

committees have served as the primary forum for critical deliberation and amendments in this body.

Bills introduced in the Senate are referred to the relevant committees where Members have the opportunity to consider, debate, and amend the bill at length. Committees are the workhorses of the Senate or at least should be. On the floor we can do only one thing at a time. But any number of committees and subcommittees may operate simultaneously, allowing Senators to work out language and make compromises on multiple bills at the same time.

Committees also perform a crucial investigative function. They hold hearings, call witnesses, and solicit expert opinions on a wide variety of issues, enabling Members to expand their understanding and to better fine-tune individual bills. Lately, however, we have witnessed a disturbing trend of bypassing the committee process altogether by bringing bills directly to the floor for votes.

This practice undermines committee work and frustrates Members who diligently seek to move their legislative priorities through the committee. It also deprives bills of the benefits of committee review, which include more search and consideration of language, opportunities for comment by outside experts, and the ability to address support for amendments without tying up precious floor time.

A healthy committee process is essential to a well-functioning Senate. This body is not a fiefdom. We do not convene merely to give our assent to immutable messaging bills. We are supposed to work together to write, amend, and pass important legislation. When Senators bring up for consideration bills they have written without input from other Members, manipulate Senate procedure to prevent floor amendment on those bills, and then simultaneously file cloture to cut off debate, they act as autocrats rather than agents of democracy.

Let's return this body to one that operates by consensus, not dictate. Let's return the committee process to its proper place in our legislative landscape, as the first line of review rather than an utter irrelevancy. Let's restore the Senate to its proper role in our constitutional system by restoring the traditions that have made this body so great: robust debate, an open amendment process, an active, meaningful committee process.

Equipped with these tools, the Senate historically never shied away from taking on what everyone agreed were the toughest issues of the day. Yes, we had to take tough votes. Yes, we could not rush legislation through as fast as we sometimes would have liked. Yes, we sometimes felt deep disappointment when proposals we championed fell short. But while the Senate's rules can be frustrating and politically cumbersome, they are what allowed the Senate to serve the country so well for so very long.

Restoring the Senate in this manner will not be easy. After years of bitter partisan tension, we cannot expect a complete change to come overnight. But by reestablishing our historic aims and reinstituting our designing modes of operation, including robust debate, an open amendment process, and regular order through committee work, the Senate can once more be about the peoples' business and observe the title of the world's greatest deliberative body.

WISHING SENATOR HARRY REID A SPEEDY RECOVERY

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, one of my friends in this body is the distinguished minority leader, HARRY REID. HARRY and I have been friends for a long time. He has served here for a long time. He served well in many respects. He certainly was a tough majority leader. He is a tough guy.

Recently he suffered some very severe injuries. He is mending. These injuries seem to be injuries he can handle, although very strong, tough injuries. I wish him the best, that he may be able to recuperate well, come back again to this deliberative body, and play the role he needs to play for the minority in this illustrious body.

HARRY and I believe many things together, especially in the religious area. He is a fine man. His wife Landra is a very fine woman. I am glad to see that her health has improved. She is a terrific person. Both of them are terrific people in their own right. I pray that the Lord will heal HARRY and make it easier for him to come back as soon as he can. Being a tough guy, he will be back here pretty soon. I wish him the best. It is no secret that Elaine and I have been praying for him. Hopefully, those prayers will be efficacious.

I have great respect for my colleagues on the other side as well as my own colleagues on this side. These are good people. There are very few Senators—not more than 2—in my 38 years in the Senate that I thought might not have much redeeming value. Everybody else has played significant roles in this body, sometimes that I hotly contested and differed with, but nevertheless very good people over all these years.

HARRY REID is one of the nicest people one will ever meet off the Senate floor. He is all right on the Senate floor too. All I can say is that I wish him well. I am praying for his recovery. I want him to succeed in every way. He is from our neighboring State. Nevada is very important to us. We like both Senators from Nevada. Senator HELLER is one of the finest Senators here. They work well in Nevada's interests together. I hope everything goes well with Senator REID and his wife Landra and his lovely family. They are good family people.

I wanted to make those comments on the floor because of the high esteem in which I hold HARRY. Yes, we disagree on a lot of issues, sometimes pretty

strongly we disagree, but great Senators can do that. They can get over it quickly too.

I hope the remarks I made earlier in the day on this deliberative body will be taken up by everybody in the Senate to realize this is the greatest deliberative body in the world. We need to make sure it remains such. That means tough votes. It means tough amendments. It means long days here sometimes, but it also means an ability to have a rapport with my friends, not only on this side but the other side as well and for them to have a rapport not only with their side but with our side.

Let's hope we can build something and let's hope we can bring our two sides together and work in the best interests of the country and get some things done that are sorely in need and do things that both Democrats and Republicans can say: We did it together. Yes, there were tough times. Yes, we differed from time to time. But we did it together, and we did it in the best interest of the country.

I hope both leaders will be able to work together in this manner and that all of us will do our work in the best interest of this country. I do not think we necessarily have to forget politics, but we ought to sublimate them sometimes to the point where they do not interfere with getting very important work done.

I wish HARRY REID the best. As I said, he is in my prayers.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri.

JOBS

Mr. BLUNT. Mr. President, first of all, this is the first opportunity I have had to follow our new President pro tempore of the Senate on the floor. He was just elected yesterday.

I have spoken on the floor at times when he has been in other leadership roles. He is a solid Member of this Senate whom we rally around in so many ways. The comments he just made about the leader of our friends on the other side and the importance of family to Senator REID—that is also important to Senator HATCH. People are important to Senator HATCH. I believe he is going to be a tremendous President pro tempore of the Senate, chairman of the Finance Committee, and a critical leader at a critical time.

The comments he made on the floor today about Senators being willing to take tough votes, to take positions on issues, to let the American people know where we stand—that is not only where the Senate ought to be but in so many ways it is where Senator HATCH has always been as a Member of the Senate and now as the highest elected official in the Senate, the President pro tempore of the Senate. I look forward to seeing him do that job, seeking his advice, and watching his leadership as he leads us now in multiple ways in the Senate.

Mr. HATCH. Would the Senator yield for a comment?

Mr. BLUNT. I yield to the Senator.

Mr. HATCH. I thank my dear friend from Missouri for being so kind and thoughtful to me and the Senate. I appreciate our friendship and the leadership he provides in this body.

Mr. BLUNT. I thank my friend for his leadership and his comments.

The Presiding Officer and I are looking at legislation we looked at last year where the Senate would simply have to stand up on rules and regulations that have an impact on the economy and say "Yes, we are going to improve those" or "No, we are not going to do those." That would be a role for the Senate where the regulators for the first time have an obstacle and an opportunity to come to the people who have to go to the voters and say: What do you think about this rule? What do you think about this regulation?

I look forward to seeing the REINS Act again that would put some more controls over regulators, which both the Presiding Officer and I have worked on.

Today I will talk for a few moments about the work we will hopefully get to quickly.

The first numbered bill in this new Senate is the bill to authorize the Keystone Pipeline. In the 6 years that Canada has been waiting to try to sell us a product that we need, I have spoken about this—as many of us have—many times. It is hard to actually think about what I might say today that hasn't been said before in that 6-year period of trying to do what I believe and what most Americans believe is the logical thing for us to do.

Our best trading partner, Canada—more North American energy is one of the critical keys to our economic future. As I over and over again think of the list of opportunities in front of us, that has to be near the top. What happens when we have more American energy? What happens when we are more self-sufficient with our two closest neighbors for the energy we use, the energy we need? What happens when we are less dependent on economies that we don't do as much business with or places that aren't as friendly to us as our neighbors to the north and our neighbors to the south?

More American energy has an impact on utility bills, it has an impact on transportation, and it has an impact on whether we are going to make more things. An economy that grows things and makes things is stronger than an economy where we just trade services with each other. We should be looking for those things which create that competitive incentive for us to get back into manufacturing.

In the last session of Congress, we were able to pass a bill I cosponsored with Senator BROWN from Ohio on advanced manufacturing, and I think it is going to have an impact on doing things in different ways, but I don't suggest that it would have a greater impact than a utility bill that somebody thinking about building a factory

understood that they had a great likelihood of being able to pay for a long time and in a competitive way or a delivery system that works. Those are the kinds of things that will create more American jobs.

The Keystone Pipeline clearly creates some jobs in and of itself. I think 20,000 jobs or so is the estimate just to build the pipeline and another 20,000 for all of the support of material and things that go into that pipeline.

I think the President's own State Department has a number of 42,000 jobs that would be created if we go to this shovel-ready project. We had a lot of discussion in the country when the President became President about the importance of finding shovel-ready projects. This is a project where people have had the shovels in hand for a long time. They have a product we need. We are their best trading partner. It is logical that they would want to sell it to us. It is equally logical that we should want to buy it from them. The State Department says over and over again—and this is the State Department where the Secretary of State was put in place by the President, who yesterday said he would veto this bill—the State Department says over and over again that there is no environmental impact we should be concerned about.

For people who say: Well, the Canadians should be concerned about the impact of taking that oil out of the ground, that is really going to happen. The oil sands are going to be heated up. The oil is coming out of the ground. It is going to be sold to somebody. The question is, Do we take advantage of that logical opportunity or do we give that opportunity to somebody else?

When we get into this debate next week, somebody will say: Well, maybe there are 40,000 jobs to build the pipeline, but there are only three or four dozen jobs to run the pipeline. Well, of course—it is a pipeline. It is not complicated to do, but it is the logical and easiest way to move fuel that we need, oil that we need, oil that would become part of our commerce and other commerce.

But anybody who thinks that those are the only jobs that would be created when we grasp the idea of more American energy just isn't thinking about what this means to our economy. There are many jobs to be created. That is why this has become such an important issue and such an important vote—not just for the pipeline itself but for the message it sends to the American workforce, the message it sends to people who are thinking about making things in America, and the message it sends about our future economy. This is one of many things that are just waiting for us to take advantage of them so that we can grow our economy in new and positive ways.

Among the things that will be said that I will disagree with on this in the next few days: Well, this is only 35 permanent jobs. Anybody who believes that embracing more American energy

is only 35 American jobs is either kidding themselves or just trying to kid the American people.

We need to take advantage of this opportunity. There is no government funding involved. It is just government approval. This is a \$7 billion project, 42,000 jobs. The government just has to say yes.

Six years and several months ago—I think about 2 months ago now we passed the 6-year anniversary of the Canadians having the application and asking us to let them do this. Why do they even have to do that? Because they cross an international border. We build pipelines in the country all the time with very little Federal involvement.

This is revenue for the States, communities, and counties this pipeline goes through. There is a revenue stream there. You pay for the permanent ability to have that infrastructure available to you. It is a \$7 billion project, revenue for State and local government, but most importantly, it is a sign from the people of the United States of America through their government that we are going to take advantage of this great opportunity of more American energy that is in front of us.

Since he came to the Senate the same day I did 4 years ago, Senator HOEVEN has been a leading advocate as a North Dakotan. He understands what energy can do for the economy. He also understands the importance of being able to transport that energy product around in the right way. It frees train cars for manufactured goods, agriculture, and other things. It does so in the best way. Senator MANCHIN, joining with Senator HOEVEN as the principal sponsors of the bill, is a leader on these energy issues. He understands energy issues. I am pleased to be a cosponsor of this bill. I believe there are 60 of us who have cosponsored the bill—clearly enough to send the bill to the President's desk. It would be nice if the President would look at the opportunity and decide to sign this bill.

This is an important part of the future of the country. It is time for the Senate, the Congress, and the Government of the United States to wrap its arms around what this means to the people of the United States. It means good jobs. It means a different future than if we don't have it.

One other topic I wish to mention while on the floor is—speaking of good jobs—jobs for veterans. A bill I filed in the last Congress in the Senate has passed the House again last night, the Hire More Heroes Act. I hope we can get to it quickly. Last year it passed in the House 406 to 1, but the Senate wouldn't take up the bill that passed the House 406 to 1.

How do we hire more heroes under this act? We give people who already have veterans health benefits—TRICARE or other VA benefits—a little bit of an exception as an employee. Employers don't have to count them

toward the 50 employees that trigger a law that many employers are trying to avoid being affected by, the so-called Affordable Care Act.

We have a chance to go to those who served us and say: Look, we are going to create one additional opportunity. We are not going to count the fact that you already have health care against you; we are actually going to let it work in favor of your opportunity to get a job and to move forward with that job.

Whether it is more American energy or hiring our heroes for jobs they need to have—the veteran unemployment numbers are unacceptable. Veterans who have served since 9/11 at one time last year had an unemployment rate right at the 9 percent number. Any number is unacceptable. We need to take those veterans' skills and put them to work. I hope we do that by quickly following our colleagues on the other side of the building—who now have passed this bill twice—and getting this bill on the President's desk as well.

Hiring our heroes, creating jobs, looking at more American energy—I am hopeful these are the kinds of things this Congress will quickly send a message to the President and the country—these are the kinds of things we want to see happen for more opportunity for young Americans and for all Americans.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. FISCHER). The Senator from South Dakota.

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, I share the view of my colleague from Missouri about the importance of the Keystone Pipeline. We will have an opportunity over the next several days to talk more extensively about that and the importance it has to our economy and to energy security. Obviously it is something that we think is about jobs and the economy, which is why there is so much support for it in the Senate among Republicans in the Senate, and I would argue—I think there will be a lot of Democrats as well.

Yesterday Republicans assumed the majority in the Senate thanks to the overwhelming support of the American people, and we are ready to roll up our sleeves and go to work.

This week President Obama is going to be traveling around the country attempting to take credit for the recent shred of economic good news we have finally seen after 6 years of economic stagnation under the President's policies. Unfortunately, all of the campaign-style tours in the world cannot disguise the fact that our economy is nowhere near where it should be. More than 5 years after the recession supposedly ended, Americans are still feeling the pinch. Wages are stagnant. Household income has declined by almost \$3,000 on the President's watch. The price of everything from health care to education has risen. And the President's policies have done nothing

to help. In fact, the President's policies have actually made things worse. Whether it is the taxes in the President's health care law or the energy tax proposed by the President's out-of-control EPA, the President's policies have done nothing to help the economy.

But there is reason for Americans to be hopeful. Poll after poll has demonstrated that the American people are concerned about jobs and the economy, and in the new Congress Republicans are going to make jobs and the economy our priorities. We are committed to passing legislation that would help create jobs, grow the economy, and expand opportunities for struggling middle-class families, and we plan to get started right away.

This week the senior Senator from North Dakota, Mr. HOEVEN, reintroduced legislation to approve the job-creating Keystone XL Pipeline. According to the President's own State Department, this commonsense project would support more than 42,000 jobs. It would also substantially increase revenue to State and local governments, providing increased funding for local priorities such as schools, roads, and bridges.

I can speak firsthand to that because it would cross my home county, Jones County, in South Dakota. I can say the people in my home county see the opportunity to generate revenues that would help support the local school district in an area of the State which is losing population and having a harder and harder time keeping the school open.

The pipeline has bipartisan support in both Houses of Congress, and I am hopeful that the President will drop his inexplicable opposition and finally sign off on this job-creating project.

Republicans also plan to take up the other job-creating measures that spent far too long languishing in the Democratic-led Senate. The Obamacare tax on lifesaving devices, such as pacemakers and insulin pumps, has already had a negative impact on jobs and the medical device industry. At a time when our economy is still suffering from years of stagnation, repealing this tax is a no-brainer. I am confident we will have bipartisan support for this repeal, and I hope—I hope—the President will sign it.

Republicans also plan to repeal the Obamacare provision that changed the definition of full-time work from 40 hours per week to 30 hours per week. This provision is forcing businesses to reduce employees' hours and wages and hire part-time rather than full-time workers in order to comply with the Obamacare requirements. Millions of Americans who want full-time work are currently stuck in part-time jobs because they can't find anything else. The last thing the government should be doing is making it more difficult for employers to offer full-time positions.

Another Obamacare position that is making it difficult for employers to

hire is the employer mandate. Later today I will introduce a bill called the HIRE Act, which would make it easier for employers to hire new workers by exempting Americans who have been unemployed for more than 27 weeks from counting as employees for whom a tax penalty must be paid by the employer under Obamacare's employer mandate.

In addition to passing job-creating legislation, the new Republican majority is committed to increasing congressional oversight. Executive branch agencies have been out of control under the Obama administration. The President's EPA alone has proposed billions of dollars' worth of regulations that will have a catastrophic effect on our economy and eliminate tens of thousands of jobs, if not hundreds of thousands of jobs. Just one of these regulations—the backdoor national energy tax on coal-fired powerplants—would cause Americans' energy prices to soar and destroy families' livelihoods.

In my State of South Dakota, household energy prices could increase by as much as 90 percent. South Dakotans with incomes below \$50,000 a year already spend one-fifth—one-fifth—of their aftertax income on residential and transportation energy costs, which is twice the national average, I might add. They can't afford a 90-percent increase in their costs.

What is more, this national energy tax will have almost no effect on our air quality. It would devastate communities and drive up energy bills in this country for nothing.

The EPA is far from the only Federal agency to have abused its power under the Obama administration. Take the Obama IRS, for example, which targeted organizations for extra scrutiny based on their members' political beliefs. It is past time for Congress to assert its oversight authority and check the executive branch's overreach.

While Republicans want to work with Democrats as much as possible, we will not hesitate to draw a bright line between Democratic and Republican priorities.

Republicans want to address some of the biggest challenges facing our economy, to put our Nation on the path to long-term prosperity. That means doing things such as reforming our Tax Code, which is inefficient and bloated, making it simpler and fairer for families and businesses in this country. It also means reforming our regulatory system to eliminate inefficient and ineffective regulations that are discouraging job growth.

The Democratic-led Senate was pretty dysfunctional. The minority party was largely shut out of the legislative process. Bills were frequently written behind closed doors. The committee process was largely defunct. Too often the Senate floor was a forum for partisan politicking rather than serious debate. What was the result? The voices of too many Americans got shut

out of the process and the Senate accomplished next to nothing for the American people.

Republicans intend to change all of that. Under Republican control, the Senate will return to regular order. That means bills will once again be debated and amended in the open, in committee, before coming to the Senate floor. Once bills come to the floor, all Senators, regardless of party, will have the opportunity to offer amendments and to fully debate legislation before it comes to a vote.

The American people deserve a Senate that works and Republicans intend to give it to them. The American people have spent a long time struggling in the Obama economy, but they are about to get some relief. Republicans are determined to pass solutions that will help create jobs, grow our economy, and expand opportunities for American families. We hope—we hope—the Democrats in the Senate and the President will join us.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

IMPORTANT ISSUES FACING OUR COUNTRY

Mr. SANDERS. Madam President, as we begin this new session, I think it is important for us to remember why we are here and what our job is as Senators. What our job is, it seems to me, is to try to understand the needs of the American people, the problems facing our constituents, and propose real solutions to those problems. So before we get involved in all of the debates I know we are going to have, let me put on the floor what I believe—in hearing from the people of the State of Vermont—are some of the most important issues facing our country and the need for the Senate, the Congress, and the President to address those issues.

First and foremost, to my mind, is the state of American democracy. We are a democracy, and men and women have fought and died to preserve American democracy, which means the people of America—not kings, not queens, not an aristocracy but the people of this country—regardless of where they come from or their economic status, have the right to participate in the political process, to elect their leaders and create the future they want for themselves and their kids.

What is the status of American democracy today? We just came out of a midterm election where Republicans did very well. But I think it is important to understand that in that election—that national election—63 percent of the American people didn't vote. Eighty percent of young people didn't vote. The overwhelming majority of low-income and working people didn't vote.

There are a million reasons an individual doesn't vote, but my guess is that for many people they look at the political process and they say: Yes, my

family is hurting. I am working longer hours for lower wages. My job went to China. My kid can't afford to go to college. I can't afford health insurance. What are those people in Washington doing to protect my interest? Not much—not the Republicans, not the Democrats. I am hurting. What are they doing? People say: Hey, I don't want to participate in this process. It doesn't mean anything. I am not going to vote.

I think another aspect about why people don't vote is they turn on their TVs and they are bombarded with 30-second ugly television ads—often ads that come not even from the candidate but from people who do “independent expenditures.” As a result of the disastrous Supreme Court decision on Citizens United, billionaires, corporations are now allowed to spend unlimited sums of money in a political process. If somebody is a billionaire, they can now spend hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars to destroy other candidates or to elect the candidates they want.

Is that truly what American democracy is supposed to be about? Do we believe that men and women fought and died for us so billionaires can elect candidates to protect the wealthy and the powerful?

I would say at the very top of the agenda for this Congress should be a movement to overturn, through a constitutional amendment, this disastrous Supreme Court ruling on Citizens United. In my view, we should move toward public funding of elections so all of our people, regardless of their economic status, can participate in the political process and run for office.

I think the next issue we have to take a very hard look at is the 40-year decline of the American middle class. I know some of my Republican friends talk about what has happened under the Obama administration, and they are right in saying we are nowhere where we should be economically. No one debates that. But let us not forget where we were 6 years ago when George W. Bush left office. Everybody remembers where we were: 700,000 people a month—a month—were losing their jobs.

People say: Hey, we are growing 200,000 or 300,000 jobs a month now, not good enough. Right, it is not good enough, but growing 200,000 or 300,000 jobs a month is a heck of a lot better than losing 700,000 jobs a month.

Our financial system—the U.S. and the world's—was on the verge of financial collapse. That is where we were when Bush left office. Now Wall Street is doing very well.

In terms of our deficit, when Bush left office we had a \$1.4 trillion deficit. Now that deficit is somewhere around \$500 billion. Are we where we want to be? No. Are we better off than we were 6 years ago? Absolutely.

But when we look at the middle class today, we understand the problems are not just the last 6 years or the last 12

years. The problems are what has been going on over the last 40 years. The fact is, we have millions of working people who are earning, in real inflation-accounted dollars, substantially less than they were 40 years ago.

How does it happen, when we are seeing an explosion in technology, when worker productivity has gone up, that the median male worker—that male worker right in the middle of the economy—earns \$783 less last year than he made 41 years ago?

Look at why people are angry. That is why they are angry. In inflation-accounted-for dollars, the median male worker is making \$783 less last year than he made 41 years ago. The median woman worker made \$1,300 less last year than she made in 2007.

Since 1999, the median middle-class family has seen its income go down by almost \$5,000 after adjusting for inflation. So people all over this country look to Washington and they say: What is going on? You gave us this great global economy. You have all these great unfettered free-trade agreements. We have all this technology. Yes, I know the billionaires are getting richer, millionaires are getting richer, with 95 percent of all new income going to the top 1 percent. We have one family, the Walton family, now owning more wealth than the bottom 40 percent of Americans. Yes, the billionaires are doing great, but what is happening to me?

What is happening to the middle class? The answer is, for a variety of reasons, in the last 40 years the middle class has shrunk significantly. Today we have more people living in poverty than at almost any other time in American history, and we have the highest rate of childhood poverty of any major country on Earth.

So what do we do? What do we do to rebuild the middle class? What do we do to create the millions of decent-paying jobs we need? Let me throw out a few suggestions that I hope in this session of Congress we will address.

For a start, everybody in America understands our infrastructure is collapsing—no great secret. According to the American Society of Civil Engineers, nearly one-quarter of the Nation's 600,000 bridges are structurally deficient or functionally obsolete, and more than 30 percent have exceeded their design life.

What that means is that all over this country bridges are being shut down because they are dangerous and they need repair, almost one third of America's roads are in poor or mediocre condition, and 42 percent of major urban highways are congested. As we speak, in cities all over America people are backed up in traffic jams, burning fuel and wasting time because we don't have proper infrastructure. The American Society of Civil Engineers says we must invest \$1.7 trillion by 2020—5 years—just to get our Nation's roads, bridges, and transit to a state of good repair—more than four times the current rate of spending.