world effects. The FCC's decision to grant a waiver to LightSquared created uncertainty for GPS users, and that includes our own National Defense Agency, the Department of Defense, and other Federal agencies. Another one is the Federal Aviation Administration which claims that 800 people would die as a result of LightSquared's initially proposed network. To the FAA, the FCC's decision could have killed people.

The Department of Defense wrote a letter to the FCC saying that it was not consulted by the FCC. Press reports say that General Shelton—who heads up GPS for the Armed Forces—said that LightSquared's interference would harm the military's use of GPS. To the Department of Defense, the Federal Communication Commission's actions would have harmed national security.

These are only two agencies, but the Department of Transportation, NASA, and NOAA, among others, have already raised concerns about LightSquared's plan. The effects of the FCC's decision are not just limited to the Federal Government; they also affect ordinary Americans. Here are two examples: For Americans who hope that NextGen air traffic control will reduce air traffic delays, the FCC's action would have continued to increase air traffic wasting time, fuel, and ultimately money for the flying public. For Americans who use precision agriculture to save time and money, the FCC's actions would harm the accuracy and reliability of their equipment. This again leads to wasted energy, lower crop yields, and higher prices for products such as wheat and corn. At the end of the day, the FCC's actions would cost the American consumers money.

Does the FCC even care? I don't know. But the agency certainly has not provided any evidence that it took any of this information into consideration. What we see today is an agency that is completely unaccountable and unanswerable to 99.6 percent of the Congress and, by extension, the American public. This is simply wrong, and I will continue to hold the FCC's nominees until this attitude changes.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. UDALL of New Mexico). The Senator from Rhode Island is recognized.

BENEFITS EXPIRATION

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I rise today to urge my colleagues to immediately extend the payroll tax cut and to fully continue jobless benefits for millions of Americans. In less than 3 weeks 160 million Americans face an automatic tax increase and millions of out-of-work Americans will begin to lose their jobless benefits. In order to keep our economy on track, we must continue the payroll tax cut and jobless benefits for millions of out-of-work Americans.

My State of Rhode Island, in particular, has felt the economic downturn acutely. With four unemployed job seekers for every one job and middle-class families struggling to get by—the possibility that Congress would let the payroll tax cut and jobless benefits expire is unthinkable.

I have joined my colleagues on this side of the aisle and voted time and again to cut taxes for middle-class families, and each time our Republican colleagues have opposed the measure because they value tax breaks for the top one-tenth of 1 percent of income earners more than they do tax cuts for middle-class Americans. Republicans have even rejected our effort to provide tax cuts to businesses and provide them incentives to hire. So in response, Democrats narrowed the focus of the tax cuts to employees. But, Republicans again refused to provide a tax cut for the middle class because it was paid for by asking the top one-tenth of 1 percent of Americans to contribute.

We have seen Republicans refuse to invest in our Nation's roads, bridges, schools, and in policies that will create jobs because Republicans cling to their belief that the wealthiest in our Nation should not have to share in the sacrifice every other American has made during these very difficult economic times. Republicans have voted in favor of millionaires and billionaires five times, costing middle-class Americans tax cuts and the continuation of jobless benefits and other policies that would help create and sustain jobs.

Republicans are not putting forth serious proposals. The House Republican extenders plan that passed that body yesterday is the latest example of not only brinksmanship but their ideological rigidity. Instead of reaching a sensible compromise that works for all Americans, the House Republicans voted to slash the current unemployment insurance program nearly in half and eliminate targeted relief for the hardest hit States like Rhode Island even as our job market is still weak and 14 million Americans are out of work. Republicans are in effect refusing to pass critical legislation, particularly with respect to continuing unemployment insurance. And instead of continuing unemployment insurance they are working to put an end to it by implementing aggressive waivers leading to block granting and creating artificial barriers to benefits—all with the long-term goal of dismantling the system. The Republicans would blunt one of the most effective countercyclical tools we have and ultimately throw it away.

At the core of the Republican Party's effort to reduce jobless benefits is the terribly misguided belief that Americans don't want to work. I say to my Republican colleagues—Americans do want to work. But we have to create jobs or incentivize the private sector to create jobs so they can work.

Instead of compromising and focusing on economic policies that will help create jobs and help the middle class, House Republicans focus on dead-on-arrival special interest pet projects such as the Keystone pipeline and further efforts to weaken the Clean Air Act.

The Republican plan ignores the reality and the challenges that face American families—to maintain their home, to maintain their job, to provide for the future of their families and their children and their retirement.

For those who have lost their jobs in one of the worst economic downturns we have ever faced, unemployment insurance is a lifeline. It is also important for Main Street businesses that rely on these dollars. Grocery stores and drugstores—they all depend on people having some cash to come in and take care of the necessities of life. Without the extension of jobless benefits, consumers will pull back spending, hurt local businesses, and decelerate the progress our economy has made.

We have had 21 months of private sector job growth. This is not sufficient to satisfy the needs across the country, but the growth stands in stark contrast to the absolute collapse of employment in the last months of the Bush administration. This job growth has not been an accident. It has been the result of decisions that the President and Congress made, which include the Recovery Act and other programs that keep the economy moving—not fast enough—but keep it moving forward.

The Economic Policy Institute has estimated that failing to extend UI benefits could result in a loss of $72 billion of economic activity in 2012—$72 billion of lost demand, which would slow down the economy and slow down job creation.

These are challenging times for millions of Americans. We cannot afford to let Congress be sidetracked by marginal issues. The core issues are very clear: extend tax cuts for middle-class Americans, continue unemployment benefits to those desperately searching for work. We are facing a tough job market; we have to pass these measures. We have to pass a clean tax cut for millions of working middle class families, and we have to continue jobless benefits in order to help millions of out-of-work Americans looking for a job.

I yield the floor and note the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

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

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

KEYSTONE XL PIPELINE

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. President, when President Obama was sworn into office, the Nation's average price for a gallon of gasoline was under $2. We all know that is not the case today. In most parts of the country, gas remains well over $3 a gallon. In my home State of

Arkansas, the price of gas ranges anywhere from just under $3 to $3.50 a gallon. The reason it stayed at a steady price is because there is a decreased demand because of the poor economy.

Business owners will tell you that when the price of gas hits $3.50 a gallon, it truly does affect how decisions are made. When it hits the $4 mark, things start to shut down in terms of the economy because the average person's disposable income is going to the gas pump instead of local businesses.

Our country at this time lacks an energy policy. We are also facing a jobs crisis of enormous magnitude. And our President is standing in the way of one project that can help address both of these problems: the Keystone XL Pipeline.

The proposed 1,700-mile pipeline would transport 700,000 barrels of oil per day from Canada to U.S. refineries in the gulf coast. Canada's oil sands are among the largest oil reserves in the world. As global demand for oil surges and Canada increases production, the addition of the Keystone Pipeline will ensure that Americans benefit from reliable and secure oil from our largest trading partner and trusted ally.

The $7 billion pipeline cost will be paid by the Keystone consortium and will fund nearly $½ billion in salaries. It will result in the purchase of $6.5 billion worth of materials, services, and other local economic activity. None of this will be funded with any Federal money. It is a no-brainer.

Some of these jobs are in my home State of Arkansas. Welspun Tubular Company, which makes pipes for the oil industry, has been producing pipe for the Keystone project. Unfortunately, due to the administration's delay on Keystone, the company has already begun to lay off workers in Little Rock. They have 500 miles of pipe that was produced for the project, ready to go, that is just sitting in the facility.

By delaying the start of the project, it is putting Americans out of work instead of putting Americans to work. Delaying this project costs thousands of well-paying jobs when Americans need reliable employment, and it hurts Arkansas businesses that have invested millions of dollars to help produce the pipeline. It is also a major step backward for energy policy goals of reducing our dependence on oil from unstable regimes.

When it comes to energy policy, I am kind of a T. Boone Pickens guy. I firmly believe that if it is American, we need to be using it. This goes for not only renewable forms of energy but the vast amount of fossil fuels we have been blessed with throughout the United States and directly off our shores. If we use what we have here in a responsible manner, we can be better positioned to pick and choose from whom we import our remaining oil.

Importing oil from Canada would accelerate America's independence from overseas oil by increasing the petroleum trade with one of our most reliable allies, one of our most reliable friends, instead of depending on the likes of Saudi Arabia and hostile regimes such as Venezuela for much of our oil. The amount of oil provided through this project is equal to half the amount we import from the Middle East. I doubt that anyone in this body would argue that any of the countries we import oil from in that region are more stable than Canada.

President Obama needs to quit pandering to the radical environmentalists. He needs to do what is best for the country, not what he perceives is best for his reelection. The Keystone Pipeline is what is best for America. Let's move forward.

Mr. President, I note the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

WITHDRAWAL FROM IRAQ

Mr. MCCAIN. Today the President of the United States traveled to Ft. Bragg, NC, to mark the end of the war in Iraq and to pay tribute to the more than 12.5 million men and women of our Armed Forces who have served and fought there since 2003. Those Americans deserve all of the praise and recognition they receive, for they have given up their comfort and safety. They have given up less demanding and more lucrative jobs. They have given parts of their bodies and cherished parts of their lives. They have given the quiet little sacrifices that often go unmentioned but often hurt the most: the anniversaries spent alone, the birth of a child missed, the first steps not seen, and the first words not heard.

They have given all of that, and always they are prepared to give more. They deserve to be honored by us all. I know the President's words of praise and appreciation for our troops today were sincere and heartfelt. I have every reason to believe he will do all in his power to keep his promises to take care of our troops and their families at home and to never forget how those noble Americans have done far more than their fair share for the betterment of our Nation.

The President is a patriot and a good American, and I know his heart swells with the same pride and sense of awe all of us feel when we are in the presence of our men and women in uniform. These are humbling feelings, feelings of wonderment and gratitude, and they unite all Americans whether they supported the war in Iraq or not.

But let me point out a fact the President did not acknowledge today, which is this: Our men and women in uniform have been able to come home from Iraq by the tens of thousands over the past 3 years, and not just come home but come home with honor having succeeded in their mission for the simple reason that the surge worked.

All of this is possible because in 2007, with the war nearly lost, we changed our strategy, changed our leaders in the field, and sent more troops. This policy was vehemently opposed at the time by then-Senator Obama and now President of the United States and his senior leaders right here on the floor of this Senate.

On January 10, 2007, the day the surge strategy was announced, then-Senator Obama said:

> I am not persuaded that 20,000 additional troops in Iraq is going to solve the sectarian violence there. In fact, I think it will do the reverse.

On November 15, 2007, when it was clear to GEN David Petraeus and Ambassador Ryan Crocker and many of us that the surge was working, then-Senator Obama said:

> The overall strategy is failed because we have not seen any change in behavior among Iraq's political leaders.

Finally, on January 28, 2008, when it was undeniable the surge was succeeding, he had this to say:

> President Bush said that the surge in Iraq is working, when we know that's just not true.

At the time the President's preferred alternative was to begin an immediate withdrawal and have all U.S. troops out of Iraq by the end of 2009. I will let future historians be the judge of that proposed policy. All I will say is that for 3 years, the President has been harvesting the successes of the very strategy he consistently dismissed as a failure. I imagine this irony was not lost on a few of our troops at Fort Bragg today, most of whom deployed and fought as part of the surge.

The fact is, the President has consistently called for a complete withdrawal of all U.S. troops from Iraq at the earliest possible date, and he has never deviated from this position as President. Indeed, he always reaffirmed his campaign promise to end the war in Iraq and withdrawal of our troops. So perhaps it should not have come as a surprise when the President announced in October that he was ending negotiations with the Iraqi Government over whether to maintain a small number of U.S. troops in Iraq beyond this year to continue assisting Iraq security forces.

I continue to believe this decision represents a failure of leadership, both Iraqi and American; that it was a sad case of political expediency triumphing over military necessity, both in Baghdad and in Washington; and that it will have serious negative consequences for Iraq's stability and our national security interests.

I sincerely hope I am wrong, but I fear that GEN Jack Keane, who is one of the main architects of the surge, could be correct again when he said recently:

> We won the war in Iraq, and we are now losing the peace.

Let me be clear. Like all Americans, I too am eager to bring our troops home. I do not want them to remain in Iraq or anywhere else for a day longer than necessary. But I also agree with our military commanders in Iraq who were nearly unanimous in their belief that some U.S. forces, approximately 20,000, should remain for a period of time to help the Iraqis secure the hard-earned gains that we had made together.

All of our top commanders in Iraq, by the way, chosen by the President of the United States—all of our top commanders in Iraq—General Petraeus, General Odierno, General Austin, all of them believed we needed to maintain a presence of U.S. troops there, and they consistently made that clear to many of us during our repeated visits to Iraq.

On February 3, the commander of U.S. forces in Iraq, GEN Lloyd Austin, and U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Jim Jeffrey testified to the Committee on Armed Services that for all of the progress the Iraqi security forces had made in recent years—and it has been substantial—they still have critical gaps in their capabilities that will endure beyond this year. Those shortcomings included enabling functions for counterterrorism operations, the control of Iraq's airspace, and other external security missions, intelligence collection and fusion, training and sustainment of the force.

Our commanders wanted U.S. troops to remain in Iraq beyond this year to continue assisting Iraqi forces in filling these gaps in their capabilities. Indeed, Iraqi commanders believed the exact same thing. In August, the chief of staff of Iraq's armed forces could not have been any clearer. He said:

> The problem will start after 2011. The politicians must find other ways to fill the void after 2011. If I were asked about the withdrawal, I would say to politicians, the U.S. Army must stay until the Iraqi Army is fully ready in 2020.

During repeated travels to Iraq with my colleagues, I have met with all of the leaders of Iraq's major political blocs, and they too said they would support keeping a presence of U.S. troops in Iraq. So let's be clear. This is what our commanders recommended, it is what Iraqi commanders recommended, and it is what all of Iraq's key political leaders said privately that they were prepared to support. So what happened? What happened?

Advocates of withdrawal are quick to point out that the current security arrangement which requires all U.S. troops to be out of Iraq by the end of this year was concluded by the Bush administration. That is true. But it is also beside the point. The authors of that agreement always intended for it to be renegotiated at a later date to allow some U.S. forces to remain in Iraq.

As former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, whose State Department team negotiated the security agreements, has said:

> There was an expectation that we would negotiate something that looked like a residual force for our training with the Iraqis. Everybody believed it would be better if there was some kind of residual force.

So if that is not the reason, I ask again: What happened? The prevailing narrative is that the U.S. and Iraqi leaders could not reach agreement over the legal protections needed to keep our troops in Iraq. To be sure, this was a matter of vital importance. But while this may have been a reason for our failure, the privileges and immunities issues are less causes than symptoms of the larger reason we could not reach agreement with the Iraqis. Because of his political promise to fully withdraw from Iraq, the President never brought the full weight of his office to bear in shaping the politics and the events on the ground in Iraq so as to secure a residual presence of U.S. troops. This left our commanders and our negotiators in Baghdad mostly trying to respond to events in Iraq, trying to shape events without the full influence of the American President behind them.

Last May, I traveled to Iraq with the Senator from South Carolina, Mr. GRAHAM. We met with all of the major Iraqi leaders. All of them were ready to come to an agreement on a future presence of U.S. troops in Iraq. But as Prime Minister Malaki explained to us, the administration at that time and for the foreseeable future had not given the Iraqi Government a number of troops and missions that it would propose to keep in Iraq.

For weeks after, the administration failed to make a proposal to the Iraqis, and when the Iraqis finally united in August and publicly asked the administration to begin negotiations, the response from Washington was again characterized by delay. This ensured that a serious negotiation could not begin much less succeed.

I know Iraq is a sovereign country. I know it has an elected government that must answer to public opinion. I know there could be no agreement over a future U.S. military presence in Iraq if Iraqis did not agree to it and build support for it. So this is as much a failure of Iraqi leadership as it is of American leadership. But to blame this on the Iraqis does not excuse the fact that we had an enormous amount of influence with Iraq's leaders and we did not exercise it to the fullest extent possible to achieve an outcome that was in our national security interest.

In fact, in the view of many, they deliberately refused to come up with a number. They deliberately refused to engage in serious negotiation with the Iraqis, with the ultimate purpose of fulfilling the Presidents's campaign pledge that he would get all U.S. troops out of Iraq.

That is not a violation of sovereignty. That is diplomacy, that is leadership. Leaders must shape events and public opinion not just respond to them, and starting in early 2009, from their desire to accelerate our withdrawal from Iraq faster than our commanders recommended, to their hands-off approach to the Iraqi process of government formation last year, to their record of delay and passivity on the question of maintaining a presence of U.S. troops beyond this year, this administration has consistently failed at the highest level to lead on Iraq.

I say again, perhaps this outcome should not have been a surprise. It is what the President has consistently promised to do, and that decision makes good political sense for this President. But such decisions should not be determined by domestic politics. The brave Americans who have fought so valiantly and have given so much did so not for political reasons but for the safety and security of their fellow citizens, for their friends, for their families, for their children's future, and for us.

This is a decisive moment in the history of America's relationship with Iraq and with all of the countries of the broader Middle East. This is a moment when the substantial influence we have long enjoyed in that part of the world could be receding—in fact, it is receding. We cannot allow that to be our Nation's future. We must continue to lead. We must not let short-term political gains dictate our longer term goals. We need to continue working to shape a freer, more just, and more secure future for both Iraq and for people across the Middle East, for it is in our own national security interest to do so.

Over 4,000 brave, young Americans gave their lives in this conflict. I hope and I pray—regardless of these decisions made in large part for political reasons—that their sacrifice was not in vain. I hope their families will not mourn the day their sons and daughters went out to fight for freedom for the Iraqi people.

Unfortunately, it is clear that this decision of a complete pullout of U.S. troops from Iraq was dictated by politics and not our national security interests. I believe history will judge this President's leadership with the scorn and disdain it deserves.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

KEYSTONE XL PROJECT

Mr. BLUNT. Mr. President, the House yesterday passed a bill that included an effort to move forward on the Keystone XL Pipeline project, and I wish to talk about that project for a while today and American energy generally.

We all agree private sector job creation needs to be the No. 1 priority in Washington. One of the best ways to jump-start job creation is simply