

more skilled than our competitors, or we have saddled them with crippling debt. We are failing to make the necessary investments in K–12 public institutions that, regardless of ZIP Code, should be preparing every single one of our children to lead our country into the future.

Quality primary education should not be a privilege only for the wealthy, and it should not depend on rolling the dice on receiving a voucher. In the greatest and wealthiest Nation in the world, a quality education should be a right for every single American child. Our Nation's promise of opportunity should be a reality for every child in America, not just for those whose parents can afford it. We already have some of the world's greatest teachers, the brightest students, and the best facilities within our own borders. All we have to do is ensure they have the resources they need to succeed. That means our kids should not have to worry about going to school hungry or getting the help they need after school or being able to pay for college when they graduate high school.

That is why I focus on commonsense solutions to increase access to educational opportunity, whether by helping to lead the charge to make college more affordable or doing well to ensure the education we are providing people actually helps them find good-paying jobs when they graduate.

In that vein, I am also disheartened by the recent erosion of civil rights protections in our Nation. The calls for bigger walls and closed doors are not only bad, costly policies, they run counter to our society's shared value for inclusion over exclusion. Too many of us seem to forget the immigrant roots within our own families. If we lose sight of our Nation's founding principles, as some in Washington would like us to do, we will lose out on the innovations we have seen from immigrants and immigrant families.

If we had rejected immigrants years ago, Apple Computers might never have been founded by the son of a Syrian man. I worry that at a time when we still have so much work to do to make our Union more perfect and to provide truly equal rights for all, under the current administration we are at risk of backtracking on hard-fought progress made by civil rights leaders who bled and even died for the rights of all Americans, regardless of race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, income or ZIP Code to have the right to vote, to have equal protection under the law, to have basic worker protections, and for the everyday rights and privileges so many of us take for granted. We still have so much progress left to make if we want the American dream to be accessible to all Americans—equal pay for equal work, a criminal justice system that truly provides justice for all, nationwide leave policies that enable anyone to take time to care for a sick family member or to start a family, a society that is

accessible for all disabled Americans and truly equal for all LGBTQ Americans.

I worry that we are at risk of going backward instead of forward. Failing to continue our Nation's inclusive nature weakens our global standing as well as the rest of the world begins to look elsewhere for moral leadership. That would be a failure for us and a weakening of our Nation that I will fight to prevent.

Of course, I also know how much our military has contributed to our Nation's greatness throughout our history. We must do a better job of recognizing these contributions, not just by purchasing equipment and technology, though what our skilled workforce has done is the envy of the world, but also by ensuring that we recognize and respect the sacrifices made by our troops, our military families, and our veterans. Servicemembers embody our values of shared sacrifice and perseverance, of loyalty and selfless service, and they each make great sacrifices to protect us.

They deserve from their leaders in Washington a clear sense of mission and strategy, and they deserve to know we fully support them. So, yes, when the drums of war are beating in the White House or in Congress, you can bet I am going to be right here on the floor of the Senate, asking tough questions and making sure our leaders in Washington, especially those who have never worn the uniform, truly consider the true costs of war—not just in dollars and cents but in human lives—in the commitments we are making on behalf of the Nation. I will also be here to remind my colleagues that we are all dishonored when any veteran is forced to lay their head down to sleep on the same streets they defended. We must end veterans homelessness. When our troops come home, I will be working to see that the veterans receive the care and support they earned for the sacrifices they have made.

Each of these components of our society contribute to what has made our country great—our military, our values, our infrastructure, our agriculture, our manufacturers, and our world-class educational system. If we fall prey to our fears, to our worst demons, and allow any of these pillars to fall, we will lose our opportunity to remain the leader of the world. We can rebuild the foundation of our Nation's strength and revamp it for the 21st century, but we can't simply rest on our past successes and act like our greatness is guaranteed forever. It isn't. It will take work.

This is deeply personal for me. I wouldn't be here today without the public education that enabled me to serve in our military for more than two decades and allowed me to give back to my Nation, both in and out of uniform.

Our Nation would not be as strong as it is today without the millions of individuals who sacrificed to build it. Our Nation's strength—what truly makes

America great—is rooted firmly in our shared sense of sacrifice. It comes from our single parents working multiple jobs just to make sure our kids don't go to school hungry; it comes from the farmer in Illinois waking long before dawn and working long after dusk to help power and feed our Nation; it comes from an immigrant family willing to put everything on the line to give their kids a chance at a better life than their own; it comes from the hard work and compassion, the sacrifice that Americans serving in our country in and out of the military demonstrate every single day.

We can all do a better job of remembering the shared values that have helped to build this Nation, but I want to make one thing clear: America is already great. We shouldn't let anyone tell us otherwise.

We know we still have a lot of work to do as a country, but let us not lose sight of the core values that make our improbable Union possible. We are still the greatest Nation on the face of the Earth, and if anyone has the capacity to overcome the challenges of today, it is this Nation. It is the American people.

I thank my colleagues for joining me today for my maiden speech.

Thank you, Mr. President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

CONGRATULATING SENATOR DUCKWORTH

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I rise to thank my colleague for her first speech. The first speech given on the floor of the Senate is a memorable occasion for not only my colleague but for the staff, friends, and family who have followed this amazing story of TAMMY DUCKWORTH, a U.S. Senator from Illinois. She didn't disappoint with this first speech.

If there was ever an inspirational speech speaking to who we are as a nation and what we can be, she encapsulated it in her comments on the floor of the U.S. Senate. It was an aspirational speech, too—a challenge to all of us to do a better job for this Nation, to make it stronger and to represent more effectively the people who have sent us here to serve them.

She brings a special quality to the service that very few have been able to bring to the U.S. Senate. I first met MAJ TAMMY DUCKWORTH 12 years ago when she was my guest at the State of the Union Address just weeks after her helicopter had been shot down over Iraq. I was amazed by her tenacity, her courage, her good humor. I thought to myself, this woman has really made history. I think she can even make more history, and she has, being elected to the U.S. House of Representatives as well as the U.S. Senate, an opportunity that fewer than 2,000 Americans have had in our Nation's history.

I think back on what she brings to the Senate, and it is something that is special and extraordinary. To come to this Senate after her service in the military is to follow in the path of Senator Bob Dole, a disabled veteran from

World War II, who led the Republican side of the aisle; Senator Daniel Inouye, a personal friend to both Senator DUCKWORTH and me, who served in World War II; Senator Paul Douglas of Illinois, who served as well; Strom Thurmond, from South Carolina, a Republican; and more recently, Max Cleland, a Vietnam veteran; Bob Kerrey, John Kerry—the list goes on and on, the great people who have served our Nation in the military and then came to serve in the Senate.

One of the points she made in that speech was one of the reasons I supported her so wholeheartedly. When we face the most difficult, trying, and challenging votes in a Senate career, the vote to go to war, having the voice of TAMMY DUCKWORTH on the floor is a reminder of the real cost of war and how we should avoid it at any cost, if we can, and what we are asking our men and women in America to do if we send them off to war. She will have more credibility, will have more confidence in her judgment, than virtually any colleague on the floor of the U.S. Senate. So she is going to play a special role.

Finally, let me say, in a short period of time serving as a U.S. Senator from the State of Illinois, she has shown that she is not going to be taking it easy. She has covered our State from one end to the other, most recently during the Easter recess, with town meetings and meetings with all sorts of people across our State, leaving a positive impression of her commitment to public service.

When I saw her and her mom and her little daughter Abigail get on the plane just the other day, yesterday, to come out here, I realized it is a family commitment which includes all of her family and her husband Bryan. They are committed to this country, they are committed to our great State, and we are fortunate to have her service.

Mr. President, I congratulate my colleague.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill 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. HOEVEN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

THE ECONOMY

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, it is no surprise that the economy continues to be one of the top issues on the minds of Americans. The 8 years of the Obama administration were characterized by weak economic growth, a dearth of jobs and opportunities, and almost nonexistent wage growth. The Obama administration ushered in long-term economic stagnation.

The Congressional Budget Office predicts that the economy will grow at a rate of just 1.9 percent over the next 30

years—a full percentage point lower than the average growth rate over the past 50 years. We cannot resign ourselves to that. Resigning ourselves to long-term growth of 1.9 percent would mean resigning ourselves to decades of fewer jobs and opportunities, low wage growth, and a reduced standard of living. Fortunately, there are a lot of things we can do to get our economy thriving again and to spur economic growth.

A recent report from the Economic Innovation Group identified one important problem with our economy today, and that is a lack of what the EIG calls economic dynamism. Economic dynamism, as the Economic Innovation Group defines it, refers to the rate at which new businesses are born and die.

In a dynamic economy, the rate of new business creation is high and significantly outstrips the rate of business death, but that has not been the case in the United States lately. New business creation has significantly dropped over the past several years. Between 2009 and 2011, business death outstripped business birth, and while the numbers have since improved slightly, the recovery has been poor and far from historical norms.

The Economic Innovation Group notes that in 2012—which, by the way, was the economy's best year for business creation since the recession—it still “fell far short of its worst year prior to 2008.” This is deeply concerning because new businesses have historically been responsible for a substantial part of the job creation in this country, not to mention a key source of innovation. When new businesses are not being created at a strong rate, workers face a whole host of problems. “A less dynamic economy,” the Economic Innovation Group notes, “is one likely to feature fewer jobs, lower labor force participation, slack wage growth, and rising inequality—exactly what we see today.”

Restoring economic dynamism would go a long way toward boosting economic growth and providing new jobs and opportunities for American workers. One big thing we can do to achieve this is to relieve the burden of excessive government regulations. Obviously, some government regulations are important and necessary, but too many others are unnecessary and do nothing but load businesses with compliance costs and paperwork hours. The more resources businesses spend on complying with regulations, the less they have available for growth and innovation. Excessive regulations also prevent many new businesses from ever getting off the ground. Small startups simply do not have the resources to hire individuals—let alone consultants and lawyers—to do the costly work of complying with scores of government regulations.

Unfortunately, over the past 8 years, the Obama administration spent a lot of time on imposing burdensome and unnecessary regulations on American

businesses. According to the American Action Forum, the Obama administration was responsible for implementing more than 675 major regulations that cost the economy more than \$800 billion. Given those numbers, it is no surprise that the Obama economy left businesses with few resources to dedicate to growing and creating jobs or that new business creation seriously dropped off during the Obama administration.

Since the new Congress began in January, Republicans in Congress and the President have been focused on repealing burdensome Obama-era regulations. So far, we have saved individuals and businesses approximately \$67 billion and freed them from 56 million hours of paperwork. Eliminating burdensome regulations will continue to be a priority for both Republicans in Congress and for the White House.

In addition to removing burdensome regulations, we need to focus on reforming our Tax Code. Our current Tax Code is strangling businesses, both large and small. Some corporations escape with paying very little in taxes, but others end up paying the highest corporate tax rate in the developed world. Meanwhile, small businesses and family farms face high tax rates, at times exceeding those paid by large corporations.

Tax reform needs to address these obstacles to growth. We need to trim our excessive corporate tax rate to make U.S. businesses competitive in the global economy, and we need to reduce taxes for small businesses so that we do not choke off these sources of growth and innovation. Measures like allowing new businesses to deduct their startup costs and expense more of their investments in machinery and equipment would spur new business creation and help small businesses thrive.

Our goal is to take up tax reform this year, and I am looking forward to that debate. Reforming our Tax Code will go a long way toward restoring dynamism to our economy and encouraging growth, job creation, and better wages.

There are other growth-boosting measures we can take as well, like removing unnecessary barriers that restrict access to capital. Both new and existing businesses rely on capital to help them innovate and expand.

The last 8 years were discouraging years for American workers, but the stagnation of the Obama years does not have to be the new normal. American workers and job creators are as dynamic and creative as ever; we just need to clear the obstacles from their paths. I look forward to working with my colleagues this year as we make putting our economy on the path to long-term health and vitality a top priority for the U.S. Senate.

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.