

forever in fire suppression. There is a group of chemicals that they dump called PFOS. That is the acronym. We have fire suppression equipment that has been used at training facilities and others on our Air Force bases, Army bases, National Guard bases, and so on, for a long time. It is not used anymore. On the west side of Michigan, we have private companies making footwear and other kinds of products where these water-resistant chemicals have been used in all kinds of ways for a long time.

Across the country, States like Michigan are struggling to address serious contamination of drinking water caused by a chemical that has been used in this firefighting foam. At our National Guard training center, Camp Grayling in Northern Michigan—which is the largest one in the country for the National Guard—we have a beautiful lake. We have a lot of lakes. This beautiful lake is in the middle of this very large facility. We now see this foam flowing on top of the water. For people with private property around the lake, this foam chemical now is floating on top of the water. The townships are looking at ways that they can go from individual wells to some kind of municipal water system, but it is touching every part of Michigan. My guess is that before it is done, because these types of foams were used all over the country, we are going to see it everywhere, and we are going to have real challenges.

I am very appreciative that the Department of Defense appropriations money was added for a study to look at the broader safety issues and public health issues that relate to this so we know that the right standards are set. There are standards now, but we need to be looking more deeply at the impacts on ground water and so on. We are going to have a lot of remediation to do for the public sector as well as private sector.

Here is the problem. This bill says that States can no longer issue any regulation on the use of these foams which may contain toxic substances. It is not only ballast water that we care deeply about. States that don't have the beautiful Great Lakes around them or our coastlines are impacted by these toxic substances that we are finding more of every day—these chemicals that were used everywhere. I am sure people thought they were safe when they were using them. Now we are finding out they were not, and they have a huge impact.

This is especially problematic when the States—not the Federal Government—are on the frontline in addressing this new awareness of citizens about the impact of the ground water contamination. This bill would take away the capacity for States to be able to act. I don't think any of the supporters of the bill intended for this to happen. In fact, many of the proponents of the bill have been leaders in the effort in the Senate to address these chemicals.

I urge us to take a step back, and before voting to proceed to concur with this, that we take a step back together and take a look at the broader implications of the way this language is put together. I strongly support the Coast Guard bill. I think everybody here is going to regret it if this moves forward with this additional language. Certainly, I am not going to support it. Because of the ballast water concerns alone, I would not. But you add on top of that taking away the State's capacity to be able to address these toxic chemicals that we are now finding everywhere—not only in Michigan, but across the country—and I think they should be sending off alarm bells to everyone.

I know that Senator CARPER and the EPW Committee have been working on a real solution to address this issue. I personally think we can do that on a bipartisan basis. I hope we will.

This is a vote, I think, that many will regret down the road as this PFOS chemical contamination becomes more widespread. The firefighting foam wasn't just used in Michigan or in a few States. It was around the country. I think taking away the State's ability to be able to address that in their State is a very serious issue. I would urge my colleagues to vote no on this motion. Let us go back and take another look at it and figure out some different language. Certainly, we all support the Coast Guard. If we want to take VIDA out and do the Coast Guard bill, that is great. If we want to look at the issues around VIDA—and I appreciate the concerns around that—let's do it in a way that makes sense for the people we represent and the States who need to be able to act now. In Michigan, this has become a huge issue around this group of toxic chemicals.

I urge a "no" vote. Whenever we vote—I believe it may be tomorrow—I hope that we take a step back and work together to get this right.

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

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

TAX REFORM

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, today is the last tax day under the old, awful, and broken tax system that the American people have had to put up with for decades.

Under the tax relief law that Republicans passed in this body in December—it was signed by President Trump and passed the House, as well—we now have a simpler and fairer system and, so importantly, one that is much less expensive for American families.

One big thing we did in the tax law was to double the standard deduction that people can take. This is what it

means. This one change alone, all by itself, means that 95 percent of taxpayers will be taking the standard deduction from now on. It means people will not have to waste a lot of time wading through paperwork and boxes of receipts. People will not have to spend hours chasing after little itemized deductions, as they have done year after year on tax day. They will not just be crossing their fingers, hoping they are doing everything right, hoping they don't overpay, and hoping they don't run afoul of the law by not paying the amount that is required by law. It is going to be much simpler and much fairer.

When I thought of all of the things we have been working on with tax relief, tax reform, tax reductions, to me, it can be summed up in just two words: simpler and lower. Taxes needed to be lower, and they needed to be simpler. So what we are seeing now is both simpler and lower taxes. That is a big change that people are going to notice. They are noticing it now in their paychecks, but they are really going to notice it next April 15 when they file their taxes.

Americans will not have to wait until next year to see a lot of the benefits of this tax relief law. They are seeing it today because the law wasn't just tax reform and simplification; it was an immediate, big tax cut as well. It means hard-working Americans are seeing money in their paychecks, and they are seeing it today.

Average wages have gone up nearly 3 percent. That is a big increase compared to the stagnant wage growth we saw during the entire previous administration.

According to the Bureau of Economic Analysis, American workers brought home almost \$200 billion more in February than they did in December. Some of it came right away in the form of bonuses that companies handed out because of the tax law; some of it came when employers cut the amount of income tax that they were withholding from a worker's paycheck; and some of it was because of higher wages we have seen with raises announced across the country. It all adds up to about \$200 billion more for hard-working Americans.

That is money people can then spend on things that are important to them and their families. It is about American families' priorities, not necessarily how the government thinks it can spend its money better than the American people. It is money people can save for things such as tuition for their kids, a new car, or whatever they want to save for. People notice that kind of difference in their take-home pay. It makes a big difference in their lives.

Another thing that happens when we cut taxes is that businesses have more money to hire more workers. I have seen it happen in Wyoming. I have seen it as I travel the State. In city after city, town after town, community after

community, businesses are hiring more workers locally. In fact, the American economy has added over 600,000 new jobs just since Republicans passed and President Trump signed the tax law in December.

These are jobs at places like Kroger. That grocery store chain—and they have a number of convenience stores, as well, serving all around Wyoming—said last week that they are going to be hiring 11,000 new workers. Those aren't just people at headquarters; these are people in stores all across the country—cashiers, produce clerks, workers in prepared food sections of the store. It is good for the American economy and good for the communities where these people are being hired.

If someone has money in their pocket, they can decide to spend some of it, give some to charity, invest some, or save some—whatever they want to do. It is their money.

In some of the stores similar to Kroger in Cheyenne, Casper, Gillette, Rock Springs—but we are seeing it all around the country—stores are hiring more people. They are increasing benefits for people who want to continue their education or get a GED. All of these things are benefiting our country. The companies say it is directly because they are saving money under the tax law.

We have heard this story again and again. You have heard it in your State, and I have heard it in mine. They are hiring because they are saving more money under the tax law.

A lot of companies are paying more because they want to hold on to the workers they have. That is one reason the initial jobless claims number for the first week of April has dropped. The claims of people who are out of work and have filed for benefits from the government have dropped by 9,000 people. That is a sign that people are keeping their jobs and don't need to apply for unemployment benefits.

The number of jobless claims has been low now for the longest stretch ever. They have been keeping records since 1967, and nobody has ever seen it like this.

One economist looked at all the good news and said: "The job market is rip-roaring." The American people don't need an economist to tell them that. All they need to do is look around their own hometown. I see it at home in Wyoming. Businesses are hiring. Workers are getting bonuses. They are getting raises. They are seeing more money in their paychecks. People all across America are feeling better about their jobs. I see confidence and optimism at home. People are feeling better about their own personal financial situation. It is certainly the case at home in Wyoming.

There have been a couple of surveys that have come out recently. In one of them, the Pew Research Center found that the number of people who say that this economy is in good or excellent condition is now the highest it has

been in two decades—20 years. That is the confidence of the American people in the economy.

In a second survey, the polling firm Gallup found that investor optimism is at "the highest levels . . . in 17 years." When we talk about investors, we are talking about families in Wyoming who are saving for their retirement. They have seen the effects of Republican policies like the tax relief law. They have seen what we are doing to cut regulations so the economy can grow, so people can be free to live their lives and make decisions for themselves. They have seen what happens when Washington starts to put America first again. All of those things, added together, make people confident in our economy, and it gives them optimism for the future.

The only people who aren't feeling optimistic right now are the Democrats in Congress who, across the board, voted against this tax relief law. Republicans voted to lower taxes, and Democrats voted for higher taxes. Now Democrats seem to be desperately trying to spin their way out of the terrible choices that they have made.

Over the weekend, the former Speaker of the House of Representatives, NANCY PELOSI, said that the Republican tax cuts "are unfair to America's working families." Who is she kidding? The only thing unfair would be if Democrats get their wish and repeal the tax cuts that we passed and raise taxes, which apparently is what they want to do.

I have spoken to a lot of working families at home in Wyoming. They are overjoyed at the extra money they have gotten in their paychecks since the Republicans cut taxes. Americans know that the economy has created 605,000 new jobs since we passed tax relief. They know we are breaking records for low numbers of people filing for unemployment. People see that the average wages are up—much higher than they were a year ago. They know the Republicans cut taxes, doubled the standard deduction, got rid of the ObamaCare individual mandate tax, and changed the death tax, which is a big issue for our farmers and ranchers in Wyoming and for small business owners.

Hard-working Americans who just filled out their taxes know the Republicans are on their side, and the last thing they want is to hear Democrats talking about raising taxes again.

Thank you.

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

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

REPUBLICAN TAX PLAN

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, today, as millions of Americans in Illinois and

across the Nation finish filing their taxes, I come to the floor to discuss the most recent tax reform bill considered by the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives.

Last year, Republicans followed through with their promise and used a special procedural approach called reconciliation, which allowed them to bring a tax reform plan to the floor outside of regular order and without committee hearings and the ordinary amendment-invoked process. Democrats were not really participants in this but only observers, under the reconciliation process. That tax plan has now become the law of the land, and now we know what it is doing. It has created a massive tax giveaway to the largest multinational corporations, to the wealthiest corporate CEOs, and to well-connected campaign donors.

In passing this plan, Republicans said that if they could just cut taxes enough for large corporations, these corporations would invest in America, give breaks to their employees, and create more employment. The benefits of these tax breaks to the corporations supposedly would trickle down to workers in the form of higher wages, and the economy would explode, creating new jobs.

The tax plan was voted on favorably by every Republican in the U.S. Senate, and it added \$1.5 trillion to the national debt, to fund these massive corporate tax cuts. So what did the corporations do with their tax cut benefits? They turned around and took their taxpayer-funded tax cut and gave their wealthy CEOs and shareholders a raise. So far, in 2018, large corporations have announced over \$235 billion in stock buybacks—far outpacing the rate of companies announcing one-time bonuses for their workers. Not only that, but more than 100,000 employees in large corporations have actually been terminated. You couldn't get further from tax relief for working families if you tried.

It gets worse. The Congressional Budget Office reported last week that the Republican tax plan will actually cost another \$300 billion beyond the \$1.5 trillion estimate. Our children and grandchildren will pay off the cost of this tax cut for the wealthiest people in America and the largest corporations. So much for the promise that these tax cuts would pay for themselves. It will cost us roughly \$1.9 trillion over 10 years for these tax cuts for major corporations and wealthy people. This is a burden our children and grandchildren will bear.

So what are we hearing now when it comes to the budget? Just last week, after seeing that the plan they voted for was expected to add \$1.9 trillion to the deficit, Republican Tennessee Senator CORKER said: "If it ends up costing what has been laid out here, it could well be one of the worst votes I've made."

The so-called fiscal conservatives here in the Senate didn't seem as concerned about the deficit when they