

which resulted in the first supporting evidence of any vaccine being effective in lowering the risk of contracting HIV.

For more than a decade, Dr. Birx served as the Director of the U.S. Military HIV Research Program at the Department of Defense. During her time there she brought together the Army, Navy, and Air Force in a new model of cooperation and greatly improved the U.S. military's HIV/AIDS efforts through innovative collaboration.

Since 2005, she has served as the Director of the Global AIDS Program at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, CDC. Through her leadership, CDC now has an infrastructure that supports HIV/AIDS programs in over 75 countries in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and Latin America which are funded by PEPFAR.

Dr. Birx has dedicated her career to advancing and improving the field of HIV/AIDS. After three decades in the fight against HIV/AIDS, her passion and dedication to her work has not wavered, and she remains stalwart in her belief that we can put an end to this epidemic. Her leadership and expertise in this field is unprecedented, which is why I urge my colleagues to support the nomination of Dr. Deborah Birx to serve as the next U.S. Global Aids Coordinator.

VOTE ON MALINOWSKI NOMINATION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the nomination of Tomasz P. Malinowski, of the District of Columbia, to be Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor?

The nomination was confirmed.

VOTE ON WU NOMINATION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the nomination of Portia Y. Wu, of the District of Columbia, to be an Assistant Secretary of Labor?

The nomination was confirmed.

VOTE ON BIRX NOMINATION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the nomination of Deborah L. Birx, of Maryland, to be Ambassador at Large and Coordinator of United States Government Activities to Combat HIV/AIDS Globally?

The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the motions to reconsider are considered made and laid upon the table and the President will be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

PROTECTING VOLUNTEER FIRE-FIGHTERS AND EMERGENCY RESPONDERS ACT OF 2014—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will now resume legislative session.

The Senator from New Mexico.

Mr. HEINRICH. Mr. President, I can still remember my first job as though it was yesterday. I worked as a busboy at a local family restaurant during our small-town fair. While that job only lasted a few days, I still remember how incredibly proud I was to have earned a few dollars myself. The next year that same family hired me to bus tables and wash dishes year-round at their family restaurant. I soon went from busing tables to bagging groceries and then stocking shelves at the local grocery store.

I grew up on a small farming and ranching operation. So whether it was drying dishes after dinner or helping my dad with the cattle, hard work was simply a requirement for every single member of my family. In addition to tending cattle, my dad worked as a utility lineman. And my mother worked in a factory inspecting wheels on the assembly line.

Like a lot of Americans, I learned the dignity of work long before I ever held a job. I learned at home.

Everyone deserves a fair shot at success in this country. That is at the heart of why raising the minimum wage truly matters.

Minimum wage workers are not just teenagers. They are single parents working two jobs to make ends meet. They are women working a minimum-wage job at a movie theater for 8 years waiting for a raise. They are students working toward a degree that they hope will make all the difference in their lives. They are mothers and fathers working 40 hours a week—sometimes many more—to support their families.

These are the Americans who work hard and earn the Federal minimum wage and still find it difficult—some would argue impossible—to get ahead.

At \$7.25 an hour, the Federal minimum wage has lost more than 30 percent of its value over the past four decades. Groceries and housing, education and energy costs all continue to rise, but the minimum wage simply has not kept pace.

This financial hardship is especially felt by women who make up a majority of minimum wage workers in this country. And stagnant wages hinder a family's chance to work their way into the middle class.

For many, raising the minimum wage means the difference between poverty and dignity. It can mean the difference between a trip to the food bank and a trip to the grocery store. It means the difference between earning enough to just barely get by and earning enough to at least think about the future.

That is why I am supporting the Minimum Wage Fairness Act to raise the Federal minimum wage to \$10.10 per hour by 2015.

According to recent estimates, more than 100,000 New Mexicans would receive a direct raise from this legislation, and another 43,000 would see their

pay increase as overall wages improve, dramatically increasing economic opportunities for New Mexico families.

Raising the minimum wage is not just good for those workers; it is good for business and it is good for the economy at large. A higher minimum wage helps reduce turnover, increases productivity, and boosts consumer demand.

A higher minimum wage puts more money in the pockets of people who spend locally and helps create a ladder of opportunity into the middle class.

Americans are no strangers to hard work and embrace the belief that if you work hard and you play by the rules, you should be able to get ahead, you deserve a fair shot.

There are cities in New Mexico that are already taking the initiative and raising the minimum wage on their own. The city of Santa Fe's minimum wage is \$10.51 per hour. As a city councilor myself, I fought to raise the minimum wage in Albuquerque. And today Albuquerque's minimum wage is still \$1.25 more than the current Federal rate.

In Las Cruces, there is a growing grassroots effort to raise that city's minimum wage.

I know this fight. We need to raise the national minimum wage so that all workers have a fair shot to get ahead. Because, the truth is, the deck has been stacked against working families for some time now. Too many working families are forced to make decisions that hurt the progress and strength of our Nation as a whole—such as taking on an extra shift instead of pursuing their education, or having to choose between paying the heating bill or the phone bill.

Raising the minimum wage is key to making this economic recovery work for all of us. But raising the minimum wage alone is not enough to constitute a middle-class economic agenda.

We need to put preschool within the financial grasp of every working family, and we need to address the outrageous increases in college tuition and loan costs. We must invest in vocational training and help build the modern American manufacturing economy of the 21st century. We must close the gender wage gap to ensure that women are paid what they deserve—paid equally with men.

Fair, livable wages, together with educational opportunities for middle-class families—that is a formula for a real opportunity agenda.

It is time to ensure that every New Mexican, every American has a fair shot. It is time to raise the minimum wage.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Thank you very much, Mr. President.

The Finance Committee is considering something we call in the Senate tax extenders. One of those is the wind production tax credit. For the next 10 minutes or so, I wish to address that

law which has been on the books for more than 20 years. It expired in December, and, in my view, needs to stay expired.

One of the things we remember most about the late President Ronald Reagan, is what he said about government programs: The closest you will come to eternal life on this Earth is a government program.

Well, my nomination for the most glaring example of a government program that seems to have eternal life is the wind production tax credit—the Federal taxpayers' subsidy for what I would call "big wind."

Here is what the wind production tax credit does. Let's say you build one of those 20-story turbines and the wind turbines begin to go around, as they will about one-third of the time to produce electricity. So for every kilowatt hour of electricity that you produce, the taxpayers will pay you 2.3 cents. That is a pretty good deal because the wholesale price of electricity, depending on where you are at in the country, might range from about 3 cents per kilowatt hour to 7 cents per kilowatt hour. So let's say you are in Oregon or a part of the country where they have pretty cheap electricity and you sell wind for 3 cents a kilowatt hour. You will pay 1 cent of the money you get in Federal corporate tax. That leaves you with 2 cents, but then the taxpayer is going to come in and pay you 2.3 cents on top of that. Because it is a tax credit, it is worth even more.

Now it is even better than that. That subsidy is not just for 1 year, but it is for 10 years. So every time we have a 1-year extension of the wind production tax credit, we tell the owner of the wind turbine—and usually they take these ownerships and they put them in portfolios and they split them up and sell them to rich people around the country and around the world who can use the tax credits—it is for 10 years. So the wind production tax credit is 2.3 cents per kilowatt hour of taxpayer money, every year for 10 years if you are producing wind electricity.

This provision of the Tax Code was enacted in 1992. It was supposed to be a "temporary" subsidy. It was intended to do what we have done several times in our country, which is to jump-start a new energy technology. Well, as President Reagan observed, eternal life for a government program sinks in pretty quickly. This temporary tax provision, enacted in 1992—more than 20 years ago—has been extended eight times since its enactment. The wind industry has become a very well-developed industry.

I asked President Obama's Nobel Prize-winning Energy Secretary, Secretary Chu, in the first term of President Obama's administration how he would describe wind power. He said it was a "mature" technology.

The No. 1 problem with the wind production tax credit is its cost. Congress enacted a 1-year extension for 2013. That was at a cost of nearly \$12 billion

to the taxpayers—remember, not all in 2013; that was just for a 1-year extension. For 2014 there is another 1-year extension which is being considered by the Finance Committee, and that will be another \$6 billion.

This is real money. I mean, just look at the amount of money we spend on energy research in multiple agencies. The number is about \$10 billion let's say we, through our research, developed a way to capture carbon from coal plants and recycle that carbon and turn it into something commercially feasible and sell it. Then all of a sudden, these coal plants that people worry about because they produce carbon, would be as clean as nuclear power, as clean as wind power. As a result we would be building coal plants everywhere in America. That seems like a better use of taxpayer dollars. We would have cheap electricity—even cheaper electricity for a longer period of time.

We spend \$10 billion on energy research in a year and the last 1-year extension of the wind production tax credit was \$12 billion over 10 years. By comparison, take tax breaks for Big Oil. One of the last times President Obama wanted to end the tax subsidies for what he called Big Oil, he identified \$4 billion worth of tax subsidies. Well, most of those tax breaks, he calls subsidies for Big Oil, are tax breaks that many manufacturing companies have.

The point I am trying to make is that we are talking about a lot of money.

The supporters of this tax credit will say: "Let's phase it out." In fact, it is phased out. If Congress did not act, all of those people who currently today have their wind turbines would continue to get their subsidies for up to 10 more years. So that phases it out.

But let's say we phase it out according to a proposal that was made last year by the wind industry. Well, the American Energy Alliance said that might cost as much as \$50 billion over 10 years—a huge amount of money. Now, there could be some other form of phase out—I would welcome the opportunity to see it—that would not cost so much. Maybe that would make sense, but beware the phase out.

The United States uses 20 to 25 percent of all of the electricity in the world. It is important to us. We use it for our computers, we use it for our businesses, we use it for our military, and we use it for our lights. If the lights go out in America, America stops. That is how important electricity is to us.

Where does that electricity come from? Four percent of it comes from wind power. Of course, that is only available when the wind blows—usually at night, usually when we need it the least. Four percent of our electricity is wind after 22 years and billions of dollars. The rest of it comes from other sources—7 percent from hydroelectric power; 19 percent from nuclear power, which is about 60 percent of all of our

clean energy; nearly 40 percent from coal; and 27 percent from natural gas. So 4 percent from wind.

It is true, as wind power advocates say, that in the past Congress has approved other jump-starts for energy technology. But the difference is that we put a cap on them.

We are very happy about all of the unconventional gas we have in this country today. Suddenly, we have an enormous amount of natural gas. The research for that partially came from Sandia Laboratory, from Department of Energy demonstration projects. There was a tax credit for fracking, but it expired in 1992. The demonstration projects are over. This technology is out in the marketplace and making lives better all across the country. Take plug-in electric cars. I supported that, but there was a cap on the number of credits we had for plug-in electric cars—200,000 per manufacturer. The nuclear production tax credit works just like the wind production tax credit. You sell a kilowatt hour of electricity from a nuclear power plant, and we will give you a taxpayer credit. But that is capped at 6,000 megawatts. So there is a limit to it. There is no cap on the subsidy for electricity produced by wind. I do not know the exact number, but it is probably in the 50- or 60- or 70,000 megawatt range.

Problem No. 1 is cost.

Problem No. 2 is reliability risk.

The problem here is that Congress is picking winners and losers. When it gives wind power such a big subsidy that is sometimes more than the cost of the electricity, it undercuts our coal and nuclear plants. And what that does is put us at risk as a country. Any country that uses that much electricity needs these big plants to operate almost all the time—coal and nuclear—to keep the lights on, to support jobs, to keep the cars running, and to make America run. Our country cannot run on windmills that only work when the wind blows. We cannot run only on solar power that only works when the Sun shines. We have to have baseload power.

Because the wind subsidy is picking winners and losers, it undercuts baseload power. It has caused the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a very well-respected organization, to say that the combination of the federal subsidy for wind power and low gas prices could cause as many as 25 percent of our nuclear plants in America to close within the next 10 years. That would be a terrible blow to our country's economy, to our effort to improve family incomes and to find jobs for middle-class Americans.

How could that be? How does it do that? Well, let's take this example. Let's say you are in Chicago and it is the middle of the night, 3 a.m., and the demand for electricity goes down as people go to sleep. Well, the supplier of electricity to your home or your business in Chicago is buying electricity from the market at the lowest possible

cost. Well, as the demand goes down, the price goes down, and who is left out there selling electricity? It is the wind power people because they can give away their electricity and still make a profit because of the subsidy. This negative pricing is what is undermining baseload, coal and nuclear.

We are very proud of the fact that in our country we have, in effect, a domestic price for natural gas. It is very low. Chemical companies are moving back to America instead of leaving. Manufacturing plants are enjoying the lower costs, and so are homeowners as they heat and cool their homes. But remember that natural gas prices can go up and they can go down. In 2005 they were not \$3 and \$4 as they are today, they were \$13. In New England, even today sometimes natural gas prices spike to \$30 a unit. So it is important to have diversity and it is important to have baseload power.

The third problem is that these large wind turbines destroy the environment in the name of saving the environment. Some people might like to look at them. I really do not. Particularly in my part of the country, the only places they work are along the foothills or along the tops of the most beautiful mountains in the Eastern United States. So you string these 20-story structures with blinking lights that can be seen for 20 miles in the middle of the beautiful view you have in the Eastern United States. They take up a lot of space.

You could run these 20-story windmills from Georgia to Maine to produce electricity, scarring the entire eastern landscape. Or you could produce the same amount of electricity with eight nuclear power plants. And you would still need the nuclear power plants to produce electricity when the wind is not blowing, which is most of the time.

The final problem is energy security. I had a meeting with George Shultz, the former Secretary of State, the other day in San Francisco. He made an observation that I had not heard him make before. George Shultz said, "We should pay a lot of attention to generating more energy where we use it because of national security risks."

George Shultz is head of the MIT Energy Initiative. He was observing that the supply of energy ought to be near the user of energy. That is especially true with military bases. It could be true for the rest of us in this age of terrorism. That is another reason it makes less sense to subsidize these giant turbines say in the Great Plains, and then someone has to pay for 700 miles of transmission lines through backyards and nature preserves to get the wind power to Memphis—to bring that electricity to Tennessee and the Tennessee Valley.

Expecting the United States to operate on windmills is the energy equivalent of going to war in sailboats while nuclear power is available. It is even worse than that. It is the same as destroying our nuclear ships—our nuclear

plants, the same way—and replacing them with sailboats.

The energy subsidy for wind turbines has served a purpose for the last 22 years. We have spent enough money on them. We have distorted the market as much as we can stand. Because of the cost and because we are undermining the baseload power of coal and nuclear, which puts us at risk as a country that uses 20 to 25 percent of the electricity in the world, my hope would be that the Finance Committee would save some money and let the marketplace flourish. Give us the opportunity to allow the wind production tax credit to stay right where it is, expired, as it did at the end of last year. Let those persons who already have the benefit of the credits enjoy them for the rest of the period of time.

I yield the floor.

Mr. ISAKSON. I rise to address two subjects briefly on the floor and would ask that my remarks be divided appropriately in the RECORD.

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

Mr. ISAKSON. There has been a lot said about the Affordable Care Act on the floor of this Chamber for 5 years. I was here when we passed the Affordable Care Act. I am in the Senate as it is being implemented.

There have been lots of things said about it, but this year marks one of the things we need to recognize as a major hit to small business. Bernie Marcus, a founder of Home Depot and the former chairman and CEO, opined yesterday in the Wall Street Journal about the cost of ObamaCare to American business, a hidden tax that has been unveiled on the American people, the American ratepayer, and the American small business person.

A tax assessment of \$8 billion in 2014 is being levied by the Affordable Care Act against every insurance company that sells to the small- and medium-sized market, to every insurance company that sells a Medicare Advantage policy or a Medicare managed care policy. The 2014 assessment is \$8 billion, and it graduates up to where in 2018 it is \$14.3 billion. That assessment is an arbitrary amount of money that was used as a pay-for in the ObamaCare legislation.

It is assessed on the insurance companies based on their market share of the insurance market in small- or medium-sized carriers, Medicare Advantage, and Medicaid managed care plans. It represents about a \$500-per-year rate increase on every one of those policyholders, because as we all know when an insurance company has the added cost to the administration of their policy, that cost is obviously passed on to the consumer; \$500 a year is \$5,000 in the next decade. It also represents over the next decade the loss, as estimated by the CBO and NFIB, of 146,000 jobs.

Let's think for a minute. The main topics we have had this year in the Senate of the United States is income

inequality, the need to lower unemployment, and the need to create jobs. Yet the signature piece of legislation of this administration is going to cost us because of a new tax being levied against insurance companies that provide health insurance to the American people, and it is going to cost 146,000 jobs. It is another example of how we need to rethink the approach of the Affordable Care Act.

We have to recognize all the things it has done from the standpoint of taxes, cost, lost jobs, and lost wages. Reform that legislation, repeal that legislation, and get it right for the people of the United States of America.

I commend Bernie Marcus on bringing this to the people's attention. I commend him on all he has done for my State and for our country, and I hope he will keep on giving us his opinion for what is best for the United States of America.

I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD a column written and published yesterday in the Wall Street Journal by Mr. Bernie Marcus, cofounder, former chairman, and CEO of Home Depot.

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

[From The Wall Street Journal, Apr. 1, 2014]

OBAMACARE'S HIDDEN HIT ON BUSINESSES

(By Bernie Marcus)

The law's insurance-company fee will raise premiums and kill at least 146,000 jobs.

President Obama's promise that Americans could keep their health insurance if they liked it was the most infamous of the Affordable Care Act's sketchy sales pitches. But many of the law's most damaging aspects are less known, buried in thousands of pages of regulations.

Consider the "fee"—really a hidden sales tax—that all health-insurance companies have been forced to pay since the first of this year on premiums for policies sold to individuals and small and medium-size businesses. The health-insurance tax—known as HIT in business circles—is expected to generate revenues of about \$8 billion this year and as much as \$14.3 billion by 2018, according to the legislation.

The Congressional Budget Office and the Joint Committee on Taxation predict that insurance companies will pass the cost on to customers, as any company subject to such a tax would. In other words, millions of Americans lucky enough to keep their current health insurance under ObamaCare will be paying much higher premiums because of this tax, with the added cost rippling through the economy and stifling job creation.

The National Federation of Independent Businesses projects the health-insurance tax will add an additional \$475 per year for the average individually purchased family policy—nearly \$5,000 over the course of a decade. Small businesses will take an even bigger hit, with the cost of an employer-provided family policy rising a projected \$6,800 in the next decade.

Since most large companies self-insure, they aren't affected by the new tax. But smaller- and medium-size businesses don't have that luxury and will bear the brunt of the tax. Many will be forced to raise their employees' share of premium payments or, worse, lay off workers to pay the escalating costs of health care for their core employees.

The NFIB projects private-sector employment through 2022 will be reduced by at least 146,000 jobs because of the health-insurance tax, and perhaps as much as 262,000 jobs. That's like vaporizing some of the largest employers in the country. Just the low-end estimate—146,000 jobs—is still more than the total number of employees currently working for companies like Costco, Microsoft and Delta Airlines.

Sadly, the NFIB predicts that 59% of the reduced job growth will be in small- and medium-size businesses, America's biggest engines of job creation. Worse, 26% of the problem will be concentrated in very small businesses—the Main Street cafes, retailers and family businesses that are the backbone of the U.S. economy. America's 28 million small businesses make up 99.7% of all American employers. They also create 63% of new private-sector jobs.

The jobs never created because of the health-insurance tax will be a “death of a thousand cuts” on Main Street that adds up to a major wound for the economy. As a result, NFIB predicts total gross domestic product in 2022 will be \$23 billion to \$35 billion smaller than it would have been absent the HIT.

To get a handle on what this means, consider that McDonald's Corp. grossed \$27.6 billion last year, selling to 68 million customers per day in 119 countries. So this one new tax on our health insurance is projected to drill a hole in our economy as big as McDonald's in just eight years, with the overwhelming majority of the damage falling on already struggling small businesses.

According to the Congressional Budget Office, the Affordable Care Act was designed to fix only half the problem of uninsured Americans, by bringing the number of uninsured from 53 million down to 27 million—equal to the current population of Texas. Yet this half-solution has brought with it full-sized problems—like lost health coverage for the previously insured, and job-killing policies like the health-insurance tax.

Poor enrollment figures and endless stories of Americans losing insurance indicate the law won't even be able to accomplish its incomplete goals. Building a sicker economy will not create healthy Americans. Congress and the president must reform this “reform.”

IRAN

Mr. ISAKSON. America was insulted earlier last month by the Iranian people. The government of the nation of Iran has appointed a new Ambassador to the United Nations.

The new Ambassador's name is Hamid Aboutalebi. He will be an Ambassador to the U.N. who served on the ground in the Iranian forces who took the American Embassy hostages in 1979, captured 52 Americans, and held them for 444 days—a man who claims he was just an innocent bystander and didn't have much to do with that horrible tragedy. If you were alive at that time and watched the “Nightline” shows night after night to watch the beatings, the torture, the terror, and the capture of the American people, you understand full well that nobody could have been within sight of that Embassy and not claim to be a part of it.

My State has been touched. Almost every State of the Union has been touched. Those hostages who were held—right up until the time Ronald Reagan was sworn in as President—

were finally released at the last minute when the U.S. Government waived their right to compensation against the nation of Iran.

The nation that held 52 of our diplomats hostage for 444 days signed an agreement never to have to pay any reparation to those people and is now appointing to the United Nations, the world forum, an ambassador who was on the site in Tehran when those people were taken captive. It is an insult to America.

First and foremost, the Government of Iran should apologize; second and foremost, the Government of Iran should compensate all of those hostages who had been held. Fifty-two hostages were held and 25 percent of them have passed away. One of them, as recently as late last year, took their own life as a consequence of the injuries they suffered.

One of the citizens from my State, Col. Chuck Scott of Jonesboro, GA, was on television just 2 nights ago about the tragedy in Iran. His teeth were knocked out by a 2 by 4 during his captivity. He is going back for another surgery in another week to try to remedy some of the pain he harbors from that tragedy that took place 34 years ago.

It is an insult to everything the United Nations stands for, to the integrity of the people of the United States of America, and the memory of those who passed and those who lived who were held hostage. We should demand this appointment be withdrawn by the Iranian Government. We should demand an apology on behalf of the Iranian Government to the people of United States of America, and we should demand that they voluntarily compensate those hostages.

They are not going to do that, and I know that, which is why we introduced legislation, which I principally sponsored 3 years ago, to compensate the 52 hostages who were held in captivity from 1979 until 1981. It is a shame beyond belief that 52 Americans who were held hostage are the only Americans in the same circumstance who have not been compensated for the damages perpetrated upon them.

I hope a vehicle comes through the floor of the Senate where we can attach this. Senator Kerry, while he was chairman of the committee and now Senator MENENDEZ, who is now the chairman, and Ranking Member CORKER have all embraced our concept of seeing to it that we fight to see that recompense is finally made to those hostages who were captured from 1979 to 1981.

We have a great and compassionate country, and we owe them and their families every effort to see that the nation of Iran compensates them and they are in some way paid back for the terrible tragedy that was perpetrated upon them.

But first and foremost, Iran needs to know that this U.S. Senator, and I think every U.S. Senator, realizes the

affront to the American people and the insult to the United Nations that Iran is perpetrating by making this appointment as Ambassador of their country today.

I yield back the remainder of my time, 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. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

AMTRAK

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I rise today to talk about one of the most recent American transportation success stories—Amtrak's Northeast corridor—and how Congress can help it grow.

First, however, I would like to thank two great leaders on the Senate Appropriations Committee. First, our chair, BARBARA MIKULSKI—she is from the Northeast corridor. I often stop by in Baltimore as I take the train from New York to Washington. She has been a staunch defender of Amtrak from the day she got here. And PATTY MURRAY who is chairman of the transportation subcommittee. She is not from the Northeast corridor but, of course, cares very much about Amtrak across the Nation and has been a defender of those of us who care about Amtrak and depend on Amtrak in the Northeast, as well as throughout the whole country. In tough budget times, these two folks have stood up for Amtrak from one end of the Nation to the other, and we very much appreciate that.

Now, as the committees begin their work on the fiscal year 2015 appropriations, my colleagues and I are here to urge something that will benefit millions of riders on the Northeast corridor, which runs from Boston to Washington, DC.

We are mindful of the fact we depend on national support for Amtrak. Even though the Northeast corridor is far and away the most used and the most profitable of the Amtrak lines, we are one Amtrak. We understand how important Amtrak is, even if it doesn't serve as many passengers in sparsely populated States, and of course in more populated areas on the west coast and the Midwest and the South.

Having said that, I want to point out that I strongly believe in the long-distance service provided by Amtrak. It connects rural communities and other economic hubs by rail. People want it and like this service. In upstate New York, in the Buffalo to Albany corridor, it is clearly not as used as in the Northeast corridor, but we know how much we depend on Amtrak there. In the other 49 States people depend on it as well.

Since 1971, Amtrak, in the Northeast and throughout the country, has been a Federal responsibility, and it should continue to be. So the proposal we are

advocating today is one of fairness to both ends of the national passenger rail system. What we are saying is simple. Accept Amtrak's new budget framework, which would allow the NEC to reinvest profits while continuing to provide long-distance service.

First, let me explain the backdrop. Amtrak's Northeast corridor has become a profit-generating operation that carries passengers in an economically critical region home to over 50 million people. Some of the facts on our region: It generates \$1 out of \$5 of GDP. One out of every three Fortune 100 companies has its headquarters located there. One out of every five jobs in the United States is located in the Northeast corridor. So you wouldn't be surprised that over the past decade ridership along the Northeast corridor has been growing.

Between the years of 2001 and 2011, Amtrak's share of the air-rail travel market has increased from 37 percent to 75 percent for trips between New York and Washington and 20 percent to 54 percent from New York to Boston. Look at those increases. You wouldn't believe it. It is counterintuitive almost, but three-quarters of the people who make the decision to travel between Washington, DC, and New York, and don't use a car or a bus but would rather use a plane or train, use the train. Even a majority now on the slightly longer route to Boston use the train.

It is a testament to the region and to Amtrak that every day 750,000 people travel over portions of the Northeast corridor main line. That is nearly half of all railroad commuters nationally. It is a total of 260,000 trips a year. Look at all the different commuter railroads that run over Amtrak's Northeast corridor structure. Here they are: Mass Bay, Shoreline East, Metro North in my city of New York, and in my metropolitan area of New York, Long Island Railroad, New Jersey Transit, SEPTA—Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation—Maryland Area Regional Commuter, and Virginia.

Two of the biggest commuter railroads in the country operate on Amtrak's structure, and those are in the metropolitan area that the Presiding Officer and I share. They are Metro North and the Long Island Railroad. Hundreds of thousands of people use these railroads every day.

So the Northeast corridor is one of the most important arteries in the beating heart of our economy, and I am happy to report that business is booming. NEC revenues currently exceed operating costs by more than \$300 million a year. So one would think, finally, we have the means to update the aging infrastructure that Amtrak and our commuter rail system depend upon. Unfortunately, the growth of the Northeast corridor and the profits it has produced are not going back into the system. Instead, over the last 10 years, NEC revenues have been used to cover the costs of the State-supported and long-dis-

tance services across the rest of the national railroad.

We understand in the Northeast why that has happened, again because we depend on support throughout the country and we need to bring the whole country together. But it is happening at the same time the Federal contributions to Amtrak in the form of operating grants have declined. In fact, operating grants to Amtrak are lower now by almost half than they were under a Republican Congress and President George Bush. Here are the numbers. You can see them: \$1 billion in 2003, and they stay about the same. But operating as a percentage of the total went from 50 percent to 24 percent.

That is not necessarily a bad thing. For the past few years, some of my Republican colleagues have urged Amtrak to become more efficient and rely on Federal operating grants. Amtrak has done just that. In 2013, Amtrak set an annual ridership record of 31.6 million and a ticket revenue record of \$2.1 billion.

The reason my colleagues and I are speaking today is to make it very clear that weaning Amtrak off of Federal operating grants shouldn't come at the expense of the capital costs in the Northeast corridor. The Amtrak operating grant request for 2015 is \$700 million—a fraction of the overall budget, and lower than the 2005 funding level under George Bush. The total request is for \$1.62 billion, a modest request over last year's \$1.4 billion. This would allow all long-distance service mandated by Congress to continue and, importantly, it would allow \$300 million a year to come back into the Northeast corridor's infrastructure. That is real money—money that, if continued over time, can service loans to build new tunnels and bridges and fix up the tracks and stations which we desperately need. It is an old, old system.

Think of some of the immediate projects Amtrak may have to forego if they do not receive the full request: the replacement of structural columns underneath Philadelphia's beautiful 30th Street Station; overhauling the Acela, which is very profitable, and usually, we know, very full, to improve Amtrak's on-time performance; and extremely important—because if they collapse the whole Northeast corridor collapses and their transportation mechanism collapses causing real harm to the economy—reconstruction of the decaying infrastructure in the East River tunnels.

This last project is particularly important—the East River tunnels, that is—for several reasons. It shows the massive benefits of this plan for people who use railroads that they rely on. The trains carry hundreds of thousands of passengers back and forth every day and are in a major state of disrepair. The proposal will allow Amtrak to invest more—way more—in these vital East River tunnels, making them more reliable and improving travel for Long Island Railroad riders and NEC pas-

sengers every day. A collateral benefit for all commuting New Yorkers is that there are Penn Station improvements—the most heavily used transportation hub in the country. The plan would fund many of these key improvements and make them happen quicker.

The status quo is unacceptable. The current Federal funding requirements leave the NEC's infrastructure vulnerable to a bigger, costlier, and far more damaging failure than we have ever seen.

The long-term need to increase capacity and make needed repairs to our bridges and tunnels could not be clearer. Several important segments, such as Hudson River tunnels, are growing at a record level. By 2030—look at that—the need will be even greater. These are segments which will exceed capacity by 2030—lots of them.

In my State of New York we see the economic cost of devastating events such as Hurricane Sandy, which flooded Hudson River tunnels and shut down the Northeast corridor for days. According to new estimates, a 1-day disruption along the Northeast corridor could cost the economy \$100 million.

So I would ask my colleagues—both Democrats and Republicans—from States along the Northeast corridor and from around the rest of the country to support an increase in Federal investment in our rail infrastructure. I know we can get bipartisan support because there has been bipartisan support in the past. Senators in this body on both sides of the aisle supported operating grant levels requested by Amtrak in the past. In the longer term, we know we need to authorize a dedicated intercity passenger rail fund that provides robust investment in this infrastructure.

In the meantime, our Nation can no longer afford to let a railroad that carries half of Amtrak's trains and 80 percent of the Nation's rail commuters fall apart at the seams. Allowing the NEC to keep the cash it generates will help benefit and support those same profit-making activities, helping to create a virtual cycle of reinvestment. I hope that sounds like something my colleagues across the aisle could support.

If we want an interstate commuter network in the next century, we must begin by fixing and improving the infrastructure from the beginning of the last century. That was the mission of our good friend, my dear friend, the late Frank Lautenberg. He was a tireless and passionate advocate for improving our Nation's infrastructure—especially our railways—because he knew it would better the State's economy and indeed our country's economy. We can honor his legacy by carrying on that mission.

I ask my colleagues to recognize this great leader as they have in the past. Give the Northeast corridor the funds and flexibility to reap the benefits of its recent growth while still providing service around the rest of the country.

With that, I would like to turn to my friend the junior Senator from Connecticut to ask him to talk about the importance of the Northeast corridor for his State and especially the relationship Amtrak has with commuter railroads.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. MURPHY. Thank you, Mr. President, and I thank the Senator from New York for bringing us all together this evening to talk about the really vital economic importance of the Northeast corridor to States such as Connecticut, New Jersey, Massachusetts, and New York.

This is a pivotal moment for the Northeast corridor. We have a region that is growing with respect to the number of people who are using the rail but an infrastructure that is dramatically aging.

It is important to remember the connection between investment in rail and the emergence of this Nation's economic greatness. The rail line that means the most to us in Connecticut was chartered in 1844. It was the New York and New Haven Railroad, and it was initially built to connect New York to Boston, going through New Haven and going through Connecticut. Later on, it had a spur going through Long Island and then a spur connecting down to Providence. It was built at a time of massive rail expansion all across the country.

In the last 25 years of the 1800s, where a lot of this expansion happened after the initial investment in places such as New York and Connecticut and Boston, the expansion of rail led to a tenfold increase in economic output for this Nation. It allowed for enormous social and economic mobility because if you didn't like the circumstances where you were today, tomorrow you could be halfway across the country because of a train. It allowed for the gradual evaporation of a lot of the divisions that were created because of the Civil War. As people got to know other parts of the country and could move more freely back and forth, they began to understand what this Nation was really about. One historian, John Hankey, has noted that the railroads essentially transitioned our lexicology about the United States from referring to "these United States" to "this United States." It is a small difference, but it suggests the way in which the rail lines allowed for this country to connect.

Nowhere has this expansion of rail mattered more than in the Northeast corridor. We have the highest concentration of population, the highest concentration of commerce, the highest concentration of ports of shipping, and the highest concentration of rail lines. Not only do we have Amtrak running up and down the spine of the Northeast corridor, we have 10 commuter railroads, including Metro North, a line Mr. BLUMENTHAL—the

Presiding Officer—and I am very proud of.

We have 260 million passengers today who are using the Northeast corridor. That number is expected to grow in 2030 to 412 million. Just think about that. We are talking about a time period of only 16 years. We are going to go from 260 million passengers today to 412 million passengers in 2030. If you ride a train from Bridgeport to Stamford or from Stamford to Grand Central on any given Monday morning or any given Thursday afternoon, you are going to fail to understand how that line is going to be able to absorb an increase from 260 million passengers to 412 million passengers. We simply don't have the capacity today to be able to absorb that increase.

We have 1,000 bridges and tunnels along the Northeast corridor that are badly in need of repair. Some of them are 100 years old. The estimates are that over the next 20 years we have to spend \$50 billion along the Northeast corridor simply to maintain a state of good repair. I wish this were a cheaper exercise, but it is not.

In Connecticut alone, we have to replace a bridge in Cos Cob that is going to cost \$830 million. The Norwalk Bridge has to be rehabbed for \$250 million. The Saugatuck River Bridge in Westport has to be rehabbed as well for \$300 million. The Devon Bridge replacement project is going to be \$750 million. We have to upgrade communication and signals all along the New Haven Line; that is \$400 million. We have an old aging catenary—the electric lines above the supply power to the trains—that is going to be \$600 million as well.

In Connecticut it is our lifeblood, meaning we are nothing if not for the economic power that is driven by those trains. About a decade ago an economic report came out on Connecticut that really shook the State to its core. It talked about the great economic potential Connecticut has as we sit right between the enormous job-creating hubs of New York City and Boston. But it warned us that if we don't get serious about unclogging the arteries out of Connecticut into Connecticut, that, in the words of the report, "Connecticut risks becoming an economic cul-de-sac." That is a pretty scary premise, the idea that we could be so close to all of this economic activity, but simply because people cannot get to Connecticut or get out of Connecticut because of these aging rail lines, we are going to ultimately be left behind.

So what we are really here to talk about is just a principle of basic fairness. The Northeast corridor makes money. It is the only section of rail in the Nation that does make money simply because of volume and because of efficient management. The profit equals about \$300 million a year. We are not asking for the Northeast corridor to get any more than we are owed; we simply want that \$300 million, as Amtrak has proposed, to be re-invested in the line.

From the Cos Cob Bridge to the Sagatuck River Bridge, we are going to have to make these upgrades at some point. If we don't, ultimately they are going to fall down. We have seen not only in the Northeast corridor but across the country the consequences of allowing our infrastructure to atrophy to the point of crisis and collapse. So why don't we make those investments today? Why don't we make those investments at a moment when people need to go to work, when the repairs are as cost-efficient as they are going to get, and when the line itself in the Northeast is generating \$300 million extra a year that right now is going to other parts of the country?

I agree with Senator SCHUMER. We support a national Amtrak. We strongly support a robust inner-city connection linking major cities, major urban areas with rail all across the country. Just in our small region, we have half of the trips of the entire country. So we think it is not too much to ask that to the extent we are profitable, we get to reinvest that money into an infrastructure that is older than any other piece of infrastructure in the entire country.

I would say this: It is not just about fairness for the States that make up the Northeast corridor. The economic power of the Northeast spreads itself out all across the country. The corporations that are located in Manhattan and Stamford and Newark employ people in Nebraska and in California, in South Dakota and Texas. So our pitch to our colleagues outside of the Northeast is not just that it seems to be the right and fair thing to do for all of this profit that is being made through the ticket fares passengers in the Northeast are paying to stay in the Northeast, but the benefit that comes from a well-constructed, efficiently run Northeast corridor accrues to the entire country.

I am really pleased Senator SCHUMER brought us down to the floor today to talk about how important reinvesting this \$300 million is to the Northeast corridor. In my State, with Metro North generating literally hundreds of millions of dollars in economic benefit to our section of the country, if we don't recapture this income, if we aren't able to make these repairs that I listed, then, as that economic report suggests, we really do risk our State of Connecticut ultimately becoming an economic cul-de-sac.

With that, Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SCHUMER). The Senator from Connecticut is recognized.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Thank you, Mr. President. I am honored to follow the Presiding Officer, my good friend Senator SCHUMER of New York, and my colleague and friend Senator MURPHY of Connecticut to talk about an issue that really affects quality of life, our pocketbooks, and our environment.

But first I wish to join my colleague from New York in paying tribute to

one of the great transportation advocates, indeed one of the great public servants of our time, Senator Frank Lautenberg, who preceded me as chairman of a critical subcommittee on the commerce committee which has authority and jurisdiction over surface transportation.

I am tremendously honored to have followed him in that role, and my mission and ambition is to be as effective and eloquent and ardent as he was in this cause. It is a cause that brings us together as a nation, as my colleague from New York has so eloquently said. We are better when we come together as a nation and the railroads provide arteries carrying the lifeblood of our economy. Not only is the train used for commuters going to work and riders going to visit relatives and enjoying tourism, traveling, vacations, and other benefits of this great Nation, but it also transports the freight that is critical to carry goods and services.

We know the infrastructure is aging all across the country. We are, in effect, transporting goods and services, products and people, commuters and riders in the 21st century using 20th century equipment, tracks, and other infrastructure. We are talking, indeed, about the economic lifeblood of our Nation, which has linked us coast to coast, north to south, and east to west in ways that are not only economically material and tangible but also emotionally and psychologically vital to our present and our future.

These economic benefits will not continue. They are not an accident of history. They are the result of purposeful invention and investing, and we are challenged as a nation as to whether we will continue to invest to ensure that our railroads carry our freight and our people to places they must go if we are to have economic growth and jobs in this Nation. No one knows this fact better than those who live on the Northeast corridor. It is among the busiest. In fact, the Metro-North line is the busiest in the Nation. It has bridges and tracks that are more than 100 years old, and tragically we have seen the consequences of lack of proper maintenance, management, and inspection of our infrastructure.

My colleague from New York has been a relentless and tireless advocate for improving rail service along the Northeast corridor and most particularly in the area of our region of New York, Connecticut, and New Jersey.

The derailment in Bridgeport was a recent tragedy that resulted in the loss of lives and caused injuries as well as power outages which disrupted travel for as much as 13 days. These disruptions should lead to a new era of leadership at Metro-North, and hopefully it will.

Good management is the key to making this railroad work better than it has and making it safer and more reliable. Good management is vital, but money, along with management, is absolutely necessary. In fact, good man-

agement requires investing, and that is why we are here today—not to talk about money for the sake of dollars and cents but the investment it means in the track, the bridges, the cars, and other equipment vital to make this railroad safer and more reliable.

We know some of this investment is small in amount. The Senator from New York and I have championed the idea of cameras facing inward and outward. Compared to the overall costs of investments, that one is relatively new. Likewise, alerters placed in cabs that operate the railroad cost relatively little, but other expenditures are much more substantial, and one of the problems is that money has been going into the system—money taken from the riders and users in the New Jersey, Connecticut, and New York area along the Northeast corridor has gone to the system as a whole.

As I mentioned at the beginning, far from begrudging the national system this kind of investment, we support it, but we need our fair share, which is necessary to make the investment that is critical to bridges such as Saugatuck, the Connecticut River, and the Norwalk River. These bridges contain movable components. They are important for marine traffic as well as rail. They are frequently opened and closed. They experience more stress than normal, and the resulting corrosion requires trains to use reduced speed. Repair and eventual replacement of many of these bridges will be crucial for keeping train traffic safe and reliable not only along the Northeast corridor but also freight and riders traveling from New York, Connecticut, and New Jersey to other parts of the east coast and indeed across the country.

It is a national investment, not just a Northeast investment. It is an investment we must make as a whole or our infrastructure will crumble and continue to erode.

I am proud to join my colleagues to urge that Amtrak's full funding request for fiscal year 2015 be granted. This amount will allow the Northeast corridor's operating revenue to be reinvested back where it is needed most—the Northeast corridor—and will simultaneously provide much needed Federal support for rail networks in the rest of the country.

A fair share is what the Northeast corridor needs and deserves. A fair share is what we are advocating. As my colleagues have explained, the support we offer and advocate for this Northeast corridor is a benefit to the whole country, and it is consistent with national support for railway travel which eliminates congestion on roads, raises the quality of our air, makes for safer travel, and maybe equally, if not more importantly, creates jobs.

This investment will help create jobs and drive economic growth in the jobs it creates directly and the jobs it enables along the route of travel.

I thank my colleagues for joining me in this effort, and I know, in par-

ticular, that there is a bridge in New Jersey—a movable swing bridge along the Hackensack River between Kearny and Secaucus, NJ. I believe it is called the Portal Bridge. That Portal Bridge is a key linchpin in the Northeast corridor. Having a functional Portal Bridge is essential to me as a resident of Connecticut. When I go from Washington to New York and then to Connecticut, we are one country. We are united by that railroad, and that Portal Bridge is a key linchpin in the Northeast corridor. It is as important to me as it is to my colleague from New Jersey who has been—similar to Senator Lautenberg—a tireless advocate for rail transportation, and he has done model work on improving rail transportation in this country.

I am happy to yield for the senior Senator from New Jersey, Mr. MENENDEZ.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HEINRICH). The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I thank my distinguished colleague from Connecticut for his engagement and for recognizing our former colleague, Senator Lautenberg, whose passion for public transportation was unmatched in this body. He understood the nexus of why it was important not just to our State of New Jersey and the Northeast but to the country.

My colleague from Connecticut is correct, that Portal Bridge—it is called the Portal Bridge because it is a bridge that is a portal to the entire Northeast corridor and carries passengers over a movable swing bridge across the Hackensack River between Kearny and Secaucus, NJ. It is a portal into and out of Manhattan. It is one of the busiest sections of the corridor with hundreds of passengers and commuter trains crossing it every day.

You would think that given its importance to the Northeast and the millions who live in that region, it would be a state-of-the-art, reliable, world-class bridge that we would be willing to invest in, making it the best possible bridge. Unfortunately, the reality is quite different.

The Portal Bridge was built in 1910. It is over 100 years old and deteriorating—causing significant delays for Amtrak riders in New Jersey and throughout the system. Because of the low clearance over the Hackensack River, the bridge opens to allow ships to pass, thereby creating delays for rail passengers and then more delays come when the bridge doesn't lock into place because it is too old and doesn't work properly.

We have delay after delay all because we are unwilling to invest in our infrastructure, and that is simply unacceptable. When the bridge doesn't close, trains throughout the Northeast corridor are delayed while Amtrak workers scramble to fix it. Further adding to the problems are speed restrictions that have been in place on the bridge since 1996. These restrictions have been

essential to allow trains to cross safely, hardly a comforting thought for riders traveling on the corridor.

The Northeast corridor is the Nation's busiest rail line and serves 700,000 people every day. The line supports eight commuter railroads every day, carrying over 200,000 New Jersey transit passengers. So failure to invest in a modern, state-of-the-art system does a disservice to all of us—certainly to the commuters. It is an economic hindrance in a region that supports 20 percent of the entire Nation's GDP.

There are other reasons to consider the importance of these investments and one is our economy and jobs. These intercity rail systems ultimately create an opportunity for people to get to employment and to reach out to find employment and find better employment.

It is also about companies that send their sales force up and down the Northeast corridor in a thorough and effective and efficient way. It is about those who might visit one of the great health institutions along the Northeast corridor for a health challenge they face. It is about tourism from anywhere—from the sights of New York or New Jersey or along the entire route, crossroads of the revolution, all the way to the Nation's Capital of Washington, DC. It is about visiting a loved one and having a way to do it that allows them to be able to afford to do so.

In the aftermath of September 11, we learned that a multiplicity of transportation modes was critical to security questions because on that fateful day when every trans-Hudson crossing closed down—the bridges closed down, the tunnels closed down, the ability to do intercity rail closed down—the one element that was open was a different form of transportation, and that was ferries. Imagine, in a different context, if you don't have intercity rail to move people away from a location in which there was a September 11-like event that, in fact, the consequences that would flow.

We learned after September 11 that transportation is more than about getting from one place to another, more than about sending a sales force, more than even about the quality of life and the environment by having more people on an efficient system, it is also another dimension of security in a post-September 11 world. We must do better.

As far as the Amtrak budget proposal, I am pleased that Amtrak's fiscal year 2015 budget request takes a step in the right direction to improve its record of good repair and reliability in the Northeast corridor. In spite of the challenges of aging infrastructure, Amtrak in the Northeast corridor is a profitable rail line, generating over \$300 million each year. Yet, under the current structure, Amtrak has been unable to invest those profits back into essential projects such as the Portal Bridge, which is ultimately the portal by which all of Amtrak's rail lines to the Northeast have to go through.

These profits have instead been used elsewhere on Amtrak's system, subsidized long-distance services that were traditionally a core Federal responsibility.

For too long Congress has failed to meet its responsibility on these routes, relying on the riders of the Northeast corridor to subsidize other parts of the rail network. Riders on the Northeast corridor deserve to have profits generated along the line reinvested—not used as a substitute for insufficient Federal investment. Amtrak's new proposal will allow it to keep revenue generated by the corridor in the corridor—a commonsense solution and a successful business model for the Northeast.

At the same time, Amtrak proposes full funding for lines outside of the Northeast corridor, making this a win-win proposal for America's rail system.

Finally, making these investments now will help us prevent large-scale failures that could cripple our region in the future. Unfortunately, we in New Jersey know all too well the consequences of a significant transportation failure. When Hurricane Sandy crashed ashore in October of 2012, our transportation systems were inundated with water and severely damaged. We saw firsthand what happens when the transit and rail networks we often take for granted are rendered unusable. Residents were stranded—cut off from their loved ones and their livelihoods. Sandy showed us just how much our region depends on its rail and transit networks.

As New Jersey and its networks work to rebuild, we must take every opportunity to strengthen our infrastructure and prevent future failures of our transportation system. Current Federal funding requirements leave the Northeast corridor vulnerable by preventing us from reinvesting in critical projects.

Amtrak's budget proposal is a straightforward solution, by keeping and allowing the Northeast to keep and reinvest its own profits. At the same time, the proposal would maintain funding for other rail lines to ensure a valuable, viable national network. The bottom line: This is a proposal whose time has clearly come.

So it is time that we as a Congress say enough is enough; 100-year-old infrastructure is simply unacceptable. It is time to make the investments that will support our economy and our quality of life and, I would add, our security. It is time to live up to our Federal commitments and fully fund our rail network.

I certainly wish to join my other colleagues in thanking our colleague from New York Senator SCHUMER for leading this important discussion about the future of Amtrak. I urge my colleagues to support this budget proposal, to fully fund Amtrak's operating and capital costs nationwide, and to take the long overdue step of allowing Northeast corridor profits to be reinvested into our critical infrastructure.

Now let me turn this over to my colleague Senator BOOKER who, until he came to the Senate, was the mayor of the State's largest city by which all of these different modes of transportation came together and through which the Northeast corridor has a major station. He saw, as it related to his own community, the realities of what the rail passenger system meant for consumers, what it meant for businesses, and what it meant for our security.

I yield the floor for the distinguished Senator from New Jersey.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The junior Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. BOOKER. Mr. President, Senator MENENDEZ is absolutely correct. When I was mayor of New Jersey's largest city, we sat upon a critical transportation superstructure—a key node in the larger region. I wish to thank my senior Senator, whom I relied upon then for being the champion he is for infrastructure investment, for the critical nature of the rail lines that crisscross our region, and really being a promoter of jobs, of business growth, of security, and of the health of this critical system. It is very good to have my senior Senator make such important remarks. I wish to pick up from there. It is a little uncomfortable not having the Presiding Officer on the floor with me, but I will continue nonetheless.

I wish to thank all of my colleagues who have already spoken from neighboring States about this absolutely vital transportation corridor. If this were a country of its own, this corridor, from Washington to Boston—this area—we would be the fifth largest economy in the world. This region continues to grow, with more than 12 million residents projected by 2040.

In New Jersey, our tracks and tunnels are simply no longer able to meet the growing demand of our Amtrak and commuter rail lines. New Jersey commuters—passengers up and down the Northeast corridor—are profoundly frustrated by overcrowded trains and by delay after delay after delay. It inhibits their transportation. It inhibits their productivity. It inhibits their ability to be successful because of those delays. Our underfunded passenger rail network forces too many of our residents to then drive, where they end up stuck in traffic, contributing more greatly to smog and pollution, and really making it even more dangerous for them on our already overly congested highways.

Amtrak needs the ability to reinvest the growing profit from the Northeast corridor back into the critical Northeast corridor infrastructure. This much needed budget request would allow Amtrak to invest \$300 million of their profits back into this region and would allow Amtrak to make overdue updates and repairs. This would create jobs at this incredibly important time in our economic present. It would create jobs and allow our busy commuter lines to travel more safely and more reliably.

We need this economic growth. We need to alleviate the problems with

this infrastructure. We need to make the daily lives of tens of thousands of people better.

One of the most important steps we can take to alleviate this congestion and delays in New Jersey and throughout this region is to make this investment. But I also say another critical aspect of making those investments is to make a strategic investment in the Gateway project. Amtrak's 2015 budget request seeks to continue investing in needed preliminary work on the Gateway project. The Gateway project is Amtrak's most important initiative—a project that is going to generate benefits throughout the Northeast region that will have a multiplier effect throughout our economy, enabling growth, enabling job creation, improving the quality of life, and helping one of the most prosperous regions on the globe continue to grow.

Currently, there are just two tunnels connecting New Jersey to New York via rail. These tunnels are currently operating at full capacity, with roughly 24 trains at peak hours carrying over 70,000 riders daily, with no space for additional riders during rush hour. In order to execute repairs and safety checks on these 100-year-old tunnels, Amtrak is required to shut down the entire tunnel and suspend half the trips in and out of the city. This causes so much of a burden. This is an unnecessary burden. This is a threat to the safety of thousands of New Jersey Transit and Amtrak passengers.

Ridership demand in and out of Manhattan is actually predicted to double in the coming decades—double. It is critical for the economic health of our region to accommodate this increase and ensure that urgently needed growth and the safety and security of so many Americans. The Gateway project itself would build two new rail tunnels from New Jersey to New York City and expand Penn Station in New York to handle all of this additional capacity. This project alone would create thousands and thousands of jobs. It would reduce commuter times and make traveling by rail more flexible and, very importantly to resident after resident who has reached out to me, it would make it more reliable. This critical investment will drive economic growth throughout that entire region.

Upon completion, the Gateway project would allow Amtrak to run 8 more trains during peak hours and allow New Jersey Transit to run 13 more trains. This is a significant capacity increase that would take thousands of cars off the roads every single day. It would increase revenue for Amtrak and New Jersey Transit. It would allow intercity and commuting passengers shorter and easier trips up and down the Northeast and in and out of Manhattan, and it would improve significantly the air quality of our region, alleviating the respiratory challenges so many people unnecessarily face because of commuter car pollution.

In short, all of these reasons point to something critical: It would make it

easier for our region to be prosperous, for businesses to grow, and American opportunity to increase. It is essential that Congress join with Amtrak in advancing this important regional project and support Amtrak's overall mission to deliver reliable, efficient passenger rail service across the United States. For Amtrak to be successful in the long term, Congress needs to become a more reliable investment partner and fund multiyear Amtrak budgets, to have predictability in that funding, making it again multiyear. Our current approach of lurching from annual budget to annual budget does not allow for Amtrak to flourish and serve our citizens as it could and as it should. We need a level of predictability to make these kinds of investments. Support for the Amtrak fiscal year 2015 budget request would be a step in the right direction.

I urge my colleagues to appreciate this critical understanding that we are a people who thrive through connectivity, whether it is virtual connectivity on the Internet or even human connectivity; that we need to, in environments such as this, one to another, work together. Indeed, it is the words of Martin Luther King, written in a jail cell in Birmingham, AL, in 1963, in the spring of that year, almost 50 years ago—he wrote in profound manner, and I paraphrase it: We are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a common garment of destiny. It was an elevation and understanding of the power of human connection, that we share one destiny, and that when we exalt our connections, prosperity grows, equality grows, opportunity grows. What King talked about in a spiritual way lives also in the physical: Country, from its transcontinental railroads, a country that united itself in early innovations and AM/FM dials; all the ways we as a nation have made more robust connectivity. It has spurred industry, it has spawned industry, and it has made jobs multiply and multiply—economic growth connecting American to American. Right now, in this critical time, we must continue.

I hope my colleagues will join me in making sure we support the Amtrak budget. I know from personal experience the challenges and the trials and the dangers from the status quo. It is time for us to advance. It is time for us to come to together, to invest in America, to expand opportunity, and make real, in a physical way, those deepening connections we have, one to another.

Thank you, Mr. President. I yield the floor and I note the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

WORLD AUTISM AWARENESS DAY

Mr. REID. Mr. President, one of the privileges of addressing the Senate each morning is the opportunity to call attention to what I believe and what I think the country believes are noble causes. I certainly hope so.

Today is World Autism Awareness Day. To the Americans who have autism and the millions of family and friends affected by this condition, one day is simply not enough to focus on this misunderstood illness, but it helps—and we certainly hope it does.

Autism is a general term for a group of complex disorders of brain development affecting social interaction, communication, and behavior. According to a recent study by the Centers for Disease Control—in fact, the report came out this week—1 in 68 children is diagnosed with having some form of autism in our country. As more and more children are identified as being autistic, it is important we in Congress do all we can to provide them, their families, and their caretakers, the help that is so vitally necessary.

Under the Affordable Care Act, autism screenings and other preventive services are available at no cost to families. For those diagnosed with autism, the days of being denied health insurance due to their preexisting condition ended with the passage and implementation of the Affordable Care Act.

Today, because of the Affordable Care Act, adult children with autism may stay on their parents' policies through age 26, providing them with the stability and additional treatment they need.

With benefits such as these, it is no wonder that more than 7 million people have sought health coverage under the Affordable Care Act. This doesn't count the estimated 800,000 to 900,000 people on 14 State exchanges. But in addition, everyone who tried to sign up during the last many months and were unable to get through, for whatever reason, are also now going to be signing up, which will add hundreds of thousands of more people.

So the numbers are pretty clear. The estimate given by the White House many months ago, which my Republican colleagues made fun of, has now been exceeded. So maybe they will quiet down and stop talking about repealing this bill that affects millions and millions of people favorably.

While the health care law is helping autistic Americans who have been diagnosed and their families, researchers at the National Institutes of Health are