

jobs and opportunities for American workers. Then there is the individual mandate tax that last year began hitting American families without government-approved insurance. For 2015, the individual mandate tax penalty is \$325 per person or 2 percent of household income, whichever is greater. In 2016, that tax penalty will rise to \$695 per person or 2½ percent of household income, whichever is greater.

But that is not all ObamaCare is bringing to tax season. This year, a full half of Americans receiving ObamaCare health insurance subsidies discovered they have to pay back some or all of their subsidies because they didn't estimate their income correctly. Ultimately, just 4 percent of households receiving subsidies had the correct subsidy advanced to their insurance companies. Unfortunately, the confusion and mistakes are par for the course for ObamaCare. The administration apparently finds the law so confusing that it sent out incorrect ObamaCare forms to more than 800,000 people. Yet the administration wants us to believe ObamaCare is somehow working.

We need to repeal this broken law and its trillion dollars' worth of taxes, and we need to reform our bloated Tax Code. We need to cut rates for families so that Americans can spend more of the year working for themselves and less of the year working for the Federal Government. We need to cut rates for businesses, both large and small. The U.S. currently has the highest corporate tax rate in the developed world. That puts American businesses at a huge disadvantage compared to their foreign competitors, and American workers suffer the consequences—lower wages and fewer opportunities. Reforming both corporate and individual tax rates would go a long way toward making American businesses more competitive and opening new opportunities and higher paying jobs for American workers.

Of course, any tax reform measure should include reforms to the IRS. From mishandled customer service to the Agency's most serious offenses—the First Amendment violations involving the deliberate targeting of groups for extra scrutiny based on their political beliefs—this Agency, the IRS, is long overdue for reform.

The IRS Commissioner himself, John Koskinen, was quoted in Monday's Washington Post as saying: "We certainly can't afford to have taxpayer service be any worse than it is, although it is hard to imagine it being much worse than it is." That is a quote from the IRS Commissioner himself. When even the IRS Commissioner admits the Agency's taxpayer services can't get much worse, that is a signal the Agency is ripe for reform.

TRADE PROMOTION AUTHORITY

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, before I close, I would like to take a moment to talk about what I think is a bright spot

for our economy, and that is bipartisan trade promotion authority. Previous free- and fair-trade agreements have been a boon to the economy, expanding opportunities for American workers and giving American farmers, such as many of those I represent in South Dakota, and manufacturers access to new markets for their goods. Nearly every one of those trade agreements was negotiated and enacted using trade promotion authority.

The idea behind trade promotion authority is very simple: Congress sets negotiating priorities for the administration and requires the administration to consult with Congress during that negotiating process. In return, Congress promises a simple up-or-down vote on the legislation instead of a lengthy amendment process that could leave the final agreement looking nothing like what was negotiated. That up-or-down vote is the key. That is what gives our trading partners the confidence to put their best offers on the table, which allows for a successful conclusion of negotiations.

Trade promotion authority expired in 2007. Republicans have been trying to get it reauthorized ever since. Currently, the administration is negotiating two key trade agreements—the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the United States-European Union trade agreement—that are unlikely to be concluded in the near future unless trade promotion authority is finally renewed. These agreements will expand opportunities for American workers and open new markets for American goods. A bipartisan reauthorization of trade promotion authority will help bring those agreements to a speedy conclusion, and that will be good news for American workers and American businesses.

The challenges facing our Nation are best solved when Members of both parties come together to find solutions for the American people. I look forward to continuing to work with my colleagues on trade promotion authority and other issues that will grow our economy, create better paying jobs for American workers, and increase the take-home pay of middle-income families in this country.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri.

NUCLEAR AGREEMENT WITH IRAN

Mr. BLUNT. Mr. President, yesterday, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee reported the Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act of 2015. To the surprise of many people, including me, it was unanimously reported, which makes me begin to wonder just how much Iran nuclear agreement review there will be in this act.

I was an original cosponsor of the Corker-Menendez bill that would give Congress and the American people a voice in what is likely to be the most significant nuclear arms agreement in

this decade. I think the likelihood, as we move toward the agreement, as it appears to be structured, is that it won't be able to contain the desire of other people in the neighborhood—and maybe in other places in the world but certainly in the neighborhood—to be just as capable of producing a nuclear weapon as we allow Iran to be.

Supporting this bill does mean that Congress really gives the opportunity for these negotiations to advance, not Congress putting the brakes on these negotiations. Specifically, the bill would give Congress the opportunity to review and weigh in on a deal that has already been made. It does appear to prohibit the administration from removing sanctions while Congress reviews and while Congress votes on a final deal, if that is what Congress decides to do. It doesn't require Congress to vote, as I read it, but I look forward to having the people who unanimously voted for this in the Foreign Relations Committee explain how it really does involve the Congress as the Constitution would suggest the Senate would be involved. This does permit removal of sanctions only if the Congress passes a joint resolution approving the agreement. I have been told.

The new bill reported out of committee makes the following changes in the original bill. Under the new bill, the congressional review period isn't going to be 60 days, it would be 30 days. The new bill removes the provision requiring the administration to certify to Congress that Iran is not providing material support to terrorists plotting against the homeland or against U.S. entities.

We are continuing to be told: Well, that is a different topic. I don't know why that is a different topic at all. A nuclear-capable Iran that is supporting terrorism is obviously more dangerous than a nuclear-capable Iran that is not supporting terrorism. The weapon that you can see being built, the weapon that would compare to weapons we may have built, and other powers, in the past was perhaps not nearly as dangerous as the weapon being built that could be used by some terrorist.

This bill does appear to give Congress the ability to intervene but only to intervene after the parties have made the deal. I am not particularly offended by that. If this were a real treaty, the administration would obviously be negotiating that treaty and then would bring the treaty to the Senate for approval, as the Constitution requires and as has happened over and over again on treaties involving nuclear capacity, nuclear ability, nuclear buildup, or nuclear build-down. That is not a new thing for the Senate to deal with, but apparently nobody in the administration wants this to be this kind of treaty. Now, there is, apparently, a way to weigh in before it is implemented but in a way that I think we are going to have to look at very carefully if and when that legislation comes to the floor.

A nuclear-armed Iran, an Iran that is nuclear weapons capable—whether that is in 6 months or 12 months or monitored or unmonitored—is a major threat, in my view, to the United States. It is a major threat to our allies in the region. Lifting these sanctions only empowers Iran to have more influence in the region. The sanctions did bring Iran to the negotiating table, but they have been given a lot of breathing room since these negotiations started a couple of years ago. We wouldn't be negotiating, I don't think, if the sanctions hadn't been working.

With what has happened to oil prices, those sanctions would have had a more dramatic effect on the economy of a country in which we have every reason to believe the population is inclined to be very friendly toward the United States. They are educated, they are capable, and they have long-term ties with many of their family members in this country. But, of course, the population is not in control of the country; the country is controlled by a small group who has only one view of how the world can work, and, frankly, that small group appears to have only one view of what they think about the United States of America. If you listen to the comments the Supreme Leader, the religious leader, makes over and over again, that view is dependably negative about our country and our people and our system of government and our ability to live side by side with each other. So we should be concerned about that.

The agreement would allow them to continue to enrich uranium. It would allow them to retain centrifuges, which we said, by the way, we wouldn't do. That was a point we wouldn't negotiate away. It would allow them to continue to have thousands of centrifuges—something we also said we wouldn't allow them to do. It would allow them to continue developing new and better and more sophisticated ways to enrich uranium, to weaponize, to have the ability to create a weapon.

Frankly, it is not even clear what agreement has been agreed to. To listen to our description of the agreement is a very different description of the framework. There is no agreement, everybody agrees to that, but there is supposedly a framework.

This framework would build two very different houses. If we listen to their description of the agreement and we listen to our description of the agreement, we are looking at very different things.

This week, for example, the Supreme Leader saw this very differently than the President—the so-called deal—with respect to when the sanctions would be removed and what would be happening.

President Obama and Secretary Kerry have put a tremendous amount of effort into reaching an agreement—in fact, such amount of effort that it has been clear from the very start of the negotiations who wanted an agreement the most. What hasn't been clear

and what isn't clear to me is why we are so eager to just check the box and move on here, and assume that sometime in the next few years Iran will become a friendlier state and will not want to head in a bad direction. Not only does it head Iran in a nuclear-weapons direction, but it heads many other people in the neighborhood in the direction of wondering if they have this capacity, why wouldn't we want to have this capacity?

Most Americans don't believe Iran will stick to a deal. Frankly, I have great questions about that myself.

Whether the President likes it or not, this is an international agreement with wide-ranging consequences. The Congress and the American people have a role to play here. The Foreign Relations Committee has made a proposal about what that role should be. But it seems to me that proposal is still a long way away from the constitutional protection that should be involved when we reach an agreement of this kind, or when we negotiate a treaty.

A number of us sent a letter a few weeks ago which got a lot of attention. I thought the reaction to that letter was pretty interesting.

The immediate reaction from the Secretary of State was: Well, this isn't a treaty, it is just an agreement. The Senate doesn't have to approve an agreement. The President would be bound by it, and it would be such a good agreement—according to the Secretary of State—that the next President would want to be bound by it as well.

This is a pretty significant moment to decide that we may or may not be bound by what is decided.

The Iranian Foreign Minister then was able to give us some sense of his understanding. I think the phrase he said the next day was: We know international law is what really matters here, not the law of any given country.

I have been all over my State, as many of us have, in the last couple of weeks. I don't think there is any courthouse, any coffee shop, or any gathering of people in Missouri where they would say: Well, really, international law is what we care about. We don't care about what the Constitution says when we are dealing with other countries.

Then 72 hours after that letter was sent, the President's Chief of Staff said: Really, the President would probably want to take this to the U.N., but he probably wouldn't want to take it to the U.S. Senate.

We will see how this debate goes on the proposal that the Foreign Affairs Committee is making, but it clearly does not bode in the direction of a treaty approved by two-thirds of the Members of the U.S. Senate. In my view, we are still a long way from a final agreement.

There seems to be a lot of disagreement as to what the framework means. But as we move toward that final agreement, our number one priority

should be to do everything possible to prohibit Iran—whose influence in the world and the region is already disproportionate—from having the capacity to ever have a nuclear weapon. I hope our negotiators continue to keep that in mind, and I hope there is not nearly as much disagreement about the final agreement as there is about what the framework itself says.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

THE BUDGET

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, later today, maybe as early as 11 o'clock or so, we are going to begin a discussion of the budget. As we know, the budget is a set of national priorities. A budget has to do with our vision of where America is and where America should be. We are now in the process of moving the budget to a conference committee between the House and the Senate.

When I think about a budget, I think about a document designed to address the problems facing our country. In that regard, I find the Republican budget that will likely pass to be totally inadequate, and a budget whose priorities are way, way out of place with where the American people are.

When we talk about the needs of America, the most significant need and the most significant economic problem we face is that for 40 years the American middle class has been in decline. Today we have over 40 million Americans living in poverty, almost more than at any time in the modern history of America. Our real unemployment is not 5½ percent; real unemployment is 11 percent. And despite the modest gains of the Affordable Care Act, we still have 35 million Americans who have no health insurance.

While millions of Americans work today longer hours for lower wages than used to be the case, despite a significant increase in productivity, what we are seeing as a nation is an obscene level of income and wealth inequality. That reality speaks to the fact that since the Wall Street crash of 2008, about 99 percent of all new income today is going to the top 1 percent. I know people find that amazing, but it is true. Which means that no matter what the GDP may be—2 percent, 5 percent—it doesn't really matter, because virtually all the new income goes to the top 1 percent.

In terms of distribution of wealth, what we are seeing in America today is worse and more unequal than any major country on Earth, and worse in America than at any time since the late 1920s. Today we have the top one-tenth of 1 percent owning more wealth than the bottom 90 percent. Unbelievable—the top one-tenth of 1 percent owning more wealth than the bottom 90 percent. Today we have one family owning more wealth than the bottom 42 percent of the American people—that is, the Walton family of Walmart.