, to be a hub in Maine on composites, we would find researchers at the University of Delaware who have done great work in composites and companies doing work in composites partnering with the fundamental research being done, let's say, hypothetically, at the University of Maine, and learning about how to deploy that new technology in ways that would benefit the local workforce and the local manufacturers.

That is why there is so much leverage coming out of these linkages. That is why these hubs have been so generative and so powerful in Germany's experience. It is a way to harness our Federal investment in research by the national labs and by State universities with the energy of the private sector and the capacity of our manufacturers to relentlessly innovate.

We have a very broad menu of bipartisan manufacturing bills that have been taken up and discussed in this Chamber. This one—this manufacturing hubs bill—has some of the broadest support and I think some of the best reasons for it to be considered in committee and taken up on this

floor later this spring. It is my real hope our colleagues will join us in doing so.

Let me yield back to my colleague from Maine.

Mr. KING. I like the Senator's suggestion of a hub in Maine involving composites. Could we write that in the bill? I wouldn't object to that amendment.

Mr. COONS. If there is a footnote that says "and Delaware."

Mr. KING. I think this is such an important idea, and in my comments I outlined how we get here. We start with a vision or a plan which the bill entails, and we start with partnerships, which is truly the essence of the bill, but there are two more pieces. There are two more Ps. One is perseverance. Any Member of this body knows about perseverance. That is what this place is all about. We have to stick to it. We have to not take no for an answer. We have to listen to our colleagues to find out how they feel about the bill and try to form a consensus and then move this bill through.

Last Friday was the 100th birthday of Ed Muskie of Maine. Ed Muskie was the father of the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act. Talk about perseverance. He spent 2 years, hundreds of hearings, hundreds of hours of markup and ended up with that bill passing the Senate unanimously—unanimously. That is a monument to perseverance.

Normally, I would say those are the three Ps: plan, partnership, and perseverance, but I think there is one more, and I am sure my colleague from Delaware agrees with me.

Nothing is going to happen without passion. We have to care about this. The people of America have to care about this. We have to say that this is something we are going to do. We are going to rebuild the manufacturing centers that made this country what it was—a sector that made this country what it was. We are going to have to do it with passion and commitment. I believe this bill is an opportunity to restart that process.

It will, and as I mentioned earlier, it can change us and provide benefits everywhere from higher wages to better national security to a stronger middle class. A plan, a partnership, perseverance, and passion—that is what changes the world.

Mr. COONS. I thank my colleague for joining me in this colloquy on manufacturing, both broadly and more specifically on this bill. I am grateful for the leadership that Senator STABENOW and Senator GRAHAM, as the cochairs of the Senate Manufacturing Caucus, have shown on this particular bill and the passion and the perseverance that Senators BROWN and BLUNT have shown in bringing this great idea into legislative form and in advancing it.

There are so many other bills that we can and should take up that will bring strength and vitality to the American manufacturing sector. But it is my real hope that S. 1468, the Revitalize Amer-

ican Manufacturing and Innovation Act will be the next in a series of important bipartisan manufacturing bills that we will take up to make sure we are doing our job to help grow high quality American jobs.

I yield the floor.

REINSTATED AMENDMENTS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Chair was in error in striking down amendments Nos. 2877 and 2878. Those amendments are reinstated.

The Senator from Virginia.

Mr. KAINE. Madam President, I rise to talk a little bit today about the Affordable Care Act and its benefit to America's women. I want to thank Senators MURPHY, BOXER, and WHITEHOUSE who have organized a few of us to come to the floor today. They will be on the floor later this afternoon.

But with so much discussion in the news about the recent completion of the March enrollment period—over 7 million people enrolled in the Affordable Care Act through the exchanges—I feel it is a good time to look at some of the benefits of the ACA, but also where there is more work to do.

I know the Presiding Officer has been very focused on "where there is more work to do." I applaud the Presiding Officer for that. I will talk about some of those issues as well. But first, let me start with a couple of Virginia stories because we hear stories from our constituents about the Affordable Care Act.

There is a 27-year-old woman in Charlottesville who was diagnosed with uterine cancer. Before the ACA, her previous insurance plan refused to cover her surgery because cancer was a preexisting condition. She is now enrolled in a health plan under the ACA, and her doctor and hospital where she is planning the surgery were confirmed to be in the provider network.

In Alexandria, VA, there is a woman by the name of Aqualyn Laury. She is 43 years old. She suffered a stroke and a heart attack at a young age and had been on a preexisting condition insurance plan that was extremely expensive for some time. With her coverage scheduled to end, Aqualyn recently enrolled in coverage through the health insurance marketplace. She found a plan through the marketplace with a reputable company with a premium of approximately \$245 a month, with copays and deductibles that were easy to understand.

Angelette Harrell from Norfolk was able to purchase a plan on the exchange. Now, she had a problem with ACA because she could not work the Web site. But she did not give up. She called the phone number. She was able to find a plan that is \$85 a month with a tax credit. She works in a care facility for adults with autism. She says she could not afford a plan that would have been \$280 a month without the tax credit. Because she is under 200 percent of the poverty level, she gets a credit, and she gets a plan for \$85 a month. That makes her a more reliable em-

ployee. She said: "It felt great. I finally got insured."

She was able to enroll. I will tell a story about another great Virginia woman, my wife, and her experience with the Affordable Care Act. We had to buy insurance on the open market for the first time as a family in the summer of 2012. Like any good husband who wants to get something done right, I asked my wife to do it.

My wife comparison shopped with a couple of insurance companies. Two insurance companies told my wife: We can give you insurance, but we can only give you insurance for four of your five family members because of preexisting conditions—one because of me and one because of one of my kids. We have to be about the healthiest family in the United States. The only hospitalizations our family of five have ever had are the three times for child birth for my wife.

Yet insurance companies told her when she called in that we—boy, I tell you, do not tell my wife we can insure four of your five family members—an important safety tip. They told her that. She said: That is now against the law.

The company said: No, it is not. This is what we do.

Well, talk to your supervisor and call me back. It is against the law.

The company had to call back in both instances within a few hours and say: You are right. It is against the law. Here is a quote for your entire family.

The ACA is helping women and families in all circumstances, people who are working in low-income jobs and cannot afford insurance or people who are well off like me but need protection from the former practice of denying people for preexisting conditions.

Here are some ways the ACA works for women in particular. The law eliminates the ability of insurers to charge higher rates due to gender. Do you know that the unfair practice of charging women more, a gender rating system, was resulting in women in this country paying \$1 billion more in annual premiums than men prior to the passing of the ACA. That is now illegal. Nearly 30 million women are receiving free coverage for comprehensive women's preventive services, including diabetes, cancer screening, contraception, and family planning. That is an important benefit for women.

Thanks to the Affordable Care Act, both women and men are free from lifetime annual limits on insurance coverage in 10 essential health benefits, like hospital visits and prescription drugs. It is not only about health, the ACA is also helping the financial health of women and families. Insurance companies under the ACA are now subject to a national rate review provision if they want to increase premiums higher than 10 percent. In 2012 alone, those rate reviews saved 6.8 million Americans an estimated \$1.2 billion in premiums just in 1 year.

Insurance companies are also required to spend their premium dollars in a smart way. They have to spend at least 80 percent of premium dollars on patient care and quality improvement. That is at least 85 percent for large insurers. In 2013—just in calendar year 2013—8.5 million Americans received rebates averaging \$100 per family because of this particular provision.

An estimated 3.1 million young Americans are able to stay on family policies—that is also affecting my family in a positive way—up until age 26. Families with incomes between 100 and 400 percent of the poverty line are eligible for tax credits. So as an example, a family of four in Virginia making \$50,000 can access a health plan with premiums as low as \$48 a month—health care for your family for less than your cell phone bill, for less than your cable bill. This is remarkable. Plans are required to limit family's out-of-pocket health care costs to less than \$12,700 a year.

Like the Presiding Officer, I am a fixer; I am not a repealer. I think there are a lot of fixings that are still needed in the Affordable Care Act and, frankly, in our health care system generally, not just in the ACA. There is more that we can do to make the ACA work better for women and families.

Medicaid expansion is an example, a critical step that my State, Virginia, has yet to take. Without Medicaid expansion, uninsured women will face a coverage gap. With Medicaid expansion, over 400,000 Virginians will receive health care coverage. The ACA was designed to provide subsidies and tax credits to individuals and families who are making between 138 and 400 percent of the poverty level. But without Medicaid expansion, it is these families—working people—who remain uninsured.

We also have to work on some proposals to continue to improve affordability and choice for all consumers. The Presiding Officer has led an effort with others to put a number of positive reforms on the table. Let me mention a couple that I am very excited about: The Expanded Consumer Choice Act, S. 1729, would create a new tier of coverage, copper plans, and would give people shopping for health insurance more options to meet their family's needs.

Everybody's financial and health situation is different. So more options are great because that gives people more ability to meet their particular needs. That is a very important piece of legislation. The Presiding Officer played a leadership role in it.

I supported expanding the small business tax credit to incentivize more businesses to participate in the tax credit program, to make it easier to access and easier for the small businesses to use. One I am particularly focused on is that we need to close the family glitch loophole. That is not a technical term, the family glitch loophole. The Affordable Care Act says an employee

is eligible for subsidized health coverage through the new exchanges if their employer does not offer "affordable coverage", which is defined as more than 9.5 percent of the employee's household income.

But the way the law is written, the affordability definition only applies to the price for the employee, not for the family coverage that an employer may offer. So if an employer does not offer affordable family coverage, there is no eligibility for a subsidy for that particular very important coverage, since most people's families are covered through their employer plan. I think that is an important thing we should fix.

So look. There are plenty of things to fix. There are plenty of things about our health care system outside of the Affordable Care Act that we ought to be focusing on and fixing. But repealing the Affordable Care Act, as some colleagues in this body and in the House continue to advocate, would mean turning back on all of these advances: Letting women be discriminated against because of gender, letting families be turned away because of preexisting conditions, saying to folks: Do not worry, you are not going to get a rebate; we can charge whatever premium we want.

The last thing we need to do is repeal the ACA or to go into the homes of nearly 10 million Americans who have received coverage and yank that coverage back from them and put them back out into the wilderness of the individual market where they were not protected before. What we need to do is to embrace the good and embrace the fixes to make it better. That is what I certainly intend to do working with my colleagues.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

Mr. KING. Madam President, I appreciate the comments of the Senator from Virginia. I think they were timely and important. I wanted to add one note. The Senator and I were in a hearing yesterday in the Budget Committee with three eminent economists—one was a Noble Prize winner—talking about income inequality and the status of our economy and where we are going.

But there was one aspect of the Affordable Care Act that came up in a discussion that really has gotten essentially no play whatsoever, no discussion in the press or in the media. I think in the long run it may turn out to be one of the most important aspects of the Affordable Care Act. It came home to me 2 weeks ago. Every Wednesday morning I have a coffee in my office here in the Senate office building for anybody from Maine that happens to be in town, whatever reason they are here, whether they are touring or have business in Washington. They can come in and have some blueberry muffins and some Maine coffee.

I met a couple there. The woman, in talking to us—she was down touring

and everything. She said: By the way, thanks for supporting the Affordable Care Act.

I said: Oh, well, that is great. I appreciate that. Why do you say that?

She said: Because I have been in a job for a number of years that I do not like. But I could not leave it because it was how I got my health insurance. My husband does not have health insurance. So I had to stay in the job in order to keep the health insurance. She said: Now under the Affordable Care Act, I have an option to get health insurance at a reasonable price so I can leave this job and start my own business.

After I had this discussion, I did a little research. It turns out there is an economic term for this. It is called job lock. All over the country there are thousands, perhaps even millions, of people who are locked into a job where they are not feeling very appreciated, where they are not really enjoying it, where they are not expressing their productivity and their talents fully because they could not leave their insurance.

Now they can. There is a lot of talk around here about job creators. The job creators are the people that start businesses, the entrepreneurs. Those are the job creators. This is going to lead to an explosion of new businesses, of people who do not have to stay in the job that they are in simply because of their health insurance but have the option to go out and start a business of their own because they can get their health insurance at a reasonable price through the Affordable Care Act.

So there is a lot to discuss about the Affordable Care Act. But this is one of the aspects of it that has been underappreciated. As the years go on, we are going to see a decrease in people uninsured—which we are already starting to see—and we are going to see an increase in small businesses because people no longer have to stay in their jobs simply to maintain their insurance.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. BALDWIN). The Senator from Wisconsin.

Mr. HATCH. I rise to speak once again about the process we have been following in the Senate when it comes to major pieces of legislation.

The Senate has been called the world's greatest deliberative body. However, if you look at how it operates these days, I don't think anyone would say that anymore unless they were being sarcastic. We no longer have real debate. Most bills don't go through committee, where they can be refined and improved.

When the Senate Democratic leadership decides to bring a bill to the floor, far more often than not we are blocked from offering any amendments. The unemployment insurance legislation before us today is a good example. Republicans have filed dozens of amendments to this bill. Some of them would definitely improve the UI legislation. Others would address the underlying

problems that have led some to call for another extension of Federal unemployment benefits—namely, the stagnant growth in our economy and jobs. Yet it appears that none of these amendments will get a vote because the Senate Democratic leadership has decided it is more important to protect their Members from having to take difficult votes than it is to actually legislate.

I filed several amendments. Two of them in particular would help to create jobs and prevent further job losses. One of those amendments would repeal the ObamaCare tax on medical devices. We had 79 votes for that. Yet we can't get a vehicle that will put it through. The House will overwhelmingly vote for it. Yet we can't even get time on the floor to take care of it. That shouldn't even be considered controversial. Indeed, a large majority of Senators have already voted in favor of repealing this job-killing tax and protecting an important American industry—I should say important American industries because there are a lot of industries in this area. Repeal of the medical device tax has bipartisan support in both the House and the Senate, as I have mentioned.

I have another amendment that would repeal the ObamaCare employer mandate. On the face of this, this may seem more controversial, but it shouldn't be. After all, the Obama administration has already delayed the mandate for 2 years. If the mandate is so harmful that the administration is afraid to let it go into effect, why don't we simply do away with it altogether and ensure that it doesn't kill any more jobs?

These are reasonable amendments. They deserve a vote. Therefore, I ask unanimous consent that it be in order for me to offer my amendment No. 2905.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. REED. Madam President, reserving my right to object, the underlying emergency bipartisan legislation is critical to helping 2.7 million Americans, and I would hope we could expeditiously move to that legislation. Therefore, I would object to the unanimous consent request by the distinguished Senator from Utah with respect to his amendment No. 2905.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. HATCH. You can imagine how disappointed I am in that.

I ask unanimous consent that it be in order for me to offer my amendment No. 2906.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. REED. Madam President, the same logic—given the emergency nature of the legislation before us, I would urge immediate action. Therefore, I would object to the senior Senator's unanimous consent request.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Utah.

Mr. HATCH. Madam President, the Senate didn't used to operate this way.

I have been to the floor many times over the past few years to talk about the deterioration of the Senate procedures under the current majority and to call for a return to the deliberative traditions of this Chamber. Many of my colleagues on this side of the aisle have done the same. Sadly, it appears our calls have fallen on deaf ears.

I have been in the Senate a long time, and I have never seen it worse than it is right now. There have been some very rough times in the Senate over the years, but I have never seen it worse. Over the past number of years, the majority has called up a bill and then immediately filed cloture as if we were filibustering, when we don't have any intention to filibuster. All we want is to be able to call up amendments. But, in addition to filing cloture, the majority will fill the tree, making impossible for anyone to call up an amendment.

Frankly, this is not the way to run the Senate.

All I can say is that the Senate is not being run the way it should be run.

I have no objection to filling the tree after a full and extended debate when people have an opportunity to bring up their amendments, full-blooded Senators here on the floor, who have the right to bring up those amendments.

I have no problem with amendments that I totally disagree with being brought up, but you can't even do that most of the time on these bills unless, basically, the leadership on the Democratic side approves. Until recently, this body has always had the position that we can call up germane and non-germane amendments. That is what makes this body great. It is what has given it such prestige over the years. Now, with it being run this way, we've just become a rubberstamp for the leadership. That can work both ways. I think it is a bad thing to do. However, the principle has been started and the precedent has been set.

I lament this because I have been here long enough to see some of the greatest debates in the history of the Senate done right here on this floor. Some were initiated by Democrats who wanted their right to be able to bring up everything and to really have it debated—whether it was germane or non-germane—and assert their rights on the floor. Others were brought up by Republicans filing amendments that Democrats didn't like. But the Democratic leadership in the past acknowledged that, my gosh, you have the right to do that in the most deliberative body in the world. But we have made it anything but the most deliberative body in the world with this type of procedure.

It is my hope that the Republicans will be able to take over the Senate in 2014. Perhaps that won't happen, but I would like to see it happen. If it does, I think my friends on the other side are

going to feel very badly if this same type of maneuvering is done to prevent them from bringing up the amendments they would like to bring up. But, I personally believe that, with Republicans in the majority, we would get back to the regular order that the rules were before these types of shenanigans took place.

This is important stuff, and there is a lot of concern on our side regarding how the Senate is currently being run. As the most senior Republican in this body, I understand those feelings. I have them too.

It is wrong, certainly not right, and we need to change this. We need to make it back to the most deliberative body in the world. Should we do that, I think everybody here will breathe a sigh of relief and say: My gosh, each side will have these rights restored that have been so distorted during the last number of years.

I am sorry I couldn't get these two amendments. One of them was the medical device tax repeal. We brought it up before during the debate over the budget. Seventy-nine of our colleagues—79 of us—voted for that amendment. It was a bipartisan vote, a vote that had tremendous leadership on the Democratic side through the distinguished Senator from Minnesota, Senator KLOBUCHAR, who has been a wonderful leader on that issue. If it wasn't bipartisan, maybe I would understand it, but it is not only bipartisan, it is crucial to all of the medical device companies throughout the United States that have set the standard for the whole world.

We are going to get that passed sooner or later, but in the meantime we are having medical device companies leaving the United States because of that stupid gross tax on gross sales, if you can believe it. There is only one reason it was put into the health care legislation, and that was because they needed about \$30 billion—with a "b"—for ObamaCare. It was basically a phony approach to come up with \$30 billion that has deliberately hurt one of the greatest budding industries in America.

I can't think of a more stupid tax than one that taxes the gross sales of these companies. That is a dangerous, debilitating, disgusting, wrongful tax. Yet we can't even get a vehicle over here to put it on—the other body would pass it quickly—so that we can get rid of it.

All I can say is that I am very disappointed, but I do understand how this body works.

With that, I yield the floor, and 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. CARDIN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mr. CARDIN. Madam President, the numbers are in—over 7 million Americans have enrolled through the health exchanges around the Nation.

When we passed the Affordable Care Act 4 years ago, projections were that we would hit the 7 million mark of enrollees at the close of the first year of enrollment. We have exceeded those numbers. We have exceeded those numbers even though we had a very rough rollout of the exchanges and people were frustrated when they couldn't get information as quickly as they wanted. But Americans wanted insurance, and they knew they could get affordable coverage, so they stuck with it and now we know that, in fact, over 7 million have enrolled.

When we see the final numbers, those numbers are going to go up because there were a lot of people in the process of signing up online on March 31 and the processing has not been completed. So we will see more. Plus, we have the Medicaid expansion, which is going to bring millions more with health insurance coverage than we had before.

Over the last 4 years we have seen incredible progress and help going out to all Americans with their health coverage and their health costs. No longer do we have preexisting conditions. A family who has a child with asthma doesn't have to worry whether that asthma will be considered a preexisting condition to full coverage. A woman does not have to worry about having a child being a preexisting condition to full coverage. Parents can keep their adult children on their insurance policies until the age of 26. There are no longer any caps on insurance. Many Americans thought they had insurance coverage only to go through a serious illness and find their insurance had a cap that did not cover all the expenses. No longer do families have to worry about being forced into bankruptcy because of an illness or an injury.

Our seniors now have much stronger coverage under Medicare, with preventive care covered without any deductibles. Prescription drug coverage is now more complete with that so-called doughnut hole—that coverage gap—being filled. And the solvency of the Medicare trust fund has been extended by a decade.

Small business owners have a choice of the types of plans they want. They do not have to worry about one person in their employment getting sick during the year and causing an astronomical increase in their premiums. They also have help and affordability in paying for their health insurance for their employees.

Community health centers have been expanded and offer such coverage as prenatal care. In my own State of Maryland we are seeing the low birth weight baby numbers declining and infant mortality rates going down. We are now providing more pediatric dental services within the community. That is all as a result of the Affordable Care Act.

So we now have passed the March 31 date and the first year of enrollment. Many Americans now have affordable quality health care and a choice. They have a good product at a reasonable cost.

Everybody hears the numbers, but I want to go through a few—and I have literally hundreds—of the letters I have received from real people whose real lives have been affected. They are one of those 7.1 million people, and we could read millions of accounts just like this. This is from Dr. Michael L. of Cecil County in a letter to the Baltimore Sun. He said:

My wife and I would like to thank President Barack Obama for helping us save almost \$4,000 a year on health care. I am 61 years old with a preexisting condition of asthma, which is under control with medication. Yet before the Affordable Care Act, my insurance company felt it necessary to charge me 25 percent more for my insurance coverage. I'm sure there are many others like myself with preexisting conditions who will see a savings on their coverage. The public should know that since Fox News and the GOP would have us believe ObamaCare helps no one and will cost everyone more.

This is from Colleen F. of Anne Arundel County, and she posted on our Facebook.

Senator—I am 26 years old and have been on COBRA paying \$570 a month for coverage because of a pre-existing condition—asthma. I want to thank you for fighting for the ACA!! I applied recently . . . and was accepted into the program. I now pay \$243 a month with a \$500 deductible! Thank you thank you thank you! Affordable health care is a human right—thank you for fighting on my behalf!

Kelly "M" wrote:

I have a new plan. I haven't had insurance for years. When I applied for insurance before, I was denied for pre-existing conditions, even for plans with huge deductibles. I signed up on the Maryland Healthcare Exchange back in October, and by January 1st, I was holding an insurance card from Carefirst Blueshield and have already had my first doctor's appointment. It works. I am proof. And I'm so grateful that I can take care of myself with dignity without having to go to the ER whenever I'm sick or have to spend half my paycheck at an urgent care center. I can do all of the preventative measures that I have been putting off, and get back on the road to health. It's a good feeling.

Pam S. of Frederick County, MD, wrote:

My daughter and I met with a Navigator from the "Door to HealthCare" . . . to discuss applying for health care. We had been having problems with the enrollment process. I had been paying for a separate plan for her and now she is paying \$55 less per month. Now my daughter gets to have a comprehensive plan, cheaper than before and without any interruption on her coverage. Thank you!

Ryan, from Prince George's County, has aged out of her parents' insurance. Ryan was suffering from asthma and a sinus infection, but she was unable to afford a doctor's visit on her own. After attending a local Affordable Care Act information session, she logged onto the Maryland Health Benefit Exchange and was able to go through the entire

process and pick an affordable health plan. She is now insured and able to get the treatment she needs.

Ryan is 26 years old. Those under 26 can be on their parents' policy. We talk about young people who think they will never need insurance. I was in downtown Baltimore over the weekend at a fair where we were enrolling people in the Affordable Care Act. I saw many people of Ryan's age—young people over 26 years of age, who were there to find out whether this was right for them. When they left, they held an insurance card. They had enrolled because they found out how reasonable the price was for a young person to get comprehensive coverage.

I have quite a few more, and maybe on a later date I will come back and read some of the other letters I have received. But the point I want to bring up is we have fundamentally changed the health care system from a system that was basically a sick system—only if you got sick, figured out how to pay your bills, maybe you went through bankruptcy—to a health care system where we keep people healthy, where we provide for comprehensive preventive health care so people can stay out of emergency rooms and hospitals.

Yes, we have benefited those who had no health insurance. Millions of people now have coverage who didn't have coverage before the Affordable Care Act. We have brought them into the system. They don't have to fear bankruptcy. They can take care of themselves, and they can do it in a more cost-effective way for all of us.

We have helped our seniors. No question about it. They now have more comprehensive benefits, and they have a system that is on a more stable financial footing.

But we also have helped those who already had insurance. We have helped them by giving them a better product, by making sure the premiums insurance companies charge are used for patients' benefits and not excessive profits. They must spend 80 to 85 percent; otherwise, they have to give a rebate.

We have gotten people out of the emergency room. I was asked on C-SPAN today: Well, aren't we helping the providers? After all, people who go to hospitals now are more likely to pay their bills. Absolutely right. But guess who paid for that uncompensated care. Those of us who had insurance. Our premiums were higher as a result of people not paying their bills. Well, now they are going to be paying their bills. First of all, they are going to stay out of the hospital which will save us all money. But if they need to be in the hospital, they will have the insurance coverage to pay for it.

The Affordable Care Act has worked for all of us by bringing down the growth rate of health care costs, by making the system more efficient. Today I think we can acknowledge the fundamentals are sound. People are taking advantage of it. We hope, as we go forward, more and more will.

One final point. When Medicare Part D was passed and we projected the number of seniors who would take advantage of it, we hit about 70 percent of our projection in the first year. On the Affordable Care Act and the health exchanges, we are over 100 percent. This program is working. People know it. The more they know about it, the more they like what they see.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Colorado.

Mr. UDALL of Colorado. Madam President, I rise today to speak about a critical disaster relief bill I recently introduced here in the Senate.

In the West, we have a saying that “Mother Nature bats last.” For millions of Americans, that saying is a reminder that often entire communities are at the mercy of the raw force of nature and natural disasters. Sadly, we are reminded of this truism every year with wildfires in the West, hurricanes in the South, and ice storms along the Atlantic seaboard. The devastating and tragic mudslides that have recently devastated Oso, WA, are the latest example.

First, and most importantly, I wish to express my deepest and most heartfelt condolences to the families of the victims of this tragedy in Washington State. I assure the people of Washington that Coloradans stand ready to assist in whatever way we can with a recovery process we know all too well ourselves. We are all in this together.

In times of disasters such as these, I believe there are no Democrats or Republicans. We put aside partisan divides to unite in the face of tragedy. When confronted by these dire situations, we stand united to support our fellow Americans who have been shaken by the destructive forces of Mother Nature.

When the Northeast was rocked by Superstorm Sandy in 2012, a majority of the Congress stood together to fund relief and recovery efforts, not because it benefited their State or because they expected anything in return, but because it was simply the right thing to do. Similarly, when Hurricane Katrina devastated the gulf coast in 2005, we united to support our fellow Americans who lost their homes and livelihoods in the hurricane and its aftermath. And when ice jams just last year caused the Yukon River to spill its banks, flooding Galena, AK, and the surrounding towns, Congress stood as one to provide aid and assistance for those in need.

My State too has felt the pain of destructive and unprecedented natural disasters in recent years. In fact, many parts of Colorado are still reeling from the September 2013 floods that resulted in 10 deaths, washed away homes and businesses, and literally redrew the map across parts of my State. In my travels to places such as Evans, Jamestown, and Estes Park, I witnessed firsthand how thousands were impacted by this disaster, which spanned 200 square miles and 15 counties.

Fortunately, in spite of a destructive and partisan government shutdown that forced all of us to scramble just days after the flooding, many of the 18,000 evacuees in my State have returned home and are working on rebuilding their lives and their communities. This is thanks to the assistance from Federal and State agencies, including important relief funding made possible by the Superstorm Sandy relief package we passed here in Congress in a bipartisan manner.

In sum, we in Colorado are on the road to recovery thanks to the tremendous efforts of thousands of people, including many of our colleagues here in the Senate. But as my colleagues who have dealt with their own natural disasters know all too well, the initial relief efforts are only the first step.

Looking ahead over the next couple of months, Colorado—like many other Western States—may be facing another round of devastating floods, wildfires, and mudslides. Why? Colorado, like Washington, has received an above-average snowpack this year. We have more snow than normal and we are expecting 127 percent of average snowmelt this spring. So when we combine this increased snowpack and the impending spring runoff with streambeds still jammed full of debris, crumbling riverbanks, and waterways that the flood rerouted out of their original path, Colorado still has a recipe for disaster on our hands.

I will share a photograph of what happened in one of our communities. We can see the culvert washed out, the vehicles embedded in the cobbles and sand and boulders of the riverbed. The riverbed itself was completely rerouted during the flooding when it took out the road in that particular area. The good news is, as we look at the potential for additional disaster, we have the power here in Congress to confront the disaster before it has a chance to occur.

I wish to speak to the history of what Congress did. Congress recognized the importance of stabilizing waterbanks, preventing soil erosion, and clearing debris from waterways back in 1978 through the Agricultural Credit Act. As part of that important law, Congress authorized the Emergency Watershed Protection Program—or EWP for short. As many of my colleagues know well, EWP provides critical disaster relief assistance for families and communities which have suffered severe damages from flood, fire, drought, or other natural disasters.

The EWP Program focuses on funding critical emergency recovery measures for runoff mitigation and erosion prevention that will relieve imminent hazards to life and property presented by natural disasters. Protecting and repairing these watersheds, wherever they may be, is critical in preventing the type of erosion that leads to massive mudslides and future disasters.

Unfortunately, even though our country is rocked by these natural dis-

asters every year, the critical EWP Program does not receive consistent funding. The sporadic and inconsistent way we fund it—via ad hoc supplemental bills—has created a backlog in need of over \$120 million nationally.

For my colleagues in the Chamber who may not immediately recognize the importance of EWP and the program attached to it, let me make clear that there are 14 States which have projects left unfunded because of this backlog, meaning there are up to 28 Senators who could see relief in their home States if we pass this bill.

This backlog is unacceptable. It is preventing us from funding dozens of projects that can help reduce the frequency and severity of mudslides, projects that can protect our watersheds, and projects that can save lives.

So with this in mind, I rise today to ask this Congress to come together yet again and pass legislation, which I introduced last week, supporting a more permanent funding stream for the EWP Program. I have introduced the bill with my home State colleague, Senator BENNET, and it has been cosponsored by the senior Senator from Washington, PATTY MURRAY.

It will not cost a dime, but it will finally change the way we structurally fund the EWP Program by creating a common, unified account to provide support to families and communities around the country.

This commonsense legislation would also free up dollars that have already been appropriated in the past but have not been used. Unlocking these dollars will not create additional spending but will infuse this newly created account with seed funding to begin clearing out the backlog and helping States such as Colorado finance critical projects that can save lives.

Moving forward, my bill sets up a system where appropriators and States impacted in the future can ensure that every dollar made available to the EWP Program is used when needed, and put back into this important, permanent fund when it is not, reducing the threat and the cost of future disasters.

As an avid outdoorsman, I am well aware of the dangers presented by the forces of nature. I have been a longtime supporter of EWP and its vital relief efforts. The importance of this program was only further emphasized to me last September when boulders, water, and debris came roaring through Eldorado Canyon, which is just a short mile from my home, and there were scenes like this as well near my home.

It has become very clear that every moment we spend trying to piece together ad hoc funding for this program every year—after these disasters have already occurred—is another moment that could be spent rebuilding the homes and the livelihoods of Americans who have been struck by Mother Nature.

Americans should not be forced to wonder or worry about partisan divides undermining their ability to access

critical resources and services. They shouldn't have to face the uncertainty of whether Congress will pass supplemental funding to support their families and communities after a devastating event such as the one we see here that forever changes their lives. And they certainly shouldn't have to wait for Congress in order to access essential and proven services from the EWP Program when a disaster leaves their homes and communities in shambles. Unfortunately, some in this Congress have shown that they are incapable of rising above partisan posturing to help those in need. The reckless partisanship of these individuals nearly prevented us from passing a bill to help the storm-ravaged States affected by Hurricane Sandy and kept the government shut down 16 days, even as we in Colorado were struggling to take the important first steps toward recovering from our historic fall flooding.

We cannot let funding as critical as EWP be subjected to this kind of rancor, which is why my bill is so important. That is why it is long past time EWP receives a solid, dependable funding stream. I hope my colleagues will join me in supporting this legislation, and I look forward to working with Senate appropriators to actively finance this fund for years to come.

With the funding structure created by my bill in place, communities around the country that have been knocked off their feet by brutal and unanticipated disasters will be able to count on this program to immediately help them get back up and onto the road to recovery. This is not only responsible to do, it is right to do.

I wish to briefly touch on a slightly different topic but one that is also very important specifically to Colorado; that is, the national security, economic, and job-boosting potential of exporting liquid natural gas or LNG.

This is a topic which I and many Senators from both sides of the aisle have been talking about over the recent weeks, particularly in light of the ongoing crisis in Ukraine and Russia's use of its natural gas exports as a weapon. Russian aggression and its incursion into the Crimean peninsula illustrates precisely the reason we cannot wait any longer to responsibly develop our natural gas reserves and to export this resource abroad.

Unfortunately, new facilities to export LNG are on hold right now waiting for approval at the U.S. Department of Energy. While the Department of Energy approval is only one step in a complex process to construct a new export facility—a process that includes environmental access and public input—it has become an unacceptable logjam. That is why I introduced a bill a few weeks ago that would break the logjam and pave the way for approval of LNG exports to World Trade Organization nations, in effect approving the pending applications in the queue.

My bill is bipartisan and bicameral, and it would send a signal to inter-

national markets that the days of Russia's monopolistic stranglehold on energy supplies is waning. My bill would pave the way for more American jobs and provide a shot in the arm to our economy. That is why I was disappointed to learn that several of my colleagues have decided that another political vote is more important than good policy and decided to push an LNG amendment tied to the approval of the controversial Keystone XL Pipeline.

I voted against both Republican and Democratic Keystone Pipeline amendments because I believe these political votes by both sides only set back progress on the real review process. Tying good LNG policy to a political vote about an unrelated topic doesn't lead to progress on either issue. Instead, it shows the political motivations of those who are deciding to go this route.

My friend from Wyoming, Senator BARRASSO, has a strong bill that would open LNG exports to a targeted group of countries in Europe, which he tried to attach to the Ukraine aid bill. I agreed with that effort. He also filed my bill, which opens LNG more broadly, as an amendment to that same legislation during the Senate Foreign Relations Committee markup. Both of these approaches have bipartisan support, both of them would make a difference, and both of them are worthy of consideration.

So I invite all of us who want to get something done to abandon election or political gains and focus on what matters. We can leverage our natural resources to promote global security, create jobs, and prevent power-hungry leaders such as Putin from using energy supplies as a weapon. Let's get this done and work together to find a real way forward, and let's have a vote.

Madam President, thank you.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. REED. Madam President, I see Senator BLUNT. I ask unanimous consent that at the conclusion of Senator BLUNT's remarks, I be recognized.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection.

The Senator from Missouri.

Mr. BLUNT. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that it be in order for me to offer my amendment on this bill, No. 2885.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. REED. Madam President, because of the emergency nature of the underlying bipartisan bill to aid about 2.7 million Americans, I would object.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The objection is heard.

Mr. BLUNT. Madam President, let me talk about why I think we should have this and other amendments on this bill.

My friend from Colorado just talked about an amendment that he said he

supported last week. Of course, none of us got to support it on the Ukrainian bill because it wasn't allowed to come up, just like on this issue of talking about unemployment extension or the other things that our friends on the other side have announced in a pretty aggressive way that they intend to bring up because they just hope to have a political issue rather than a process that will actually work.

I believe we should have these energy amendments such as the one I am proposing on this bill because getting people back to work and being concerned about people's take-home pay, being concerned about what people get to keep of what they earn is an important part of this whole process.

So the amendment my friend objected to would be an amendment that would make it very difficult—it would establish another hurdle before anyone could have a carbon tax. This amendment is similar to the one I offered during the budget debate this year, and 53 of my colleagues supported it, so a majority of the Members of the Senate are for this but just not the majority it would take in the Senate to get it done.

A carbon tax would force families to pay more at the pump. What is a carbon tax? It is a tax on fuels that have some carbon component, and that means fuels such as gasoline, coal-based electricity, and other fossil fuels. For this component, you would have to pay more at the gas pump, you would have to pay more for your heating, more for your cooling, more for virtually every product we make in America.

The energy bill, the utility bill is a big component of what we make in the country today, and it could be one of our huge advantages in manufacturing and job creation, but we are headed in a direction with our view of energy that is not the most focused on more American energy and that doesn't take advantage of the moment we could be in.

Areas where I live in Missouri, people in the South and Midwest—frankly, from about the middle of Pennsylvania to the western edge of Wyoming—are heavily dependent on coal for electricity. About 50 percent of all the electricity in that vast majority of the land mass of America is from coal. Eighty-two percent of the electricity produced in Missouri is from coal. There are at least five States that have a higher dependency on coal than we do. If we had a cap-and-trade bill, the estimates are that our bill would have gone up about 40 percent since 2013.

A carbon tax is disproportionately impactful on people who are struggling to get by. If you want to really do things that impact the vulnerable in our society, make the utility bill higher. If you want to really do things that impact the vulnerable in our society who are looking for work, make it harder to put those jobs in the United States of America.

About 40 million U.S. households that currently earn less than \$30,000 per year spend almost 20 percent of their income already on energy. Why would we want that percentage to be higher. What you make is not nearly as important as what you are able to use to advance your family. If the utility bill is 30 percent of what you make or 40 percent of what you make instead of 20 percent, obviously the other things you would have done with that money could not have been, done.

These are the households that can least afford to have the new energy-efficient refrigerators. These are the last households to get the better windows, the last houses to get more insulation in the ceiling and the walls, the first houses where people have to think about, What room do we shut off this winter because we cannot use all the rooms in the house in the way we would like to? It would be nice to be able to fill up your tank rather than stand at the gas pump and wonder, Can I possibly afford to put more gas in than that pump has already shown on prices that are already too high.

There are lots of amendments on this bill about energy, none of which, I am told, will be allowed, and I think that is a tragedy.

A 2013 study by the National Association of Manufacturers found that the overall effect of a carbon tax on American jobs would be staggering, with a loss of worker income equivalent to about \$13 million and 1.5 million jobs. Why would we want to take that out of our economy when we can not only keep it there, but by enhancing more American energy, we could expand it?

The utility bill is an increasingly important part of job creation. Energy-sensitive industries such as chemicals, auto manufacturing, iron and steel manufacturing, cement, mining, and refining sectors are the hardest hit by a carbon tax, and these sectors would see a big drop in their manufacturing output.

So if we had the kind of debate we ought to have, it would be a debate about how we get people back to work rather than how we continue to extend benefits in a policy that was never intended to have never-ending benefits. This system doesn't work. It doesn't work for people who pay into the system or draw out of the system if we abuse it.

I think we all know this is not the debate we should be having this week, and I would like to see us have a debate on how we could improve the economy while we deal with this so-called immediate need that we are talking about on the floor instead of the things we ought to be talking about.

I wish to talk for a few minutes about the announcements yesterday about how many people have signed up for the President's health care plan. As I said when the Web site wouldn't work, it is not about whether the Web site works. Frankly, it is not even about how many people sign up. This is

about whether this is the right direction for us to go as a country. Is this health care more affordable, and will more people be insured, and will the people who are insured be insured with policies they can afford and coverage they want?

The President, of course, and everybody understands the Web site had its problems. I think we would be really remiss if we decided—if making the Web site work was the test of the program or, frankly, making people sign up was the test of the program.

This debate is not over. It shouldn't be over. We need to continue to look for ways to try to make this work better because I certainly continue to hear from Missourians who tell me that the course they are on is hurting their families, hurting their job opportunities.

The law of unintended consequences appears to be the law here that is most likely to be applied, the unintended consequences of people who are going to work part time, the unintended consequences of people who are looking at a job that used to be a full-time job but now the government said: You don't have to provide benefits unless somebody works 30 hours a week. I guess what the government really said was that you have to provide benefits when they do work 30 hours a week. But people immediately look at that and the society adjusts to that government determination. So suddenly people are working 28 and 29 and 20 hours without benefits where they might have been working those same hours before with some level of benefits or might have—more importantly for their families—been working full time before.

We are going to continue to talk about this law and how it serves people. Let me give a couple of quick examples as I conclude this morning.

I had a person in the office this morning who was here for another purpose. He is a radiologist from Cape Girardeau, MO, and he said he received notice that his insurance was going to go up \$500 a month for the same coverage until the President made the decision to suspend the law, which is a totally different debate topic, whether the President can do that. But when the President suspended the application of this law, which everybody is supposed to be so excited about, they were able to keep the policy they had for another year, and it was \$500 a month less—\$6,000 a year less for that family.

Here is some information I got today from Sherry in Shelbyville, MO, who said that her 18-year-old son has had cerebral palsy his whole life. They had a medicine that works that allows him to deal with this. Last year a 3-month supply of this particular medicine went from \$125 to \$1,086—almost a \$1,000 increase. But that may or may not be impacted by what is happening with overall health care policies. What was impacted this year was her family's deductible. Their deductible went from

\$500 to \$5,000. They were paying \$500 on a 3-month supply of medicine. A 1-year supply of that medicine cost a little over \$4,000. They were paying \$500 of that, and now they are paying all of that.

Her view—which would be the view of most working families—is: We had insurance we could afford, we had insurance that met our needs, and now we are paying \$3,500 more than we were paying. For almost any family, \$300 a month makes a big difference. It particularly makes a difference for families who are struggling and already dealing with a health problem.

Pete from Jackson, MO, receives health care benefits through his employer, but his wife and two children had health insurance through an independent carrier. His wife and children's plan will be dropped November 30 of this year. Their new plan will cost \$1,200 per month instead of \$530 for similar coverage they have right now.

By the way, these are just a few of the letters from the top of the list. If I had more time, I could certainly read more letters.

I have a letter from Greg who is from St. Joseph. His out-of-pocket expenses went from \$2,500 per year to \$10,000 per year. He is paying that by going into his 401(k) retirement plan. If anybody thinks Greg and his family are better off from this new change in the law by paying \$10,000 out of pocket instead of the \$2,500 out of pocket—and he is having to dip into his retirement plan to help pay for his health insurance—I would like to hear from them.

There are people who had insurance before this new law, and although they have insurance now through the exchange, they just happen to be paying in many cases a lot more and have a deductible that is a lot higher. I think that would be a great debate for us to have on the floor now that we know, as a country, what is at stake.

What do we do to be sure the best health care system in the world works better for everybody? How do we make changes so that those who are outside of the system have a better chance to be a part of that system rather than penalizing everybody who had insurance they thought was working for them?

I yield the floor to my friend from Rhode Island.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. REED. Madam President, I rise today to discuss the underlying legislation, which is so critical. It is an emergency. On December 28, we stopped extending unemployment benefits for at that point 1.3 million Americans. These are individuals who were working and who are looking for work, since that is the only way you can collect these benefits.

Since that time, they have been without the very modest support that emergency unemployment insurance provides. It provides about \$300 a week. We are trying, on a bipartisan basis, to

move this legislation through this body and get it to the House so these people can get some help and support as they continue to look for work.

This legislation will support a program that is vital to 2.7 million Americans, and it is a bipartisan compromise. This is not something that is being jammed through exclusively at the will of the majority. This has been an effort that began months ago. First we worked with Senator HELLER and then other colleagues—Senator COLLINS, Senator MURKOWSKI, Senator PORTMAN, and Senator KIRK.

We listened to their suggestions and incorporated them so we could move forward on a bipartisan basis as we have done on so many different topics. We would like to have a vote, move it to the House, and have it signed by the President so we can get the relief, support, and assistance to these Americans. Again, I have to emphasize that they are only qualified for this program because they lost their jobs through no fault of their own, and they are continuing to look for work in a very difficult economy.

The one other thing I wanted to mention, which is very important, is we are building on significant changes to the unemployment compensation laws that were passed in 2012. At that time the chairman of the Ways and Means Committee in the House of Representatives, Chairman DAVE CAMP of Michigan, described these as historic reforms. Our goal, as I said many times during the past few weeks and months, and prior to and since the ending of these benefits on December 28, is to find a path forward to a rather straightforward extension of the benefits. Again, this is a temporary extension. It is a 5-month total window, but with each day more of it is retroactive. The reason we wanted to look for a very straightforward proposal is that, first, it would recognize the important changes and reforms that were made in 2012. Many of the ideas I have seen and heard discussed around here actually were considered thoughtfully in 2012 and incorporated in many cases—not all cases—into the legislation.

The other thing we want to do is make this as administratively feasible as possible to implement by the State agencies. Adding significant changes, such as adding a training component that didn't exist before, not only complicated the implementation, but when you stop and step back, it usually costs money.

One of the underlying premises, particularly from my colleagues who worked with us from the Republican side, is that this whole effort has to be fully funded. This bill is fully offset during this ten year budgetary window. This is paid for, it incorporates the ideas and suggestions from my colleagues on the other side, and it is now time to move for passage.

I recognize there are many issues we could deal with in the Senate. Many of my colleagues from both sides of the

aisle have come to us with their issues. But to do that would undercut the ability to, in timely manner,—today or I hope tomorrow, but certainly this week—pass this legislation and move forward.

Millions of Americans are facing a crisis. They are out of work and looking for a job. In my State there are probably two applicants for every job, and in many cases there are probably three or four applicants for every job. We also recognize this is a long-term unemployed population that is different in some respects than previous episodes of unemployment. There are indications and suggestions that they are older on average. They are also facing a situation where the economy has been very difficult for many years.

Many of them are homeowners who can't sell their house because of the market so they can't move to an area where there is work. Many of them, particularly if they are middle-aged, have responsibilities to mothers and fathers who may have health issues, and children they have to support. The overall situation is that these individuals are facing a very difficult challenge.

There is a very thoughtful paper by the former chair of the President's Council of Economic Advisers, Alan Krueger, and his colleagues. They described the difficulty of these unemployed Americans in this economy, particularly for the long-term unemployed.

We have seen periods of significant unemployment. I can recall the 1980s, when unemployment hit 10 percent, but normally there is a relatively fast response once the right fiscal and monetary policies are put in place. Some of that was because of the mobility of the American people back then, contrasted to people who are now tied to their home because they can't sell it, and some of it is due to the relative age of the unemployed back then where the mobility was not as much of a factor as it is today.

We are trying to help these people who have, in many cases, worked for decades and now for the first time find themselves in a very difficult situation.

If you look overall, there are 10.4 million Americans who are out of work but are looking for that job—for that fair shot—so they have a chance to move on and be a part of the American economy. Extending emergency unemployment benefits to these 2.7 million people is just one part of the efforts we have to undertake. No one should be under the impression that this is a solution. No. This is just a response to the incredible need of these very worthwhile Americans who are looking for work.

I do note that this aid is very targeted. I cannot repeat it enough. There is this sort of notion out there that this is sort of a giveaway to people who are undeserving. Well, the benefits are targeted to people who meet very spe-

cific criteria and, most importantly, they have to have an adequate work history to be eligible for unemployment insurance in the first place. They have to be workers. We are trying to help workers. They have to have lost their job through no fault of their own—they were laid off. It is not as though they didn't like their job and left, or had problems in the workplace and were not fitting in. These are people who want to work, and they were told they cannot work any longer. They were downsized, they were outsourced—all the 10K euphemisms for saying, "We don't need you anymore." Well, they are important people who want to work, and they have to actively look for work in order to qualify for benefits. This is not an open-ended benefit to individuals who have no end in sight. They are either going to find a job or exhaust these benefits.

One of the reforms we did in 2012, frankly, was to shrink the period of time. Previous to 2012, there were 73 weeks of emergency extended benefits. We shrunk that down to 47 weeks. So this notion that this is an unending, indefinite, long-term benefit to people who don't earn it is completely incorrect.

This program has been in effect for a very long time. Indeed, some form of it has been put in place since 2008 when George W. Bush was the President, when we first started seeing the signs of increasing unemployment. This was in conjunction with the near collapse of many financial institutions, in 2007 and 2008. The housing market was literally coming off the tracks. The consequences for the American economy at that time were probably the most severe since the Great Depression. One of the ways we have been dealing with these issues began with President Bush, and continuing now with President Obama, is emergency unemployment compensation benefits for Americans.

I think we have to look at and be conscious of all of the facts and data. We are also at a point where we have to recognize there are two programs. There is a State program, which covers the first 26 weeks, and then there is the emergency Federal unemployment benefits program.

This emergency program, in some respects, is becoming much more critical, because what we find now is that the long-term unemployed are probably twice the number you would typically associate with an economy such as ours at the present moment. We have unemployment rates that range from the high—unfortunately Rhode Island is at 9 percent—to the very low. There are some States because of the commodities—particularly energy commodities—that virtually have no unemployment.

At this point we should not see the kind of long-term unemployed we are seeing. The Federal program—not the State program, which is the first 26 weeks—is going to help these people

who are particularly struggling. It is a targeted program—very much targeted—but it has an outsized impact. Not only are the workers who are receiving this very modest weekly stipend of roughly \$300 a week able to pay for essentials, but it has a very positive effect on our overall economy.

All of my colleagues are here today saying, listen, not only do we have to help these people, but more importantly, we have to grow this economy. Well, by the way, the legislation we are proposing does both. These emergency benefits have been repeatedly analyzed by economists, and they have been determined to provide a significantly greater bang for the buck than many other programs being talked about today on the floor that are being suggested as alternatives or complements to what we are talking about. That is why the Congressional Budget Office, in a very modest and conservative analysis, projected that if we fail to extend these emergency benefits through 2014—through the whole year—it would cost our economy 200,000 jobs. So those people who are opposing these benefits are basically saying we are not interested in at least part of these 200,000 jobs.

It is not, as they often say, rocket science. What happens to this money is it goes to a family who desperately needs it immediately to repair the car, to buy groceries, to take care of the necessities of life. So this money is not going to be put aside for a rainy day. It is not going to be exported overseas for a venture some place. It is going to be used locally in the economy—at the grocery store, at the service station, at the dry cleaners, and to pay for the cell phone so a person can stay in touch to see if they get that job and if they are offered a job. That effect of immediately putting money in the economy immediately generates more economic activity. It is the fact that at the local coffee shop a person will come in and get a cup of coffee and maybe be able to afford something else too. That goes to the ability of that local coffee shop to keep some more people on to work the counters. It has a cumulative effect.

The economists have measured it, and it is much more than the dollars we are putting into it. It has a multiplier effect. So what we are doing is not only providing the necessary support for these deserving families; we are providing an injection of economic activity into our economy—precisely what all of my colleagues are saying we have to do. Let's do it. We can do it. We are very close. On a bipartisan basis, we are hopefully hours away, I hope, from getting this done, and then sending it over to the House.

Then, we need to ask our colleagues on the other side of the Capitol to consider not only the bipartisan nature of this bill but also the fact that it not only provides economic stimulus, but it also is fiscally responsible. We have paid for these efforts. That was insisted

upon, and we have certainly acceded to that request by so many of our colleagues.

Now, with respect to reforms of the temporary program, and even the permanent State program, as I said before, we made significant reforms in 2012. I was a member of the conference committee, at the request of the chairman of the Senate Finance Committee to participate, particularly in the deliberations about the unemployment insurance compensation program. These 2012 reforms go a long way to make the system better. Can we make more improvements? Of course. Can we shift to a related but an important topic, which is job training, through the Workforce Investment Act? Yes, we can, and we should. But we shouldn't hold this legislation hostage to training improvements and to additional reform.

One of the reforms which we worked to enhance in the bill before us today, which was implemented in 2012, is the Reemployment Service and Reemployment Eligibility Assessment, or the RES and REA. I have to thank Senator COLLINS, particularly. She was insistent that we provide a way to better link up individuals looking for work and the jobs that are available. This is a mechanism that does this. This is an evidence-based reform that has been successful in getting individuals back to work sooner. It also helps to ensure individuals are receiving the proper benefit. It addresses one of the major concerns we received from the House Ways and Means Committee Republicans with respect to overpayments. Essentially, what it does is it requires—there is one assessment in the program right now—a second assessment at a certain period during the extended benefits. So an individual would have to come in and essentially be counseled. They would also verify the person is searching for work, that the benefits are appropriate, and also give the kind of counseling and assistance and help that is shown by evidence to be effective in linking job seekers to jobs. We are very committed to this improvement. This is one of the improvements we put into the legislation. We have provided the funding for State agencies to take care of it.

So this is something we think is going to be a direct beneficial solution to a legitimate issue raised by so many. How do we connect those who are unemployed today with the jobs that are out there?

I will say something else, too, about this. There has been some suggestion that there are a lot of overpayments in the system and that people are really getting more than they should. Well RESs and REAs play an important program integrity role, not just providing counsel to the individual. They also have to ensure that the people are, in fact, actively seeking work. This legislation is saying these individuals have to physically come to the State agency, not just at the first tier, when they start it, but at the third tier—that is

the way we break it up—several weeks into the process of emergency unemployment benefits. Doing that—their physical presence in the office, talking to a counselor—helps the system be more legitimate, and it helps the accountability because the individual State counselor will be able to check on how faithful they are to the program and how consistent their benefits are. That double check is part of the legislation which I think will be effective and efficient. We want both effectiveness and efficiency. As I indicated before, it is fully paid for, so it is not an additional burden to States.

In the 2012 reforms, we also included my work-sharing initiative. This is critical. I have heard from so many companies in Rhode Island that before the 2012 legislation, there were a few States—Rhode Island was one—that were actually doing something very creative. They said that instead of laying a person off totally, if you keep the person employed for a certain number of days and provide their benefits, we will pay for the one or two days they don't work. It is a partial payment. That has been able to allow companies to really keep their core group of workers together. Instead of throwing someone out and saying they are sorry, as well as losing their expertise and losing their skills, they have been able to keep their operation moving. It is a smart way of doing it. It has been very successful in Rhode Island, and it is now a national option. That is because of an initiative from 2012 that was a good reform and a smart, efficient way to use the taxpayers' dollars.

With respect to work search generally, the 2012 reforms for the first time created a uniform standard for both the State-based program and the temporary emergency program to ensure that States require that in order to be eligible, individuals need to be “able, available, and actively seek[ing] work.” We also passed a reform to better recover improper payments by requiring States to offset their current State benefits in order to recover overpayments owed to other States and the Federal Government. So program integrity, program efficiency, and program effectiveness were significantly embodied in the 2012 amendments.

We are looking at a program that just 2 years ago has been significantly reformed—in fact, as I said, according to the chairman of the Republican Ways and Means Committee, historically reformed. So this program is one that we can support and we should support.

Back in 2012 we also provided up to 10 demonstration projects in States that could be granted waivers on their State-based unemployment insurance program if they could come up with proposals that would improve the effectiveness of their reemployment efforts. This was an opportunity to give the States flexibility, to test out new ideas. Some of the new ideas my colleagues have shared with me—we

should do this or that—the States—at least 10 States—have that opportunity to apply today to do that. I don't think we need to reinvent that opportunity in this legislation since it is on an emergency, short-term basis. That authority sunsets at the end of 2015. But it is very telling, because since 2012, 10 States have had the option, but no States have taken up these proposals. So many of the good ideas my colleagues have suggested haven't passed muster at the State level. One would think if they were that compelling, if they were that efficient, that affordable, that one State, at least, would have taken the option, out of 10 available, to try these proposals.

The 2012 reforms also allowed States to drug screen and test individuals if they were terminated from prior employment for drug use or if they were applying for work for which passing a drug test was a standard eligibility requirement. I mention this because we have persistently heard proposals—particularly from the other side of the Capitol—oh, we have a drug test proposal, et cetera. Guess what. States already have the option to do that now. So it is not a reason to stop today and say we have to fix this problem.

I think this whole issue of drug testing, though, deserves a further comment. It is somewhat of a presumption that people who are applying for these benefits somehow are more susceptible to drug dependency, and that is not accurate. In fact, reflecting back to my previous comments, there are so many people now, particularly the longer term unemployed, who are middle-aged colleagues or slightly younger than I am, who have spent 20 or 35 years working, et cetera. They are not the typical person who one would suspect of that. But when we looked at data from the TANF realm—there were related arguments for testing in TANF—it turns out that individuals who are tested in these TANF programs, which is a welfare program, actually show an average of slightly less drug usage than the average American. So this whole drug issue has to be disabused. But, for the record, there are in the 2012 reforms, opportunities for States if they feel so compelled to exercise some of these options.

So the record demonstrates clearly that we have made extensive reforms. Additionally, as I said, in this legislation, we are requiring a second assessment process which I think is going to be very efficient and very effective.

This raises the final point. We have tried to keep this very simple. Even so, the State administrators came forward with a letter saying: This is going to be very difficult for us. The letter was refuted point by point by the Secretary of Labor, Tom Perez. Secretary Perez was the former director of these programs for the State of Maryland. He knows better than anyone what it takes to make these programs work. He has committed that the Department of Labor not only will—but can—be

sure that these programs, as we have written them today, will be fully and effectively implemented.

So I hope my colleagues really come together. I thank my colleagues who already have joined together to get this legislation moving. Time is literally ticking. This is a 5-month bill. This is not a long-term, indefinite bill. The clock is ticking, so that every day more benefits are retroactive than prospective. We want to give people the chance. They have worked for it all of their lives—many of them—and now, in many cases, this is the first time they have really struggled.

With that, I yield the floor because I see my colleague, the Senator from Kansas.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas.

Mr. MORAN. I ask unanimous consent that it may be in order for me to offer an amendment that has been designated No. 2911.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. REED. Madam President, reserving the right to object, and not elaborating much further than the comments I already made, but in order to get this bipartisan emergency legislation completed which will affect 2.7 million Americans, I would respectfully object to my colleague's amendment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Kansas.

Mr. MORAN. Madam President, we were here last evening on this topic for consideration by the Senate. The amendment I was offering that the Senator from Rhode Island has objected to in my view is one of the many amendments that could be considered in this legislation—certainly should be considered by this Senate. While I am certainly interested and willing to have a discussion about the extension of unemployment benefits, it seems to me that this Senate ought also to be looking at issues that would reduce the chances that individual Americans—workers across the country—need that extension. We ought to be doing the things we are not doing here in the Senate. In fact, in my view, this Senate and this President have done nothing to increase the opportunities for Americans to keep their jobs, to increase their employment opportunities, to get a higher wage, to expand their economic opportunity in this country.

The amendment I was offering, which has been objected to, is one of those many examples of legislation that, once again, gets ignored on the Senate floor. It is not considered by any committee and is not allowed to be made in order.

Again, the process in the Senate has broken down so that individual Senators who have good ideas, at least who believe they have good ideas about how we can make life better for Americans, are not being enabled the opportunity

to offer those amendments for consideration by the Senate.

In fact, there have now been 70 amendments offered to this legislation. It appears that none of those 70 will be considered while we consider this issue of extension of unemployment benefits. The amendment would, in my view, increase the opportunity for every American to find a better job.

We know that if we are going to increase economic activity, create jobs in this country, the statistics show, the facts show, academic and real-life experiences demonstrate that entrepreneurs—individuals who have a dream to start a business, who work in their garage or their backyard or their barn, decide that they have something they can contribute to the consumer in this country and they pursue that dream—have the best opportunity that we have in this country to create jobs for other Americans.

So the amendment I offered would be legislation called Startup Act 3.0. This is not just the Senator from Kansas or not just a Republican Senator in the Senate offering this amendment, it is a bipartisan amendment offered by me and one of my Democratic colleagues, but the underlying legislation actually has more Democratic sponsors than it has Republican sponsors. Again, it is the kind of thing that one would expect some consideration in the Senate.

Unfortunately, this legislation was offered 3 years ago, shortly after I came to the Senate. So my frustration is not that just this opportunity today is being denied me and my colleagues who support the concept of promoting entrepreneurship, but it has been denied for certainly more than 2 years, almost 3 years, when we have facts, academicians who tell us these are exactly the kind of things that would increase the chances that Americans are better off today and in the future.

This legislation deals with the regulatory environment, the Tax Code, access to capital, federally funded research put into the hands of the private sector more quickly, the opportunity for Americans to better compete in the battle for global talent, all things that are just common sense and my guess is would be agreed to. If we would ever have a vote on the Senate floor about this concept, I would not be surprised that overwhelmingly my colleagues would support this.

There is nothing in here that is a partisan issue. There is nothing in here that is significantly controversial. We can argue or debate the details, we can improve this legislation, but we are never given the chance to pursue that goal. It is certainly disappointing to me that once again legislation that would address the underlying problems we face in this country, the inability of Americans to keep jobs, improve their job circumstance, and create a brighter future for the next generation of Americans, is something this Senate, for the last 3 years, has determined does not

have merit for even consideration, either in a committee or on the Senate floor.

For those who are interested in the details of this legislation, I would refer them to my remarks on the Senate floor last evening.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. VITTER. Madam President, I rise to try to advance important legislation to fully authorize 27 Veterans Affairs clinics around the country in 18 different States, in communities that desperately need these facilities for our veterans, including two in Louisiana, Lafayette and Lake Charles.

These clinics have been on the books, planned for, approved for quite a while. Unfortunately, they ran into several bureaucratic glitches and hurdles. In the case of our two clinics in Louisiana, the first thing was a flatout mistake, a screwup at the VA, which they fully admit to. They made some errors in the contract letting process. Because of that, they had to stop that entire bidding process and back up and start all over.

That basically cost us 1 year in terms of those vital community-based clinics in Lafayette and Lake Charles. Then, as they were into that year of delay, out of the blue the Congressional Budget Office decided to score these sorts of clinics in a different way than they ever did before. That created a scoring issue with regard to all 27 of these clinics in 18 States.

On a bipartisan basis, a number of us went to work on that issue to clear that up. We have solved that issue, and the House has put a bill together with strong bipartisan support—virtually unanimous support—and has passed the bill that resolved that issue.

It came to the Senate. I reached out to all of my colleagues. There were a few concerns, and I addressed those concerns proactively by finding savings in other parts of the budget to off-balance, counteract any possible costs of this bill, and so we added that amendment to that proposal. Through all of that hard work, we have addressed all of the substantive concerns with moving forward on these 27 clinics.

I have been trying to pass this bill with an amendment at the desk so that these 27 clinics can move forward as expeditiously as possible. As I said, every substantive concern about this bill, as it would be amended, has been met—everybody's concerns, conservatives, moderates, liberals.

The only objection to the bill now is from the distinguished Senator from Vermont, who, quite frankly, wants to hold it hostage, wants to object to it,

simply to try to advance his much broader veterans bill which he brought to the floor and was unsuccessful in passing several weeks ago. While I appreciate the Senator's passion on this issue—I appreciate his legislation and his focus on it—the problem is that legislation does have many Senators with concerns about it, including me. Forty-three Senators, forty-three percent of the overall Senate, 43 out of 100, have serious, substantive concerns with that much broader bill.

In contrast to that, no one in the Senate has substantive concerns with my narrower bill with regard to 27 VA clinics around the country.

I simply suggest that we agree on important matters we can agree on; we use that to begin to build consensus to move forward constructively, do what we can agree on, and continue to work on that on which there is some disagreement.

In that spirit, I come to the floor again to ask unanimous consent that the Veterans' Affairs Committee be discharged from further consideration of the narrow veterans clinics bill I was referring to, H.R. 3521, and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration; that my amendment, which is at the desk, which I also referred to, be agreed to; that the bill, as amended, be read a third time and passed, and the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. SANDERS. Reserving the right to object, I thank my colleague from Louisiana for coming to the floor today to talk about, in fact, an important issue.

Before I respond to him directly, I did want to comment he is right, there were 43 Members of the Senate who voted against what is regarded as the most comprehensive veterans legislation to have been introduced in several decades, legislation that was supported by virtually every veterans organization in the country, including the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Disabled American Veterans, Vietnam Veterans of America, the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, the Gold Star Wives, and dozens and dozens of other veterans organizations.

If I might point out that while my colleague from Louisiana is, of course, right that there were 43 Senators who voted no, he neglected to mention that there were 56 Senators who voted yes. There was one Senator who was absent on that day who would have voted yes.

We are now at the stage where we have 57 Senators, which I would suggest to my colleague from Louisiana is significantly more than 43 percent, it is 57 percent.

If we could have the cooperation—and I hope we can maybe make some progress right here, now, from my colleague from Louisiana who has shown interest in veterans issues—do you know what, we can do something that

millions and millions of veterans and their families want us to do.

If my colleague from Louisiana would allow me, I would like to quote from what the Disabled American Veterans, the DAV, has to say about this legislation—which, unfortunately my colleague from Louisiana voted against. He was one of the 43 who voted against it.

DAV says:

This massive omnibus bill, unprecedented in our modern experience, would create, expand, advance, and extend a number of VA benefits, services and programs that are important to the DAV and to our members. For example, responding to a call from DAV as a leading veterans organization, it would create a comprehensive family caregiver support program for all generations of severely wounded, injured and ill veterans. Also, the bill would authorize advance appropriations for VA's mandatory funding accounts to ensure that in any government shutdown environment in the future, veterans benefits payments would not be delayed or put in jeopardy. This measure would also provide additional financial support to survivors of servicemembers who die in the line of duty, as well as expanded access for them to GI Bill educational benefits. A two-plus year stalemate in VA's authority to lease facilities for health care treatment and other purposes would be solved by this bill . . .

—which, of course, is what the Senator from Louisiana is referring to. Then they continue:

. . . These are but a few of the myriad provisions of this bill that would improve the lives, health, and prospects of veterans—especially the wounded, injured and ill—and their loved ones.

That is the DAV. I ask my colleague from Louisiana—you are raising an important issue, and I agree with you. But what I cannot do is take this issue over here, separate it, and that issue over here, because tomorrow there will be somebody else coming and saying: You know, Senator SANDERS, I want you to move forward on this. Then the next day somebody else comes forward and says: I want to move forward on that.

We have a comprehensive piece of legislation, supported by millions of veterans, and supported by 57 Members of the Senate. I ask my colleague from Louisiana—who is concerned about veterans' issues—work with us, support us, give us the three Republican votes we need. We had 55, 54 Members of the Democratic Caucus. We only had two Republican votes. Help me get three more votes. You will get these facilities in Louisiana, we will get these facilities all over the country, but we will also address many of the major crises facing the veterans community.

With that, Madam President, I would object to my colleague's proposal.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Louisiana.

Mr. VITTER. Reclaiming the floor and reclaiming the time, I find this approach very unfortunate. To follow through on the scenario the Senator from Vermont himself laid out, yes, we can find agreement here on the floor,

but then, “Katy, bar the door.” That might lead to our finding agreement on other important matters that can help veterans, and we might be moving forward in this area and that area and the other one. God forbid that we make progress to help veterans and actually get something done versus having a hostage standoff. God forbid. I think the more productive way of working together is to agree on what we can agree on and keep talking about those areas where we have disagreement.

In fact, in the past Senator SANDERS has endorsed that approach in the area of veterans affairs. He has said, in the past, working on another issue in November of 2013:

I'm happy to tell you that I think that was a concern of his . . .

This was referring to another Senator. He continues:

. . . we got that UC'd last night. So we moved that pretty quickly, and I want to try to do those things, where we have agreement, let's move it.

He agreed on a small focus bill where we did have agreement. He said, let's do that by unanimous consent, let's agree where we can agree and be constructive and move on. He said, “I want to try to do those things where we have agreement, let's move it.”

Well, I would say to Senator SANDERS, through the Chair, we have agreement. This is an important matter. Twenty-seven clinics isn't the world, but it is an important matter that affects hundreds of thousands of veterans in 18 States, including in my Louisiana communities of Lafayette and Lake Charles. We have agreement, so let's move it. I agree with that approach. I think that is a constructive approach versus saying: I have majority support, but not the 60 required, so I am holding everything else veterans-related hostage, I am not agreeing to anything else.

I don't think that is a constructive approach. I don't think that reflects the spirit of the American people who want us to try to reach agreement where we can reach agreement. I don't think that is a constructive way to build goodwill and to build consensus.

I would urge my colleague, with all due respect, to reconsider. Let's agree where we can agree, where we have agreement. Let's move forward where we have agreement. Let's move it.

This isn't the world, but it is meaningful, it is significant, and it does not relieve any pressure in terms of the broader veterans discussion regarding the Sanders bill or the Burr alternative or anything else. Those bills are so much massively larger than these 27 clinics, being done separately, do not change the discussion or the dynamics of this in any way, shape, or form.

I would urge my colleague to reconsider. I would urge my colleague from Louisiana, Senator LANDRIEU, to urge Senator SANDERS to reconsider, something she has not done to date. A lot of us are waiting for her support of these important community-based clinics in

Lafayette and Lake Charles. She hasn't been on the floor. I urge her to join me on the floor to get this done.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. SANDERS. First, I would tell you that—two things in terms of Senator LANDRIEU. She has, in fact, spoken to me on numerous occasions about her concerns about this issue but, more importantly, she has shown a willingness to stand for all veterans in this country, and she voted for the legislation supported by the American Legion, the DAV, and the Vietnam Veterans of America and virtually every veterans organization. So I thank Senator LANDRIEU very much for her support for comprehensive legislation that would benefit millions and millions of Americans.

Essentially, what the Senator from Louisiana is saying is let's work together. I agree with him, let us work together. I have 57 votes for this piece of legislation. Right now, I ask my friend from Louisiana, work with us. What are your objections at a time when we have given huge tax breaks to billionaires and millionaires, and when one out of four corporations in this country doesn't pay a nickel in Federal income taxes. Does my colleague from Louisiana think that in this country we should not take care of the men and women who have put their lives on the line to defend this country?

I am prepared, my staff is prepared, to sit down and hear the Senator's objections. I am not sure what his objections are. He hasn't told me. Is the Senator opposed to an expansion of the caregivers program? Is he? So that 70-year-old women who have been taking care of their husbands who lost their legs in Vietnam get a modest bit of help? Is that an objection the Senator has? Is the Senator objecting to the fact that maybe we provide dental care to some veterans whose teeth are rotting in their mouths? Is the Senator objecting to advance appropriations so we are not in a situation where if we have another government shutdown, disabled vets will not get the checks they need? Is the Senator objecting to the fact that right now we have young veterans who are trying to go to college through the GI bill but can't get in-State tuition? Is the Senator objecting to that? Is the Senator objecting to helping veterans find jobs in an economy where it is very hard to do so?

I am not quite sure what the Senator's objection is. Tell me. Tell me now or sit down with my staff and me, and maybe we can work it out and do something of real significance for the veterans of this country.

Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of Calendar No. 297, S. 1950; that a Sanders substitute amendment, the text of S. 1982, the Comprehensive Veterans Health and Benefits and Military Pay Restoration Act, be agreed to; the bill, as amended, be read a third time and passed; and the

motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table, with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Louisiana.

Mr. VITTER. Reserving the right to object, I would again point out that I am not only going to object to this, there are 43 Senators who have serious substantive concerns with this very broad and expansive bill, and those concerns and objections have been laid out. They have been laid out by my staff, in meetings with the staff of the Senator from Vermont, and they have been laid out by the Republican ranking member on the committee, Senator BURR. I share the general concerns of Senator BURR about the bill. So if the distinguished Senator from Vermont doesn't understand those concerns, quite frankly he hasn't been listening very hard. We have laid them out, and they are shared by 43 Senators, versus a bill, as amended at the desk, with no objections to its substance—none, 100 to 0. Big difference. Big difference.

So on behalf of the total of 43 Senators, I do object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. VITTER. Madam President, retaining the floor, I would also ask the distinguished Senator from Vermont through the Chair—because he mentioned Senator LANDRIEU—has Senator LANDRIEU asked him to remove his objection to this bill so we can get a clinic in Lafayette and Lake Charles, No. 1; and No. 2, all those veterans groups he mentioned, do they oppose moving forward with this bill as it would be amended at the desk? Do they publicly oppose moving forward with those 27 veterans clinics?

I would ask those two very important, pertinent questions of the Senator from Vermont through the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. SANDERS. Madam President, I believe at this point—please correct me if I am wrong—that I control the floor; is that correct?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator is correct.

Mr. SANDERS. While my friend from Louisiana is still here, let me answer yes in response to his question. Senator LANDRIEU has asked me, very forcefully, to move forward on this provision on more than one occasion, and my response to Senator LANDRIEU, who voted for the comprehensive legislation, unlike Senator VITTER, is the same.

Secondly, what the veterans organizations of this country want is for the Congress to recognize the very serious problems facing the veterans community. What I can tell my colleague from Louisiana is that to the best of my knowledge the veterans organizations have been to my colleague's office, and we are trying to get some specific objections as to why he is not supporting this legislation and we have not gotten that.

So I would ask my colleague from Louisiana to come forward and tell me what he disagrees with, which he has not done yet, and I look forward to working with him. I agree we have to work together. I am offering him that opportunity to tell me what he doesn't like. Let's get a piece of legislation the veterans of this country need and want and that we will be proud of.

With that, I believe I have the floor; is that correct?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont is correct.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont has 53 minutes remaining in his postcloture time.

Mr. SANDERS. I will tell my colleague from Louisiana that I don't intend to be addressing this issue.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Louisiana.

Mr. VITTER. Madam President, in that case, I ask unanimous consent to wrap up this discussion in about 45 seconds.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. VITTER. I thank my colleague.

Again, Madam President, I think this is very important. I agree with what Senator SANDERS said last November—where we have agreement, let's move it. We have agreement about these 27 clinics, 18 States, including Lafayette and Lake Charles. Let's move it.

I didn't hear him say that any of those veterans organizations he continually cites oppose this because they do not. They take the commonsense approach the huge majority of Americans take: Where there is agreement and we can constructively move forward for veterans, let's do it and let's build on that.

Finally, if Senator LANDRIEU has forcefully asked the Senator to remove his objection to this, apparently she has not been very effective. I think that is very unfortunate because veterans in Louisiana are suffering today. They have been waiting for this. They have been waiting for years for this, and they still wait, even though there is no substantive disagreement with this bill.

I thank the Chair, and I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. SANDERS. Madam President, it is not my intention to get involved in Louisiana politics, but just let me say that Senator LANDRIEU has voted for this legislation, she has been a champion of veterans rights, and I look forward to continuing to work with her on comprehensive legislation that will benefit all of the veterans of Louisiana and those in the other 49 States.

Madam President, I wish to change subjects, if I might, and I wish to touch upon an issue which I believe is far and away the most significant issue facing the American people; that is, a strug-

gle not just to make sure we can preserve and expand the vitally important programs that are life or death to tens of millions of working-class and middle-class families—programs such as Social Security and Medicare and Medicaid. The issue we are discussing now is not just whether we must create the millions and millions of jobs that we need. Real unemployment is not 6.8 percent. It is close to 12 percent and youth unemployment is close to 20 percent. We have to create millions of jobs for our young people and for working families around this country.

We have made some progress with the Affordable Care Act, announced just yesterday. About 10 million more Americans will have access to health care who formerly did not, but we have to go further. We have to join the rest of the industrialized world, all of which have stated—every country has stated—that health care must be a right and not a privilege. When we do that through a Medicare-for-all, single-payer program, we can do it much more cost-effectively and end the absurdity of the United States spending almost twice as much per capita on health care as do the people of any other nation.

All of those issues, and education and climate change, are all enormously important for the future of this Nation. But the issue that is even more important than all of those is whether we can prevent this country from moving to an oligarchic form of society in which virtually all economic and political power rests with a handful of billionaire families.

I know we don't talk about it too much. Most people don't raise that issue. Certainly we don't see it in the corporate media. That is the reality. Right now in America we have, by far, the most unequal distribution of wealth and income of any major country on Earth.

What we are looking at is the top 1 percent owns 38 percent of the financial wealth of America. I have very little doubt the overwhelming majority of Americans have no idea what the bottom 60 percent looks like. The top 1 percent owns 38 percent of the wealth of America, and the bottom 60 percent owns all of 2.3 percent. That gap between the very rich and everybody else is growing wider and wider. We have one family—one family—the Walton family, who owns Walmart, that owns more wealth than the bottom 40 percent of the American people.

In terms of income, the situation is equally bad. In the last number of years since the Wall Street collapse, 95 percent of all new income has gone to the top 1 percent.

So we have an economic situation where the middle class is disappearing, and more people are living in poverty than at any time in the history of the United States. We have 22 percent of our kids living in poverty, the highest rate of childhood poverty of any major country on Earth. All the while the

middle class disappears, more and more people are living in poverty, people on top are doing phenomenally well. Almost all new income goes to the top 1 percent.

It is not just a growing disparity in terms of income and wealth—that is enormously important—but it is what is happening to the political foundations of America. What we are now seeing as a result of Citizens United—and we are going to see it more as a result of the disastrous Supreme Court decision of today in *McCutcheon*—will enable the billionaire class to play an even more prominent role in terms of our political process.

The Koch brothers are worth about \$80 billion—\$80 billion. They are the second wealthiest family in America. Working with other billionaires, such as Sheldon Adelson, the Kochs are prepared to spend an unlimited sum of money to create an America shaped by their rightwing extremist views—and I mean unlimited.

If your income went up, Madam President—and I know our Presiding Officer is not quite there in this status—from \$68 billion to \$80 billion in 1 year—a \$12 billion increase in your wealth—and you believed passionately, as the Koch brothers do, in this rightwing agenda, why would you hesitate in spending \$1 billion, \$2 billion on the political process? Last year, both Barack Obama and Mitt Romney spent a little more than \$1 billion for their entire campaigns. These guys can take out their checkbook tomorrow and write that check and it will be one-twelfth of what their increased wealth was in 1 year. It doesn't mean anything to them. It is 50 bucks to you; it is \$1 billion to them.

So we have to be very careful that we do not allow this great country, where people fought and died to protect American democracy, become a plutocracy or an oligarchy, and that, frankly, is the direction in which we are moving.

I suspect that many of our fellow Americans saw a spectacle in Las Vegas—and this was not the usual Las Vegas spectacle, with the great shows they have there—this was the Sheldon Adelson spectacle. This is what the spectacle was just last weekend. Sheldon Adelson said to prospective Republican candidates for President: Why don't you come on down to Las Vegas and tell me what you could do for me because I am only worth \$20 billion. I am only the largest gambling mogul in the entire world. But \$20 billion isn't enough, so I want you to come to Las Vegas and tell me what favors you can give me if you happen to be elected President and, by the way, if you sound the right note—if you kind of do what I like—I may put a few hundred million into your campaign. Maybe if I am feeling good, I will throw \$1 billion into your campaign.

The media has dubbed this the Adelson primary. What primaries generally are about are hundreds of thousands of Republicans getting together

and they vote on whom they want their candidate to be in a State—Democrats do the same—and candidates make an appeal to ordinary people to get votes. Some of us are old-fashioned and we kind of see that as democracy.

I come from a State which proudly has town meetings. I have held hundreds of town meetings in my State. I know it is old-fashioned. I know it is getting out of step, but I actually listen to what people have to say. They walk in the door free, occasionally we actually even serve some lunch, and they don't have to be a billionaire to ask me a question. I answer questions and I talk to people. I understand that is old-fashioned, not the way we do it anymore.

The way we do it now is the Adelson way: walk in the door and I will give you hundreds of millions of dollars or come to a campaign fundraiser, and if you make the largest contributions—tens of thousands of dollars—I will listen to you.

We have to turn this thing around, because if we don't, we are going to end up in a situation where not only the economy of this country is going to be controlled by a handful of billionaires and large multinational corporations, but we are going to be living in a country where the political process is controlled.

Somebody mentioned to me—and I don't know, maybe I will introduce this legislation. We all know what NASCAR is. These guys who drive the racing cars have on their coats they are being sponsored by this or that oil company or this or that tire company. Maybe we should introduce that concept in the Senate. You could have a patch on your jacket that says: I am sponsored by the Koch brothers. Eighty-seven percent of my funding comes from the Koch brothers.

Maybe we will give you a special jacket, and then you have the Adelson guy or this person or that person. But it might tell the American people why we continue as a body to give more tax breaks to billionaires and yet we are having a heck of a tough time raising the minimum wage to \$10.10 an hour. It might tell the American people why we do nothing to close corporate loopholes, but we are having a hard time addressing pay equity in America so women get the same wages that men do.

I think when we talk about issues such as campaign finance, a lot of Americans say: Well, yes, it is a problem, but it doesn't really relate to me.

Let me suggest that it absolutely does relate to every man, woman, and child. It is imperative people understand what the agenda is—the Koch brothers, for example. These are people who have been very clear that they want massive cuts in Social Security or the privatization of Social Security. They want massive cuts in Medicare or the voucherization of Medicare, and massive cuts in Medicaid. As some of the largest polluters in America in

terms of greenhouse gas emissions, the Koch brothers want to crack down on the ability of the EPA to regulate pollution. These guys want to cut back on funds for education so our kids can afford to go to college.

So if we think the issue of campaign finance does not relate to our lives, we are very mistaken. We are moving toward a situation where people with huge sums of money are going to spend unlimited amounts to elect candidates who reflect an extreme rightwing agenda which will make the wealthiest people in this country even richer while continuing the attacks against the middle class and working families in this country.

I will conclude by saying this—and I mean this quite honestly. As somebody who grew up in a family that didn't have a lot of money and as somebody who represents the great State of Vermont, where people constantly tell me they ask for so little, I have heard veterans say: I don't want to use the VA because another veteran really may need it more. I don't need this program and somebody else may need it more.

I don't understand how people worth \$80 billion are spending huge sums of money to become even richer. They are doing it by trying to attack life-and-death programs for the elderly. Why would somebody want to cut Social Security when they are worth \$80 billion and have more money than they can dream of for retirement? Why would somebody want to do that when they are worth billions and have the best health care in the world? Why do they want to make massive cuts in Medicare or Medicaid? What motivates somebody with so much money to go to war against working families and the middle class?

I frankly don't understand it. I can only think that this has to do with power—the drive for more and more power, the thrill it must be to tell candidates: Do you want my support? This is what you have to do.

But I think this is just a huge issue that we as a nation have got to address. Too many people have given up their lives fighting for American democracy to see this great Nation be converted into a plutocracy or an oligarchy. We must not allow that to happen.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The assistant majority leader.

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, can you tell us the order of business pending on the floor?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate is considering H.R. 3979.

Mr. DURBIN. I ask unanimous consent to speak for 10 minutes in morning business.

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

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I start by commending my colleague from Vermont.

What happened today across the street at the Supreme Court will be

lost on most Americans. They can't understand why they should even care about it.

The Supreme Court was asked whether it was proper under the law to limit the number of Federal campaigns and the total dollars an individual can give to candidates. To no one's surprise, the Supreme Court said there should be no limitation. People can give as much money as they want to as many Federal candidates they want with no limitation.

Most Americans will say: So what? You know, these politicians run against one another. During the campaign both sides spend too much money. I am sick and tired of their ads. I don't care how you pay for it; it is all bad.

But I have to say, Senator SANDERS put his finger on it. What is at issue here is not just how we finance campaigns. It is who we elect. What we are faced with is a Supreme Court across the street which celebrates oligarchs. They happen to believe that the wealthiest people in America deserve the strongest voice in American politics. I couldn't disagree more.

Sadly, many of us are caught up in this system of campaign financing where we literally have to raise millions of dollars to run for election and reelection. In my State multimillionaires are running for the highest offices against what I consider to be mere mortals—those of us who aren't in the multimillionaire class—trying to compete with them, always wondering if tomorrow the Koch brothers—with an \$80 billion net worth—will say: Spend \$10 million there; spend \$20 million there.

I say to my friend from Vermont, as best we can count, in the last election cycle the Koch brothers—not to be confused with the soft drink—spent over \$250 million in ad campaigns. I think the figure, frankly, is much higher, and the suggestion is they are going to double that spending this time. They have already spent \$10 million in the State of North Carolina with negative television advertising for 12 months against the Democratic incumbent Senator KAY HAGAN, trying to beat her down, so they can defeat her in November.

Make no mistake. There is a lot of money being spent on both sides. But Sheldon Adelson, who—as the Senator from Vermont said—runs one of the biggest gambling operations and maybe is the wealthiest man when it comes to that in the United States, maybe in the world, has become a player. Can you imagine if those who want to run for the Republican nomination for President come hat in hand, land at the Las Vegas airport, walk into a room and see if they can say something that appeals to this man who is worth billions of dollars? Last time he fell in love with Newt Gingrich, and he was going to make Newt Gingrich President. People in many of the Republican primaries saw it differently. Well, this

time he wants to pick another horse to run.

Why are the richest people in America so intent on owning our political process? Because they have an agenda. It isn't just because they love the Constitution. They have an agenda—an agenda which makes the Tax Code work for them, an agenda which makes sure that government spending and things that aren't priorities for them are reduced.

We saw some of that yesterday, when Congressman PAUL RYAN in the House of Representatives introduced his budget, his vision of what America should look like. What is it? It is a budget amendment which cuts back on some basic things. One thing the Ryan budget cuts back on that everybody listening to this debate ought to take note of is domestic discretionary spending for medical research—seriously.

Today happens to be World Autism Awareness Day. Do you know a family with an autistic child? Do you have any idea what they are going through? I know a few. Sadly, the number of people suffering from autism and the autism spectrum disorder seems to be growing by the day. We look at these families struggling to give their son or daughter a chance and think: If we only knew a little bit more about this disease, if we only knew a little bit more about the human brain, if we only could see this coming and do something to avoid it, if we could find a way to treat it, what a difference it would make for all of these families on World Autism Awareness Day. But the answer from Congressman RYAN is to cut back on medical research. That is not the answer. It is not the answer for any of us.

God forbid we go to the doctor's office tomorrow with a child, and the doctor says something awful has happened. But the first question we would ask the doctor is: Is there something you can do? Is there a medicine? Is there a procedure?

How many families have been in that position where they have asked that physician, praying to God that the answer is yes? The answer will not be yes when we cut back on medical research. The answer is going to be no.

That is why we have to really reflect on our priorities—not only in Congress but in elections. If we are going to let people take over the American political scene through the Citizens United case across the street or the McCutcheon case which was decided today, we are going to turn our government over to people who are totally out of touch with the reality of American families and American working families. That would be a serious mistake.

While we are on the subject, these are the first people in line who want to eliminate the Affordable Care Act. I was in the Rose Garden yesterday, invited by the President with a large group to celebrate the announcement that more than 7.1 million Americans

have now enrolled by the deadline under the Affordable Care Act, and more than 3 million young people, fresh out of college, looking for jobs are covered by their mom and dad's health insurance while they are looking for work. Then add another 8 million people across America who now have health insurance protection through Medicaid—meaning their income is so low that they qualify for this basic health insurance. Add those numbers up, and they come to somewhere in the range of 15 million to 18 million people who benefited by the Affordable Care Act—people, who until they had this opportunity, some of them, many of them had no insurance. I have met them. I have met them across my State. I have met those in downstate Illinois who worked all their lives. They are 62 years old.

A friend of mine never had health insurance one day in her life, never missed a day of work in her life. Now she has the protection of health insurance at age 62 for the first time—and thank God she does. She has just been diagnosed with diabetes. She has a chance now because she has health insurance under the Affordable Care Act. So what is the response from the other side? Repeal it. Get rid of it. We don't need it. It is a waste—too much government.

We are not going back. We're not repealing. We can make it better, and we ought to do it on a bipartisan basis. But we are not repealing the Affordable Care Act.

What would repealing the Affordable Care Act mean to the rest of us who have health insurance? The Affordable Care Act guarantees that if you have a child or a spouse with a medical condition—a medical history of asthma, diabetes, survived cancer—you cannot be discriminated against when you buy health insurance. What we are talking about here is giving families a fair shot at affordable health insurance—giving them a fair shot even if their child is born with a serious medical issue.

Secondly, the Affordable Care Act says: When you sell me a health insurance policy, it ought to be worth something when I need it. They used to sell these policies and put limits on them. God forbid tomorrow you are diagnosed with cancer and facing radiation therapy, chemotherapy, surgery, and hospitalizations. But there is a limit on your policy, and pretty soon you bust through the limit, and now it is all coming out of your meager savings. That is the number one reason people declare personal bankruptcy in America—health bills. The Affordable Care Act puts an end to that and says that your health insurance policy has to be there in an amount when you need it.

The third thing it says is if you are a senior citizen getting prescription drugs—there used to be something called the doughnut hole. It was a crazy thing. You couldn't even explain it. I pay for prescriptions—no, wait a minute. I don't pay for prescription

drugs for the first 3 months, and then I pay for them for 4 months, and then the government pays for them. It was called the doughnut hole. It made no sense at all. We closed the doughnut hole, saying to seniors: We are going to make sure that your prescription drugs are covered and you don't have to pay out of pocket, and you can get that annual checkup that you need to stay healthy. Those who want to repeal the Affordable Care Act want to do away with that, and that is just plain wrong.

As I mentioned earlier, if you happen to be a family with a child under the age of 26, you can keep that child on your health insurance plan while they are finishing college and looking for a job, maybe getting that first job. It may not be the best, may not have benefits. They are still covered under your policy.

Have you as a parent ever called your 24-year-old daughter and asked her, as I have: Jenny, do you have health insurance?

No, Dad. I'm fine. Don't worry about me.

Right. I will stay up all night worrying about you.

You don't have to do that anymore under the Affordable Care Act. Those who want to repeal it want to go back to those days where young people fresh out of college had no health insurance protection. We are not going back. We can make this bill stronger and better, and I will work to do it. But for the millions of Americans who now have a chance at affordable, accessible health insurance, we are not turning the clock back.

There is one other thing worth mentioning. Not only are millions now on health insurance, the good news is for the last 5 years since we passed this bill, the rate of increase in costs for health insurance has been going down—yes, going down. Not as fast as we want it to, but it used to be trending up in a way we couldn't even manage or control. Now we are moving in the right direction in terms of health care costs. So for those who come to the floor of the Senate or the floor of the House growling and whining about the Affordable Care Act, the good news is that this debate is over in America. The Affordable Care Act is here to stay.

We could make it better. We should work to make it better. We should do it on a bipartisan basis. But there are 18 million reasons why we are not going to repeal the Affordable Care Act—18 million Americans that have peace of mind with health insurance because of this law.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BOOKER). The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. FLAKE. I ask unanimous consent to offer my amendment No. 2935.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there an objection?

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, in order to keep this bipartisan emergency legislation

pending on the floor and to benefit 2.7 million Americans, I respectfully object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The objection is heard.

Mr. FLAKE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be permitted to speak as in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection.

Mr. FLAKE. Thank you, Mr. President.

I think it is unfortunate that we are not allowing amendments to be offered here for extending unemployment benefits. The least we ought to do is make it easier to find a job. Unfortunately, there is no room in the legislation to do that.

I would like to talk about one area where we could offer some help and relief. Hearing some of the discussion over the past few minutes in this Chamber, it seems that this Chamber has become an echo chamber for happy talk about the Affordable Care Act. Unfortunately, for those who talk about figures—enrollment figures and whatever—we seem to forget about the number of people who had their health care canceled, who may have been able to pick up new coverage under the Affordable Care Act, but it is hardly—hardly—affordable. In fact, in most cases the cost has gone up significantly.

So I am here today to join a number of my colleagues who are seeking to offer amendments to this legislation, to make it easier for those who don't have jobs and who cannot easily access jobs. As we all know, the ACA or Affordable Care Act placed requirements on what new plans are mandated to cover, including coverage of things—I think they named 10 essential health care benefits, essential being used loosely—like pediatric dentistry, maternity care, mental health.

We have all heard stories of those squeezed by the ACA's new mandates and regulations. For many, if it isn't higher premiums, it is higher deductibles, increased copays or even greater out-of-pocket costs. That is the case for most but not all. I think all of us should freely acknowledge that some people have been able to buy more affordable care, but I think those examples are overshadowed completely by those who are facing higher costs.

The Wall Street Journal noted in a March 22 article—they cited an eHealth report—that the average premium for an individual health plan that meets ACA requirements was \$274 a month, up 39 percent from last year, before the ACA provisions took effect. The same article reported that family plans averaged \$663 a month, a 56 percent increase from last year. These facts have real world implications and have a bearing on both a family's financial realities as well as their employment.

For instance, I previously referenced a case of Leanne from Eager, AZ. Her family is facing what she calls "sky-high" rates now. This is thanks to the

Affordable Care Act. If that isn't bad enough, it looks as if she and her husband will have to put off buying their parents' business.

In January I introduced the ReLIEF Act as a response to the administration's announcement that those facing health cancellations due to the ACA will be able to enroll in catastrophic coverage. The relief act would allow health insurance providers to provide catastrophic coverage to everyone and would deem these plans as meeting the minimal essential coverage requirement. The bottom line is, if we are going to delay benefits, delay mandates on the Affordable Care Act or delay implementation of certain parts of the Affordable Care Act for some, we ought to do it for everyone. I get a real kick out of hearing everybody reference the happy talk about the Affordable Care Act, but the reality is that much of it has been delayed or postponed or changed. If there are no problems with it, why do we keep doing that? If we are doing that for some, why don't we delay the mandates for everyone or allow others to buy more affordable coverage by giving some relief on these mandates?

This ReLIEF Act that I have introduced will allow health providers to offer catastrophic plans that may cost a lot less, that families used to be able to access and simply no longer can because too few insurance companies will offer them because at a certain point they will have to offer compliant plans that are much more expensive. My goal is to provide affordable insurance options and to give individuals who don't need or don't want more extensive coverage options to purchase these plans.

I applied the relief act to this bill as an amendment. I hope to bring that up. That was the purpose of the unanimous consent request that was just rejected. Unfortunately, it appears that very few, if any, amendments will be allowed to this legislation. I think that is unfortunate.

If we are concerned about the unemployed, as I know we all are, then we ought to at least offer them alternatives, offer them ways to more easily find employment to give them some more relief.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, I come to speak about the economy in terms of wages, but I do want to respond to the last discussion in terms of health care for a moment. Part of the fair shot is to make sure they have a fair shot that they need for their families, and thank goodness, under the Affordable Care Act, now folks are going to get what they are paying for. They cannot just get dropped if they get sick or if their child has juvenile diabetes or they have heart disease or some other condition. They are going to be able to know they can get insurance without preexisting conditions.

But it is also going to be incredibly important moving forward for women.

As the author of the provision to improve maternity care, I do want to say to my friend who just spoke that prior to health reform, about 60 percent of the plans in the private market wouldn't provide maternity care for women, amazingly. Being a woman was viewed as a preexisting condition because you might be of childbearing age or maybe you are not.

I remember hearing from one young couple where the husband couldn't get insurance because his wife was of childbearing age. This is not true anymore—not true anymore. Thank goodness for the comprehensive care that our friends on the other side call regulations on insurance companies—and actually that regulation is a requirement—so that women can get maternity care, and there is a requirement that we treat mental health and physical health the same in terms of insurance, which by the way affects 1 out of 4 people in our country. I think that it is a good thing.

We can always improve on it, and we will, to make it better, listen to the concerns and do what needs to be done to make it work better. But I think that families now have a fair shot to get health care coverage and not as parents go to bed at night worrying about whether their kids are going to get sick. It is a good thing, and we will move forward in a positive way.

Mr. President, let me tell you now about a business owner who said the minimum wage wasn't good enough—wasn't good enough—and his employees needed more. So he doubled everybody's wages. He doubled everybody's wages, and people thought he was crazy. He was shunned by the business community. People said he would go bankrupt. His name was Henry Ford—Henry Ford. Because of his decision to pay his workers \$5 a day, which was unheard of 100 years ago, he became one of the richest men in America.

When he first announced a \$5 workday, not everybody was happy. Economists had a fit. Ford's competitors were furious. The Wall Street elite were calling the \$5 day "an economic crime." They said Ford wouldn't be competitive in the economy anymore. They questioned his judgment and his business sense.

They were wrong. His decision to pay his workers \$5 a day not only was a brilliant business decision, it created the middle class of this country. We are very proud in Michigan that it started with us.

A hundred years ago \$5 a day was a lot of money. A loaf of bread cost 6 cents. A gallon of milk cost about 35 cents. At 3 a.m., the day after Henry Ford made his announcement, a bitterly cold day in Detroit, something started to happen on Woodward Avenue.

Picture it. In the middle of a cold night—and we have a lot of cold nights in Michigan—people all around Detroit

at 3 o'clock in the morning began walking through the snow-covered streets to Woodward and Manchester, the site of Ford's Highland Park plant. A line was forming, getting longer every minute. Tens and then hundreds and then thousands of people were getting in line. Traffic came to a standstill. There were too many people in the road for the cars to get by.

The hours passed. The lines got longer. By 10 a.m. there were 12,000 people standing in line waiting in the freezing cold for the chance to get one of those jobs—one of those \$5-a-day jobs that Henry Ford was offering, to be able to work hard, get that job, and build a better life. They were just looking for a fair shot to get ahead, like the millions of workers today who work 40 hours a week, such as the single mom who scrubs floors and works 40 hours a week and is still living in poverty, and the millions of other Americans still looking for work. Like most Americans and like those Ford workers 100 years ago, they just want a shot to work hard and play by the rules and be able to get ahead with their family.

Henry Ford knew that when his workers had money in their pocket, when they had enough money to put food on the table, when they were caught up on their bills, it meant they could afford to buy one of those cars they were building at the plant.

In fact, that is what he said when folks called him crazy. He said, "I want to make sure I got somebody who can afford to buy my car."

For families in 1914, a job in the Ford factory was a ticket to the middle class, and that is still true today. Henry Ford knew that paying a higher wage would mean happier workers and lower turnover, instead of workers who were frustrated about not being able to make ends meet. Henry Ford had workers who were proud to work for him. This meant greater productivity and greater profits because if the workers could make more cars he could sell more cars. If they could sell more cars, they could make more cars, so this was a win-win situation.

Henry Ford made more money than he had ever dreamed of, and his workers made more money than they had ever dreamed of. The effect this new wage had on Ford's employees went deeper than their wallets. In the first 3 weeks after the raise began, more than 50 of his employees applied for marriage licenses because they said they could now afford to get married and start a family. A lot of folks talk about the importance of starting a family. Having money in your pocket to be able to get started in life is a pretty big deal.

When the workers made enough money to live on, they were able to spread the wealth. Their local grocery stores, restaurants, and hardware stores and others also benefited from the increase in wages, which was reflected all around the neighborhood and the plant in 1914. A sandwich cart

operator near the plant was interviewed about the new wages by the Detroit News in February of 1914, and he said: "I'm for this raise in wages. I sell nearly twice as much as I did a month ago." Those who sold food and goods, such as hats, scarves, and gloves near the plant said the same thing. One vendor said that if things kept going like this, he would have to hire a new employee to help out with the new business.

It is simple: When workers have more money in their pockets, they have more money to spend at businesses both large and small. When businesses have more customers, they can pay their workers better and hire more of them. When the workers have more money in their pocket, they can go out and buy more things, and that is called the demand part of the economy.

Our colleagues are always talking about the supply side. They like to say: Let's just give it to the top and it will trickle down. Most people in Michigan are still holding their breath waiting for it to trickle down. We know if you put it in the pocket of workers—people who are, frankly, fighting to hold on to stay in the middle class or working to get into the middle class—you create the demand side of the economy.

As Henry Ford found out, things started turning. This kind of virtuous cycle that Henry Ford helped create in Michigan and in America 100 years ago is what we need to do today to restore our economy. We can't do that with a minimum wage that has lost most of its value in the past few decades.

Those Ford workers worked hard, saved their money, bought homes, built communities, and gave their children opportunities, such as being able to go to college. In Michigan, you can buy a little cottage up north where you can have a boat, a snowmobile, or be able to go out hunting on the weekends and enjoy life—that is the middle class.

Because of what was done by doubling people's wages—when everyone said Henry Ford was crazy—created the middle class of this country. But today everything the middle class worked for—what they built with their bare hands, elbow grease, and blood, sweat, and tears—is at risk. The Federal minimum wage has been stuck at \$7.25 for nearly 5 years. That single mom with two kids working for minimum wage today earns about \$15,000 a year, which is \$4,000 below the poverty line. That is not right, if you work 40 hours a week and make less than the poverty level. That is not how we built the middle class 100 years ago, and it is certainly not how we are going to grow it today.

Too many Americans rightly feel they are trapped in a rigged game where heads, the wealthy win, and tails, the rest of us lose. What we need is an economy that gives everybody a fair shot. That is what we are fighting for, that is what we believe in, and that is what we are promoting in everything we are doing. We want a fair shot and a fair economy for everybody—not a

free shot but a fair shot for everybody who works hard. Being rewarded for your hard work is what makes this country great. You can take a good idea, you can work hard, you can build a better life, and that is the American dream.

Today there is less opportunity for people who do that, unfortunately. People need to have a chance to build something—to build a career, a company, and a future—or we will fall behind the rest of the world. They need a fair shot. They deserve a fair shot. The middle class we built over the last 100 years could cease to exist if we don't act together and understand what drives the economy.

To turn things around, we need to make sure people can get jobs that pay a fair wage just as we had 100 years ago. Let's talk about what that means. We can start by raising the minimum wage. What is appalling to me today is that the \$5 a day Henry Ford paid his workers for 8 hours of work is the equivalent of \$14.67 an hour. If we did what Henry Ford did 100 years ago by paying \$5 to his employees to help drive the economy and create the middle class, employees today would have to be paid about \$14.67 an hour.

Think about that for a minute. The millions of Americans across this country who are working today for a minimum wage are only making the equivalent of half of what Henry Ford paid his workers 100 years ago. Meanwhile, the average CEO in this country today now makes as much as the wages of 933 minimum wage workers combined. I could not fit quite that many people in here, but imagine 933 people—all working 40 hours a week, making minimum wage, and maybe working 2 or 3 jobs—combined equals the average salary of a CEO.

We are going to move this country and working-class people forward again if we understand that people need a fair shot to get ahead and we do something about it. That is why we are going to vote soon on the Fair Minimum Wage Act which does just what it says. It makes sure all of our workers are getting paid a fair wage. An hourly wage of \$10.10—not even as much as I was talking about with Henry Ford—is the right number because it gets people out of poverty. That is the number that gets people out of poverty.

Some places across the country are seeking a minimum wage hike that is higher than that, while too many States are stuck at \$7.25 an hour, which is the national average. The bill before us in the Senate strikes the right balance by raising the minimum wage to the point where people are above the poverty line and have a fair shot to get ahead. If it made sense for Henry Ford in 1914, it makes sense for us today in 2014. The American people know this, and that is why raising the minimum wage enjoys broad bipartisan public support. If the public were voting, this would be done.

Democrats, Republicans, and Independents understand that it makes

sense, just as Henry Ford realized it 100 years ago. If families are making more money, it is better for everybody in the economy, and it is better for taxpayers. All of us, as taxpayers, know that higher salaries mean we are not spending so much money on food assistance. If we can get \$10.10 an hour, we are saving money on SNAP and people will not need or qualify for food assistance anymore. That is the way to cut the food assistance budget the right way. We need to give people access to work that pays above poverty line. Give people a handhold on the ladder to opportunity.

This is about the future of our country. If we want to continue to be a world leader, we have to make sure everybody has a fair shot at a good education, to get a good job, start a business, and make enough money. When they can do that, they will be able to support their family.

Nobody who works 40 hours week should live in poverty. Yet that is exactly what is happening today. We can change that. We can do what Henry Ford did. This man became one of the wealthiest men in the world by lifting people up and giving them a fair shot with a fair wage. I hope that in a few days we will do that. The American people get it, and I hope we will too.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

Mr. FRANKEN. Madam President, I ask to speak in morning business for up to 20 minutes.

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

Mr. FRANKEN. Madam President, this morning the Supreme Court announced its decision in the *McCutcheon v. Federal Election Commission*, the latest in a series of rulings that have done away with any meaningful limits on money in politics. Since the Supreme Court issued its ruling in *Citizens United* in 2010, we have witnessed the systematic unraveling of our Nation's campaign finance laws.

I am sure this is a cause for celebration for some—the superwealthy and well-funded corporate interests—because, after all, these rulings give them more influence, more access, and more power, as if they need it. Then there is everybody else—the everyday folks in Minnesota and around the country who don't have the luxury of pouring millions of dollars into political campaigns.

There is the senior on a fixed income who gives \$25 to a candidate she likes—maybe someone fighting to contain the cost of prescription drugs. That \$25 donation is real money for that senior, but it is nothing compared to the \$25 million the pharmaceutical industry can now spend to elect the other candidate.

There is the middle-class mom who has just enough money to buy her kids' school clothes, but surely doesn't have enough money left over to buy an election too.

There is the small business owner in the suburbs who is so concerned about

making payroll that she cannot even begin to think about making a huge campaign contribution.

Our democracy can't function the way it is supposed to when these voices are drowned out by a flood of corporate money, so for those who believe the measure of democracy's strength is in votes cast, not dollars spent, well, for us there is nothing to celebrate today.

Citizens United was, in my view, one of the worst decisions in the history of the Supreme Court. By a 5-4 margin, the Court ruled that corporations have a constitutional right to spend as much money as they want to influence elections. If Big Oil wants to spend millions of dollars to attack the guy who is advocating for more renewable fuels, the Supreme Court says: Sure. Go ahead. If huge corporations want to run endless radio ads against a candidate who promises to raise the minimum wage, the Supreme Court says: Fine. Go ahead. If the Wall Street banks want to pour money into a campaign to undo consumer protection laws, the Supreme Court says that is their constitutional right so there is not much you can do about it. That is the way the Court sees it, but it is not the way I see it and it is not the way most Minnesotans see it either.

I think we should be able to say: Enough is enough. There is too much corporate money in politics and some reasonable limits on campaign spending are not just appropriate, they are necessary. Really, that is what *Citizens United* is all about—the case that got us into this mess. It sort of came down to the question: Can we, the people, place any real limit on the amount of money corporations can spend on elections? The answer should have been, yes, of course we can, but five Supreme Court Justices said: No, we can't. Their logic was literally unprecedented.

To reach the result it did, the Supreme Court had to overturn the case *Austin v. Michigan Chamber of Commerce*. The decision had been on the books for 20 years. Overturning *Austin* wasn't some minor technical change to the law; it was a radical shift, an exercise in pro-corporate judicial activism. Just compare what the Court said about campaign expenditures in *Austin* to what it said 20 years later in *Citizens United*. In *Austin*, the Court refused to strike down a Michigan law that limited corporate spending on elections. The Court explained that the lawsuit served a "compelling interest"—namely, preventing corporations from gaining an unfair advantage in the political system. The *Austin* Court said that "corporate wealth can unfairly influence elections." Those were the Supreme Court's words in 1990, that "corporate wealth can unfairly influence elections." The Court explained that campaign finance laws prevent "the corrosive and distorting effects of immense aggregations of wealth that are accumulated with the help of the corporate form." In other words, there is good reason—no, a compelling rea-

son—to be worried about unlimited corporate money in politics.

Had today's Supreme Court followed the precedent, *Citizens United* would have been an easy case. I mean, I would have written the opinion in a couple of minutes. It would have gone something like this: Laws limiting corporate campaign expenditures are constitutional. See *Austin v. Michigan Chamber of Commerce*. The end.

Of course, that is not the opinion the Court wrote in *Citizens United*. The Court's opinion was a lot longer and a lot worse.

Here is the one phrase that sums up the *Citizens United* decision: "We now conclude that independent expenditures, including those made by corporations, do not give rise to corruption or the appearance of corruption." The majority of the Court told us that there is no reason at all to be worried about unlimited corporate money in politics anymore, that it does not give rise even to the appearance of corruption. And, the logic goes, since there is no reason to be concerned about it, there is no constitutional basis to regulate it. That is what the Court tells us, but we know better. The Court's analysis not only is disconnected from precedent, it is disconnected from reality.

The Minnesota League of Women Voters recently issued a report in which it concluded that "the influence of money in politics represents a dangerous threat to the health of our democracy in Minnesota and nationally." That is the Minnesota League of Women Voters. That sounds right to me because here is the thing: In our democracy, everyone is supposed to have an equal say regardless of his or her wealth. The guy in the assembly line gets as many votes as the CEO—one. You don't get extra votes just because you have extra money or greater say because of greater wealth. It doesn't work that way—or shouldn't.

Citizens United turned the whole thing on its head and basically said that those among us with the most money get the most influence, and not only that, there is no limit to the amount of money the wealthy can spend or the amount of influence they can buy. I think that is inherently corrupting.

Unfortunately, *Citizens United* was just the beginning of the story, and in the years since we have seen courts across the country strike down campaign finance laws, ushering in what are known as super PACs—wealthy groups that can raise and spend unlimited money to influence elections.

Today, in *McCutcheon*, the Court took *Citizens United* a step further, striking down a law that limited the amount of money people could give directly to candidates and political parties. In doing so, the Court overturned a key holding from *Buckley v. Valeo*, a case from 1976. Until today, the law said that direct contributions to candidates, parties, and certain PACs

could not exceed about \$125,000 in the aggregate per election cycle. The law was intended to stem the tide of money in politics and maintain the integrity of our public institutions. But as of this morning, that law has been taken off the books at the Supreme Court's direction.

As Justice Breyer explained in his dissenting opinion in *McCutcheon* today, "Taken together with *Citizens United*, today's decision eviscerates our Nation's campaign finance laws, leaving a remnant incapable of dealing with the grave problems of democratic legitimacy that those laws were intended to resolve." He is right.

Changing law has real consequences. What happens when we get rid of the speed limit? People with fast cars drive faster—as fast as they want to drive. What happens when we get rid of campaign finance limits? Well, special interests with a lot of money spend more of it on politics—as much as they want to spend. That is not a theory; it is empirical fact. According to data collected by the Center for Responsive Politics, spending by outside groups more than tripled from 2008 to 2012, with overall outside spending topping \$1 billion—billion with a "b"—for the first time in history. Where is the new money coming from? Well, in most cases we don't know. More on that a little later. What we do know is pretty much what one would expect. According to one study, 60 percent of super PACS' funding in the 2012 election cycle came from just 132 donors, each donating at least \$1 million. So we have a relatively small group of super-wealthy people accounting for most of the money.

Remember when the *Citizens United* court decision assured us that all of this new money in politics is OK, that we shouldn't be worried about it, that it "will not cause the electorate to lose faith in our democracy"? Wow, were they wrong. People are losing faith in our democracy, and can we blame them?

The system is broken, and we need to fix it. There are a number of good proposals out there, and I wish to use this opportunity to mention three of them: disclosure, public financing, and a constitutional amendment.

First, we need greater disclosure. The problem in the post-*Citizens United* world isn't just that there is now unlimited money in politics, it is also that we have no idea where that money is coming from. Billionaires and big corporations want to influence elections by giving unlimited money to super PACs, but they don't want anyone to know they are the ones pulling the strings, so they do something that looks a lot like money laundering—except that it is perfectly legal.

Let's say there are a bunch of corporations and billionaires out there who want to preserve indefensible tax loopholes that really only help their bottom lines. Their allies form a super PAC with a mission to do just that—

preserve their big tax breaks. Now, a super PAC needs a name. "Americans for Indefensible Tax Loopholes" probably doesn't achieve their end, so the super PAC decides to go with something such as "Americans for a Better Tax Code." After all, who could be against that? Remember, the corporations or the billionaires who are behind this whole thing don't want their fingerprints on this, so they pass their money through shell corporations before it ends up in the super PAC. That way the actual donors don't show up on the Federal disclosure forms. So now the TV is flooded with attack ads and something like "paid for by Americans for a Better Tax Code," but nobody has any idea who is actually behind the advertisement and there is no good way to find out.

But hang on. It gets worse. In addition to all of the secret money being spent by these super PACs, there are a bunch of nonprofit organizations that are using a glitch in the Tax Code to keep all of their campaign activities secret. These groups, liberal or conservative, don't have to disclose a single penny. Combine them with the super PACs, and we have a lot of money and very little information. Voters aren't just being flooded, they are being blindfolded too.

We have a bill called the DISCLOSE Act that would go a long way toward fixing this problem. It would put in place a clear set of rules requiring disclosure whenever anyone spends more than \$10,000 to influence an election, even when that money is being funneled through back channels. The idea is pretty simple: If someone is going to spend that kind of money to influence elections, people should know about it so they can make informed decisions and effectively evaluate what a candidate has to say. This is all about transparency and accountability.

All of us should be able to get behind that. Indeed, most of us already have. The last version of the DISCLOSE Act had support from a majority of Senators, and I am proud to have been one of the bill's cosponsors. Several of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle have spoken enthusiastically about greater disclosure. They have said things such as "sunshine is the greatest disinfectant." Even the Supreme Court has endorsed disclosure laws in both *Citizens United* and in today's decision. Poll after poll shows that the vast majority of Americans support greater transparency in campaign financing.

This is a basic step we should be able to take pretty easily—or one would think so. It turns out that one would be wrong. In July 2012 we brought the DISCLOSE Act to the Senate floor and Republicans blocked it. The bill died before it could get an up-or-down vote. But we are not going to give up on it. I will continue to work with my colleagues to make the campaign finance system more transparent.

Here is another thing we can do: Fundamentally change the way candidates

finance their campaigns. Senator DICK DURBIN of Illinois recently reintroduced the Fair Elections Now Act, which basically says that candidates who refuse to accept contributions of more than \$150 will be eligible for public financing of their campaigns. This would level the playing field. Instead of campaigns that are funded by a handful of wealthy donors, we will have citizen-funded grassroots campaigns where candidates focus their attention on people who donate \$5, \$10, \$50, up to \$150. We will restore power to that senior who makes the \$25 donation.

I have cosponsored the Fair Elections Now Act in the past, and I am proud to cosponsor it again in this Congress. This isn't going to solve all of the problems created by *Citizens United* and *McCutcheon*, but it is a step in the right direction.

Finally, there is something else we can do, and honestly it is the one thing we most need to do if we are going to repair all the damage the Supreme Court has done; that is, amend the Constitution to reverse the *Citizens United* and *McCutcheon* decisions.

Let me be clear. Amending the Constitution is not something I take lightly. I think it should be done only in extraordinary circumstances. But the Supreme Court's decisions present us with one of those situations because they erode the very foundation of our democracy.

I know what my colleagues are thinking: Constitutional amendments are really hard to come by. They require agreement by two-thirds of both Chambers of Congress, and they have to be ratified by at least three-quarters of the States.

It is no wonder that constitutional amendments have been so rare in our history.

Just because a constitutional amendment takes a long time to accomplish doesn't mean it is not worth trying. It took a long time—much longer than it should have—to enshrine women's suffrage into the Constitution, but it got done because it would have been an affront to our democracy had it been otherwise.

These things take time and patience and persistence and perseverance, but they happen. In fact, there is already momentum building. I am proud to cosponsor a constitutional amendment that has been proposed here in the Senate that would restore legal authority to the people to regulate campaign finance. The States are moving in the right direction too. According to Public Citizen, 16 States have already called for a constitutional amendment. I believe it is time for us to answer the call.

Mr. President, thank you. I yield the floor for the Senator from Connecticut.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. COONS). The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. MURPHY. Thank you very much, Mr. President.

Yesterday, the administration announced that 7.1 million people had

signed up for private health care all across the country in exchanges that range from the national exchange down to the State-based exchanges. Many of those who signed up are women who are enjoying new benefits and new protections under the health care law. So I wanted to come down to the floor, as Senator KAINE did earlier today, as Senator BOXER will in a few moments, to talk about why women all across this country have a completely different health care experience today under the Affordable Care Act and why they have no interest in going back to the days before the Affordable Care Act, and to talk also about what it means to have 7 million people all across this country who now have access to private health care insurance who did not have it before.

The story for women all across this country, as Senator BOXER will talk about in far more articulate terms than I can, is pretty stunning. Mr. President, 8.7 million women will gain maternity coverage in 2014; 8.7 million women did not have maternity coverage either because they did not have coverage to begin with or because they had a plan that did not provide maternity coverage. The health care law says if you buy insurance, we are going to expect that insurance has just a basic, commonsense level of benefits, and I think every American would agree with the fact that insurance for a woman should probably cover what for many women will be the most expensive intersection with the health care system they have in their life: And that is when they get pregnant. For families across the country, getting pregnant can bankrupt a family if they do not have maternity coverage. That changes with the Affordable Care Act.

Twenty seven million women can receive lifesaving preventive care without copays all across this country. A copay for many people is just \$5 or \$10. But for some cancer screenings, it can be a significant amount of money, running more than \$100. For low-income women, who are the primary breadwinner for their family, who are perhaps only making about \$25,000 a year, that is a barrier for them in seeking this basic preventive care, seeking care that could catch a cancer when it can be treated before it becomes a killer. Because of the Affordable Care Act, 27 million women now can receive lifesaving preventive care.

But maybe the most important statistic for women is this one: zero. Zero women can be charged more just for being a woman. The reality was, as Senator BOXER will talk about, if you were a woman in this country, you were sometimes paying 50 percent more simply because insurance companies believed in many cases that being a woman constituted a preexisting condition.

So we have 7.1 million people who are now on these private exchanges. Many of them are women who are already enjoying the benefits of the Affordable

Care Act but now are going to be able to get lifesaving treatment because of the ACA.

There were a lot of people who said this day was not going to happen. There were a lot of naysayers out there who said there was no way we were ever going to be able to hit the 7 million mark.

It is kind of interesting to look back now on all of the folks who predicted catastrophe for the Affordable Care Act who have been proven wrong. Before I yield the floor for Senator BOXER, I want to go through a couple of these statements.

A lot of people in the House of Representatives have spent the majority of the last several years trying to destroy the Affordable Care Act. I was a Member of that body, and I probably was down on the floor of the House of Representatives for about 40 different votes to repeal all or part of the Affordable Care Act. I think we are now at about 50 or 51 votes.

But when the Web site ran into some troubles in the beginning of the year, they all went down to the floor and went on the cable news networks and said this was an example of how bad this law is and there is no way to fix the law, there is no way to fix the Web site.

Representative BILL JOHNSON of Ohio said this:

This may be the most stunning example of overpromising and under delivering in recent U.S. history. Based on my review, the problems with the Healthcare.gov website are catastrophic.

That is a bit of hyperbole to suggest that the problems with the Web site were the most stunning example ever in recent U.S. history of overpromising and underdelivering. But, of course, the Web site problems were fixed. They were fixed within a few months such that we have actually gone straight through the CBO's estimate—after the Web site troubles—of 6 million people enrolling and we now have 7 million people enrolling.

But as early as this month, Republicans and mass media sources were telling us there was no way we were going to hit 7 million or 6 million. An Associated Press article said:

... the White House needs something close to a miracle to meet its goal of enrolling 6 million people by the end of this month. With open enrollment ending March 31, that means to meet the goal, another 1.8 million people would have to sign up during the month. . . . That's way above the daily averages for January and February. . . . The math seems to be going against the administration.

Well, what the Associated Press did not get is that there is desperation out on the streets. People who have not had insurance for years, if not decades, well, they might have taken their time to price out the right plan for themselves. Some of them might have simply waited until the last minute. But the reality is, the demand there is, frankly, almost insatiable, such that the Web site actually came down for a

portion of time on the 31st because so many people were going to it. The number eventually eclipsed even the CBO's rosiest estimate of enrollment.

Bill Kristol said this:

If the exchanges are permitted to go into effect . . . there will be error, fraud, inefficiency, arbitrariness, and privacy violations aplenty. . . . Just as economic shortages were endemic to Soviet central planning, the coming Obamacare train wreck is endemic to big government liberalism.

Well, the exchanges are working pretty well, such that we broke through the 7 million barrier. In my State of Connecticut, which has run a really good exchange, we are coming close to doubling our expected enrollment. Senator BOXER will talk about her numbers in California. But when you actually work to implement the health care law, rather than work to undermine it, as several States are, the exchanges work very well.

So then they turned and said: Well, yes, lots of people are signing up, and, yes, the exchanges seem to be working, but the wrong people are signing up. So one conservative scholar said:

They have thrown the entire health-care system into unprecedented chaos for a population—

The uninsured—

that is, it seems, staying as far away from it as possible. Little has been fixed. . . .

Well, Kentucky, just in the first 6 months of implementation, has reduced its uninsured population by 40 percent. The RAND Corporation said that 9 million Americans who had no health insurance now have health insurance. The reality is that people without insurance are signing up for the new health care law. Why? Because they can afford it and they desperately need it.

The fact is Republicans are going to continue to attack this law, and they are going to continue to change their arguments, they are going to continue to be shifting in the messages they send to the American people because every time they tell us that something is wrong, they are wrong.

Now they have said—do you know what—that 7 million figure, well, that just cannot be right. They are cooking the books. That cannot be right. There has to be something wrong with the methodology. Well, it is not just the Obama administration that says it is 7 million; it is independent analysts who say it is 7 million. And guess what. By the end of the year it could be 8 million once people who have had life-changing events sign up for care, once we incorporate all the State numbers.

Nobody is cooking the books. The uninsured are not staying away. The exchanges are not catastrophic. The Web site is not unfixable. All of these things have been proven untrue. Yet we still have people come down to the floor and tell us why this thing cannot work.

I listened to one of my colleagues come down to the floor earlier today and tell a story about a family in Wyoming. I do not know the specifics of the

family there. But let's talk about families in a State like Wyoming that is on a Federal exchange—the real story of the options that are out there for families out there.

I think my friend from Wyoming was talking about a family of five. Again, I cannot know all of the specifics of that family. But let's say that family of five in Carbon County, WY, was making \$100,000 a year—which would be about twice the average salary in that State and across the country. Well, that family of five making \$100,000 a year would qualify for a \$677 per month tax credit. A bronze plan would be about \$550 to \$750 per month. That is about 40 percent cheaper than a lot of private plans that may be available today.

Now let's say that family is actually making the median income in Wyoming, which is around \$56,000. Well, if you are making \$56,000, and you are a family of five in Wyoming, all your kids will qualify for Medicaid, which is virtually free, and the parents would qualify for a tax credit of \$528 per month. A bronze plan could be as cheap as \$171 per month.

That is the reality. That is affordable for a family of five making the median income. That is affordable. I understand people are having stories that do not match up with the 7 million people who have signed up for these plans over the past several months. I get that there is bad news out there. But there is a lot of good news out there as well. There are a lot of people who could not afford to buy a health insurance plan, who now can finally afford health care.

That is why Senator BOXER and myself and Senator STABENOW and Senator WHITEHOUSE and so many others have been coming down to the floor to talk about the fact that the Affordable Care Act is working. And for all of the naysayers, for all of the people who have predicted that this law could not work, well, the example has been set: 7 million people and counting signed up for health care exchanges all across this country—never mind all of the people who have gotten access to Medicaid, never mind all the people who have been able to stay on their parents' plan. We do not know what the overall number right now will be of people who have qualified for health care under the exchanges, Medicaid, and the provisions allowing people to stay on their plans. But this number could be 25 million by the time the year is out.

So I am thrilled to see the success of the Affordable Care Act and the number from yesterday. I am thrilled to see the life-changing benefits for women all across the country. I am pleased to be joined here on the floor by my colleague, Senator BOXER.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from California.

Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, what is the time situation?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate is postcloture on H.R. 3979 and a perfecting amendment thereto.

Mrs. BOXER. Do I need to ask permission to speak on health care?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator does need consent.

Mrs. BOXER. I would so ask.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mrs. BOXER. Thank you so much, Mr. President.

I want to say a big thank you to Senator MURPHY because he has been a great leader on this issue. He and I are coming from States where people are signing up and signing up and surpassing the goals. The stories are incredibly heartwarming and wonderful and are being told on the radio and being told on TV. The truth is coming out about the Affordable Care Act.

All of the scares aside, we see now it is working. Why is it working? Because there was a very simple premise when we passed this bill 4 years ago; and that was, people deserve a fair shot at affordable health care. That is all it was. They deserve a fair shot at getting affordable health care. They deserve affordable health care. They deserve to be free from discrimination by the insurance companies.

So I am so pleased Senator MURPHY has taken it upon himself to organize a few of us so we do not allow misinformation and lies to be spread about the Affordable Care Act.

What I loved about President Obama's speech yesterday at the Rose Garden was that he is so open about it. He said: Yes, we had a flawed rollout. We lost time. That was bad. And, yes, no bill is perfect. I think it was our colleague ANGUS KING who said it the best. He said: The most perfect document in the world is the Constitution, and it has been amended 27 times. So is any bill perfect? Is any document perfect? Of course not. But I am here to say, given the facts—not the made-up stuff—given the facts, I am so proud I was able to vote for the Affordable Care Act. I am so proud of that. And I am sad that not one Republican joined us in that vote—not one of them, not one of them.

When you go back to 4 years ago, we saw that millions of our citizens were uninsured because they could not afford insurance; or they were uninsured because their insurance company walked out on them when they were sick; or there were annual limits on their plans, and they simply went over that annual limit and they went broke and they could not afford insurance. Some had lifetime caps. And it sounded like a lot: Oh, you have a cap of a quarter of a million dollars. But then when you get cancer, that cap is reached a heck of a lot faster than you thought.

So we had kids kicked off their parents' health insurance at 18, 19 years old.

We had people with asthma, diabetes, cancer who could not get insurance until the Affordable Care Act passed. Being a woman was considered a pre-existing condition. If you were a victim

of domestic violence, forget it. The insurance company wanted no part of your risk. So Democrats took action—took action.

All the Republicans can do is come down here and say: Oh, here is one constituent's story. For every one constituent's story that they tell, No. 1, doublecheck the facts because sometimes we look at the facts and they are not exactly what they say. But I can give 100 stories to their 1 of people finally getting health care.

By the way, we can fix this law any day of the week with the help of the Republicans if they have an issue they think needs to be addressed. But their answer is: repeal, repeal, repeal. Why would they want to repeal a law that is helping, I will tell you, over 100 million Americans, not 7 million—7 million who are on the exchange—but I will show you more than 100 million of our people are getting preventive care, free cancer screenings, immunizations, contraception.

It has made a big difference in their lives. It is making a big difference that kids can stay on their parents' policies. Why do they want to repeal a law that does that, that gives us a patients' bill of rights, so insurance companies cannot look at you when you are sick, in your darkest moment and say: Senator or friend or Mr. Jones or Mrs. Smith, I am so sorry to tell you that you are not getting any more coverage because we just learned you had diabetes. You did not tell us. You did not mention it. You are out.

I do not know why Republicans want to take that away from people, but then again history is repeating itself. I tell my friends—I have so many friends on the other side of the aisle. We just see the world differently. When we go back to Medicare, you should see what the Republicans said in this Senate about Medicare: Socialism, let it wither on the vine.

Bob Dole was here. He was so proud he voted against it. He led the charge. "It is terrible." Now you have tea party members come with signs to rallies that say, "Don't touch my Medicare." They love their Medicare. They do not understand it is a government program, Medicare. The government is the insurer. Of course, PAUL RYAN wants to end it in his budget. So I guess nothing changes; it all stays the same. They hated Medicare. They still hate it. They wanted it to wither on the vine. They totally destroy it in Ryan's budget.

Social Security. You should see what they said about Social Security. It was an abomination. That is what they said. So nothing changes. We have different people in different clothes. I look a little different than the Democrats in the old days. There were no women here for starters. My colleague is very handsome. He had some predecessors that looked good, but they all say the same thing: Government should not be involved in any of this. It will all be great. You know what. I

wish they were right. I wish they were right.

My husband developed a small business. He managed to pay health care for his people. He was proud to do it. But you know not every business is fair and just and right. So, yes, once in a while we have to say let's all work together to make sure people are covered. When I was a little kid, my mother used to tell me all the time: Without your health care, you have nothing. If you are sick, you got nothing.

I used to say: Oh, God, I am so tired of hearing that. I remember she used to say: You see that beautiful actress over there? She has everything, but she got sick so she has nothing. Your health is everything, she told me. You have to protect your health. She was right.

How do you protect your health and the health of your family? By getting preventive care so you can catch something early. If you do not have insurance, you do not get that preventive care. You are in trouble. If something happens and you are in an automobile accident and you thought you were an invincible young person and nothing would happen to you and suddenly you find yourself with broken bones and everything else, including a broken heart, and you have no health insurance, you can go bankrupt. People did, because it was so hard to get affordable insurance before the Affordable Care Act.

So what you are hearing and will continue to hear are scare tactics, stories. I am here to tell you—and I want to say it very clearly—about the millions and millions of Americans who understand that the Affordable Care Act is working for them.

Yesterday was a historic day. They said: Never would you get 7 million people to sign up for private insurance on the exchanges—never. It happened. Why? Because this is a product people need, health insurance that is affordable. But that number is the tip of the iceberg. I will prove it.

Medicaid; that is, insurance for the poorest working people. We expanded it. We let more people qualify: 4.5 million Americans previously uninsured now have coverage through Medicaid. So let's do the math. There are 7 million on the exchanges—7.1; 4.5 million on Medicaid who did not have it before; 3 million young adults are able to stay on their parents' plan who were not able to do that before. How about this? Eight million senior citizens who have saved billions of dollars because of the fix in the Affordable Care Act that says they get more help paying for their prescriptions.

That adds up to, drum roll, 22.6 million Americans with those very important benefits, but then here is the other thing. One hundred million Americans are now getting help with preventive services that they used to have to pay for: immunizations, mammograms, vaccines, annual exams, and other lifesaving preventive care.

We are talking about millions and millions. Even with private health care

now, you can have no annual limit, no lifetime limit. They cannot be turned away for preexisting conditions. Your insurance company cannot break out on them just when they are needing them. So that is almost everyone in the country who is benefiting from the law.

Let me tell you about California. We are the biggest State in the Union, 38 million strong. Covered California is the way we set up our exchange. It is coveredCA.com. Peter Lee is the head of that. I wish to thank Peter Lee today—he does not know I am doing this—for his extraordinary leadership.

Here is what happened. We exceeded our State's goal for enrollment through Covered California by not 100,000 people, not 200,000 people, not 300,000 or 400,000, but by 500,000 people we exceeded our goal. That is bigger than some States. Can you believe it? Half a million people, more than we expected.

I am sure Senator THUNE is shocked by this. This is a fact. We expected to have 700,000 sign up. Instead we had 1.2 million. That does not even include all of those who signed up on Monday or who were still in the process of completing enrollment.

We are going to hear a lot of stories about families who are paying what they think is too much—and I want to work with everybody to make this law better, believe me—but listen to a couple of my constituents. Julie Mims from Sacramento said:

We no longer have to worry about being ruined physically and financially by a serious health issue. . . . We enrolled in a Bronze 60 plan that will cost us \$2 a month.

This is a working woman who is getting the help she needs to have a decent—decent—health care policy.

Then there is Rebecca Tasker. She runs a small construction business in San Diego with her husband. They are saving \$1,000 a month. They are saving \$12,000 a year that they can spend on their family. They can spend that in their community boosting this economy.

She said, "These savings will help our company grow and might allow us to be able to hire our first employee this year."

So here is a small businesswoman who had to spend so much on health care, and now because of the Affordable Care Act she is able to save \$1,000 a month and possibly hire her first employee. Have you heard of something called job lock? Before the Affordable Care Act, people said: I do not want to leave my job because I have health care. I am scared to go out on my own. I would not be able to get it. I would not be able to afford it. That is why we set up the exchanges. It is freeing people to move out of a job that maybe they think is a dead-end and start their own business.

Here is a woman who is going to be able to hire her first employee with the money she is saving. There are hundreds more stories. I will be coming to

talk about those in the coming days and weeks. Stunningly, House Republicans keep bragging about their never-ending efforts to take health care away from millions of Americans.

Do you know the House has voted not once, not twice but more than 50 times to repeal the Affordable Care Act. They are doing it again. If they had spent as much energy working with us to make the law better, which the President said he is open to, we are open to, just like we worked with them on Medicare Part D when they carried that. We worked with them to make it better.

Can you imagine, we would be standing here talking about even more millions of people. I have to say and this—I know it might be viewed as controversial, but because this law helps women so much with mammography, with vaccines, with birth control, with the end of discrimination based on gender, with an end of discrimination if you have been the victim of violence, with the end of discrimination because you could carry a child and have a pregnancy and want coverage, this Affordable Care Act helps women.

So I am going to say this: When you vote 50 times to repeal a law that benefits women, you are voting against women. So you can say all you want to become—and I know Speaker BOEHNER said: I want to become more sensitive to women. I have an idea: Stop trying to take away health care from women and their families and then you will see women feel much better about you.

Women are smart. They know who is on their side. They know who wants to give them a fair shot. But it is not people who want to take away their health care. That is what you say day in and day out. Remember, under the Affordable Care Act, many women were denied health insurance because of pre-existing illnesses such as breast cancer, depression or, again, even being a victim of domestic violence. They were charged more than men. Let us be clear. Now we are guaranteed access to free preventive care and maternity care. Women are now paying zero dollars for a checkup—zero. This is it. Zero dollars to get a test to check for cervical cancer, zero dollars for a mammogram, zero dollars for FDA-approved contraception. Why do the Republicans want to repeal this law and take away mammograms, take away tests for cervical cancer, and take away checkups and FDA-approved contraception? Why?

At the same time, they say they do not understand why women do not gravitate to their party. I have to say, we should be celebrating this law—yes, fixing it where it needs to be fixed. But I think if Republicans would join with us and say let's work together to make this a better plan—if you have someone who cannot find their doctor in their plan, let's try to work together to fix it. If you have someone who you think deserves a subsidy, let's work together and try to fix it.

But let's remember, folks, I just pointed out the millions of people who are benefiting.

House Speaker BOEHNER called the Affordable Care Act a "rolling calamity." House Majority Whip McCarthy said the enrollment numbers would be "staggeringly low." Several GOP Members tweeted excitedly about how enrollments in their States wouldn't even fill a football stadium to capacity, and former Gov. Mike Huckabee said: "You've got more people wanting to go moose hunting in New Hampshire than want Obamacare."

Wrong. Really wrong—really, really wrong.

It is time for Republicans to look at the facts. It is time for the GOP to accept the reality that this law is helping millions of people: seniors, women, men, students, children—all Americans.

It is time to recognize that one of the biggest problems facing our country before the Affordable Care Act was a lack of affordable insurance and millions of people are gaining the benefits.

So we are not going to go back to the days when our people were denied health care, where an insurance company would walk out on you, where you brought in a child with asthma when they were wheezing and the insurance company said: Get out. We can't insure that child.

I have seen the tears before the ACA when people were forced into bankruptcy because they had no insurance, and I have seen the tears of joy since the ACA.

So we will listen to our colleagues tell their tale of horrors, and that is fine. They have every right. I respect them. But remember, as we hear these stories, go back and make sure that is exactly what you thought you heard and then ask them what is their plan. How do they want to help women and their families and their children?

So far, we haven't heard much. All we have heard about is repeal, repeal, repeal. That is not a policy. Repealing the Affordable Care Act will hurt Americans and not just a few but many millions.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

Mr. BARRASSO. I ask unanimous consent to engage in a colloquy with a number of my colleagues for up to 45 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection.

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, before I start, I noted that the Senator from Connecticut came to the floor in an attempt to debunk a letter from one of my constituents to me, a family from Rawlins, WY, whom I talked about earlier on the floor.

It seems the Senator is making the same argument the majority leader Senator REID has made time and time again that these letters are made up. That is what seems to be the case. Is that what the Senator from Con-

necticut is saying? These are letters, these are emails, these are news articles that are out there coming from our constituents and coming from our home States.

This was all supposed to be about affordable care. Care and affordability were the keystones of this entire piece of legislation.

So I heard the Senator from California talking about people being denied care. It is happening now because of the health care law—because of the health care law people are being denied care.

Let me reference where my colleague from Connecticut comes from. The State of Connecticut, the Hartford Courant, a major newspaper in the State of Connecticut, has a report that came out March 17 of this year, just a couple of weeks ago: "Connecticut Is Less Competitive After Federal Health Care Reform."

I heard the Senator from California saying there are people who have been helped, and I believe that, but for every one person who has been helped, I believe many have been harmed as a result of the law.

Let me tell you what our friends from the Hartford Courant wrote:

The individual health insurance market is less competitive in Connecticut since the implementation of the Affordable Care Act, sometimes called Obamacare, the Kaiser Family Foundation said in a report released Monday.

Of the seven States to release enrollment data by insurer, Connecticut and Washington had fewer options—

Fewer options, not more options, as the President of the United States has claimed—fewer options. The article continues—

for people buying health plans on the individual market, according to Kaiser foundation, a non-profit health policy research organization.

California and New York, the largest States in the study, each has a more competitive insurance market today compared to 2012, Kaiser found.

But Connecticut, the State where my colleague had questioned where the woman from Wyoming comes from, is less competitive. The article continues:

In 2012, Connecticut's individual health-insurance market was more evenly distributed among a number of insurers.

They list Aetna, WellPoint/Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield, UnitedHealth Group, EmblemHealth/ConnectiCare. It says:

Connecticut has fewer insurer options available on Access Health CT, its public health exchange, which was created by the Affordable Care Act.

As of February 18, two insurers dominated 97 percent of health plans sold through Access Health CT.

There is a "less competitive exchange market and" let me point out "higher than average premiums."

If that is what my colleague from Connecticut wants to say is a success, let him have it, but he has no right, in my opinion, to come and say that a woman who wrote to me is either not

smart enough to know how to figure out how much of her premiums she is being asked to pay and what her premiums were prior to her losing insurance because of the health care law.

Then the Senator from California came to the floor to say: Well, people aren't losing the care they had.

NBC Connecticut, again where our colleague is from, says: "Some Connecticut doctors said they will not accept certain health insurance plans offered on the state health exchange." The story goes on to say: "It broke my heart," losing the doctor she had been to before whom she trusts and has faith in but because of the health care law is losing that care.

I come to the floor to just point out that Republicans have better ideas. Republicans have ideas about ways to help work to lower the cost of care so patients can get the care they need from a doctor they want at lower cost, not the situation we see across the country, where many individuals believe and truly feel harmed as a result of the President's health care law.

With that, in response to what my colleagues from Connecticut and California have just said, we are here today to talk about jobs, the economy, getting people back to work. As a doctor, I will tell you long-term unemployment, how it affects someone's life, how it affects, I believe, their identity, their self-worth, their dignity, and the way they think about themselves, and so it is much more important that we get Americans back to work.

I am on the floor with a number of my colleagues. The Senator from South Dakota is on the floor, and he knows as well as anyone the impact unemployment has in rural America, in the Western United States and how when jobs go away it makes it much harder for other jobs to come. I would ask that he share some of those thoughts with us right now.

Mr. THUNE. I thank the Senator from Wyoming for his observations about health care and more particularly about jobs.

We are talking about a 13th extension now of unemployment insurance benefits which, in my view, does treat a symptom, but it doesn't do anything to address the underlying cause. The cause is we have too many people in this country who are out of the work, which means we need to create more jobs, and that means making it less expensive and less difficult to hire people, not driving up the cost of hiring.

The Senator from Wyoming has just touched on one of the issues that is affecting hiring in this country; that is, ObamaCare.

You can say what you want—and the other side may have some stories, which we will not dispute, unlike when we come up here and we share the stories, the real-life stories of some of our constituents, and then we have the majority leader of the Senate say those stories aren't true, those stories are all made up. Then he came to the floor

last week in response to more bad news about ObamaCare and said the reason people aren't signing up for it is they just aren't educated enough about the Internet.

What he is essentially saying is that the people of this country, No. 1, aren't telling the truth and; No. 2, aren't very smart. That is not what I believe and I don't think that is what any of my colleagues believe.

We do believe there are things we ought to be doing to get Americans back to work. Repealing ObamaCare would be a good place to start because it is making the cost of growing your business, expanding your business in this country, dramatically higher. It is also raising the premiums and the deductibles for people all across this country, for middle-class families, and giving them fewer options when it comes to doctors and to hospitals.

I want to talk just briefly, if I might, about the cost of overregulation and what it is doing to our economy.

We have had an opportunity during this discussion on unemployment insurance to talk about some of the things that we would do if we would be given a chance to offer amendments. Typically, the case around here, what happens, the practice and pattern of late is that the majority leader fills the tree and blocks us from offering amendments. We have a lot of Members on our side who have great ideas about things that would actually create jobs, actually grow the economy. One of the things we know is costing jobs and hurting the economy is the cost of overregulation, destroying jobs and making it more difficult for our job creators.

In fact, the estimate is it is almost one-half trillion dollars in the cost of regulations since the President has come to office—almost one-half trillion dollars added—added cost in this country. That figure is larger than the entire economy of Peru. It is larger than the entire economy of Sweden. Think about that. The cost of regulation in this country since this President has come to office is larger than the entire economies of either Sweden or Peru.

One of the largest contributors to these new regulations and compliance costs is the EPA, the Environmental Protection Agency. They came out with the Boiler MACT regulations, they came out with the Utility MACT regulations, and they came out with tier 3 fuel standards. All of these things that the EPA has finalized are some of the most costly regulations we have seen from any agency in recent history.

These rules will impose billions of dollars in costs on energy producers and manufacturers, which are going to be passed on to consumers in the form of higher prices. Unfortunately, for consumers already hurting in the Obama economy, more bad news is on the way. The EPA is currently working on regulations for ozone standards, greenhouse gas emissions for power-

plants, and a dramatic expansion of the Clean Water Act that will reach into ditches and gullies all across America.

I would like to briefly touch on the impacts EPA mandates, including greenhouse gas standards, regional haze requirements, Utility MACT, and Boiler MACT, are having on energy prices back in my home State of South Dakota. Unfortunately, South Dakotans are on the frontlines of this administration's war on affordable energy.

In 2008, then-Senator Obama promised to make energy prices skyrocket. Today, in my home State, he is fulfilling that promise. Just Monday Black Hills Power, a utility company in western South Dakota, announced a proposed rate increase to cover the cost of new EPA mandates. If that rate increase is approved, the average customer's rates will increase by \$130 a year. For a family living in western South Dakota, \$130 can go a long way toward putting food on the table or making a car payment.

South Dakota is a rural State with energy-intensive manufacturing and agricultural sectors of our economy. Families have to travel long distances. We are a cold-weather climate. We see dramatic swings in seasonal temperatures that create uncertainty when opening monthly utility bills. Unfortunately, the EPA's backdoor energy tax, which is already beginning to hit South Dakota's families, is about to get even more expensive.

The tier 3 gasoline standards, greenhouse gas regulations, and new ozone rules are a train wreck of new regulations that are going to further drive up energy costs and destroy jobs. That is why I have offered two commonsense amendments to rein in these costly EPA regulations.

The first amendment would require Congress to approve any EPA regulation with a projected cost of more than \$50 million a year. If Congress rejects that rule, the EPA would be forced to go back to the drawing board and pursue less costly alternatives.

From regulating greenhouse gases under the Clean Air Act to regulating streams and ditches under the Clean Water Act, this EPA stretches authority well beyond what Congress intended when we created a Federal-State environment regulatory structure decades ago. This EPA needs to be reined in, and the best way to do that is by creating congressional oversight of major regulations.

My second amendment would create another check on the EPA's ever-expanding regulatory reach. This would require the Department of Energy and the Government Accountability Office to conduct a cost-benefit analysis of EPA's proposed greenhouse gas regulations on powerplants.

If, based on this study, the DOE, the Department of Energy, or GAO determined that the new regulations would raise energy prices or destroy jobs, the new regulations could not take effect.

The EPA could still propose new regulations on new and existing powerplants, but those regulations couldn't be finalized until it certified that those new rules would not negatively impact jobs or energy costs.

We have over 10 million people who remain unemployed. Economic growth and job creation remain stagnant and middle-class incomes have dropped by \$3,000 per family over the past 5 years. The last thing middle-class families need is for their pocketbooks to be further stretched by misguided government policies that drive up energy costs. It is time to put a check on the EPA. It is time to have an open debate, an amendment process on commonsense proposals to increase congressional oversight, and it is time to put consumers ahead of liberal environmental groups.

I encourage my colleagues on the floor with me today to continue pushing for policies that make energy more abundant and more affordable. Unlike the heavyhanded regulations we have seen from the Obama administration, these policies will actually create jobs and help grow the middle class. I will continue fighting, along with my colleagues joining me on the floor today, to make sure we get votes on these policies and begin to rein in the out-of-control regulations from the Obama administration.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri.

Mr. BLUNT. Mr. President, I am pleased to be here with my colleagues talking about ways we can get people back to work, regulations that don't make sense, and energy policies that clearly every economist we talk to understands are a key to the future.

I know the Republican leader has joined us on the floor, and I think I will ask him if he has some comments he would like to make, and then we can come back to me at the end of his comments.

Mr. MCCONNELL. I thank my friend from Missouri.

What we have been talking about is how to create jobs. Unfortunately, the agenda of the Senate Democratic majority does just the opposite. It appears as if we are not likely to be able to get any amendments offered that would actually create jobs and opportunity for our people.

One of the things I have been so disturbed about over the years is the inability of employees to make a voluntary choice about whether they want to belong to a union.

In addition to the energy jobs measures we are discussing here today, I have another related measure I would like to highlight. As I mentioned earlier this morning in my opening remarks, enacting national right-to-work legislation is just plain common sense. My colleague from Kentucky, Senator PAUL, has been the leader on this issue.

This is a fundamental issue of worker freedom. This amendment would empower American workers to choose

whether they would like to join a union. It would protect a worker from getting fired if she would rather not pay dues to a union boss who fails to represent her concerns and her priorities. According to one survey, 80 percent of unionized workers agreed that workers should be able to choose whether to join a union.

It is an issue of upward mobility. A worker should be able to be recognized and rewarded for her individual hard work and productivity.

This is paycheck fairness. A worker should no longer be held back by an antiquated system where pay raises are based on seniority rather than on merit.

This is an issue of leveling the playing field. Workers in all States would have a more equal chance of finding work in every State, and they would no longer see their communities failing to secure new investments because their State hasn't passed a right-to-work law.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that it be in order for me to offer my amendment No. 2910, which I have just described to my colleagues here in the Senate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. REED. Mr. President, reserving my right to object, the underlying measure is a bipartisan response to an emergency in terms of extending unemployment for 5 months—a temporary extension. Given the emergency nature of the underlying legislation, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Missouri.

Mr. BLUNT. Mr. President, Senator THUNE, my friend from South Dakota, and I have worked for a long time on the kinds of economic and troublesome regulations he talked about earlier. Nobody appears to be answerable to the people—those who come forward with these regulations. I think he has an amendment on that, and I would afford him the chance to talk about that amendment.

Mr. THUNE. I thank my colleague from Missouri.

Senator BLUNT and I have, as he said, worked very hard when it comes to the overreach of government agencies and the burdens of regulations, the cost of regulations and what that is doing to a lot of middle-class families and their pocketbooks.

I mentioned earlier a couple of amendments I had filed here that pertained to energy costs in my home State of South Dakota, one of which sets a \$50 million threshold over which a regulation proposed by the EPA would have to be voted on by the Congress of the United States, and if Congress rejected it, the EPA would have to go back to the drawing board to come up with an alternative approach. That amendment is amendment No. 2895, and I think it fits perfectly with

what we are talking about today, which is growing our economy, creating jobs, and trying to do what actually would get people back to work. Certainly, the burdensome cost of regulation is a tremendous deterrent and impediment to job creation in this country.

I ask unanimous consent that it be in order for me to offer my amendment No. 2895.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BROWN). Is there objection?

The senior Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. REED. Mr. President, reserving my right to object, once again, given the emergency nature of this bipartisan legislation to address the plight of over 2 million Americans desperately looking for work, I object and hope we can press on with the passing of the underlying legislation.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Missouri is recognized.

Mr. BLUNT. Mr. President, let's talk about this topic a little longer—regulation. Again, in my view—and my friend from South Dakota and I have shared this view for a long time—when the Congress passes laws—and I think it is appropriate that we are not always in the best place to come up with the regulations that put those laws in place—I believe the country has clearly come to a place where nobody is then answerable for regulations that have a significant impact on our economy.

The Senator from Kentucky Mr. PAUL and I have cosponsored the REINS Act, which addresses these laws that meet this kind of threshold, and it is a bill that was before the Congress, but we can't get that bill to the floor.

Senator THUNE and I have worked for a long time on this kind of proposal that would simply create opportunity.

The emergency nature of the opportunity is really a 5-year emergency now where we have seen job opportunity after job opportunity go away. Part of that is surely because of what were the unintended but clear consequences of the Affordable Care Act, and part of it is rules and regulations that don't make sense to people who are about to take enough of a chance with their creation of opportunity for themselves and somebody else without having any idea that someone answerable to them is eventually going to have to answer for what the Federal Government does. And that is what bringing these regulations to the floor would do.

Nobody is saying Congress should be responsible for implementing every law and the goal of law, but we should be responsible for the impact of that law and should have the final say on rules and regulations that we have essentially started in motion. They should come back here.

If we don't do this on this bill today, we should do this. We should have done this years ago. Many of us in this body,

in the Congress, have believed for a long time that this is one of the major impediments to job creation.

Another impediment is bad energy policy. That is why there are so many energy amendments. The amendment I offered where the Congress couldn't have a carbon tax unless it passed a threshold of 60 votes was offered in the budget debate last year, and 53 of my colleagues—Democrats and Republicans here on the floor—agreed that, yes, we should have a special threshold.

When we talk about a tax that makes gas at the gasoline pump more expensive; that makes diesel fuel that delivers products more expensive; that raises the utility bill of everybody who has some element of fossil fuel in their utilities, and that is virtually everybody; that makes it less likely that people will create manufacturing jobs and those kinds of opportunities here, of course we ought to be talking about those kinds of policies, whether or not it is the carbon tax.

In Ohio, in Missouri, in Wyoming, in the vast middle of the country, our energy comes from fossil fuels. Those are the resources we have. Our focus should be on using those more effectively, not figuring out ways we shouldn't use them at all or figuring out ways to double the utility bill.

That is the EPA's own estimate of their own rule, that the utility bill, they say, will go up 80 percent if the rule is in place. I think that is probably a little optimistic on their part. Eighty percent is almost doubling your current utility bill. Think about where you work or your daughter-in-law works or your son-in-law works or somebody in your family works, doubling the utility bill there and wondering if there will still be a utility there or if that company will decide to go somewhere else. The incredibly capable and competitive American workforce is being held back by utility policies that stop people from making the investments they want to make.

The energy cost of manufacturing, according to the National Association of Manufacturers and others, is a key element now in that final decision to decide where you are going to build something, where you are going to make something, and, most importantly for families, where you are going to create a job that has the kind of take-home pay families need.

When we talk about the Keystone Pipeline, the ability to maximize our use of natural gas, of fracking for oil, we are talking about the great resources we have, and we should use those resources to our benefit. Every other country in the world, when they look at their tableaux of natural resources, the first two words that come to mind in every other country in the world are "economic opportunity" or "economic advantage." What does this allow us to do that we couldn't do otherwise? What advantage does this give us over our competitors?

We shouldn't let the first two words that come to mind when we look at our

natural resources be “environmental hazard.” What is the worst thing that would happen and what would happen if that happened every day? No. 1, the worst thing to happen is something we should think about but not be overwhelmed by. We should see that that doesn’t happen, and if it does happen, what are we immediately prepared to do about it so it does not become an ongoing problem? That is the whole formula it takes on the energy side, on the natural resources side to create opportunity.

The one thing government policies can do, although they can’t create jobs, is they can create an environment where people want to create private sector jobs. That is and continues to be the No. 1 priority domestically this Congress should be focused on—what we do to create more private sector jobs. I think energy is a big part of that.

Certainly, my friend from Wyoming Senator BARRASSO who has brought us together to talk about this, understands that so well. Energy and regulation policies that make sense are the kinds of policies that help us create the opportunities that hard-working families need and that families who would like to see somebody in their family have that job with great take-home pay are focused on.

I yield for my friend Senator BARRASSO.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

Mr. BARRASSO. I thank my colleague, and I appreciate the comments of my colleague Senator BLUNT, who has been a leader and champion on the issue of getting people back to work.

We heard the Senator from Rhode Island saying there are people out there desperately looking for work. What we are doing is bringing to the floor amendments to this piece of legislation that will actually get people back to work nearly immediately.

So I rise today to discuss how Congress can actually help the people who are unemployed get back to work. We have been debating all week whether the Senate should extend unemployment insurance to the long-term unemployed. And whether or not one supports extending unemployment insurance, we can all agree and should all agree that job creation should really be the top priority. This, to me, is where the unemployment insurance bill, as currently written, falls short. That is why I, along with a number of my colleagues, have filed amendments that would help create nearly 100,000 jobs.

Our amendment would do two things, and President Obama has failed to do them. The amendment I am here with Senator HOEVEN to discuss would permit—approve the Keystone XL Pipeline as well as liquefied natural gas exports to our allies and strategic partners.

The Keystone XL Pipeline has been pending for over 5½ years—over 5½ years. During that time the Obama administration has conducted five sepa-

rate environmental reviews of this project—five environmental reviews in the last 5½ years.

Despite this scrutiny, President Obama continues to delay approving the Keystone XL Pipeline even though its construction would support over 42,000 jobs. That 42,000 jobs number is not my number. This is the jobs estimate from President Obama’s own State Department.

The Keystone XL Pipeline has broad bipartisan support throughout the country. A recent Washington Post/ABC News poll found that 65 percent of Americans support the construction of the Keystone XL Pipeline. Labor unions such as the plumbers and pipefitters, building and construction trades, international labor, and the union of operating engineers, among others, have all called on the President of the United States to approve the Keystone XL Pipeline. Just over 1 year ago, 62 Members of the Senate voted in favor of the Keystone XL Pipeline.

If the Senate is going to extend unemployment insurance, it should also help Americans get back to work. We should adopt this amendment which approves the Keystone XL Pipeline.

The other part of the amendment deals with approving LNG exports—liquefied natural gas—to our allies and strategic partners. Before getting into the specifics of that, I ask my colleague and friend from North Dakota, Senator HOEVEN—who has worked closely with supporters of the Keystone XL Pipeline, a man who was Governor of the State of North Dakota during the early discussions—to express his thoughts on why we think this is important to the economy, to help those people who are unemployed, and help getting Americans back to work.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota.

Mr. HOEVEN. Mr. President, I thank the esteemed Senator from Wyoming for leading this colloquy.

Our effort here is to address in real terms the problem—the legislation we have on the floor right now is the unemployment insurance bill—to truly address the problem, which is getting people back to work, rather than additional government payments added onto the payments already made.

What we are trying to do is make sure there are jobs to get people back to work. Energy is an incredible opportunity to do just that. So when we talk about this energy legislation, it is about producing more energy for our country. But it is about jobs, it is about economic growth, and it is about national security. So I commend the esteemed Senator from Wyoming for leading the charge on legislation which would allow us to export liquefied natural gas.

We currently consume in the United States on an annual basis about 26 trillion cubic feet of natural gas a year, but we produce 30 trillion cubic feet of natural gas a year. So we are already in a situation where we are producing

more than we consume. We import some from Canada, and we are growing in terms of our domestic production in States such as Wyoming, my home State, and others. Across the country with the shale gas development, we are producing more and more natural gas. We need a market for that natural gas, and Europe very much needs natural gas so they are not dependent on Russia for their energy. So we are talking about an opportunity here at home to actually create more economic activity and put people back to work. That is the real solution. It doesn’t cost the government one penny. Instead, we get revenue—not from higher taxes, but from a growing economy and people going back to work.

When we look at this legislation, we have taken legislation led by the Senator from Wyoming and we have tied it together with Keystone legislation I have submitted. We call it the Energy Security Act, and it does those two things—it approves the Keystone XL Pipeline, a \$5.3 billion investment by private companies in our economy. By the Obama administration’s own estimate, their State Department has said it will create more than 40,000 jobs in the construction phase. We tie that with legislation which has been put forward by the Senator from Wyoming, which I am extremely pleased to co-sponsor. We put those two together, LNG exports with Keystone. We call it the Energy Security Act. We have submitted it and we have filed it as amendment No. 2891.

I therefore ask unanimous consent that it be in order for me to offer my amendment No. 2891.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. REED. Mr. President, reserving my right to object, once again, the underlying legislation is designed to help 2.7 million Americans who need the support. It is a bipartisan agreement. There is a time and place to debate all these issues, but I think the time and place now is to move forward and vote on the underlying agreement.

Therefore, I respectfully object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. HOEVEN. With due deference to the good Senator, I understand his desire to make sure people who are unemployed receive assistance. I think he truly is a champion in that effort. I appreciate the opportunity to work with him in a bipartisan way. But I would submit this very legislation absolutely complements what he is trying to do, and does it in a number of ways, first, in terms of a permanent, real, long-term solution—meaning getting those people back to work, but, second, in terms of paying for it, in terms of actually paying for the cost of unemployment insurance, these provisions—this amendment and the other amendment we are offering—will actually help create revenue to do what the Senator is trying to do.

For that reason, I think it is absolutely complementary to the legislation at hand and will in fact add bipartisan support to passage of that legislation.

I will cite one more extremely compelling study which relates to this point before I turn back to the Senator from Wyoming.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce in 2011 commissioned a study. They had experts do an evaluation of energy projects awaiting approval to proceed from the administration—awaiting permits or other requirements so they could proceed with these energy projects.

What I am talking about are energy projects that total billions, even hundreds of billions, of dollars where private companies are willing to invest their money and develop energy resources across this great country.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce study I cite was performed in 2011. It came back and said there are more than 350 energy projects, both renewable type energy and traditional energy, that are stalled because of bureaucratic redtape on the part of the Federal Government at a cost of \$1.1 trillion to the American economy and nearly 2 million jobs for the American people. Think about that, 2 million jobs for the American people, when what we are talking about here today is the unemployed.

What we are talking about here today is putting people back to work.

I will cite from that study:

In aggregate, planning and construction of the subject projects (the "investment phase") would generate \$577 billion in direct investment, calculated in current dollars. The indirect and induced effects (what we term multiplier effects) would generate an approximate \$1.1 trillion increase in U.S. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) including \$352 billion in employment earnings, based on present discounted value (PDV) over an average construction period of seven years. Furthermore, we estimate that as many as 1.9 million jobs would be required during each year of construction.

Good-paying construction jobs. The Keystone XL Pipeline is just one of those more than 350 projects, and it alone is an investment of \$5.3 billion. It alone, according to the State Department's own estimates, will create more than 40,000 jobs.

What are we trying to do here? I thought it was to put people back to work, trying to make sure they have an opportunity—in States such as Ohio. Of course, in my State we have an energy boom. We are trying to get people. We have more jobs than people because we have unleashed this investment in energy. We have done that in our State. Why not do it across the country? Why not do it across the country? There is no question we can.

We have offered other amendments as well. The other point I want to make is they are bipartisan amendments. They are amendments that don't cost the Federal Government any money but create incredible investment and in-

credible opportunity for our people, and they are bipartisan.

One of the amendments put forward by the Senator from Missouri passed through the House with 1 dissenting vote. I don't know if the 1 dissenting vote was Republican or Democrat, but I don't know how you get any more bipartisan than that, because they were one short of unanimous. So that is what we are talking about here.

I know negotiations and discussions are going on as to votes we may get on the legislation we are offering as part of this unemployment insurance bill. I ask the leadership on the majority side to allow us to vote on these amendments. We will accept the verdict of the Senate; all 100 get to vote, which is what we were sent here to do.

I will close with that. This isn't about either the Democratic side of the aisle or the Republican side of the aisle. This is about people who are unemployed and need an opportunity. We absolutely have the ability to give them that opportunity, so let's do it. Let's do it. That is what this debate is all about.

Again, I thank the distinguished Senator from Wyoming for leading the discussion. He has been an energy leader as well as a physician, so he certainly has been a leader on the health care issue too. But he has certainly been an energy leader, and his State is a leading energy-producing State.

As I said at the outset, and he has made the point so eloquently, this is an opportunity. Energy is an opportunity. It is jobs, it is economic growth, it is national security. Let's go. Let's get it done.

With that, I turn to my colleague from Wyoming and again thank him for his leadership of this important discussion.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, how much time remains?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. There is 5 minutes 20 seconds.

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I appreciate the comments of my friend and colleague from North Dakota, a State in which he served as a Governor, a business leader in the community, and knows the State very well and knows the importance of energy—not just to his State's economy but to the economy of the country and the importance for people who want work, who want jobs.

I think bringing together the issues of the Keystone XL Pipeline as well as the exportation of liquefied natural gas is what will help get Americans back to work.

Since September of 2010, the Obama administration approved only seven applications to export liquefied natural gas. The administration is sitting on 24 pending applications. Thirteen of those applications have been pending for more than 1 year. Some of these applications have been pending for more than 2 years. To put this in context:

The United States has approved less than half of the LNG export capacity that Canada has approved. To me, this administration's delay is unacceptable and the excuses have run out.

I take a look at this from the standpoint of what is happening globally as well. Ukraine imports about 60 percent to 70 percent of its natural gas from Russia. Nine of our NATO allies import 40 percent or more of their natural gas from Russia. Four of our NATO allies import 100 percent of their natural gas from Russia.

LNG exports would help our strategic partners and allies free themselves from Russian energy. This is why our NATO allies are calling on Congress to expedite—expedite—LNG exports.

LNG exports will give our allies an alternative supply of natural gas and enable them to resist Russia's intimidation. LNG exports will also help create jobs right here at home.

In February, The Economist explained that LNG exports "would generate tanker loads of cash" for the United States.

More recently, Nera Economic Consulting suggested that LNG exports could help reduce the unemployment rolls by as many as 45,000 over the next few years. This is extraordinary. LNG exports would not only create new jobs but would employ Americans who cannot find work today.

LNG exports would help as many as 45,000 Americans find work. President Obama through his actions has made it very clear that jobs are not his priority. He seems to be more interested in inventing new delays and new excuses than in actually creating new jobs. That is why the Senate must act today and here in this place. That is why the Senate should approve the Keystone XL Pipeline and LNG exports and that is why we should adopt the amendment that Senator HOEVEN has offered.

So, Mr. President, I come to the floor today to say Republicans have now tried to offer 9 amendments we believe would get this economy growing again, amendments we believe would actually create jobs and put people back to work.

Now, to inform my colleagues of what I am about to do, I am going to move to table the pending Reid amendment No. 2878, which for everyone's information is an amendment which merely changes the date of enactment. So Senators voting not to table this amendment would rather change the date than vote on amendments that would help put people back to work.

In order for my colleagues to be able to offer amendments, I move to table the pending Reid amendment No. 2878, and I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The clerk will call the roll.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

The assistant bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Massachusetts (Mr. MARKEY), the Senator from West Virginia (Mr. ROCKEFELLER), and the Senator from Massachusetts (Ms. WARREN) are necessarily absent.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Texas (Mr. CRUZ).

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

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

[Rollcall Vote No. 97 Leg.]

YEAS—46

Table with 3 columns of names: Alexander, Ayotte, Barrasso, Blunt, Boozman, Burr, Chambliss, Coats, Coburn, Cochran, Collins, Corker, Cornyn, Crapo, Enzi, Fischer, Flake, Graham, Grassley, Hatch, Heller, Hoeven, Inhofe, Isakson, Johanns, Johnson (WI), King, Kirk, Lee, Manchin, McCain, McConnell, Moran, Murkowski, Paul, Portman, Risch, Roberts, Rubio, Scott, Sessions, Shelby, Thune, Toomey, Vitter, Wicker.

NAYS—50

Table with 3 columns of names: Baldwin, Begich, Bennet, Blumenthal, Booker, Boxer, Brown, Cantwell, Cardin, Carper, Casey, Coons, Donnelly, Durbin, Feinstein, Franken, Gillibrand, Hagan, Harkin, Heinrich, Heitkamp, Hirono, Johnson (SD), Kaine, Klobuchar, Landrieu, Leahy, Levin, McCaskill, Menendez, Merkley, Mikulski, Murphy, Murray, Nelson, Pryor, Reed, Reid, Sanders, Schatz, Schumer, Shaheen, Stabenow, Tester, Udall (CO), Udall (NM), Walsh, Warner, Whitehouse, Wyden.

NOT VOTING—4

Table with 2 columns of names: Cruz, Rockefeller, Markey, Warren.

The motion was rejected. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Louisiana.

Mr. VITTER. Mr. President, I have a germane amendment to this matter, which I have been trying to get recognized to present.

I call up my amendment No. 2931 to the Reid amendment No. 2874.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The amendment is not in order to be offered. It is inconsistent with Senate precedence with respect to the offering of amendments, their numbers, degree, and kind.

Mr. VITTER. Mr. President, in light of the fact that our practice of regularly shutting out Senators from the ability to offer reasonable and germane amendments is inconsistent with all of the history and traditions of the Senate, I appeal the ruling of the Chair that the amendment is not in order and ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I move to table and ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be 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 Massachusetts (Mr. MARKEY), the Senator from West Virginia (Mr. ROCKEFELLER), and the Senator from Massachusetts (Ms. WARREN) are necessarily absent.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Texas (Mr. CRUZ).

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

The result was announced—yeas 67, nays 29, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 98 Leg.]

YEAS—67

Table with 3 columns of names: Alexander, Ayotte, Baldwin, Begich, Bennet, Blumenthal, Booker, Boxer, Brown, Cantwell, Cardin, Carper, Casey, Chambliss, Cochran, Collins, Coons, Corker, Donnelly, Durbin, Feinstein, Flake, Franken, Gillibrand, Hagan, Harkin, Heinrich, Heitkamp, Heller, Hirono, Isakson, Johnson (SD), Kaine, King, Klobuchar, Landrieu, Leahy, Levin, Manchin, McCain, McCaskill, Menendez, Merkley, Mikulski, Murkowski, Murphy, Murray, Nelson, Pryor, Reed, Reid, Sanders, Schatz, Schumer, Sessions, Shaheen, Stabenow, Tester, Udall (CO), Udall (NM), Walsh, Warner, Whitehouse, Wicker, Wyden.

NAYS—29

Table with 3 columns of names: Barrasso, Blunt, Boozman, Burr, Coats, Coburn, Cornyn, Crapo, Enzi, Fischer, Graham, Grassley, Hoeven, Inhofe, Johanns, Johnson (WI), Kirk, Lee, McConnell, Moran, Paul, Risch, Roberts, Rubio, Scott, Shelby, Thune, Toomey, Vitter.

NOT VOTING—4

Table with 2 columns of names: Cruz, Rockefeller, Markey, Warren.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The motion to table the appeal on the ruling of the Chair is agreed to.

The majority leader.

NOMINATION OF TOMASZ P. MALINOWSKI TO BE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

NOMINATION OF PORTIA Y. WU TO BE AN ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF LABOR

NOMINATION OF DEBORAH L. BIRX TO BE AMBASSADOR AT LARGE AND COORDINATOR OF UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT ACTIVITIES TO COMBAT HIV/AIDS GLOBALLY

Mr. REID. Mr. President, pursuant to an order that is now in effect in the Senate, I move to proceed to executive session to consider the Malinowski, Wu, and Birx nominations, and ask that all time for debate be yielded back on all of these nominations.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The clerk will report the nominations.

The assistant bill clerk read the nominations of Tomasz P. Malinowski, of the District of Columbia, to be Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor; Portia Y. Wu, of the District of Columbia, to be an Assistant Secretary of Labor; and Deborah L. Birx, of Maryland, to be Ambassador at Large and Coordinator of United States Government Activities to Combat HIV/AIDS Globally.

Ms. MIKULSKI. Mr. President, today I rise to express my support for the nomination of Dr. Deborah Birx to serve as the next Global Aids Coordinator at the Department of State. Dr. Birx's extensive leadership, experience, and research in the field of HIV/AIDS make her an ideal candidate to lead our Nation's response to HIV/AIDS around the world.

The President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, PEPFAR, has been a resounding success. Our investments in fighting HIV/AIDS throughout the world have resulted in access to treatment for millions of people and dramatic reductions in new infections. It has also garnered unprecedented respect for the United States in communities around the world. This is why it is important that we have a strong coordinator who will continue to lead on this important issue. Dr. Birx has a unique combination of scientific, technical, and leadership experience that makes her the best candidate for this position.

Dr. Birx began her career serving in the Walter Reed Army Medical Center and the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research, where she led the Department of Defense in its work on HIV/AIDS throughout the 1980s. In that role, she lead one of the most influential HIV vaccine trials in history,