

the worthiness and the necessity of this program, which will now go forward.

I yield the floor and 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. CRAPO. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mr. CRAPO. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

Under the previous order, the question occurs on agreeing to amendment No. 1 offered by the Senator from Massachusetts, Ms. WARREN.

The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from West Virginia (Mrs. CAPITO).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from California (Mrs. BOXER) and the Senator from Nevada (Mr. REID) are necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HOEVEN). Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 31, nays 66, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 1 Leg.]

YEAS—31

Baldwin	Hirono	Sanders
Blumenthal	Kaine	Schatz
Booker	Leahy	Schumer
Brown	Markey	Shaheen
Cantwell	Menendez	Udall
Cardin	Merkley	Warner
Coons	Mikulski	Warren
Durbin	Murphy	Whitehouse
Feinstein	Murray	Wyden
Franken	Nelson	
Gillibrand	Reed	

NAYS—66

Alexander	Fischer	Moran
Ayotte	Flake	Murkowski
Barrasso	Gardner	Paul
Bennet	Graham	Perdue
Blunt	Grassley	Peters
Boozman	Hatch	Portman
Burr	Heinrich	Risch
Carper	Heitkamp	Roberts
Casey	Heller	Rounds
Cassidy	Hoeven	Rubio
Coats	Inhofe	Sasse
Cochran	Isakson	Scott
Collins	Johnson	Sessions
Corker	King	Shelby
Cornyn	Kirk	Stabenow
Cotton	Klobuchar	Sullivan
Crapo	Lankford	Tester
Cruz	Lee	Thune
Daines	Manchin	Tillis
Donnelly	McCain	Toomey
Enzi	McCaskill	Vitter
Ernst	McConnell	Whitehouse

NOT VOTING—3

Boxer	Capito	Reid
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The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order requiring 60 votes for the adoption of the amendment, the amendment is rejected.

The bill was ordered to a third reading and was read the third time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the bill having been read the third time the question is, Shall the bill pass?

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There is a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from West Virginia (Mrs. CAPITO).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from California (Mrs. BOXER) and the Senator from Nevada (Mr. REID) are necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 93, nays 4, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 2 Leg.]

YEAS—93

Alexander	Flake	Murkowski
Ayotte	Franken	Murphy
Baldwin	Gardner	Murray
Barrasso	Gillibrand	Nelson
Bennet	Graham	Paul
Blumenthal	Grassley	Perdue
Blunt	Hatch	Peters
Booker	Heinrich	Portman
Boozman	Heitkamp	Reed
Brown	Heller	Risch
Burr	Hirono	Roberts
Cardin	Hoeven	Rounds
Carper	Inhofe	Sasse
Casey	Isakson	Schatz
Cassidy	Johnson	Schumer
Coats	Kaine	Scott
Cochran	King	Sessions
Collins	Kirk	Shahleen
Coons	Coons	Klobuchar
Corker	Lankford	Shelby
Cornyn	Leahy	Stabenow
Cotton	Cotton	Sullivan
Crapo	Crapo	Tester
Cruz	Cruz	Thune
Daines	Manchin	Tillis
Donnelly	McCain	Toomey
Enzi	McCaskill	Vitter
Ernst	McConnell	Whitehouse

NAYS—4

Cantwell	Sanders
Rubio	Warren

NOT VOTING—3

Boxer	Capito	Reid
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The PRESIDING OFFICER. The 60-vote threshold having been achieved, the bill (H.R. 26) is passed.

Mr. McCONNELL. I move to reconsider the vote.

Mr. DURBIN. I move to lay that motion on the table.

The motion to lay on the table was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

KEYSTONE XL PIPELINE ACT— MOTION TO PROCEED—Continued

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that at 2 p.m. on Monday, January 12, the motion to proceed to the consideration of S. 1, a bill to approve the Keystone Pipeline, be agreed to, and that Senator MURKOWSKI be recognized to offer a sub-

stitute amendment that is the text of the committee-reported bill.

Before the Chair rules, for the information of all Senators, it is the intention of the chairman and the leadership on this side of the aisle to ask that the two bill managers or their designees offer amendments in an alternating fashion to allow for an open amendment process.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, what is the pending business?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The motion to proceed to S. 1.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. McCONNELL. I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The closure motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the pending motion to proceed to S. 1, a bill to approve the Keystone XL Pipeline.

Mitch McConnell, Lisa Murkowski, Chuck Grassley, Richard Burr, Tim Scott, John Boozman, Ron Johnson, Lindsey Graham, James Lankford, James M. Inhofe, Dean Heller, Rand Paul, Kelly Ayotte, Bill Cassidy, John Cornyn, David Vitter, John Hoeven.

Mr. McCONNELL. I ask unanimous consent that, notwithstanding the provisions of rule XXII, the mandatory quorum be waived and the vote on the motion to invoke cloture occur at 5:30 p.m. on Monday, January 12.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. McCONNELL. Now, Mr. President, we had hoped to begin working on the bipartisan Keystone jobs and infrastructure bill today. We had hoped to continue offering amendments tomorrow. Unfortunately, some of our colleagues across the aisle objected to proceeding to this bipartisan legislation so that forces a few changes to the schedule.

First, it means we will have to file cloture on the motion to proceed, which I just did; and then, as a result, it means under the rules of the Senate we won't be able to begin offering amendments until next week.

Frankly, it is unfortunate. Many Senators on both sides had hoped to use tomorrow to work on the bill, and I did as well. But we will work through this because we are determined to get bipartisan jobs legislation on the President's desk as soon as we can.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I know we are all concerned right now with the progress that is going to be made on the pipeline, and I would like to make a few comments about it.

I have three charts. Let us look at this one from Oklahoma. I want to remind everyone that we had a visitor to the State of Oklahoma—the only time, I understand, the President has been in Oklahoma. President Obama came to Cushing, OK.

Let me explain where Cushing, OK, is. It is in the central part of the State, and it is the hub of all the pipelines—all the way from Canada down to New Mexico. Of course this is the pipeline in question here that we have been talking about over and over now for months and months and months, and it is one we understand just how great it would be. So the President, knowing this is very popular—and this trip was, in fact, actually before the election—made a trip to Oklahoma and talked about how good—well, I will actually read the quote. Keep in mind this was in Cushing, OK, right in the middle of the hub of the pipelines going through. The President said he was directing his administration “to make this project a priority, to go ahead and get it done.”

That sounded real good. The problem was everyone in Oklahoma knew he wasn’t telling the truth. I don’t like to stand here and use the “L” word, because nothing really gets done by it, but he has done everything since that time to destroy the pipeline.

The President was making the statement then that he was not going to stand in the way of furthering the production of this pipeline to go down south through Texas. Well, there is good reason for that, because he couldn’t do anything about it. It doesn’t go across any international borders. But where he has blocked this is where he can do so, because it crosses the international border between Canada and the United States.

I want to mention that there is a person who has been very active in the political realm. His name is Tom Steyer. He has been very much involved. Quite frankly, I don’t object to people who are right forward and honest about what their intentions are. This is the man—Tom Steyer, who is a billionaire—and he has had several meetings and said that he was going to put up \$50 million of his own money and raise an additional \$50 million—that is \$100 million—to put in races in the coming election, meaning this last November.

It is my understanding that, in the final analysis, he wasn’t able to raise the extra money, but of his own money—and these are his words, not mine—he put in \$70 million. Mr. Steyer said:

It is true we expect to be heavily involved in the midterm elections . . . we are looking at a bunch of . . . races . . . My guess is that we’ll end up being involved in 8 or even more races.

So we are talking about some \$70 million that was going to be involved, and I would say that wasn’t a real good investment because he didn’t win any of those 8 races and actually netted out a loss of 9 races.

So again, he has a stated goal to try to do two things with his influence and his money. Again, I don’t criticize him for this. He believes in his cause. His two causes are No. 1, to try to stop any further development on Federal land—in other words, to try to do what he can with some of the suggested pollution and all these things that are supposed to go with it—and another thing is to stop the pipeline.

Again, he was the one who made the statement. He also has been very influential in this administration. It has been reported—this was about 2 weeks ago—that he had visited the Obama White House some 14 times, which led a member of the watchdog group Public Citizen to say: “Tom Steyer has not just got the ear of the President, but he clearly has the President’s attention.”

Now, these White House meetings were often with President Obama’s counselor and chief environmental adviser John Podesta. We all know John Podesta. We have known his background for a long time. Personally, I have known him. He has lobbied for Mr. Steyer to be the U.S. Secretary of Energy, saying, “I think he would be a fabulous choice for energy secretary, and I’ve let my friends in the administration know that.” The reports also show that Mr. Steyer and Mr. Podesta have met with George Soros, one of the liberal billionaires.

So this effort is going on, and I think it is necessary to remind the American people because it has probably been about 6 months since anyone has even talked about some of the obstacles we can look forward to that are in the way of getting the things done that need to be done.

The President tries to downplay the job numbers. We talk about the 42,000 jobs. The President said a couple days ago: Wait, those are just temporary jobs. Well, all jobs are temporary, but these jobs will be there for a number of years and will lead to others.

The President tries to downplay the numbers by using rhetoric that has earned his statements multiple Pinocchios. The Washington Post has a program where they check the facts, and several times he has been the recipient of these Pinocchio awards.

Unfortunately, his attitude toward construction and manufacturing jobs is one that would stop jobs for hard-working Americans.

So I ask my colleagues on both sides of the aisle—and this is very significant. We are talking about jobs. We are talking about important jobs. We are

talking about high-paying jobs. I am a little biased because in Cushing, OK, we are the hub of these pipelines going through America. So what is going to positively affect our economy nationwide will probably be even more in my State of Oklahoma.

The President has done a lot of talking about the transportation infrastructure. Of course, this pipeline is part of it. We think about transportation infrastructure as roads, highways, and bridges. I applaud every time I hear him saying we need to do something about our transportation infrastructure. Unfortunately, it is always just words. He never follows through. He had a program on two different occasions that was going to be very ambitious and was going to start constructing new highways. He was very specific about where they were going to go. But then that was the end of it. He got the word out there, and everyone heard about it and agreed that he must be for highways, but then he forgot about it.

I am pretty biased here because I chair the Environment and Public Works Committee that deals with all the infrastructure. I would say this: We are embarking on a very ambitious transportation reauthorization bill, and it is one that is going to include lots of modes of transportation. Of course, it would all be a part of this pipeline and the benefits that are coming through it. So I would say he does a lot of talking about that, but we are going to really have to get down and do it.

I often wonder what could have happened 6 years ago. Just to refresh our memories, the first thing this President did was his \$825 billion stimulus bill. How better could you stimulate the economy than having an ambitious transportation bill? I remember my colleague on the other side of the aisle, BARBARA BOXER, and I offered amendments on this amount. I, of course, vigorously opposed the \$825 billion—that was a checkbook given to the President in the opening months of his office. But the fact was that it was going to pass, and we knew they had the votes to pass it right down party lines—which it did—and then he was going to be in a position to say: We are now going to be doing these things. So BARBARA BOXER and I thought, well, let’s get a percentage. I think our amendment was 8 percent would be reserved—a modest amount—for highways. If we really want to stimulate the economy, there is no better way to do it than that way.

That is kind of a background of what has been happening.

I really believe, now that we have a majority, that we are going to get busy and try to get this done and will be successful in doing it. We have a lot of critical infrastructure projects. This is supported by the chamber of commerce and by labor unions. Almost everyone out there is in support of this.

Yesterday, I think it was, in one of the committee hearings—I wanted to

make sure this was properly answered in the committee hearing because it was in a committee that I am not on, the energy committee.

One of my good friends on the Democratic side of the aisle made the statement: We are very proud of the President because our production has dramatically increased during the 6 years he has been President of the United States.

Yes, that is true, but it has been in spite of the President. Let me give a couple statistics that people are not aware of. In the shale revolution taking place in this country, we have increased, during that period of time, our production—we are really talking about shale production—by 61 percent. So 61 percent in 5 years. That is what it has been. But all 61 percent of that has been on private and State land. On Federal land—over which President Obama has jurisdiction and can stop it—while the rest has increased by 61 percent, it has decreased by 6 percent.

I think we need to make sure to remind people because we don't want the public thinking that somehow the President is not involved in a war on fossil fuels. He is definitely involved in a war on fossil fuels.

Let me mention one other thing about the shale revolution. Because of the Marcellus, what is happening back East—people have always historically thought about the West and the State of Oklahoma as being kind of where all the oil is and where the production is. That really was true for a long period of time, but with the Marcellus coming in, Pennsylvania, New York—the Northeast has been a heavy production area. In fact, I have heard figures that in Pennsylvania, the second largest employer right now is people involved in the shale production that is taking place there. I don't know that it is the second largest, but that has not yet been refuted.

So very important things are happening there, but the key to making all of this happen is the pipeline. We know that eventually we are going to be there, but there has already been a veto threat. We are going to pass a bill. I know we are going to pass a bill. It is going to pass the House and the Senate. The President will probably veto it. He said he would. I am inclined to think that a lot of my friends on the Democratic side are going to stop and think “Wait a minute, this is good for everyone,” and there will be a bunch of people overriding a veto. I really believe something like that is going to happen, this is so significant.

People have said: The reason we don't want this is because it is dirty. This is up in Alberta, Canada. This is going to affect the environment.

First of all, it won't. People understand that is just not a true statement. But if it were true, it is something that is ridiculous because China is already making their deal. It has been made public that China wants to have transportation across Canada that would go

to the west coast and be able to be sent over to China. If that should happen, in terms of the pollution, since they don't have any safeguards over there, that would result in increasing, not decreasing, any pollution that would be associated with this production.

I know a lot of people want to talk about this. To give an idea of what all is there in moving this production around, this is a very significant chart because it shows what is out there today and what can be produced. A minute ago I talked about the Northeast. That is the Marcellus we are talking about. It is a huge benefit out there. Yet a lot of the people who represent that part of America are not even aware that this is not just the Western United States. Just look at that, and we can see.

We have an opportunity here. I feel very strongly that our friends up there with the pipeline coming down—everyone is going to benefit. We have seen the charts. Certainly the Presiding Officer has many times pulled out the charts that show the great benefits that are going to be there for the entire country, along with our rapid path to be totally independent of any other country in our ability to produce our own energy.

This is a win-win situation. We are eventually going to get it but the sooner the better. I applaud the Chair and others involved in the legislation we are going to be considering.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, we have begun the new year of the 114th Congress with a Republican majority and a fresh commitment to get Congress working again.

Overwhelmingly, Americans supported the pro-growth ideas of the Republican Party in the polls in the November election, sending a strong message about their frustration with the gridlock we have experienced in the Democratic-led Senate.

So it is time to get to work, time to return to regular order and to debate openly legislation, to move bills through committee, to allow Members on both sides of the aisle to offer amendments, and to get the Senate back on track passing bills the way it should be. The American people deserve a Senate that works, and the new Republican majority intends to deliver.

That is why it is so disappointing that President Obama would threaten to veto the very first bill Republicans plan to bring to the Senate floor for a vote—a bipartisan vote to authorize the Keystone XL Pipeline, a bill that

was introduced here in the Senate with 60 cosponsors.

The Keystone XL Pipeline enjoys widespread public support, and that is not surprising. Polls have demonstrated that the American people are concerned about jobs and the economy, and they want to get the country working again and to strengthen our energy independence. The Keystone XL Pipeline will help do just that. Yet President Obama would rather hold the economy hostage to the far left wing of his party than put American workers first. His war on energy runs counter to what this country needs—jobs and the affordable energy that will support them.

I have shared time and time again on the Senate floor what President Obama's own State Department has said about the project. The State Department has concluded the pipeline will not only support 42,000 jobs during construction, but it will do so without significant impact on the environment—and, I might add, without spending a cent of taxpayer money.

The Keystone XL Pipeline has been stuck in limbo for over 6 years and has become more than just an energy issue. In my own State of South Dakota, rail backlogs have caused tremendous delays for farmers trying to get their harvests to market. The Keystone XL Pipeline will help alleviate this backlog by taking 100,000 barrels of Montana and North Dakota oil off the rails, freeing up nearly two unit-trains per day of capacity that is sorely needed by other rail shippers.

The pipeline will also bring tax revenue to South Dakota. The State Department estimates that in my home State of South Dakota alone, the construction of the pipeline will support 3,000 to 4,000 jobs during construction and generate well over \$100 million in earnings. It will bring more than \$20 million in annual property taxes to South Dakota counties. Places like Jones County, where I grew up, could greatly benefit by having this added tax revenue for their schools.

The Keystone XL Pipeline will also decrease our reliance on oil from dangerous countries such as Venezuela. Yet President Obama and some Democrats continue to downplay all these benefits. They say the jobs are mostly temporary. Well, construction jobs are temporary by nature, but that doesn't mean they don't matter. Rather, it means we need to keep new projects such as Keystone XL coming to spur growth and to develop new infrastructure. By shutting down what would be a routine energy infrastructure project, President Obama is creating a difficult environment for future development and projects.

The far left wing of the President's party claim the pipeline will increase greenhouse gases, but reports from the

President's own State Department undermine his claim. In its final supplemental environmental impact statement, the President's State Department noted that the Keystone XL Pipeline is "unlikely to significantly impact the rate of extraction in the oil sands or the continued demand for heavy crude oil at refineries in the United States."

In other words, the emissions associated with the oil sands extractions will not change whether or not the pipeline is built. While oil prices may impact the production rate of oil sands, the State Department also found that "the dominant drivers of oil sands development are more global than any single infrastructure project" and that "the industry's rate of expansion should not be conflated with the more limited effects of individual pipelines." And mind you, this is again from one of the five exhaustive reports we have seen from the State Department about this project.

In fact, the State Department's final environmental impact statement also compared the operational greenhouse emissions that would result from the pipeline to those that would result from various transportation alternatives such as rail, rail and pipeline, and rail and tanker. The report found that the annual emissions from these alternative transportation modes would be anywhere from 28 percent to 42 percent greater than if the oil were shipped through the pipeline. Plus, a pipeline is safer than truck or rail.

The American people have been clear on their feelings about this project. Poll after poll has shown their strong support for it. Republicans support the pipeline, Democrats in both Houses of Congress support the pipeline, and unions support the pipeline. The only people who seem to oppose it are President Obama and members of the far leftwing of the Democratic Party.

After the Senate passes the bill, it will have one final hurdle to clear—the President of the United States. I very much hope he will reconsider his veto threat and listen to the voices of American workers and the bipartisan majority in both Houses of Congress.

If the pipeline's economic benefits, the support of the American people, and five successful environmental reviews have not yet convinced the President to approve this project, I am pretty skeptical that he ever will approve it, but I hope I am wrong.

I hope even more Democrats here in the Senate will join us and send a message about their readiness to work with Republicans in this 114th Congress.

My colleagues can help show the American people that Congress has heard their demands for change in Washington and that their economic priorities will be addressed.

I am sorry American workers have had to wait years for this project, but I am hopeful we can resolve this issue once and for all. The new Republican

Senate majority is about creating jobs and economic opportunities for the American people, and it starts right here, right now with the Keystone XL Pipeline.

We hope Democrats and the President will join us.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority whip.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, even during moments of intense polarization here in Washington, especially over the past 6 years, it is really kind of refreshing to find a topic—maybe a handful of topics—on which there appears to be bipartisan consensus, and that includes the topic *du jour*, the Keystone XL Pipeline. I wish to share a few reasons why I believe that is the case.

First, the Keystone XL Pipeline will be good for our economy, and it will be good because it will create jobs. I know there is some hairsplitting out there. Some people say: Well, these are not really good jobs; they are only temporary jobs or some such thing. But the truth is—I will tell you what the President's own administration said about that.

The State Department—President Obama's State Department—said that roughly 42,000 American jobs would be created directly and indirectly from the construction of the Keystone XL Pipeline.

Now, it is true that some of these would be temporary construction positions, but by their nature, construction positions are such that you go to work on one job, finish that job, and move on to the next job. If the President has a problem with that, I am not sure what he or anybody else can do about it. There are also other permanent jobs that will be created by this Keystone XL Pipeline related to refining and transporting this oil, and many of them will be in Texas.

As a matter of fact, this pipeline—which will go from Canada into North Dakota and across the United States—will end in southeast Texas, where we have most of our refining capacity here in the United States. It will then be refined into gasoline and other types of fuel.

By the way, one of the blessings of having a plentiful supply of oil as a result of what has happened here in the United States is lower gasoline prices. Boy, those came just in time for the Christmas holidays and put money in people's pockets. It was like a pay raise for hard-working American taxpayers.

The President has also tried to downplay the job-creation impact of the Keystone XL Pipeline by saying it would have a "nominal" impact on consumers and the Nation. I am curious. At a time when the national labor participation rate is hovering at its lowest point in three decades and we are coming off of the financial crisis that we have had since 2008—which has finally, after all of these years, recovered many of the lost jobs that were lost as result of that crisis—does the

President truly feel that any additional jobs—especially 42,000 additional jobs—are just nominal and not worth the candle? Well, for those people who don't work and are now able to find work, those jobs are not nominal. For the people who are working part time and want to work full time, those jobs will not be nominal. When we need to grow the economy so we create more opportunity for more hard-working taxpayers, no job, in my view, should be deprecated as just a nominal job and not worth having. That is what the President is saying.

I would also ask that the President visit the Texas leg of this pipeline. As a matter of fact, the President did go to Cushing, OK. The irony of that is, once again, the President seems to be taking credit for something he didn't have anything to do with because this domestic portion of the pipeline from Cushing, OK, down to southeast Texas didn't require his approval at all. But what does he do? He holds a press conference there. It is just like the President taking credit for this renaissance of American energy. He has had absolutely nothing to do with it. All of that has happened as a result of private investment on private lands and not on public lands.

As a matter of fact, the Federal Government continues to make it harder and harder to produce more American energy, which, again, according to the laws of supply and demand, as we have seen, will bring down gasoline prices for American consumers. At a time when wages have been stagnant for so long as a result of the policies of this administration, why wouldn't we do something to put more money into the pockets of hard-working American families? Why wouldn't we do that?

Well, I would ask the President to visit the Texas leg of the pipeline, which was constructed and went operational about a year ago this month and is already transporting about 400,000 barrels of oil a day to gulf coast refineries. Of course, again, this does not require his approval, but that didn't stop him from claiming credit for it. I think he would find it edifying and educational to go there.

In Texas alone more than 4,800 jobs were created to construct that gulf coast portion of the pipeline. That includes heavy equipment operators, welders, laborers, transportation operators, and supervisory personnel. When our friends across the aisle spend so much time and effort trying to argue for a minimum wage increase, they turn around at the same time and deny hard-working Americans from earning these high-paying wages and these high-paying jobs.

I was reading an article today about a welder in Texas who went to school to learn how to be a welder. Now, it was not a 4-year liberal arts education such as many of us have had. He didn't go to law school or medical school, but he is earning \$140,000 a year as a welder. Those are good jobs. Those are the

kinds of jobs we ought to encourage, and they are the kinds of jobs that the Keystone XL Pipeline would help pay for.

Well, perhaps these kinds of jobs don't count in the President's book because they are not funded by the taxpayer. In other words, they are not a result of stimulus funds. The President seems to believe that the only jobs worth having are those that are paid for by borrowing money, increasing the debt, and having the Federal Government pay for them. We have recently been down that road once before when we had the nearly \$1 trillion stimulus package. Remember that? The President said these were shovel-ready jobs.

I remember at the time Speaker PELOSI said they were targeted, temporary, and timely, I think it was. It was the three t's. The President came back later on—when the stimulus did not have the desired effect and the \$1 trillion of borrowed money, including interest, didn't create the kind of economic recovery he had hoped for—and said: Well, I guess shovel ready didn't really mean shovel ready, as if it were a joke.

Well, this Keystone XL Pipeline is paid for as a result of private investment and not as a result of tax dollars—your money and my money going into this pipeline. The Texas portion of the pipeline was a \$2.3 billion private sector investment. The taxpayer funded infrastructure project seemed to be the only kind of investment the President actually wants to see and encourage. There are many examples, and perhaps the most notorious of which was Solyndra, where the Federal taxpayer was asked to sink a bunch of money into a project that basically flopped because there was no market for what they were making. It was not economically viable. But that is the kind of investment the President wants to encourage while discouraging private investment that creates jobs.

Now, in Texas we are proud of that portion of the Keystone XL Pipeline, and like so much of what makes my State successful, it was not built by the government. I am proud of the fact that my State is doing better than the rest of the country. I wish the rest of the country would do as well when it comes to job creation and opportunity because I worry, as I think many parents worry, that we are somehow losing the hope and the aspiration for the American dream. When young men and women graduate from college and can't find jobs so they end up living with their parents, we here in Washington say, that is OK, because we will let your parents keep you on their health insurance coverage until you are 26, as if that is supposed to be some kind of answer to their inability to find work commensurate with their education and training.

Well, this is not a government solution. Of course, we all remember the President notoriously said to the private sector: Well, you didn't build that.

That certainly doesn't apply here because the private sector did build the Texas portion, and what we would like to do is complete the Canadian-U.S. portion so we can get even more of this oil down to Texas and refine it into gasoline so it is available to consumers here in the United States.

The President acts as though if we don't complete this pipeline, this oil is not going to be produced. That is malarkey. We know that China is starved for natural resources, and Canada is not just going to sit on this valuable natural resource. They are going to build a pipeline to the Pacific Ocean, put it on a tanker, and send it to China or other countries that need those natural resources.

Well, I am beginning to think the one reason why the Texas leg of the Keystone XL Pipeline was so successful is because the Federal Government didn't have anything to do with it. That seems to be the test. If the Federal Government has something to do with it, it ends up not delivering as promised. But if the private sector does it, it has the potential of living up to expectations.

Well, we all know the President has continued to delay making a final decision on the Keystone XL Pipeline. I know last year the distinguished Presiding Officer sponsored the bill in the House that approved the Keystone XL Pipeline. Over here in the Senate, I remember the Senator from Louisiana, Ms. Landrieu, was urging—in almost desperate terms—that Senator HARRY REID allow a vote on the Keystone XL Pipeline after denying it for many months, even years.

Well, we know what happened. It failed because very few Democrats on that side of the aisle decided to support the Keystone XL Pipeline. Perhaps it was because even at that time the President said he was undecided whether to sign it or to veto it. There have been times when the President has said—of course, he says lots of things, but I have learned one thing around Washington, DC: We can't just listen to what people say, we have to watch what they do. The President indicated, with the start of this new Congress following the November 4 election, that he was looking forward to working with the new Congress in a constructive way. I just have to ask you, Mr. President: Is it constructive to issue a veto threat on a piece of legislation before it is even voted out of the energy committee and isn't even on the floor for consideration by the Senate?

The majority leader, Senator McCANNELL, the senior Senator from Kentucky, has said we are going to have an open amendment process, a procedure many of our colleagues on the other side of the aisle, and actually many on this side of the aisle, haven't experienced under the former majority leader—an open amendment process. I anticipate there are going to be a number of amendments offered, some of which will succeed and some of which will not

succeed. I don't know anybody who can tell us right now exactly how this bill will leave the Senate, although I am confident it will pass since there are at least 63 Senators, on a bipartisan basis, who said they will vote for it. As we know, 60 is the magic number in the Senate, so we have a pretty good idea it will pass. But we don't know what other measures will be attached to it, some of which may command more Democratic votes, some of which may make the President more interested in taking another look at this legislation. So to prematurely issue a veto threat before the Keystone XL Pipeline is even voted out of committee, much less comes to the Senate floor, does not strike me as wanting to work with the Congress; just the opposite.

I say enough is enough. That is what we heard from the voters on November 4: Enough is enough. They are sick and tired of the dysfunction in Washington, DC. I heard that story daily back in Texas and around the country as I traveled: Enough is enough. We want Congress to function. We want our elected representatives to work together to find solutions to the problems facing our country, and the No. 1 problem is not enough jobs. There are not enough good jobs for hard-working Americans.

So now the President has, in spite of this, said: I am not going to sign that legislation once it reaches my desk. He said this before the Senate has even acted on it. It is just breathtaking. Is that within the President's authority under the Constitution? Yes, it is. The President can either sign legislation or he can veto legislation. The Constitution gives him that authority. But I think the President ought to have to explain to the American people his reasons for saying he will not sign this legislation. Again, this is the same project his own State Department said would create 42,000 jobs, again at a time when the percentage of people in the workforce is at a 30-year low. While unemployment is coming down, unfortunately a lot of it has to do with the fact that people are not looking for work and have dropped out of the workforce. They have given up. Hopefully, in spite of the Federal Government—and I say it is in spite of the Federal Government—the economy seems to be strong enough to be growing, finally, but we need to continue to have our economy grow. We need to continue to let this American economy create jobs for hard-working American taxpayers.

I say in closing that I hope the President makes his decision not wearing ideological blinders, not just listening to the hard left base of the Democratic Party that thinks we can somehow survive and prosper with only wind turbines and solar panels. By the way, Texas actually produces more electricity on wind energy than any other State in the Nation. We do believe in an "all of the above" policy. The President says he does but apparently does

not, at least his actions would so indicate.

So we are missing out on a golden opportunity to further enhance North American energy security with one of our strongest allies, and that is another very important reason for this. Why in the world would we continue to import oil from Saudi Arabia and other countries in the Middle East that have their own problems, in an unstable region of the world, when we could import that oil from our best ally and next-door neighbor, Canada, and in a way that benefits our economy and creates jobs.

I believe what the American people said on November 4 is they want effective, efficient, and accountable government and one that benefits all hard-working Americans and especially hard-working American taxpayers.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

TRIBUTE TO JEANNE ATKINS

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, I rise to recognize Jeanne Atkins, my Oregon State director, who is retiring from team Merkley this month. Jeanne is a long-serving member of my team, and she is an outstanding public servant, an individual who has dedicated her life to making the world a better place.

Jeanne Atkins and I first began working together a decade ago after I took up the post of Democratic leader in the Oregon State House. It was a challenging but exciting time as my leadership team worked to build our policy agenda and get our caucus operations up to speed. A key component of that effort, of course, was to hire a superb caucus director. Thus, it came to pass that four members of my leadership team were seated in the Old Wives' Tale restaurant brainstorming over candidates for the position. That group consisted, in addition to myself, of Diane Rosenbaum, who is now majority leader of the Oregon Senate; Dave Hunt, who became majority leader of the house and then speaker of the Oregon House; and Brad Avakian, who is now Oregon's labor commissioner. As we were brainstorming, Diane spoke up and said: I know someone who would be tremendous, but I am sure she would never take the position. Dave Hunt encouraged Diane to put the name forward anyway, and when Diane said the person is Jeanne Atkins, Brad Avakian responded: Jeanne? I know her, and she would be great.

We immediately called Jeanne, and by that evening I was sitting in her living room attempting to persuade her that she would be just the right person for the position and that, moreover, she would enjoy the challenge. Fortunately for us, Jeanne did take the position, and thus began a decade of close collaboration.

The leadership, conviction, and hard work Jeanne Atkins brought to our team allowed us to make a big impact as the minority party during the legislature and an even bigger impact when

we won the majority 2 years later. At that point I became speaker of the Oregon House and Jeanne became my chief of staff.

Few legislative sessions in Oregon history have seen the passage of as many major bills as that 2007 session, and no individual was more important to the success of that session than Jeanne Atkins.

We passed domestic partnerships and a broad-based civil rights bill that outlawed discrimination against LGBT Oregonians in employment, in housing, and in public accommodations.

We passed legislation setting ambitious renewable energy standards and making Oregon a national leader in the transition to green energy. We cracked down on predatory payday lenders that were bankrupting our working families. We passed the Access to Birth Control Act requiring insurance plans in Oregon to cover contraceptives just as they do other medication, a law that is now helping to shield Oregon women from the misguided Hobby Lobby decision.

Through this all, we worked across the aisle, encouraging bipartisan cooperation, and were able to put together a session that a major newspaper, *The Oregonian*, deemed the most productive in a generation.

After I was elected to the U.S. Senate and took that office in January of 2009, Jeanne stayed on in the Oregon House as chief of staff to the new speaker, Dave Hunt, who had helped to hire her 6 years earlier. In that role, Jeanne played a pivotal role in expanding health care to Oregon children. As Dave relates, after Oregonians rejected a ballot measure in 2008 that would have raised the cigarette tax to expand health care to low-income children, the Oregon Legislature was seeking an alternative strategy to fund that expansion. Jeanne was the key staff member who brought a contentious dialogue among legislators to a compromise funding strategy that was successfully passed into law. That achievement brought health care to an additional 90,000 children per year. Well done, Jeanne. That was an extraordinary accomplishment.

After the completion of that Oregon legislative session, I was hoping I would have the opportunity to bring Jeanne back onto team Merkley. The stars aligned and she became my Oregon State director in August of 2009.

Oregon's House loss was the U.S. Senate's gain. In her more than 5 years as State director, Jeanne has overseen hundreds of townhalls, thousands of meetings, and has made sure the millions of Americans who call Oregon home have a voice in the U.S. Senate. I wrote the day I hired her as Oregon State director that "Jeanne is greatly respected by Oregonians of all political stripes for her hard work and her dedication to this State." Today, that statement is even more true than 5 years ago.

Jeanne is known across the State as an honest broker who works hard to

bring the voices of all Oregonians into our office. She is a tough advocate for our State and has never hesitated to stand up for what she thinks is right and what she thinks is best for Oregon.

Of course, over the last 5 years, we have also had the chance to get into a few adventures—and a few misadventures—traveling around the State. On one memorable townhall swing, we were on our way between rural townhalls when I suggested an impromptu revision of our route. I thought it would be interesting to take a shortcut via a minor semipaved road. That road turned out to have been abandoned so long ago that after a few miles it was no longer even visible. So there we were traveling off-road in a van that was not designed for off-road navigation, wondering if we were choosing the right path through the field or between the trees. To make matters worse, we quickly lost cell phone communication and couldn't alert the advance team that we were going to be late to the townhall. In fact, we were wondering whether we might be out there in the woods for a night or two as we worked to walk our way out should we break an axle or blow a tire.

Through this all, though I could tell Jeanne's blood pressure and distress were elevating, she displayed the same unflappable demeanor that made her so effective in contentious policy dialogues with overwrought legislators. In that moment and in so many others, Jeanne was grace under pressure personified.

Jeanne is not someone who got into politics to be important or powerful. She got into policy and politics because she believed in public service and she believed that each person has the power to make a difference. It is one of the attributes I most value about having her on my team. It is an attribute that has allowed her to make a huge impact in many of the different positions she has held.

Today, as Jeanne looks forward to the next chapter of her life in retirement, it seems only appropriate to reflect back and look at the huge difference Jeanne has made not just in our office but over the course of her career. She has been a longtime advocate for women's rights. This comes from her childhood growing up in Bremerton, WA, in the 1960s. Her own experiences also shaped Jeanne's steadfast determination for equality.

She told me a story about her first job out of college as a bank teller in Seattle, WA. During that first job, the women in the bank, regardless of their position, were required to take turns making lunch for the entire bank every Friday. Jeanne worked hard to shine at this task, just as she worked hard to shine at all her other tasks, but she knew it was wrong that all the women in the office were treated differently than the men, and she carried her passion for that throughout her career.

Jeanne went to work for the Women's Equity Action League here in

Washington, DC, and when she and her husband John went back to Oregon she worked for the Oregon Women's Rights Coalition, the United Way of the Columbia/Willamette, Planned Parenthood of the Columbia Willamette, and then as manager of the Women's and Reproductive Health Section of the Department of Human Services. Her long and storied career has been powerfully connected to equality and an unshakable commitment to women's health.

Along the way, Jeanne also engaged in electoral politics. She ran for the Oregon house twice in the early 1990s, narrowly losing against a well-established incumbent in her second race. As Brad Avakian relates, in the process, she restored door-to-door canvassing and relationship building in Washington County as a political art form.

Jeanne Atkins is an Oregon gem. I wish her the best in retirement and know that she has many more adventures ahead and many more contributions to make.

Thank you, Jeanne, for working hard to make Oregon, our Nation, and our world a better place. We will miss you.

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

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

AFFORDABLE CARE ACT

Mr. COONS. Mr. President, I come to the floor today at the start of this new year and this new Congress to speak about how we can and why we must work together to improve the Affordable Care Act.

Since work on health care reform really began in earnest in 2009, debate in this Chamber and across this country has too often been defined by fantastic claims and fearmongering. In the midst of this division, I believe that too often the experiences of real people have been lost. While politicians on both sides cling to their sacred cows, too many Americans become casualties of our divided politics.

On few issues has this been more true than on health care. Critics of the Affordable Care Act seem locked into the belief that it will bring about America's demise—despite little evidence to support them. Too often they have been unable or unwilling to grapple with the reality of those whose lives the law has forever changed for the better.

Now, on the other side of the aisle, we—mostly Democrats—have often shied away from acknowledging some of the law's weaknesses. I know many of my colleagues have been eager and have offered fixes to the law. But without willing Republican partners, we have not made enough progress.

As I have spent time in my home State of Delaware in recent months lis-

tening to families and other folks who have been affected by the law—for better or for worse—it has become clear to me that this stalemate is unsustainable. On many days, I have met Delawareans who love the Affordable Care Act, whose lives have literally been saved by it. But in between those encounters, I have also met many, small business owners in particular, who want to offer health insurance to their workers and are struggling to afford it.

This much has become clear to me: No conversation about the Affordable Care Act and how to improve it can be complete without reconciling the reality of the millions of Americans it has helped and the many others for whom it falls short.

Michelle Reed is the Delawarean whom I have come to know and admire with breast cancer and who contacted me first about this issue last fall. She is an example of why the Affordable Care Act is so important. Michelle was first diagnosed with cancer back in 2008 and went through month after painful month of chemo and radiation therapy as well as surgery.

Over the next few years since her cancer nightmare began she faced problems that were sadly typical of how our health insurance system used to work. At the time she was first diagnosed, she and her husband received health insurance through her husband's employer. Her husband is an auto mechanic and worked for a small auto body shop. But though the insurance he got through his work was helpful for routine minor health care needs, it was a barebones insurance policy, as she explained it to me.

It left her and her husband with extremely high copays, straining their family budget. Naturally her husband began looking for a new job to provide better health insurance. But this ended up being much more difficult than it seemed, because transitioning to a new job often required accepting a large 3-month gap in coverage, a gap Michelle just could not afford, as insurance companies would then deny her care considering her cancer a preexisting condition.

At one point during Michelle's years of treatment, her husband's employer switched health care plans and in the process missed one premium payment. Suddenly, after months of having had steady, positive progress in her care, without any warning or notification, Michelle started getting bills—not just small bills but huge bills, a bill for \$23,000 for radiation.

It took her months of going back and forth between employer and insurance company, all the while as she is also trying to overcome her disease, before Michelle and her husband got a straight answer about why they were suddenly facing these huge costs.

Now, let's step back for a second. Just imagine where she was. Michelle has cancer. She is shuttling from chemo to radiation. Her husband is

working constantly to try to cover the high premiums, trying to get all of the overtime he can. During this, they are also going back and forth between employer and insurance company, trying to figure out where this new high charge they cannot afford had come from.

Meanwhile, Michelle's husband was out looking for a new job with better insurance, struggling to find one because Michelle would face discrimination and could not get coverage. The emotional strain on a family and a loved one battling cancer is enormous, almost unimaginable. But if you add to that the financial and the emotional stress caused by our relic of a health care insurance system of that time, that is unimaginable.

Yet this is the reality that Michelle and her family faced. Unfortunately, it is the reality that millions of Americans used to face before the Affordable Care Act. These problems all changed last year when the ACA exchanges came on line. As Michelle wrote to me: The ACA open enrollment began and we could not get signed up quick enough, although it did take her a little while because the administration's Web site had some problems. She persevered. As she said to me in her note: We have no problems now. We have what we need, and we need what we have.

People like Michelle are why Democrats passed the Affordable Care Act in the first place. It is because of the law that millions of Americans now have access to quality and affordable health insurance that was once desperately out of reach for them.

But the story is not complete, unless we are clear-eyed about where this law also falls short. As the President and many have recognized, any significant reform such as the Affordable Care Act is going to have weaknesses and unintended consequences that only become apparent after the law is being implemented. This has been true throughout our history with every major event, and health care reform is no different.

In Delaware, among the many whom the law has helped, I have also seen how some of those reforms in the costs they have incurred have hurt small business. To the small business owners with whom I have sat down and listened to, their employees are not labor costs or rows on a balance sheet. They are family. They have worked together for years and owners provide health insurance because they believe it is the right thing to do for the workers who help their business grow.

Many of the folks I have sat down and visited with are not required to provide insurance because they have fewer than 50 full-time workers. They still want to do so because it is the right thing to do. It helps them incentivize and support their best employees. Many, though, are struggling today because of higher costs and the challenges that come with navigating a changed insurance market.

This year the biggest issue they face is how higher quality standards have also caused premiums to increase—often to unaffordable levels. This has been especially true for a small State such as like Delaware, where there is not a lot of competition in the provision of health care or in our insurance market. Unfortunately, some of the increases are also due to insurance companies using the health care law as an excuse to charge more.

Some of this is simply the result of plans that now cover more are costing more. For the most part, that is not a bad thing. But the Affordable Care Act was designed to compensate for increased quality with financial assistance to those who cannot afford it. In Michelle Reed's case, this increased quality was great—almost literally life saving. For people such as her, those insurance plans now need to meet certain standards, and in particular, that they can no longer discriminate against preexisting conditions.

But we have also seen that even though there is assistance to many, some individuals and some small businesses have fallen into gaps where they have to deal with higher costs and they are not getting the help they deserve.

Here is where we are. The Affordable Care Act has helped millions of Americans. It also can be improved to help many more. When we talk about health care, it is simply dishonest to leave one side out when talking about others.

In this new Congress, I know many of my Republican colleagues are eager to continue the efforts of their colleagues in the House. In their majority, I know many will seek an opportunity to vote on repealing or dismantling the Affordable Care Act. But I ask them for an answer to Michelle Reed and to the many Americans such as her who have had their lives changed or even saved by this law.

I know many of my Democratic colleagues are as well eager to work together to improve our health care system, to ensure small businesses do the right thing and can be successful and to ensure that no American gets left behind. We know this is possible. There is no reason to believe that we as a body lack the creativity, the drive, and the ability to work together across the aisle on these important issues.

Surely there is much we can do to reduce the costs through more competition, to develop new and more efficient delivery systems and innovative payment models. The Affordable Care Act took critical steps to move forward in each of these areas. Millions more have health insurance and costs across our health care system have actually increased at the slowest rate in decades. For most, costs have been manageable or even decreasing. But critical work remains. We now have the opportunity, to take the next step to build a health care system that works for every American. It is my sincere hope that we can come together and seize that opportunity.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Mississippi.

MR. WICKER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

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

URGENT PRIORITIES

MR. WICKER. Mr. President, these will be my first remarks of the 114th Congress. I am encouraged by the commitment of many of my colleagues, including the majority leader, to restoring the Senate as one of America's great institutions. It is time for us to get to work. We begin this Congress with a number of urgent priorities—not the least of which is job creation.

More than 9 million Americans are still unemployed. More significantly, perhaps, millions more have given up looking for work. The latest jobs report from the Department of Labor shows that the labor force participation rate is only 62.8 percent—one of the lowest levels in 36 years. This number matters because it reflects the size of the U.S. workforce. It reflects how many working-age Americans have a job or are actively looking for one.

Now, some people have suggested we should take heart in the latest job figures, that this points to an improving economy. I disagree with that. I am not at all satisfied with these employment numbers, particularly with the fact that only 62 percent of eligible members of the labor force actually are choosing to participate.

To me, a shrinking workforce points to a weak economy. Boosting the job market is important to boosting future economic growth. I look forward to working with my colleagues to advance job-creating legislation that has a positive impact on American's daily lives. Fortunately, dozens of job bills were passed during the last term of Congress by the House of Representatives.

These ideas deserve consideration and debate in this Chamber. I think in the new Congress, these ideas will receive that consideration. I am aware that there is likely to be disagreement about the details, disagreement about the merits of some of the pro-growth ideas that have come over to us from the House of Representatives, as well as proposals concerning energy and health care, to name a few. But resolving our differences is part of what make this Chamber and our country unique. In a floor speech early last year, Leader MCCONNELL said: I am certain of one thing. The Senate can be better.

I think that is one of the messages from the American people in last November and last December's election. The American people believe the Senate can be better. We each have a responsibility and a role in making the Senate better. We could start by legislating through the committee process. We have begun doing that already. Instead of backroom deals, pushed through at the last minute, which has

been the order of the day in past years, bills should be thoroughly debated and vetted—first in committee and then on the Senate floor.

The issues of our day deserve that attention. Forging consensus takes effort, but that is how the Senate is supposed to work. Our consideration next week will demonstrate that this is a new day in the Senate. I look forward to being a part of the debate and the amendment process on the Keystone XL Pipeline proposal.

Offering amendments is a way in which each of us can have input on the legislation at hand—input on behalf of our constituents, the people who sent us here. For too long the amendment tree has been filled by the majority leader, essentially limiting the right of every Member to voice the concerns and opinions of the people they represent, essentially limiting the our right to represent the people of our States who sent us here.

Instead of a series of continuing resolutions, we should return to the process of 12 separate appropriations bills. In doing so, we could carefully assess Federal spending and reduce waste, and I think the American people sent that message to us also in November and December. The Federal debt has reached unprecedented levels, forcing us to make tough decisions on how to do more with less.

With regard to national defense, I look forward, during the 114th Congress, to serving as chairman of the Senate Armed Services Subcommittee on Seapower. Our subcommittee has a wide range of oversight responsibilities, including the procurement, sustainment, and research and development needs of the Navy and Marine Corps.

From classified briefings and other hearings with senior officials in the Navy and intelligence community, I am well aware of the imminent and emerging threats facing our sea services. America should maintain its ability to project power around the world while upholding our obligations to our friends and allies.

Our Navy is now the smallest it has been since World War I, demanding, I believe, a robust investment in sea power.

In the coming weeks the Seapower Subcommittee will hold hearings to determine whether the President's budget proposals for the Department of the Navy are sufficient to meet our national security requirements. Following these hearings, we will draft the Defense authorization bill to deliver important capabilities and support for our sailors and marines. This support includes funding for construction of various types and classes of ships, such as aircraft carriers, amphibious ships, submarines, and large and small surface combatants.

I wish to note that supporting the Department of Defense is best done when Congress legislates under regular order. The Republican-led Senate

should take up a defense authorization bill and a defense appropriations bill, and we are committed to doing so. Regular order will help provide our military planners with valuable budget predictability—something they have suffered without in past years.

I was very pleased to learn this week that Chairman McCAIN plans for the Armed Services Committee to mark up a defense authorization bill before Memorial Day. Our committee did that under the leadership of Senator Levin last year, but where this Senate fell down on its responsibility is that we didn't get the bill to the floor until December, and then it was in a rushed and unamendable form.

Our goal under regular order is for us to take up the bill on the floor this summer and have a conference report between the House and the Senate reported before August. I am heartened that Chairman McCAIN intends to do this. I am heartened by the commitment of the distinguished majority leader that we will indeed take up that legislation before the end of the fiscal year.

I should also observe that, absent congressional action, budget sequestration will return to the Defense Department in October of this year. Sequestration remains one of the greatest challenges facing our military. Unless we take action, the ability of our military and our industrial base to react to unforeseen contingencies will be severely eroded, and there will undoubtedly be unforeseen contingencies. There are always unforeseen contingencies, and we will be unprepared for them unless we take action to prevent sequestration.

As a member of the Armed Services Committee and the Budget Committee, I will work to help forge a bipartisan path so we can avert a return to the across-the-board defense cuts under sequestration. I am so pleased that a bipartisan task force within the Armed Services Committee is already taking shape to discuss this issue. We will begin to have discussions beginning Monday and Tuesday of next week.

With regard to commerce, I also look forward to assuming the chairmanship of the Subcommittee on Communications, Technology, and the Internet. My chief focus will continue to be the deployment and adoption of broadband in rural America—something I am interested in as a Senator from Mississippi and something the distinguished Presiding Officer is interested in as a Senator from Louisiana.

Broadband has become a vital economic engine in this country and around the world. In many ways, the proliferation of the Internet is like the construction of the Interstate Highway System in the 1950s. We need to ensure that people in rural areas have the same quality broadband as those in urban areas. To that end, our committee will continue to examine ways to foster broadband growth and development. We also need to find ways to

make more spectrum available for wireless, which can help spur innovation and economic growth in the mobile broadband space.

I also expect the Senate this year to deal with legislation regarding the Environmental Protection Agency and the Obama administration's environmental executive overreach. The administration has proposed a litany of costly environmental rules, targeting everything from coal-fired powerplants, to small streams, to small ponds. Many would cause significant economic harm, while providing little or no help to the environment—no help to the environment but significant economic harm. By EPA's own estimates, its recently proposed ground-level ozone rules could cost taxpayers as much as \$44 billion per year, making it the most expensive rulemaking to date. Meanwhile, EPA's clean powerplant rule could lead to a loss of 224,000 jobs each year. These costs are staggering.

I am pleased that the final omnibus appropriations bill for fiscal year 2015, which was passed in December, included limits on the controversial waters of the United States proposal, which regulates small ponds, streams, and puddles. However, I remain committed to ensuring that this rule will not be implemented at all. By broadening the definition of "waters of the United States," Washington bureaucrats would potentially regulate puddles and ditches on farms and in backyards. Is this really what is necessary to protect the environment? Is this really what the American people require?

These regulations would have significant impact on the State of Mississippi. Our economic growth depends on agriculture, and it depends on manufacturing and other energy-intensive industries.

With each new environmental regulation, the administration is compounding the financial burden on the American people without delivering any environmental benefits. We can have clean air and we can have clean water without losing 224,000 jobs. We can have clean air and water without the cost of \$44 billion per year for one single regulation.

Low-cost and reliable energy is at the core of economic growth. Economic gains from the abundance of affordable energy could be lost if these rules are allowed to be put into place. In an economy desperate for growth, a regulatory onslaught is the worst way to encourage jobs and investment.

The American people also want us to address the Affordable Care Act, ObamaCare. I was particularly interested in the thoughtful remarks of the Senator from Delaware, who spoke immediately before me. The remarks of my distinguished colleague suggests that Members on both sides of the aisle heard the message from the American people in November and December in the elections. I think both sides recognize that the Affordable Care Act is not

affordable and as a matter of fact is causing great hardship and pain to the majority of the American people. So I am pleased to hear Members on the other side of the aisle at least acknowledge that many major, significant changes need to be made to ObamaCare.

Overall disapproval of the President's health care law is at an alltime high of 56 percent. Americans are suffering under the law's mandates and taxes. Many are faced with the financial burden of higher copays and higher deductibles. This is a reality.

I must say that I appreciate the remarks of the distinguished senior Senator from New York recently when he acknowledged that passing ObamaCare in the way previous Congresses did was a mistake, that most Americans were satisfied with their coverage and it was a mistake to turn that entire system on its head to solve a problem which we very much needed to solve with regard to the uninsured and underinsured.

There was a better way to provide health insurance to those individuals without disadvantaging the vast majority of people who were satisfied with their health care and who now find themselves in a much worse position.

Congress has the responsibility to ease the burden of ObamaCare by repealing the law's most onerous provisions. I would like to repeal the entire act and start over with some good aspects that we could incorporate into a better bill but also start off with a better way to provide health care for Americans and provide those who were uninsured with the opportunity to get insurance.

At the very least, we should pass legislation restoring the 40-hour workweek. I hope this is one of the things my colleagues on the other side of the aisle are talking about. I note that the President of the United States has threatened to veto Affordable Care Act amendments that would restore something that has become very traditional in the United States—the 40-hour workweek. It is very surprising to me that it would be on that proposal that the President of the United States would say: No, I will not even sign legislation to restore something as traditional as the 40-hour workweek.

We need to repeal the medical device tax, and clearly there are well over 60 votes in this body today to do just that. We need to exempt veterans from the employer mandate, to provide relief to rural hospitals, and we need to repeal the health insurance tax. I hope we can do that, and I hope the sounds I hear from the other side of the aisle indicate that we can reach bipartisan consensus and send legislation to the President persuading him that there is such broad support for that and he should sign it.

We can do better for the American people than the higher copays, the higher deductibles, and the broken promises they received under the ACA.

Americans were flatly told: If you like your doctor, you can keep your doctor. That turned out to be a promise the administration could not or would not keep. They were told: If you like your health care plan, you can keep your health care plan. It turned out the administration was not able to make good on that promise. We can do better.

With regard to the Federal budget, the national debt now exceeds \$18 trillion. During the next 10 years, interest payments on the debt will be the fastest growing budget expenditure. Interest on the debt will be the fastest growing expenditure, more than tripling to \$800 billion. Put in perspective, one out of every seven tax dollars taken in by the government will be used to service the Federal debt.

Why is regular order important in this regard? In returning to regular order, the Senate Republicans will enact a budget resolution each year as required by law. We haven't done this. The law requires it, but somehow Congress has waived this requirement for themselves. This contrasts sharply with the past 5 years, during which the Democratic-led Senate passed only one budget. As a result, Congress has not adopted a joint budget resolution since 2009. This will change in this new day of Congress.

Under the previous majority, spending bills were not brought to the floor to be debated. Budget laws were routinely waived or ignored, and there has been no plan whatever for finally bringing the Federal budget under control. These are facts. We need to change that, and I hope we will do so in this Congress.

In conclusion, we have plenty of work to do. People in my State of Mississippi, like most Americans, expect results from this Congress. The challenges of our economy, the importance of our national defense, and the negative impact of intrusive executive overreach are too great not to address. We need to meet the expectations of the American people in this regard.

The distinguished majority leader reminded us earlier this week that Americans want a government that works, one that functions with efficiency and accountability, competence and purpose.

I believe we can do that, but it will take a return to regular order. It will take faith in the committee process. It will take faith in returning this institution to functioning the way the Founders intended. And it will take meaningful legislation. It is time to put the priorities of the American people first.

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

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

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

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

TRIBUTE TO SARAH KENNEY

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, when Sarah Kenney decided to volunteer with the Women's Rape Crisis Center in Burlington, VT, in 1997, she may not have realized just how that experience would shape nearly two decades of her life. There, in cramped offices furnished with old futons, she recalls, "I fell in love with the passion of the place."

That passion led Sarah to the Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, where she has spent the past 13 years advocating to end such violence and to raise public awareness about the abhorrent crimes that account for roughly half of all homicides in Vermont in any given year.

Over the years, Sarah has been a trusted and valuable partner in my work to strengthen support for survivors of domestic and sexual violence, including the successful reauthorization and expansion of the Violence Against Women Act so that it better protects all survivors. Her understanding of the legislative process, combined with her ability to work with all sides, have been the hallmark of her effective advocacy. Sarah has also spent much time at the Vermont State House, testifying on legislation to strengthen protections against victims of crime across our State.

Sarah will be leaving her post as the Vermont Network's Associate Director of Public Policy this month, to take on a new advocacy role as Deputy Director at Let's Grow Kids in Burlington, where she will use her tremendous skills on behalf of bettering children's lives.

I am proud to note that Sarah holds a bachelor's degree in political science from my alma mater, St. Michael's College. Her contributions are too many to list here, but her work in shaping policy has undoubtedly resulted in stronger protections for women and families in Vermont and across the Nation. In my 40 years in the U.S. Senate, I have worked with many advocates who are passionate about the work they do. I can say that Sarah's passion and commitment make her one of the best. She is superbly effective in turning advocacy into action.

In Vermont, we are fortunate to have an organization such as the Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, and even more fortunate to

have someone of Sarah's talents advocating on behalf of victims. It has been an honor to work with someone whose commitment to a cause is so distilled and focused. The Vermont Network will miss Sarah's many talents, but Vermont's children have just gained a passionate advocate.

I wish Sarah and her family all the best in her new role.

TRIBUTE TO STEWART HOLMES

• Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, I want to express my gratitude for the service of my long-time aide, Stewart Holmes, who is leaving the U.S. Senate to pursue a new career. Stewart has served the Senate in different capacities over the past 17 years in a manner that reflects credit on the institution and our Nation. During this time, I have valued Stewart as a trusted and loyal advisor with sound judgment on complex national security issues. More broadly, his public service on Capitol Hill has contributed to the safety of the American people and our Nation.

Stewart's sense of service, responsibility, and dedication to the United States is closely linked to his own 22-year military service career. He enlisted in the United States Marine Corps in 1979, and was appointed a 2nd Lieutenant in 1986. He was deployed during Operation Desert Storm. While in the military, he earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from the Citadel in South Carolina and a Master of Arts degree in Financial Management from the U.S. Naval Post Graduate School. In 1997, he became the first military fellow to serve in my Senate office, a position that preceded his becoming the Marine Corps Appropriations Liaison.

In 2001, Stewart Holmes retired from the Marine Corps as a major and joined my staff as a military legislative assistant. In 2005, he joined the Senate Committee on Appropriations and served as an intelligence and military advisor to me. He became minority clerk of the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee in 2009.

Throughout my association with Stewart, he has been a hard worker. He has demonstrated consummate professionalism, attention to detail, and dedication to the Senate as an institution. These qualities have served him well as the Defense Subcommittee has worked to overcome the fiscal and political challenges inherent in funding our national security priorities. I appreciate his work on various issues of importance to our national interests and to my State of Mississippi, including shipbuilding, supercomputers, next generation technology, shipbuilding, NASA and others.

As Stewart moves on with the next chapter of his career, I wish him, his wife, Maren, and their children every success and happiness. We will miss him here in the Senate. I am pleased to extend my thanks to him for the great job he has done in the Senate.●