

save and strengthen Medicare. But Americans will not forget that the sponsors of the proposal were the very same people who voted to raid Medicare in the first place, through ObamaCare.

And they will not forget what happened last week either when Republicans advanced a series of bills aimed at increasing flexibility in the workplace and boosting upward mobility. We thought Democrats might want to work with us in a bipartisan manner to move these bills forward, but apparently the far left will not let them. Democratic leadership will not even consider legislation I have introduced that would help more moms and dads work from home while caring for young children. My bill aims to bring tax policy in line with what life is really like for working parents, and it would help young families save on child care costs too. But as I said, Senate Democrats have just gone campaigning.

For the Democratic leadership, helping the middle class seems to be far from priority one. But the middle class needs help right now, and the only way to offer working moms and struggling college graduates real solutions is to break through the Senate Democratic logjam.

There are two ways to accomplish that. Either our friends on the other side can get serious about working for the people who elected them or the people who elected them can make the decision for them.

Mr. President, I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The 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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.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, yesterday the White House held its Summit on Working Families. On the summit's Web site, the White House notes: "Too many working Americans—both men and women—are living paycheck to paycheck, struggling to make ends meet and respond to the competing demands of work and family." That, unfortunately, is the truth.

But what the White House does not acknowledge is how much its policies have done to create that situation. Working families have not fared well under the Obama administration. Household income has fallen by \$3,500 on the President's watch. Meanwhile, prices for nearly everything have risen. Food prices have gone up. Tuition costs are soaring. Airline fares are rising. The cost of recreational activities, such as going to the movies, has risen. And energy prices are placing a huge burden on American families.

Gas prices have nearly doubled since the President took office. Low-income

families in my State of South Dakota pay an average of 24 percent of their income on energy costs alone. And things are set to get much worse.

This month the President's EPA announced plans to implement a massive energy tax on Americans. Thanks to this tax, energy bills could rise to crippling levels for many families in the next few years. That is not what families need, especially—especially—when they are already paying huge amounts for health care.

ObamaCare was supposed to make things better for American families. The President assured the American people that his health care law would reduce premiums by \$2,500. But since ObamaCare passed, not only have premiums not fallen, they have actually risen—gone up—by \$2,500.

Millions of Americans were forced off the health plans they were promised they could keep and into exchange plans that frequently cost more money and offer less. Too many American families now have exchange plans with massive deductibles—some as high as \$12,000 or more.

What middle-class family can afford to pay \$12,000 a year for medical care—\$12,000 on top of their premiums? That is like having an additional mortgage payment every single month. It is no wonder 54 percent of Americans do not think the President "is able to lead the country and get the job done," according to a recent Wall Street Journal/NBC News poll.

So what can you do if you are a working family living paycheck to paycheck and struggling with the high cost of everything from health care to gasoline? Well, over the past few years the answer has been not much because opportunities are few and far between in the Obama economy. Instead of promoting policies to create jobs, too often the President has proposed policies that kill jobs.

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office has reported that ObamaCare will cause 2.5 million full-time workers to leave the workforce. Mr. President, 2.6 million Americans earning less than \$30,000 are in danger of having their hours and wages cut thanks to ObamaCare's 30-hour workweek rule. Mr. President, 63 percent of those workers are women.

The President and his party have also pushed hard for a minimum wage hike the Congressional Budget Office said would destroy up to 1 million jobs. Low-income Americans would be hit the hardest by that.

Then there is the President's national energy tax. In addition to raising energy bills for all Americans, the President's energy tax would result in the loss of tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of jobs. The rule would gut the coal industry, putting tens of thousands of workers out of work there.

It is difficult to reconcile the President's ostensible commitment to families with a policy that would put thou-

sands and thousands of parents out of a job.

The Keystone XL Pipeline would allow the President to put thousands of Americans to work. With a stroke of his pen, the President could sign off on this project and the 42,000-plus jobs it would support. Instead, he has ignored American workers and union leaders and chosen to pander to the wishes of his extremist environmental base.

The American people need jobs—steady, good-paying, long-term jobs with opportunities for advancement. Democrats and the President are not giving that to them. Instead of spending time on real job-creation measures, the majority leader has chosen to waste the Senate's time on gimmicky, politically motivated legislation.

If Democrats were serious about providing real relief to American families, they would be working with Republicans on the many bills we have proposed to spur job creation and to support American workers—bills such as Senator COLLINS' Forty Hours Is Full-Time Act, which would repeal the ObamaCare 30-hour workweek rule, which is resulting in lower wages and fewer hours for American workers; or Senator FISCHER's workplace advancement amendment, which would further equip women with the tools and knowledge they need to fight discrimination in the workplace; and Senator RUBIO's RAISE Act, which would amend the National Labor Relations Act to allow employers to give merit-based pay increases to individual employees, even if those increases are not part of a collective bargaining agreement; and Senator MCCONNELL's Working Parents Home Office Act, which would fix a flaw in the Tax Code that prevents men and women from claiming a home office deduction if their home office has a baby crib so they can care for their child while they are working.

President Obama has talked about the importance of flextime for parents so they can adjust their work hours for parent-teacher conferences or soccer games. Well, Senator LEE has a bill that would help workers handle the constant challenge of work-life balance by allowing private-sector employers to offer all individuals who work overtime a choice between monetary compensation and comp time. Unfortunately, like so many other Republican bills, the Lee Working Families Flexibility Act is buried in the majority leader's Senate graveyard.

Traditionally thought of as a place where bills go to be debated, the Senate has, instead, become the place where bills go to die. But it is not just bills that go to die here; it is the solutions to improve the lives of millions of Americans. In addition to the many Senate Republican jobs bills that the majority leader has prevented from seeing the light of day, there are dozens—literally dozens—of House-passed jobs bills—several of them bipartisan—that the majority leader refuses to bring up. The Senate historically has

been a place where the voices of all Senators—Republican and Democrat, majority and minority—have been heard. But lately, the Senate seems to have become nothing so much as an arm of the Democrats' campaign committee. Democrats have brought up bills designed to win votes, not solve problems.

The Democratic leadership has worked hard to protect its vulnerable Members from ever having to take challenging votes. They do not want Democrats in tough campaigns to have to choose between the American people and the Democratic Party's far-left political base.

One of Congress's most basic duties is to consider appropriations, yet over the past 2 weeks the majority leader has pulled not one but two appropriations bills from committee consideration because he did not want his Members to have to take votes on ObamaCare or on the President's national energy tax.

That is wrong. We are here to take tough votes. If you do not want to have to take hard votes, do not run for the Senate. There is a lot of stuff that—amendments get offered by our colleagues on the other side that I do not like to vote on either, but that is what we are here for. We are here to debate. We are here to take votes. We are here to offer amendments, to put legislation on the floor.

All of us have different ideas. I may not agree with some of the things that are offered up by my colleagues on the other side, but the fact of the matter is, they have a right, on behalf of the constituents they represent, to bring the issues to the floor that are important to their constituents, and for us to debate them, and for us to vote on them.

In fact, the majority leader has exerted such tight control over the Senate that over the past year he has not only blocked almost all Republican amendments, he has blocked almost all of his party's amendments as well.

Since July of 2013—almost a year ago—the majority leader has allowed votes on just 9 Republican amendments, and just 7 Democratic amendments—out of 1,500 amendments that have been filed on the floor of the Senate.

Think about that. The world's greatest deliberative body—open to amendment, open to debate—1,500 amendments get filed; Republicans get 9 votes. I understand the whole idea, the political motivation of the leader in trying to protect his Members from having to take tough votes. But how are you as a majority Member—how do the Democrats in the Senate go back to their constituents at home and say: It is advantageous for us to be in the majority in Washington, when you have only had votes on seven amendments? Think about that. How do you, with a straight face, go back to your constituents and say: Being in the majority matters in the Senate, when

Democrats here are only getting—in the last year—seven amendments voted on? It is outrageous. One a month—about one amendment a month—is what we are voting on here, roughly.

Senators were elected to speak for the people of their State and to make sure their concerns are represented in the Senate. When Senators cannot add their voices to the process, the American people's concerns are not getting heard.

The American people have had a tough time getting their voices heard over the past few years. Over and over, they have made it clear they need good jobs and more economic opportunity. Instead, they have gotten 5½ years of higher costs and low job creation, and the jobs that are being created are not the kinds of jobs that were lost—the good-paying jobs that provide opportunities for advancement.

Republicans have proposed numerous bills to expand opportunities for American families and workers. It is time for the Senate to vote on these bills. The American people have spent enough time being ignored. It is high time for the Senate to change the way it is conducting its business.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

#### MINE BAN TREATY

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, yesterday in Maputo, Mozambique, representatives of many of the 161 countries that have joined the treaty banning the production, stockpiling, export, and use of antipersonnel landmines convened the third review conference in the 15 years since the treaty came into force.

The impact of that treaty, once ridiculed as a naive dream by many in the U.S. defense establishment, has been extraordinary. The vast majority of landmine use and production has stopped. New casualties have dropped significantly. Many countries have cleared the mined areas in their territories.

Of the 35 countries that have not yet joined the treaty, including the United States, almost all abide by its provisions. We can be proud that the United States has been the largest contributor to programs to clear mines and to help mine victims. Those programs have saved countless lives. In fact, the Leahy War Victims Fund was first used in Mozambique.

But I remember during the negotiations on the treaty how officials in the U.S. administration at the time urged, even warned, their counterparts in other countries, including our NATO allies, against signing the treaty. In the end, every member of NATO except the United States joined it.

Some in our government said it was a meaningless gesture that would accomplish nothing. I think they resented that other governments, especially Canada, and nongovernmental organizations from around the world

could achieve something outside the U.N. negotiation process, which had utterly failed to address this problem.

Instead, the treaty has already accomplished more than most people expected, thanks to the extraordinary advocacy of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines and three-quarters of the world's governments, many of whose people have suffered from the scourge of landmines.

But the problem is far from solved. There are still thousands of deaths and injuries from mines each year, and most are innocent civilians.

Twenty years ago this week, in a speech at the United Nations that inspired people around the world, President Clinton called for a global ban on antipersonnel mines. I was proud of President Clinton for doing that, but his Presidency, his administration, was outmaneuvered by the Pentagon, and it failed to join the treaty. Then, during the 8 years of the last Bush administration, nothing happened. In fact, during those years, the White House reneged on some of the pledges of the Clinton administration.

When President Obama was elected, I thought we would finally see the United States get on the right side of this issue. After all, we fought two long wars without using antipersonnel mines. All our NATO allies and most of our coalition partners have banned them.

But that has not happened.

Now we rightly condemned, and I do condemn, the Taliban for using victim-activated IEDs, which are also banned by the treaty, but we still insist on retaining our right to use antipersonnel mines.

Eighteen years ago, President Clinton charged the Pentagon to develop alternatives to antipersonnel mines. Instead, the Pentagon has fought every attempt to get rid of these indiscriminate weapons, even if they do not use them.

As I have said many times, no one argues that antipersonnel mines have no military utility. Every weapon does. Poison gas has a military utility, but we outlawed it a century ago. Are we incapable of renouncing, as our closest allies have, tiny explosives that are the antithesis of precision-guided weapons, weapons we have rightly not used during two long wars, weapons that kill children and innocent civilians, and weapons that should bring condemnation to anybody using them?

We talk about the importance of avoiding civilian casualties. We all believe in that. We have seen how civilian casualties can turn a local population against us. We do not export antipersonnel landmines. We do not use them. We can drive a robot on Mars by remote control, but we say we cannot solve this problem. It begs credulity.

This is not an abstract issue. This girl is who I am talking about. I have met countless people like her. She is lucky. She survived, even though without hands and legs. Many others like her bleed to death.