

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-adjusted 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-adjusted 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.

So what happens when we invest in infrastructure? I will introduce legislation to invest \$1 trillion in rebuilding our roads, bridges, water systems, wastewater plants, aquifers, older schools, and rail. When we do that, \$1 trillion in infrastructure investment not only makes our country more productive and efficient, but it also creates a substantial number of decent-paying jobs. A \$1 trillion investment would maintain and create 13 million decent-paying jobs. The fastest way to create good-paying jobs is to rebuild our crumbling infrastructure. In my view, that should be a very, very high priority for this Congress.

The second issue I think we need to address—and I understand there are differences of opinion on this issue. I think when our kids and our grandchildren look back on this period and they look at an issue such as the Keystone Pipeline, they will be saying: What were you people thinking about? How could you go forward in terms of increasing the exploration and production of some of the dirtiest oil on this planet when virtually all of the scientists were telling us that we have to substantially reduce carbon emissions and not increase carbon emissions?

In my view, an important mission of this Congress is to listen to the science and the scientific community. They are telling us loudly and clearly that climate change is real, climate change is caused by human activity, climate change is already causing devastating problems in America and around the world in terms of drought, in terms of flooding, in terms of extreme weather disturbances, and we have to transform our energy system away from fossil fuel and into energy efficiency, into weatherization, into wind, into solar, into geothermal, and into other sustainable energies. When we do that, we not only lead the world in reversing climate change, but we also create a significant number of jobs.

In this last election, interestingly enough in some of the most conservative States in America, voters voted to raise the minimum wage because they understand that a minimum wage of \$7.25 an hour—here in Washington, DC, the Federal minimum wage—is literally a starvation wage. No family, no individual can live on \$7.25 an hour. I applaud all those fast food workers all over this country—people who work at McDonald's and Burger King—for having the courage to go out on the streets and say: We have to raise the minimum wage. I applaud their courage in doing that, and I applaud the many States around this country, including the State of Vermont, who have raised the minimum wage. In my view, if someone works 40 hours a week, they should not be living in poverty. I hope that one of the major priorities in this Congress is to raise the minimum wage to a living wage. Over a period of years, I would raise that minimum wage to \$15 an hour.

It is also unacceptable that in America today women who do the same

work as men earn 78 cents on the dollar compared to male workers. I think we have to address this discrimination, and we need to move forward with pay equity for women workers.

When we talk about the decline of the American middle class and the fact that millions of workers are working longer hours for lower wages, when we talk about the fact that in the last 14 or so years this country has lost 60,000 factories and millions of good-paying manufacturing jobs—when we put that issue on the table, we begin the discussion which is long, long overdue about our trade policies. That is what we have to talk about. The truth of the matter is that from Republican leadership in the White House to Democratic leadership in the White House, there has been support for a number of trade policies which, when looking at the cold facts, have failed. NAFTA has failed. CAFTA has failed. Permanent Normal Trade Relations with China—PNTR—has failed. Over the last 30 years, Republican Presidents and Democratic Presidents have continued to push unfettered free trade agreements which say to American workers: Guess what. You are now going to be competing against somebody in China who makes \$1.50 an hour. If you don't like it, we are going to move our plant to China.

And many companies have done exactly that. Do we think that is fair? Do we think that is right? I don't.

We are going to be coming up with the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement, TPP. Without going into great detail at this point, I have very, very serious problems with that agreement. In terms of the process, no Member of this Congress has been able to walk into the office where these documents—highly complicated legal documents—are held, bring staff in there, and copy the information. We are not allowed to do that, but we are supposed to vote on a fast-track agreement to give the President the authority to negotiate that agreement. It doesn't make a lot of sense to me.

So I hope we use the TPP as an opportunity to rethink our trade agreements. Trade is a good thing, but American workers should not suffer from unfettered free trade. Trade should be used to benefit the middle class and working families of this country and not just the multinational corporations.

We live in a highly competitive global economy. Everybody understands that. I think we also understand that our young people are not going to do well and our economy does not do well unless our people have the education they need to effectively compete in this global economy. It saddens me to note that a number of years ago the United States of America led the world in terms of the percentage of people who had college degrees. We were number one. Today we are number 12. The reason is that the cost of college has soared at the same time that the in-

come of many middle-class and working-class people has declined. We are in a position now where hundreds of thousands of young people thinking about their future look at the cost of college, look at the debt they will incur when they leave college, and they are saying: I don't want to go to college. I am not going to go to college. I am not going to get post-high school education. That is a very bad thing for this country. It is a bad thing for our economy. We should put high up on the agenda the issue of how in America all of our people, regardless of the income of their families, can get the education they need without going deeply in debt. This issue of college indebtedness is a horror.

I remember a few months ago talking to a young woman in Burlington, VT, who left medical school \$300,000 in debt. Her crime was that she wanted to become a doctor and work with low-income people. She shouldn't be punished with a debt of \$300,000. Other people are graduating college \$50,000 in debt. And graduate school—we have attorneys in my office who have a debt of over \$100,000. We can do better than that as a nation.

Those are some of the issues. There are others out there. But I think what is most important is that we try to listen to where the American people are today—to the pain of a declining middle-class, to single moms desperately struggling to raise their kids with dignity, to older people trying to retire with a shred of dignity.

On that issue, let me be very clear. If there is an attempt going to be made here in the Senate to cut Social Security or to cut Medicare, there will be at least one Senator fighting vigorously on that. Poverty among seniors is going up. Millions of seniors in this country are trying to make it on \$12,000, \$13,000, \$14,000 a year. The last thing we should be talking about is cutting Social Security. In fact, we should be talking about expanding Social Security.

There are a lot of issues out there. I hope we don't get lost in the weeds. I hope we focus on those issues that are major concerns to the American people. I hope very much that we have the courage to stand up to the very, very wealthy campaign contributors and their lobbyists who have enormous influence over what takes place here, and that we in fact represent the people who sent us here who are overwhelmingly middle-class and working-class people.

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

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

KEYSTONE XL PIPELINE

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, under the direction of our new majority leader, the Senator from Kentucky, we have been entrusted with a great opportunity to lead this new Congress—the 114th Congress—and it is a great honor. Maybe people assume that to be the case, but it is always a good idea to express it out loud and to say how grateful we are for the opportunity to be able to lead the 114th Congress and serve in the majority in the Senate.

It is also important to say we approach this opportunity with great humility—not just with humility but with also a determination and a commitment to address the top priorities of the American people. If there is one issue I heard about from my constituents in Texas during my reelection campaign, which concluded on November 4, it is: Why can't you guys and gals get things done? How come you can't address the problems that confront the American people? By and large, at the top of that list were jobs and stagnant wages, part-time work when people want to work full-time. They were kitchen table, bread-and-butter sorts of issues.

Now we have an opportunity starting this week to address one of those priorities, which is creating jobs with the approval of the Keystone XL Pipeline. The Keystone XL Pipeline is important for a lot of reasons, one of which is job creation. It obviously transports oil from Canada through the United States, bypassing the delivery of this oil in railcars, which has been the subject of some news reports when some of them have gone off-rail and created some accidents. The oil ends up in Southeast Texas, where we have a lot of refineries which create a lot of jobs but where that crude oil will then be refined into gasoline and jet fuel and other refined products.

This is also important because this is a supply of oil from a friendly neighbor, Canada—one of our closest allies—and reduces our dependence on oil from parts of the world that aren't quite as stable certainly as Canada is. So it is important from a jobs perspective. It is important from a geopolitical perspective and a national security perspective as well.

I went back and looked and noted that the President actually formed a Jobs Council during his first term in office. The job of the members of the council was to put their heads together and provide strategic advice on ways to boost the economy. This is the President's Jobs Council that he created during the first term of his Presidency. The group's main homework assignment was to produce this framework for job creation and enhance national competitiveness. In fact, they produced something entitled "Road Map to Renewal." I haven't Googled that or Binged it or put it in a search engine, but I bet if anybody who happens to be listening is interested, they could type that into a search engine on the Inter-

net—the "Road Map to Renewal"—and find out all they want to know about it. It includes a number of specific and practical recommendations for action.

One of those recommendations to the President was to "optimize all of the nation's natural resources and construct pathways (pipelines, transmission and distribution) to deliver electricity and fuel."

That would seem to be right in the wheelhouse of the Keystone XL Pipeline.

The report added that regulatory and "permitting obstacles that could threaten the development of some energy projects, negatively impact jobs and weaken our energy infrastructure need to be addressed." So the President's own Jobs Council recognized that the key to America's energy security is to focus on America's energy development, including the transmission lines and pipelines by which this natural resource is transported.

I know perhaps coming from an energy State such as Texas we are perhaps a lot more familiar with the pipelines and the oil and gas industry because it creates so many jobs and so much prosperity in my State, but some people are a little apprehensive about the idea of a pipeline going under the ground. I invite them to again type into their favorite search engine on the Internet "oil and gas pipelines" and look at the map that pops up. It is astonishing how many existing pipelines exist in the United States today. I bet 98 percent of Americans don't even know they exist. Maybe that is too high; maybe it is 95 percent. So this is a safe and efficient and effective way of transporting these natural resources all around the United States. Obviously, if they are transported by pipeline, they don't have to be transported by railcar, including through some populated parts of our country, and subjected to some of the accidents we have read and heard so much about. These underground pipelines are a fairly common reality in our country, which leads me to be absolutely mystified at the resistance from some on the other side of the aisle and in the White House to doing what should be in our self-interests, which should be something that addresses one of the most important things the American people care about, which is jobs, and the other thing they care an awful lot about, which is security and reducing our dependence on imported energy from the Middle East.

That was 3 years ago last month that the President's Jobs Council made this recommendation. Then there is last month, when the President said this: "I'm being absolutely sincere when I say I want to work with this new Congress to get things done."

Hearing that was like music to my ears and I think to a lot of people, to have the President say he wants to work with the Congress, even though Republicans won the majority in the House and in the Senate. So imagine

my confusion and the confusion on the part of so many Americans when yesterday the White House Press Secretary said the President would veto any legislative approval of the Keystone XL Pipeline.

Think about the timing of that statement. We had an election on November 4, we had the new Congress sworn in yesterday, the President said a month ago he wanted to work with the Congress, and then the first day of the Congress, before the legislation was even filed much less voted out of committee and brought to the floor, the President said: If you pass that, I am going to veto it. I am probably not the only one who is confused by the contradiction.

We know this pipeline would produce thousands of well-paying jobs and would enhance the supply of energy from a close ally and neighbor, as I said earlier.

So the President issued a veto threat on the day the new Congress was sworn in, and it is clear to me that notwithstanding the President's previous statements, he is either confused or he has changed his mind about cooperating with the Congress. I hope he meant what he said when he said he would work with us to try to address the concerns of middle-class families when it comes to jobs and help grow the economy and help America prosper. But I am here to say that Republicans who now have the honor and responsibility of serving as the majority in the Senate and in the House did listen. We heard the message delivered to us by the voters on November 4. We know they don't want more bickering. They don't want more dysfunction. The American people, including my constituents in Texas, want results. They want jobs. They want full-time, not just part-time work, and they want the security that would come with legislation such as this that we are considering today.

That is why this week our new majority leader, the senior Senator from Kentucky, Mr. McCONNELL, has decided we will take up this energy project as job No. 1. This is bipartisan legislation. I was watching TV this morning, I think with the Presiding Officer, and we were together and saw that Senator MANCHIN from West Virginia and Senator HOEVEN from North Dakota were appearing on a morning TV show talking about the importance of this legislation, and they estimate they have as many as 63 votes in the Senate, which by definition is a bipartisan majority, to pass this legislation.

This place can be pretty confusing at different times, and I am perplexed why the same President who said he wants to work with us is issuing premature veto threats, even though there is a bipartisan majority for this legislation.

Again, the President said he is for an "all of the above" approach to take care of our energy future. If that is true, then this should be a part of that approach. He has acknowledged the important connection between job growth