

this infrastructure. We need to make the daily lives of tens of thousands of people better.

One of the most important steps we can take to alleviate this congestion and delays in New Jersey and throughout this region is to make this investment. But I also say another critical aspect of making those investments is to make a strategic investment in the Gateway project. Amtrak's 2015 budget request seeks to continue investing in needed preliminary work on the Gateway project. The Gateway project is Amtrak's most important initiative—a project that is going to generate benefits throughout the Northeast region that will have a multiplier effect throughout our economy, enabling growth, enabling job creation, improving the quality of life, and helping one of the most prosperous regions on the globe continue to grow.

Currently, there are just two tunnels connecting New Jersey to New York via rail. These tunnels are currently operating at full capacity, with roughly 24 trains at peak hours carrying over 70,000 riders daily, with no space for additional riders during rush hour. In order to execute repairs and safety checks on these 100-year-old tunnels, Amtrak is required to shut down the entire tunnel and suspend half the trips in and out of the city. This causes so much of a burden. This is an unnecessary burden. This is a threat to the safety of thousands of New Jersey Transit and Amtrak passengers.

Ridership demand in and out of Manhattan is actually predicted to double in the coming decades—double. It is critical for the economic health of our region to accommodate this increase and ensure that urgently needed growth and the safety and security of so many Americans. The Gateway project itself would build two new rail tunnels from New Jersey to New York City and expand Penn Station in New York to handle all of this additional capacity. This project alone would create thousands and thousands of jobs. It would reduce commuter times and make traveling by rail more flexible and, very importantly to resident after resident who has reached out to me, it would make it more reliable. This critical investment will drive economic growth throughout that entire region.

Upon completion, the Gateway project would allow Amtrak to run 8 more trains during peak hours and allow New Jersey Transit to run 13 more trains. This is a significant capacity increase that would take thousands of cars off the roads every single day. It would increase revenue for Amtrak and New Jersey Transit. It would allow intercity and commuting passengers shorter and easier trips up and down the Northeast and in and out of Manhattan, and it would improve significantly the air quality of our region, alleviating the respiratory challenges so many people unnecessarily face because of commuter car pollution.

In short, all of these reasons point to something critical: It would make it

easier for our region to be prosperous, for businesses to grow, and American opportunity to increase. It is essential that Congress join with Amtrak in advancing this important regional project and support Amtrak's overall mission to deliver reliable, efficient passenger rail service across the United States. For Amtrak to be successful in the long term, Congress needs to become a more reliable investment partner and fund multiyear Amtrak budgets, to have predictability in that funding, making it again multiyear. Our current approach of lurching from annual budget to annual budget does not allow for Amtrak to flourish and serve our citizens as it could and as it should. We need a level of predictability to make these kinds of investments. Support for the Amtrak fiscal year 2015 budget request would be a step in the right direction.

I urge my colleagues to appreciate this critical understanding that we are a people who thrive through connectivity, whether it is virtual connectivity on the Internet or even human connectivity; that we need to, in environments such as this, one to another, work together. Indeed, it is the words of Martin Luther King, written in a jail cell in Birmingham, AL, in 1963, in the spring of that year, almost 50 years ago—he wrote in profound manner, and I paraphrase it: We are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a common garment of destiny. It was an elevation and understanding of the power of human connection, that we share one destiny, and that when we exalt our connections, prosperity grows, equality grows, opportunity grows. What King talked about in a spiritual way lives also in the physical: Country, from its transcontinental railroads, a country that united itself in early innovations and AM/FM dials; all the ways we as a nation have made more robust connectivity. It has spurred industry, it has spawned industry, and it has made jobs multiply and multiply—economic growth connecting American to American. Right now, in this critical time, we must continue.

I hope my colleagues will join me in making sure we support the Amtrak budget. I know from personal experience the challenges and the trials and the dangers from the status quo. It is time for us to advance. It is time for us to come to together, to invest in America, to expand opportunity, and make real, in a physical way, those deepening connections we have, one to another.

Thank you, Mr. President. I yield the floor and I note the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to a period of morning business with Senators allowed to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

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

WORLD AUTISM AWARENESS DAY

Mr. REID. Mr. President, one of the privileges of addressing the Senate each morning is the opportunity to call attention to what I believe and what I think the country believes are noble causes. I certainly hope so.

Today is World Autism Awareness Day. To the Americans who have autism and the millions of family and friends affected by this condition, one day is simply not enough to focus on this misunderstood illness, but it helps—and we certainly hope it does.

Autism is a general term for a group of complex disorders of brain development affecting social interaction, communication, and behavior. According to a recent study by the Centers for Disease Control—in fact, the report came out this week—1 in 68 children is diagnosed with having some form of autism in our country. As more and more children are identified as being autistic, it is important we in Congress do all we can to provide them, their families, and their caretakers, the help that is so vitally necessary.

Under the Affordable Care Act, autism screenings and other preventive services are available at no cost to families. For those diagnosed with autism, the days of being denied health insurance due to their preexisting condition ended with the passage and implementation of the Affordable Care Act.

Today, because of the Affordable Care Act, adult children with autism may stay on their parents' policies through age 26, providing them with the stability and additional treatment they need.

With benefits such as these, it is no wonder that more than 7 million people have sought health coverage under the Affordable Care Act. This doesn't count the estimated 800,000 to 900,000 people on 14 State exchanges. But in addition, everyone who tried to sign up during the last many months and were unable to get through, for whatever reason, are also now going to be signing up, which will add hundreds of thousands of more people.

So the numbers are pretty clear. The estimate given by the White House many months ago, which my Republican colleagues made fun of, has now been exceeded. So maybe they will quiet down and stop talking about repealing this bill that affects millions and millions of people favorably.

While the health care law is helping autistic Americans who have been diagnosed and their families, researchers at the National Institutes of Health are

tackling the question of why this disease is here, what are the origins of this condition.

Research is critical in supporting development tools, interventions, and evidence-based services to help provide a quality of life for people in the autism spectrum.

Over the last year, researchers funded by NIH have made significant advances in understanding the onset of autism. They have learned that brain changes that contribute to autism occur even during pregnancy and continue through the first years of life. They have also concluded that some of the possible signs of autism may begin to appear within the first 6 months it can be identified. The work at the NIH in understanding the problem cannot be understated, but far more needs to follow to better comprehend autism.

Congress also has responsibilities. One is providing resources to the National Institutes of Health and the Centers for Disease Control, and we need to do that. My friend Senator DURBIN has introduced legislation that would focus on ways we can provide more help that is badly needed. With sequestration and the other cuts which have taken place it has been unfair to these two agencies.

The Achieving Better Life Experience Act—also known as the ABLE Act—would improve the quality of life for individuals with autism and other disabilities through tax-advantaged savings accounts. These special savings accounts would help disabled Americans and their loved ones plan for the future by setting aside money to cover future expenses, including education, housing, therapy, and rehabilitation.

I am a sponsor of the ABLE Act and proud to stand with all advocates in celebrating today World Autism Awareness Day.

UKRAINE

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, yesterday afternoon a bipartisan majority in the House of Representatives passed Senate legislation to provide loan guarantees to Ukraine and to impose sanctions on certain Ukrainian and Russian officials.

This legislation comes at a time when Ukraine's future hangs in the balance between democracy and dictatorship. The brave Ukrainians who protested across the country and at Maidan square have shown an inspiring determination to defend their freedom. Many of them endured the brutal attacks of riot police, snipers, and below freezing temperatures. Some died in the mayhem. President Putin, who has long demonstrated his disregard for international law and human rights in his own country, has now extended that sphere of repression to Ukraine by violating its sovereignty and strong-arming its citizens.

This legislation exemplifies our support for a free and democratic Ukraine. The new government will face every

imaginable economic, political, and security challenge, but the country's interim leaders have already indicated a willingness to implement austere reforms to put their country on the right track. It is important that during this time of uncertainty the people of Ukraine know that they have the full support of the United States and the international community.

In addition to the loan guarantees which will be available immediately to help facilitate the development of a more resilient economy, the legislation authorizes funds for democracy and security assistance in future years. It also imposes sanctions against various Ukrainian and Russian officials who have been identified as principles in the subversion of democracy in Ukraine and who have treated the public treasury as their own personal bank account. While efforts to recover stolen assets will not restore the entire amount that has disappeared, it will further expose President Yanukovich and other corrupt officials for the criminals that they are.

I do want to say that I am very disappointed that domestic politics prevented inclusion of provisions, included in the version of the bill that was reported by the Foreign Relations Committee, authorizing U.S. support for reforms and participation in the quota increase at the International Monetary Fund. These reforms have been widely recognized as important for global economic stability, for maintaining U.S. leadership at the IMF, and for our efforts to maximize international assistance for Ukraine. Unfortunately, the House Republican leadership decided that partisan politics at home is more important than U.S. leadership in an international organization that we were instrumental in creating.

Ukraine and Russia have a shared history, but it is clear that the people of Ukraine see their future with Europe. That is why it is imperative that we support them at this critical time, and that we send a strong message to President Putin that there are real consequences to the use of brute force to violate the territorial integrity of Russia's neighbors.

As chairman of the appropriations subcommittee that funds our assistance for Ukraine, my subcommittee will not only provide the budget authority to pay the subsidy cost of the loan guarantees, we will also look for other ways in fiscal year 2015 to protect it and its neighbors from further Russian aggression.

VERMONT COMMISSION ON WOMEN

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, the Vermont Commission on Women this year celebrates its 50th anniversary. Established in 1964 by Vermont Governor Philip Hoff, the commission was established in response to a challenge presented by President Kennedy, urging every State in the country to create such commissions "to encourage

women to use their abilities, and to reduce discrimination against women." I am proud that Vermont's is one of the oldest continuously operating commissions in the United States.

The commission's work is fueled by 16 volunteer commissioners, a team of advisors and a small but energetic staff. By advocating for new State laws and strengthening old ones, the commission has fought to reduce gender discrimination, achieve pay equity, support families and create job opportunities for women in my home State. Just last year, the commission was a strong force in strengthening provisions of Vermont's Equal Pay Act, so that women move closer to the reality of receiving equal pay for equal work. The law also extended protections so that employees could ask coworkers about their pay, and perhaps learn of disparities, without fear of retaliation.

I have no doubt the commission's ongoing efforts have helped Vermont women narrow the gender pay gap, to 84 cents for every dollar earned by a man. Vermont is leading the way in this area: the national level finds women earning 77 cents for every dollar earned by their male counterparts. I am grateful to the commission for its ongoing support for the Paycheck Fairness Act, which the Senate will consider in the coming weeks.

The commission also serves as a needed source of information. Its handbook, *The Legal Rights of Women in Vermont*, serves as a valuable guide for women who may find themselves in need of advice on matters such as adoption, employment rights, housing and divorce. The commission also conducts research, coordinates conferences and workshops, and engages in partnerships, all in the interest of furthering gender equality.

Despite the great strides that have been made over five decades in Vermont and across the Nation, we know that many discriminatory issues affecting women still exist today, and that the need for the commission's work is still critical.

The State of Vermont is very fortunate to have such a strong group advocating for women's rights. I have been proud to work with the Vermont Commission on Women for over 15 years on Vermont's Women's Economic Opportunity Conference, an annual event in Vermont that brings women of all different backgrounds together to talk about the challenges facing women in the work place.

I am proud to acknowledge and honor the Vermont Commission on Women as it celebrates 50 years of leadership and achievement.

VOTE EXPLANATION

Mr. MARKEY. Mr. President, I was necessarily absent from votes during today's session. Had I been present, I would have opposed the motion to table the Reid amendment to H.R. 3979 and I would have supported the motion