

our soldiers abroad, we need to help those who have fought for us, risked their lives for us, and now have healthcare problems.

As hundreds upon hundreds of thousands of miners, truckdrivers, construction workers, and food service workers approach retirement age, we have to make sure the pension plans promised to them have enough in the bank to fulfill that promise. These people painstakingly paid every month into their plans, and so did their employers. They would forgo larger salary increases so they could make sure they are taken care of when they retire.

Now that the pension funds—in good part because of the crash of 2008—don't have the money they need, these people should not be left out. Hard-working American families deserve to retire with the dignity and security they have earned. If we don't meet these pension obligations today, they are going to cost the government a whole lot more tomorrow. That is why Democrats are fighting for a pension solution in the year-end spending bill.

These are all urgent priorities. There are more. They can't wait another day, just as we must make sure our men and women in uniform have the resources and support they need to do their job. Let's do both in a bipartisan way.

As Democrats continue to push for desperately needed funding to combat the opioid crisis, improve veterans' healthcare, and shore up pension plans, we will also be pushing to reauthorize CHIP—the Children's Health Insurance Program—and community health centers, as well as dealing with certain healthcare programs that have expired.

We have to do more for the Americans in Texas, Florida, Louisiana, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands who are still recovering from devastating natural disasters.

We are in the process of negotiating with Republicans to provide a significant investment in border security in exchange for DACA. These talks continue to progress, and I am hopeful we can reach an agreement on that issue as well.

We have a lot to get done before the end of the year. We don't have much time to do it, but with the concerted effort of both parties, negotiating in good faith, I believe we can reach an agreement acceptable not to every Member of either Chamber but to large numbers of Members on both sides of the aisle so we can pass our agreement by a wide margin.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant 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 ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

NET NEUTRALITY

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, for more than two decades, under both Repub-

lican and Democratic Presidents and Republican and Democratic Congresses, the United States pursued a bipartisan light-touch approach to internet regulation. The internet as we know it today flourished under this light-touch approach, much to the benefit of American consumers and the domestic economy. It also made America the world leader in internet technology and positioned us to continue that leadership in the years to come.

In 2002, broadband internet was classified by the Federal Communications Commission, or FCC, our Nation's communications regulator, as an information service under title I of the Communications Act. This classification exempted the internet from burdensome regulations contained in title II of the Communications Act, which were designed in the Depression era for the old telephone monopolies.

Under the Obama administration, we saw repeated attempts to bring the internet under greater government control. Finally, in 2015, at the explicit direction of President Obama, the FCC did as it was told and reclassified broadband internet access service as a title II service, subjecting broadband internet to onerous common carrier rules and opening the door to further regulation, including price regulation. Not surprisingly, with heavier regulation came a decline in broadband investment. Indeed, we have seen private investment in broadband infrastructure decline over the past 2 years. This decline should not be mistaken as a sign that broadband infrastructure is not needed. In fact, the opposite is true, as there are still 34 million Americans who lack access to broadband services at home.

In States like my home State of South Dakota, encouraging broadband deployment continues to be critical to ensuring that rural areas have the same economic opportunity as their urban counterparts. The Federal Government should not be putting up barriers to broadband deployment; it should be removing them. Congress and the FCC need to ensure regulatory framework is in place that protects consumers but that doesn't stand in the way of investment and innovation.

Prior to the FCC's 2015 actions to bring broadband under title II, and for more than a decade under the light-touch regulatory framework of title I, we saw unprecedented growth that revolutionized our daily lives and allowed us to stay better connected with our loved ones. The internet created new jobs and expanded opportunities for education and commerce. It became the greatest engine of innovation for our times.

Despite the fearmongering and doomsday rhetoric that continues to plague this debate, when the FCC moves forward and restores the internet to its pre-2015 regulatory status, the internet will continue to thrive and serve as an engine for future economic growth.

I commend Chairman Pai at the FCC and the entire Commission for all the hard work over the last year that has gotten us to this point. I also commend Chairman Pai for his commitment to transparency throughout this process. For the first time in the history of the Commission, under Chairman Pai's leadership, the public was able to view the Restoring Internet Freedom item 3 weeks prior to the FCC's vote. That is true of all documents to be considered by the Commission—a major departure from the previous administration's actions, which were often not made public until the very last minute. As a result of Chairman Pai's commitment to transparency, the public has the benefit of not only viewing the item but also participating in the process.

Despite attempts by those more interested in politicizing the issue and distracting from this debate, this item resulted in the most well informed and most exhaustive record of comments ever submitted to the FCC. The FCC is now well positioned to move forward to ensure that the internet is open and free. Regrettably, however, debate doesn't end there. The outcry from opponents of the FCC's proposal is that the internet will fall apart without adequate consumer protections.

There is obviously immense passion that follows the issue of net neutrality. Americans care deeply about preserving a free and open internet, as do I and so many of my colleagues in the U.S. Senate on both sides of the aisle.

As I have stated repeatedly and I will say again today, congressional action is the only way to solve the endless back-and-forth on net neutrality rules that we have seen over the past several years. If my colleagues on the other side of the aisle and those who claim to support net neutrality rules want to enshrine protections for consumers with the backing of the law, I call on them today to join me in discussing legislation that would do just that. While we are not going to agree on everything, I believe there is much room for compromise.

Many of us in Congress already agree on many of the principles of net neutrality. True supporters of an open internet should be demanding such legislative protections today, not posturing while waiting for years during protracted legal proceedings or waiting for the political winds to shift.

If Republicans and Democrats have the political support to work together on such a compromise, we can enact a regulatory framework that will stand the test of time. I have stood willing to work with any and all supporters of net neutrality protections for many years now, and I continue to stand ready today.

It is time for Congress to settle this debate, and I welcome discussion on ways to ensure a free and open internet for decades to come.

TAX REFORM BILL

Mr. President, it has been a good week in the U.S. Senate. We are getting closer and closer to the finish line

on tax reform. That means we are getting closer and closer to real relief for the American people. Our legislation is going to cut tax bills for American families, it is going to increase their wages, and it is going to give them access to new jobs and opportunities.

The tax bill the Senate passed on December 2 would cut income tax rates for American families starting next month. It would double the standard deduction. It would double the child tax credit. That would mean a substantially lower tax bill for American families next year. Under our bill, a family of four making \$73,000 a year would see a \$2,200 tax cut.

But our bill doesn't just provide immediate relief for families. Our bill also sets families up for economic health for the long-term by giving them access to higher wages, new jobs, and better opportunities.

How does it do this? By improving the playing field for American businesses. In order for individual Americans to thrive economically, we need American businesses to thrive.

Thriving businesses create jobs and provide opportunities; they increase wages and invest in their workers. But our current Tax Code has not been helping businesses thrive. For years now, our tax laws have left businesses of all sizes struggling under the burden of high tax rates and an outdated tax system that has left American businesses at a disadvantage in the global economy. Small businesses employ nearly half of American workers and create a majority of new jobs in this country, but right now small businesses face high tax rates that can make it difficult for these businesses to even survive, much less thrive and expand their operations.

Our bill fixes this. To start with, our bill implements a new deduction for passthrough businesses, such as partnerships, LLCs, and S corporations. This deduction would allow them to keep more of their money, which would allow them to reinvest in their operations to increase wages and to hire new workers.

Our bill also reforms current provisions in the Tax Code that frequently leave small businesses with little cash on hand. Under our legislation, small businesses would be able to recover the capital they have invested in inventory and machinery much more quickly and, in certain cases, immediately. This, in turn, would free up capital small businesses could use to expand and create jobs.

Our legislation also includes provisions that I helped develop that would simplify accounting rules for small businesses, which would also help reduce their tax burden, leaving more of their earnings to reinvest in their businesses and in their workers.

In addition to providing relief to small businesses, our bill will boost American wages by lowering our massive corporate tax rate. Our Nation's corporate tax rate is currently the

highest in the industrialized world, which puts U.S. businesses at a major disadvantage next to their international competitors. Reducing the corporate tax rate will enable U.S. businesses to compete on a more level playing field, freeing up money that U.S. businesses can use to create jobs and to increase wages.

The White House Council of Economic Advisers estimates that reducing the corporate tax rate to 20 percent would increase wages for U.S. households by \$4,000. That is money that families could use to save for retirement, help pay for a child's education, replace an aging vehicle, or invest in their home.

Our bill would also boost wages and increase opportunities for Americans by ending the outdated tax framework that is driving American companies to keep jobs and profits overseas. Our Nation currently operates under a so-called worldwide tax system. That means that American companies pay U.S. taxes on the profit they make here at home as well as on part of the profits they make abroad, once they bring that money back to the United States. The problem with this is that American companies are already paying taxes to foreign governments on the money they make abroad. When they bring that money home, they can end up having to pay taxes again on part of those profits at the highest tax rate in the industrialized world. It is no surprise that this discourages businesses from bringing their profits back to the United States to invest in their domestic operations, new jobs, and increased wages.

Our bill replaces our outdated worldwide tax system with a territorial tax system. Under our legislation, American companies would no longer face the double taxation that has encouraged them to send their investments and their operations overseas. Instead, U.S. companies would have a strong incentive to invest their profits at home in American jobs and American workers.

All in all, the Tax Foundation estimates that in addition to increasing wages, our bill would create nearly 1 million new jobs for American workers and boost the size of the economy by 3.7 percent.

This week, Members of the House and the Senate—myself included—are working on the final draft of comprehensive tax reform legislation. We hope to send a final bill to the President next week. I am thankful to have been able to be part of this tax-writing effort.

The bill we are finalizing, which is the product of years of work by Members of both parties, represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to profoundly change the American people's lives for the better. Our tax bill will provide real, immediate, direct relief to Americans and do it now, and it will give Americans access to the kinds of jobs, wages, and opportunities they

need for a secure and prosperous future. After years of economic stagnation, the bill we are drafting will usher in a new era of economic dynamism in this country, and it will send a message to the world that America is serious about competing and winning in the 21st century.

I am grateful to my colleagues on the House and Senate tax-writing committees for all the work they have done to put together this legislation, and I look forward to working with my colleagues on the conference committee to finish our final draft and to get this bill across the finish line for the American people.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT *pro tempore*. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I approach this topic with a little bit of trepidation. Ordinarily when people make outrageous, outlandish, and unbelievable statements, I usually think it is best just to let them go because when people make these kinds of statements, I think they lose their own credibility, and maybe it doesn't bear any particular comment by anybody else or a desire or an attempt to refute it. But on the subject of tax reform, there have been some incredible statements that have been made, and I am going to mention a few of those because I think they really paint an ugly picture of what is supposed to be a debate on tax reform policy, but I think probably they relate more to sort of the nature of what passes for debate here in Washington, DC—and particularly the Congress—on matters of important public policy. In other words, there isn't a lot of debate. There is accusation after accusation. It gets repeated on social media, then the press picks it up, and then people just assume, well, it must be true since nobody has ever denied it or offered any contrary narrative.

For example, the House minority leader apparently had the time to read every bill that has ever been written since the year 1789 because she felt comfortable calling this tax bill, which is still in the process of being written—reconciling the House and Senate versions—she called it the “worst bill in the history of the United States Congress.” She has been busy if she has read every bill since 1789. Then she went further because that apparently wasn't enough for her. She said that our tax bill isn't just poor legislation; she said that it is an existential threat to the Nation and possibly the entire planet. Can you believe that? An existential threat to the Nation and possibly the entire planet.

Well, you can see why perhaps I was reluctant to come address these accusations, because I think anybody who would make those kinds of accusations has lost all credibility. But acting either as a prophet or an amateur astrologist—we are not quite sure—she called the prospect of passing tax reform “Armageddon.”

Well, it is hard to know what to say or do in the face of that sort of rhetoric because, frankly, this tax reform bill is a good thing. I wish our friends across the aisle, the Democrats, would join us in trying to make it better. That is what happened the last time we tried to do this or this Congress tried to do it.

In 1986, a Republican President; a Democratic Senator from New Jersey, Senator Bill Bradley; Dan Rostenkowski from Chicago, chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, a Democrat; and other Members of Congress came together to try to reform our Tax Code, and they were successful in doing it against all odds.

But today, we have an entirely different scenario. We have Republicans seeing that the economy is growing at a very slow rate and that wages for most workers have been flat for the last 10 years and realizing that our current Tax Code is counterproductive when it comes to encouraging investment, job creation, and wage growth in our country because we have the highest tax rate in the world for businesses that do business internationally. We thought, we need to do something about it, and so we set about reforming our Tax Code with three goals in mind.

One is to simplify the Tax Code. Everybody knows how complex it is and how much money people spend hiring an accountant or H&R Block or somebody to help them figure it out. Secondly, we figured that it would be important to give hard-working families a tax cut. So we have succeeded in reducing the tax break for every tax bracket in the Tax Code for working families. For example, for low-income families, we have a zero tax bracket now. For a joint-filing husband and wife, on the first \$24,000 they earn, there is no tax at all. And thanks to some great work by Senator RUBIO and Senator LEE, we have doubled the child tax credit. Those are good things. We have doubled the standard deduction—so fewer people have to itemize deductions to get the full benefit of the code—while maintaining the charitable deduction and the mortgage interest deduction and popular items like that. We have also said, for example, that a family earning roughly \$70,000 a year—the median income in America for a family of four—would see a benefit of roughly \$2,200 less tax liability.

I would think those would be good things that our friends across the aisle would want to work with us on. How do we simplify the code? How do we let people keep more of what they earn, more take-home pay, a better standard of living? How do we make America's

economy more competitive since we have the highest tax rate in the world and we are seeing investment in businesses flee to other lower tax jurisdictions? You would think those would be the sorts of things on which our friends across the aisle would want to work with us but apparently not. Instead, what we get are these sort of reckless and really buffoonish allegations that cause the speaker to lose all credibility in any sort of debate we might be having.

Unfortunately, the media tends to pick up on some of this rhetoric and jump on the bandwagon, but the media's worst claims are at least a little closer to Earth than what I recounted earlier. For example, the Washington Post said the tax reform “took place behind closed doors.” Well, that is a tired old rhetoric and talking point. You would think the Washington Post could come up with something a little better than that and actually something that is a little more accurate than that. One columnist at the New York Times sighs that the package benefits donors at the expense of voters—what does that mean?—and that it “only modestly addresses the central socioeconomic challenge of our time.” Well, I wonder what this reporter or columnist for the New York Times thinks is the central socioeconomic challenge of our time. I think one of those is for people to be able to pursue the American dream, to be able to find work, to be paid a decent wage, and to be able to keep more of what they earn, but that apparently isn't good enough for this columnist at the New York Times.

Certainly, these charges deserve a little more attention than the minority leader's asteroid attack, but they, too, are misguided.

When it comes to tax reform, the drafting process did not take place behind closed doors. I wonder why the Washington Post was so ill-informed and ignorant of the legislative process that they didn't see the 70 Senate hearings we have had on tax reform since 2011. They apparently didn't bother to turn on C-SPAN to see the debate and the amendment process in the Senate Finance Committee that produced the Senate bill, and they apparently are not paying much attention to what we are talking about here on the Senate floor as we are trying to reconcile the differences between the House bill and the Senate bill. So I guess they are just not paying much attention, which I thought newspapers and reporters were supposed to do.

The second major allegation—that we are ignoring working Americans and the middle class—is demonstrably false.

Many are wondering why tax cuts for families are temporary and the ones for corporations are permanent. Well, we know that businesses need long-term assurances about the tax environment so that they will invest and make plans. We wanted to make tax cuts for

individuals permanent, too, but that requires 60 votes in the Senate, and every single one of our Democratic colleagues voted against the bill and they refused to participate in the process. So with only 52 votes to work with, we were unable to meet that 60-vote threshold. So on the one hand, they criticize us for not making those tax cuts for individuals permanent, but then they deny us the votes we need in order to make that happen. It is not that we don't want to make these tax cuts permanent for the middle class; it is that the Democrats are preventing us from doing so.

I agree with my friend and colleague, the junior Senator from Florida, Mr. RUBIO, who has said that when it comes to debating tax reform, Republicans can't be the country club party. I certainly agree that is not who we are, but that is also not who we should be helping in this bill. We ought to be addressing low-income and middle-class Americans first.

Yes, we do lower the corporate rate, but historically that has been something Democrats have called for. I remember that in 2011, President Obama, in a joint session of Congress, called for reducing the highest corporate tax rate in the world, and he called upon Republicans and Democrats to work together to make that happen. And we have had others, like the ranking member on the Senate Finance Committee, the Senator from Oregon, Mr. WYDEN, who cosponsored a bill that would have reduced the corporate tax rate from 35 percent to 24 percent. We do a little better than that in this bill. We take it down to 20 percent, which is close to the industrialized world average on tax rates, but the Senator from New York, the Democratic leader, has also called for lowering the corporate tax rate and making us more competitive in the global economy. Do you know what will happen when we do that? We will see investment come back to the United States, along with the jobs that go along with it. Who will benefit from that? Will the businesses that create those jobs benefit? I suppose they will, but the people who will really benefit will be the people who perform those jobs and who earn those wages: hard-working American families.

A group of nearly 140 economists say that, on balance, they believe the bill will enhance economic efficiency and result in most households enjoying lower marginal rates. That is economics talk for tax cuts. But what about fairness and simplification? Don't we all want a fairer tax code and one that is easier to navigate? I believe, once again, our bill delivers.

Those economists I mentioned say fairness would be served by reduction differences, and the tax treatment of individuals with similar incomes and simplification would be served by reducing the number of individuals who itemize for Federal tax purposes. That is exactly what we do by doubling the standard deduction.

Right now, about 3 out of 10 individual taxpayers itemize. Under our doubling the standard deduction, only 1 out of 10 will find it necessary to itemize.

The simple truth is, the Senate bill will lower tax bills on millions of working-class Americans. It will lower taxes, not raise them, on the working class. Again, by nearly doubling the standard deduction and lowering rates across the board and doubling the child tax credit, the Senate tax reform plan will lower taxes for every income group. The Senate tax plan was written with working families in mind, and the legislation reflects that goal.

As I said earlier, and I will say it again, a family of four earning a median income of about \$70,000 will see a \$2,200 savings in their tax bill each year. It may be easy for folks living in the rarified air in Washington, DC, to shrug that off and say \$2,200 is no big deal to me, but to the people I represent, \$2,200 in tax savings a year is a big deal. It can mean the difference between being able to save for retirement, help pay for a college education, or maybe take a vacation for the first time in a long time. That is the money they have earned, and we are simply saying you can keep more of it under this bill.

Finally, I want to mention the Federal deficit. Will the tax bill increase it? Well, yesterday the Office of Tax Policy at the Treasury Department released an analysis of expected tax revenue associated with the administration's economic growth initiatives. Among the key findings is, \$1.8 trillion of additional revenue would be generated over 10 years based on expected economic growth. The Congressional Budget Office uses the baseline of 1.9-percent economic growth. That is because, during the entire Obama Presidency, the U.S. Government and economy experienced an unprecedented low rate of economic growth since the Great Recession of 2008, but, historically, dating back to World War II, we have seen the economy grow at 3.2 percent. So why should we settle for 1.9 percent or 2 percent? We shouldn't.

Our friends on the other side have suddenly become deficit hawks after seeing the national debt double during the Obama administration. Let's not forget, they supported lowering these same corporate tax rates year after year and embraced other parts of our plan which we have incorporated. That is why their attacks, their histrionics, their screams of Armageddon are laughable, and, frankly, they insult the intelligence of Americans who are trying to figure this out. It is hard to figure out what is actually happening when you have somebody crying like Chicken Little that the sky is falling. It is hard for people to sort all of this out.

Well, as we continue to work on a conference committee report to reconcile the differences between the House and the Senate versions of the

bill, our focus will be on those hard-working American families I mentioned earlier—people of modest income, people of average income.

Yes, we are going to make our businesses more competitive globally because that will benefit the same families we are trying to benefit by the individual tax cuts.

You can see why I perhaps was a little reluctant to come address some of these histrionics and outlandish and unbelievable claims, but I have also learned that if you don't respond—if you don't counter falsehood with truth—some people are simply going to believe the falsehood, so I thought it was important to do so. Let's remain clear-eyed, and let's get this work done.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, I come to the floor to talk about the Children's Health Insurance Program and Community Health Centers, but I do want to take a moment to respond to my friend and colleague, the distinguished Senator on the Republican side.

I can speak for myself and others, I know, on this side who very much want to see tax reform, very much want to close loopholes that take jobs overseas and support small businesses, but what is in front of us and what was voted on was a bill that, when fully implemented, would raise taxes on something like 87 million middle-class Americans. That doesn't make any sense at all.

All of the rosy estimates on economic growth were not backed up in legislative language. As to the \$4,000 wage increase that had been talked about as a minimum for people across the country to receive based on economic growth, I suggested we write that into law; that if, in fact, folks don't get their \$4,000, the tax breaks would stop—and folks aren't willing to do that.

I want to make sure folks in Michigan get their \$4,000 wage increase, and we don't get another bunch of promises with trickle-down economics, where everything goes to the top 1 percent, and folks in Michigan are still waiting for it to trickle down.

CHIP AND COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTERS

Mr. President, let me go to the subject I am here to talk about; that is, the fact that we are now on day 73 since the Children's Health Insurance Program and community health center funding has stopped. The Federal funding stopped on September 30.

I am very concerned. I was reading today that the House leadership has essentially been saying they don't want to see this continued as part of a year-end package in 2 weeks. My assumption was, we were going to see the Children's Health Insurance Program and community health centers wrapped into the bill in a couple of weeks that would set the priorities for our country.

If it is true what was reported, there ought to be an alarm going out all across the country. The Children's Health Insurance Program—which we call MICHild in Michigan—covers 9 million children across the country. These are working families. These are working families who need some help to have insurance for their children—children who now go to the doctor instead of an emergency room. This actually saves dollars by children being able to have a regular relationship with a doctor, parents knowing they can take their children to the doctor instead of having to figure out how to address their concerns in the middle of the night in the emergency room.

So 9 million children right now are at risk because of inaction. It has been 73 days. I am very concerned that as soon as February, the MICHild Program will be running out of funding. In fact, this month, there are three States that are losing funding for the Children's Health Insurance Program: Arizona, with over 88,000 children who receive health insurance and are able to go to the doctor. Their moms and dads know that at least the kids are going to be able to see the doctor for their juvenile diabetes, their asthma, or simple things like a cold, flu, or serious things like cancer.

New Hampshire has 17,000—almost 18,000 children. In Oregon, 140,000 children right now receive their healthcare through the Children's Health Insurance Program. Starting in January, if there is no action, we will see millions of children losing their health insurance: California, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Idaho, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Texas, Utah, and Virginia. Each month, we will see funding that will be eliminated. In total, we are talking about 9 million children.

This has been a bipartisan program. This came out of committee on a bipartisan vote in September with Senator HATCH and Senator WYDEN. I was pleased to join them in putting together a 5-year extension. It came out of committee with strong bipartisan support and only one “no” vote.

I assumed it was going to be brought up on the floor before September 30 and passed. Yet 73 days later, children and families across the country are still waiting.

The other piece of healthcare that has been so critical to families—to children and individuals across our country—is funding for community health centers, which, by the way, also has strong bipartisan support. Senator ROY BLUNT and I have put in legislation with Republicans and Democrats cosponsoring it. We have a letter that 70 different Members signed to our leadership saying they support extending community health center funding. Yet, again, there has been no action for 73 days.

Our assumption had been that the Children's Health Insurance Program would come to the floor, we would amend it to add health centers, and get