

have more free trade, and our economy will benefit because of it.

With that, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

RECESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands in recess until 2:15 p.m.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 12:31 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. PORTMAN).

DEFENDING PUBLIC SAFETY EMPLOYEES' RETIREMENT ACT—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Hampshire is recognized.

PERMANENT INTERNET TAX FREEDOM ACT

Ms. AYOTTE. Mr. President, I wanted to come to the floor today to talk about Internet tax freedom and to talk about ensuring that our online businesses remain competitive.

First of all, I commend the House of Representatives for recently passing the Permanent Internet Tax Freedom Act, which would permanently extend the current ban on Internet access taxes. The current tax moratorium will expire on October 1, and if we fail to renew it, it could cost taxpayers nearly \$15 billion in new fees and taxes next year. In addition, as importantly, it would make Internet access less affordable to hard-working families and hamper small businesses' ability to grow and create jobs using the Internet because essentially it would allow all of these jurisdictions to tax the Internet. So when you get on the Internet, you can expect many more taxes if we do not do what the House of Representatives did and extend the Internet Tax Freedom Act. In fact, I think we should make it permanent.

I am a cosponsor of a Senate companion bill of which I hope this Senate will follow the House's lead to pass and send a permanent extension to the President's desk.

Unfortunately, one of the things we have heard is that some see this extension of the moratorium on Internet taxation as an opportunity to attach another piece of legislation that, in fact, would burden our online businesses and would tremendously disadvantage a State like my home State of New Hampshire that has made the legislative decision not to have a sales tax.

We have seen this playbook before. It was called before the Marketplace

Fairness Act. Of course, there is nothing fair about this act when it comes to our online businesses having to collect taxes for nearly 9,000 taxing jurisdictions. You can imagine the bureaucratic nightmare that would occur. So this so-called Marketplace Fairness Act—I always used to like to call it the "Online Sales Tax Act" or the "Online Sales Tax Collection Act." That would be a more accurate description of that particular act.

So here we are. We have a rerun of this particular bill that would have required businesses in the State of New Hampshire—even though we do not have a sales tax—our online businesses to collect for all these other tax jurisdictions. Again, it is not even just States that have sales taxes. In some States, it goes down to the municipal level when it comes to municipalities and local jurisdictions actually collecting a separate tax, so it would have ended up being over 9,000 taxing jurisdictions. So here you have a nice online business out there having to be the tax collector for all these different jurisdictions. You can imagine that this would really be a huge burden on these online businesses.

The individuals who have been supporting this new sales tax collection scheme in this new burden on the Internet—by the way, one of the reasons I am such a strong proponent of permanently extending the tax freedom and the lack of taxes on the Internet, on Internet access, is because we have seen not only consumers' access to the Internet but the ability of businesses and the ability of us to create jobs and to see real growth on the Internet. This has allowed people to start businesses from their home. It has allowed so much creativity. It has been very positive for our economy.

So lo and behold in all of that there are some talking about attaching to this Internet Tax Freedom Act this incredibly burdensome collection scheme to require businesses to be out there collecting all these sales taxes throughout the Nation. The latest proposal the proponents of this type of tax collection scheme have come up with is one that again creates even more issues—certainly as many if not more issues—than the prior proposal that was called the so-called Marketplace Fairness Act. Of course, we know there is nothing fair about it if you are a business having to collect all these taxes.

What this rerun would do is actually create this reporting system and require businesses to purchase this software and then require States to actually have what are called certified software providers. Here is what would happen: Under this latest scheme, the certified software providers for these States would actually collect all the sales information for every sale—every online sale in a State—and then they would manage the collection of these taxes. Well, can you imagine? So now we are going to say to businesses: Yes,

you have to purchase this certain software. And guess what. Every sale you make is going to be held by the central government in each State.

Can you imagine, with all the things we have seen happen in terms of breach of privacy of individuals? We have seen cyber attacks, all these issues we are facing. We have seen it in our government with OPM. We have seen it with the IRS. We have seen it with private companies in data breach.

Now this latest scheme is, let's send all the sales information to one place, and we will have some company—I guess some private companies will stand to benefit from this—they will now collect all these taxes, and they will hold all this information. Imagine how much information they would hold in each State.

So that is how we are going to create this new taxing scheme. You can imagine how a State such as New Hampshire would feel about that as a State that has decided not to have a sales tax—that suddenly our State has to keep all this information, has to hire some private company to do this, to collect all these taxes, and then that each of our online businesses has to purchase this software which is supposed to interface with its State government. What a massive bureaucracy, and how unfair it is in terms of State sovereignty that the Federal Government would impose this on a State such as New Hampshire that has made a decision not to have a sales tax.

This, to me, would be the opposite of what we are trying to accomplish under the Permanent Internet Tax Freedom Act, which I fully support, which is about Internet tax freedom, and to attach this proposal to that Internet Tax Freedom Act, which some people, I think, are scheming around here to do, which with the right hand we are going to give you Internet freedom and with the left hand we are going to take that freedom away from States like mine that have chosen not to have a sales tax. And our online businesses would now have to be part of this huge bureaucratic scheme to collect taxes for other States and other localities.

So I would hope my colleagues would not go down this road because I think the Internet should be free. I think online businesses should be able to continue to thrive and grow. I think online businesses should not be required to collect for over 9,000 taxing jurisdictions. And certainly I think all of us should have concerns about all of the sales data being collected by some kind of third party and being held in one place just so we can collect more taxes on online businesses.

In fact, what I have heard from our businesses in New Hampshire previously when the so-called Marketplace Fairness Act was on the floor of the Senate—many of the businesses in New Hampshire that have online sales told me then how unfair they thought this taxing scheme was, and those concerns

remain, great businesses such as Garnet Hill in Franconia, NH. Russ Gaitskill, who is the president and CEO of Garnet Hill, told me previously: “It’s going to be a nightmare.”

I heard in the past from E&R Laundry and Dry Cleaners, a small business founded in Manchester in 1921. About 70 percent of E&R’s sales are now Internet based. The company’s president said he would not have the resources to calculate, collect, and deliver sales taxes for thousands of jurisdictions across the country.

There is a great bakery, certainly, in the Nashua and Amherst area, Frederick’s Pastries. Anybody who has been there—I can tell you, Frederick’s is a great bakery. Susan Lozier Roberts of Frederick’s expressed concern that this taxing scheme would create mass confusion, keeping up with all the individual tax codes.

There is the fact that we are going to have to have software and have some third party hold all of the sales information for all these online businesses. That creates so many other additional burdensome issues, as well as privacy issues.

Travis Adams with whaddy.com, based in Nashua, said previously: One tax audit from another State or jurisdiction would completely crush us. Because what happens under this so-called taxing scheme is now all of our online businesses can be audited in all of these taxing jurisdictions. So you can be an online business in New Hampshire, and what the proponents of this new tax scheme would like to have is this opportunity that businesses in New Hampshire can now be audited in all these other jurisdictions. You can imagine what kind of burdens that would create on businesses that are trying to focus every day on the bottom line and creating jobs.

So I would say that as we look at this new proposal that some people behind the scenes are talking about trying to attach to the Internet Tax Freedom Act—I hope we will not go down this road. It would be bad for business, it would be bad for people’s privacy, it would be a big power grab, I think, from Washington to require States such as New Hampshire to collect these taxes from throughout the country, and it certainly would not be positive to create more jobs through online businesses.

In fact, the Competitive Enterprise Institute said of this latest proposal, which is a cousin to the so-called Marketplace Fairness Act:

[This] new tax grab erodes healthy tax competition among states, puts consumers’ information at higher risk, and ushers in a regime of taxation without representation. It’s like the Blackwater of tax collection, state-paid mercenaries with sales tax charts. Under the Marketplace Fairness Act businesses are threatened by the prospect of being audited and prosecuted in every state into which they sell.

This issue is one I think we all should care about. I know in my home State of New Hampshire, where we

have chosen not to have a sales tax, it would be completely unfair for us to consider passing this proposal which is a brandnew tax grab that erodes New Hampshire’s competitive status of choosing not to have a sales tax. Also, there is the concern we all should have about a central taxing authority holding all of this private sales information in each of the States and what could be done with that information and how will consumers’ information be protected. New Hampshire’s residents and Internet retailers cannot afford this radical Federal invasion of our State. I hope my colleagues will see the importance of extending the Internet Tax Freedom Act to encourage innovation and job creation, but under no circumstances should the Internet access tax moratorium be held hostage by a new and invasive sales tax that would not only undo the benefits of the tax moratorium but also burden our small businesses with becoming tax collectors for other States. That is wrong, and I hope this body will not go down that road. I certainly will be doing everything I can within my power in the Senate to make sure this new sales tax collection regime does not get attached to a very positive proposal, which is the Internet Tax Freedom Act.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Indiana.

Mr. DONNELLY. Mr. President, it is an honor to follow my colleague from New Hampshire, who has done such an eloquent job.

EXPORT-IMPORT BANK

I want to talk about the Export-Import Bank. I said this during the unnecessary 2013 Government shutdown, and I will say it again: Most Americans think Congress can do something to help create jobs and strengthen our economy—even if it is simply not doing any harm. Yet here we are again, willfully allowing an important tool for economic growth to expire by not taking commonsense action.

On June 30, the charter for the Export-Import Bank will expire. During its 80-plus years of existence, the Bank has garnered support from every President during that span and repeatedly been renewed by Congress, often without any objection. The Export-Import Bank is not a Democratic program or a Republican program. It is a program to help American businesses. President Reagan’s words from 30 years ago still ring true:

Exports create and sustain jobs for millions of American workers and contribute to the growth and strength of the United States economy. The Export-Import Bank contributes in a significant way to our nation’s export sales.

The Gipper was right then, and he is right today.

Those who oppose the Ex-Im Bank for ideological reasons may make their case in the abstract, but I have to operate in the reality, where I have heard over and over from Indiana small business owners and workers about the importance of the Ex-Im Bank.

Jon, the vice president of Specialty Hardwoods of Indiana, in Nappanee, told me about their small company, which has around 40 employees. They got through the financial downturn of 2008 and 2009 but suffered during that time, as all small manufacturers did, not only here in this country but worldwide. As they returned to profitability, they made a decision to try to diversify markets.

Up until 2008, they mostly sold their products to the recreational vehicle industry. Since then, they have started to sell to cabinet companies that market to the kitchen and bath industry nationally and made a direct attempt to go after export sales. Lumber product exports now account at Specialty Hardwoods for more than 45 percent of their current sales. Jon told me:

We could not have done this without the support of EXIM bank. I personally have helped other small companies in our industry contact EXIM and establish relationships with EXIM to market their products. It levels the playing field for smaller companies to enter this market segment of our industry.

We have grown our business and survived because of EXIM bank and the efforts of the 40-45 people that we employ.

The stories continue.

Mark, the vice president and co-owner of Agrarian Marketing Corporation, told us about his company that makes feed additives and nutritional supplements for the livestock industry. They have a very large distributor in Cairo, Egypt, that represents nearly 30 percent of their business. For this Hoosier business, nearly 30 percent of their business comes from Cairo, Egypt.

The credit insurance they purchase through Ex-Im Bank allows them to source this business by extending beneficial credit terms to their Egyptian customer. It would not be possible if they required their customer to prepay for those orders.

Mark said:

Although we are a small business, this segment of our business is very important to us and provides excellent profitability and jobs here in Indiana as well as jobs for our contract manufacturers in Iowa, Illinois, and Ohio. All would suffer if we lost this business.

Bruce, the CEO and chairman of Sullivan-Palatek in Michigan City, noted that not only are the 140 jobs at his company impacted but several hundred more at local suppliers.

Bruce said:

In the event that the Ex-Im Bank were to be shut down, the impact to us would be immediate. I believe we would have very much difficulty in getting any new orders.

In fact, the orders that we have in house, many of them we would not be able to ship. We would have to shut them down right in the middle . . . of the order process.

Jon, Mark, and Bruce are three of many in Indiana, many around the country. In my home State, the Hoosier State, since 2010 the Export-Import Bank has directly helped more than 100 companies that have exported more than \$3 billion in goods and services.

The Ex-Im Bank costs zero in taxpayer dollars. In fact, it turns a profit.

Since 1992, the Bank has returned more than \$7 billion in profits to the Treasury. Last year, \$675 million was returned to the Treasury. And the default rate is 0.175 percent. That is less than one-fifth of 1 percent. That is an effort to manage it in a fiscally prudent, fiscally responsible manner.

In fiscal year 2014, the Ex-Im Bank authorized around \$20.5 billion for 3,746 transactions, which contributed to \$27.5 billion of U.S. exports and more than 164,000 jobs right here in the United States.

These are not, for the most part, huge corporations. They are small companies that wouldn't be able to afford financing elsewhere. In 2014, 90 percent of the transactions approved by the Bank were in support of small businesses.

So what happens if Ex-Im's charter is to expire? It will be forced to shut down, unwind current obligations, and the loss of future financing could result in a significant amount of business being lost overseas. That directly affects the bottom line for many businesses, leaving them with less revenue to reinvest and less revenue to pay wages or create new jobs. It becomes difficult—if not nearly impossible—for the private sector to replace the loans, the guarantees, and the insurance provided by the Ex-Im Bank.

At a time when American companies are competing in a game that is often rigged by foreign currency manipulation, intellectual property theft, and insurmountable regulatory barriers, unilaterally eliminating our export credit agency further handcuffs U.S. job creators and allows competitors in foreign countries to pick up the business.

If Ex-Im no longer provides financing, foreign companies and countries are still going to buy their goods and products. They need the products. But instead of buying that product from Muncie, IN, they will purchase it in Russia or China.

This is, to me, the direct opposite of what Congress should be doing. It seems as if up is down and down is up in this discussion. Nearly every other major country has a credit export agency. Many are larger and much more aggressive than the Export-Import Bank. Unilaterally eliminating our export credit agency hurts not only the United States and handcuffs our job creators, but it also helps competitors in foreign countries to capitalize and seize that business.

Our global competitors, including China, Brazil, and India, are investing more in export financing every single day. They are investing in their companies and in their economy. If we take this measure, we are stepping back. They are rooting for America's Export-Import Bank to close because it means more business for them.

Even our neighbor Canada is providing far more export financing than the United States. Canada's economy is one-tenth the size of the U.S. economy,

and their export-import agency already provides far more export financing than we do at the present time. The Ex-Im Bank is a tool that helps American companies compete in the global economy.

In Indiana, we pride ourselves on what we call Hoosier common sense. It does not get more common sense than creating more American jobs in a fiscally responsible way. That is what the Export-Import Bank does.

Congress needs a dose of that Hoosier common sense, which is the same as the common sense in the Presiding Officer's home State of Ohio. We should act quickly to reauthorize the Export-Import Bank to help our companies, to help our employees, to help workers around our country, and to help our Nation.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. GARDNER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. ERNST). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. GARDNER. Madam President, our country stands on the brink of a great opportunity in the Asia-Pacific. Since 2008, the United States and 11 other Pacific nations, including Japan and New Zealand, have worked to conclude negotiations on the Trans-Pacific Partnership. This agreement represents nearly 40 percent of the global gross domestic product, or GDP, and is the most ambitious free-trade agreement in history. By upending antiquated international tariff systems and tearing down barriers to trade, we can unleash American ingenuity and send our Nation's products from Main Street to Malaysia.

Much has been said about the national benefits of concluding TPP, but I want to focus on some of the particular benefits for my home State of Colorado. Colorado, like most States, benefits immensely from international trade, particularly with Asia. According to the Business Roundtable, more than 265,000 Colorado jobs are supported by the countries that would be affected by TPP. These trade-related jobs include the farmworker harvesting world-famous melons down in Rocky Ford and the meatpacker shipping American beef from Greeley. They are the electrical engineer designing computer systems in Boulder and the natural gas worker maintaining a rig in Parachute. Collectively, these everyday working Americans help drive the economic and trade engine of Colorado.

Last year, my State exported more than \$8 billion worth of goods all across the world. Approximately half of them, or \$4 billion, went directly to TPP countries.

While nations like Vietnam and Japan have imposed hefty tariffs on

our Colorado goods in the past, TPP presents an opportunity to level the playing field. American goods would flow more freely to the region and American workers stand to benefit. That is why I strongly support granting the President trade promotion authority, or TPA, and finalizing a high-standard TPP. A vote for TPA is a vote for the American worker. It is a vote for more active engagement in the world and a higher standard of living, and it is a vote to recognize that through increased trade, we can indeed deliver upon the promise of a better tomorrow.

Unfortunately, however, some in Congress have opted for isolationism and retreat. They have sounded the alarm over supposed failure of past trade agreements and argued in favor of taking cover rather than taking charge, and they have doubled down on the false notion that trade is always bad for the American economy and the American worker. But a quick review of the facts will dispel these myths very quickly. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, national beef exports to Colombia and Panama have more than tripled since 2011 when we enacted free-trade agreements with these countries. National wheat exports to Chile more than doubled from the enactment of our 2003 free-trade agreement through 2014, while dairy exports increased more than 20 times to that country, and our beef exports have increased more than eight times to the participant countries of the Central America and Dominican Republic free-trade agreement.

Colorado businesses have played a large role in expanding overseas as well. My State witnessed a 37-percent increase in goods exported to countries with free-trade agreements between 2003 and 2013. Exports to Korea have increased 61 percent since the conclusion of our free-trade agreement with that nation in 2011. And NAFTA, which anti-trade forces frequently dismiss as the poster child for trade deals gone awry, has resulted in a 293-percent—that is right, 293 percent—increase in Colorado exports to Canada and Mexico since 1994.

Beyond the numbers, though, it is important to meet with the workers and business owners who understand that freer trade helps their bottom line. Just a few days ago, I traveled to Eastern Colorado on my annual wheat tour. It is a tradition that Senator Wayne Allard started in the 1990s—then a U.S. Representative—and one I was excited to continue in the Senate. I invited my colleague from Colorado Senator BENNET, so we could both hear the needs directly from Coloradans and see the positive impacts that agreements such as TPP could have not only on Eastern Colorado but farmers across this country.

On the tour, we had the chance to marvel at the truly incredible production level of Colorado wheat growers. We are just about 2 weeks away from

the height of the winter wheat harvest in Colorado—a time when I have always enjoyed working at our family implement dealership in Yuma—and a reminder that Colorado helps feed the world. The vast majority of Colorado's wheat crop is exported. In fact, in 2013, we shipped more than \$235 million worth of wheat across the globe. Eighty percent of the wheat we produce in Colorado is exported. Most of the wheat growers we met on the Eastern Plains aren't interested in retreating from the international marketplace. In fact, they want to expand the international marketplace. They understand that free trade means improved opportunities to place their product. And with a high-standard TPP, Colorado wheat growers could penetrate notoriously difficult markets in countries such as Japan and begin to ship from Thurman to Tokyo and beyond.

It isn't just wheat either. Colorado farmers and ranchers already export millions of dollars in Western Slope beef, Southern Colorado onions, and San Luis Valley potatoes. In fact, according to the Department of Agriculture, Colorado potatoes represent around 70 percent of all U.S. potato exports to Mexico. That market stands to grow significantly if TPP is successfully concluded, considering that Mexico is a member nation in the negotiations.

There is no question that trade benefits rural America. We should be promoting Palisade peaches in Perth and Olathe sweet corn on the streets of Singapore. Growing up in rural Colorado, I saw the potential that our hard-working farmers and ranchers created for Colorado and for Colorado products abroad. Their determined spirit and hard-working attitude are what keep America at the top of the global economy, and TPP will expand that promise in the Asia-Pacific.

Urban and suburban America succeed with increased trade as well. As do their rural counterparts, urban and suburban Coloradans benefit from a wider selection of cheaper goods. The mechanics of free trade stretch dollars a little bit further for the teenager with a part-time summer job as well as for the family struggling to make ends meet.

Aside from the benefit of cheaper products, increased trade creates jobs here at home. A couple of months ago, I was fortunate enough to visit a company in Boulder, CO, that manufactures zip lines and other adventure equipment. This company has successfully expanded their business to Europe and Asia, helping people across the globe enjoy rain forest canopy tours, free falling, and more.

As this business expanded overseas, they had the ability to hire more employees and boost the local economy in Boulder. They doubled their Colorado office and are still looking to grow. An agreement such as TPP will open further opportunities for this company in

the Asia-Pacific and beyond, perhaps facilitating world-class bungee jumping in New Zealand or advanced rock climbing in Peru, and with those new opportunities come more Colorado jobs.

That is the essence of free trade. It encourages innovation and entrepreneurship. It connects the world while growing our workforce at home, and it presents an opportunity for Colorado and our country to spread our goods and ideas across the globe.

That is why I have supported free-trade agreements in the past—agreements that have yielded significant economic and strategic benefits for our Nation. That is why I supported the latest generation of trade promotion authority and look forward to supporting it again. We will continue to support it this week as it goes to the President's desk to be signed into law. That is why I urge my colleagues to continue their support for free-trade agreements, so the United States can help grasp the great opportunity that awaits us in the Asia-Pacific.

We have held several hearings over the past couple of months in the Foreign Relations Committee and beyond talking about the benefits of free trade. A couple of weeks ago, we were joined by experts from Asia and economic leaders around this country, all of whom believe we have an important role to play in expanding trade and expanding the opportunities that the Trans-Pacific Partnership will lead to when that agreement comes to this floor, thanks to trade promotion authority. It is an important measure that we must enact. It is an important statement of good faith that the United States truly is interested in the Asia region, the Asia-Pacific region, making good on our efforts to truly pivot to Asia to rebalance policy we all support but making good on our word that we are indeed in the region to stay.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota.

REPUBLICAN-LED SENATE

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, last fall, Republicans promised that if we were elected to the majority, we would get Washington working. That wasn't a campaign slogan, that was a commitment. After 6 months of Republican control, I am proud to report we are delivering on that promise.

The past 6 months in the Senate have been the most productive months in a long time. We passed bipartisan legislation to approve the Keystone Pipeline. We passed a bipartisan bill to help prevent suicides among veterans. We passed the first significant bipartisan reform of Medicare in years, which will ensure that our seniors have access to physicians and that those physicians are judged by the quality rather than the quantity of the care they provide. We passed bipartisan legislation to give law enforcement new tools to fight human trafficking and provide support

for trafficking victims. We passed a bipartisan bill to authorize funding for our national defense to provide for the needs of our men and women in uniform.

Those are just some of the highlights.

Every piece of legislation I mentioned passed with bipartisan support. One reason that happened is because the Republican majority has been committed to ensuring that all Senators, whatever the party, have the opportunity to make their voices heard.

Under Democratic leadership, not only were Members of the minority party shut out of the legislative process, but many rank-and-file Democrats were as well. During all of 2014, the Democratic leadership in the Senate allowed just 15 amendment rollcall votes—15 votes in an entire year. That is barely more than a vote a month.

By contrast, the Republican-led Senate has taken more than 130 amendment rollcall votes so far this year or more than 21 votes a month. That is not only more amendment rollcall votes than last year, it is more amendment rollcall votes than the Senate has taken in the past 2 years combined. That is through the first 6 months of 2015. We have another 6 months to go.

This week, the Senate is considering what I hope is going to be our next bipartisan achievement; that is, the legislation to help expand U.S. trade with other countries and increase the opportunities that are available for American businesses and American workers.

Over the past few years, exports have been a bright spot in our economy, supporting an increasing number of American jobs each and every year. In 2014, exports supported 11.7 million U.S. jobs and made up 13 percent of our Nation's economy. We need to continue to open markets around the globe to American goods and services, and the best way to do that is through new trade agreements.

Countries with which we have free and fair trade agreements purchase substantially more from us than other countries. In fact, in 2013, free-trade agreement countries purchased 12 times more goods per capita from the United States than nonfree-trade agreement countries—12 times more goods per capita.

For American workers, increased trade means more opportunity and increased access to high-paying jobs. Manufacturing jobs tied to exports pay, on average, 13 to 18 percent more than other jobs in our economy.

Unfortunately, while trade agreements have proliferated around the globe over the past several years, the United States hasn't signed a new trade agreement in 8 years. A big reason for that is the fact that trade promotion authority expired in 2007. Since 1934, almost all of the U.S. free-trade agreements have been negotiated using trade promotion authority or a similar streamlined, expedited process.

Trade promotion authority is designed to put the United States in the

strongest possible position when it comes to negotiating trade agreements. Under TPA, Congress sets guidelines for trade negotiations and outlines the priorities the administration must follow. In return, Congress promises a simple up-or-down vote on the resulting trade agreement instead of the long amendment process that could leave the final deal looking nothing like what was initially negotiated.

That simple up-or-down vote is the key. It lets our negotiating partners know that Congress and trade negotiators are on the same page, which gives other countries the confidence they need to put their best offers on the table. That, in turn, allows for a successful and timely conclusion of negotiations.

Currently, the administration is negotiating two major trade agreements that have the potential to vastly expand the market for American goods and services in the European Union and in the Pacific. The Trans-Pacific Partnership is being negotiated with a number of Asia-Pacific nations, including Australia, Japan, New Zealand, Singapore, and Vietnam. If this agreement is done right, it could have huge benefits for American agriculture, among other industries.

Agriculture producers in my State of South Dakota and in the Presiding Officer's State of Iowa understand that trade promotion authority is the most effective way to secure trade agreements that will benefit our farmers and our ranchers. One pork producer in my State of South Dakota contacted me to tell me that a successful TPP deal could increase U.S. pork exports to just one of the Trans-Pacific Partnership countries by literally hundreds of millions of dollars in a year.

Discussions of the benefits of trade tend to focus on the economic benefits, and with good reason—it helps our economy. It creates good-paying jobs and raises the standard of living for people in this country and gives access for consumers to lower cost goods and services. But new trade agreements also have the potential to result not just in economic gains for America's farmers, ranchers, and manufacturers but in national security gains for the country.

When we make trade deals with other countries, we are not just opening new markets for our goods, we are also developing and cementing alliances. Trade agreements build bonds of friendship with other nations that extend not only to cooperation on economic issues but to cooperation on security issues as well.

It is also important to remember that just because the United States isn't negotiating trade agreements doesn't mean other countries will not be. In fact, the United States hasn't signed a single new trade agreement over the past 8 years, but that hasn't prevented other countries from signing numerous trade agreements over the same period. If America fails to lead on

trade, other nations such as China will step in to fill the void, and these nations will not have the best interests of American workers and American families in mind.

The bill before us today will help pave the way for the United States to cement alliances with friendly nations through trade and will help ensure that any trade deals the United States enters into will be favorable to our economic and our national security interests.

The Senate passed a version of this bill last month with a bipartisan majority, and I am hopeful we will have a similarly strong bipartisan vote yet this week. Republicans believe our Nation's problems are best solved when Members of both parties come together to find solutions for the American people.

Republicans' plans for our second 6 months in the majority are the same as those for the first 6 months of our majority; that is, to make sure we continue to move forward in a way that addresses the challenges that are facing our country. Unfortunately, last week we saw an unfortunate return to partisanship on the part of the Democrats when they blocked an appropriations bill to fund our troops. It is not that Democrats have a problem with this bill; in fact, many of them voted to support the funding this bill provides when they voted in favor of the National Defense Authorization Act last week. The authorization act is the first step in a two-step process which has to be followed by the appropriations bill that actually provides the funding. But Democratic leaders and the President, even though many of them supported the Defense authorization bill, are upset that government agencies such as the EPA and the IRS aren't receiving the Democrats' preferred level of funding, so they have decided to hold appropriations bills hostage in an effort to get what they want.

It is unfortunate that Democrats are holding money for our troops hostage in order to get more funding for the EPA and the IRS. If Democrats believe the funding levels in the appropriations bills are not acceptable, they will have the opportunity to offer amendments to increase the funding. But in order to do that, they have to allow us to actually proceed to consideration of these bills on the Senate floor. What they are, in effect, doing now is filibustering any attempt to bring any spending bill to the floor; most recently, as I mentioned, the funding bill for our troops. The bill that funds our national security interests in this country is currently being held hostage. We can't even get it on the floor to debate it. We are not only talking about ultimately passing it, we are talking about even having a discussion on the floor of the Senate about something as important as funding our troops and the important military objectives we have as a nation. Yet, right now, we have a filibuster being conducted by the Demo-

crats—again, because they want to get more funding for their favorite agencies. Well, that is a bad way to go about this.

I am hopeful that this obstruction—which is largely driven by the Democratic leadership—that most rank-and-file Democrats will rethink a strategy that involves opposing every opportunity to fund our Nation's priorities and to get things done for the American people.

After years of stagnation in the Senate under Democratic leadership, I think even most Democrats have enjoyed governing in a functioning Senate again. We have dozens of bipartisan bills to show for the first 6 months of this year, and our record of accomplishment can continue if the Democrats abandon their strategy of obstruction and continue to work with us to solve the challenges facing our Nation. They can start by not objecting to proceeding to even getting a bill that funds our national security interests here on the floor of the Senate so we can debate it. As I said, if they don't like the funding levels in there, we will have an open amendment process in which they will be able to offer amendments to change those funding levels. But what they are doing right now is fundamentally wrong, not even allowing consideration of an appropriations bill that funds our military and pays our troops on the floor of the United States Senate. I hope that will change.

I hope that the Democrats will join us in making the next 6 months of 2015 as productive as the first 6 months have been and that we can point to bipartisan achievements that are good for the American people, that focus on their basic daily needs, and that will promote policies which will grow our economy and create jobs and lead to a higher standard of living and increased take-home pay for middle-income families across this country.

I yield the floor.

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

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

Mr. HATCH. Madam President, I would like to take a few minutes to underscore the importance of trade and trade promotion authority to the American manufacturing industry.

Despite some claims to the contrary, U.S. manufacturers have been among the principal beneficiaries of our existing free-trade agreements. One in four U.S. manufacturing jobs depends on exports. On average, the wages of those in export-supported manufacturing jobs are 18 percent higher than those of other factory workers.

Furthermore, since the last TPA bill passed through the Congress in 2002,

U.S. goods exports have more than doubled, reaching \$1.6 trillion in 2013 alone. While we hear a constant drum-beat decrying our trade deficits, the United States enjoys a nearly \$60 billion yearly manufacturing surplus with our 20 existing partners to the free-trade agreements. Consumers and businesses in those 20 countries purchased \$658 billion of U.S. manufactured goods in 2013 alone, which represents nearly 48 percent of all exports produced by the 12 million Americans employed in manufacturing.

Clearly, in places where we have free-trade agreements, where our manufacturers can compete on a level playing field, they are winning. We need to build on that track record of success and enact more high-standard, 21st-century free-trade agreements. That is yet another reason why we need TPA.

It is no wonder, then, that our TPA bill is supported by manufacturers throughout the country. We have received letters or statements of support from groups such as the National Association of Manufacturers, the National Electrical Manufacturers Association, the Grocery Manufacturers Association, the American Forest and Paper Association, the Association of Equipment Manufacturers, the Semiconductor Industry Association, the Society of Chemical Manufacturers & Affiliates, the National Council of Textile Organizations, and many others.

On top of that, a number of iconic individual manufacturing companies have weighed in publicly in support of our bill, including Boeing, Cummins, Dow Chemical, Honeywell, Intel, Texas Instruments, Xerox, and, of course, many others.

Caterpillar, which is based in Peoria, IL, is the world's leading manufacturer of construction and mining equipment, diesel engines, and gas turbines. Caterpillar knows the value of trade to a healthy economy, having exported nearly \$88 billion in goods and services over the past 5 years. They know that if we pass TPA, they can do even better.

Upon introduction of our bill, the company issued a statement saying, "Passage of TPA will provide the United States with the strongest possible hand when negotiating future trade agreements and will help eliminate the current high tariffs and trade barriers that companies like Caterpillar currently face."

It is not just big companies that benefit. Ninety-eight percent of nearly 300,000 American exporters are small and medium-sized businesses. Let me say that again. Ninety-eight percent of all U.S. exporters are small and medium-sized businesses. There are 300,000 of them. That fact escapes many people.

Let me give an example of one of those small businesses from my home State of Utah. Kimber Kable is owned and operated by Ray Kimber. Ray's story is emblematic of the American dream. In the late 1970s, Ray figured

out a way to weave audio cables to reduce unwanted noise and improve fidelity. The company he started in his garage over 35 years ago is now a driver of economic growth and a source of jobs. Today, he employs 30 people in Ogden, UT. He sells his cables to the world. Two-thirds of Ray's cables are shipped to customers overseas.

Ray is not only a friend of mine, he is also an outstanding example of a larger truth: The U.S. manufacturing sector is the most innovative in the world, and American workers are unsurpassed in manufacturing productivity. Because of U.S. innovation and productivity, where U.S. manufacturing competes on an equal footing, it always succeeds.

We can help people like Ray reach more markets and maintain healthy small businesses across America—businesses that will grow our economy and create more jobs—but we can only do that if our trade negotiators have the tools to set fair trade rules for our exporters. That is what our TPA bill provides.

For example, a big part of the ability of small companies like Kimber Kable to sell around the world is digital trade. That is why the TPA bill that is again before us directs our trade negotiators to ensure that electronically delivered goods and services are classified with the most liberal trade treatment possible and that our trading partners allow the free flow of data across borders.

Using the Internet to market, sell, and transmit digital products is only part of the story. Companies like Ray's are also innovators, and their innovations must be protected. Too many small businesses have experienced firsthand the destructive impact of intellectual property theft. Companies like Kimber Kable have to contend with counterfeiters stealing their company name to sell inferior products. This TPA bill, therefore, will also ensure that U.S. trade agreements reflect a standard of intellectual property rights protection similar to that found in our own U.S. law. The bill calls for an end to the theft of U.S. intellectual property by foreign governments, including piracy and the theft of trade secrets, and for the elimination of measures that require U.S. companies to locate their intellectual property abroad in return for market access. These are strong provisions that will help U.S. manufacturing compete and sell their products around the world.

Companies from Caterpillar to Kimber Kable recognize the importance of trade and trade agreements to the future of American manufacturing. They recognize that 95 percent of the world's consumers live outside of the United States and that if we want to sell American-made products to these customers, we need strong agreements to break down barriers and level the playing field. We simply cannot do that without the TPA.

We can do better and we must do better for American manufacturers. If we

really want to support the American manufacturing industry, then we should vote today to pass this TPA legislation once and for all.

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

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

Mr. HATCH. Madam President, I wish to take a few minutes to talk about the importance of international trade to my home State of Utah and how Utahns will benefit from the passage of the TPA bill.

Despite having a relatively small population, the State of Utah is a very significant player in international trade. In 2014 alone, Utah exported more than \$12 billion in goods. That number has more than doubled over the past decade, despite the economic downturn that took place during that time.

Goods exports account for more than 11 percent of Utah's GDP. More than 50,000 Utah jobs are directly tied to goods exports, as more than 3,400 Utah-based companies export goods to countries around the world. By the way, nearly 86 percent of those exporting companies are small or medium-sized businesses.

These Utah exports include a number of key manufacturing exports, including primary metal products, computer and electronics products, chemicals, processed foods, and transportation equipment, just to mention a few.

There are a number of Utah companies that I could single out here today. As I said, there are more than 3,400 Utah-based exporters, but let me talk about one in particular—Albion Laboratories, which is based in Clearfield, UT.

Albion is a leading, global manufacturer of chelated minerals for human and plant nutritional applications. The company is incredibly innovative, owning more than 100 patents from manufacturing processes to food applications. Over the years, Albion has enjoyed strong growth in large part because of its expanded exports. Today, Albion exports to more than 100 different countries, which has allowed the company to regularly add new jobs to accommodate its increased output. As of right now, the company employs approximately 150 people. This is just one example of the many unique and innovative Utah companies that have benefited from international trade and will benefit even more from expanded access to foreign markets in the future.

Now, there has been a lot of talk about the potential benefits of our pending trade agreements with countries in the Asia-Pacific region and the European Union. As of right now, more than half of Utah's exports already go

to these two markets. Therefore, I think it is safe to say that Utah-based exporters will benefit greatly from the expanded market access they will undoubtedly see if we can get both the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership over the finish line.

Of course, without TPA, these two important trade agreements, which are among the largest and most ambitious agreements in our Nation's history, don't stand a chance. TPA gives our negotiators the tools they need to get the best deals possible. TPA gives Congress and our constituents a strong voice in the negotiating process, and, of course, TPA assures that once an agreement is reached, our country will be able to deliver on the deal.

Utahns depend on international trade. Utah's job creators, like those throughout the country, need greater access to foreign markets in order to compete. Put simply, they are not going to get that access without TPA.

So for the sake of the thousands of Utah companies that export goods around the world and the tens of thousands of Utahns whose jobs depend on those exports—and for the hundreds of thousands of companies all over this country and more—I urge my colleagues to join me one more time in supporting our TPA legislation.

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

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

(The remarks of Mr. GRASSLEY pertaining to the introduction of S. 1648 are printed in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

RECESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands in recess until 5 p.m.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 4 p.m., recessed until 5 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Ms. AYOTTE).

DEFENDING PUBLIC SAFETY EMPLOYEES' RETIREMENT ACT—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wisconsin.

JASON SIMCAKOSKI MEMORIAL OPIOID SAFETY ACT

Ms. BALDWIN. Madam President, I rise not to speak about an issue that divides this Chamber but rather one that unites us; that is, the care of those who have served and sacrificed for our Nation, America's veterans.

Today, I take great pride in the fact I have worked across the aisle to introduce bipartisan VA reform legislation, the Jason Simcakoski Memorial Opioid Safety Act. I am pleased to be joined in offering this legislation by my friend and colleague Senator CAPITO of West Virginia.

This legislation is aimed at addressing the problem of overprescribing practices at the VA and providing safer and more effective pain management services to our Nation's veterans. It is named in honor of a Wisconsin veteran, U.S. Marine veteran Jason Simcakoski.

On August 30, 2014, Jason tragically died at Wisconsin's Tomah Veterans Affairs Medical Center as a result of what was medically deemed mixed-drug toxicity. I call this a failure to serve someone who has faithfully served our country.

At the time of his death at the VA, Jason was on 14 different prescription drugs. Yet this Marine's heartbreaking story is just one example of the over-prescribing problem at the VA.

After two, decade-long, wars, a large number of our servicemembers are coming home with the damage of combat, and our veterans and their families are facing the difficult challenge of physical injuries, PTSD, and other mental illnesses.

Unfortunately, I believe the VA's overreliance on powerful and highly addicting opioids has resulted in getting our veterans hooked rather than getting them help. Jason's story is a tragic example of the devastation caused by addiction—addiction whose roots are, regrettably, at the VA.

To me, overprescription of opioids at the VA is a root problem, and it is growing into a weed—a weed of addiction whose impact is being felt beyond the walls of VA facilities. The ripples are indeed being felt across America in the communities we work for every day in our Nation's Capital.

The families whom we have a responsibility to represent—families of those who have bravely served our country—are struggling with the loss of a son or a daughter, a father or a mother, a sister or a brother to addiction whose root is planted within the VA system. It is our job to make sure they do not feel alone, and I believe we have a shared responsibility to do everything we can to pull out this weed by its roots.

Jason's family is in Washington today, and I am so honored to have worked with them and others in putting these reforms together to provide the VA with the tools it needs to help prevent this type of tragedy from occurring to other veterans and their families.

I what to thank the Simcakoski family and let them know I have a tremendous amount of respect for the courage they have shown in telling theirs and Jason's story and working to make a difference in the lives of other veterans and their families.

Their story is one of a sacred trust we must have with our veterans and their families. It is a story of how that trust has been broken, and it is a tragic story of loss.

My message to my colleagues comes from Jason's widow Heather, who has said:

When I look back at the past, I want to know we made a difference. I want to believe we have leaders in our country who care. I want to inspire others to never give up because change is possible.

Her words have inspired me, and it is my hope they will inspire my colleagues to join us in taking action. I hope I speak for all of us when I say there is no room for politics when it comes to ensuring that our Nation's veterans receive the timely, safe, and highest quality care that they have earned.

Our legislation takes steps to give veterans and their families a stronger voice in their care by strengthening opioid prescribing guidelines and other measures. It also works to improve coordination and communication throughout the VA and puts in place stronger oversight and accountability for the quality of care we are providing our veterans.

Our goal is simple: put these bipartisan reforms in place to prevent tragedies like Jason's from occurring to other veterans and their families.

I wish to thank and recognize Senators BLUMENTHAL, BROWN, HIRONO, JOHNSON, KAINE, MANCHIN, MARKEY, MORAN, MURRAY, SANDERS, and TESTER for joining Senator CAPITO and me, signing on as original cosponsors of this bipartisan effort. I also wish to thank the many veterans service organizations and medical professionals for their invaluable support, insight, and input as we crafted this legislation.

Today, I ask the rest of my colleagues to join us in working to confront the problems of overprescribing practices at the VA and to provide more safe and effective pain management services to our Nation's veterans.

Let us work together to fix what has been broken and restore that sacred trust with our veterans and their families. Let us work together to give our veterans and their families a voice—a voice that is heard, respected, and recognized. Let us be inspired by that voice to take bipartisan action on solutions to prevent these problems and tragedies from ever happening again and to provide our veterans and their families with the care they have earned and the care they deserve.

Madam President, I yield time to my coauthor on this bill Senator CAPITO.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from West Virginia.

Mrs. CAPITO. Madam President, I come here before you today, joined by