

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

were voting for a 10-figure increase that would go to cut taxes for wealthy people and large corporations. But make no mistake—as predictably as night follows day, we now have a renewed call in the House of Representatives for a budget amendment—a constitutional, balanced budget, “stop me before I sin again” amendment. Now that Republicans have exploded the deficit, the absolutely vital public assistance programs like Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid are now at risk. If there is a balanced budget amendment, they have said that we have to get to the basic programs like Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid to make up the difference. I think it is unconscionable to give tax breaks to people who are well off and comfortable and then to cut the basics of human existence for many senior citizens in Social Security and Medicare.

The devastating first act of the Republican tax plan and fiscal conservatives, as they define it, has exploded our Nation's deficit and provided enormous benefit to those who, frankly, don't need it. We can't let the second act be a balanced budget constitutional amendment that will end up pillaging the basic programs that help low- and middle-income Americans the most in the name of fiscal responsibility.

COAST GUARD AUTHORIZATION BILL

Mr. President, there was a poll in the city of Chicago a few years ago by the Chicago Tribune, and they asked the residents of that city: What is the greatest asset in the city of Chicago? Overwhelmingly, they all said the same thing: Lake Michigan. That is understandable. If you have been to that beautiful city and seen that lakefront and realized the impact it has on the quality of life, it is understandable that Chicagoans would value it the most.

Millions of people visit Lake Michigan each year. They swim, kayak, and boat. They just walk along the beach and have little picnics. It really is a major asset. The lake is the primary source of drinking water for more than 10 million people not just in Illinois but in Wisconsin, Indiana, Michigan, and many other States. Together, the Great Lakes support a multibillion-dollar fishing industry, dozens of local economies, and thousands of small businesses. However, the Coast Guard reauthorization bill, which could come before the Senate as early as tomorrow, will do irreversible damage to the Great Lakes, and I am urging my colleagues to oppose it.

It is not uncommon in this Chamber for Members from each State to stand up from time to time and tell a story to their colleagues about something in their State of great personal value to them and to plead with their colleagues to understand what this means and to stand by them in protecting a great natural resource or a great natural asset.

The bill itself—the Coast Guard reauthorization—I don't have a problem

with. It does a lot of good things for an important part of our military service. It helps equip the Coast Guard with the tools they are going to need so they can keep us safe and be part of the critical homeland security mission. There is, however, one provision in the bill that should not be there.

This bill was reported by the Commerce Committee. One of the provisions in this bill should never have started in the Commerce Committee; it should be in the Environment Committee. It is known as the Vessel Incidental Discharge Act, or VIDA. This provision in the Coast Guard reauthorization bill will undermine the Clean Water Act just to give a generous deal to one specific industry.

VIDA exempts the shipping industry from being regulated by the Environmental Protection Agency under the Clean Water Act. It places it instead under the Coast Guard. The Coast Guard is a great organization, and there are great men and women serving there. The Coast Guard, however, has no expertise in setting standards for clean water; the Environmental Protection Agency has that responsibility. This bill takes that responsibility away from the EPA.

This bill also preempts the States and their rights to implement their own standards that would meet specific needs and limits the public's ability to seek action in court.

Who opposes this bill? The attorney general of the State of Illinois, as well as the attorneys general from New York, California, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Washington, so far.

The bill's supporters say all of this is necessary to establish a uniform national standard, but the bill doesn't do that. Instead, it cuts a big Great Lakes-sized doughnut hole out of its own standard and exempts ships operating on the Great Lakes from meeting the same “best available control technology” standard that all other shippers are required to meet. It is a sweetheart deal for shippers on the Great Lakes.

VIDA also makes it almost impossible for anyone to ever require ships operating on the Great Lakes to install new pollution controls in the future. This means these ships would likely never be required to use any available technology to prevent the spread of invasive species like mussels, blood red shrimp, and Asian carp.

I can't tell you how much money we have spent to stop the Asian carp from invading the Great Lakes. We think it is going to destroy the Great Lakes as a marine habitat if we are not careful, and we have stopped them so far. This irresponsible measure as part of the Coast Guard reauthorization goes in exactly the opposite direction. It opens the door for invasive species invading our Great Lakes through ballast water. That is unacceptable.

Chicagoans deserve to know that ships operating on Lake Michigan are

using the best technology available to prevent the discharge of harmful chemicals into their primary drinking water and invasive species, but the bill's exemptions go far beyond the Great Lakes.

Another provision of VIDA would prevent EPA and States from enforcing standards to stop the shipping industry from releasing fluorinated chemicals into the lakes and oceans across the country. Many of my colleagues have become familiar with chemicals like PFAS and PFOA after they contaminated critical groundwater sources in their own States.

As the ranking member of the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, I can't tell you how many colleagues from all across the United States have now discovered that these perfluorinated chemicals are a danger to their drinking supply and a public health hazard. They come to me begging for Federal funds to clean up the messes at military bases and airports. Now we are considering a bill on the floor that weakens the standard for release of those chemicals into our water supply. What are we thinking? Is the shipping industry worth that much that we turn our backs on this public health hazard?

I have seen how the military has used these chemicals over the years for legitimate purposes like firefighting. Now we are going to spend millions of dollars cleaning them up, and this Coast Guard bill is going to make it worse. Allowing the commercial shipping industry to freely release these chemicals into bodies of water without proper oversight is downright disgusting.

All of these reasons are why more than 115 environmental organizations have announced their opposition to this Coast Guard bill. It has nothing to do with the Coast Guard—we value them; we treasure them; we want to help them—but to slip this provision in, this environmental rider which endangers the water supply for millions of Americans, is just wrong.

Despite all these objections, Senator MCCONNELL now wants to bring this bill to the floor in a way that will limit debate, doesn't allow for any amendments to change it, and provides no pathway to improve the bill or to delete this terrible provision. This is not how to consider an issue that is so important with so many people concerned about it.

I urge my colleagues, when this measure of the Coast Guard reauthorization comes up for a vote on cloture on concurrence, to vote no.

Today it is the Great Lakes. Tomorrow it is your backyard, it is your water supply that some special interest group will want to contaminate in the name of more profits. We can do better. We owe it to our kids to do better.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CRUZ). The Senator from Arizona.