

of the military areas. I also mentioned the chambers of commerce. They have awakened to the fact that oil on beaches is a killer of our economy. When this plan is announced later today, probably, it will not be unusual to see local governments spring into action, like the Broward County Board of Commissioners, which has already sent letters that oppose drilling off of Florida's coast.

Floridians understand this issue. That is why, in the past, we have had such bipartisan agreement all over Florida—Republicans and Democrats alike—to keep drilling off of our coast, but if Big Oil gets its way, every inch of the Continental Shelf is going to be drilled. We saw what happened less than a decade ago. The scientists would say we are still uncovering, for example, the full extent of that BP oilspill and its damage.

I urge our colleagues to take up the bill that was filed earlier this year by this Senator, Senator MARKEY, and others that would block an attempt by the administration to open up our coast to oil drilling.

The stakes are extremely high for the economy of our States all along the eastern coast. Georgia has a substantial tourism-driven economy. You know South Carolina has Myrtle Beach. What about North Carolina? What about Virginia's tourism-driven economy and especially with all of the military concentration there? You can go right on up the coast. The stakes are exceptionally high. We simply can't risk it.

I yield the floor.

RECESS

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

Thereupon, the Senate, at 12:29 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. PORTMAN).

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR—Continued

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

FUNDING THE GOVERNMENT AND THE REPUBLICAN TAX BILL

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, as everybody knows, the Republican Party now controls the U.S. House, the U.S. Senate, and the White House. We also know that unless a budget agreement is reached by December 22, the U.S. Government will shut down, which will cause serious harm to our country, including the men and women in the Armed Forces and our veterans.

I do not know why the Republican Party, which controls all the branches of government, wants to shut down our government. I think that is wrong, and I think a shutdown will be very hurtful to people from coast to coast.

Earlier this year, President Trump tweeted: “Our country needs a good

shutdown.” I strongly disagree. I don’t think we need a good shutdown; I think we need to reach an agreement on a budget that works for the middle class of our country and not just the wealthiest people.

It is no great secret that we are living in a nation that has almost unprecedented income and wealth inequality, at least since the 1920s. We have the top one-tenth of 1 percent owning almost as much wealth as the bottom 90 percent.

I don’t believe that now is the time to give massive tax breaks to the wealthiest people in this country in a horrific tax bill and then at the end of 10 years raise taxes on 83 million middle-class families. I think that makes no sense. I don’t think it makes much sense to be passing a tax bill that gives 62 percent of the benefits to the top 1 percent.

Apparently it is not good enough for my Republican colleagues that corporate America today is enjoying record-breaking profits and that the CEOs of large corporations are earning more than 300 times what their employees make. What the tax bill would do is give over \$1 trillion in tax breaks to large, profitable corporations at a time when already one out of five of these major corporations is paying nothing in taxes. That is apparently not good enough—we need to lower taxes for large corporations even more.

Right now as we speak, legislation is being written behind closed doors by the House Freedom Caucus and other Members of the extreme rightwing to provide a massive increase in funding for the Pentagon for the rest of the fiscal year, while only providing temporary and inadequate funding for the needs of the working families of this country, including education, affordable housing, nutrition, environmental protection, and other vital programs.

What we have seen over the last year is a Republican effort to throw 30 million people off of health insurance. What we then see is a Republican effort to give \$1 trillion in tax breaks to the top 1 percent and large corporations and at the end of 10 years raise taxes on middle-class families. Now what we are seeing on the part of the Republican Party is an effort to increase military spending by \$54 billion while ignoring the needs of a struggling middle class. We have to get our priorities right and maybe—just maybe—we have to start listening to what the American people want, not just what wealthy campaign contributors want.

In terms of the Republican so-called healthcare bill, the repeal of the Affordable Care Act, there is massive opposition from the American people. In terms of this tax bill, in case you haven’t seen the last few polls, there is massive opposition to a tax bill that gives incredible tax breaks to people who don’t need it and raises taxes on the middle class. Maybe—just maybe—we should start paying attention to the needs of working families.

For a start, let us be clear that since the passage of the Budget Control Act of 2011, Democrats and Republicans have agreed to operate with parity, which means if you are going to increase military spending, you increase programs that meet the needs of working families, domestic spending. There was parity in 2011 and parity three times after, and parity must continue. It is not acceptable to be talking about a huge increase in military spending and not funding the needs of a shrinking middle class, which desperately needs help in terms of education, in terms of nutrition, and so many other areas.

Furthermore, the American people are quite clear that they want us to move toward comprehensive immigration reform. They understand that it would be a terrible, terrible, terrible thing to say to the 800,000 young people who have lived, in most cases, their entire lives in the United States of America: We are ending the DACA Program. You are going to lose your legal status. You are not going to be able to go to school. You are not going to be able to hold a job. You are not going to be able to be in the military. We are taking away the legal status that you now have, and you will be subject to deportation. That is not what the American people want. They want to continue the DACA Program, and, in fact, they want comprehensive immigration reform—and now. Now is the time to deal with that.

I am happy to say that on this issue, there are a growing number of Republicans in the House and in the Senate who understand that in America, you are not going to throw 800,000 of our brightest young people, who are serving in the military and holding important jobs, out of this country by withdrawing their legal status.

I have been deeply involved, as have Senator BLUNT and others, in the Community Health Center Program, which is so important for the people of our country. Twenty-seven million Americans today receive their healthcare through community health centers, which provide primary care, provide mental health counseling—so important today—provide dental care, and provide low-cost prescription drugs. While my Republican colleagues have been busy trying to throw 30 million people off of health insurance, while they have been busy trying to give a trillion dollars in tax breaks for the rich and for large corporations, somehow they have not had the time to extend the CHIP program or the Community Health Center Program. How in God’s Name can we be talking about tax breaks for billionaires and not extending a health insurance program for the children of our country? If the CHIP program is not reauthorized, 9 million children and working families will lose their health insurance.

Let us get our priorities right. Let us immediately pass legislation extending and funding the CHIP program and the Community Health Center Program.

In the Midwest, as you well know, and all over this country, we have a major crisis in terms of pensions. So many of our older workers are scared to death about retiring because they have very little or nothing in the bank as they end their work careers. If Congress does not act soon, the earned pension benefits of more than 1.5 million workers and retirees in multiemployer pension plans could be cut by up to 60 percent. People who have worked their entire lives, people who have put money into a pension program, people who have given up wage increases in order to gain decent pensions now stand the possibility of seeing their pensions cut by up to 60 percent. How can we do that? How do you tell someone who has worked their entire life, who is looking forward to a decent retirement, that we are going to cut their pension by up to 60 percent? We cannot do that. When a worker is promised a pension benefit after a lifetime of hard work, that promise must be kept. Congress needs to act before the end of the year to make sure that no one in America in a multiemployer pension plan will see their pension cut. Yes, I also think that is more important than tax breaks for billionaires.

We need to make a downpayment on universal childcare. In my State of Vermont and all over this country, it is increasingly difficult for working families to find high-quality, affordable childcare. We must, in my view, double the funding for the Childcare and Development Block Grant to provide childcare assistance for 226,000 more children and move toward universal childcare for every kid in America. What the social sciences tell us is that there is no better investment than early childhood education. Every dollar we invest there is paid back many times over by kids doing better at school and by kids getting out, getting jobs, and becoming taxpayers.

There is another crisis in this country that has to be dealt with. Ten years ago, Congress passed the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program to support Americans who enter public service careers—teachers, nurses, firefighters, police officers, social workers, and military personnel. One of the absurdities that exists in America today is that we have tens of millions of Americans who are paying outrageous interest rates on their student debt. People who have done the right thing by trying to get the best education they could are now being punished because they went to college, went to graduate school, and are having to pay a significant part of their income back to the government in terms of their student debt. Congress must address this issue, and there is legislation to make sure that, at the very least, if you are prepared to go into public service work—if you want to be a teacher, a nurse, a firefighter, a police officer, a social worker, or want to go into the military—we will forgive your debt. That is an issue that should be dealt with before the end of the year.

We have a crisis in terms of our rural infrastructure, and I come from a rural State. In the year 2017, soon to be 2018, how does it happen that in rural communities all over America there are inadequate broadband capabilities? How do you start a small business in a small town if you don't have good-quality broadband? How do the kids do well in school if they can't gain access to the internet? This is the United States of America, and we should not be trailing countries all over the world that have better broadband access at lower costs than we do. If we want to grow rural America, if we want our kids to stay in rural America, we have to deal with the collapsing infrastructure in this country, especially in rural America.

Mr. President, I don't have to tell you—because Ohio has been hit hard, as has Vermont, New Hampshire, and all over this country—that we have a terrible, terrible epidemic in terms of opioid addiction. I am trying to deal with this issue in the State of Vermont, and I know it is severe in Ohio. We have to be adequately funding programs that focus on prevention, making sure that our young people do not get trapped into a life of addiction. We have to provide the kinds of treatment people need. We cannot ignore this. This is an epidemic that is sweeping this country. More people will die this year from opioid overdoses than died during the entire war in Vietnam. We have to adequately fund treatment and prevention for the epidemic that we are seeing in terms of opioids.

We ought to keep our promises to our veterans. We now have tens of thousands of positions at the Veterans Administration that have not been filled, and we need to make sure they are filled so that the veterans of our country, when they go into the VA, get high-quality care in a timely manner, which they are entitled to.

There was an article, I think it was in the Washington Post, a couple of weeks ago that talked about the fact that 10,000 people died in the last year, waiting for a decision on Social Security disability benefits. In other words, you have people who desperately need these benefits; they have applied for these benefits through the Social Security Administration, and they wait and they wait and they wait. Unbelievably, in the last year, 10,000 people died while they were waiting for a decision from the Social Security Administration. This has everything to do with the fact that there have been budget cuts in recent years that have been significant and have resulted in the loss of more than 10,000 employees in the Social Security Administration, the closing of 64 field offices, and reduced hours in many others. In Vermont, one field office has seen its staffing cut by 30 percent. We have to adequately fund the Social Security Administration so that our elderly and our disabled can get due process in terms of the benefits for which they have filed.

In 2016, the National Park Service recorded over 330 million visits to na-

tional parks and over \$11 billion in deferred maintenance. In other words, our national parks are very, very popular, but they are not getting the maintenance work they need. Meanwhile, the President wants to double fees for people visiting our beautiful national parks. This is an issue we must deal with.

The bottom line is that we are coming toward the end of the year, and we have a lot of work to do, but the work we do has to start reflecting the needs of the working people of this country, not just the billionaire class. We cannot give \$54 billion more to the military and ignore the needs of our children, our elderly, our sick, our poor. We have to come up with a budget proposal that works for all of us and not just wealthy campaign contributors. As a member of the Budget Committee, I expect to be very active in that process.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

HEALTHCARE

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, I stand today to call for bipartisan action on several things that are really critical. One of them has become routine, since it started as a bill that Democrats and Republicans did together. That was the Children's Health Insurance Program, something that my colleague from Vermont has referenced.

In my State, we have been a good-government State. We have had a budget surplus for years, and, believe it or not, we relied on the fact that Congress would come through and do what they were supposed to do and reauthorize the Children's Health Insurance Program, but that didn't happen. As a result, we have a slight budget deficit—something we haven't had for years. But it really hit home when I called our budget director in the State and I said: How did this happen when we have had these surpluses?

He said: Well, we actually thought that you guys would reauthorize the Children's Health Insurance Program, but you didn't.

Instead, what we have seen is a tax bill that adds over a trillion dollars to the debt. Even when you take into account any economic gain from that bill, a nonpartisan group said that it would, in fact, add \$1 trillion to the debt. That is what we are doing instead of reauthorizing the Children's Health Insurance Program, which makes no sense to me.

Funding for CHIP expired more than 2 months ago, even though, as I said, it is one of the success stories out of this Congress. Both parties have come together for years to support this program that provides healthcare to millions of children across the country.

In Minnesota, these funds support coverage for more than 125,000 kids. Just last week, my State estimated that failing to reauthorize CHIP would cost us \$178 million. That is why the