

when they get it on something like the Veterans Choice Program, we do not talk about it. This is really important to our veterans—people to whom, I believe, we have a solemn commitment as a result of their service to our country.

Over the last few years, we have heard how the Veterans Health Administration has been plagued by inefficiency, unaccountability, and poor quality of care. The VA has been hindered too long by unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles, which have been incredibly frustrating and deadly. I am afraid, in some cases, for our veterans. We have heard stories about veterans having to travel hours to get medical care, sometimes causing them to accept lower quality care or to forgo that care entirely. Sadly, in some cases, veterans turn to coping mechanisms, self-destructive activity—self-medicating—with drugs or alcohol because they simply cannot get access to genuinely helpful medical care.

The Veterans Choice Program was designed to help address that by ensuring that veterans could receive timely appointments close to where they live. If they had to drive too far or if they had to wait too long for an appointment at a veterans facility, we said: You could show up at your local healthcare provider's, and we will pay for it through the Veterans Choice Program.

The VA Choice and Quality Employment Act of 2017 continues that important program and guarantees veterans that they will have access to care without interruption.

This bill also strengthens the VA's ability to recruit, train, and retain its valuable workforce, which will help the VA continue to improve veterans' care. I am glad we were able to pass this legislation last night to ensure that this program can continue serving veterans. In moving forward, both Chambers should continue to work with the VA to get the agency back on track and right the years of poor quality of care and of service to our veterans for whom, I believe, we have a sacred obligation, a solemn commitment, based on their service to our country.

Next, we will focus on another important piece of legislation. This is authorizing the Food and Drug Administration's user fee program.

This is how the Food and Drug Administration actually considers and approves new drugs that can save lives and improve the quality of lives. These partnerships between the public and private sectors ensure that patients will have access to safe and effective drugs and medical devices while also maintaining America's position as a global leader in medical innovation. Faster approvals mean treatments and cures reach patients sooner. Increased competition leads to lower costs, and that, in turn, means more lives saved. This is another example of what, I believe, will be a bipartisan accomplishment of the current Senate and current Congress.

I heard one of our colleagues last week stand in front of the Nation and say nothing ever gets done. Well, we are doing some important things. The Veterans Choice Program and the FDA reauthorization bill are important, lifesaving bills that are being passed on a bipartisan basis.

Then, of course, there is the backlog of the President's nominees.

I have never seen anything quite like it. We had an election on November 8, but for many of our colleagues, the election remains undecided. They do not accept the verdict of the American people and the electoral college that President Trump won the election and that Hillary Clinton lost. That is how they, somehow, justify their consistent foot-dragging and obstruction when it comes to the President's nominees for important offices, including his Cabinet.

It is the President's prerogative to nominate whom he wants to serve in the executive branch, but it is our duty, our responsibility, to carefully consider their qualifications before coming together to confirm them. Now, we have had people who had been waiting months for their nominations to be confirmed and who were confirmed by almost unanimous votes of the Senate, which tells me we were delaying those votes unnecessarily. If they were truly controversial, I think it would be reflected in the votes for their confirmations, but they are not.

Let me just name one—our former colleague, Kay Bailey Hutchison, who has been nominated to serve as the Ambassador to NATO. I cannot think of a more qualified person than my good friend, the former Senator from Texas. Our country needs leadership in Brussels, at NATO, to help counter Russian aggression and threats and intimidation against our allies in the region, but that is just one example.

Last night, the Senate confirmed the FBI Director—I am grateful for that—but they also confirmed—again, in the dead of night when nobody was paying attention—eight other Department of Defense nominees. Now, if our Democratic colleagues had good reason to delay those confirmations because they felt like they were controversial, that is their right, but evidently they were willing to let those people who had been nominated to the Department of Defense be confirmed, basically, by consent after months and months of delay.

We have a lot of other nominations that are backlogged due to the unfortunate obstruction and foot-dragging of our Democratic colleagues, and I, for one, do not think we ought to leave in August—this month—without a big, robust package of the confirmations of these noncontroversial nominees.

It is time to get over the election. That was on November 8. We used to see a difference between elections and the responsibility of governing. Regardless of who wins the election, we still have the responsibility to govern.

Some people seem to have forgotten that.

Again, I hope we have a big, robust package of noncontroversial nominations approved before we leave for the rest of the month of August. I think it is too important to leave town without that. We need our President to succeed so the country can succeed. This is what every American who voted for President Trump hoped for, and they trusted him to choose men and women for his Cabinet to lead and guide our country. I have to say, he has done a remarkably good job in the people whom he has chosen for his Cabinet so let's come together and confirm these appointees so the administration can better serve our Nation and all Americans.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, thank you.

I come to the floor today to urge my colleagues to vote no on the nomination that we will vote on shortly.

On the campaign trail, President Trump promised to put workers first. Instead, President Trump's administration has rolled back worker protections and prioritized corporate interests at the expense of workers.

It is critical, now more than ever, that the NLRB remain independent and committed to advocating for workers and their right to organize, but I am deeply concerned that President Trump's nominee, Mr. Kaplan, does not have a record of supporting the rights of workers and unions.

At his nomination hearing, Mr. Kaplan confused basic labor issues and decisions, further proving he lacks the knowledge and experience to serve on this important board. NLRB members should be committed to standing up for workers, and it is clear Mr. Kaplan does not make the cut.

I urge my colleagues to join me in doing what President Trump has failed to do, and that is to put workers first. Vote against this nomination.

Thank you.

I yield the floor.

CLOTURE MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Pursuant to rule XXII, the Chair lays before the Senate the pending cloture motion, which the clerk will state.

The 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 nomination of Marvin Kaplan, of Kansas, to be a Member of the National Labor Relations Board for the term of five years expiring August 27, 2020.

Mitch McConnell, Chuck Grassley, Marco Rubio, Deb Fischer, John Cornyn, Susan M. Collins, Lamar Alexander, Roy Blunt, Luther Strange, Pat Roberts, James Lankford, Bob Corker, Richard C. Shelby, John Barrasso, Joni Ernst, Orrin G. Hatch.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the nomination of Marvin Kaplan, of Kansas, to be a Member of the National Labor Relations Board, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from North Carolina (Mr. BURR) and the Senator from Arizona (Mr. MCCAIN).

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

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 50, nays 48, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 183 Leg.]

YEAS—50

Alexander	Flake	Perdue
Barrasso	Gardner	Portman
Blunt	Graham	Risch
Boozman	Grassley	Roberts
Capito	Hatch	Rounds
Cassidy	Heller	Rubio
Cochran	Hoeven	Sasse
Collins	Inhofe	Scott
Corker	Isakson	Shelby
Cornyn	Johnson	Strange
Cotton	Kennedy	Sullivan
Crapo	Lankford	Thune
Cruz	Lee	Tillis
Daines	McConnell	Toomey
Enzi	Moran	Wicker
Ernst	Murkowski	Young
Fischer	Paul	

NAYS—48

Baldwin	Gillibrand	Murray
Bennet	Harris	Nelson
Blumenthal	Hassan	Peters
Booker	Heinrich	Reed
Brown	Heitkamp	Sanders
Cantwell	Hirono	Schatz
Cardin	Kaine	Schumer
Carper	King	Shaheen
Casey	Klobuchar	Stabenow
Coons	Leahy	Tester
Cortez Masto	Manchin	Udall
Donnelly	Markley	Van Hollen
Duckworth	McCaskill	Warner
Durbin	Menendez	Warren
Feinstein	Merkley	Whitehouse
Franken	Murphy	Wyden

NOT VOTING—2

Burr
McCain

The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 50, the nays are 48.

The motion is agreed to.

The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I come to the floor today to stand up for the workers President Trump is failing. As a candidate running for President, Mr. Trump promised workers that he would put them first and that he would bring back good-paying, respectable jobs to their communities, but since day one, President Trump has done the exact opposite. He has rolled back worker protections and made it harder for families to be more secure.

Now, this doesn't come as a surprise to me, especially when I look at President Trump's record as a businessman. I have to say that he has refused to allow even his own hotel workers to organize or join a union, preventing them from having the opportunity to better advocate for safer working conditions and better pay.

We all know that strong unions have helped to create our middle class, and for many working families in the 20th century, a good union job, or the right to collective bargaining, helped them move up the economic ladder. But over the past few decades, we have seen a decline in unions and union membership across the country. As a result of that, our economy has started to favor corporations and those at the top. This paved the way for President Trump and billionaires like him to take advantage of their workers, with little recourse for everyday people who are the backbone of our country.

The National Labor Relations Board gives workers the opportunity to file charges against corporations when they are illegally fired or when corporations retaliate against workers for exercising their rights. President Trump should be familiar with the NLRB, as his own businesses have had complaints filed numerous times. That is precisely why it is so important that the Board is independent and is committed to advocating for workers and their right to organize.

The preamble of the National Labor Relations Act clearly states that it is the policy of the United States to encourage collective bargaining and to give workers a voice, allowing them to speak up for fair wages and safe working conditions. It is the responsibility of the NLRB to ensure that workers are being treated fairly and to resolve disputes between corporate management and workers.

So it is clear to me that Board members should believe in the core mission that I just stated of the NLRB and should be committed to standing up for workers and their right to collective bargaining, which is exactly why I have very serious concerns about Mr. Marvin Kaplan's record, which has largely been in opposition to the work and mission of the NLRB.

As a labor staffer in the House of Representatives, Mr. Kaplan prepared and staffed hearings where Republicans consistently attacked the NLRB. In fact, I would be hard-pressed to name a single example of Mr. Kaplan supporting the rights of workers and unions.

In addition to Mr. Kaplan's opposition to the core mission of the Board, I also have deep reservations about Mr. Kaplan's lack of legal experience practicing before the NLRB. When I asked Mr. Kaplan about his lack of practical qualifications, his responses were telling: Have you ever represented a party, employer, or a union in an unfair labor practice case or representation case before the Board? No. Have you ever represented a worker in an employment matter? No.

What is more, when asked to speak on the pressing questions facing the Board at his confirmation hearing, he actually confused basic labor issues and decisions, further calling into question whether he has the experience and knowledge to serve on this critically important Board.

This is not a difficult concept for workers across the country to grasp. If you are not qualified for a job that is this important or if you want to undermine the basic goals of the law, you shouldn't get the job.

So I will be voting no on Mr. Kaplan's confirmation. I urge my colleagues to do the same.

I know my colleagues on both sides of the aisle want to strengthen our economy and rebuild our middle class. So I hope we can stand with working families across the country who today are simply asking for a fair shot.

Thank you, Mr. President.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Hawaii.

Mr. SCHATZ. Mr. President, there are two reasons why every Member of the Senate should vote against confirming Marvin Kaplan to the NLRB. The first is that he is just not qualified.

The NLRB is the Federal agency that enforces our labor laws. It protects the rights of workers and the private sector to organize for better wages and better working conditions. It is up to them to make sure that their employers follow the law and that when there is an issue between employers and employees, everyone acts reasonably.

Democrats and Republicans who have served on the NLRB have been the top labor and employment attorneys in their fields. They have had long careers working on labor issues, either as lawyers or as law professors. Many of them have spent time as staffers on the NLRB board. In other words, they understand the labor issues better than anyone. They may have a unique perspective on it one way or the other—sort of pro-management or pro-labor—but there is no question that previous nominees and previous members of the Board know labor law.

Marvin Kaplan doesn't fit this profile. He is not a lawyer with any relevant labor experience. He has no record and no public positions on relevant labor law. What he is is a well-connected Capitol Hill staffer. His only qualification, that I can find, is that he has drafted some legislation for a committee in the House of Representatives. That does not stack up against the resumes of any other member who has served on the Board—Democrat or Republican.

This lack of experience is dangerous. It means he will not know the intricacies and the historical development of labor law. He will simply be a rubberstamp who brings a political agenda to the Board, because he has no on-the-record opinions on these issues of his own.

That was clear from the hearing on his nomination, when he would not properly commit to recuse himself from any issues he had worked on and to approach issues with an open mind, which brings me to the second reason. If somehow Senators can make an excuse for his lack of experience, we can't

deny that this is the opposite of the message that Congress should have received during the 2016 election.

In November, Americans made clear that Washington had failed working families and that we have not done enough to stand up for American workers.

Now here we are about to confirm a nominee to the NLRB, and the only experience he has is that he has drafted legislation to hurt American workers.

The Board is about to face some important decisions. They could reverse a decision that holds big companies accountable for how their contractors treat workers. The future of American workers and their ability to organize will be influenced by this Board, which includes any members confirmed by the Senate.

If Mr. Kaplan is appointed, it will further silence workers who already feel that they aren't being heard in Washington, DC.

A vote for Mr. Kaplan is a vote that ignores the voices of American workers. It is a vote that further politicizes the NLRB at a time when we need to shore up our institutions against blind, corrosive ideology.

I urge my colleagues to vote no on this nominee.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. CASEY. Thank you, Madam President.

I rise to speak in opposition to the nomination of Marvin Kaplan to serve as a member of the National Labor Relations Board. Mr. Kaplan has spent much of his career as a staff member in Congress, where he worked to undermine unions and the rights of workers to bargain collectively.

A key role of the National Labor Relations Board is to preserve the right of workers to bargain collectively. The Board itself is charged with enforcing the National Labor Relations Act, which Congress passed in 1935 in the depths of the Great Depression. The act gave workers the right to join unions, and it encouraged and promoted collective bargaining as a way to set wages and settle disputes over working conditions.

This law that passed in the 1930s—and is still in effect today—is not simply a benefit to workers; it also benefits businesses, and it also benefits the economy. Section 1 of the act says, in pertinent part: “The inequality of bargaining power between employees . . . and employers . . . substantially burdens and affects the flow of commerce, and tends to aggravate recurrent business depressions, by depressing wage

rates and the purchasing power of wage earners.”

There are a lot of important words there. When you have inequality of bargaining power, the findings of the Congress at the time said that would burden and affect the flow of commerce. So that tells you the impact on commerce. It also says that when you have inequality of bargaining power, that aggravates business depressions, and the result of that is depressing wages and depressing purchasing power.

Everyone here knows that when we are measuring the American economy today—I am sure this has been true for many generations but especially today—the consumer plays a substantial role in our economy. So if that consumer, that worker has lower wages, that is not good for anyone. So giving workers the right to both organize and collectively bargain allows them to demand higher wages, thereby increasing their incomes and that purchasing power which is so critically important. That, in turn, of course, increases consumption and demand for goods, which, of course, increases production and employment. So all of these are tied together. Wages and benefits affect the economy, not just the worker and his or her family.

I believe there is now a concerning trend to weaken the National Labor Relations Act and to tilt the Board against workers. Mr. Kaplan's nomination is another sign of this disconnect between the rhetoric of the administration claiming to be pro-worker and its actions that are of late anything but pro-worker. The administration claims it is here to support workers, but at every turn, we have nominees who have spent their careers working in the opposite direction.

We know that in the 1950s and 1960s, the economy worked well for working Americans because 35 percent of workers were in a labor union. The decline of unions, the decline of the workers' voice, and the decline of collective bargaining have helped to lead us where we are today—stagnant wages over a long period of time, as well as power, wealth, and income, of course, concentrated at the top.

So we know that unions helped workers to win higher wages, job security, and unprecedented benefits, including paid vacations, paid sick leave, and pensions that gave those workers and their families a measure of security, but it also increased their purchasing power, and it also, of course, strengthened the economy. American family incomes grew by an average of 2.8 percent per year from 1947 through 1973, with every sector of society seeing its income roughly double.

We know now that in the last number of years, it has been a different story. Families across Pennsylvania and the United States know that the story is much different. It is not a coincidence that union membership has declined from its peak of 35 percent of private

sector employment in the 1950s to less than 7 percent of private sector employment today. This is all the more reason to stop this assault on workers and labor unions.

Nominees with a partisan history of working to undermine unions or undermine the National Labor Relations Act or undermine the National Labor Relations Board should not be confirmed to a position where they are supposed to act as an arbiter to protect the rights of workers to form a union and to bargain collectively. So I urge my colleagues to oppose the nomination of Marvin Kaplan to the National Labor Relations Board.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. BROWN. Madam President, during his campaign, President Trump made a lot of big promises to workers in Ohio and across the country. He told them he would look out for them.

In a letter I sent to the President 2 days after the election, on November 10 or 11, asking the President to work with me to renegotiate NAFTA, insisting on “Buy American” provisions and infrastructure, the President scrawled across the top of the letter: “I will never let down workers.”

He said he would look out for them, but too often the people he puts in charge are along the lines of this latest nominee to the National Labor Relations Board, Marvin Kaplan. Mr. Kaplan has devoted his career—imagine such a thing—to working to strip workers of their rights and trying to undermine the workers' watchdog he is now seeking to join. I never question people's motives in this body. I just don't quite understand why somebody would devote his work life to trying to take away workers' rights and undermine labor protections. Someone who views unions and collective bargaining as a threat to be dealt with rather than as essential rights to be protected has no business serving on the National Labor Relations Board.

The National Labor Relations Board was created, in part, at this desk. Then Senator Hugo Black of Alabama, in the early 1930s, sat at this desk. At this desk, one of the pieces of legislation he wrote was the minimum wage law. One of the other pieces of legislation he worked on with Senator Wagner was the National Labor Relations Act. In those days, people understood that you had created the National Labor Relations Act to strengthen workers, to create workers' rights, and to protect those workers' rights.

Mr. Kaplan's nomination sets that on its head. It is the latest in a long, long line of evidence that we in this country

simply don't value work the way that we used to. Workers have continually seen their rights undermined. Workers' wages have been stagnant. People who work hard and play by the rules don't have the standard of living they had in our parents' generation or even half of a generation ago.

We see companies refusing to pay overtime to workers who have earned it. We see companies misclassify workers so that companies can pay them less. We see executive salaries and CEO compensation going up and up and up. Yet for the broad middle class in this country, for people who aspire to be middle class, for low-wage workers, they have simply not gotten a raise for the last 20 years. So then, are we going to appoint somebody to the National Labor Relations Board—the President says we are going to confirm somebody to the National Labor Relations Board—who has devoted his entire career to undermining workers, to taking away workers' rights, to scaling back workers' protections, and to scaling back wages—all these things we as a country never stood for?

I don't know what is happening in this country that we think it is right to deprive workers of their wages, to take away overtime, to basically hit workers day after day after day in their pocketbooks, all while productivity goes up, profits go up, and while executive compensation goes up.

When I was a kid, the average CEO-to-worker ratio of pay was about 35 to 1 or maybe even less than that. Today it is often 300 or 400 to 1. The CEO will make 300 times what the average worker in the same company makes. How much is enough? What moral principle says to pay a CEO 300 or 400 times what a worker makes? How much do they need? Why do they keep doing that?

They keep doing that in part because of people like Mr. Kaplan, who always sides with the CEOs against the workers. As we think about this, I think everybody in this body can learn something from Pope Francis. At the end of June, Pope Francis spoke to workers in Italy at the Italian Confederation of Trade Unions. He was talking about something we do not think about much in this town that really ought to be at the heart of everything we do. He talked about the value and the dignity of work. An employer—a CEO—cannot say that he—and it is usually a “he”—values work when he takes away workers' rights. He cannot say he appreciates the dignity of work, when he scales back their wages or cheats them out of their overtime or takes away, by misclassification, the dollars she has earned.

When Pope Francis talked about the dignity and value of work, he meant all work. He meant looking out for the little guy whether she punches a time clock or fills out a timesheet or makes a salary or earns tips, whether she is a contract worker or a temporary worker, whether he works in a call center or in a bank or on a factory floor.

I went to my high school reunion in Mansfield, OH, about a year and a half ago. I sat across from a bank teller who works for one of the largest banks in the United States. She has worked at that bank for 30 years. She makes \$30,000 a year, and she has worked at a bank, as a bank teller, for most of the last 30 years. That is not respecting the dignity of work. That is simply undermining the value of work.

Pope Francis said:

The person thrives in work. Labour is the most common form of cooperation that humanity has generated in its history.

Work is a form of civil love . . . that makes the world live and carry on.

Yet too often that work—the cooperation that gives life purpose and that powers our country—does not pay off for the people who are doing it. While corporate profits are up, the GDP is up, and executive salaries have exploded upward, wages have barely budged. Workers simply have not shared in the wealth they have created.

I went to an auto plant once after the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement. At my own expense, I flew to Texas. I was representing a congressional district in Northeast Ohio then. I rented a car with a friend, went across the border from New Mexico, and I visited an auto plant in Mexico. It was an American company, but it was in Mexico.

This auto plant looked just like an American auto plant. It was clean, and it was up-to-date. In fact, it was newer than most of our auto plants. The floors were clean, the workers were working hard, and the technology was up-to-date.

Do you know the difference between the American auto plant and the Mexican auto plant? The Mexican auto plant did not have a parking lot because the workers did not make enough. They were not paid enough by this American auto company. They were not paid enough in Mexico to buy the cars they make. The work was not respected, profits were going up, the GDP was going up, executive salaries were going up, and the workers were not sharing in the wealth they created.

This is a universal problem. It affects blue-collar workers, and it affects white-collar workers. It is in the industrial heartland of Ohio, and it is on the farmlands of Iowa. It is a problem on both coasts. People earn less. People cannot save for retirement. People feel less stable—all while working harder, all while producing more for their employers, which feeds right into huge executive compensation, but they do not share in the wealth they create for their companies. They are also less likely to have a union card that protects them.

So the President's appointment to the National Labor Relations Board is pretty much a guy who has tried to make sure unions do not get a foothold in our economy and in our companies.

The Pope spoke about the labor group. He said it performs an “essential role for the common good.”

He said:

It gives voice to those who have none . . . unmasks the powerful who trample on the rights of the most vulnerable workers, defends the cause of the foreigner, the least, the discarded.

This is the Pope talking.

Think about airline baggage handlers. Airline baggage handlers used to make a good union wage. They used to work for United. They used to work for American. They used to work for Delta. Now they work for private companies that are contracted by United, American, and Delta. Airline baggage handlers' wages in the last 10 years have dropped 40 percent. They are working just as hard—they are probably working harder—but they are making 40 percent less than they used to.

Again, the Pope said:

. . . unmasks the powerful who trample on the rights of the most vulnerable workers, defends the cause of the foreigner, the least, the discarded.

The capitalism of our time does not understand the value of the trade union because it has forgotten the social nature of the economy, of the business. This is one of the greatest sins.

We know from rightwing attacks on the labor movement, from so-called right-to-work bills to Mr. Kaplan's efforts to undercut rules that protect workers, that too many in this country do not understand the value of the trade union.

Right now, in Mississippi, auto-workers at Nissan are organizing and trying to form a union, and the corporation has responded. This foreign corporation has responded with despicable intimidation tactics. This is one of the most powerful, profitable companies in the world that is attacking workers one at a time in Mississippi.

One worker said: “There is no atmosphere of free choice in the Canton plant—just fear—which is what Nissan intends.”

It is shameful the lengths that this corporation is going to—all to prevent workers from bargaining for fair pay. It is why we need a strong, not an undercut, weakened, emasculated National Labor Relations Board. We need a strong National Labor Relations Board to defend these workers and defend our laws on the books because an attack on unions is an attack on all workers. It is an attack on our economy as a whole because it depresses wages.

There is the idea that you give tax cuts to the richest people in the country and that you make sure executive salaries are \$5- and \$10- and \$15 million. You squeeze workers so they do not get increases. Is that a good economy? No. The money does not trickle down and build the economy. You build the economy from the middle out. We know that.

In the 1990s, we built the economy from the middle out, with 22 million private sector jobs during the Clinton years. In the Bush years, they had two

huge tax cuts for the rich under the Wall Street Journal theory that it would trickle down and everybody would be better. There was literally no net private sector job increase during the Bush years. There were 22 million private sector jobs in the Clinton years and zero net growth in the Bush years. That is because, during the Bush years, they believed the economy was built from the top down. It is not large businesses that drive the economy—it is the workers. That is how you grow the economy—from the middle class out. If work is not valued, Americans cannot earn their way to better lives for their families no matter how hard they work.

That is what I think of when I hear Pope Francis talk about the social nature of our economy. Work has to support families and communities. Today businesses seem to be more focused on cutting costs than on investing in their workforces. Workers are often nothing more than a line item in a budget, a cost to be minimized. More businesses use temp workers, more businesses use contractors—look at the airlines—and more businesses use subcontractors. They pay a lower wage. They provide less job security. They roll back their retirement benefits. They undercut their health benefits, and they take away legal protections. We have to change this.

This spring, I laid out a plan to make work pay off by raising wages and benefits, including retirement, giving workers more say and more power in the workplace, encouraging companies to invest in their greatest asset—the American worker. My plan to restore the value of work has to include the labor movement. Modernizing labor law means recognizing the right of all workers, even those in alternative work arrangements, to collectively bargain for higher pay and better wages.

Pope Francis concluded:

There is no good society without a good union, and there is no good union that is not reborn every day in the peripheries that does not transform the discarded stones of the economy into its cornerstones.

We are a country of discarded stones—of people who rose from humble beginnings and joined together to build institutions that were greater than any one of us. We need laws that reflect that—that reflect the dignity of work and that reflect, as in the Pope's words, the dignity of every discarded stone, of each and every American who works too many hours for too little pay.

The last thing we need for the National Labor Relations Board is another nominee who does not value work, who demeans work, and who demeans the workers and the unions who do it. Everyone in this town ought to listen a little more to Pope Francis and a little less to corporate lobbyists, a little less to big banks, and a little less to Wall Street. Maybe, then, we will start to make hard work pay off again

for American workers. We can start today by rejecting this anti-worker nominee.

I yield the floor.

(Disturbance in the Visitors' Galleries.)

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Expression of approval or disapproval is not permitted in the Gallery.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

HONORING NEBRASKA'S SOLDIERS WHO LOST THEIR LIVES IN COMBAT

Mrs. FISCHER. Madam President, I rise to continue my tribute to Nebraska's heroes and the current generation of men and women who lost their lives defending our freedom in Iraq and Afghanistan. Each of these Nebraskans has a special story to tell.

CORPORAL MATTHEW ALEXANDER

Madam President, today, I recall the life and the service of Army CPL Matthew Alexander, a native of Gretna, NE.

Matthew was drawn to the military at a young age. His parents Mel and Monica and brother Marshall described him as always eager to be part of a team. He practiced martial arts, played the piano, and participated in band as a kid. As a member of the Gretna High School band, Matthew helped to organize the uniforms and shoes before concerts to ensure that all of the band members were ready to perform. He helped his band mates play at their best, and his caring and compassionate nature stood out among his classmates.

Matthew and his wife Kara had been friends since childhood. Kara described the teenage Matthew as somebody who could not sit still and who loved to learn. He took a keen interest in history and English classes in high school. He was also comfortable in talking with anyone and often referred to the mothers of his friends as "Mom." Kara recalled how Matthew always had a grin or a smile on his face. Matthew also loved his church youth group, and he embraced his Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Matthew always wanted to be a soldier, and the 9/11 terrorist attacks further solidified his desire to defend his country. He enlisted in the Army shortly before graduating from Gretna High School in May of 2004, and he shipped off to basic training that summer.

After he finished training, Matthew attended the Advanced Individual Training to become an infantry soldier. This was the first step toward his dream of joining the Army Special Forces. He was assigned to the 5th Battalion, 20th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Division, 2nd Infantry Division,

and like both of his grandfathers, Corporal Alexander was stationed at Fort Lewis in Washington State.

When he first arrived, his unit had just returned to Fort Lewis from a deployment. Matthew had to wait until the next deployment cycle to go overseas. He did not like that delay. As a brave soldier, eager to defend his country, Matthew wanted to be in the fight. Several months later, Matthew's unit deployed to Mosul, Iraq. They assisted with the training of the Iraqi militia.

From the beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Mosul has been the center of battle. The fighting escalated in 2006 during the Sunni awakening. During the training of Iraqi forces and while conducting combat patrols, troops in Mosul encountered enemy attacks on a daily basis.

Matthew returned home on leave in February of 2007, and he proposed to Kara. They were married 2 weeks later, on February 14, Valentine's Day. Regarding their very short engagement, Kara simply explained that Matthew felt strongly about being married before he returned to combat.

When Matthew returned to Iraq, he learned that his unit had moved to Baqubah. The Battle of Baqubah began in March. The enemy used hit-and-run tactics to harass Allied forces that were trying to control the city. During April and May, the fighting intensified, and casualties were high. Some likened the fierce fight to the close quarters of the combat of Vietnam.

It was in this heat of battle that CPL Alexander showed heroism and leadership when an IED hit a Bradley Fighting Vehicle on one of his missions. As Matthew's section rushed to the burning Bradley, the other vehicle commander told him to block off the southern approach and prevent the enemy from attacking up the road. While the Bradley continued to burn and take machine gun fire, Matthew acted without further instructions, and he saved lives. He set up his vehicle to prevent the attacking enemy forces from shooting accurate fire into those helping with that rescue operation. For his valor, Matthew received the Army Commendation Medal.

One of the members of Matthew's platoon, SSG Mark Grover, remembered Matthew feeling surprised to have been recommended for the honor. He said that he was just doing the right thing to protect his fellow soldiers.

Days before a mission on Sunday, May 6, Matthew called home to talk to his mother Monica and to Kara. Tragically, this was the last time he spoke to loved ones. While on the mission, an improvised explosive device detonated near his vehicle, killing him instantly.

Corporal Alexander was laid to rest on May 18, 2007, in a rural cemetery between Gretna and Elkhorn, NE. Hundreds of Patriot Guard riders led the funeral procession and over 1,500 people filled Gretna High School to say their final goodbyes. Staff Sergeant Grover traveled to Gretna to represent the