

Former Governor Pawlenty, who was considered by many people in the last election cycle to be the right person for the Republicans to nominate for President, came out today strongly and said words to the effect of: I am not afraid of the Koch brothers. I believe the minimum wage should be increased.

My Republican colleagues should listen to this respected Republican leader.

To add to the Republicans' theater of the absurd, the House of Representatives Budget Committee is holding a hearing today on poverty in America. How about that.

The Presiding Officer will recall that committee chairman PAUL RYAN ran for Vice President. He was part of the ticket that labeled 47 percent of Americans as moochers and not deserving the Republicans' attention—moochers. Representative PAUL RYAN himself has even called struggling Americans "takers." Taking into account his well-documented disdain for hard-working Americans trying to help their families, I am anxious to learn how Representative RYAN plans to eradicate poverty since he considers them takers and moochers. Maybe he will need to check with the Koch brothers first, as it seems he did with his recent budget proposal.

While House Republicans hold hearings and Senate Republicans do nothing, Senate Democrats are doing something. We continue to propose meaningful legislation, such as this minimum-wage bill, that gives American families a fair shot at prosperity. The Republicans filibustered extended unemployment benefits. They filibustered giving women the right to make the same amount of money as men. Why should my daughter get 77 cents when a man doing the same job she does gets \$1? It is unfair, but they filibustered that. We are going to continue to propose meaningful legislation.

Senate Republicans assert that increasing the minimum wage will not help working families. That assertion is not only wrong, it makes no sense. It is illogical. Twenty-eight million Americans stand to benefit from an increase in the minimum wage. I repeat: About 10 percent of all Americans stand to gain from the legislation before this body. We are going to vote to see if we can begin debate at noon today.

Republicans assert that boosting the minimum wage would hurt businesses and slow down our economic recovery. Almost 75 percent of small businesses support raising the minimum wage. Why? It creates more business for them. It is good for the economy. The assertion that boosting the minimum wage would hurt businesses, again, is wrong and it is illogical.

Researchers at the Chicago Federal Reserve Bank have found consumer spending increases—yes, increases—dramatically following a minimum-wage hike and businesses reap the benefits of a minimum-wage increase.

That is what these experts said. This minimum-wage legislation is good for American workers, businesses, and the economy, but Republicans refuse to even allow us to debate the issue. Instead, they have signaled their intention to filibuster the minimum-wage legislation just as they have filibustered virtually everything the President suggested during the past 5 years.

When it comes to helping working-class families, the Republicans in Washington are echoing what the Republican leader declared last week in Kentucky: It is not my job to create jobs.

Well, it is his job. It is the Republicans' job, it is my job, and it is the job of every Member of Congress to do everything we can to help create jobs. That is why in addition to raising the minimum wage, which will create jobs, we believe there should be something done about the infrastructure deficit we have in this country which would help create tens of thousands of jobs. It is so badly needed.

Today we have an opportunity to help our hard-working constituents from sea to shining sea and show them that we are attentive to their needs.

I urge my Republican colleagues to join us and Governor Pawlenty and give American workers a fair shot at the American dream by ensuring they are paid a livable wage. At the end of the day our job is to give every American a fair shot to provide for themselves and their families—no welfare, just a job.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

Will the Chair announce the business of the day.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 10:30 a.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with the time equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees, with the Republicans controlling the first half.

Mr. REID. I note the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader is recognized.

THE MINIMUM WAGE

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I would like to start this morning by reading an excerpt from a 1998 memo from Gene Sperling to President Clinton. It relates to a minimum-wage proposal similar to the one we are considering today. Here is what he wrote:

Your entire economic team believes that this approach is too aggressive and are concerned that . . . [it] could prove damaging to employment prospects of low-skilled workers, as well as to the general macroeconomic performance of the economy.

But the memo noted there was a plus side to supporting that proposal. "[It] would unify [the] liberal wing of the Democratic party."

Today feels like déjà vu all over again because even though our constituents keep telling us they expect Washington to focus on jobs, that is clearly not what they are getting from the Senate. Instead, Senate Democrats are pushing legislation today that would cost as many as 1 million jobs in this country—legislation that the left flank of their party demands. That is their response to the pleas of our constituents to do something about jobs—a proposal that nonpartisan analysts tell us could cost jobs.

But then again, these are the same Washington Democrats who have been at the helm of our economy for 5½ years, the same ones who have been bragging about a recovery for the past 4.

We learned this morning the economy grew by just 0.1 percent—0.1 percent. So I can assure you that if this is the Democrats' idea of a recovery, the people in my State at least are not terribly impressed. They are ready for new ideas. They are ready to turn the page from the liberal playbook that just has not worked.

It is clearer every day that the DC liberal establishment is completely out of ideas. They do not even pretend to be serious about jobs anymore. The clearest proof of that is today's vote—on a bill that could cost about 17,000 jobs in Kentucky alone, and potentially as many as a million nationwide.

But Senate Democrats do not seem to care. They do not seem to care that about 6 in 10 Americans oppose a bill like this if—if it means losing hundreds of thousands of American jobs. Washington Democrats' true focus these days seems to be making the far left happy—not helping the middle class.

They seem to think they can coast on talking points and stale ideas and that the American people have not been paying attention to their recent dismal record at actually helping the people they claim to care about.

They seem to think people will not notice that time and time and time again they have ended up making things harder for the people they claim they want to help.

But the American people see through that game. It is crystal clear from new polling that we have seen this week.

People realize the Washington liberal establishment is just out of energy and out of ideas. If they did not realize it before this year, they got confirmation of it when Senate Democrats effectively admitted that their so-called agenda for the rest of the year was drafted by campaign staffers.

In short, Washington Democrats are just not serious about helping the middle class. That helps explain why they would even consider legislation that we all know could cost up to a million jobs at a time when Americans need those jobs more than ever.

It helps explain why satisfying their leftwing patrons has become a more urgent priority than helping to create the kind of well-paying middle-class jobs our country needs.

I think our constituents deserve a lot better than what they have been getting this year from Democrats who control the Senate. They are already struggling under the weight of Washington Democrats' last ideological adventure—ObamaCare.

Washington Democrats promised the Sun and the Moon to sell that law, and then just rammed it through anyway when Americans refused to buy what they were selling.

Washington Democrats told us ObamaCare would lower costs, but polls show that nearly twice as many people believe the government is adding secret mind-control technology to our TVs as believe the law is actually decreasing health care costs.

Washington Democrats promised Americans that they could keep their plans if they liked them too. As we know, that turned out to be the "Lie of the Year."

Washington Democrats downplayed ObamaCare's negative impact on jobs, just as they are doing with this legislation we will consider later today.

Yet the government's own non-partisan analysis shows that ObamaCare will effectively drive 2.5 million people out of the American workforce. We are already seeing the effects in Kentucky, where hospitals are laying off workers and cutting salaries because of the impact of this law.

One of the largest health care systems in the State recently let go nearly 500 employees, and its CEO stated that ObamaCare was a factor in that decision. The head of another community hospital in Glasgow, KY, also said that ObamaCare was a factor in his hospital's recent decision to reduce salaries and cut as many as 49 employees.

It is happening at other businesses too.

As a result of ObamaCare, a company in Kentucky with 8,000 employees was forced to cut part-time workers' hours to below 30 hours a week. That was a difficult decision—one that particular company, like so many others, never wanted to make because of the impact it will have on its own employees, but one that it felt was necessary to comply with ObamaCare.

I recently read a story about Paul Deskins, who runs an auto dealership

in Pikeville with about 50 employees. Paul says that ObamaCare might force him to reduce his workforce or sell his body shop altogether. "We were hoping that Obama thing would go away," he said. Millions of Americans feel the same way.

Washington Democrats promised this law would help the little guy, but it ended up hurting many of the people it purported to help.

We are seeing the same thing with the legislation before us today. Six in 10 Americans do not want a policy like this if—if it costs jobs. No matter how Senate Democrats try to spin their support for this bill, the bottom line is this: It could cost up to 1 million American jobs—17,000 of those jobs in the Commonwealth of Kentucky. That is really the opposite of what Americans expect us to do on jobs.

So it is time for Washington Democrats to drop the tired ideological approach that has failed so miserably the last 5½ years. It is time for them to work with Republicans to boost job creation and start helping the middle class. That has been Republicans' focus all along, and it is about time Washington Democrats joined us in working for the middle class too.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Tennessee.

Mr. CORKER. Mr. President, I rise today out of a genuine concern that the foreign policy that our administration is conducting is creating danger for the U.S. citizenry and creating danger throughout the world. Let me speak a little bit about that.

I think all of us have seen what happened in Syria when the administration had an opportunity on the front end of a conflict to put its thumb on the scale to change the dynamic of what was happening inside the country and stated that it would do so. It did not.

This weekend I was at a security conference and people on both sides of the aisle expressed dismay at the way the administration had conducted its operations—or actually had not conducted it operations in Syria, and yet had stated so many times what it was going to do.

Today we find ourselves in a situation where I am absolutely certain that one of the policies we will end up carrying out in Syria will be a counterterrorism policy because of our concern about the fact that because we did not act when we could—not with American boots on the ground; that is not what anybody has proposed—but when the administration could have done something to prevent the disaster that has occurred there, to prevent 60,000 more Syrians from being killed indiscriminately—in many cases by helicopters from the administration dropping barrel bombs on innocent civilians there—when the administration could have acted to keep those types of atrocities from occurring, to keep Al Qaeda and other extremists from coming into the

country—when it said it was going to act and did not, when it could have done that—now we are going to find ourselves, very quickly, in a situation, in my opinion, where we realize this is a threat to our homeland, and we are going to be engaged in counterterrorism activities.

I say that as a predicate to the issue I am going to discuss, which is Ukraine.

So many Members of our body have recently been to Ukraine. As a matter of fact, I count 12 Members—Members on both sides of the aisle—who have spent time visiting Ukraine and going to Maidan and seeing what the people there did. They rose up to hope for a free world, to hope for human rights, to hope for democracy, and to rid the country of corruption.

Today, we have a prime minister who is young, who is taking on the issues of the day, and doing everything he can to usher this country into a new era—a country that is destined to join the West on its current path.

At the same time, we see a country whose greatest threat to that occurring is Russia—a country that, as we know, illegally went into Crimea and annexed it, a country that today has 40,000 troops on the border, a country that has black ops operators inside eastern Ukraine, the industrial part of Ukraine that it hopes over time will, in a sense, become a part of what they are doing in Russia.

We see every day the destabilization occurring. We know the most important next step in Ukraine is for them to go to this May 25 election and have an election that the world community believes was a valid election. Yet we know that daily Putin and Russia do everything they can to destabilize Ukraine and to delegitimize this process of elections and moving forward.

So a number of us, out of grave concern for what is happening—out of concern about where this is going to lead America, where this is going to lead Europe—have come together to write a piece of legislation because what we have seen from the administration is a lot of rhetoric. Unfortunately, what we see is an administration that cannot help itself but to try to be in every 24-hour news circle, talking about what it is going to do, but then when it actually comes to the time of actually doing it, that is not what has occurred.

This week I was very disappointed when the administration unveiled its next round of sanctions. We had all hoped the administration would put in place sectoral sanctions, sanctions that would have an impact on the Russian economy, so that Putin and all those around him who are carrying out these activities would understand they would pay a price for what they are doing illegally in this part of the world, which, by the way, goes against the agreements we all came to around the Budapest Memorandum, where we said we would honor the sovereignty of this country.

For that reason, a number of us have come together to write a piece of legislation. It is legislation that is intended to try to drive an outcome. It is a piece of legislation that moves away from the way the administration has been dealing with this, where they are always a day late and a dollar short. They are always responding to what Russia does. They are always doing something that, in essence, deals with the situation after something bad has already occurred. This legislation is designed to, again, drive an outcome, to show the administration there is a strategic way to deal with this issue.

Let me tell you what this does not do. I was very disappointed to pick up the Wall Street Journal this morning and read on the front page that those of us who are concerned—which, by the way, is strongly bipartisan, strongly bipartisan in this Senate: concern about what is happening in Ukraine and concern about the fact that the administration has not done those things with economic sanctions in a stronger way to cause Russia to pay a price for what it is doing—but I was very disappointed to pick up the paper and read where the President said those people who want to see military action by the United States in Ukraine—that is not what this bill does. As a matter of fact, what the bill does is it lays out a strategy to try to keep that from happening, which I think numbers of us on both sides of the aisle are concerned that under the current policy of saying what we are going to do and not doing it, of basically continuing to allow Russia to do what it is doing inside eastern Ukraine, that this is actually the very policy that could lead to significant problems down the road. We all understand these are how major conflicts unfold, and we all understand we are talking about two countries that are armed with nuclear weapons.

So today at noon a number of us will gather around and introduce a piece of legislation that does three things.

No. 1, it strengthens NATO. I think everyone would agree that the commitment of NATO to its allies, our commitment to NATO, our partners' commitment to NATO, has waned over the last period of time.

By the way, this is not something that has just occurred under this administration. It has been going on for some time. We have only three countries, as a matter of fact—three countries—within the NATO alliance that are actually honoring their commitments relative to the support of NATO.

So the first piece of this is to strengthen NATO. It is to expedite, by the way, this administration's own plan relative to missile defense—the plan they have laid out. It does not change that technology.

The second piece of this legislation is intended to deter Russia from what it is doing.

If my colleagues remember, the Geneva accords said Putin would move the Russian troops who are intimi-

dating people inside Eastern Ukraine away from the border. But I think what we have seen now is that "red line" has changed. Now what the administration is focused on is them actually not going inside the country, but all of us understand that Russia is actually accomplishing what it wishes to accomplish inside Ukraine without even sending troops in because they are able to do it again with black ops.

So this piece of legislation that my friend from Wyoming and so many others were involved in developing lays down clear sanctions first—beginning today, or after passage, beginning with sanctions—sanctions that hit several important entities in the banking sector and in the energy sector, so we actually do something that affects the Russian economy until such time that they pull those troops away from the border and they remove those black ops operators inside the country who are fomenting the problems.

Secondly, in the event Russia does actually cross the border with military troops, this bill again imposes much deeper sanctions on Russia and certainly signifies to them what kind of price they would pay.

Again, earlier this week when the administration put forth its sanctions, it was a marvel to see that the stock market in Russia, several days in a row, continued to go up. It had no affect on Russia, none. Editorial writers and people on both sides of the aisle understand this was nothing more than a slap on the wrist. Putin understands that. Russia understands that. They understand that we as a nation so far have not signified that we are willing to use these economic sanctions in a way—through the President's own Executive order, I might add—to change behavior. So we are very concerned about the direction this is taking.

The third thing this bill will do is harden our non-NATO allies. I think my colleagues know that in the country of Moldavia, from where I just recently returned—and Senator BARRASSO on another trip just recently returned as well—and in Georgia and in Ukraine, there are a number of things we need to do as a nation to help them harden their country and this bill lays objective things out. Let me give one example. In the Russian-speaking area of Eastern Ukraine, the only information the people who are Russian-speaking in that part of the world are receiving is coming from Russia. It is propaganda about actions the United States is taking, which we aren't, and the great lives they will have if Russia is able to annex that part of the world. So at a minimum we need to make sure the information those people are receiving is very different. There are so many actions that we as a nation can be taking to ensure that Ukraine is not destabilized, that Moldavia is not destabilized, that Georgia is not destabilized.

Let me say this in closing because I see my friend is ready to speak on an-

other topic. This bill we are introducing today is a serious piece of legislation. As a matter of fact, I am gratified by the work so many Members have put into making this legislation as it is. It is strategic. It is serious. It tries to accomplish a good outcome. I hope the introduction of this legislation will cause the administration to step away from the microphones and the cameras and to step away from the empty rhetoric that has been shared all across this world, to step back and say wouldn't it be good if we laid out a strategic approach to Europe.

It is time we realized Russia is destabilizing Europe, and that affects our citizens. Our citizens are 4½ percent of the world in population. We benefit from 22 percent of the world's gross domestic product. So the fact of the world being secure is not only important to us because of human rights and democracy and freedom, but it is important to the very livelihoods of the people of our country.

So I thank those involved. I look forward to discussing this more fully at noon today when we unveil this. Again, I hope the White House and those involved in setting foreign policy will step back, they will sit down, and they will begin to do take actions that strengthen NATO more fully. I hope they will take those actions that will certainly cause Russia to understand exactly what will happen if they continue on the path they are on, as well as strengthen our non-NATO allies which, because of the policies we have not put in place, are continually being destabilized.

Mr. CORKER. I yield the floor and I thank the Chair for the time.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Wyoming.

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, first, I commend my friend and colleague from Tennessee for his leadership on foreign affairs and his efforts in these areas. I fully support all of his efforts to bring forth a united position on behalf of our country.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I come to the floor because the American people have just received more horrible news about our economy.

The Commerce Department reported this morning that our economy grew at the smallest rate in 3 years. The exact number is 0.1 percent—much worse than expected. To be specific, investment in business equipment declined, residential home construction declined, U.S. exports fell sharply, and companies increased inventories at a much slower rate.

I wish to read what some of the economists have said about this. Dan North, a chief economist, said:

We've been living in sub-3 percent land, and people have gotten used to that as the new normal. But it's not. It's anemic.

To make matters worse, the Financial Times this morning is reporting