struggled to make long-term planting decisions, and more than 20 programs—such as those affecting organic certification cost-sharing, beginning farmers, relief from livestock disasters, renewable energy, and rural small businesses—all have been stranded without funding. Rural small businesses are a major part of my State and the Presiding Officer's State. But every State has some rural area that is extremely important.

This farm bill limbo is part of a string of artificial made-by-Congress dilemmas. Farm bill limbo hurts not only farmers, but their communities, and our economy. It hampers efforts to help those who are struggling the most in our communities, with food security for their families. It holds us back from making greater gains toward energy security.

Last month, the Republican leadership in the House of Representatives proposed a short farm bill extension. Short extensions are nothing new here on Capitol Hill. Most of us know them by the term ''kicking the can down the road.'' They patch things over from one crisis to the next. But just as a temporary extension to fund government offers neither certainty nor meaningful change, a short extension of the farm bill would not provide farmers the certainty they need to plan, or funding for stranded programs. Farming is a business, and saddling farmers with this needless uncertainty makes their difficult work even more difficult. Even worse, the proposed House extension would prolong direct payment subsidies for another year, senselessly costing taxpayers untold millions of dollars. At this point, the only acceptable path forward is to deliver a full, five-year, comprehensive farm bill by the end of January. Moving forward on the farm bill not only will avoid the so-called ''dairy cliff,'' but it also will help families put food on the table, improve conservation efforts, support regional farming, and put an end to wasteful subsidies.

This farm bill marks the seventh time that I have served as a member of a Farm Bill Conference Committee. I know how difficult it is to bring complex, five-year bills to the floor and ultimately to final passage after a conference. I don't in any way diminish the difficulty in that. I know; I have been there, and I have done that.

While there have been many significant changes in agricultural policy since the 1981 farm bill, which I had the privilege to write, one thing has remained the same: No farm bill is easy, and no farm bill is perfect. But to finalize a farm bill, the Senate and House must work together to reach bipartisan agreement. It means, whether you are a Republican or Democrat, forget the symbolism and start dealing with the substance. Stop rhetoric and go to reality.

The conference committee is making steady progress, and Chairwoman STABENOW and Chairman LUCAS deserve credit, and our appreciation, for working closely together to bridge the wide differences between our two bills. The cuts it includes will not go unnoticed, as we have already seen spending reductions from the sequester, followed by the end of the Recovery Act nutrition benefits. We can talk here on the floor. We are all going to collect our paycheck every month. But we sometimes forget these cuts and policy changes affect real people in real ways. So we have to continue to do the best we can.

Speaking as a Vermonter, I would note that every farm bill is important to Vermont, just as every farm bill is important to every State represented in this body. Farm bills make real differences in our quality of life, and the fact that Congress every 5 years or so would renew and pass a farm bill was once something Americans could take for granted. This is the first time we have not been able to do so.

The delays have been unfortunate, and they have been needless. But I am increasingly hopeful that this recent dark chapter is coming to a close. Farmers and families around the Nation are looking to us to pass forward-looking, fiscally responsible, and regionally sensitive food and farm policy—and the two have to be together, both the food and the farm policy. Farmers have to be able to plan, but families have to know, when their children go to school, they are going to be fed. Every teacher will tell you that a hungry child doesn't learn. If children aren't learning, what are we doing for the next generation? That is our responsibility.

Now is the time, without further delay, to enact a farm bill that will strengthen the Nation and support the economy. I know we are up to this challenge. We have done it twice already in this body, forging a bipartisan coalition. I am hoping the other body, notwithstanding some of the Republicans who tried to block it, will come forward and speak, not just for a small part of one political party, but speak for all Americans.

Before I yield, I ask unanimous consent that all the time during the recess count postcloture on the motion to proceed to S. 1845.

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

Mr. LEAHY. 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 12:32 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Ms. BALDWIN).

EMERGENCY UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION EXTENSION ACT—MOTION TO PROCEED—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican whip.

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, last month the President of the United States gave a speech on what has come to be known by the code words ''income inequality,'' which means different things to different people. He also talked about a very important aspect of that, and that is upward income mobility. In other words, we want to make sure that somebody who goes to work in a restaurant bussing tables can work their way up the income and education ladder to where they can actually own their own restaurant and create jobs and opportunities for other people. The President called it ''the defining challenge of our time.''

Well, the timing, coming as it has, one might be forgiven from wondering whether the President and his allies want to change the subject from ObamaCare. We know that the rollout of ObamaCare has been an unmitigated disaster, and, frankly, there is more to come. We can certainly understand why the President might want to change the subject. But while he is changing the subject, Republicans should embrace the challenge of discussing this: What are the policies that have resulted in income inequality and insufficient upward mobility when it comes to jobs in America?

Of course, the President, you might predict, has talked about his proposed solutions, which are creating more government programs and more spending, including up to $6 billion of money that we have to borrow from China and our other creditors just to extend the unemployment insurance program by 3 months. My question is: What happens after that 3 months? I don't want to be rash, but I will make a prediction that the Democrats will say: We need another 3 months. After that, they will say: We need another 3 months. Before you know it, unemployment insurance has been extended beyond the half-year mark, which is the basic program, to another full year beyond that at a cost of $25 billion.

Just to put all of this in context, the Federal Government spent $250 billion for extended unemployment insurance benefits since 2008. Of course, the President did not mention some of the primary causes for income inequality and the loss of upward mobility because he is responsible for a lot of that, along with his allies. He failed to mention that under his administration America has suffered the longest period of high unemployment since the Great Depression, and he failed to mention his signature health care law. I mentioned that a moment ago. He is trying to pivot to another subject, but inevitably we find ourselves coming back to ObamaCare and its negative impact on job creation and the 40-hour workweek.

We know that ObamaCare has done a number of things in the short period of time since it began the rollout, which was October 1st. Millions of people have lost their existing insurance coverage. In fact, more people have lost their insurance coverage than have

signed up for ObamaCare or even Medicaid. Then there is the issue of skyrocketing insurance premiums. So I thought the idea was: How do we make health care more affordable? In fact, instead of making health care better and more affordable, it has become less affordable.

We are not just talking about the insurance premiums, we are talking about deductibles. We have all heard the stories of people signing up on the ObamaCare exchanges only to find out: Yeah, they have health insurance, but you know what, the first $5,000 per person is the deductible, which effectively means—for all practical purposes—that person is self-insured. That is a deal breaker for many hard-working middle-class Americans.

We know, of course, that even organized labor has complained about the fact that ObamaCare has turned full-time work into part-time work. Why is that? For employers who put their employees on a 30-hour workweek, they are not required, under the law, to pay for health care benefits. But if you have a full-time worker, you are required to pay for health care benefits. So what is happening is that many employers are cutting people back from 40 hours to 30 hours with a commensurate loss of income.

Recently, I was in Tyler, TX, sitting around a table at a restaurant when one gentleman who owns a restaurant said that because of ObamaCare one of the single moms who works in his restaurant lost her 40-hour workweek job. He had to cut her down to 30 hours. So she had to get two 30-hour jobs in order to get by. In other words, she now has to work 60 hours instead of working 40 hours, and obviously she is worried about the lack of time she has with her children in addition to having lost her full-time job.

The President has also failed to mention a number of other items which have contributed to income inequality and the loss of upward mobility, such as the medical device tax that is a feature of ObamaCare. In Texas we have a number of medical device companies that came to see me after the ObamaCare legislation passed.

They said: We have a duty to our shareholders not to spend their money inefficiently, and so our only alternative is to expand our existing facility in Costa Rica rather than in Texas. So the jobs that would have been created in Texas effectively moved to Costa Rica because of the medical device tax. So much for job creation and reducing income inequality and enhancing upward mobility.

The President also declined to talk about his refusal to approve the Keystone XL Pipeline. Of course, this is a pipeline that would start in Canada and end up in Port Arthur, TX, in an area we call the Golden Triangle. We happen to have a lot of refineries there that can refine that oil into gasoline, jet fuel, and other products for Americans consumers.

The President promised the country he would make a decision by the end of 2013. I may have missed something during the holidays, but I don't recall the President making any announcement whatsoever on the Keystone XL Pipeline. Not only would it produce thousands of good well-paying jobs, it would also produce a dependable supply of energy from a friendly country—the nation of Canada.

What else did the President fail to mention in his income inequality and upward mobility speech? He failed to mention how the impact of his regulatory policies are piling hundreds of billions of dollars of additional costs on small businesses.

For example, the small banks in Texas have told me that they have hired new people, but the people they hired are the people who help us comply with the Dodd-Frank regulations. This bill—just to remind everybody—was filed to address the abuses on Wall Street that led to the subprime loan crisis and collapse in 2008. As we now know, while Wall Street was the target of Dodd-Frank and these regulations, Main Street is the collateral damage. Yes, people are being hired but not for the purpose of loaning more money and helping small businesses start and grow their businesses but, rather, just to comply with new government regulations.

What else did the President fail to mention in his discussion about the lack of jobs and upward mobility? He failed to mention his proposed greenhouse gas rules, which will kill jobs and drive up energy costs.

He failed to mention that during the so-called Obama economic recovery—the President has now been President for 5 years. He can't blame this on George Bush anymore. But during the so-called Obama economic recovery, real median household income has fallen more than $2,500. At the same time that real household median income has fallen by $2,500, households are finding that their health care insurance costs have gone up by $2,500, for a net loss of $5,000 for most hard-working American families.

The President has failed to acknowledge—in his discussion of slow economic growth—high unemployment. He has failed to mention that the economic recovery following the 2008 recession has been the weakest U.S. recovery since World War II.

Economists ordinarily say that after a recession there will be sort of a V-shaped recovery—once you hit the bottom, you come out of it very quickly and the economy grows fast. Under the Obama recovery, that has been flatlined to anemic growth, which is not fast enough or strong enough to hire more American workers.

Indeed, we have the lowest percentage of Americans actually in the workforce in the last 30 years. What that means is that even though the unemployment rate is roughly 7 percent—that is on a national basis—millions of people have simply dropped out of looking for a job because they see the prospects for finding work so dim.

The President also failed to mention that his 2009 stimulus package—at that time you may remember that Speaker PELOSI said: Our goal is to make timely, targeted, and temporary investments in government spending to help stimulate the economy and help bring down the unemployment rate.

The President later joked and said—we found out it wasn't a funny joke—that "shovel ready" didn't actually mean it was shovel ready, which was absolutely true. He failed to add that his 2009 stimulus package added more than $1 trillion to the national debt, which now stands at $17.3 trillion. That is equivalent to more than $54,000 worth of debt for every man, woman, and child living in America today.

I don't think anyone in their right mind believes we can continue down this same path of racking up more and more debt by borrowing more and more money without having some negative consequences at some point in the future. One thing we do know will occur is that the present generation that is racking up all of this debt will probably not be around to have to pay it back, but the next generation and beyond will.

If the President wants to have an honest debate about income inequality, he needs to be honest about his own record, and he needs to talk about it in a holistic context.

A few months ago, the New York Times reported that the trend of rising inequality "appears to have accelerated during the Obama administration." Indeed, according to one measure of the income gap, inequality has increased about four times faster under President Obama than it did under President George W. Bush.

Here is the reality: If we want to reduce income inequality, we need to boost economic growth. That is the debate we should be having and which this side of the aisle embraces—not how we can pay more government benefits to people who can't find work or artificially fix the price of wages. We need to figure a way to benefit the entire country by growing the economy.

Largely—at least where I come from—people say there are three things that the Federal Government can do to help grow the economy: Get out of the way, get off our back, and get your hand out of our pocket. Those are three things the Federal Government could do which would help the economy grow, create more opportunity, and deal with this issue of income equality in an effective sort of way.

So we need to boost economic growth. That is the debate we should be having—how do we create more jobs, or actually how do we allow the private sector to create more jobs? We tried having the government spend borrowed money to create more jobs, and that did not turn out so well. So now we need to figure a way to get out of the

way so the private-sector economy can create the jobs that will put Americans back to work and deal with this issue of income inequality once and for all.

As we saw last night, instead of trying to actually solve the problem, sometimes I am tempted to think that the majority leader and his allies really want a political issue rather than a solution to the problem, because we saw last night the majority leader was ready to have a vote with 17 Senators missing because of the storms around the country. We know people could not get back because of cold weather and storms and flight cancellations and the like, and I predict if we had had the vote last night, the cloture vote that we had today would have failed, and that would have fit very nicely into the majority leader's and the President's desire to change the subject from ObamaCare to Republicans blocking this unemployment compensation bill.

It did not turn out that way because we had the vote here this morning. We embrace the opportunity to talk about our progrowth alternatives, which will actually make life better for the American people, not worse, as the policies of this administration have over the last 5 years.

Basically, we know that the demand is this: to extend long-term unemployment benefits beyond the half year, which is the basic program, another 3 months, and to put the entire $6.5 billion tab on our national credit card. But I ask you, What is going to happen after 3 months? Will the President and his allies be back asking for another 3 months and another $6.5 billion in deficit spending that will be added to the debt? I think so. How about in 9 months? If we extend it for two 3-month periods, we will be here for another one that will extend it to 9 months and beyond, ad infinitum—$25 billion in added deficit and debt spending—unless we solve the root of the problem.

Republicans would prefer that we offset any real extension with spending cuts that would make it revenue neutral. We would also like to reform the unemployment insurance program so it delivers better results to the unemployed.

For example, if there is one thing that most people who are unemployed need it is the opportunity for job skills training. We ought to make sure things such as Pell grants are available for people during that 26-week period of time they are on unemployment, that they can go to a community college in their own town and learn new job skills, and so they do not have to be stuck in the same old position. They could learn new job skills, which will open a whole new world of opportunity for them when it comes to jobs.

Before I conclude, I want to mention a few numbers that help put the Obama economy in perspective. According to the Joint Economic Committee, the economy grew during the first 4 years of the Reagan administration by 22.3 percent—22.3 percent. During the first 4 years of the Obama administration, it was about 9 percent—less than half. Why is that? Why is it that the economy grew during the first 4 years of the Reagan administration by 22 percent; in the first 4 years of the Obama administration by about 9.2 percent?

As I pointed out, there are some good reasons why this recovery has been anemic and so slow and why so many people are still struggling to find work. If the Obama recovery had been as strong as the Reagan recovery, we would have millions more private-sector jobs. Isn't that what we want? The recipients of unemployment insurance compensation do not want to receive a government check. What they want is the dignity and the self-confidence and the opportunity to provide for their family that comes with a good job. That is what is missing in this whole equation and this transparent political exercise to play gotcha at their expense.

We know it was President Reagan's economic strategies, combined with permanent, broad-based tax cuts and sensible regulatory policies that helped grow the economy. By contrast, President Obama's strategy is to combine massive tax increases—including the payroll tax, a year ago January—with a regulatory bonanza. We do not have to speculate about what the impacts of President Obama's policies are. We are living with them today.

So I would say to President Obama, if you really want to reduce income inequality and promote upward mobility, we want to have that conversation. Let's get back to the policies, though, that have worked so well in the past, not those which have failed us and the American people during the last 5 years. Let's put a stop to regulations that do not pass a cost-benefit test. Let's do what we need to expand domestic energy production and create jobs.

Do you know where the two lowest unemployment rates in the country are? Bismarck, ND, and Midland, TX, and that is because of the shale energy renaissance that has created jobs. If you can pass a commercial driver's license test, you can get a job driving a truck with a high school degree in both of those places and earn between $75,000 and $100,000 a year; the lowest unemployment in the country but this administration's policies have made it harder and harder for those jobs to be created, along with the Keystone Pipeline and the jobs that would create.

We need also to reform our Tax Code to encourage more investment. We need to reward earned success so that small businesses can be started, so existing small businesses can expand. All of the President's policies, including, of course, most notably, ObamaCare, have made that harder. We need to do what we can, as I said, to expand domestic energy production and create jobs. We need to reform unemployment insurance to get more people back into the workforce by making sure they have the job training they need to learn employable skills.

Then, of course, the subject that will not go away—notwithstanding the President's most earnest desire—that is, we need to dismantle ObamaCare before it does any more harm to our health care system and our broader economy. We need to replace it with more affordable coverage that lets consumers keep the doctor they trust—a promise that ObamaCare made, but a promise that has been broken, as too many people already know.

Mr. PORTMAN. Madam President, will the Senator yield for a moment?

Mr. CORNYN. I will.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

Mr. PORTMAN. I was just walking through the Chamber and I had the opportunity to visit with some of my colleagues in the back, and I heard what my colleague from Texas was saying, and I just want to add a couple things, if I could. One is to say he is absolutely right in terms of the underlying problem here, which is a weak economy, and really a historically weak economy. Never coming out of a recession have we had a recovery this weak.

The Senator made that point well—that typically we go into a recession in sort of a V formation. We go in and then come back out with a relatively strong recovery from a relatively deep recession. That certainly happened in 1981, where at this point in Ronald Reagan's recovery we had created over 8 million new jobs. Unfortunately, we are not creating the new jobs that we created in these other recoveries. As a result, we do have these problems with folks who are both unemployed and long-term unemployed.

I think it is important to note that we now have historic levels of long-term unemployment, people who have been out of work for more than a half year, more than 26 weeks—the highest levels ever. So something is not working. It is different this time. I think what is not working is that some of our basic structural institutions—such as our tax system, our regulatory system, the regulations that have come from ObamaCare, and so on—are adding more and more burdens to the economy.

The historic debt and deficits the Senator talked about are also adding to our economic woes. It is hurting the economy today, and it is certainly unfair, I would say even immoral to put that burden on future generations. Some of the young people who are here today are going to get left holding the bag for the $17 trillion national debt we now have—$145,000 for every family in Texas or Ohio.

So the Senator makes the right points. We have to get this economy moving. There are some very specific policy proposals the Senator has outlined that we ought to turn to. The President has talked about tax reform, he has talked about regulatory relief,

but he has not delivered. If we do not get at those issues, we are not going to ultimately solve the problem.

But here we find ourselves within a few hours of having voted to proceed on a debate on whether we do extend unemployment insurance for people for the next 3 months beyond the normal unemployment insurance that would be out there. Most States provide about 6 months of unemployment insurance, about 26 weeks; some States a little more, some States a little less. What we are talking about is how much do you add at the Federal level as emergency unemployment benefits? I did vote, along with some of my other colleagues on both sides of the aisle, to proceed to this debate. As the Senator said earlier—I heard him—perhaps that was not what the majority leader was hoping for because maybe he wanted more of a political issue. But I did so because I took to heart what was said on the other side of the aisle about the fact that we are going to now have a debate.

I think this debate breaks down into a couple things. One is, how do you deal with paying for this? Because, as we indicated, this economy is not going to grow until we deal with these historic levels of debt and deficit.

How ironic would it be if we were saying: We are going to help those who are unemployed by making it harder to get the economy moving—by not doing anything with regard to the debt and deficit, in fact, adding to it.

So what I am going to be filing is an amendment. It is a very simple amendment that says let's pay for this extension for 3 months. I just heard my colleague from Texas saying he would support that. Others, I hope, on both sides will support this. The specific idea that we have is let's take the proposal out of the President's budget that says if you are on Social Security disability and, therefore, not working, you, of course, should not be getting unemployment insurance. It is in the President's budget. I would also say trade adjustment assistance, of course, should not be available to you because you are not working by definition.

So it is basically tightening up some of the provisions in current law to make them work better. That provides the funding to be able to say: OK, let's go ahead and extend unemployment insurance, but only for a few months while we do sit down and work on these bigger problems that the Senator from Texas has taken a lead on and talked about today. I hope that is where we will end up, that we will actually pay for this rather than adding to the burden and making the economy even weaker by adding to our deficit.

Second, I think we need to have an honest discussion, even in the next couple of days here, as to how to make the unemployment system itself work better. Unemployment insurance, as has been noted, is not connecting people to jobs. That is the reason we have these historic levels of long-term unemployment.

The Senator mentioned the Pell grants, for instance, being available to people who are on unemployment insurance. That is incredibly important, but also having our worker retraining programs at the Federal level work better for those folks who are uninsured. I think we should engage in that topic now—not only on how do we pay for this, but how do we actually make the unemployment insurance system work for the people who are unemployed?

The Federal Government spends over $15 billion a year in worker retraining programs—47 programs spread over 9 different departments and agencies. Often the right hand does not know what the left hand is doing. The GAO, which looks at these issues—the General Accountability Office—has said there is duplication in most of these programs, and only a handful—four or five—are seeing the kind of performance measures you would want to have in a Federal program.

So there is a great opportunity here on a bipartisan basis for us to get those worker retraining programs working better and into the hands of the people who really need the retraining to match skills with jobs. In Ohio—and I am sure the same is true in Texas—we have a lot of jobs going wanting right now. We have about 100,000 jobs available. We have about 400,000 people out of work. How do you connect those? A big part of that is providing the skills to those workers to be able to access those jobs that are available that do require a higher skill—maybe it is advanced manufacturing, maybe it is biotechnology.

The Federal Government is not providing that help right now. Those worker retraining skills that are needed are not being provided. So I do think there is an opportunity here for us to pay for this, to be sure we are not adding to the debt and deficit, at a time when the economy is too weak already, and, second, to provide the skills workers need—Pell grants and so on—to actually give people some hope and give people some additional tools to be able to access this economy and these jobs that are available and get this economy moving again.

I thank the Senator for yielding.

Mr. CORNYN. Before the distinguished Senator from Ohio leaves the floor, I did not know he was coming down, but I am delighted he did. Not only is he an expert and former Director of the Office of Management and Budget, distinguished Member of the House, now the Senate, and a great new addition since 2010, he understands these issues, particularly the fiscal issues, better than most of us.

But the Senator makes a very important point. I am worried, based on what the majority leader did last night, that they preferred to have a ''gotcha'' moment, have the bill fail at the very outset, rather than have a fulsome debate and a realistic discussion about what the alternatives are to basically permanently paying people not to work, through virtually a permanent extension of unemployment.

More than most people, the Senator from Ohio, when he came to this Chamber, said what we need is a jobs program. So he advocated among those in our Republican conference. He said: We need a positive program for how do we facilitate the economy, the private sector, creating those jobs. Of course, he described the amendment that he intends to offer on this bill, not only to pay for this 3-month extension, which would be a welcome measure, but also to reform the unemployment system so that people can learn skills that actually match them with the jobs that do exist.

I would add, while the Senator is on the floor, that as he knows, there are a lot of other good ideas that will be offered this week by this side of the aisle, but it is entirely dependent upon the majority leader allowing that sort of fulsome debate and those ideas to come to the floor and be available for a vote, things such as the Forty Hours Is Full Time Act that Senator COLLINS has promoted, the medical device tax which I talked about, the repeal sponsored—the chief sponsor, Senator HATCH of Utah.

Senator BARRASSO from Wyoming has got one that would repeal the health insurance tax from ObamaCare, which is a direct passthrough to consumers. Senator PAUL, Senator MCCONNELL have their economic freedom zones idea to help blighted areas where unemployment is high, and to create a way for the private sector to be incentivized to come in and start jobs and to create opportunity.

We have got regulatory reform bills and proposals. We have got the Keystone XL Pipeline idea. I know Senator LEE and Senator RUBIO have both recently come up with some very visionary ideas about how do we fight the war on poverty in a realistic sort of way. But my point is that whether we are going to get into that debate and give a full and fair consideration of all of these ideas about how to solve this problem depends on the majority leader allowing amendments to be offered and voted on.

I would ask the Senator from Ohio what his expectation is in that regard, and what the consequences would be if the majority leader decides to deny any amendments and basically shut down this process?

Mr. PORTMAN. I appreciate the Senator yielding. I would say that having listened to some of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle speak earlier today prior to the vote about what their intentions were, including one of the authors of the legislation, and one of the leaders in the Senate, it seems to me they are interested in a debate. They encouraged those from the Republican side to vote yes on the motion to proceed, with the understanding that there would be the opportunity then to at least discuss these issues

and to therefore offer amendments and to have what the Senate typically has had over the years, which is the opportunity for some give-and-take, and the opportunity to have voices heard, people representing both the States on the Democratic side and the Republican side of the aisle. So I am hopeful we will have that debate. That is my expectation.

I plan to file an amendment to pay for the unemployment insurance extension, and I know a lot of support will come from both sides of the aisle for that. I also hope to be able to offer other amendments that have to do with growing the economy in a more direct way. The Senator mentioned regulatory reform, for instance.

We have bipartisan proposals on this side of the aisle that are intended to take the unemployment situation and deal with it in a broader context of reducing the burdens on small businesses, for instance. When you try to get a permit, for instance, from the Federal Government right now, sometimes with an energy project, sometimes there are as many as 34 different permits you have to obtain. That is one reason we are not seeing investment in some of the energy projects we would like to see. It is a great potential for our economy right now. We can make the potential even greater and achieve it if we can do something on the regulatory reform side. So these are all issues that ought to be part of the broader discussion as to how to increase economic growth and therefore to increase jobs and opportunity for people who find themselves unemployed and are looking for those job skills and are looking for the jobs that are open.

I look forward to that debate over the next few days. That is certainly my expectation. I hope that Members on both sides would come down to the well and offer their amendments, have them voted up or down in the great tradition of the Senate.

Mr. CORNYN. I thank the Senator for responding to that question.

I would point out, in conclusion, that this bill extends unemployment benefits for 3 months at a cost of $6.5 billion, right now which is unpaid for. But if the amendment of the Senator from Ohio is adopted, there is the solution to that problem, along with reform of the job training components of our current unemployment compensation system.

But if we are unable to have this broader debate, we will find ourselves right back here in 3 more months because none of the underlying problems, of which high unemployment and low growth are symptoms, will have been addressed. So what I hope—and I would love to be optimistic about the majority leader's willingness to allow those amendments and allow those votes and have that fulsome debate. If he does not, then we have had a 3-month patch and we will be right back here with the same problems confronting us, with the underlying symptoms of an anemic economy, with slow economic growth and high unemployment.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mrs. FISCHER. I rise today on behalf of over 37,000 unemployed Nebraskans and nearly 21 million Americans who are searching for work. The vast majority of these men and women are jobless through no fault of their own. They are the real-life casualties of failed Washington policies. They are our friends, our neighbors, and in many cases they are our family members. They are decent people, and they are desperate to regain the dignity of a full day of labor.

We have had 5 years of economic fits and starts—glimmers of hope dashed by the harsh reality of persistent economic headwinds. But the weak job reports and the Pollyanna claims of recovery don't tell the full story. Our real unemployment rate or the total percentage of unemployed and underemployed workers tops 13 percent, significantly higher than the 7 percent reported by the Department of Labor in November. That is nearly 21 million people out of work. At the same time our labor force participation rate is at 63 percent, a near 35-year low.

The greatness of a nation cannot endure without work for its people. It is not only about putting food on the table. It is about the ability of families to buy a home, to save for their kids' college education, and to retire with a modest nest egg. It is about hard-working moms and dads in need of the simple assurance that their government isn't going to pass laws that intentionally make life harder for them.

I am interested in promoting thoughtful economic policies that increase employment opportunities and make life a little bit easier for our people. But instead of a laser focus on job creation, politicians in Washington seem to pivot from issue to issue, frantically chasing the topic du jour. Jobless Americans aren't interested in who is to blame; they are interested in who is going to fix this mess and how.

Congress has returned to Washington for a new year, a new chance to take on daunting challenges, such as joblessness in America. We have all been informed by the media and the so-called wise men of Washington that 2014 will be a year in which very little is accomplished. The pundits point to election-year politicking, and some Members are fretting about taking those very tough votes. There is no will for action, they say. There is no chance for any kind of compromise, they claim.

The 21 million Americans without jobs are counting on us to do our job. They expect and they demand that we do better. Promoting policies to create jobs is not election-year rhetoric; it is the duty of the people's government.

The best way to support the unemployed is not to just extend the benefits; we need to grow the economy, and we need to provide paychecks for families.

Lately, there has been a lot of talk about income inequality or the need to bridge the gap between rich and poor. Some argue that deficit spending is the way to go, while others insist on increasing the minimum wage.

Arthur Brooks, the president of the American Enterprise Institute, offers a different take on how to best conquer the income divide. In a July 31, 2013, opinion piece published in the Wall Street Journal, Brooks notes:

> Again and again, the president offers a higher minimum wage as a solution. Yet as the overwhelming majority of economists have argued for decades, the minimum wage actually harms the poorest and most marginalized workers—those with the most tenuous grip on their jobs.
>
> In January, a study from the National Bureau of Economic Research surveyed the most recent studies and concluded: ''The evidence still shows that minimum wages pose a tradeoff of higher wages for some, against job losses for others.''

Brooks continues:

> The story for strivers and entrepreneurs is no better. Scott Shane of Case Western Reserve University has shown that business formation fell by 17.3% between 2007 and 2009. Launching a business is never a walk in the park, especially given the explosion of red tape at all levels of government.
>
> While it is still possible for the educated and comfortable, government bureaucracy can crush entrepreneurship entirely for those at the bottom of the income scale.
>
> As a pro-poor rule of thumb, I suggest this: If you want to start a landscaping business, all you should need is a lawn mower, not an accountant and a lawyer to help you hack through all the red tape before setting up shop.

I think Brooks is right.

Regulatory overreach is also holding back American business. Regulations can be helpful. They ensure the health and safety of Americans. However, overregulation places unnecessary burdens on small business owners, and it does stifle economic growth. A homebuilder in Nebraska once told me that he was fined $7,000 for leaning a ladder against a wall.

There is solid legislation out there to address the rampant redtape. Here are a few examples.

The Regulatory Responsibility for our Economy Act of 2013 is a bill that was introduced by Senator PAT ROBERTS that I am cosponsoring. It requires the executive branch to repeal duplicative and onerous rules currently hindering our Nation's job creators. It also requires Federal agencies to modify, streamline, or repeal significant regulatory actions that are unnecessary or overly burdensome. The legislation ensures that regulations put forth by the administration account for their economic impact on American businesses. It ensures stakeholder input and promotes innovation.

These simple commonsense policies are a good start toward relieving business owners of some of the unnecessary challenges they face in these already difficult economic times. I believe and I know many Nebraskans believe that executive agencies should be held accountable for the rules they put in place which directly affect our economic growth and our job creation.

Another key way we can spur economic growth is through broad-based tax reform. Our current tax system is arcane and riddled with loopholes for special interests from the eighties. It is time that we simplify our Tax Code so that we can encourage progrowth behavior.

Whenever I travel in my State and I meet with Nebraska's business owners, both large and small, I hear the same message over and over: We need more certainty. We need more certainty.

They need more certainty in the Tax Code, they need more certainty in health care, and they need more certainty in the regulatory environment. A business cannot grow today if it cannot adequately predict its needs for tomorrow.

This is especially true for small business owners, who are responsible for 64 percent of all net new private sector jobs. Jobs will come when these entrepreneurs have confidence that the bureaucrats are going to get off their backs. Jobs won't come from just another DC Government program.

I believe we must shift the focus of economic growth from government-driven regulation to private sector innovation. The great government-controlled experiment has failed us yet again, so it is time for a change of course.

There is no shortage of good ideas out there. My colleagues and I have introduced dozens of bills to directly address job creation by repealing specific regulations, preventing new burdensome mandates, and encouraging a fairer tax system. But so far we haven't had any form of meaningful debate. Why? Why can't we debate in this body in a meaningful way? I believe it is because we are restricted in this Senate by what we can actually vote on. It is a radical form of control, and we are tired of it. Rather than allowing an open amendment process, the majority leader has locked this place down. We hear constant calls to end obstruction, but if we are being honest, we would all acknowledge that the primary obstruction here is in the broken, nonexistent amendment process.

My friend and colleague Senator COBURN recently noted in the Wall Street Journal:

> Mr. Reid had already used Senate rules to cut off debate and prevent the minority from offering amendments 78 times—more than all other Senate majority leaders combined.

Why?

It appears designed to advance a partisan political agenda—show votes in an election year. In other words, let's airdrop bills on the floor and prevent any form of modification or improvement. That seems to be routine business around here these days, and it is shameful.

It is my hope that in this new year all thoughtful ideas will get a vote. It is my hope that in this new year we will actually get a chance to amend bills. That is the only way we can actually pass legislation to improve the lives of the American people.

I look forward to putting forth my own proposals to fulfill my duty to the people of Nebraska to get our friends and our neighbors back to work. Rather than focusing on issues that divide us, I hope my colleagues, Republicans and Democrats, will come together to support policies that promote opportunities for all.

Show votes might make for good election-year politics, but make no mistake—they are bad policy. And unfortunately it is ''we the people'' who pay the steep price for politics over policy.

I am excited for another year here in the Senate where I can represent my friends and neighbors, Nebraskans from back home, and I look forward to helping put Americans back to work in the year ahead. Our citizens send us here to do a job and they are counting on us, so let's not let them down.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MANCHIN). The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, the Chair and I earlier today were part of a historic majority—a very bipartisan majority—that voted 60 to 37 to extend unemployment insurance for millions of Americans across this country who are struggling to make ends meet, to keep their families together, to keep a roof over their heads—basic essentials not only to continue living but to continue searching for work. These Americans are not without a work ethic. In fact, they are devastated by being out of work for so long with such destructive results for their sense of self-worth and their family.

This measure is limited in its scope and significance. It is only a procedural vote on a temporary measure for 3 months, and only a partial solution to the grave and pressing issue of putting Americans back to work, restoring employment for Americans who want to work and keep their families together, but it is profoundly important.

I want to thank my colleagues, Senators REED of Rhode Island and HELLER of Nevada, as well as all of our colleagues who voted for it, and even many of my colleagues who may have voted against it but were torn and, hopefully, will vote for it on final passage. I urge all my colleagues to get this job done so we can send it to the House of Representatives and make sure it is approved there.

What is significant about this measure is in fact it was bipartisan. It was overwhelming. It shows Congress is listening; that it is heeding the calls for action from those 4 million Americans, including over 60,000 of them in my home State of Connecticut, who need this measure so they can continue seeking work, hopefully successfully.

It is a temporary fix, but it is a measure with profound significance for those men and women who courageously are facing the searing facts of life during long-term joblessness. One of those individuals, in fact, from Connecticut, very courageously appeared with the President earlier today. Katherine Hackett of Moodus, CT, is the parent of two sons in the military, who herself is struggling to keep the heat on and put food on her table. She described her situation in introducing President Obama when he spoke about this problem earlier today. I am proud she is at the forefront of this fight, and I am proud to be fighting with her so that Americans have the benefit of unemployment insurance when they are unemployed for longer than the 26 weeks that is recognized under the statute.

This story is one of numbers. We can't deny the statistics. The great recession may have ended for a lot of Americans, but it continues for the unemployed, the jobless, particularly long-term jobless. Those numbers have become almost mind-numbing, but they are very significant. According to a report recently released by the Joint Economic Committee, 3 years after the recession ending in 1991, long-term unemployment was at 1.3 percent. Three years after the recession ending in 2001, long-term unemployment was also at 1.3 percent. Today, long-term unemployment is double those numbers, at 2.6 percent.

Here we are, 4 years after the supposed end of the recession in 2009 with double the percentage of long-term unemployed that we had in previous recessions. Our economy simply is not growing fast enough or creating enough jobs to end that persistently high rate of long-term unemployment. About 4 million Americans, more than one-third of unemployed Americans, have been looking for work for 6 months or more.

In my home State of Connecticut, long-term unemployment has become even more prevalent among those who have lost their jobs. In fact, 43.6 percent, or almost half of Connecticut's overall unemployed population, are long-term unemployed. That means over 60,000 people.

But those numbers are less convincing and compelling than the human stories. I was proud and moved to sit with a number of my fellow Connecticut citizens—hard-working, dedicated people of all ages, some of whom have spent lifetimes working for a single employer only to find themselves rejected and released. Many of them told me they expected to find work right away, within a couple of weeks, and here they are—more than 6 months later, many of them—still struggling to find work and working to improve

their skills so they can match the job opportunities that may exist.

Rosa Dicker, who has been out of work for almost a year, is a former health insurance project manager who also has experience with health care reform implementation in Massachusetts, our neighboring State. Rosa has sent out 500 job applications in the past year. I almost misstated that figure. I thought it was 50. It is 500 job applications in the past year. And she has been granted how many interviews? She has interviewed three times.

Nyrsa Cruz, an experienced social worker with a master's degree, has also been unemployed since early 2013. Despite hours and hours she has devoted to countless job applications, she has been unable to find work.

Michael Kubica, unemployed after years of experience in the insurance and publishing industries, went back to school to pursue an MBA. Yet despite his educational experience, despite his degrees, despite his dedication, he has been unable to secure more than temporary holiday season work.

Anyone who suggests the long-term unemployed are somehow content or have decided to stay out of work or have abandoned the search ought to talk to people in their own communities—people such as Rosa, Nyrsa, or Michael, who have struggled and worked to find suitable jobs. They are driven, passionate, and absolutely dedicated.

One woman I met, Erin London, described it this way:

> My whole family is impacted. My son asks, ''Am I going to be able to go to college?'' I don't know how to answer. I don't want him to know I am scared.

Imagine yourself as a parent thinking—and we have all thought it—I don't want him or her to know I am scared.

Another Connecticut woman, Alicia Nesbitt, was proud to be working and to have worked continuously since the age of 16, until she was unemployed. Now she depends on food stamps and heating assistance.

These stories are powerful and compelling, even more so than the numbers and statistics, shocking as they are. I hope we will heed those human stories when we come back tomorrow and the next day to vote on this bill.

In the long term we need measures such as targeted tax credits and skills training so people can be matched with jobs and so they can prepare for the jobs of the future. Pathways Back to Work is a bill I have introduced that supports creation of new jobs as well as training for the ones that exist. I have introduced it with my colleagues Senators MURPHY and GILLIBRAND, and I think it would do a great deal to address the fundamental underlying challenges that are keeping unemployed people from reconnecting with the world of work. But these measures are for next week or the week after. Right now, the urgency of this week is passing a measure that is fundamentally important to keep people moving forward, searching for work, and to keep our economy moving forward.

Those folks who receive unemployment insurance use it to buy clothes or food or a car that drives the economy, provides for the kinds of consumer demand we need to enable our economy to continue moving forward. So we are helping these folks avoid the precipice of poverty and homelessness, which makes their job search even more difficult, but we are also helping our economy. All of us who want job creation and economic progress want it to be our Nation's priority and success.

I am proud to stand and join Senators REED and HELLER, and thank also our majority leader Senator REID for their leadership, because our most urgent task is to move our economy forward, provide these unemployment benefits as soon as possible, and then look toward more permanent measures—skills training, the Pathways Back to Work Act, veterans programs that will enable all Americans to enjoy more equally the benefits of the greatest nation in the history of the world.

The challenge of our growing inequality is also our growing inequity. This measure is a start—a temporary, limited start—in the right direction toward making America fulfill its great promise for the future.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I come to the floor today, and as I do so, Washington has an incredible opportunity for a new beginning—a beginning that would begin by listening to the American people and what the American people want, and not just what Washington and the Democrats in this body think is best for all the American people.

According to a new Associated Press poll, most Americans say health care reform is the top issue they want the government to work on this year—the top issue they want government to work on this year. Fifty-two percent of people have said that is what they are asking us to work on.

People have seen—and I heard about this all around Wyoming over the Christmas holiday—the complete failure of the health care law's big rollout last year. They saw President Obama and they saw Washington Democrats break one promise after another. As a matter of fact, one of the President's promises was designated ''the lie of the year.'' The American people have lost faith this administration can ever get health care reform right.

It wasn't just a bad Web site. The President said: Well, the Web site was bad. He said: The health care law is more than a Web site.

In spite of what the Obama administration has said, it wasn't all fixed last year because the Web site is just the tip of the iceberg. And huge Web site failures? Absolutely. I heard it everywhere I went around Wyoming, and I actually even heard it brought up when I was in Afghanistan visiting the troops on New Year's Day.

So it is not just the Web site, with the higher premiums, canceled coverage, can't keep your doctor, fraud and identity theft, higher copays and higher deductibles; the Web site continues to be just the tip of the iceberg.

Beyond all of those things we have been talking about coming down the line and hitting the American people, we have also seen even more problems surface already this year.

Here is a headline from the Wall Street Journal, January 3: ''Consumers Hit Snags as Health Law Kicks In.'' The snags? We can imagine what they are. People have been going to the doctor, going to the pharmacy looking for help, and even though they signed up for insurance in the new exchange, it turns out they can't be found. They are not in the system.

So Web site failures? Absolutely. Insurance companies aren't sure who is signed up with them. People aren't sure if they are covered. Doctors aren't sure who is covered.

Doctors, as a result of their training, their compassion, their care for human beings, are trying their best to help their patients. They have been fighting a losing battle against the exchanges and all of the problems with the new Washington-mandated health insurance. One Chicago doctor tried for 2 hours to verify the new insurance for a patient who was scheduled for surgery. The office manager finally gave up. The doctor went ahead with the surgery without what should have been a routine approval from the insurance company.

Here is another problem some people are going to have to deal with this year. The Associated Press ran an article headlined ''Adding a baby to health plan is not easy.'' Every day, babies are born and need to be included in the family's health plan. For common life changes such as having a baby, you would normally just call your insurance company and they would take care of it from there. Not under this law. If you have to buy your insurance through one of the new health care exchanges, it is not that simple. According to the article, ''the HealthCare.gov website can't handle new baby updates, along with a list of other life changes including marriage and divorce, a death in the family, a new job or a change in income, even moving to a different community.'' Yet the Obama administration and the Secretary of Health and Human Services says the Web site is fixed. It can't handle a baby being born, marriage, divorce, moving, change in income. It can't handle any of those things, and they claim it is fixed.

Here is another problem that has turned up. Washington Democrats said the law would lead to fewer people visiting emergency rooms—I heard it right here on this floor: fewer people getting their care in emergency

rooms—and that would reduce expenses. The reality is very different. The New York Times, Friday morning, January 3: ''Emergency Visits Seen Increasing With Health Law. Doubt Cast on Savings.'' But Democrats on this floor said that emergency visits would decrease and that it would save money. That is not what the New York Times says. They said, ''Oregon Medicaid Test at Hospitals Found Rise of 40 Percent.'' The Wall Street Journal, in the same issue, talks about how the Medicaid expansion drives up emergency room visits. The Washington Post said, ''Study: Expanding Medicaid Doesn't Reduce ER trips. It increases them.''

Democrats don't want to talk about all these problems. They don't want to talk about all of the reform bills which Republicans passed in the House last year but which never got a vote in the Senate in spite of our efforts to try to get votes on those bills. Democrats hope people believe what they are saying, accept their claims that the Web site is working fine and that all the law's problems have been fixed. The American people see through this. They know that what has been done to them by this administration is not right.

It is time for Washington Democrats to play it straight with the American people and to make a new beginning on health care reform. I am not talking about more fake fixes like the one we saw right before Christmas. That was the Obama administration quietly announcing that people whose insurance had been canceled because of the law could apply for a hardship exemption to avoid the individual mandate.

Well, the newer numbers have come out. There are now more than 5 million health insurance cancellations in 35 States. And we don't even know how many were canceled in Texas, Ohio, Virginia, South Carolina, Missouri, and Wisconsin. We don't know those numbers yet. So we know that a minimum of 5 million people have received cancellation notices and the anxiety that comes with that, as well as the anger. When people tried to replace the plans they lost, many found that their premiums would skyrocket and their deductibles would be higher than ever.

I find it interesting that Democrats I have talked to said: Well, January 1 has come, so the numbers aren't going to go up anymore. That is just not true. I was just in my office and got off the phone with a friend in Douglas, WY. He is a pharmacist and provides health insurance for employees. He has fewer than 50 employees, so it is not mandatory under the law that he do so, but he does it anyway and he has done it for years. But Gary is in a situation where he has now received a letter of cancellation of his own insurance policy, and it was dated January 1. This is not something from last year; this is something dated January 1, 2014. It is a letter from the Madison National Life Insurance Company to Gary Shatto at Shatto's Frontier Drug in Douglas, WY.

''Important Notice.'' Can you imagine getting this letter and opening it? ''Important Notice'' in bold print. ''This Affects Your Insurance Contract Rights. Please Read Carefully.'' That would get your attention.

This notice is to inform your company that Madison National Life Insurance Company . . . will be exiting the employer small group major medical insurance market in Wyoming effective June 30, 2014 at midnight.

Exiting June 30, 2014, at midnight.

So what this tells us is these numbers are going to go up because, at 3,000, the numbers in Wyoming are such that we know more people are going to get cancellation notices. And this isn't just for Gary; this is for everybody who works there.

They ''will be exiting the employer small group major medical insurance market in Wyoming effective June 30, 2014 at midnight. This decision was prompted by the increased regulation since the federal government's passage of its recent federal health care reform, commonly referred to as the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (''PPACA'').

''The increased regulation will make it difficult for Madison National to continue to operate and compete meaningfully in Wyoming's small group major medical market. As such, your referenced insurance coverage will terminate at midnight on June 30, 2014.''

This is what people are going to continue to deal with, letters like this continuing to go out, a new round of letters going out January 1.

The President of the United States needs to be honest with the American people about the significant damage his health care law is doing to families all across the country. And as the employer mandate—which the President has delayed for a year—kicks in this year, we are going to see more and more letters like this and more and more people dumped, losing their insurance, in spite of the President's claim that ''if you like your coverage, you can keep your coverage.'' No wonder the folks who look into these things have labeled it the ''lie of the year.''

The White House continues to try to do this little bandaid approach. Now they say they are going to let some Americans buy catastrophic coverage. That is an idea I proposed to the President at the White House health care roundtable back in February of 2010. After 25 years of practicing medicine, I know that for some people catastrophic coverage is the right option. For many people it is, and it encourages patients to be smart consumers of medical services. But at our meeting 4 years ago President Obama said that these plans were suitable only for the wealthy, that they weren't good ideas. He said that letting people be smarter consumers wouldn't help. Now he has changed his mind.

Don't expect him to admit that Republicans were right all along. The President said: Well, the Republicans have no ideas. If they have some ideas, they can bring them to him. There were a number of different bills and proposals by Republicans. The President seems to want to ignore that just as much as he wants to ignore the problems and the misery his health care law has caused for so many people all around the country.

Instead of trying to patch this terrible health care law together with chicken wire and duct tape, it is time for Democrats in Washington to admit that this entire law is failing the American people because it absolutely hurts so many American families. Then we can move on to talking about real reforms to give people access to quality, affordable health care. That is the year's top priority of the American people, and it needs to be our top priority in the Senate.

I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, I rise today in support of the Emergency Unemployment Compensation Extension Act. That would be S. 1845. This is legislation that will continue to be a critical safety net for workers who have fallen on tough times through no fault of their own. Just a few short hours ago, as you know, the Senate sent a strong message by voting to move forward on this vital legislation to restore unemployment insurance for the more than 1 million Americans whose benefits expired on December 28.

I wish to thank Senator JACK REED and Senator HELLER for their bipartisan leadership on this issue. This is a very important step in providing economic security for the millions of Americans who lost their unemployment benefits at the end of the year or who will lose them this year if Congress does not act.

By helping people to stay on their feet after an unexpected job loss, unemployment insurance has kept millions of Americans out of poverty. Rather than removing the safety net these people rely on, we should be focused on policies that help the long-term unemployed get back to work, including the help that will allow them to pay their rent and fill their gas tanks while they are searching for jobs.

Yesterday I released the Joint Economic Committee report making the economic case for extending the Federal support for our unemployment insurance, designed to keep long-term unemployed Americans above water as they search for work. Approximately 1.3 million workers, as we know, lost their unemployment benefits on December 28. Barring Congressional action, benefits will expire for an additional 3.6 million over the next year. In

my home State of Minnesota, roughly 8,500 people lost benefits at the end of last year and about 65,000 Minnesotans will lose benefits by the end of December of 2014.

These are people who may have had a plant close in their town. Maybe their position was eliminated and no one is hiring. Either way, these are people who have been paying into the system for their working lives and we need to see them through to their next job.

This is especially important at a time of stubbornly high long-term unemployment. For most Americans, State-funded unemployment insurance lasts 26 weeks. Yet the average unemployment spell lasts 10 weeks longer. In 2008, as our country went into the worst downturn since the Great Depression, Congress authorized Federal support for extended unemployment benefits for those who were out of work for more than 26 weeks. For people struggling to find work during those dark days, the extension was a lifeline. For the millions of Americans still searching for work as our economy recovers, it is a critical safety net.

Our economy, as we know, has come a long way since the downturn began, with the national unemployment rate now lower than it has been in 5 years. In my home State of Minnesota we are doing even better. The unemployment rate is more than two points below the national average. We are proud of that for our businesses. We are proud of that for our workers.

But there is a problem that remains. While the overall workforce is growing stronger every day, we are still facing significant challenges with long-term unemployment. At 2.6 percent, that is people long-term unemployed more than 6 months, it is more than twice what it was when Congress last allowed Federal unemployment insurance to expire after the recessions of 1990–1991 and 2001. In fact, in our report we have a graph that shows that literally this unemployment rate we are facing now for the long-term unemployed is twice what it has been in any other year when we faced a decision in Congress and decided in fact to terminate those benefits.

Literally, that long-term unemployment rate is now twice what it was in those other years. That is why there is so much concern about stopping the benefits at this point.

In Minnesota, our long-term unemployment rate is 1.4 percent, much better than it is in many States in the country, but too many Minnesota communities are still hurting, with unemployment rates reaching as high as 9.5 percent in Clearwater County in Minnesota.

Given the numbers, Federal support for unemployment insurance is more important than ever for the long-term unemployed. Extending this critical safety net is fair. American families, struggling against long-term unemployment, are working hard to find a job, to put food on the table, to pay their bills. They are not exactly the ones who have seen the upturn from the stock market that many people have seen in the last years. They are not the ones who have seen their stocks rise. They don't have stocks. They are just trying to put food on the table for their families. They are not faceless, nameless charity cases. They are our neighbors, they are our family members, and they are our friends. In fact, nearly one out of every five Americans has either received or is living with someone who has received Federal unemployment benefits since 2008. That is 69 million people. Almost 24 million long-term unemployed workers have directly benefited and another 45 million Americans, including nearly 17 million children, are living with someone who is receiving unemployment insurance.

These benefits help carry families through long unemployment spells, pay the mortgage, rent, utilities. While the average unemployment insurance benefit of $300 per week only replaces about one-third of an individual's average weekly wage, unemployment insurance benefits have kept 11 million Americans out of poverty; 2.5 million in 2012 alone. That is 2.5 million Americans kept out of poverty because of this program.

In 13 States, over 40 percent of those who are unemployed have been out of work for more than 26 weeks and have exhausted their State-funded benefits. Nationally nearly 38 percent of unemployed workers are long-term unemployed. These are the workers, the 4.9 million Americans who will lose their unemployment insurance if we fail to pass this bill. These benefits help them to keep looking for work, support their children and families, and contribute to the economy.

The longer a person is unemployed, the more difficult it is for that person to find a job. Skills atrophy and professional networks dry up. But you can't go on a job interview if you cannot even fill up your car with gas, so we also need to make sure the long-term unemployed are not left high and dry after State-funded unemployment benefits run out.

Addressing long-term unemployment is a problem that calls for an all-of-the-above solution. We need to do more to support American workers.

This is the right thing to do. We also know it is better for the economy. The CBO has found that each dollar of unemployment insurance increases the GDP by as much as $1.90, and extending the Federal unemployment benefits through 2014 would boost GDP by a .2 percentage point and increase employment by 200,000 jobs. Failing to extend Federal unemployment benefits will cost the economy 240,000 jobs, according to the Council of Economic Advisors. Those are the numbers with which we are dealing.

We also know if we look at the suggestions of the debt commission—something that I think is a very important body of work and has some very good ideas in it—their idea is trying to get about $4 trillion in debt reduction. We are something above $2.6 trillion of the way there with more to do, but the point is there are ways to get there. One of my favorite ways is to pass the immigration bill. CBO has found that in the second 10 years that will actually save $700 billion on the debt by making people pay taxes, by bringing them out of the shadows so they pay fines. That is what we are dealing with.

If we want to look at ways to reduce our debt, I don't think we should be doing it on the backs of the most vulnerable, those kids, those people who are long-term unemployed who still have not been able to find a job. In many States it is still a very difficult economy. Especially for the long-term unemployed, this is the right thing to do. We shouldn't leave these Americans in the lurch. We need to restore this critical safety net and focus on getting Americans back to work.

I urge my colleagues to support the bill.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Ms. AYOTTE. Mr. President, I come to the floor to talk about an amendment I will seek to offer on the pending bill, amendment No. 2603.

We all sympathize with those who are struggling to find work in a difficult economy, and I want to see people get back to work. Certainly a short-term extension for those who are relying on unemployment insurance—if it is paid for—will allow a transition for those who are out of work. What we need to do most in this Chamber is to give them an opportunity to get a good-paying job. The focus in this Chamber, most of all, needs to be on enacting progrowth policy that will encourage both small and large businesses to thrive and grow in our economy and create jobs.

I have voted today to begin debate on the legislation to provide a temporary extension of unemployment insurance. I voted to begin this debate because I believe both sides of the aisle can find a way to grant this temporary extension to those who are struggling to find work in this difficult economy while making sure we don't add to the $17 trillion of debt that also threatens our country and our economy.

I continue to believe that any temporary extension in a long-term unemployment benefit should be paid for in a responsible manner. So I have submitted an amendment, Ayotte amendment No. 2603. I think it is an amendment that makes a ton of sense.

Let me tell you what this amendment does. This amendment pays for

the 3-month extension of unemployment insurance. It fixes the unfair cut to the military cost of living that was just enacted in the budget I voted against. I felt this was unfair to those who have served in our military and were singled out for cuts to their retirement benefits, unlike anyone else, and it included, by the way, those who were retired because they had a medical retirement. In other words, those who many of us—I know the Presiding Officer has visited Walter Reed, as have I; those who have lost arms, legs—they have received a medical retirement, and their cost of living was cut under this budget as well.

So my amendment not only would pay for this temporary unemployment insurance for those who are struggling to find work, to give them a transition to get them back to work, but it would also pay to fix and reverse this unfair cut in military retirement benefits—many who, by the way, have served multiple tours for our country and have sacrificed a tremendous amount because they moved around, because they served both in Iraq and Afghanistan, on behalf of our country.

It would also give approximately $7 billion toward reducing our deficit.

The way I pay for this is to fix an egregious problem in our Tax Code. It is a problem that was identified by the Treasury IG. It is, frankly, egregious. This is a problem in our Tax Code that has allowed illegal immigrants to claim a refundable tax credit for children who should not be entitled to it—children that do not even live in the United States of America or may not even exist. Why? Because when someone claims this refundable tax credit, they do not have to include a Social Security number on their return. A Treasury IG report identified this problem.

This amendment—a simple fix that would require a Social Security number for anyone who is claiming the additional child tax credit on their tax return—is estimated to save approximately $20 billion over the next 10 years. So paying for reversing the cost-of-living increase for those who have sacrificed so much for our country, paying for a temporary unemployment insurance extension for those who are struggling to find work, and reducing our deficit by approximately $7 billion over 10 years—all three of those things are done by fixing an egregious problem in our Tax Code.

The audit of the Treasury IG in 2011 reported that individuals who are not authorized to work in the United States of America received $4.2 billion by claiming this additional child tax credit. The audit found that the payment of Federal funds through this tax benefit appears to provide an additional incentive for aliens to enter, reside, and work in the United States without authorization, which contradicts Federal law and policy to remove such incentives.

The audit was based upon an analysis of tax returns filed by persons with individual taxpayer identification numbers which are issued to individuals who are required to have a taxpayer ID number for tax purposes but are not eligible for a Social Security number because they are not authorized to work in the United States of America.

Again, this saves approximately $20 billion over the next 10 years.

Let me tell you how egregious this is. Here are some of the reports about this problem in our Tax Code. It is fraud. This is fraud we are going to fix here. This is good government. We should fix this now, regardless. This $20 billion is money that should not be going out the door over 10 years.

Here are some examples from Indiana. In fact, I just saw walk into the Chamber one of my colleagues from Indiana, Senator COATS. In Indiana, a local television station found that an undocumented worker who was interviewed at his home in southern Indiana by a reporter admitted his address was used this year to file tax returns by four other undocumented workers who do not even live there. Those four workers claimed 20 children who live in one residence, and, as a result, the IRS sent the illegal immigrants tax refunds totaling over $29,000.

The local station has found many undocumented workers are claiming tax credits for children who live in Mexico. Many children who do not even live in this country are being used by those committing fraud on the IRS to claim this tax credit.

In Indiana, a tax preparer who acted as a whistleblower to an Indiana news station said: ''We've seen sometimes 10 or 12 dependents—most times nieces and nephews—on these tax forms. The more you put on there, the more you get back.'' The whistleblower had thousands of examples.

Another example from the whistleblower: ''We've got an over $10,000 refund for nine nieces and nephews,'' he said, pointing to the words ''niece'' and ''nephew'' listed on the tax form nine separate times. ''We're getting an $11,000 refund on this tax return.'' ''There are seven nieces and nephews,'' he said, pointing to another set of documents. ''I can bring out stacks and stacks. It's just so easy, it's ridiculous.''

In North Carolina, investigators uncovered more than 1,000 tax returns linked to eight addresses in that state last May, with refunds worth more than $5 million. Investigators tied at least 17 tax returns, totaling more than $62,000 in refunds, to a Charlotte, NC, apartment one woman leased. At another apartment nearby, investigators discovered 153 returns, valued at over $700,000 in refunds.

Another address in the same apartment complex had 236 returns worth $1.1 million in refunds.

At another Charlotte apartment complex, investigators traced 398 returns to two apartments, totaling more than $1.9 million in additional child tax credits, with no guarantee that the children even existed or lived in the United States of America.

Another North Carolina woman owned a tax preparation business. A search of that business and her home turned up more returns, dozens of uncashed U.S. Treasury checks, a FedEx box containing dozens of foreign birth certificates, and a notary public stamp and signature stamp listing her as a notary. That fraud case by the IRS totaled over $5 million.

In Tennessee, a search warrant prepared by the IRS claims that a Murfreesboro, TN, tax company encouraged undocumented workers to lie on their tax returns by claiming children who live in Mexico as dependents. The IRS says that the Tennessee tax preparer has filed 6,000 tax returns over the last 3 years and although his clients only paid $3.3 million in taxes, they were able to claim more than $17 million in refunds. The refunds left the United States on the hook for $14 million.

So here is the question in this Chamber. The question is, Should we fix egregious fraud in our Tax Code, where we have people, who are not entitled to work in this country, claiming tax refunds for children, some of whom have not been determined to exist, some of whom do not even live in our country? Should we fix that in our Tax Code? Isn't that good government?

And if we fix it, we can use the pay-for, the $20 billion that the Joint Tax Committee has estimated to save over the next 10 years, to do the following: to provide for a 3 month temporary extension of unemployment insurance to those Americans who are struggling for work right now; to fix the unfair cut to our military retirees, including those who have gotten a medical retirement, those who are our wounded warriors who have been injured, many of them serving in Afghanistan and Iraq; and return $7 billion to the Treasury.

So here is the choice. Only in Washington would this be the choice: We can fix the egregious problem with the Tax Code, where there is all kinds of fraud and save billions of dollars; we can fix it for those who have sacrificed the most—the unfair cuts to their cost-of-living increase—those who have served our country admirably, and our wounded warriors; and return money to reduce the deficit or what? We can be denied a vote. I hope I will get a vote on this amendment. It is pretty outrageous if I am not granted a vote on this amendment to prevent tax fraud that needs to be fixed on behalf of the taxpayers in this country.

If I cannot get a vote to take that $20 billion to help struggling workers and to fix the unfair cuts to those who have sacrificed the most and taken the bullets for this country and also to help fix our deficit—only in Washington would that be a tough choice for anyone. How do you vote against doing that?

I really hope the majority leader will allow a vote on this commonsense

amendment that will allow us to help struggling workers without adding to the $17 trillion debt, that will allow us to say to our men and women who have sacrificed the most: We are not going to continue to target you with these unfair cuts to your cost of living, when no one else has sacrificed under this budget agreement like that—and particularly our wounded warriors—and to say to the American public: We are going to fix fraud in our Tax Code, and also take some money and apply it to the deficit.

It makes so much sense that only in Washington would I even be asking the question on the Senate floor: Will I get a vote on this commonsense amendment that allows us to do important things for the Nation and fixes egregious fraud in our Tax Code, putting taxpayer dollars to uses that they should be put to.

I end with the hope that I will get a vote on this commonsense amendment and that my colleagues will support this amendment.

Thank you, Mr. President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Indiana.

Mr. COATS. Mr. President, I would like to discuss today's vote, as others who have come down here.

First of all, it is important to understand that this was a vote on whether to start debate. I was one of those who joined several of my colleagues saying: Yes, this ought to be debated. It was not a vote to pass or not pass the legislation. That will come.

But the frustration that so many of us have had over this past year in particular of not being able to participate in the process of legislating boiled over at the end of the year and ended with a change in the rules in the way the Senate has operated for more than 200 years and stuffed the desires of the minority to be able to participate in certain areas regarding nominations. Now there is some talk about doing the same for legislation.

That frustration has led many of us to try to rethink: How can we get back to what is called regular order—the way the Senate has always operated in the past, the way it operated when I came here in my first tranche in the Senate.

I started in the House of Representatives back in 1980. I was part of a minority for four straight terms. There are majority rules. If one is in the minority, they do not have a whole lot of authority. Maybe at that time we held the White House under Ronald Reagan. He had the ability to go above a Congress which did not support him but went to the American people, and through their efforts many changed their minds in the majority party and supported the policies of President Reagan.

When I came to the Senate in 1989, I was asked: What is the difference between the House and the Senate? You are in the minority in the Senate. You were in the minority in the House. I said: The difference is like going to legislative heaven from a place a lot lower than that in the House, because any Senator, majority or minority, had the opportunity to offer an amendment, to offer an alternative, to offer a statute, to participate in the effort to pass better legislation.

Any Senator had that in the minority. The majority leader, then-Senator George Mitchell, the Democratic leader, honored that. It was honored throughout my term in the Senate. I was then gone for 12 years and came back. I thought I was coming back to that same process, only to find that, no, the whole process has been changed.

We do not have the rights we once had. We do not have the opportunities we had. I came here to represent the people of Indiana and their wishes. Yet now I am in a position where I do not even have a chance to offer an amendment. I do not have even have a chance to offer an alternative or a substitute saying: Look. This may be a legitimate issue. I cannot support what is being handed to us take it or leave it. It deserves debate. It deserves alternatives. It deserves to give us an opportunity to try to convince our colleagues that a majority of us can work together to pass legislation.

That is the kind of legislation that works, as opposed to some of the legislation we are dealing with now that has been enacted simply by one-party rule. I think looking back on the Affordable Care Act, so-called ObamaCare, those who supported it wish now that it did have bipartisan support, that it was worked out, that some of the alternatives that were presented by Republicans were debated and perhaps supported. Maybe we would be in a different position now.

It is not right to characterize a vote on a procedural motion to say let's go forward and open this for debate, the opportunity to have amendments. That is why I voted for it. Unemployment insurance is a legitimate issue, policy issue to debate. I cannot support the proposal that was brought before us. But I can support going forward to discuss that proposal, to look at the alternative, to offer my own amendments and see if our thoughts, our ideas prevail.

I am hoping that is what will happen. That is up to the majority leader Senator REID. Mr. President, 2013 did not offer us very many—in fact, very few—opportunities to do that. We ended up on a very sour note in 2013. It was good we had that break and we are back, the second day of a new session of Congress. I hope Members on both sides of the aisle reflected over this period of time on how we can return the Senate to its original intent, how we can get back to so-called regular order, so we can have legitimate debate on the floor, we can go back and forth with our colleagues.

I think if we amend this, it will be a better bill. We do not think that bill is the one that ought to address this problem, but here is a substitute. Let's debate it. Then let's have a vote. Some of us will win and some of us will lose. But every one of us will have the opportunity to have their voice heard, their amendment voted on, their alternative evaluated, and perhaps work in a bipartisan way to come up with something constructive.

So that was the purpose for leaving most of my party and voting for the motion to proceed, to go forward. Here we are. Now we have a chance to debate it. Senator AYOTTE was on the floor speaking before me, Senator PORTMAN, Senator CORNYN, all proposing ways in which we can offset the cost.

We all know we are adding to our debt and deficit on a daily basis. We have not come to grips with that. Yet the future consequences for this country, our economy, our children, our grandchildren, future generations is something we are all going to be ashamed of if we do not try to impose some discipline. How do we do that?

We made many efforts going all the way back to Simpson-Bowles. All of the major efforts, we were unable get the President's support for any of those, even though he commissioned the Simpson-Bowles group, which was bipartisan. But nevertheless, we have not yet to this point been able to get that large effort in place that will put us on the path to fiscal health.

But one thing we can do is when we have programs—new programs, an extension of programs such as this—come before us, we can say: Let's, one, reform this so we achieve what we want to achieve, and, No. 2, let's make sure we do not add more taxpayer dollars to our deficit spending and our debt. Let's offset it with something.

For those who say we cannot cut a penny more, for goodness' sake, the organizations—the Federal organizations, the Office of Management and Budget, the Congressional Research Service, on and on, GAO and others, have proposed numerous ways of billions of dollars, hundreds of billions of dollars in savings for programs that are deemed wasteful and fraudulent.

Senator AYOTTE just mentioned specific examples, some in my State, of abuses of the system. There are concerns about abuse of the unemployment insurance, people seeing this not as a help to getting a job and getting back into the workforce but seeing this as yet another entitlement benefit they can receive without putting the effort in to get meaningful employment.

We have the responsibility to bring forward measures that I think give people a connection between unemployment and their ability to get employed. That has been suggested by Senator PORTMAN and others here. Senator CORNYN also talked about that. So whether it is an offset in order to pay for this so we do not go further in debt and use taxpayer money for excess

spending, when we know over here is waste and fraud and abuse in programs that have been deemed dysfunctional, unnecessary, the Federal Government never should have been involved in this process in the first place, why not take those programs that have been recommended to us by nonpartisan agencies of the Federal Government?

Senator COBURN has spent his career down here pointing out excessive, outrageous, egregious waste that has gone on and a misuse of taxpayer dollars. That is not how to run a government. My State has had to face this. They have faced up to it. We made the tough decisions. Of course, there have been interest groups supporting every possible item we spend money on. But we separated the necessary, the efficient, the effective from the unnecessary, ineffective.

We now have been rated as the most taxpayer conscious friendly State in the Nation. Our per capita tax impact on Hoosiers in Indiana is the lowest of any State in the Nation. We have an efficient, effective government that has a AAA credit rating, that has been deemed business friendly, taxpayer friendly, residential friendly, family friendly. It is a good place to live because we are not wasting taxpayer dollars. People are tired of spending money on what does not work.

I have gotten way off my intended statement. But I guess I am expressing my frustrations over the inability to participate in the process that can bring about better use of the taxpayers' dollars and more effective government. I think I speak for a lot of people on both sides of the aisle, that the way to do this is simply not to freeze out debate, not to freeze out amendments, not to freeze out the opportunity to offer alternatives. By moving through this motion to proceed, I am hoping this is a step forward to returning to a process in which we are able to do what I just suggested.

This decision is going to be up to the majority leader. If he wants honest debate, if he wants the American people and all of us in this Chamber to know—to examine alternatives, if he wants to be conscientious about spending taxpayer dollars, allow us the opportunity to offer some offsets.

Senator AYOTTE had a specific and I think very compelling offset. If we took a fraction of the money that we would save, we can cover the cost of this extension, if that is where we think we should go. I think major reforms need to be made to this program, and we ought to be emphasizing getting people back to work rather than how to keep extending unemployment. But the two go somewhat hand in hand.

There are people in Indiana and other places who have made every possible effort to get a job and have come up short. We need to be sensitive to the plight of those people, but we do not need to be sensitive to those who have taken advantage of this program and are abusing this program who simply say: I do not have to work because the government will send me a check; when I add up all of my benefits, I am doing as well as I could if I worked. That is not the kind of policy we ought to be advocating or enabling in the Senate.

As I said, there are numerous alternatives or ways in which we can find a way to pay for this, if we can also put the reforms in place that mean we ought to go forward with this particular program. Let me suggest three. My colleagues have suggested others also, which I support. Any one of these could work. This program is scored at about a cost of six point something billion dollars.

This is a program, a policy, which requires taxpayers, in order to claim refundable portions of the child tax credit, it would require them to provide a Social Security number. I mean, this is so elementary, it is unbelievable to discover that a government agency has said: This is not in place. In other words, if you want to qualify for a refundable child tax credit, you have to verify who you are by giving them your Social Security number, so they can check to see if this is legitimate or not legitimate.

Senator AYOTTE laid out a situation where people were claiming 10, 15, 20 exemptions for children who did not even live in the United States, who were not even citizens. I was embarrassed that one of examples came from my State. But I think it is true of all States. But the savings to put a good bit of common sense into a program is scored not by DAN COATS, not by a Republican Senator but by a government agency. It is scored at $27 billion.

So here is a program that wants to spend $6.6 billion. Republicans say: First of all, we have problems with the program. I may or may not support extending this. But if it does get extended, surely we do not want to dump more money, more future debt, onto our children and grandchildren. So let's take this $27 billion, or a fraction of that $27 billion, and pay for this.

Let me offer another option: a delay for 1 year of the individual employer mandates under ObamaCare, the legislation I introduced in the Senate. If the President has delayed the mandates for businesses, should not he offer the same delay to families and individuals as a simple issue of fairness? What is the score—$30 billion.

A third option: Prohibit those who are eligible for unemployment insurance from claiming Social Security disability benefits. Under the law, one must be able to work to qualify for unemployment benefits.

Yet some people claiming unemployment benefits are also claiming Social Security disability benefits. We can't make some of this stuff up. Savings: roughly $6 billion, maybe more, that, if we want to support this bill, would be a pay-for. So whether it is a pay-for or whether it is the necessary policy changes to make the program more effective—including, and I would suggest, a number of efforts that have been proposed by my colleagues in terms of better connecting the unemployed with those who are seeking, with the employers.

I can't tell you how many employers I have talked to in Indiana who have said: I have jobs.

I have talked to others, but the bottom line is this. There are people out there who look at what I have to offer. It is not the greatest, but it is a job. It covers benefits, and it is a step forward for them.

But they say: It doesn't match what I am getting from the government, so I think I will take a pass.

This is not America and not the principles that made America the kind of country it is. We should not be enablers in that regard through legislation that we pass.

I hope that we can have a full and open debate on this bill and move to policies that will grow and create jobs, and that we will adopt a practice of paying for new spending with offsets from known waste, fraud, and abuse that has been documented by government agencies.

Can't we at least do that? Can't we at least agree, in the future interest of our country, both fiscally, domestically, on a number of issues, for all of the reasons that I have articulated or tried to articulate, this makes sense?

Breaking with some of the past ways I have given my vote, I have said I am going to vote for the motion to proceed, and I going to challenge the majority leader to look at this and say let's run this place differently in 2014 than it was in 2013. Let's not be afraid of debate. Let's not be afraid of amendments. Let's let the yeas be yeas and the nays be nays. Let's give everybody an opportunity to state their case, to offer an alternative, and to be recognized. As a Member of the Senate, and the way this Senate was designed to be and traditionally for over 200 years it has been, let's move back to that.

What happens next is now up to the majority leader. The ball is in his court.

Had we not passed the motion to proceed with the support of Republican help, then we wouldn't have given the majority leader the need to make a decision.

What kind of a Senate do we want in 2014? A Senate that is doing what the American people want us to do, representing the people of our State with their interests, representing our beliefs about how government should be run, how it should be funded, having an open and honest debate, not afraid to take votes, trying to construct good policy for the future of this country? We can't do that if this body is run by one person saying: My way or the highway. You are in the minority. Tough break.

This is a chance for the majority leader. Let's give us the opportunity and return this back to the Senate it was once and always has been until lately. It is up to the majority leader.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Massachusetts.

Ms. WARREN. I am here today with some good news. This week the government will fix something that was broken. I know that some people wish to deny that is possible, but hear me out.

Five years ago, during the 2008 financial crisis, we witnessed firsthand that the market for home mortgages was badly broken. The fundamental problem was that many lenders issued mortgages without any concern about whether the borrower would be able to repay those mortgages in the long run. Why would they do that? They did it because they could immediately sell the mortgage to another financial institution. If the borrower couldn't pay, that would turn out to be somebody else's problem.

We all know what happened next. Millions of these dangerous mortgages were bundled together, sliced, diced, slapped with AAA ratings, and then sold to retirement funds, local governments, and investors all over the country. When borrowers couldn't make their monthly payments, those bundles of mortgages began collapsing, and the effects were felt in every corner of the economy.

This Friday, that basic business model will change, thanks to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau's new mortgage rules. When these rules go into effect, lenders will be able to issue a mortgage only after they determine that the borrower has the ability to repay it.

Lenders will no longer be able to make loans they know will blow up and then feed those dangerous loans into the financial system. Because of the consumer agency's new rules, families will be safer. Pension funds and other investors will be safer. Our whole economy will be safer—not completely safe, but with a new cop on the beat, it will be safer.

The new rules will fix other problems as well. Before the crisis, some mortgage brokers who were supposed to be helping consumers find the best mortgage were actually taking money from lenders to steer those consumers into higher-cost loans. The CFPB's new rules will prohibit this sort of under-the-table dealing and protect consumers from being tricked by people they think they can trust.

The rules will also address many of the mortgage servicing problems that emerged during the crisis. After mortgages were sold off, bundled, and cut up into pieces for various investors, too many borrowers were unable to track down clear information about their accounts. Some of the companies responsible for servicing their loans took days or even weeks to give them credit for their payments.

When borrowers fell behind, these servicers often began foreclosure proceedings without giving people full information about the options they had to modify their loans. The consumer agency's new rules will help clean up the mortgage servicing industry so more families can keep up with their payments and stay in their homes.

CFPB Director Rich Cordray and his hardworking and incredibly talented staff have worked for a long time to put these new rules together, and its rules will reshape the mortgage market for the better. They will give people a better chance to buy homes and a better chance to keep those homes. They will force mortgage lenders and servicers to compete by offering better rates and customer service, not by tricking and trapping people. These rules will help markets work better, and they will reduce the risk that the economy will crash again.

Our work is not done. The march toward financial reform has been too slow, and the chances of another crisis, while dialed back in some areas, remain unacceptably high in others. Even today, the too-big-to-fail banks that nearly crashed the global economy in 2008 are nearly 40 percent bigger than they were back then.

Yes, we have more work to do on dangerous banking practices, but this week marks an important milestone. Six years ago, I noted that it was impossible to buy a toaster with a one-in-five chance of bursting into flames and burning your house down, but it was possible to take out a mortgage that had the same one-in-five chance of putting a family out on the street.

The point was that consumers had the Consumer Products Safety Commission to keep people safe from dangerous toasters, and they needed the same kind of agency to keep people safe from dangerous and deceptive financial products.

In the years since, we have built that agency. It has already returned nearly $1 billion to consumers who were cheated, and it has helped tens of thousands of consumers resolve complaints against financial institutions. Now, this Friday, that agency will put in place some commonsense rules that will make a real difference for millions of families who own—or someday hope to own—their own home.

The consumer bureau's new mortgage rules show, once again, that government can fix problems. Sure, we have to work hard. We have to fight against those who benefit from the broken system, and we have to stick with it even when the odds are against us. But when we do those things, real change is possible in this country. We are seeing that up close this week.

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

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

THE FEDERAL RESERVE

Mr. SHELBY. Madam President, last night here in the Senate we confirmed Janet Yellen to be the next Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System. I firmly opposed her confirmation. In 2010 I also voted against Dr. Yellen's nomination to serve as Vice Chairman of the Federal Reserve. I want to explain.

At that time I stated my deep concerns about Dr. Yellen's Keynesian bias toward inflation as a member of the Federal Open Market Committee and her poor record of bank regulation as president of the San Francisco Federal Reserve. Those concerns have not faded; rather, they are magnified in light of the importance of the position to which Dr. Yellen has now been confirmed, and that is the Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve.

It is not just that the Chairman of the Fed is perhaps the most powerful individual in the global economy; it is that the institution itself is in utterly uncharted waters. I believe we need a Federal Reserve Chairman with the record and resolve to navigate our economy through this incredibly delicate situation. In my judgment, I thought Dr. Yellen was not that person.

The Federal Reserve's balance sheet currently stands at $4 trillion.

I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD a copy of the balance sheet as of January 1 of this year.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

8. CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF CONDITION OF ALL FEDERAL RESERVE BANKS

[Millions of dollars]

Assets, liabilities, and capital	Eliminations from consolidation	Wednesday Jan 1, 2014	Change since	
			Wednesday Dec 25, 2013	Wednesday Jan 2, 2013
Assets:				
Gold certificate account		11,037	0	0
Special drawing rights certificate account		5,200	0	0
Coin		1,955	−8	−148
Securities, unamortized premiums and discounts, repurchase agreements, and loans		3,952,587	−7,327	+1,113,092
Securities held outright (1)		3,756,159	−6,835	+1,086,566
U.S. Treasury securities		2,208,775	−54	+542,657

8. CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF CONDITION OF ALL FEDERAL RESERVE BANKS—Continued

[Millions of dollars]

Assets, liabilities, and capital	Eliminations from consolidation	Wednesday Jan 1, 2014	Change since Wednesday Dec 25, 2013	Change since Wednesday Jan 2, 2013
Bills (2)		0	0	0
Notes and bonds, nominal (2)		2,103,871	−1	+523,399
Notes and bonds, inflation-indexed (2)		91,379	0	+16,639
Inflation compensation (3)		13,525	−53	+2,619
Federal agency debt securities (2)		57,221	0	−19,562
Mortgage-backed securities (4)		1,490,162	−6,781	+563,471
Unamortized premiums on securities held outright (5)		208,610	−492	+37,730
Unamortized discounts on securities held outright (5)		−12,352	+20	−10,788
Repurchase agreements (6)		0	0	0
Loans		171	−21	−416
Net portfolio holdings of Maiden Lane LLC (7)		1,541	0	+128
Net portfolio holdings of Maiden Lane II LLC (8)		63	0	+2
Net portfolio holdings of Maiden Lane III LLC (9)		22	0	0
Net portfolio holdings of TALF LLC (10)		109	0	−747
Items in process of collection	(0)	165	+4	−22
Bank premises		2,289	−1	−42
Central bank liquidity swaps (11)		272	−1	−8,617
Foreign currency denominated assets (12)		23,821	+35	−1,181
Other assets (13)		24,579	−1,637	+3,987
Total assets	(0)	4,023,640	−8,935	+1,106,451

Note: Components may not sum to totals because of rounding. Footnotes appear at the end of the table.

Liabilities:				
Federal Reserve notes, net of F.R. Bank holdings		1,197,920	+2,719	+71,059
Reverse repurchase agreements (14)		315,924	+164,667	+212,653
Deposits	(0)	2,445,620	−174,717	+822,821
Term deposits held by depository institutions		0	0	0
Other deposits held by depository institutions		2,249,070	−201,663	+740,398
U.S. Treasury, General Account		162,399	+68,506	+77,941
Foreign official		7,970	−10	+1,660
Other	(0)	26,181	−41,550	+2,822
Deferred availability cash items	(0)	1,127	−87	−66
Other liabilities and accrued dividends (15)		8,035	−1,514	−311
Total liabilities	(0)	3,968,627	−8,930	+1,106,158
Capital accounts:				
Capital paid in		27,507	−2	+147
Surplus		27,507	−2	+147
Other capital accounts		0	0	0
Total capital		55,014	−4	+294

Note: Components may not sum to totals because of rounding.

Mr. SHELBY. A recent Bloomberg analysis contains figures that help us put this staggering number—$4 trillion—into perspective.

I also ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD that Bloomberg article.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From Bloomberg, Dec. 17, 2013]

FED'S $4 TRILLION IN ASSETS DRAW LAWMAKERS' SCRUTINY

(By Jeff Kearns)

The Federal Reserve's balance sheet is poised to exceed $4 trillion, prompting warnings its record easing is inflating asset-price bubbles and drawing renewed lawmaker scrutiny just as Janet Yellen prepares to take charge.

The Fed's assets rose to a record $3.99 trillion on Dec. 11, up from $2.82 trillion in September 2012, when it embarked on a third round of bond buying. Policy makers meet today and tomorrow to decide whether to start curtailing the $85 billion monthly pace of purchases.

Among Fed officials, ''there's discomfort in the sense that the portfolio could grow almost without limit,'' former Fed Vice Chairman Donald Kohn said last week during a panel discussion in Washington. Kohn said there was ''discomfort in the potential financial stability effects'' and added: ''There's some legitimacy in those discomforts.''

Fed Governor Jeremy Stein has said some credit markets, such as corporate debt, show signs of excessive risk-taking, while not posing a threat to financial stability. Representative Jeb Hensarling, chairman of the House committee that oversees the Fed, last week said he plans ''the most rigorous examination and oversight of the Federal Reserve in its history.''

While any effort to rewrite the law establishing Fed powers lacks support from Democrats who control the Senate, the scrutiny is undesirable for central bankers who believe ''independence is priceless,'' said Laura Rosner, a U.S. economist at BNP Paribas SA in New York.

NOT WELCOME

THE FED APPROACHES A TAPER ON TIPTOE

''It's not a welcome development that a lot more time and focus is spent on answering questions'' from Congress, said Rosner, a former researcher at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. Lawmakers may also use the size of the balance sheet to ''draw attention to concerns they have about the Fed's responsibilities and growing role in financial regulation.''

Chairman Ben S. Bernanke, whose second four-year term ends next month, has quadrupled Fed assets since 2008 with bond purchases intended to lower long-term borrowing costs and reduce unemployment. Vice Chairman Yellen, who may win Senate confirmation this week to replace Bernanke, has been a supporter of the policy.

The Fed has said it will keep buying bonds until the outlook for the labor market has ''improved substantially.'' Thirty-four percent of economists surveyed by Bloomberg Dec. 6 predicted the Fed will start reducing purchases this month, while 26 percent forecast January and 40 percent said March.

ASSETS HELD

The Fed's balance sheet exceeds the gross domestic product of Germany, the world's fourth-largest economy. It's enough to cover all U.S. federal government spending for more than a year. It could pay off all student and auto loans in the country with $2 trillion to spare, Fed data show. The central bank's assets are set to exceed the $4.1 trillion held by BlackRock Inc. (BLK), the world's largest asset manager.

The third round of quantitative easing probably will total $1.54 trillion before it ends, bringing the balance sheet to $4.3 6 trillion, according to economists in the survey.

''This is a stimulus of the first order. It's just unprecedented,'' Alabama Republican Senator Richard Shelby said in an interview last week. ''The Fed is an independent body, but we can point out what they're doing.''

Jeffrey Lacker, president of the Richmond Fed and a critic of the Fed's bond buying, said in a Dec. 9 speech he expects the Fed policy makers to discuss reducing purchases at this week's meeting. Adding to the balance sheet ''increases the risks'' associated with exiting stimulus, he said.

'REAL RISK'

Shelby, a five-term senator and past chairman of the Banking Committee sees ''a real risk'' the balance sheet will ignite inflation. So far, there's little sign that's happening: a measure of prices watched by the Fed rose 0.7 percent in October from a year earlier, below the central bank's 2 percent target and the least in four years.

At 22 percent of the $16.9 trillion U.S. economy, the balance sheet is surpassed by those of other major central banks as a percentage of gross domestic product, according to third-quarter data compiled by Haver Analytics in New York. In the euro zone, the figure is 24 percent, and in Japan, it's about 44 percent.

That doesn't mollify Republican critics. When Yellen started to make global comparisons at her Senate confirmation hearing last month, Shelby interrupted her.

''I'm asking about the Federal Reserve of the United States of America,'' he said.

WARNING SIGNS

Yellen is set to take over amid warnings that assets from leveraged loans to farmland are showing signs of froth.

The Fed and other U.S. banking regulators have said they want to crack down on underwriting standards in the market for high-risk, high-yield loans.

Non-bank lenders such as mutual funds, hedge funds and pools of collateralized loan obligations, bought $630 billion of the loans this year, surpassing the 2007 peak of $581.5 billion, according to data compiled by Bloomberg.

Sales of high-yield, high-risk bonds, rated below Baa3 by Moody's Investors Service and lower than BBB- at Standard & Poor's, soared to an annual record of $373.2 billion this year, data compiled by Bloomberg show. That compares with $149.2 billion in 2006, the year before the start of the credit crisis.

The extra yield investors demand to hold speculative-grade bonds rather than government debt reached 411 basis points, or 4.11 percentage points, last week, the least since October 2007, according to Bank of America Merrill Lynch index data. Spreads ended the week at 412 basis points.

RECORD LOANS

Sales of institutional loans have also reached an annual record, soaring 71 percent from 2012 to $627.1 billion, according to data compiled by Bloomberg.

Potential losses on the Fed's investments are also cause for concern and ''something we will be watching,'' Representative John Campbell, a California Republican who leads the House Financial Services subcommittee on monetary policy and trade, said in February.

The Fed sent a record $88.4 billion to the Treasury in 2012 and $75.4 billion in 2011, up from $31.7 billion in 2008. Most of the income was from interest on assets bought under the quantitative easing program.

The risk for the Fed is that rising interest rates reduce the value of its bond holdings, potentially causing losses if the central bank had to sell the securities back into the open market.

''Losses are dangerous for the Fed from a political perspective because they would be a risk to its independence,'' said Roberto Perli, a partner at Cornerstone Macro LP in Washington.

DEFICIT SPENDING

Campbell and Hensarling also say the Fed's purchases of government debt are encouraging deficit spending by allowing the government to borrow cheaply. The yield on the 10-year Treasury note has averaged 2.31 percent this year, compared with a 6.61 percent mean over the past half century.

''The Fed's additional extraordinary purchases of Treasury bonds have supported the Obama administration's trillion-dollar deficits,'' Hensarling said at a Dec. 12 hearing.

Yellen says bond purchases have put Americans back to work. Asset purchases helped the private sector add 7.8 million workers since 2010 and boosted home prices and auto sales, Yellen said in her confirmation hearing, adding that the progress will let the central bank get back to more normal monetary policy.

JOBLESS RATE

The jobless rate has fallen to 7 percent from a 26-year high of 10 percent in October 2009. Since then, the economy has regained most of the jobs it lost during the 18-month recession ended in June 2009.

''The balance sheet is growing because that's how the Federal Reserve thinks it's going to accomplish the mandates that Congress gave to it'' for full employment and price stability, Kohn, now a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution's Hutchins Center on Fiscal and Monetary Policy in Washington, said in an interview last week.

Still, policy makers haven't spurred the growth they expected. Officials forecast 2013 growth of 2 percent to 2.3 percent in September, down from a 2.3 percent to 2.8 percent estimate in March.

''QE turned out to be a safety net, a floor, a way to catch the economy to keep it from crashing,'' said Steve Blitz, chief economist at ITG Investment Research Inc. in New York. ''A safety net to catch a falling economy is not the same thing that can springboard the economy to a higher rate of growth.''

Mr. SHELBY. The article contains the following three comparisons that I found more than interesting. Four trillion dollars is equivalent to 24 percent of the U.S. GDP. That is greater than the GDP of the world's fourth largest country—Germany. Think about it. Four trillion dollars is twice the amount of all student and auto debt in this country. Yes, $4 trillion far surpasses even the amount of money the Federal Government spends in an entire year.

This brings me to my next point. Many hold the misconception in this country that China is the world's largest owner of U.S. debt. That is not true. In fact, the Federal Reserve's balance sheet shows the Federal Reserve itself is by far the largest holder of U.S. Treasury bonds. With $2.2 trillion in Treasury debt, the Fed holds nearly $900 billion more than China does, if you can think in those terms. The Fed holds more in Treasury bonds than do China and most of the eurozone combined.

The rate of acceleration with which the Federal Reserve is purchasing Treasuries should be alarming to all Americans. On the day of President Obama's first inauguration, the Federal Reserve held $475 billion in Treasuries. Today it holds $2.2 trillion in Treasuries. That represents a 363-percent increase in the past 5 years.

It is no coincidence that President Obama has greatly accelerated our national debt over that same period of time. There is a connection. When he took office, the national debt stood at a large $10.6 trillion. That is a lot of money. Today it stands at $17.3 trillion—5 years later. I believe the Federal Reserve is aiding and abetting the failed policies and the reckless spending of the Obama administration.

But the Fed's binge on Treasuries alone doesn't tell the full story of its exploding balance sheet. The Federal Reserve's portfolio is also loaded with nearly $1.5 trillion of mortgage-backed securities. I have long been concerned that this aggressive and extraordinary purchasing program is artificially propping up home prices, and this is especially pertinent since an overheated housing market greatly contributed to the financial crisis that caused this situation in the first place.

Taken altogether, the Federal Reserve has added more than $3 trillion to its balance sheet since early 2008, just before the investment bank Bear Stearns failed and the Federal Reserve stepped in.

I realize that sometimes it is easy to become lost in all of these huge figures I have been sharing. I brought a simple chart that illustrates the magnitude of the Federal Reserve's actions. It shows here the size of the Federal Reserve's balance sheet by decade, from its creation in 1913, 100 years ago, to present day. As we can see, it took 95 years for the Federal Reserve's balance sheet to reach $1 trillion. But look at the incredible spike in just a few years since, in the red here. Here we are today, just 5 years later, at $4 trillion and growing.

Let's call this what it is: a backdoor stimulus program through monetary policy. Very complicated, yes, but very important. It dwarfs even the fiscal stimulus package President Obama rammed through Congress during his first days in office about 5 years ago. President Obama's fiscal stimulus package totaled $787 billion—a lot of money—and I have just described the Fed's monetary stimulus package as nearly four times larger and growing.

This highly unconventional monetary policy poses huge risks to our economy—namely, inflation in the future and a devaluation of our currency. I realize that current inflation expectations are relatively low and anchored. However, again we are in completely uncharted territory. Should inflation expectations become unglued, prices could increase uncontrollably. There is simply no playbook that I am aware of on how to deal with such a situation successfully.

Yes, I also understand that the Fed has recently announced it will modestly scale back its so-called quantitative easing program. The Fed will still purchase tens of billions of dollars of securities each month.

Make no mistake—the Fed's balance sheet will continue to expand rapidly. How long will this continue? We don't know. How large will the Fed's balance sheet ultimately grow? We don't know. Will the Fed be able to contain inflation if it does begin to rise? Again, we don't know. And when will the Federal Reserve actually begin to unwind the balance sheet—which will be tricky? Again, we don't know. How exactly does the Federal Reserve plan to unwind the balance sheet? Again, we don't know, and I don't believe they know.

I raise these points because I met with Dr. Yellen in my office and attended her confirmation hearing in the Banking Committee. I received no meaningful answers to any of those questions, only the usual platitudes that so often mark such meetings.

If I may, I will now turn briefly to the subject of bank regulation, which is very important in this country—a primary and critical function of the Federal Reserve.

I have been a member of the Banking Committee since I first came to the Senate in 1987. I served on the committee through many difficult times in the financial markets, including the savings and loan crisis and the 2008 financial crisis. In all of my experience, I have never seen a financial institution fail that was well managed, well capitalized, and well regulated. The

fact is that so many financial institutions failed in 2008 and 2009 in no small part because the Federal Reserve failed spectacularly in its role as their regulator. I think that is a given.

As President of the San Francisco Fed from 2004 to 2010, Dr. Yellen presided over a regional housing bubble and failed to restrain the excesses in the market. Yet, despite this record of failure, she now runs the most powerful bank regulatory institution in the world—the Federal Reserve. I guess failure begets promotion in President Obama's view. We have seen it time and again.

This is all the more important considering that the Fed gained even greater power under the Dodd-Frank financial regulation law despite the fact that the Federal Reserve's own failures contributed to the need for financial reform in the first place.

In light of Dr. Yellen's weak touch as a bank regulator and her strong inclination to print more and more money, I firmly opposed her nomination. Only time will tell, but I believe a vote in the affirmative is one many of my colleagues will come to regret.

Madam President, I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Madam President, I presume we are in a quorum call. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

GLOBAL WARMING

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Madam President, I am back today for the 54th time to urge my colleagues to wake up to what carbon pollution is doing to the Earth's climate and oceans. We see the facts all around us, but can't seem to penetrate the politics of Congress.

We, in this body, are willfully ignoring changes we have never seen before, changes that threaten our planet and its rich array of plant and animal life, our homes, farms, and factories, and our very health and well being.

Carbon-driven climate change can be seen in warming surface temperatures and shifting seasons, but perhaps nowhere is carbon pollution doing more harm than in our oceans. The year 2013 brought ample new evidence of these changes in our oceans.

People often talk about climate change as if it were a theory. Here is what we know. We know that the oceans are warming. That is not a theory; that is a measurement. It is done with thermometers. It is not complicated. Sea level, we know, is rising; that is another measurement. It is very simple. We could do it with a yardstick. Oceans are becoming more acidic. Every American with an aquarium measures acidity with litmus paper. Again, it is simple measurement and proven facts.

If we put those proven facts into context, let's look at geologic context. According to an article published in 2012 in the journal Science, our current rate of carbon dioxide emissions—mainly from burning fossil fuels—is enough to cause the most severe changes to the chemistry of our oceans in 300 million years, and 300 million years ago is before the dinosaurs.

We know the oceans are warming. The oceans have absorbed more than 90 percent of the excess heat in the atmosphere between 1971 and 2010, according to a 2013 report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

Here is where the heat goes: 93.4 percent goes into the ocean. The rest we are seeing, 2.3 percent, goes into the atmosphere. Our oceans are really taking the brunt of the added heat.

We also know that sea level is rising. We know this. It is driven not only by melting glaciers carrying water into the seas and raising their level, but also by ocean water expanding. As water warms, it expands. The principle of thermal expansion is known in every science class in this country.

At the Newport tide gauge in Rhode Island, sea level is up almost 10 inches since the 1930s. So that means that storms driving the sea against Rhode Island's coast have 10 more inches of sea to throw against our homes and infrastructure.

Recent satellite measurements from the University of Colorado Sea Level Research Group show 3.2 millimeters of sea level rise per year from 1993 to 2013. Between 1901 and 2010, that rate was estimated at 1.7 millimeters per year. So the rate of increase has nearly doubled, and that means sea level rise is very likely speeding up. That is all stuff we measure. That is not theory.

The IPCC report also projects—conservatively, in my view—that sea level will likely rise one-half to one full meter by the year 2100 if we do nothing to dial back carbon pollution. Obviously, the other estimates are for far more extreme sea level rise.

We know the oceans are becoming more acidic. Oceans not only absorb 90 percent of the heat that has come from climate change, they are absorbing about 30 percent of the carbon itself. The carbon itself goes to the surface of the ocean, and it is absorbed there. Roughly 600 gigatons worth of carbon have been pumped into our oceans as a result. As all that carbon dissolves into the oceans, what happens? Ocean water becomes more acidic. It is a chemistry experiment you can duplicate in any simple lab. Indeed, if you do the measurement, we have gotten about 26 percent more acidic—the seas have—since the Industrial Revolution. That was reported, again, last year by the International Programme on the State of the Ocean.

The rate of change in ocean acidity—we can see it is speeding up—is already faster than at any time measured in the past 50 million years according to research published in the journal Nature Geoscience. Yet we sleep walk here in Congress, narcotized by polluter money.

Ocean acidification and warming are fundamentally altering our undersea environment—what Pope Francis in his recent exhortation called the ''ocean wonder world.'' These changes, among other things, have made the world's coral reefs extremely vulnerable to decay and bleaching. Areas such as the Great Barrier Reef—one of the great global wonders of the world off the coast of Australia—has already experienced large-scale bleaching.

As a boy, I used to scuba dive in the Andaman Sea. If you go back now—30 years later—it is heavily bleached. These are pictures that were taken in 2002 by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, and they clearly show a once lush and vibrant reef now gone and barren.

Worsening this bleaching would be particularly hard on countries whose people depend on the bounty of the reef for their protein, sustenance, and economy. Remember, the reefs are the ocean's nurseries, and they support food and economic stability as well as pretty tropical fish.

New research also suggests that even the most remote depths of the ocean will suffer the consequences of climate change. A study published in the journal Global Change Biology looked at various climate models to predicate changes in food supply throughout the world's oceans. The models predict that the changes to our ocean could lead to a worldwide drop in sea floor dwelling life by the year 2100.

The North Atlantic—off our shores in Massachusetts and in Rhode Island—may lose more than one-third of all deep-sea marine life. These drastic changes from our carbon pollution are daunting ones—particularly for our ocean State of Rhode Island. Our way of life in Rhode Island, like the Presiding Officer's in Massachusetts, has always been closely tied to the sea. Yet here in Congress we ignore all of that and continue perilously sleepwalking through history.

The Obama administration has at last put forward a Climate Action Plan, the cornerstone of which will be EPA regulations to limit greenhouse gas emissions from new and existing powerplants. Our 50 worst powerplants—in terms of emission—put out more carbon pollution than the entire country of Canada and the entire country of Korea. So solving that problem is vitally important.

The plan also directs executive branch agencies to take concrete steps to safeguard the American people and our interest in the world against the harmful effects of excessively high temperatures, melting ice, ocean acidification, and sea level rise.

These are important steps, but they must ultimately be backed up by congressional action. EPA regulations and executive orders will never have the same economy-wide effect as a congressionally approved carbon fee, for instance.

The sweeping changes taking place in our oceans make adapting to these changes particularly important along our coastlines. Warmer waters and higher seas load the dice for more damaging storms. Our coastal counties in this country harbor 39 percent of the country's population and account for 41 percent of our GDP.

Let's look at our ports, for example. According to a 2009 National Ocean Economics Program report: ''Three-quarters of all United States trade passes through estuary ports.'' No wonder, then, that the American Association of Port Authorities is taking climate change seriously—working to reduce carbon pollution and stave off its effects, rather than waiting for Congress to awaken from our slumber.

American ports are switching trucks and cranes from diesel to electric and installing onshore power supply to ships, thus reducing emissions from the port and from idling vessels. Likewise, the International Association of Ports and Harbors has launched the World Ports Climate Initiative to reduce the CO_2 output from port-related activities.

In my State, the Rhode Island Climate Change Commission reported:

> Inundaton of the state's ports and railroads may reduce interstate access, affecting economic viability and potentially limiting imports and exports. Sea level rise may also reduce navigational clearances for the State's bridges, additionally limiting access.

These changes will be particularly harmful for the Port of Providence, which today brings hundreds of millions of dollars to the region.

We need strong Federal action to reduce the carbon emissions that are threatening our coastal communities. We must also take firm Federal action to adapt ourselves, and our States and our coastal communities, to the changes that we can no longer avoid because of what we have already pumped into the atmosphere and the harm we have already done.

This is a real threat. It is embarrassing, and it is wrong for Congress and the Senate to continue to ignore it. Somebody who knew something about looming threats was Sir Winston Churchill. He gave this advice:

> One ought never to turn one's back on a threatened danger and try to run away from it. If you do that, you will double the danger. But if you meet it promptly and without flinching, you will reduce the danger by half.

That is good advice. What's embarrassing and wrong is that not only are we failing to meet it promptly—and flinching—but that failure and that flinching is the result of special interest influence in this body.

We face uncommon challenges and they demand uncommon resolve. America has not overcome past crises by pretending they did not exist; that state of play is preposterous for us to embark from. We actually have clear scientific understanding of the problem. The doubt is passed, the jury is in, and the verdict has been delivered. Yet we lack the will of leadership to forge a solution. Another great leader who knew something of leadership in times of crisis was President Lincoln. He understood that the greatest challenges require clear vision and brave thinking. When faced with a crisis, President Lincoln said:

> The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew, and act anew. We must disenthrall ourselves, and then we shall save our country.

It is past time to disenthrall ourselves of the corrupt thrall of polluting special interests. It is time, at last, to wake up and get to work on the job we have before us.

I thank the Presiding Officer, and I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alabama.

Mr. SESSIONS. Madam President, I want to share in some remarks Senator AYOTTE had relative to the amendment she submitted that would pay for the unemployment insurance extension and veteran pensions benefits. I will just say her pay-for is an issue that I have had some experience with. I offered several years ago an amendment to fix the same problem, and I was disappointed when the majority leader, Senator REID, objected to that amendment.

Senator AYOTTE's amendment would pay for the jobless benefits of unemployed Americans and restore veterans' pensions by cutting off fraudulent tax payments to illegal aliens. This is a very simple concept. There is a clear abuse going on here that needs to be fixed, and it should have been fixed a long time ago.

The amendment contains an offset of $20 billion—$20 billion—by closing this loophole and ending this abuse of American tax dollars. Remember, the veterans' retirement benefit reductions in their retirement plans that were voted on recently in this body—part of the Ryan-Murray budget agreement—only saved $6 billion over 10 years by altering the retirement benefits of veterans. So this amendment—closing the tax loophole—would save $20 billion over 10 years.

In 2011—this is when the matter first came to my attention by the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration. Each Department has an inspector general. The inspectors general are part of the Obama administration, but they take pride in their independence, and they are by and large a very valuable part of the American Government.

So this Treasury Inspector General made this statement in a report:

> Millions of people are seeking this tax credit who, we believe, are not entitled to it. We have made recommendations to the IRS as to how they could address this, and they have not taken sufficient action in our view to solve the problem.

A clear statement by the Inspector General of the U.S. Treasury Department that there were problems with this policy, and they could be fixed, and the Internal Revenue Service was failing to take steps to fix the problem.

One press report that highlighted the abuses occurring within this program reported that an illegal alien admitted that his address was used to file tax returns by four other illegal workers. All were in the country working illegally, and they filed tax returns. Did they file the tax returns to pay taxes? No. They filed the tax returns to get a tax credit back from the government, a check from the government. They claimed 20 dependents living inside their residence, and the Internal Revenue Service sent the illegal tax filers $30,000—direct checks from the U.S. Government, from the U.S. Department of Treasury, went to them. They filed a return, they said they had all these children, and they were given $30,000.

According to the report, none of those dependents lived in the United States or had even visited the United States. The illegal alien in the story justified the enormous tax fraud by saying: ''If the opportunity is there and they can give it to me, why not take advantage of it?''

Well, this is an interesting development. Let's go along a little further. As the Treasury Inspector General himself said: ''The payment of Federal funds through this tax benefit appears to provide an additional incentive for aliens to enter, reside, and work in the United States without authorization, which contradicts Federal law and policy to remove such incentives.''

So the inspector general took the obvious position that it is the government's position that people who enter the country illegally ought not to receive tax credit checks from Uncle Sam and that this policy not only encouraged that, it encouraged more people to come to America to claim benefits, as this person who entered the country illegally said: If they can give it to me, why not take advantage of it?

Now one of the things I have learned as I have traveled the world is, a lot of people have an exaggerated opinion of the wealth and power of the United States. You meet good people in underdeveloped countries, and they say: Why doesn't the United States do this, that, and the other—as if we had unlimited power, unlimited money, and unlimited ability to solve the problems they face at any given time.

So a lot of people, maybe, when they come to the country do not realize we are a nation of limited resources and we cannot be wasting money, we cannot be having people enter our country contrary to the law, undocumented, working, taking jobs that Americans need, and then sending them big checks—$30,000 for children who do not even exist or certainly have never been in the United States.

How do they do it? They use an ITIN, an individual tax identification number. They do not have Social Security numbers. They have a tax ID number. Why? That is a tax number that the Treasury Department came up with to

allow noncitizens who do not have Social Security numbers to pay taxes to Uncle Sam. That is what it was supposed to be used for. These clever individuals have figured out a way—they do not qualify for a Social Security number, so they get an ITIN number, and then they immediately start filing a tax return, claiming benefits, tax credits for children they may not even have or are not in the country, and they are not entitled to it. It is billions of dollars. According to the best estimates we have, if this loophole were closed—that the Treasury Department themselves has identified—it would save $20 billion over 10 years. Well, that is a lot of money.

In fact, in 2011, they claimed—and I do not know why it is not more—that illegal aliens received a staggering $4.2 billion in refundable tax credits in 2010. So in 2010, they received illegally $4.2 billion under this program. Can you imagine that? That is more than the budget of the State of Alabama—the general fund budget of the State. This was in 2010, and it has been growing substantially. It is probably more than that now.

So the legislation Senator AYOTTE proposes would fix this problem, and it is time we fixed it. I cannot imagine why anyone would oppose it. The House has passed legislation already that would fix this problem and it died in the Senate. Senator REID refused to bring it up. He obstructed its passage. It should have long since been passed.

So I pose a question to my colleagues: Which would you rather do? Would you cut the retirement benefits of men and women who served this country for 20 years or more in the U.S. military, being deployed in harm's way, placing their lives at risk—even those who are disabled as a result of service in the U.S. military in combat zones; they have their retirement cut too—would you choose to cut their pay to save $6 billion, when you could cut out a totally unjustified claim of tax credits of $20 billion? Is it political correctness run amok that we are dealing with here? Why can't we fix this? So I think this is something that needs to be fixed. It is past due to be fixed.

Senator AYOTTE is correct to raise it as a legitimate pay-for for unemployment compensation and veterans' retirement, and I salute her for it. It is something I pushed for, and I offered a very similar amendment when the Murray-Ryan bill moved through the Senate. I think it is something we need to work on.

We are not talking about as much as we should now the chatter has receded a little bit—but our deficit situation is still very grim. We now have a current debt of $17 trillion. That is unprecedented in the history of the United States. It has doubled in recent years. They are the kind of deficits we have never seen before, and it is something we have to address.

Mr. J.T. Young, in the Washington Times, a former member of the Department of Treasury, I believe, in the Bush administration, and a former staffer on the Budget Committee, wrote that what we are seeing in our budgeting is a tip of the iceberg. The interest payments we are making now—some $250 billion a year on the $17 trillion we owe—is a tip of the iceberg. Because if interest rates return to their 40-year average, we are going to see a dramatic increase in interest payments on that debt.

When we say we have $17 trillion, we are talking about money the U.S. Government has borrowed so it could spend. That borrowed money comes from a source. Much of the source of that money are foreign nations. The largest creditor is China. They loan us money, and we pay them interest every year.

Right now interest rates are low, unusually low, exceedingly low according to historic averages, and most people expect they are not going to stay low. The bond market is already slipping because people expect interest rates to go up, making their bonds less valuable. All the experts—virtually all—expect we will have a rising interest rates in the year to come.

Our Congressional Budget Office analyzes the debt of the United States and our whole fiscal policy—taxing and spending and income and outgo and has calculated that 10 years from today, under their baseline budget plan, with interest rates increasing, and the increased deficits—the deficits every year that we will have that will add to the $17 trillion—in 10 years we will be paying interest, each year, of over $800 billion.

Mr. YOUNG refers to that as a ''third entitlement.'' Actually, under these figures, it looks as though that interest payment will exceed Social Security's payment and Medicare's payment and the Defense Department. Not together, but each. This is a stunning danger that we face. So it is not mean-spirited to say that before we pass an unemployment compensation extension beyond our historic levels that we need to ask: Will we just borrow all the money, or will we look around this government and find places to save money such as the child tax credit going to people without Social Security numbers illegally in the country? What should we do?

The challenge we face is how to confront the rising debt. Every year, every month , virtually, some other issue rises before the Senate. It sounds persuasive and it is something we want to do, sometimes it is something we really need to do. Certainly Americans are hurting today. There is no doubt about that. There are a lot of reasons for it. We need to work to reverse those trends. Middle America, poor America are not doing well financially.

One reason is, there are millions of people in the country illegally taking jobs, pulling down wages and reducing the employment prospects of American citizens. There is no doubt about that. President Obama proposed, and this Senate voted by a sizable majority, to double the amount of guest workers who come into America. Meanwhile, they come before the Senate and say: We need another $7 billion in unemployment benefits because we have too much unemployment in America. How can that possibly resonate logically with the American people? We should control immigration in America. We are a very generous nation of immigrants. We support immigration. One million people enter our country every year legally. We have guest workers who come every year.

The immigration bill that was before us, that was voted on by this body, would have not ended the illegality it would reduce it only by 40 percent or so, according to the Congressional Budget Office. But it would have doubled the legal flow of guest workers to America. What a stunning number, at a time of high unemployment, low wages, and the lowest workplace participation rate this country has seen since the 1970s.

Americans are having a hard time finding work. So we have our colleagues, our Senate majority, who voted for that immigration bill, ranting to the Senate, demanding now that we extend unemployment insurance, demanding that we raise the minimum wage. Well, I would like to see the wages of Americans go up, all of them. I would like to see people make $15, $18, $25, $30 an hour. We need more of that kind of growth and prosperity in America. But I am not comfortable with the Federal Government setting wages and price controls in this country. It has never worked effectively.

We should do things that make sense. We should create economic policies that create prosperity. We should not import large increases in labor in America when we have huge numbers of people here that are unemployed. That is just common sense.

I want to share with our colleagues some thoughts about where we are with regard to the unemployment insurance extension legislation that is now before us. Since 2009, the Senate has required that any extension of unemployment insurance benefits be paid for because we agreed that we need to reduce the amount of money we are borrowing. We are spending considerably more than we take in. We are going to have to raise the debt ceiling again next month so we can borrow even more money. So all of the money my colleagues want to spend on extending unemployment insurance, unless some savings are found elsewhere in the government, will be borrowed. The legislation that is before us now borrows every cent of it. Every cent of the $7 billion that is proposed will be borrowed.

We are $17 trillion in debt, much owed to foreign creditors. It does not seem wise to do this. This is the wrong thing. In the past, Congress has paid for unemployment insurance extensions. This is unprecedented, an

extranormal unemployment insurance extension. The current amount is always out there, but because the unemployment rate has been high, we have extended it up to 99 weeks. We paid for this in 2009. We paid for it in 2011, and we paid for it in 2012.

So clearly the Senate's policy approach has been consistent in recent years to pay for this. Many remember our former colleague, Jim Bunning, that Hall of Fame baseball pitcher, who stood right back here and objected to this one time before, I think it was in 2009, all alone and he insisted that it be paid for, and eventually he prevailed. It caused quite a stir. He stopped the train until there was an agreement to pay for this.

According to a report yesterday in National Journal, some Senators want to rush this bill through now and will worry about paying for it later. They will promise to pay for it later. This ''spend now, pay later'' policy is how we racked up $17 trillion in debt. It is smoke and mirrors. If you do not in this Congress agree to pay for something before it is spent, it is not going to be paid for later. We have got debt in the hundreds of billions of dollars every year and we are certainly not going to go back and pay for more, pay down the money we spent the year before. We have got to deal with the year we are in. If we do that, it would be helpful. This is how we go broke.

But what I want to say is, fundamentally, the spending provided for in this extension of unemployment insurance violates the spirit of the Budget Control Act of 2011. It spends money above what we agreed to spend. It should not be done. We need to know, every one of us, that by voting for this bill, you are voting to violate the promise you made to the American people in August of 2011 that we would limit the growth in spending, not cut spending, but limit the growth in spending, that we would raise the debt ceiling $2.1 trillion so that money could be borrowed and be spent, but we would reduce, over 10 years, the growth in spending enough to offset that increase. That was the bargain that was made.

More importantly, this legislation violates the budget agreement that was passed into law, the Murray-Ryan bill that was signed by President Obama just before Christmas—just a few weeks ago. The ink is barely dry on that agreement and my colleagues now are proposing to bust it completely. This has become too common. This is too much how we operate here. Some of our Members take umbrage at the fact that millions of Americans are unhappy with us in Washington. People complain about how we are doing our jobs. They say the Tea Party people are angry and therefore they are evil people. Well, why should they not be angry with us? We promised not to spend over a certain amount of money and we have repeatedly voted to do that since 2011.

We voted in December to contain spending and maintain spending levels. Now, in January, as soon as the year began, we have a proposal to add $7 billion to the debt above what we agreed to spend. So I think the American people have a right to be hot with us. We need to vote some people out of here. If we do not change the spending habit, this country is going to be facing a fiscal catastrophe as independent observers have warned us for years.

Next month, the President is going to ask Republicans for our help in passing a bill that raises the debt ceiling. We have already hit the debt ceiling again. So he will be asking for us to raise it again, because we need to borrow more money because we haven't cut spending. We are spending more money than comes in. We are spending that every year. The President wants to keep spending and not reduce spending. So he is asking us to raise the debt ceiling to let him borrow even more than the $17 trillion we have. They are going to threaten, cajole, and try to scare Americans with horror stories of imminent financial collapse if we do not agree to raise the debt ceiling. We know that is coming. Hopefully we will reach an agreement that will raise the debt ceiling but get some real reforms in this government and bring down the rate of growth in spending in this country.

But how can we talk about promise to contain spending in the future when we have got a bill before us right now that blatantly violates the Budget Act? All we are doing is spending more money, borrowing more money, and raising the debt ceiling even faster than otherwise would be the case. This is the wrong direction for America. We need to be reducing our deficit, not voting to increase deficits. This is simple and plain. We need to be reducing deficits.

We need to be working every day, as the American people have told us, to bring our spending under control. Wasteful Washington spending is threatening America. The Federal Government already taxes too much, spends too much, borrows too much, regulates too much. It is time for us to live within our means, to balance our budget. That includes finding offsets and spending savings to pay for any extension of unemployment insurance or really any other proposal for new spending.

This Congress has not been doing that. I would note that in the New York Times recently, Jonathan Weisman wrote this:

> The drive to extend unemployment insurance has put both parties into awkward political positions. Mr. Reid opened the second session of the 113th Congress Monday by declaring: 'The rich keep getting richer. The poor keep getting poorer, and the middle class are under siege.' It was hardly an endorsement for an economy entering its sixth year under President Obama's watch.

Gene Sperling, the President's economic advisor, just said this recently. ''Three people are looking for every one job open.''

So what are we to do about this? What do we say about this? I would say, colleagues, that while hopefully we can help unemployed Americans today with some sort of a benefit that we will pay for in a financially sound manner, hopefully we will see wages rise. We need to see wages rise, in my opinion, because I think the middle class is under siege. I think poor people are getting hammered in this current economy.

But I will ask this question: Who has been setting the agenda economically for America for the last 5 years? Has not President Obama taxed more? Hasn't he regulated more? Has he not spent more? Hasn't he borrowed more? Hasn't ObamaCare, the Affordable Care Act, hammered American businesses and caused them to lay off workers and hire people part time rather than full time?

Actually two-thirds of the people hired in 2013 were hired part time. This is not healthy. Things are not going well. The model that is planned that we are seeing overall is not working.

How much longer will it take for people to recognize that? The promises were made. If we just send out more checks, if we pass more stimulus bills, if we spend more money, if we do all these things, somehow this will create growth and prosperity in America. But all this time, we have been increasing the debt dramatically, trillion-plus-dollar deficits for 4 years. We have never seen anything like this in American history.

The debt itself is a detriment and a depressant to economic growth in America. It causes fear and concern throughout the entire American populace and the world, unease about the future of the United States with these kinds of debts.

The point I would make is let's do some things that fix the disease, and the disease is an excessive government domination of the economy that is suppressing growth and prosperity, suppressing wages, and government actions that create more unemployment and part-time employment than is necessary and should be happening. That is the problem we need to be addressing. The symptoms of that are being addressed when we deal with unemployment insurance or mandatory wage rates.

I thank the Chair and my colleagues for the opportunity to share these thoughts. I really do believe Senator AYOTTE's proposal to deal with the waste and fraudulent abuse of tax money through the improper use of the ITIN—the individual tax identification number—is very real. It is very effective, would save billions of dollars, and would help us pay for some of the things we would like to do. That is what we should be doing, not adding more debt to the people of America.

I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. REED. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mr. REED. I come to the floor this evening to express my hope that the bipartisan effort that brought this 3-month bill to the floor can be sustained as we go forward so that we can swiftly help the 1.3 million long-term unemployed workers who were cut off from these benefits on December 28. As many of my colleagues have discovered from going back to their home States, in many cases these folks are desperate. This benefit was the difference between things we take for granted—having a car to be able to get to a job, having a cell phone so they can get a message saying they have a job interview, paying for heat in the cold weather, putting groceries on the table. For many people, this is truly an emergency.

That is why working with Senator HELLER, whom I applaud for his vision, collaboration, and for his sense in terms of the difficulties of his constituents and, nationally, many people, and for his effort—he did a superb job. What we sensed was we needed to provide relief immediately. Longer term, there are issues to address, and my colleagues have been on the floor discussing these issues, but immediately we have 1.3 million Americans, and every day many more who need help go off the rolls.

I hope we can move very expeditiously and provide at least this short-term aid. Then, of course, we have very significant issues going forward for the entire-year extension, which I hope ultimately we can resolve.

In addition to Senator HELLER, I wish to thank all of my colleagues. Particularly, I thank Senators COLLINS, MURKOWSKI, PORTMAN, AYOTTE, and COATS for their support, along with all of our Members of the Democratic caucus who came together.

Now we have the challenge of providing this relief and then thinking creatively, constructively, and collaboratively about how we provide this relief at least through the full year. I hope we can extend the program for the next 90 days immediately and quickly, but that other issue is certainly before us.

I understand also that my colleagues have raised issues about the structure of the program, about whether this spending—even the short-term spending—should be offset. Again, I go back to the point that we have 1.3 million Americans—and growing each day—who are looking for immediate help, not thoughtful, careful, long-term deliberation. That was the logic behind moving to a 90-day extension, getting it done, and then going forward and dealing with inherently more difficult issues for a full-year program.

We already understand that short-term lapse from the 28th until today has already had dramatic impacts on families. This is what I think my colleagues have heard, seen, and read about when they have gone home. Men and women who worked for decades, never thinking they would ever use their unemployment benefits, which they have earned since they started working, are now suddenly facing a weakened job market where there are nearly three people for every one job, where there are issues of skill training for the new jobs that are emerging. These are very difficult challenges.

I think what finally led us to at least this point of moving forward was the perception that this program is not subject to some arcane abuse by people in the system; this is for working men and women who, through no fault of their own, lost their jobs, who are desperately looking for jobs, and they are our neighbors and our constituents—many of whom we thought and they thought would never be in this predicament. They have families, elderly parents, and young children. They have responsibilities.

They have something else too, which I think we sometimes don't give enough credit for: They want to work. They have spent a life, many of them, working to a position of responsibility where they are using all of their talents. The idea that they are just going to give that up for the only available job, which might be working at a counter at a fast-food restaurant—that is a challenge not only to your pocketbook, but that is a challenge to your person, to who you are—we have to recognize that also.

These benefits are usually helpful to people in so many different capacities.

As I said, we are trying to deal with a situation where people have been let go through no fault of their own. If someone quits, they don't qualify. If they are fired, they don't qualify. Many of these people are unemployed as a result of the new economy—information technology that makes their job something that can be done away with; mergers, acquisitions, and downsizing that caused the bottom line of a corporation to grow, but they are out of a job. We have to deal with it, and we have to deal with it as we have done so many times before by providing these long-term unemployment benefits.

We also have to do it because it is good for our economy. The CBO estimates that if we do not renew UI for the full year 2014, we will lose 200,000 jobs because the weekly benefits, which are rather modest—$300 to $350 a week—go almost immediately from the recipient into the economy. It is the reason some grocery stores can keep two or three extra people on, because the demand is still there. It is the reason some service stations can keep the extra mechanic on, because the demand is still there. If we shut down that demand, we will have 200,000 more people—ironically—who will qualify, at least initially, for State unemployment benefits.

This is about our economy.

I would like to draw our attention to the report our colleague Senator AMY KLOBUCHAR did as the vice chair of the Joint Economic Committee. It was very thoughtfully done. It is not a surprise given that it was authored in large part by Senator KLOBUCHAR. This report touches on these important issues and notes that ''unemployment insurance (UI) has kept more than 11 million people out of poverty since 2008—including 1.8 million adults and 620,000 children in 2012 alone. People of all demographic and socio-economic backgrounds have been helped by unemployment insurance following a job loss.''

This cuts across the whole spectrum. Again, how does someone get to qualify? They have to work. I would suspect that every one of my colleagues would say this country should be all about work, rewarding work, and if someone loses a job through no fault of their own, give them a chance to get back in the workforce.

The reality of this economic downturn has been so pervasive that it has affected virtually every American. And so unemployment insurance has been a key part of the recovery. We all know that economists who have looked at this program suggest there is anywhere from a $1.50 to $1.60 benefit for every $1 we put in the economy. Economically, for the national economy as a whole, this is a very powerful tool to keep economic growth, expansion, and demand moving forward. That is exactly what we need to keep the economy growing.

Indeed, one of the aspects of this recession and one of the aspects highlighted very insightfully by the report from the Joint Economic Committee is the long-term rate of unemployment. This might be a new structural phenomenon in our economy, but definitely something is happening out there.

I will go back to when I was a kid. Someone is on the third shift because they are the junior person. The recession comes and guess who gets laid off. The third shift. The second shift, the middle people, and the first shift, the most senior people, typically weren't touched. The economy came back, and that third shift got rehired, but those workers with 10, 15 years' experience were pretty safe.

Now that is not the case. Now we are seeing first, second, and third shift gone. Now we are seeing, well, this is a great opportunity, with interest rates at in some cases 1 percent—at least for the major financial institutions—to replace a lot of workers with a lot of machines. Let's do that. Let's get value. Let's downsize. Let's make sure we invest in capital. This is the phenomenon we are seeing, and it is causing some of this significant increase in long-term unemployment.

In the JEC report, they note:

The current long-term unemployment rate of 2.6 percent is twice as high as it was when Congress allowed emergency federal UI programs to expire after the 1990–91 and 2001 recessions.

Let me say that in my terms. Previously, we have never taken away these benefits when long-term unemployment has been so high, and these benefits are not directly responsible for long-term unemployment. The 26 weeks of the State benefit programs is for people who lose work and find it relatively quickly. This program, the one we are debating today, is specifically designed for those people who are having a difficult time finding work over a long period of time.

We are now at twice as high a level of unemployment as we were in previous recessions when we ended these benefits, which would suggest this is not the time to end these benefits.

Let me continue from the JEC report:

> While employment prospects have improved for many jobless Americans (the national unemployment rate is 7.0 percent—the lowest rate in five years), finding work is challenging for the long-term unemployed. More than one-third of unemployed workers (roughly 4 million Americans) have been searching for work for more than 26 weeks, when state-funded UI benefits typically run out, and 2.8 million unemployed people have been searching for work for more than one year.

This is a phenomenon we have to deal with. This program we are discussing today is specifically designed for those long-term unemployed. So if there is one program that is responsive to one of the most salient aspects of this current recession, it is the long-term UI program because long-term unemployment seems to be the most difficult issue to resolve, even as our overall employment numbers continue to grow—not fast enough, but they are growing.

I want to also dispel the belief of some of my colleagues that these benefits only flow to one or two distinct constituencies. That this is a targeted program that provides some benefits, but it doesn't apply across the board. That is not the case. This is about every American from virtually every type of education, income, and ethnic background.

As the JEC report documents:

> The 23.9 million Americans who have directly benefited from the EUC program since 2008 include people of all demographic and socioeconomic backgrounds . . . [I]n 2012, more than 60 percent of the recipients were between the ages of 25 and 54.

Let me stop. There is a stereotype out there that a lot of these folks are 18 year olds who had a job for a while but decided they would rather go skiing in Utah or snorkeling in the Caribbean, and what better way to do that than just essentially sort of perform so that when the layoffs come you get one—but so what, I am not going to look for work; I'm going to just go. Sixty percent of these people are 25 years old to 54 years old. They are starting the prime or are in the prime of their work career. They have responsibility. They typically have families. They have, probably, if they are in their 50s, been working for 30 years.

So this notion this is just a convenient time to take a vacation subsidized by the government is erroneous.

Let me continue from the report:

> The remaining recipients were about evenly split between those younger than 25 and those 55 and older.

Again, the 55 and older—and this is very close to home—for these people it is a desperate struggle because they are caught right in the middle. They have a 75-year-old or 80-year-old mother or father; they have 30-year-old children and some younger who are going to school or they need the help. They have been working for 30-plus years. They have reached positions of responsibility in their firm and now, suddenly, for the first time—many is the case—they are without a job. That is not just economic, as I suggested. That also goes deeply to who they are, their value, and how they can help their family if they can't work. What is the effect on the family? How do they come home every day from looking for work without a job and not have it affect the family? This is the reality we are dealing with.

That is why, frankly, I have been pleading to at least get this program restored for 90 days. That will give us the time—not on the backs of the unemployed—but give us the time to do the work for a longer extension.

Now let me continue:

> More than half the recipients in 2012 were white, while 22 percent were black, and 19 percent were Hispanic. The vast majority (85 percent) lived in households with more than one adult, and 43 percent lived in households with at least one child.

So these are not single transients who move around and are used to being unemployed and could work if they wanted to. These are people with real family responsibilities.

> People of all levels of education have received EUC benefits. The majority of recipients in 2012 had earned a high school diploma, and almost one-fifth held a 4-year college degree.

These are people that have skills. They have at least got the credentials, which, again, 20 or 30 years ago put you into the workplace and probably kept you there, if you were diligent.

So I hope my colleagues take time to review this report. It is extremely useful. It shatters some stereotypes and reinforces the point this is about helping working Americans who need help.

I think the facts are clearly on the side of continuing this program, and I think the reality is they need the help now. If we can get them that help, then we will have the time to deliberate the very serious questions that my colleagues have raised; and they have raised them constructively and raised them sincerely about the long-term approach of this program. But to continue to trade legislative ideas on the floor while millions of Americans either are losing their benefits or are seeing the end come within days, weeks or months is not the right response.

So I urge my colleagues to move forward through these procedural hurdles. Let's get this bill done as Senator HELLER and I have proposed it. Let's get it done, and then we have another huge challenge because we want, frankly, and I think the sentiment is across the board—if we are going to do this, let us at least continue it through the year 2014.

We are beginning to sense some positive economic shifts. We hope those materialize. We hope they come forward to the point where the unemployment rate, which has fallen—I heard the President today say when he took over we were losing 800,000 jobs a month. It was rocketing up into the stratosphere in some states, 12 percent, 14 percent. In Rhode Island it is still 9 percent. We have seen some progress—not enough in my State, in Nevada, and other States. But we have seen progress, and we hope that progress continues.

Indeed, one of the other aspects of this program, if we pass these benefits—and the economists have pointed it out, particularly if we pass them on an emergency basis—it will add more fuel to our economy, not less. It will add more demand. It will, in fact, increase growth at a time when everyone is on the floor talking about the fact that we just have to grow more jobs. Of course we do. But this program is, in a way, the proverbial two-fer. You help people who need help, and you help the economy grow faster—200,000 jobs at least.

So I really do think we should move forward as quickly as we can to get this Reed-Heller bill completed, and then we have a lot of careful, thoughtful, collaborative effort to engage in. Because if we want to go forward for a full year, which we do, we have other significant issues—not just the size of the program, but other issues as were brought up by my colleagues, and brought up very fairly, very constructively, and very thoughtfully.

So Madam President, my message is: No. 1, I thank my colleagues for giving us the chance to seriously debate this bill, and I urge them to pass it quickly, and then we will set ourselves up for another serious, thoughtful and constructive debate. That is my wish.

With that, Madam President, I yield the floor, and 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. REED. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. REED. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to a period of morning business with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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