what they can do to help them when they get sick. So 97 percent of our children can now see a doctor, and that is the highest level ever, and we should be proud of that. That is a good thing.

Yet, unless Congress acts soon, MIChild will begin running out of funding as early as January, which is not very far away. Happy New Year. Lose your health insurance.

January will also be a bad month for Michigan's community health centers. Nearly 20,000 people will lose access to healthcare. Some 20,000 people in Michigan who now are able to go to a community health center would see that access to healthcare go away, with thousands more dropped each month.

Last year, Michigan's community health centers treated more than 680,000 patients—680,000 people—including 12,710 of our veterans. They diagnosed coronary artery disease in more than 21,000 people. Nearly 34,000 Michigan residents were diagnosed with asthma and began to get help. Nearly 140,000 people were diagnosed with diabetes and could get help. All of those health conditions can be managed—we know that—if you have access to a doctor, to nurses, and to medications. You can manage those kinds of chronic diseases. However, they can be deadly if they are undiagnosed and untreated.

Just ask William. He didn't have a regular doctor after moving to Jackson, MI, from Chicago, but one morning he knew he needed one. He woke up feeling light-headed. So he went to the Center for Family Health, a great facility. They discovered that William's blood pressure was high—so high, in fact, that he was in danger of having a heart attack or a stroke. It took about a year for William's doctors to find the right combination of medications to control his blood pressure, but they were able to do that. He has been getting his care at the Center for Family Health ever since. They literally saved his life.

Emily from Rochester Hills has her own story about the Children's Health Insurance Program. Emily's dad was laid off from two separate jobs within 3 years at a time when her mom was working a part-time job that didn't provide insurance. That is a very common story for a lot of hard-working folks in Michigan as well as across the country. Thankfully, Emily and her brothers and sisters had health insurance through MIChild. It covered their scoliosis, asthma, a seizure disorder, and typical children's health insurance issues like bronchitis and broken bones. Emily's words are:

> The Children's Health Insurance Program was a lifesaver for my siblings and me. . . . I can't imagine the stress that my parents dealt with during that time and how we would have survived so well without the program.

Emily and William know CHIP and community health centers make lifesaving differences for people in Michigan as well as across the country.

We are 60 days late, but there is no time like the present to get this done. We are 60 days late, but we don't have to make it 61. Our children and our families should be put at the top of the list for action, not at the bottom. It is time to make things right for the 9 million children who rely on the Children's Health Insurance Program and the 25 million people who use community health centers.

We shouldn't let one more day go by without acting. We can do this now. There is bipartisan support to get this done, and our children and our families deserve to have this done as quickly as possible.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota.

TAX REFORM

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I know I don't need to tell anybody that American families have had a tough time in recent years. Weak economic growth, stagnant wages, and a lack of opportunities have left many Americans struggling just to get by.

To put a fine point on that, during the entire years of the Obama Presidency, there wasn't a single year wherein the growth rate and the economy exceeded 3 percent. If we go back to the end of World War II, average economic growth in this country has averaged somewhere in the 3 to 3.5 percent range. So in the entire 8 years of the Obama Presidency, there was not a single year—not one year—where economic growth exceeded 3 percent.

What did that mean for American workers? It meant that their wages stayed flat. In many cases, up until just recently, American families haven't had a pay raise for the better part of a decade as a result. It has been a sluggish, anemic, slow-growth economy that wasn't creating the kind of good-paying jobs or the wage levels that enabled American families to benefit from increasing incomes.

A recent survey found that 50 percent of Americans consider themselves to be living paycheck to paycheck. That makes perfect sense if we look at the economic statistics, economic record of the past 8 years. About one-third of those same Americans say they are just $400 away from a financial crisis.

Real help is on the way. This week, we will bring the Senate version of comprehensive tax reform to the Senate floor. The legislation we have produced will provide immediate, direct relief to hard-working Americans, but that is not what we are hearing from Democrats. Here is what we are hearing Democrats say about the Senate plan—and I will just contrast that with the facts, what is really true. Here is what we have heard: The Republicans have somehow drafted this secret tax plan behind closed doors and are forcing it through the voting process much too fast.

No doubt we have heard this as well: The Senate tax bill raises taxes on lower and middle-income, middle-class Americans while cutting taxes for the rich.

Here is an interesting attack that is coming from my colleagues on the other side as well who have, in the past, not been considered budget hawks: The Senate tax bill somehow is a budget buster that irresponsibly increases the deficit.

First off, let me address that question. The answer to the deficit question is that this is a $5.5 trillion tax cut. Seventy percent of the tax cut is paid for by ending loopholes and special exemptions in the Tax Code today—what we call base broadeners—broadening the base by doing away with some of the preferences that exist in the code today.

The Joint Committee on Taxation says that with a static score, we will have about a $1.4 trillion delta to cover. Assuming that we use current tax policy—and we normally do extend current tax policy—we believe the remaining cost of the tax cut will be covered through increased economic growth.

What does that mean? What kind of growth do we have to achieve in the economy in order to have the kind of growth that would enable this tax relief above and beyond what we have done in terms of base broadeners and pay-fors to be covered?

Just to put it in perspective, the Congressional Budget Office is assuming and forecasting 1.8 percent growth over the next 10 years. Again, as I mentioned earlier, we didn't have good growth over the last 8 years in the Obama administration. We were averaging 1.5 to 2 percent growth. The Congressional Budget Office is forecasting currently 1.8 percent growth for the next 10 years.

Well, I can't believe that growth rate would be acceptable to people in this country—the greatest economy on the face of the Earth growing at less than 2 percent a year. That cannot be the new normal. We have to do better than that.

If we get just 2.2 to 2.4 percent growth with this bill, we will have covered the remaining cost of the tax cut. The amount I pointed out earlier is not covered in terms of base broadeners and pay-fors and offsets, but it assumes a certain reasonable amount of growth—just the growth necessary to cover the cost of that tax cut—which is 2.2 to 2.4 percent. Again, to put it in perspective, going back to the end of World War II, the economy in this country has averaged 3 to 3.5 percent growth. It is only in the last decade, where we have had heavy taxes and heavy regulations and policies that have created conditions that are not favorable for that kind of growth, where we have gotten stuck with this malaise of 1.5 to 2 percent. So if we can just get 2.2 to 2.4 percent growth in the economy, we will cover the remaining cost of this tax cut.

In reality, when my colleagues on the other side of the aisle say that this is going to add to the deficit, they are saying our country cannot grow at 2.2 to 2.4 percent a year over the next 10 years. They have gotten used to the low, slow, sluggish, anemic growth and have accepted that as the new normal.

I don't accept that as the new normal, and the American people shouldn't accept that as the new normal because we are selling our country—the greatest economy in the world—woefully short when we find it satisfactory that the economy can grow at less than 2 percent. As I said, since World War II, we have averaged over 3 percent growth.

After such a long period of stagnant growth, I understand how my colleagues on the other side of the aisle are resigned to accept this as the new normal, but I think I can speak for all of our Republican colleagues here when I say we can do much better than we did during the Obama years. We can and we will grow at a faster rate on account of this tax reform bill. Why? Because when you reduce taxes, you allow people to keep more of what they have earned. Instead of growing the government in Washington, DC, you start growing the economy. When you reduce taxes on businesses, those businesses invest. They expand their operations. When they expand their operations, it means they have to hire new people. The demand for labor raises the price of labor. Wages go up. Paychecks get bigger. That is what happens.

It also means the government generates more revenue. When the economy is growing at a faster rate, people are working, paying taxes; people who have invested are taking their realizations, and that raises tax revenues in this country.

We can and will grow at a faster rate if we can put the right economic policies in place, starting with this tax reform bill. We can create those new, good-paying jobs, keep existing jobs from moving overseas, and we can see wages in this country go up and finally give Americans a much needed break in their paychecks. We can get the economy growing again and generate enough revenue to cover the remaining 30 percent cost of this tax reform bill.

This bill has been put together after many years of hearings and work. Democrats argue that this was somehow cooked up in a short amount of time. I joined the Senate Finance Committee in 2011. Since I have been on the committee, we have had 70-plus hearings on tax reform. Two years ago, in 2015, the chairman of that committee, Senator HATCH, created a number of working groups to examine various aspects of the Tax Code. I had the privilege of chairing one of those groups along with Senator CARDIN, a Democrat on the other side of the aisle. We looked at and examined the business part of the Tax Code to try and determine what sorts of recommendations we could make that would get the economy growing at a faster rate and generate better paying jobs. There were five groups like that, all of which made recommendations, much of which formed the basis for the tax bill we are considering today.

We have been working on this for years to get to where we are today. It has involved a lot of thought, a lot of analysis, a lot of work has gone into the legislation that we will be voting on later this week.

We made a focus of this tax reform legislation delivering meaningful tax relief to middle-income families who we believe know better how to spend their money than the Federal Government here in Washington, DC. If we can make American families' paychecks bigger, they can decide what they want to do to help themselves and their families, such as save for college education, perhaps save for a more secure retirement, or take care of the daily needs they have in their lives. The fundamental premise is, we trust the American people to make those decisions.

We believe, after the last decade of stagnant wages and a slow and sluggish economy, that they deserve a pay raise, that they deserve to have a bigger paycheck than they do today. So reducing tax rates, doubling the standard deduction, doubling the child tax credit, which are all features of the Senate bill—all benefits of this Senate bill—are things that will help allow these families to keep more of what they earn.

The average family in this country, under this legislation that we will consider—when I say ''average family,'' a typical family of four—with a combined annual income of $73,000, will receive a $2,200 tax cut as a result of this tax legislation. That is a 60-percent tax cut over what they are paying today under current law.

So if we look at the way this impacts middle-income families in this country, doubling the standard deduction, doubling the child tax credit, and lowering rates are all policies that will inure to the benefit of middle-income families in this country. We believe middle-income families deserve to keep more of what they own. They deserve bigger paychecks. This tax bill will do that for them, in addition to creating the growth in the economy that we need to see if we are going to get those better paying jobs generated and get wages back up to where American families are enjoying a higher standard of living and a higher quality of life than what they have today.

We need to get back to normal. We need to get back to 3, 3.5 percent growth. We can do that with the right policies, and it starts by passing the kind of tax reform we have before us today that will lower rates on businesses, lower rates on families, double that standard deduction, double that child tax credit, and allow American families and American workers to get the benefit of keeping more of their paychecks, more of their hard-earned money in their own pockets, and the benefit of higher wages that will compliment a stronger, more robust economy that is growing at a faster rate than what it is today.

That is what is at stake in the discussion over tax reform. I hope, before the week is out, we will get the votes that are necessary to pass this and then go to conference with the House of Representatives, which has already passed their version of tax reform, and then put a bill on the President's desk that he can sign into law before the end of this year that moves us in a direction that provides meaningful tax relief for middle-income families in this country, as well as creates conditions that are favorable to that economic growth that will create better paying jobs and higher wages.

The American people deserve better than 1.5 percent growth. They deserve a pay raise, not a pay cut, and that is what this tax reform bill will help accomplish.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. NELSON. Mr. President, I am here to discuss the tax bill, what we have done before, and what we have now in front of us. That is not what the American people want. It is what large corporations want—large, multinational corporations that get their corporate tax rate cut from 35 to 20 percent. It is what the well-to-do want. That is what is before us.

Now, let me explain. Anyone who says that this bill is all for the middle class is not giving the full story. What they are not telling you is that the tax cuts for the middle class expire in 7 or 8 years. That is not what is being told.

Folks are not telling you that this bill will put small businesses at a competitive disadvantage, making it easier for large, multinational corporations to crush local small businesses. I say this as a Senator from Florida, since small business is the economic backbone of our State, not the large multinational corporations.

What people are not telling you is that this bill will cause healthcare premiums to go up by 10 percent and will force 13 million people to lose their health insurance, and that is according to an independent analysis by CBO, the Congressional Budget Office.

Folks are not telling you that this bill will send thousands of jobs—American jobs—overseas. It is not a jobs bill; it is a bill that is going to send jobs overseas because the tax rate for income produced overseas for large, multinational corporations is going to be less than the tax rate for those same corporations producing the income in America. This is exactly what is in the bill.

They are not telling you all the other ways that CBO says this bill will hurt ordinary Americans. For example, beginning in 2019, CBO says anyone making under $30,000 a year will take a hit from this bill if it becomes law. Then, in 2021, anyone making under $40,000 will start to feel the pinch. Finally, in 2027, anyone making under $75,000 is actually going get a tax increase. That is what folks are not telling you, but that is what is in print in the bill. All the while, the big, multinational corporations and those at the economic top will continue to reap the benefits of tax cuts.

This is not fooling; this is what the bill says. Once folks find out what is in this bill, there is going to be a day of reckoning. The question is, When are they going to find out? Are they going to wait until they see that everybody—in about 7 years—earning under $75,000 is actually getting a tax increase? What the bill needs is balance.

This Senator is a member of the Finance Committee. We tried to add balance in the committee, but our Republican colleagues insisted on voting down every Democratic amendment that was brought up, only making changes on the margin to say that they had gone through regular order. An amendment of this Senator's to increase the child tax credit was voted down, 14 to 12.

In the meantime, the real bill is being written in secret by one party, with a new iteration to change it coming out almost every other day. I wish I were kidding. In fact, it came out the week before Thanksgiving. On Monday, we started marking it up. A new version came out on Tuesday. A new version came out on Wednesday. Then, in the markup on Thursday before Thanksgiving week, lo and behold, there was a new version with a so-called managers' amendment. The bill starts changing colors, with each new version trying to top the last in what it is doing to the middle class.

This isn't the way we should be doing the people's business. We ought to be coming together to find a way to negotiate a tax bill that works for most Americans, not pit red States against blue States or make it harder for cities to invest in infrastructure. We shouldn't have a tax bill that makes healthcare less affordable and takes healthcare away from 13 million people and, on top of all of this, that increases the national debt by almost $1.5 trillion on top of the $20 trillion of national debt.

What the American people want is for us to work together, to work on bipartisan compromise, but what we have is the opposite of that. The American people want the best way to ensure a good outcome for the widest majority of Americans. I daresay, if we put a tax bill on this floor in a bipartisan way, it would end up having 70 to 80 votes out of 100 Senators in a big, resounding, bipartisan vote, but that is not the course that has been chosen.

I want to give one other example. Some Senators are being told that the health insurance part of this bill ends up raising rates by 10 percent and taking health insurance away from 13 million Americans. They are saying that in a series of bills that this Senator has worked on in a bipartisan fashion, some of them being initiated in a bipartisan way out of the HELP Committee by Senator ALEXANDER and Senator MURRAY—some are saying that those bills, including a bill that this Senator has cosponsored with Senator COLLINS to establish a reinsurance fund—and in some States, the use of it has lowered premiums by 20 percent—some say that all of those fixes to the Affordable Care Act will completely overshadow and take away the health insurance premiums that this tax bill has that CBO has said will raise premiums 10 percent.

That argument has been made why some Republican Senators should vote for this tax bill, but, in fact, the Congressional Budget Office came out today with a letter saying that that is not true, that the rates on what is being done in this tax bill on health insurance will still go up 10 percent almost every year for the next 10 years. That is not this Senator saying that; that is in a letter of November 29 by the Congressional Budget Office.

So how we ought to do it is the same way the last major tax bill was passed. It was way back in 1986. It was when Ronald Reagan was President and the Speaker of the House was Tip O'Neill. They were two old Irishmen who used to fight like the dickens. But they had a personal friendship. They had a personal relationship. They could cut through all the political differences. When it was time to get things done, they could come to a bipartisan consensus. In 1986, they found a way to do it, and the middle class was the one that benefited.

We know it can be done. It has been done before. This isn't 1986; this is 2017. Things have changed. It has gotten a lot more partisan around here. It has gotten a lot more ideologically rigid. But when you are doing major tax bills that affect one-sixth of the American economy, isn't it time to revert to what we did back in 1986 when we came together in bipartisan consensus? As long as there is a will, there is a way. And in the midst of this extreme, toxic atmosphere of high partisanship, what I hope is that we might find the will to cut through that and say: Indeed, there is a way, and it is a bipartisan way. We just need willing partners on both sides.

I pray that will occur between now and Christmas before we do something we are going to regret, so that we can do something for the American economy and so that we can do something for the American people, that they finally say: This is the way I want our public servants to act. I want them to act in consensus building in a bipartisan or a nonpartisan way. I hope that will be our Christmas present.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mrs. CAPITO. Mr. President, I come to the floor to voice my very strong support for the tax reform legislation that will come before the U.S. Senate this week.

This bill will power economic growth and provide great opportunities for American workers. It will lead to increased wages, and it will help our small businesses expand. I have said often on the Senate floor that small businesses in West Virginia comprise 95 percent of the businesses in West Virginia and over 50 percent of the workforce. Small businesses want to thrive, and they want to expand.

It will provide much needed tax relief for middle-class working families in my State and across the Nation, and for many in the working class, the increase in the standard deduction will lower rates and provide for a much simpler process. I have talked about this on the floor a lot. I think that one of the things that is underemphasized and not talked about in this great tax relief package is the simplification model that many Americans really want and deserve in the Tax Code. So let's talk about our State of West Virginia.

In my State of West Virginia, 83 percent of individual tax filers take the standard deduction—83 percent. This bill will nearly double that deduction—from $6,300 to $12,000 for an individual and from $12,700 to $24,000 for married couples. That is for 83 percent of the filers in my State of West Virginia. For West Virginians who are already taking the current standard deduction, this provision means less taxable income and lower tax bills—more money in their pockets at the end of the day that they have earned.

Others who itemize will find that they are actually better off with the increased standard deduction. At tax time, they will make the determination: Should I take the standard deduction? I used to itemize in the past. They may make the determination: I am really better off taking the standard deduction because it is almost doubling. That is what I am going to do. That means that they will benefit financially and avoid the complications that come along with itemizing.

Families with children will benefit from the child tax credit that is doubled. This will provide real help to working families who are trying to afford education costs, pay rent or their mortgages, and simply make it to the end of the month. Whether they want to put money aside for their futures or they need money to get through the tough child care or health costs, more money is a significant factor in a lot of people's families. They are working hard, and they want and deserve more money.

I was interested in an editorial that was in my local newspaper today, written in a negative way about this bill. It is funny, but it is not humorous. It actually does not mention the 83 percent of West Virginia earners who are going to be having the benefits of this simply by doubling the standard deduction and by doubling the child tax credit.

This bill also eliminates the Affordable Care Act's individual mandate, which is a penalty that mainly impacts the middle class. Let's talk about this. In 2015, more than 34,000 West Virginians were penalized under this mandate, and 81 percent of those people—81 percent of the 34,000 people—who were penalized with a tax penalty, because they could not afford to buy insurance or they chose not to, were assessed a tax penalty for that decision. That 81 percent earns under $50,000 a year.

There has been a lot of misinformation about this provision, so let me just clarify. No one is being forced off of Medicaid or a private health insurance plan by the elimination of the individual mandate. By eliminating the individual mandate, we are simply stopping penalizing and taxing people who either cannot afford or decide not to buy health insurance plans. I, for one, want everyone to purchase and be able to purchase a health insurance plan, but that is a personal decision, at the end of the day, that a family makes. If you opt not to purchase, which I hope you would not, your government shouldn't be taxing you, and that is what has happened.

Working families will also benefit from the higher wages and increased opportunity that this bill will create. The Tax Foundation found that this bill will create more than 4,900 jobs in the State of West Virginia. It doesn't sound like much, I guess, to a larger State. Yet, to a small State, almost 5,000 jobs is significant. A typical middle-class family in our State would see its after-tax income grow by over $1,900. Nationwide, this bill could create as many as 925,000 jobs in this analysis, which is significant. These new jobs and higher wages result, in part, from lower tax rates and the shift to a territorial system.

This will make America more competitive. We want our jobs to be competitive not just here but globally. I mean, let's face it. We are in a global economy. Many of the companies, particularly the larger companies that are employing over 30 percent of West Virginia workers, are competing globally. If we can make it more competitive for those businesses to compete globally, that is going to mean higher wages, more jobs, and more products that will be made here in the United States with our American workers.

Quite frankly, our current system is driving American companies and jobs overseas. The United States has the highest statutory corporate tax rate in the industrialized world. That drives behavior when you look at investing. After 30 years—30 years ago was the last time we modernized this—it is past time to modernize our business Tax Code and make America more competitive—hire more people, raise wages, buy more equipment, and invest more capital. We know by estimates—and some of these say they are conservative—that there is more than $2 trillion—with a ''t''—in U.S. corporate earnings that is kept overseas. This tax reform package can bring those resources home, which will lead, again, to more jobs and higher wages here at home.

It is important that communities across our country benefit from this growing economy. Half of our Nation's job growth since 2010—almost 8 years ago—has occurred in only 2 percent of the counties across this country. I will add that none of those counties are in the State of West Virginia. That demonstrates to me the need to help lower income areas attract more jobs and investment. That is why I am very glad to support this tax reform bill, because it includes a provision called the Investing in Opportunity Act that Senator TIM SCOTT, of South Carolina, introduced and that I was proud to cosponsor. This bill is designed, as a part of this tax reform bill, to attract investment into areas that have been left behind in our Nation's economic recovery, including areas in my State of West Virginia that continue to struggle in the wake of the Obama administration's anti-coal policies.

Besides making the Tax Code more competitive and helping to create and attract investment in economically distressed areas, this bill will also help our small businesses. We know that small businesses are a major economic driver in our economy. As I said earlier, half of West Virginia's workforce in the private sector is employed in small businesses, and this bill will provide significantly needed tax relief to our small businesses.

I have been traveling across the State, listening to those at small business roundtables, and talking to a lot of people. What I have heard is that small businesses are eager to take the tax relief they get and raise wages so that they can keep their good employees. They want to pay them more. They want to hire additional workers so that they can expand their work or buy new equipment. I met with a communications company that wants to invest in more IT. These investments will have a positive effect on the economy in local communities across the country—those that are not in that 2 percent that have had the growth over the last 8 years.

I believe that this tax reform bill will help the Nation as a whole and the people I represent. I am excited to have this bill on the floor of the U.S. Senate this week.

The Senate Finance Committee, of which the Presiding Officer is a terrific member and is from the neighboring State of Pennsylvania, has held over 70 hearings on tax reform and has put together a very good piece of legislation. It has held over 70 hearings and an amendment process and has listened to many constituents and many individuals who will be impacted by this. The House has acted. President Trump stands ready to sign a tax reform measure into law. What remains now is for the Senate to do its work—for us to do our work—and pass this legislation. Some Senators will have a choice. Soon, Senators will make a choice. We can accept the slow economic growth that has occurred over the past decade or we can take big and bold action.

To my colleagues, I say, if you want to help the middle class benefit from tax cuts, higher wages, and more job opportunities, then you should vote for this bill. If you want America to become more competitive in the global economy, then you should vote for this bill. If you want small businesses to expand and thrive, then you should vote for this bill. Our country needs this, and our constituents are demanding it. I call on my colleagues to join me in passing this bill on the Senate floor this week.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. TOOMEY). The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, for most of my time here in the U.S. Senate, I have been on the Senate Finance Committee, which deals with our Tax Code. For most of my time in the House of Representatives, I served on the House Ways and Means Committee, which dealt with our Tax Code.

Quite frankly, I thought that there were three guiding principles in regard to tax reform that both Democrats and Republicans felt were essential and that, really, I thought were beyond being controversial. That is, if we are going to have tax relief, the focus must be on the middle class; that in today's economic circumstances, we would not want to have tax reform add to the deficit; and that we need to use an open process—a bipartisan process—for tax reform so that we have the opportunity for all stakeholders to understand exactly what we are doing so that we don't have any unintended consequences. As I look at the bill that is being brought to the floor by the Senate Budget Committee, it violates all three of these basic principles.

First, with regard to providing relief to middle-income taxpayers, the Joint Committee on Taxation has looked at this bill, and that is the objective scorekeeper. Some may not like what they say, but we have to acknowledge that these are the objective numbers that look at exactly who benefits from the tax provisions. It is an interesting analysis that they do about those who are in the top income tax brackets, and we are using about half a million people. In 2019 this group of half a million people will receive $34 billion in tax relief—half a million taxpayers. In that same year, those taxpayers who have income under $50,000, which amounts to about 90 million taxpayers in this country or about 180 times the number of people, will receive about 30 percent of the amount of benefits, about $14 billion in that year. That analysis does not take into consideration who benefits from the estate tax changes in the bill that is going to be brought before us. I must say that I doubt there are any taxpayers under $50,000 a year who would benefit from increasing the $4 million base that we currently have in our estate tax. The Joint Committee on Taxation did not include the impact of the repeal of the individual mandate for health coverage, which affects the funds going into health premium support and Medicaid which, again, goes to lower income families. The figures I just provided are conservative figures. It is much more skewed toward higher income than even the committee's analysis for 2019.

Let me point out one more issue about this number. Year 2019 is the most favorable year for middle-income taxpayers. It gets worse every year thereafter. The bill is not targeted toward middle income. It is targeted to the wealthy.

Look at some of the reasons. The estate tax repeal helps wealthy people. The alternative minimum tax—those in the highest incomes who are required to pay some taxes—is repealed. There is the fact that the business tax relief is made permanent but the individual relief has a sunset and terminates after 8 years.

So the Congressional Budget Office has told us exactly who will pay more taxes. This is interesting. In 2019, those at the lowest income tax brackets, or under $30,000, will actually pay more taxes. They are not getting a tax cut. If you look at 2021, 2 years later, those under $40,000 are going to pay more taxes. If you go all the way up to 2027, for those earning under $75,000, the majority will pay more taxes. So as to this bill, which is being advertised by my Republican colleagues as benefitting all taxpayers, know that it doesn't benefit all taxpayers.

In my State, it is estimated that 800,000 Marylanders will pay more taxes under this bill in 2027. It particularly affects those in middle income who are going to be put at a disadvantage. The people who are protected are those at the high income level. To add one more complication to middle-income taxpayers, there is also not even a subtle attack on Medicaid, Medicare, and other programs that are important for middle-income families. Job training programs dealing with education, et cetera, are all going to be jeopardized because of the way this bill is funded.

On the first test, is this bill aimed at middle-income taxpayers? The answer is no. It fails.

On the second test, are we financing this tax cut by increasing the debt, asking our children and grandchildren to pay for this tax cut? The answer is clearly yes. By its own admission, the budget instructions tell us that we are going to have a $1.5 trillion deficit as a result of this tax bill, and that is not the whole picture. We know there is at least $1.5 trillion of new debt if this bill becomes law, but as I am sure my colleagues are aware, there are many provisions in this bill that have sunsets—that terminate—but it is anticipated that those sunsets will be extended. For example, in the business expensing or the credits for family medical leave, many people are advertising this as just a way of fitting a more expensive bill into a $1.5 trillion deficit and not making it larger, but in reality, when extending those extenders, we find that the deficit will be half a trillion dollars more. We are talking about a $2 trillion hole in the deficit. To make matters even worse, we have a trigger that is being recommended that is in the bill itself, but that trigger will extend more tax relief, not less. So this bill fails in the second basic test, and that is because it creates a major hole in the deficit.

The third test is whether this is truly an open bipartisan process. Here no one can say with a straight face that the answer is yes. The majority, the Republicans, are using reconciliation, which is by definition a partisan process. There is no real opportunity for open debate or hearings or amendments. The amendments are all contrived under the reconciliation restrictions.

Does anyone here believe that at the end of the day the majority leader is not going to offer a new bill at the eleventh hour with no time to debate, where we vote up or down, which will be the final product that we are being asked to approve?

So on all three tests this bill coming out of the Budget Committee fails. But then it goes beyond that. There was a late addition in the Senate Finance Committee that repealed the individual mandate under the Affordable Care Act. Now, quite frankly, one would wonder how would that ever get put into a tax bill? Why would this be put into a tax bill? The Congressional Budget Office tells us that it will add 13 million Americans to the uninsured rolls by 2027. These 13 million individuals will not be able to get access to quality healthcare. If they run into a major health episode, they are going either to have to sell all of their assets or go into bankruptcy or be denied care. I think we should be concerned about those 13 million. In addition, these individuals who don't have health insurance and don't have a doctor end up in emergency rooms for care, which is more expensive. Guess who pays the bill? We all do. We pay for it through higher hospital rates. Those of us who have insurance and who pay our bills are going to be paying for those who don't pay their bills. So the fact that we are eliminating the individual mandate doesn't just affect 13 million people. It does affect those 13 million, and it affects all of us who will be paying more through cost shifting.

Quite frankly, what is really aggravating is that it is in the bill getting scored as a tax savings—as more revenue coming in. It is more revenue coming as we spend less on healthcare subsidies, less on Medicaid, and the bill spends that money. So we are using cuts to middle-income families in healthcare to finance permanent tax relief for businesses in this country. Where are our priorities? That makes no sense whatsoever.

There are individual changes that are being recommended in this bill that are going to have very dire consequences. I will just mention one. I spent a good deal of my life in public office at the State level, and I believe very much in federalism. I believe that State legislators are trying to do what is right for their taxpayers as we are trying to do what is right for the same taxpayers. Federalism says that we respect each level of government, but by eliminating the State and local tax deductions, we are telling taxpayers that they have to pay taxes on taxes, that we don't respect our State and local governments, and that you can no longer deduct your State taxes or local property taxes. Again, that is an insult to the Constitution and to federalism. It also, by the way, will hurt taxpayers.

In my own State, almost 50 percent of Marylanders use the State and local tax deductions. If the Senate bill becomes law, all of them will lose that ability to deduct State and local taxes on their Federal income tax returns. It will affect the ability of our States and local governments to finance the necessary functions of government, whether it is to keep people safe or whether it is to provide schools for our children.

I heard from people this last weekend from different charitable groups who told me that if the Senate bill becomes law, it will have a dramatic impact on private giving, because under the Senate bill, only 5 percent of the taxpayers in this country will be able to get a tax deduction from charitable contributions. Think about that for one moment.

We pride ourselves in the services that are provided by the private sector, services in healthcare, education, social services, and the arts. All of that depends on the generosity of private givers. Yet we are saying that only 5 percent of the population in this country will have any tax incentive to give charitable gifts. That will have a major negative impact on charitable contributions.

Then, there is the value of the credit that we have out there for economic growth. I am very proud of the public-private partnerships we have in Maryland. I am sure my colleagues are proud of those public-private partnerships in Pennsylvania and in every State in this country, but the credits we give are going to be worth a lot less if the Senate bill becomes law, making it much more difficult to put together a venture that can redevelop vulnerable communities around our Nation.

Let me just add one or two points before yielding the floor. What I think we all want to accomplish in tax reform is to have a tax code that is simpler and is predictable. That is not happening with the bill that is being recommended by the Budget Committee.

So many provisions are temporary. It is a partisan process. It doesn't simplify the Tax Code, and there certainly is not going to be predictability on provisions that have sunset termination dates.

The final bill could even be much worse. As I said, the bill coming out of the Budget Committee that is getting all this attention is certainly not going to be the bill that we vote on at the end of the day—sometime, as I have been told. It could be as early as tomorrow. It is going to be a different bill.

It is being negotiated now in closed sessions with Republicans meeting, trying to get their last couple of votes. We don't know what the changes will be, but at the end of the day, we know we are going to be presented with a different bill. But that is not going to be the final bill because then it will go to the House and there will be additional changes. There are measures in the House that have many of us upset, such as this: Are we not able to deduct medical expenses if we have an extraordinary need in the family? In the House bill you cannot deduct those expenses. Student loan interest costs cannot be deducted in the House bill. Are they going to end up in the final vote we are going to be called to vote upon in the Senate?

One thing is clear. The bill is only going to get worse and get more expensive, and it is going to cause greater damage to an already too-large deficit.

There is a better way. There is a better way, and that is true bipartisanship. Let's come together and work together.

I am very proud of the work I have done here in my career in the Senate and the House. In the House I worked with then-Congressman PORTMAN, and the two of us worked together with stakeholders to change our retirement policies for retirement savings. We were able to get bills not only enacted but made permanent. Even though we didn't have the political support of our leadership, we had the support of the American people, we had a bipartisan process, we used all of the stakeholders, and we came to good policy changes. More people have retirement savings as a result of those efforts. That is the type of effort we need to put on for tax reform—Democrats and Republicans working together so we can have a predictable tax code moving forward.

There is a better way for job growth in this country. I heard my Republican friends say this bill will create up to a million jobs—$1.5 to $2 trillion creating 1 million jobs?

We had a bill in the last Congress that we could revise immediately to take the repatriation funds—that is the corporate money that is locked overseas—and bring it back here. I will submit an amendment to the Senate Finance Committee to try to get this done. A couple hundred billion dollars could come back into this country. We could use that for infrastructure, which creates 4 to 5 million jobs for a fraction of the cost. We could do much better in job creation than spending this type of money for the type of jobs that are predicted.

I started by saying I thought one of the guiding principles is to help middle-class families. This bill doesn't do it. Let's join together, Democrats and Republicans, and do what is right for middle-income taxpayers in this country.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

The Senator from New York.

Mrs. GILLIBRAND. Mr. President, I rise to speak about the tax plan we will be voting on tomorrow, likely in the middle of the night, and definitely without much needed debate, oversight, and transparency, as it should have.

I think everyone in this Chamber agrees we need to fix our tax system so it doesn't create so much difficulty for the working families in our States. If this bill actually did that, it would be real reform, and it would be bipartisan. However, this plan does not seek anything close to the type of relief regular working people need. Instead, what it does is this: It pays back wealthy donors and lobbyists through corporate welfare, and it does this at the expense of the middle class. In other words, this is a blatant attempt to take millions of families' hard-earned money and hand it over to rich corporations on the Fortune 500 list.

If the Senate actually goes ahead and passes this bill, corporations and the wealthiest 1 percent of income earners will get massive and permanent tax cuts, and it will blow a $1.5 trillion hole into our deficit. Make no mistake, 3 months from now, Republican leadership will use that new, massive deficit as the reason to cut Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid.

Why are Republicans in Congress so determined to provide massive corporate welfare? Listen to this actual quote from one Republican Member of Congress, which will tell you everything you need to know about whom this tax plan is really for. He said: My donors are basically saying, "Get it done or don't ever call me again."

This is Washington's culture of soft corruption at its absolute worst. Now, somehow after years of talking about it, a massive tax bill has finally made its way to the Senate floor and, after all that talk, it doesn't even help the middle class. It does the exact opposite.

Here is one very simple example that sums it all up. This bill eliminates the deduction for local and State taxes, known as the SALT deduction, which so many Americans need to help them stay afloat. The SALT deduction prevents hard-working families from being double taxed on their income. It has long been our policy that when workers pay their State and local taxes, the IRS doesn't tax them twice on the same income, but the Republican tax plan now repeals this. In effect, this plan would make it so you are taxed on everything you make and then you will be taxed again. Why? Because corporations need a big tax break and to pay for the tax breaks for the richest Americans.

In many cases, the SALT deduction makes it possible for families to afford to buy a home, which is usually a family's largest asset, and it keeps the value of this investment growing. Eliminating the SALT deduction would hurt New Yorkers, and it would hurt millions of Americans. There is literally no other way to spin it.

When the details of this tax plan were released, we started hearing a lot of dredged up old talk about the supposed virtues of trickle-down economics—the myth that if only corporations had more money, it would help American families. Well, we have heard this one before, and let's not be fooled again.

Let's take a look at the state of things right now. The biggest companies in America are flush with cash, the stock market has never been higher, but cities, towns, and rural areas all over my State have been hit hard over and over again by companies that have packed up and left for cheaper labor and fatter profits abroad. So then why would we reward them by giving them yet another tax cut they don't need and will not go to their workers?

President Trump's top economic adviser recently asked a roomful of CEOs to raise their hands if this extra cash from the tax cut would get them to reinvest in their communities. No more than a handful of CEOs in the room raised their hand. I know a lot of people like to pretend otherwise, but is that really a surprise to anyone here?

In fact, several CEOs have said on the record that instead of hiring more workers or raising their pay, many companies will reward shareholders and not workers by increasing dividends or buying back their own shares.

This plan could not be more misguided because we should be rewarding work, not shareholder value. Let me put it another way. Just yesterday, the Dow broke another record with a new alltime high, and I am sure many CEOs will get a massive bonus for that, but what I want to know is this: When the Dow broke that record, how many workers on factory floors in Pennsylvania or in New York saw their pay increase? How many workers in grocery stores saw their pay increase? How many families in your State were given big pay raises that reflected those historic profits? I think we all know the answer to that question.

In our economy today, even as corporations are earning more money than ever before, there is essentially no benefit for families. The wealth does not trickle down, and this tax plan would make that problem even worse.

This tax plan helps the wrong people. It helps the people and corporations that don't need any extra help right now. It ignores the people who do. We need to start rewarding work in this country again, not doling out lavish tax cuts for giant companies. I can't say this clearly enough to New Yorkers and to hard-working Americans all over this country: If you are not rich, if you are just a regular hard-working family, then there is a very good chance you are going to take a big hit if this bill passes.

I urge every one of my colleagues to do what is right for families and oppose this plan. Tax reform should never be a partisan exercise, and we should all agree that our goal should be to help middle-class workers and their families. So let's pass a bill that actually does that. Huge corporations do not need our help. They are going to be just fine. Instead, let's finally start rewarding work in this country again.

Mr. President, I yield the floor

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I come to the floor today painfully aware of the many reasons to oppose this reckless, wasteful Republican tax plan. It is a shame because I still believe we need smart tax reform that puts working families and small businesses first and that prepares America to compete in the 21st century, but that is not what we will be voting on this week.

We are voting on the Trump tax plan this week—a plan Republicans hope to ram through the Senate with a simple majority vote, 51 votes. With 51 votes, Republicans will raise taxes on millions of middle-class families and those working to join the middle class. With 51 votes, Republicans will hand huge tax cuts to big corporations with no strings attached and no guarantees that workers will see higher wages. With 51 votes, they will take healthcare coverage away from 13 million Americans and hike premiums for everyone else. With 51 votes, they will saddle our children and our grandchildren—like my new grandchild—with another $1.5 trillion in debt.

Now, any one of these reasons is reason enough to oppose the Trump tax plan, but, for me, as the senior Senator from New Jersey—a State of nearly 9 million people, a State with the eighth most productive economy in America—I cannot and will not support a tax bill that reads like one giant hit job on New Jersey's middle class.

Just how bad is the Trump tax plan for New Jersey? Well, take the House version—which is a bill so awful that 11 out of 12 Members of Congress from New Jersey voted against it, many of them Republicans—take that plan and make it worse in the Senate. The Senate bill is worse because it totally eliminates the State and local tax deduction, otherwise known as the SALT deduction.

Even President Trump's external economic adviser, Larry Kudlow, recently said ending the SALT deduction will hurt "a lot of different people," and a lot of these people who will get hurt live in States like New Jersey.

In 2015 alone, nearly 1.8 million New Jersey households deducted a combined $17 billion in State and local taxes from their Federal tax bills, and over 1.5 million New Jersey homeowners with sky-high property taxes deducted nearly $15 billion that same year. These taxpayers aren't high rollers. They are middle-class families who had to work hard to achieve the American dream. In fact, tax data tells us that 83 percent of New Jerseyans who claim the State and local tax deduction make under $200,000 a year, and about half of those make under $100,000 a year. So the families who get hurt live in every corner of our State—from Ocean County, where it will cost taxpayers $1.3 billion, to Burlington County, where it will cost taxpayers $1.37 billion, to Passaic County, where it will cost taxpayers $1.16 billion in deductions. That is wrong. It is just plain wrong to ask these hard-working families—folks who weren't born with a silver spoon in their mouth, who had to work hard for every dollar they have, who had to fight their way into the middle class—it is wrong to ask them to pay more just so big corporations pay less, and do so permanently, and those born to multimillion-dollar inheritances pay nothing at all.

Ending the State and local tax deduction will literally force New Jersey families to pay taxes twice on the same money, and rubbing salt in their wounds is the fact that Republicans let corporations keep on deducting their State and local taxes on top of the huge tax cuts lavished on them by the Trump tax plan.

If protecting the State and local tax deduction is so important for big corporations that make billions of dollars a year, surely my Republican colleagues can imagine how important it is for a middle-class family in a State like New Jersey to keep it.

Quite frankly, I am sick and tired of Congress treating States like New Jersey as America's piggy bank. My constituents already pay too much in taxes. New Jerseyans can't afford to subsidize the rest of America more than we already do. Yet Republicans now want to dig even deeper into the wallets of New Jersey's middle class with the Trump tax plan. To borrow an old phrase as you come into New Jersey from the Lower Trenton Bridge: "What New Jersey makes, the GOP takes."

Some have speculated that this tax bill was designed to punish Americans who live in so-called blue States. Certainly, I don't know, but I wouldn't put it past an administration as cynical as this one to punish States that voted against Trump in the 2016 election, but ultimately this isn't about red States or blue States. It is time we start calling these States what they really are. These aren't blue States. They are America's blue-chip States. They are America's innovation States, America's economic powerhouse States.

States like New Jersey are home to millions of makers, not takers, and we are proud of it, but our success didn't happen overnight. It didn't happen by accident. New Jersey's success is predicated on our priorities and our investments. New Jersey is a donor State precisely because we invest in public schools and higher education so New Jerseyans continue driving innovation in fields like biotechnology, agriculture, and medicine.

New Jersey is a donor State precisely because we invest in mass transit and infrastructure so workers can commute to high-paying jobs, whether in New York City or Philadelphia or in the financial district in places like Jersey City and Hoboken, and family and friends in nearby States can easily travel to the Jersey Shore.

New Jersey is a donor State precisely because we invest in public health and law enforcement because we are stronger when we have safe communities and a healthy workforce. In fact, the Fraternal Order of Police says ending the State and local tax deduction will hurt States' ability to "recruit the men and women that keep us safe." That is their quote.

In short, New Jersey is a donor State. We see the States ranked by their deduction, their per capita income, their education rank. There is a correlation. It is a donor State because we believe in opening the doors of opportunity to as many people as possible. That is how a small State like New Jersey continues to punch above its weight economically to the benefit of all Americans and especially the Americans who live in less productive States that are more reliant on Federal spending.

For more than a century, the State and local tax deduction has encouraged

States to invest in education and infrastructure and opportunity for all. It is ironic that Republicans, who talk so much about supporting the States, want to single out those like New Jersey, Virginia, and Massachusetts that invest in the middle class. That is why Senator CANTWELL and I will be introducing an amendment to protect the State and local property tax deduction, and I hope a majority of our colleagues see the value in that.

For as long as I can remember, I heard my colleagues on the Republican side talk about protecting—not punishing—success. No matter how you slice it, ending, limiting, or capping State and local tax deduction is a massive tax on the success of States like New Jersey.

The Trump tax plan will raise taxes on millions of middle-class families across America, not in a few years, not in a decade—immediately.

I refuse to support a tax bill that enriches the few at the expense of the many, that saddles our children with trillions of debt, that sets the stage for Republican cuts to Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security because when that debt rises, the next thing we will hear is we have to deal with the entitlements—but not entitlements given to corporations permanently—and that punishes the success of millions of hard-working, middle-class families in States like New Jersey. That is not something I am willing to do.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Colorado.

Mr. BENNET. Mr. President, I only have a few minutes of time on the floor so I want to be relatively brief.

I want to share with you a chart that shows what is actually happening as a result of this proposed tax bill. Here is what is happening. There are 572,000 taxpayers. That is about half a million taxpayers in America who are fortunate enough to make more than $1 million a year. As a result of this proposed plan, they will receive $34 billion in tax cuts. They will receive $34 billion in tax cuts this year, next year, and the year after that. That is an average tax cut of roughly $59,000 a person. That is $34 billion going to 572,000 taxpayers.

What about the middle-class people the Republicans claim this bill is about? There are 90 million taxpayers—not half a million—90 million taxpayers who make $50,000 or less. Do you know what they get under this bill? They don't get $34 billion. By the way, if you include the estate tax, that number is $39 billion, $40 billion. They get $14 billion. That is an average tax cut per taxpayer of $160 a year, and that is in 2019. That is the best year these guys have—after that, it goes negative—and $160 a taxpayer is equivalent to $7.50 a paycheck. So I suppose in 1 year, you could say there is a $7.50 tax cut per paycheck.

That doesn't sound like a tax bill that is a middle-class tax bill to me. These are the tax cut levels under the Republican plan also in 2019. This is the $59,000 number. If you are making between $40,000 and $50,000, you get $492. If you are making between $10,000 and $20,000, you get $48, and so on and so forth.

There is nothing middle class about this tax cut proposal. I was asked today by somebody: How could these Republicans go home and explain—in the States Donald Trump won—how could they explain they didn't vote for that tax bill, when I was saying: I think we still have a chance to defeat this tax bill. How can you say that? How could somebody go home? I can't wait to go home to rural counties in my State that voted 80 percent for Donald Trump—75 percent for Donald Trump—and tell them I voted against this tax bill. My only regret is I will not be able to tell them I voted against it twice.

They are not stupid. People in Washington think that somehow by selling something based on percentages or selling something based on rates, people aren't going to understand what is actually happening to their aftertax income. My farmers and ranchers will understand that. They voted for a guy who said he was going to Washington to drain the swamp. They voted for a guy who said he was going to go to Washington and not help the rich people—or the rich, as the President says. They voted for a guy who said he was going to defend, support, and fight for what he called the forgotten man.

It turns out that when the rubber hits the road, we see the same movie that was happening before he got here—unless you want to argue that the forgotten man is making more than $1 million in an economy where people at the top earn more of that economy than they ever have, at least since 1928. If you want to make that argument, you can. My farmers and ranchers will not believe you. They will not believe that argument. This is a disgraceful bait and switch.

Wait until you have to tell them that in order to make that tax cut for the wealthiest people in America, you are going to borrow the money from their children. You are going to borrow the money from the children of people here to pay for the tax cuts at this end. You are going to borrow the money from teachers' children, and police officers' children, and firefighters' children. You are going to blow a $1.5 to $2.5 trillion deficit. Today, J.P. Morgan came out and said this will result in the largest nonrecession deficit this country has ever had since World War II. That is what J.P. Morgan said.

We do have problems in this economy. In Colorado, we have problems because even though we have one of the most dynamic economies in the country, middle-class families are still having a hard time paying for early childhood education. They are having a hard time paying for housing. They are having a hard time paying for higher education, which this bill makes even worse. They are having a hard time paying for healthcare, which this bill makes even worse. You can't even make it up. They are taking healthcare away from 13 million Americans in a tax bill, and the Congressional Budget Office tells us that because of the tax cuts they are producing for the wealthiest Americans, there is going to be an automatic cut to Medicare of $25 billion in January.

So I say, let's go after those 80 percent Trump counties and 70 percent Trump counties in Colorado and have a debate. They are not going to like what is in this plan. They will hate what is in this plan. It is the opposite of what they were told they were voting for.

I would implore my colleagues—before I yield the floor—that we stop this. Let's stop this bill. This bill doesn't deserve to be on the floor of the Senate. It is a disgrace. There was not a single hearing in the committee of jurisdiction—the Finance Committee—about this bill. There was not one hearing about a bill that touches every recess of our economy. It touches every household in our economy.

It has been 31 years since we did tax reform, and back then we did it right, in a bipartisan way. This time, we don't even have the decency to have a single hearing so the American people can hear what is in this bill and make a judgment about whether it is a good bill or not a good bill.

I am telling you, I know what they are going to say when they know what the details are. We should stop this, and we should work in a bipartisan way.

My colleague from Florida is on the floor. I know how important the child tax credit is to him and my colleague from Utah. It is important to me too. That is the basis for a deal.

I believe the corporate rate is not competitive with the rest of the world. That is the basis for a deal, but borrowing money from middle-class taxpayers to finance $34 billion in tax cuts for 572,000 people is not a basis for a deal.

The American people are not going to be fooled by this. They are too smart for this.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. GARDNER). The Senator from Florida.

Mr. RUBIO. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be allowed to enter into a colloquy with my colleague, the Senator from Utah.

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

Mr. RUBIO. Mr. President, I hope that in tax reform, we will try to do what we should do in all of our policies; that is, come up with ideas that are both pro-growth and pro-worker.

There are a lot of good things in this tax bill, but we need to make it better. We can make it more pro-growth and more pro-worker. Senator LEE from Utah and I have a plan that helps us move in that direction. I will describe it briefly, and I want him to have the opportunity to weigh in on this as well.

On the pro-growth side, it is about becoming more globally competitive, and we do so by lowering the current corporate tax rate. The current corporate tax rate in the United States is 35 percent; we would reduce that to 22 percent. Now, the current bill has it at 20, but 22 percent is just as competitive as 20. Here is why. Just like the current bill, it would be lower than the global average rate of 23 percent. Just like the current bill, it would move us from last place to third place among the G7 countries. So it is just as pro-growth. It makes us just as competitive, but it allows us to do the pro-worker reform that we desperately need.

Here is what it allows us to do. It allows us to change the child tax credit in the current bill to help working families even more. No. 1, it would make it fully refundable up to the amount you pay in payroll tax. No. 2, it would eliminate the marriage penalty, meaning you pay more in taxes if you are a married couple than you do if you are an individual. No. 3, it would index the tax credit to chained CPI, which basically means that as inflation grows and the cost of living goes up, the credit doesn't lose its value because it doesn't go up.

The one thing I want to emphasize is, Who does this help? I have had some people in the past and even today ask: Why are you doing this? This is like welfare.

I find that offensive. I find it offensive not because I am offended by people who need the help and are in the safety net program because they have come upon difficult times but because the people we are trying to help are not on government assistance. They are workers. You have to work to get this credit. In essence, the credit applies against their tax liability, be it payroll tax or income tax. A lot of people who are working don't make enough money to be paying a lot of income tax, but they pay up to 15.3 percent of what they make in payroll tax. It is their primary tax liability, and if you don't allow the credit to apply toward that, you are not helping them.

Who are they? Who are the kinds of people we are talking about? In essence, who are these workers? Well, this chart tells you who they are. They are the waitresses making about $20,000 a year. They are not fully benefiting from this credit right now. If we do it the way Senator LEE and I are talking about doing it, they would. They are the home health aides. They are the office clerks. They are the welders making $35,000 a year. They are the truckdrivers. They are the nurses. They are the firefighters making $48,000 a year. These are working people, the backbone of our country, the ones who have been left behind for over three decades because no one fights for them. They have been ignored and disrespected in our public policy, and they are not accounted for in this bill. They are raising families, our future taxpayers. It costs money to raise a family. The more children you have, the more expensive it is. Our Tax Code should recognize that, and we make a reasonable proposal in that regard.

Now I would like to turn to Senator LEE and ask him to expound on the importance of this for America's workers and why, if we are truly going to have a pro-worker reform, the expansion of the child tax credit and applying it toward the payroll tax the way we have described is essential.

Mr. LEE. Mr. President, I am grateful to my colleague, the distinguished Senator from Florida, for his work on this issue.

He noted a couple of issues that we focus on in this amendment. He noted, among other things, the marriage tax penalty. That is a more obvious defect within our Tax Code. There is another defect he also mentioned that doesn't get as much play as it should. It doesn't get as much play, especially considering the amount of damage it does. It is called the parent tax penalty.

Here is how it works. We have American parents from one end of the country to the other who are essentially propping up and securing the future of our senior entitlement programs, not just once but twice and in a pretty unfair way. They prop up Social Security and Medicare two times—first, as they pay their taxes, and secondly, as they incur the substantial costs associated with child-rearing and thereby prop up and secure Social Security and Medicare.

Social Security and Medicare are paid for on a pay-as-you-go basis. Many of today's workers pay for the benefits of today's retirees. Today's children are tomorrow's workers who will, in turn, be working to pay the taxes to fund the Social Security and Medicare retirement benefits of today's workers, who will be tomorrow's retirees.

Those costs add up over time. According to one very lowball estimate—an estimate that doesn't include a lot of things that it probably should, such as education, higher education, and so forth—a family raising three children can reasonably expect to incur $700,000 in child-rearing costs as they raise their three children. Those three children are going to go on to be tomorrow's workers, paying the Social Security and Medicare benefits for today's workers, tomorrow's retirees. This is important.

We need to end the marriage tax penalty. We also need to end this parent tax penalty. The best way to do that is to make sure that we increase the child tax credit up to $2,000, as the current Senate proposal would do, but just as importantly, we need to make that sum refundable up to $2,000, up to the total amount of taxes paid, including payroll tax liability—in other words, up to 15.3 percent of earnings. If we do this, it is not going to end the parent tax penalty altogether, but it is an important first step.

I also want to echo something said by Senator RUBIO a moment ago, and I think it is worth mentioning. This is not a handout. This is not a welfare benefit. This is money they are making. It is not welfare when you say that the government's not going to take away something that you have worked hard for, that you have earned.

We should at least be doing that for those people who are America's ultimate, most important entrepreneurial class, America's most cherished group of investors. The most important investment decisions are not necessarily those made around the boardroom. They are made at the altar. They are made in delivery wards in hospitals throughout America. They are made when a couple says ''I do'' and they agree to raise children. Those are the investors we need to be encouraging and certainly not punishing.

We can fix this problem. We need to do it by passing the Rubio-Lee amendment and increasing refundability so that we can all benefit from this and so that America's families can stop being punished as a result of the interaction between our Tax Code and our senior entitlement programs.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Virginia.

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I come to the floor today to join other colleagues from both sides of the aisle to talk about this tax debate. We don't do tax reform nearly enough here in the United States. It seems we have taken it on about every 35 years whether we need to or not. But if there is one lesson we have learned from previous tax reform efforts, it is that while they can do a lot of good, they can also do a lot of harm.

I have to start by expressing my extraordinarily deep frustration with the process we have gone through. Today we are considering a bill that was drafted in secret, designed with more gimmicks and loopholes than I have ever seen, and is being rushed through the process without input from all of us on this side of the aisle and without even appropriate analysis of its true financial impact.

In many ways, to quote the President, what got us here is the worst of Washington. If you want to see swamp 101, look at the process of this tax bill. It is a 300-page tax bill that was released on the eve of a holiday weekend, only days before it was marked up in committee. Over a 4-day markup, two significant rewrites of this bill were presented. One consisted of over 100 pages of changes, and a second was released a mere 30 minutes before Members were asked to vote on its myriad of provisions. Now, less than 2 weeks later, we are considering that bill or a variation of it on the Senate floor. We are voting to proceed to the bill later today and then maybe on amendments tomorrow, before we even have any analysis from JCT.

We know that near the end of the debate on the floor, another bill will magically appear from the majority leader's office without any time for those of us who want to do tax reform to have a chance to genuinely review or analyze its provisions. I believe it makes this process enormously dishonest.

I know my friend from Delaware has just come on. I will speak quickly because I know he will raise some of these same concerns.

One of the things I have been most involved with since I have been here in the Senate is trying to grapple with our Nation's overwhelming debt. We are a country that has run up close to $20 trillion in debt, and both sides—both sides—have been a party to that over the last 70 years.

But what I have heard from colleagues on both sides of the aisle is that when you are in that deep of a hole, you ought to stop digging, and that we need to make sure that if we are going to do tax reform, we do it in a fiscally responsible way.

This legislation is the absolute opposite of any kind of fiscal responsibility under anybody's guideline. It starts with a $1.5 trillion acknowledgement that that money will somehow magically appear through magical growth. But when you peel that away a little bit, it is bad enough that it is not really $1.5 trillion in additional debt that we are adding, the real number is $2.2 trillion. Let me tell you why. Off of the over $1.4 trillion of additional debt that is added, that alone will generate more than $230 billion of additional interest payments over the next decade, raising the cost of the bill from over $1.4 trillion to roughly $1.7 trillion. And then, in an effort that really takes the cake in a place where both sides have been known to use gimmicks, this legislation includes 37 different expiring provisions—provisions that are popular, provisions that a number of my colleagues have said give middle-class tax relief. The interesting thing is, all of these provisions are due to expire in 5 to 6 years, within the 10-year window.

Rather than acknowledging the true costs of the bill, what people have said is, we know what we are going to create. We are going to create a whole new series of fiscal cliffs, in the neighborhood of $500 billion, that the expectation will be that it will become so popular that Congress will go ahead and have to extend these provisions, again, without paying for them.

In terms of gimmicks, don't take my word for it; you only need to listen to the words of the President's own OMB Director, Mick Mulvaney, who recently acknowledged that the tax bill had a lot of gimmicks to it. Well, if we add that over $500 billion and the $230 billion of additional interest and the $1.4 trillion that we start with, what we are talking about today is a $2.2 trillion addition to our debt.

All my friends who for years have stood with me on the floor of this Senate and spoken out against adding this additional burden to our kids and grandkids, I hope they will take a moment and rethink their support for this legislation.

Some have asked: Well, how will this get paid for? I believe there might be some dynamic growth. I believe there might be some addition from some smart tax reform that would add to the growth of our economy but nothing near what this bill assumes. In fact, it is even worse than that in certain ways. Not only will this add over $2 trillion to our debt and deficit, but we have even had the audacity of the Secretary of the Treasury, Mr. Mnuchin, who said that this bill is going to be so good for our economy, it is going to decrease our debt by $1 trillion. Yet there is no responsible budget projection of any economist from left to right that makes any kind of assumption that would make that kind of prediction true at all. And, if we go back and look in recent American history, when you pay for tax cuts with borrowed money, you end up with a pretty bad situation.

Many of my friends on the other side of the aisle like to cite Ronald Reagan. I think President Reagan was a great President, in many ways. President Reagan's 1981 tax cut did provide a short-term stimulus, but then that stimulus ran out and our debt and deficits grew dramatically, and President Reagan himself had to raise taxes in 1982 and 1984.

Likewise, again, President Bush, in 2001, inherited a surplus. He promised to give the magic of tax cuts that would grow our economy. Instead, we ended up with very little job growth and a debt and deficit now that is rapidly approaching the full size of our economy.

When we look at the scoring of the effects of this kind of tax cut, we see that the Tax Policy Center did a dynamic score, saying: How can we build in growth that would come from a tax cut? They said again that this bill would cost $1.5 trillion.

The Penn-Wharton Budget Model—again, an organization that is well respected by both sides of the aisle—did a dynamic score on this legislation as well. Again, they are saying the bill would still cost $1.5 trillion.

Congress's official scorekeeper, the group that we look to for outside advice, the Joint Committee on Taxation—we are rushing this bill through so quickly that we have not even allowed our official scorekeeper to come up with a score.

This is not the way to do a once-in-a-generation tax reform process.

The truth is, when you do a tax cut with borrowed money, in periods similar to where we are right now—relatively full employment—there is no historical precedent at all in which you will see any kind of economic growth.

Again, don't take my word for it. Alan Greenspan, the respected Fed Chair, pointed this out just within the last 2 weeks: Tax cuts paid for with borrowed money do not provide the kind of growth that this budget projects and that this tax reform bill projects.

I could go through a whole litany of other concerns with this legislation. I, for one, believe we do need to do international tax reform. I, for one, believe we need a corporate tax rate that is more competitive. I, for one, believe we need repatriation and we need to bring back tax profits that have gone abroad. But we have seen analyses recently that show that this legislation may actually increase the amount of American jobs that are pushed overseas, for example, because of the average of tax rates in their so-called territorial system, where a company can go ahead and build that factory in a relatively high tax State, move their intellectual property to a tax haven like the Cayman Islands, average out the tax bill combined, and end up paying our country nothing and, at the same time, continue to see job loss around our country.

There are a group of us—close to 17 of us, and many of them are my colleagues who are on the floor today—who came together yesterday and said to our Republican colleagues: Time out for a few minutes. We will work with you to do a responsible tax reform effort. We share many of the same goals. But, unfortunately, the process we are going through here today—to reach some kind of arbitrary Christmas present for the President—is not the way we ought to be doing responsible tax reform.

I hope my colleagues will reconsider. I hope they will take the offer of the 17 of us who said that we will look at corporate tax reform, we will look at lower rates, we will look at repatriation, we will look at ways to make businesses more competitive, and join with us to do this in a way in which we can all be proud. If we are going to do tax reform only once every 30 or 35 years, we sure as heck owe the American people a product that we can all be proud of, not a product that is rushed through with one party only and that, at the end of the day, will leave our kids and grandkids paying the bill for decades to come.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Delaware.

Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, 9 years have passed since I first joined the Senate Finance Committee. For each of those 9 years, I have looked forward to working on tax reform. In the House of Representatives, a million years ago, I had the privilege of working on tax reform legislation led by President Reagan, led by Tip O'Neill, Dan Rostenkowski, Bill Bradley, Bob Packwood, and others, which actually worked. It got us where we wanted to go, with lower rates and a more simplified code.

Tax reform takes time. It takes a lot of energy and a lot of effort. There is a lot of give and take. When we did that in 1986, the Congress took 2 years of public hearings, 2 years of meetings, and 2 years of bipartisan negotiations. The idea that a permanent and enduring tax reform plan today can come to fruition in mere weeks is what they call in my State ''the triumph of [a man's] hope over experience.''

Any tax legislation that is purely partisan, written in the dark, and rushed to the finish line is bound to be poorly designed and riddled with inadvertent errors. A flawed process results in a flawed product.

When considering any tax policy, I look at it through a prism of 4 questions: No. 1, is it fair? No. 2, does it foster economic growth or impede it? No. 3, does it simplify the Tax Code or make it even more complex? And No. 4, is it fiscally responsible? Those are the four questions. Unfortunately, the Republican tax reform plan fails the test on, sadly, all four of these questions.

According to the nonpartisan—we just heard this from the Senator from Virginia—Congressional Budget Office, this plan would actually increase taxes on millions of Americans, beginning next year. By 2019, the CBO found that Americans earning less than $30,000 a year will be worse off under this tax bill. By 2021, Americans earning less than $40,000 will be worse off. By 2027, most Americans earning less than $75,000 a year will be worse off, not better. In fact, within 10 years, more than three-quarters of the tax cuts in this bill will go to the richest 5 percent of Americans. Think about that. Within the next 10 years, more than three-quarters of the tax cuts in this bill will go to the richest 5 percent of Americans. In fact, almost two-thirds of the tax breaks will go to the richest 1 out of every 100 Americans. None of this meets the reasonable definition, in my judgment, of fair.

The second question is, Does it foster economic growth or impede it? This bill does little to foster economic growth, and I fear, in the long run, it will actually impair growth.

Last week, a survey of top economists—including economists from across the political spectrum, as well as Nobel Prize winners and former presidents of the American Economic Association—found that only 1 out of 43 experts believe this type of tax reform would boost economic growth—1 out of 43—just 1. The truth is, any economic growth from this bill will be swamped by the deficits it creates. I will talk more about fiscal responsibility in a moment, but an important point here is that the increased national debt will be a huge drag on economic growth.

More Federal borrowing means higher interest rates, which means it will cost more for businesses, both large and small, to borrow and finance investments. It will cost more for families to take out a mortgage. It will cost more to borrow for college.

No. 3, does it simplify the Tax Code? One goal of tax reform is supposed to be simplifying the Tax Code and reducing unpredictability and uncertainty. Unfortunately, this bill introduces new and complicated provisions, for examples, new requirements to claim the child tax credit and an awkwardly designed tax deduction for passthrough businesses. This will make it difficult for Americans to file their taxes—more difficult, not easier. As we learned earlier this month from the Joint Committee on Taxation during consideration of this bill in the Senate Finance Committee on which I am privileged to serve, this tax bill will actually make the Internal Revenue Code regulations longer, not shorter. Making the Tax Code longer is not the key for simplification.

A large part of the additional complexity results from the enormous new fiscal cliff created by this bill, which makes tax policy unpredictable for families and businesses. That point brings me to my fourth question: Is it fiscally responsible? This bill blows a $1.5 trillion hole in the debt, and it will be far costlier than that as the deficit grows in years and decades to come.

With respect to the fiscal cliff I just mentioned, almost all of the individual tax provisions expire within 9 years. I will say that again. Almost all of the individual tax provisions expire within 9 years.

The bill's increase in the standard deduction, the increase in the child credit, the new tax break for passthrough businesses, and most other provisions affecting individuals will, under this Republican bill, expire by the end of 2025. At the same time, the tax cuts for large corporations in this bill are permanent.

Many of our friends on the other side of the aisle are saying that all of these individual provisions will be extended and made permanent. Well, if that is the case, why don't they do it now? The truth is extending these provisions would dramatically increase the deficit, adding far more to the national debt—more than the $1.5 trillion this bill already adds.

Making the individual provisions temporary and the corporate tax cuts permanent is, at bottom, an elaborate attempt to have our cake and eat it too. At best, making the individual provisions expire is, simply put, an elaborate scheme to hide the true cost of this tax bill, obscuring the fact that this bill would add much more to the debt, possibly twice as much as the $1.5 trillion that has been admitted and advertised.

At worst, making the individual tax provisions expire is a sneaky way to increase taxes on American families, all in order to pay for a permanent and expensive corporate tax cut. Either way, the result is unconscionable and an affront to fiscal responsibility.

Let me just conclude by noting that it doesn't have to be this way. Instead of rushing ahead with a partisan product that haphazardly remakes the American economy, there are many areas where Democrats and Republicans could work together on tax reform. I talked about a couple of those yesterday in a press conference that Senator WARNER alluded to, and one of those areas is the standard deduction. I have supported a proposal to double the standard deduction, which would simplify filing for a lot of taxpayers.

Another area where we could find common ground is the corporate rate. I think many of our Democratic colleagues would agree with me and with others that business tax rates should be reformed to ensure that American businesses remain competitive with our global trading partners. And while lowering the rate from 35 percent to 20 percent may be too low—and, I think, fiscally irresponsible—a more sensible and modern proposal would bring both Democrats and Republicans together. There has to be a rate somewhere between 25 percent and 35 percent on which we could come together.

Another area for common ground is the child tax credit. The bill increases the child tax credit but fails to deliver the benefits to the middle- and working-class families who need it the most. A better tax reform proposal would have reformed the child tax credit to be fully refunded and, just as important, permanent, so that lower income families could benefit from it as well.

Despite these many areas of bipartisan agreement, our Republican colleagues' partisan rush to the finish line leaves us with no room for negotiations on a plan that blows a $1.5 trillion hole in our debt while actually increasing taxes on millions of Americans beginning next year.

In closing, President Trump made three promises when he ran for President, when he was nominated for President, and when he was sworn in to office as President. One of those is he didn't want a tax reform proposal that helped people like him—the wealthy. That is not what he wanted to do. No. 2, he wanted to make sure that we put money back into the pockets of hard-working families. A lot of middle-income families would benefit from tax reform. That is what he wanted. And he said that he wanted to simplify the Tax Code. The Democrats are all-in on tax reforms that keep those three promises. But from what we know about the legislation before us this week, this plan does almost nothing to fulfill the President's three promises.

I join my colleagues today in urging Republicans to slow down, work with Democrats on a plan that is actually fair, actually fiscally responsible, and that encourages economic growth and job creation and simplifies the Tax Code.

I will close with an African proverb that I mentioned yesterday: If you want to go fast, travel alone. If you want to go far, travel together.

We need to travel together, and if we do, we will go far, and, frankly, we will lift with us the economy of this country and families who need our help.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida.

Mr. NELSON. Mr. President, we do want to go far, and we need to travel together. We have been trying to make the case that, indeed, we do this in a bipartisan way instead of being jammed through in a partisan way.

I don't think there would be a Senator in this Chamber that would not want to help Puerto Rico, given the fact that Puerto Rico is going through the ravages of the aftermath of a hurricane, where still today just under half of the population in Puerto Rico does not have electricity, and it is 3 months after the hurricane. But we are going to send another hurricane to Puerto Rico if we pass this bill because of the provisions that are so punitive to Puerto Rico in this tax bill.

In this tax bill, there is a 20-percent penalty on businesses doing business in Puerto Rico. It is just unbelievable, a 20-percent penalty on companies that invest in Puerto Rico, causing one of the daily newspapers on the island, El Nuevo Dia, to state that 250,000 jobs would leave the island just as a result of that provision. That is not something we want to do to Puerto Rico. We want to help Puerto Rico.

Unfortunately, that is not all. The bill eliminates the section 199 manufacturing deduction for Puerto Rico, specifically in the law to encourage manufacturing in that island Commonwealth, a territory of our fellow U.S. citizens.

The bill also eliminates the rum cover, which is how they get a rebate for paying those excise taxes on the production of Puerto Rican and U.S. Virgin Islands rum. It is a means of offsetting the cost of economic development in those two territories, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

This bill further fails to put Puerto Rico residents on an equal footing with those on the mainland by giving them the same treatment on the earned income tax credit and the child tax credit.

First, the bill is so out of balance, to begin with. But then, when you get down to the specifics in so many of the items—now, in this particular item affecting Puerto Rico—this is not what we want to do. Yet we are just about to vote on this bill, and that is what is going to happen. That is what is going to happen in Puerto Rico.

I urge some of our Members to reconsider their vote.

I yield the floor.

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

MISSILE DEFENSE

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, for 20 years now, I have viewed the development and deployment of a layered ballistic missile defense shield as vital to our national security. The experience that we witnessed yesterday is something we have been talking about for a long time that was going to happen. Sometimes our DIA, or Defense Intelligence Agency, has said it is going to happen 5 years from now and then 4 years from now. The question is this: When will North Korea have the capability of a weapon and delivery system that would reach Washington, DC, or any of the States of the United States? The adversaries like North Korea are developing ballistic missiles with increasing range and accuracy. It is important for us in the Senate to communicate to the American people the credible, grave, and immediate threat that we face.

Today the world is more dangerous than it has ever been before. I have said so many times in the past that I look wistfully back at the days of the Cold War when things were predictable. We had two superpowers. We knew what they had, and they knew what we had. It is not that way anymore. Every time we have someone coming in to our Defense Committee to testify, they talk about the fact that North Korea is not predictable. So we don't know what is going to happen and what they are capable of doing.

I have been here on the floor on this issue in 2001, 2009, 2012, and this will be the third time this year. Over the last 30 years, we have witnessed our missile defense programs go through dramatic investment changes from administration to administration, depending on who is President. Remember how everyone ridiculed President Reagan about ''Star Wars,'' hitting a bullet with a bullet. They felt that it was pretty funny at that time. Right now, everything he said that was going to happen is happening and happened yesterday.

In 1993, they cut out of the Reagan budget and from the Bush budget the missile defense budget request for fiscal year 1994. They terminated the Reagan-Bush Strategic Defense Initiative Program and downgraded the national missile defense—this is all during the Clinton administration—to a research and development program only and cut 5 years of missile defense funding by 54 percent, from $39 billion to $18 billion.

In 1996 they cut funding and slowed the development of the THAAD program—the THAAD program we are so dependent on right now to defend against an incoming missile in many parts of the world with our allies. They cut the Defense authorization bill, which required accelerated development.

In 1999 they delayed by at least 2 years our Space-Based Infrared System satellites, designed to detect and track missile launches, necessary to coordinate with any effective national missile defense system.

Then along came Bush. By the end of 2008, the Bush administration had succeeded in fielding a missile defense system that was capable of defending all 50 States. During that period of time, we had 44 ground-based defense systems in the United States. The Obama administration cut that back down, but the Bush administration wanted a system that would take care of all 50 States.

Here is the problem, though. All of our ground-based systems were on the west coast—in Alaska and California—so we didn't have anything else. At that time, they thought that was where the threat was going to be, but during the last years of the second Bush administration, we realized that we needed to do something about the rest of the country—something about the east coast—and something about Western Europe.

We made a deal with the Czech Republic and Poland to have a ground-based system in the Czech Republic and Poland, along with the radar that was necessary to operate it. I remember that. I was there and had a conversation with Vaclav Klaus in the Czech Republic.

He said to me: If we go along with building this system, we are going to incur the wrath of Russia, and it is going to be very difficult for us. So can you assure us, if we agree to do this, that you will not pull the rug out from under us?

I said: Certainly, we will not do that. This is something that we are committed to doing.

The problem is that the first thing that happened when the Obama administration came in was he pulled the rug out from under them. So we found ourselves vulnerable to, maybe, having one shot at a defense system in the eastern part of the United States and in Western Europe.

Then, in April, there came the first of the Obama defense cuts, which began disarming America and dismantling our layered missile defense system. Additionally, due to President Obama's overall reduced budget request for defense, there were not enough Aegis ships or missiles to meet the demand that was there.

Since Kim Jong Un took power in 2009, he has already conducted more than 80 ballistic missile tests. That is far more than his father and grandfather conducted. North Korea has conducted six nuclear tests of increasingly powerful weapons. The latest test was in September of this year. That bomb had an explosive yield estimated to be 100 kilotons, which is almost 7 times more powerful than the bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima and as much as 11 times more powerful than what North Korea tested in January of last year.

In April of this year, at a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing on Policy and Strategy in the Asia-Pacific, a panel of expert witnesses agreed with me that North Korea currently represents the most imminent threat to our national security. On July 4 of