

predicted model for our sea ice coverage by 2030. We can see an even larger portion of the Arctic is expected to be open to maritime commerce.

The Navy predicts that the traffic through the Bering Strait will double again in the next 10 years. Again, that is going to happen whether or not the United States participates. Foreign vessels, if not American vessels, will be traveling across Alaska's western and northern coast. That is a given.

The last chart I have shows the Bering Strait as the gateway between the Pacific and the Arctic Oceans. Again, when we talk about Alaska, we are talking about its strategic geographic location, where it is on the globe. We are very proud of the military opportunities we have for amazing training ranges in Alaska when it comes to our assets in the air and on the ground.

But look at where Alaska sits in terms of its strategic location to not only Asia—we are sitting literally halfway between Nagoya, Japan, and Seattle, Washington, when you are at Adak. It is just as easy for me to get to Japan as it is to get to Seattle if I go as the crow flies. Unfortunately, I do not have anything that will take me as the crow flies.

But I think it is important for us to recognize this: That whether it is passage over the Northwest Passage, which is still relatively problematic, the increased traffic we are seeing from the Northern Sea Route coming over Russia, or potentially the transpolar route at some point in time, everything funnels through the Bering Strait here—the 57 miles between Russia and the United States—and then has to exit or cut through the Aleutian chain here.

So when we think about where Alaska sits, we truly are the gateway between the Pacific and the Arctic Oceans. With the predicting of a doubling of vessel activity in the Arctic via the Bering Strait in the next 10 years, the time to develop the infrastructure and support capacity to handle this growing amount of traffic is now—actually, it was yesterday.

This is not a region that is devoid of activity, but it is a region that lacks adequate levels of investment, government resources, and attention. Deep-water ports, navigational aids, search and rescue capabilities, and ice-breakers are all needed now and, in addition, the basic charting of many of our Arctic waters, which some of us have recognized is seriously lacking. This is going to take a very collaborative effort across all of our agencies and working with our Arctic neighbors to achieve that.

With a vision, it is not difficult to see how we could have a transshipment facility developed in the Aleutian chain to capitalize on the intersection between the North Pacific great circle route and the three Arctic Sea routes. Imagine you have cargo that is transiting the Arctic from Europe, coming from the Northwest Passage or coming over the Northern Sea Route.

Imagine that cargo then being offloaded at Adak. Adak is a former Navy base and, quite honestly, the infrastructure that is there is—well, it is a little bit old—pretty amazing. You could then offload in either Adak or Unalaska and load that cargo onto ships transiting the North Pacific and to the west coast—and vice versa.

Ice-strengthened ships could be used entirely within the Arctic, rather than traveling all the way to Singapore or Hong Kong. It would save time, it would save money, and it would allow for an increased number of transits. I am looking at it and saying: This could be a real win, a win for consumers, a win for business, and a win for national security by being able to keep a closer eye on commerce traveling to the United States.

It is clear—I hope it is clear—that people recognize that we have such opportunity, we have such capacity for opportunity and growth within the Arctic. But we have to be careful, we have to be considerate, and we have to be sure that the necessary resources and infrastructure necessary are there.

The United States has never been last in a race to the future, but absent visionary leadership and meaningful resourcing, we will continue to take a back seat and fail to capitalize on all that the Arctic has to offer. We will miss out on resource development and shipping efficiencies and, in turn, new opportunities to create new jobs and generate needed economic growth.

I don't believe that we can afford to sit idle any longer, which means that it is time for our Federal Government and this administration to really start taking the Arctic seriously and dedicate the necessary resources to the region.

I don't mean to suggest that the efforts that have been made to date are not important. We have come quite far in the past few years, but you have to remember, we were starting from ground zero. There was nothing, really. We have made some strides, and it is important that we have these documents coming out of our agencies, and it is important that we have framework because it is on these that we will build. But I feel like I need to lend an air of urgency that it is not just about methodically chipping away year by year with yet another document—another strategy plan that will sit on the bookshelf.

I have a lot of those on the Arctic. I think many do. It is how we are a true participant in a level of engagement in a region that holds such excitement and such potential that nations around the world are turning their eyes northward with excitement and enthusiasm.

The United States should be leading with equal enthusiasm about what our opportunities hold.

I thank the Chair, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. KING). Without objection, it is so ordered.

UNEMPLOYMENT EXTENSION

Mr. COATS. Mr. President, I come to the floor today to discuss the vote that is about to occur on the unemployment benefits extension act. I have repeatedly said that the Senate should have a full and open debate on this important issue and that debate should include the opportunity for those of us in the minority—and perhaps those in the majority—to offer amendments and changes that would represent the view of the people they represent in Congress. Those amendments could strengthen the bill, make it better, and perhaps make it something that the House could consider, since they have not taken up this legislation.

Clearly, for those who are truly in need and for those who have played by the rules, the issue of extended unemployment benefits is a legitimate issue for debate—and for many here, for passage. I have not only worked with my colleagues on the Republican side of the aisle, but also with my Democratic colleagues, to secure two items which would give me a better sense of where we are going and would provide for better legislation—legislation that could perhaps work its way through the Congress and onto the President's desk.

One of those two items was a legitimate pay-for. We clearly have a fiscal situation where, if we can't offset new spending with spending on programs that have not proven their worth, then we are going to continue to spend more than we take in, continue to add to our national debt, and continue to trot down the precipitous road to a fiscal crisis—\$17 trillion-plus and counting, an ever-accumulating debt and continued unbalanced budgets. You can only run a business, a family or a government for so long when you do not make ends meet by having your revenues there to pay for your expenses. So having a legitimate pay-for was one of the criteria that I was trying to address along with my colleagues.

Secondly was reforms to the program. It was the President himself who publicly acknowledged that the unemployment insurance program needed reforms. There were abuses in the program. It was not reaching all of the people it was intended to reach. It had some flaws and needed to be fixed. Once again, all of those attempts for reasonable reforms—not only by me, but by a number of my colleagues—were to provide what I believe is deemed, even on a bipartisan basis, as reasonable, but they have been rejected. They have been rejected not because we had a debate and voted and didn't achieve the requisite number of votes for passage, but they were rejected because the majority leader simply used procedures,

once again, to deny the minority any opportunity—and, of course, that also includes the majority—to stand on this floor, to offer an amendment, to debate that amendment, to have a vote on it, to accept the result, and then move to forward.

The two reforms I had mentioned—and that I thought made eminent sense—didn't really have much opposition to them. One was to simply end a process that resulted in a waste of taxpayers' money by violation of the law. The law requires that if you apply for unemployment benefits, you must prove you are able to work and that you have been seeking work—but most importantly, you are capable of working.

The Social Security Disability Insurance Program requires, by law, that you are unable to work. Therefore, you cannot be eligible for those benefits unless you can prove—through a medical process or evidence—your inability to work. Yet the Government Accountability Office has found a significant number of folks in our country who are receiving checks from both programs. You can't have it both ways. You can't say you are not able to work and therefore receive a disability payment, and at the same time—and in the same mailbox—receive a government check for unemployment insurance where you have to prove you are willing to work. I don't know what provision might be more logical than that in terms of reforming the program. It saves the taxpayer money, it eliminates fraud, and it simply puts the program on better footing. Given our fiscal plight today, it is the least we can do. Yet I have been denied—and my colleagues who have tried to offer the same amendment have been denied—the opportunity to do just that.

Had we had the opportunity to come down here and offer that amendment, we could have had a debate. Those who saw it another way or didn't agree with what we were saying would have had every opportunity to vote no and turn down that amendment. They would then be accountable for their no or yes when they went back home—one way or another. There are people on both sides of the reform issue, and that is how the Senate is designed to work.

The Senate is not designed to simply shut off a debate and deny the minority the opportunity to offer amendments. We are not asking for passage. We are simply saying: Give us a chance to make our case, and we will have to accept the outcome. That way every Member of this body will be responsible for how they voted and will go home and tell folks: This is why I did such and such. That is how the system is designed to work.

Yet we find ourselves in a dysfunctional situation where there is no opportunity to have a debate and no opportunity to vote and to let people know where we stand. Maybe it is designed that way. Maybe we don't want people to know where we stand. I don't

think anyone in this body can go home and tell the people they represent—their constituents: We are not going to tell you how we feel about that. I didn't want to put my vote on the record, and therefore, we are not going to have an opportunity to do that.

It is a black mark on the Senate. It is a dysfunctional situation. It is no wonder that the American public holds us in such low regard. This body, which was created by our Founding Fathers, enshrined in the Constitution, and labeled as the greatest deliberative body in the world has simply turned into something totally different and totally opposite from that. We are a rubberstamp Senate, depending on what the majority leader decides he wants or doesn't want. I think that is a great disservice to the American people, and it is a great disservice to this institution.

Having had the opportunity to serve here on two different occasions, the contrast between my two tenures in the Senate could not be more stark. When I first came, the rights of the minority were recognized by a variety of majority leaders who simply said: This is the Senate. You take tough votes, you have the debate, and you allow the minority their rights. As a consequence, the Senate has functioned as the world's greatest deliberative body for more than 200 years.

Suddenly, we are now in a situation where that is not the case, and we have turned this simply into somewhat of a fiefdom where the majority leader has the full power to deny the minority their rights.

I think we will come to rue the day when this practice was first initiated and rue the day when it has been accepted because it denies those of us who have had the great honor and privilege of representing our States the opportunity to do just that.

Along with the amendment that I had for suitability, which simply gives States more flexibility in terms of providing suitable work for the unemployed—if it is provided to them, they have to accept it or they don't receive the unemployment checks. Those two amendments are two of the many suggested reforms that I think would make sense. But whether you agree with that or not, shouldn't we have the opportunity to present to the American people an honest, intellectual, rational debate on legislation—whether it fails or passes—so we can have a full understanding and they can have a full understanding of how to measure us in terms of whether we are true representatives of those who sent us here?

Having said that, I yield the floor and note the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, I hope for and expect a strong bipartisan vote today for legislation to extend emergency unemployment benefits through the end of May and applies retroactively from the point emergency benefits expired in December.

This is an important victory I wish had come much sooner—sooner for the 80,000 Michiganians who already have gone without unemployment benefits and for the thousands more who stand to lose them if Congress fails to act.

These benefits keep food on the table and a roof overhead for families affected by job loss through no fault of their own. The idea that some of our colleagues have advanced—that unemployment insurance gives workers an excuse not to find a job—is as inaccurate as it is insulting. For all but a handful of recipients, unemployment benefits are not a free pass from working but the economic lifeline that keeps them going while searching for the job they so desperately want and need.

I wish to commend Senators on both sides of the aisle who have not given up on this issue and who worked so hard to forge a compromise, led by Senators JACK REED and DEAN HELLER. Republicans have joined with Democrats on the procedural votes necessary to move this bill forward, and I hope the bipartisan support for this measure in the Senate will prompt Speaker BOEHNER to bring it to a vote in the House. There is a strong bipartisan majority for passage in the House. It is now up to Speaker BOEHNER to respond to the will of the American people who understand that people who are unemployed don't want to be unemployed. There may be a few exceptions and a few stories and a few anecdotes, but that is about it. The unemployed in this country are suffering. They have suffered for too long. The job growth that has come following the recession has been weak, and the least we can do is respond.

There is a bipartisan majority to do that here. It will be strong. My hunch is it will be well over 60, perhaps over two-thirds of the Senate, and there is no excuse for Speaker BOEHNER not to bring this bill to the floor of the House. I hope he does so. It is just in all conscience essential that he do so.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREEMENT—EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. DURBIN. I ask unanimous consent that following the vote on H.R. 3979, the Senate proceed to executive