

Speaker and work well across the aisle on foreign policy? When I was coming up, foreign policy basically stopped at the water's edge. We respected the President, whoever it may be, Republican or Democrat.

If we had a critique, we expressed it, but we did it in a way that was, if I can just say, less partisan. I will leave you with the image of this chart. This chart says it all. We have investigated this. We have looked at it. We have conducted hearings and briefings and interviews and issued subpoenas and reviewed documents and issued reports.

We do not need to spend money on another committee because someone is afraid of Hillary Clinton's candidacy. Just deal with it. Do not try to revise history. She was the first person to convene an independent investigation to begin to put the pieces into play that would in fact make sure this did not happen again.

Don't say you care about embassy security when you stand and oppose a bipartisan bill that would make sure we make the requisite improvements to our facilities? I hope HARRY REID, our leader, will not say yes to a committee that is nothing but a political witch hunt. I will continue to come down to the floor to discuss this issue, to debate this issue if it is necessary to do so.

I yield the floor and I 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. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

THE ECONOMY

MR. THUNE. Mr. President, there were two polls that were released this week, one from Gallup and one from Politico. Both polls asked Americans what concerns them the most. Both polls got the same answer: the economy, jobs, and health care.

That response is not too surprising. Unemployment is high. In fact, there are 3½ million Americans who have been unemployed for 6 months or longer. Last month more than 800,000 Americans gave up hope of finding work and dropped out of the labor force entirely. The economy barely grew at all last quarter—one-tenth of 1 percent.

Household income is down by \$3,500 since the President took office. Some 6.7 million Americans have fallen into poverty since 2008. Meanwhile, the price of everything from gas to college to health care keeps going up. It is no wonder Americans list jobs and the economy as two of the issues that concern them the most.

It is not surprising that the other top concern of Americans is health care, because over the past 4 years the President and his team have taken an im-

perfect health care system and made it much worse. Thanks to ObamaCare, millions of Americans have lost their health care plans, plans which in many cases they liked and wanted to keep.

Many of the 8 million exchange signups the President likes to brag about were actually people who were forced into the exchanges after their health care plans were canceled. In fact, according to a recent McKinsey survey, only one-quarter of the people who signed up on the exchanges were previously uninsured. In addition to losing their plans, millions of Americans have also seen their costs increase.

Family health insurance premiums, which the President claimed would fall by \$2,500 under his health care law, have actually risen by \$3,671, and they are still going up, no end in sight. I would like to read just a few of the headlines from last week. This is from the Fiscal Times. It says, "Big Increases in ObamaCare Premiums and Deductibles Coming in November;" from Forbes, "First ObamaCare Premium Notices for 2015 Show Double Digit Increases;" from the Los Angeles Times, "Employer health costs to rise nearly 9% this year, survey finds;" from Investors Business Daily, "ObamaCare Deductibles to Rise to \$6,600 by 2015;" from the Associated Press, "Cost-Control Plan for Health Care Could Cost You."

There are more, but we get the idea. Prices are not on their way down; they are in fact on their way up. Then of course there is the President's "if you like your doctor, you'll be able to keep your doctor" promise. As too many Americans have found out, that was another promise destined to be broken. Over the past 4 years, Americans have not only discovered that in many cases they will no longer be able to see the doctors they have been seeing for years, they have also discovered their choice of a replacement is limited.

The New York Times reported last week:

In the midst of all of the turmoil in health care these days, one thing is becoming clear. No matter what kind of health plan consumers choose, they will find fewer doctors and hospitals in their network or pay much more for the privilege of going to any provider they want.

That is from the New York Times. One quote in that article struck me particularly. It was something Marcus Merz, the CEO of Minnesota insurer PreferredOne, told the Times. This is what he said:

We have to break people away from the choice habit that everyone has. . . . We're all trying to break away from this fixation on open access and broad networks.

Let me repeat that to get the full context of what he is saying. We have to break people away from the choice habit that everyone has. Is this what we wanted out of health care reform? Was that not one of the good things about our health care system, the fact that people are able to, by and large,

go to the doctor they chose; that people could look around for the best doctor in a particular field or find a doctor who they felt comfortable with?

Do we really want a health care future where Americans don't have a choice about the doctor they see?

Limited choice doesn't just mean that Americans might not be able to find a doctor they like. It also means that Americans may not be able to go to a doctor they need.

A Daily Caller article from last week noted:

Cancer centers, with their top-of-the-line physicians and expensive procedures, have been a primary casualty of narrow networks. According to an Associated Press analysis, just four of the top 19 comprehensive cancer centers are covered by all Obamacare exchange plans in their states.

Four of the top 19 cancer centers in the country—that is not what you want from of a health insurance plan if you have cancer.

Given the President's broken promises and the havoc that ObamaCare is wreaking on our health care system, it is no surprise that 83 percent of those Politico surveyed want to modify or repeal the law entirely or that health care was the most frequently cited reason for a negative experience with the government over the past year or that nearly 90 percent of respondents say that ObamaCare will be important in determining how they vote this fall.

There is a lot more that could be said about ObamaCare, such as the damage it is doing to our economy.

VETERANS AFFAIRS

I want to move on to talk about another, very serious instance of government mismanagement—what is going on in the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Almost every day a new report surfaces of mistreatment or mismanagement at VA facilities across the country. At least 40 veterans have reportedly died because of delayed or inadequate care.

It is now clear that this is not an isolated problem at a few select locations but a system-wide crisis, and it is a national embarrassment.

Our contract with our servicemen and women is a sacred trust. They pledge their lives in the service of our country and take upon themselves the burden of defending liberty for the rest of us. In return, we promised them benefits, including health care and a college education.

Our men and women in uniform uphold their end of the contract, sometimes at the cost of their own lives. For us to fail to uphold ours is a disgrace and a betrayal of their sacrifice.

Every resource of this administration should be focused on discovering the full scope of this problem and immediately starting to fix it. Yet this administration has shown a startling lack of concern about the widespread mistreatment of veterans in our country.

When it became clear that his health care Web site was a disaster, the President employed an "all hands on deck"

approach to fixing the problem, spending hundreds of millions of dollars in the process.

In response to the VA disaster, on the other hand, the President has dispatched just a single staffer to oversee the investigation. This is not acceptable. As Commander in Chief our Armed Forces, the President should be leading the charge to fix this problem, but he hasn't even spoken publicly about it for weeks.

Regardless of the President's inaction, Congress must take immediate step to address this crisis. This week the House of Representatives is taking up a version of Senator RUBIO's bill, the Department of Veterans Affairs Management Accountability Act, which would allow the VA Secretary to fire or demote senior executives in the department when warranted.

Private organizations can fire employees who fail to fulfill their responsibilities. We ought to be able to fire officials who fail in their obligation to our veterans.

Yet all we have seen from the VA is the resignation of the Under Secretary for Health, Dr. Petzel, who was already planning to retire—hardly the accountability our veterans deserve.

I have introduced a bill to require the VA inspector general to conduct a national investigation into the wait times veterans face. It is essential that we get an idea of the full scope of this problem so we can ensure that it gets fully fixed.

Under my bill the inspector general will have 6 months to investigate and submit a report to Congress. In the meantime, the VA would be forbidden from closing any of its medical facilities.

No facility—not the Hot Springs facility in my State of South Dakota or any other—should be closed unless we make very sure that veterans' care is not going to be affected.

There are other bills this body should be considering as well, including Senator HELLER's bipartisan legislation, to reduce the backlog of veterans' disability claims, and I hope the Senate will take them up quickly.

This crisis can't wait. There is every likelihood that right now—right now—veterans around our country are still failing to receive the care they need. I hope the President of the United States will come to his senses and treat this situation with the seriousness it deserves.

If he won't act, Congress must. It is the very least that we owe our veterans.

I yield the floor.

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

WATER RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT ACT

Mr. ISAKSON. Madam President, this year Congress has not particularly been noted for much of an accomplishment of anything. We have been in clo-

ture atrophy and we have been in political atrophy, but we are about to change that for a day.

I want to pause for a moment and acknowledge the hard work of a number of Members in the House and the Senate on what is known as the Water Resources Development Act, which soon will be on the floor of the Senate, and I understand will be on the floor of the House today for its ratification.

The Water Resources Development Act is the authority of the U.S. Government to move forward on infrastructure across the country.

I congratulate Chairman SHUSTER in the House and Chairman BOXER in the Senate for their hard work on the conference committee.

Ranking Member VITTER has been an untold hero for us and working hard for the Senate.

I give thanks to Sylvia Burwell of the OMB. She has been a lifesaver for us on the Port of Savannah. I appreciate her cooperation and her help.

I thank Vice President BIDEN. We did a tour of ports on the east coast of the United States to focus on the importance of improving our infrastructure.

In this WRDA bill are improvements across the country, but the one I want to talk about for a second is an example of why infrastructure is so important, and that is expansion of the Savannah Harbor and the deepening project in the Savannah at the Port of Savannah. That is a project that was authorized 16 years ago—the year I was elected to the House of Representatives. It was authorized to be built, but it hasn't been expanded for 16 years or authorized for 16 years because of environmental concerns, atmospheric concerns, sometimes funding concerns, and sometimes political apathy concerns. But finally everyone has their act together. NOAA has endorsed it, Fish and Wildlife has endorsed it, the EPA has endorsed it, and the Corps of Engineers has endorsed it.

Thanks to this Water Resources Development Act authorization, a \$706 million project in my State for the southeastern United States will become a reality over the next 5 years.

Why is it important? It is important for this reason. As we sit and talk today, the nation of Panama is widening and deepening the Panama Canal. Within a few months, they are going to be taking through the Panamax ships of the 21st century, ships that can carry not 9,000, not 11,000 but 14,000 containers.

Ports along the east coast of the United States, such as the Port of Savannah, are not able to take that deep of a ship. They will have to wait until high tide to bring it in and then have to wait a day for high tide to come back to take the ship out. That costs money, and it causes people to divert to other ports, to other countries, and it hurts our economy.

Over the next 5 years as we deepen the Savannah River and Savannah Harbor, and as we improve that port, we

are improving the opportunity for the entire southeastern United States to grow, prosper, and be competitive in the 21st century. The Port of Savannah directly contributes to 297,000 jobs in our State. It contributes to 49 of the 50 States on the continental United States. It provides jobs, economic vitality, tax revenues, and prosperity for America. Its time has come.

I am so delighted the Water Resources Development Act is done. I am so delighted that Chairman BOXER, Ranking Member VITTER, and Chairman SHUSTER have put their teams together, dotted the last "i" and crossed the last "t."

I encourage everybody in the Senate to ratify prosperity, employment, and economic development for America. When the bill comes before the Senate, ratify the Water Resources Development Act and that final conference committee report.

I yield back the remainder of my time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. REED. I rise to discuss again the urgent need to restore emergency unemployment insurance.

Like many Americans, I am hopeful about our future but concerned about how the great recession has impacted our fellow Americans, particularly those who have been hit the hardest—the long-term unemployed. These are good people from all walks of life, from all 50 States. They are people who work in a variety of fields, from high tech to manufacturing, from cubicles and offices to plants and factory floors.

Many of them are older and find themselves out of work for the first time in decades. All of them, all 2.78 million of them, lost out on December 28 of last year. While they have been looking for jobs, Congress has failed to do its job and restore unemployment insurance.

Previously, Congress had never let emergency benefits expire when the long-term unemployment rate was so high. Today's long-term unemployment rate is 2.2 percent, and it is still well over the highest rate, 1.3 percent, of previous expirations.

In the past, when the rate was this high for long-term unemployment, we maintained these benefits. This is still an emergency, and we have to maintain these benefits. It still requires our attention and swift bipartisan action.

To the Senate's credit, there has been bipartisan action. Thanks to my Republican colleague from Nevada, Senator DEAN HELLER, and a coalition of 10 Senators—5 Democrats and 5 Republicans—the Senate passed a 5-month extension of these vital benefits that would provide aid to job seekers who have been searching for work for more than 26 weeks. Senators on both sides of the aisle recognize this is the right thing to do for workers and the smart thing to do for our economy.