

bridges and airports and rails and all the other things that will allow us to be leading the pack in a global economy and competing. We want to bring those jobs home.

Then we are laser-focused on lowering costs for folks. If that means taking on the oil companies or taking on the drug companies, so be it. But we are laser-focused on bringing down costs.

That is what Bidenomics is all about. Bidenomics, the opposite of trickle down—the opposite of trickle down.

Meanwhile, what are our Republican colleagues doing? Unfortunately, the same thing they have been doing for decades. By the way, they have never met a problem that a tax cut for the wealthy wouldn't solve. I remember so many times, when the economy was doing well 20 years ago: Oh, we should do a tax cut for the wealthy.

And then, when the economy was down, and when we had Wall Street crash: Oh, we should do a tax cut for the wealthy.

It doesn't matter what the problem is, the solution is a tax cut for the ultrawealthy of the country, with the idea that it will trickle, trickle down. Unfortunately, what has happened with that is it never trickled down, at least not for the people in Michigan. Of course, they are waiting for it to trickle down.

But it did blow up the deficit. It did blow up the deficit. In fact, 25 percent of all of the debt accumulated by the country ever was in 4 years of President Trump. Twenty-five percent of all of the deficit and debt created ever in the country was under 4 years of President Trump.

And the 2017 Trump tax giveaway exploded the deficit. That is why that was happening. It exploded the deficit by nearly \$2 trillion and gave the ultrawealthy massive tax breaks.

So we have come out of this manufactured crisis around the debt ceiling, taking the country to the edge of default, and all the talk about how much debt we have, and then, as soon as that gets resolved and President Biden brings everybody to the table and there is a bipartisan agreement not to have our country crash and default because of, unfortunately, the manufactured antics on the other side, what happens next? Our Republican colleagues have a new tax package. After talking about the debt and the deficit, they have turned around again and want another tax cut for the wealthiest and the largest corporations. In fact, Big Oil will get another \$10.5 billion tax break under their latest tax cuts, on top of the embedded tax breaks that have been there for 100 years with Big Oil.

These tax breaks are supposed to help folks get started in the industry—and I think they are pretty much established in our country, after 100 years of this. But, no, a \$10.5 billion tax break, in addition now, is what is being proposed in the House.

Their proposal would roll back clean energy tax credits that are creating

jobs. The things I listed at the very beginning as I was talking all relate to the focus on investing in clean energy and saying it has to be a production tax credit. So you don't get it unless you are making this in America, and this is key. This has not been happening for decades, and it is now happening.

They want to roll that all back—roll back all the things we are trying to do to combat the climate crisis, which is hitting us over the head every single day, destroying homes and creating havoc and costing lives. All that is happening because of excess carbon pollution that is in the atmosphere, and that has been here for as long as we have been using fossil fuels.

I wish the oil companies would take some of the hundreds of billions that they have been given on tax breaks and put it back into technology to stop pollution. That would be very helpful, if that were where they had put that. But instead what they have done is put it into funding efforts to say the climate crisis isn't real, that it is all a hoax, that everybody is making it up. And we see where we are today because it is not made up. It never was made up.

When they got the first tax breaks 100 years ago, if they had put part of that into technology to make sure that what they were doing was not polluting the atmosphere, we wouldn't even be here today talking about the climate crisis. And, certainly, Mr. President, with what is happening in your home State of Vermont, you see how it destroyed a town. It is extraordinary what is happening with the weather and all the damage.

Our Republican colleagues want to roll back all the efforts right now to try to clean up things and for a cleaner environment. They want another big tax break for Big Oil. They are going to endanger about 150,000 good-paying jobs, and, on top of that, it would balloon the deficit again by another \$300 billion just over the next 3 years.

If Republicans extend all of the Trump tax giveaways, we would add another \$2.5 trillion—"t"—to the deficit if they got what they have been proposing.

Again, we have tried trickle-down economics, with tax breaks for those at the top, slashing investments for America, and shipping good jobs overseas. That has been the strategy or the result of the strategy—not that they were saying: Oh, we are going to ship jobs overseas. No, they just let it happen by giving tax breaks to folks who did that with no accountability. That is trickle-down economics.

Now, we have what we are proudly calling Bidenomics: investments in America, empowering workers, lowering costs, and helping small businesses. And it is actually working.

Let me go back to the slide. It is actually working. When we look at just last month, there were 209,000 jobs. And every month there is a jobs report—more jobs, more jobs, more jobs. There

were 13.2 million jobs created in the last 2½ years. That is real. There are economists talking about that—good-paying jobs for people, jobs you can raise a family on; 3.6 percent unemployment rate and under 4 percent for the last 17 months, the lowest in 50 years.

It is not about just debating rhetoric back and forth. What we have is something that has never worked, which is trickle-down economics, but is used over and over and over again.

I shouldn't say it never worked. It never worked for the majority of people. It never grew the middle class. It worked for a few people. It worked for a few people really, really well, but it has not worked for the majority of Americans.

And now we are turning and saying: Let's focus on something that does—investing in America, bringing jobs home, tackling the big special interests that are causing all of our costs to go up, like the drug companies and oil companies, and bringing down the costs. And, by the way, the engine of our economy, the small businesses, let's make sure we are laser-focused on helping our small businesses.

We have tried Republicans' trickle-down economics. Surprise—it didn't work. It never worked. The wealthy keep buying bigger yachts, while everybody else is left treading water.

Bidenomics is different. It is investing in us—all of us. It is investing in our shared future. It is growing the middle class. And it is working.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Iowa.

#### NOMINATION OF TANYA J. BRADSHER

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, Congress and our Nation have no more solemn duty than the one we owe to our veterans. They have given their blood, their sweat, and their tears for our great country. They have fought on battlefields only to come home and face new battles, like difficulty accessing healthcare and challenges in transitioning to civilian life. A lot of them face homelessness, PTSD, and, of course, we hear it all the time, in our various congressional offices, about bureaucratic redtape at the Veterans' Administration.

I have long engaged in Veterans' Administration oversight. The VA has fought my efforts tooth and nail. I won't tire. Our veterans deserve nothing less than making sure the VA delivers in an efficient way, and particularly when we find things to be wrong there.

It is because of my oversight that I placed a hold on the nomination of Tanya Bradsher to be Deputy Secretary at the VA. I urge my colleagues to oppose the nomination as well. So I am here to tell you why.

Records in my possession, as well as statements from VA whistleblowers, show that Ms. Bradsher has failed to secure our veterans' private and sensitive protected health information,

personally identifiable information, and whistleblower information. Information also shows that she played a key role in the Veterans' Administration obstruction of my investigation of VA corruption.

My Democratic colleagues rushed Ms. Bradsher's nomination through the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee without even investigating the allegations that I brought to the committee's attention. Let's start with one of these: the VA Integrated Enterprise Workflow Solution, otherwise known by the acronym VIEWS. Records show that this system exposes sensitive medical, health, and personal information of many veterans, as well as whistleblower names and information. At least 1,900 Veterans Affairs employees have access to this system but without the need to view this sensitive information.

Now, Ms. Bradsher has direct responsibility for that system as the VA's Chief of Staff, her present position. Emails and screenshots from VIEWS were supplied to me by whistleblowers. And most of my colleagues know I get a lot of information from whistleblowers. These emails show that these whistleblowers notified Ms. Bradsher's deputy last July—a whole year ago—about these issues. One of these whistleblowers told Ms. Bradsher's office she had been harassed and that she feared for her safety.

To this day, Ms. Bradsher hasn't followed up or instructed anyone else to follow up with these whistleblowers to make sure that their concerns were addressed. Despite questions for the record asked by Ranking Member MORAN and Senator BLACKBURN, Ms. Bradsher has offered no explanation whatsoever for why the specific personnel information brought to her office's attention was not secured as it should be secured. Instead, she pointed to a few feeble actions she says were taken to address future correspondence, such as training on private data.

This is unacceptable for a nominee who will be in charge of the VA's effort to modernize our veterans' sensitive electronic health records if she is confirmed. Ms. Bradsher was in the Chief of Staff position 16 months before whistleblowers notified her of the serious potential data breach and now for a year after. That kind of inaction and negligence is remarkable, even for the Veterans' Administration.

These flaws provide a back door enabling whistleblower retaliation and potential identity fraud, and they must be fixed now, not ignored. The matter was serious enough that the Office of Special Counsel last August found "substantial likelihood of wrongdoing" in potential violation of Federal privacy laws and ordered the Secretary to complete an investigation within 60 days. The Veterans' Administration still hasn't completed its investigation.

The Office of Special Counsel advised my office that the most serious allegation relating to data privacy has al-

ready been confirmed. The Veterans' Administration report to the Office of Special Counsel should be issued by August 1, just days away.

We would fail our Nation's veterans and neglect our constitutional duty to offer informed advice and consent on this nomination if we allowed the nomination to go forward before we have those answers. Also, how can any Member have an informed choice on this nominee if the Veterans' Affairs Committee didn't even bother to interview the people with relevant information on that matter?

Instead, rather than investigate, the majority actually circulated a misleading memo to the committee members that was written by the Veterans' Administration. It also slandered my office by claiming my staff had these allegations but intentionally hid them from the committee until the day before Ms. Bradsher's hearing.

This is not true. My staff provided the information to the committee right away. The VA ought to quickly get with the program.

That brings me to my second point of opposition to this nominee. Documents obtained under the Freedom of Information Act show that Ms. Bradsher played a key role in the VA's failed response to my investigation into VA corruption, which the VA has stonewalled for over 2 years.

We shouldn't continue to reward the Veterans' Administration and a nominee for their inattention to congressional oversight. We shouldn't confirm a nominee who represents business as usual and continued inattention to Congress and our veterans. I urge my colleagues to vote against this nomination until we get the answers to the American people, as they deserve those answers.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. DUCKWORTH). Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### MAIDEN SPEECH

Mr. WELCH. Madam President, I appreciate the opportunity to address the Senate today as Vermont's new Senator, and I hope to express how I will serve Vermont and our country, and I will outline the challenges we face as a governing body and as a nation.

Most importantly, I will state why I believe that the U.S. Senate can be an institution that renews the strength and vitality of the democracy that all of us—whomever we represent and whatever views we advocate—depend on for our mutual benefit.

But before I begin, I would like to say that my heart, today, is with the people of Vermont. They are grappling with the brutal flooding that hit us

last week. And when I came to the floor last week after touring the damage in Vermont, I pledged that, along with Senator SANDERS and Congresswoman BALINT, we will do everything in our power to get the people of Vermont the resources that they need to build back from this. And I make that pledge again today, and I appreciate the leadership of our senior Senator, Senator SANDERS, in advocating for Vermont as we recover from this real crisis.

I also appreciate the offers of help from so many of my colleagues here in the Senate. One of the first Members who approached me was Senator KENNEDY from Louisiana, a State that has had to deal with more than its share of natural calamities.

Vermonters, Madam President, have always supported emergency aid when disaster struck others. Senator SANDERS and I are very grateful for so many assurances of support now that Vermonters face their own huge recovery challenge.

I recently heard our colleague, Senator ERIC SCHMITT, from Missouri, give his first speech. He spoke with real respect and reverence for the people of Missouri—hardworking, honest, family- and community-oriented, and very generous. And I felt Senator SCHMITT's deep connection to the people who sent him here. In that respect, Senator SCHMITT spoke for me. In fact, he spoke for all of us. And Senator SCHMITT and I—and all of us—share something else: The citizens that we represent, despite many differences on many issues, share common needs; all the things that families and communities need—affordable housing, safe schools, good healthcare, a secure environment for our kids, and good jobs where you can pay your monthly bills and have a little left at the end of the month. We share that in common.

So the question I have is this: If we share so much respect for the citizens who sent us here in our commitment to their shared aspiration, why can't we make more progress? Why are we so divided?

I believe there are two reasons: First, our democracy is more imperiled at this time than at any time since our Civil War; and, second, working middle-class Americans have been treading water economically for the past 40 years. Top-down economic policies having failed them. So the towns many of us grew up in with diverse economies and vibrant downtowns, farms, and factories that support our communities are vanishing. And many Americans, no matter how hard they work, still struggle to pay their bills.

Our challenge is strengthening our democracy and improving the living standards for everyday Americans. And we must do both, or we won't do either. Democracy depends on trust. It also depends on results.

If conditions stagnate for working Americans and they fall further behind, their trust in democracy will