

are just talking points that have been designed to appeal to the fringe of their political party and to make a political statement. That is why a number of our colleagues on the Democratic side changed their tune once the majority leader announced that the Senate would vote on this resolution.

Generally speaking, in my experience in the Senate, if you introduce a bill or a resolution, you are thrilled to hear the majority leader say he is going to schedule it for a vote on the floor—but not the Senator from Massachusetts, one of the proponents of the Green New Deal. Following the leader's announcement, he released a statement that derided Senator MCCONNELL's effort to "sabotage" the Green New Deal by his giving them a vote on their resolution. Apparently, holding a vote on something you have introduced is now a form of sabotage in this wild and wacky world in which we currently live. The Senator from Minnesota, who announced her bid for President, later downplayed her support and brushed it all off as aspirational.

Our constituents didn't send us to Washington to advocate for partisan wish lists that will never be voted on. They want us to be accountable as their elected Representatives. They sent us here to craft legislation that can and will make our country stronger. This Green New Deal is nothing more than a Socialist agenda that is being disguised as feel-good environmental policy, and it is indicative, unfortunately, of the hard left turn our friends across the aisle, the Democratic Party, have taken.

The Green New Deal is not what our country needs, and as we have heard from both Republicans and Democrats over the last several days, it is not what our country wants.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, later today, we hope we will have an opportunity to vote on legislation that will fund the government and provide much needed support for border security. While no agreement is perfect and not everybody gets everything one wants, this makes a significant downpayment on a border wall as well as on other border security measures. At the same time, it funds all of the appropriations bills for this fiscal year.

I hope, as our Members review the text, they will have an opportunity to conclude that we will be able to get the votes that will be necessary to move the legislation through the Senate and, hopefully, ultimately, through the House and to the President and that

the President will be able to sign it into law. So stay tuned on that. Hopefully, that will all transpire later today.

TAX REFORM

Mr. President, tax reform is working. When Republicans took office 2 years ago, we had one goal in mind, and that was to make life better for the American people. Key to that goal was getting our economy going again after years of economic stagnation under the Obama administration. We took action to lift burdensome regulations, and in December of 2017, we passed the historic, comprehensive reform of our Nation's Tax Code.

Why the Tax Code?

Well, the Tax Code plays a huge role in the health of our economy. It helps to determine how much money individuals and families have to spend and to save. It helps to determine whether a small business can expand and hire. It helps to determine whether larger businesses hire, invest, and stay in the United States. A small business owner who faces a huge tax bill is highly unlikely to be able to expand her business or to hire a new employee. A larger business is going to find it hard to create jobs or to improve benefits for employees if it is struggling to stay competitive against foreign businesses that pay much less in taxes. A larger business is also unlikely to keep jobs and investment in the United States if the Tax Code makes it vastly more expensive to hire American workers.

Before we passed tax reform a year ago in December, our Tax Code was not helping our economy. It was taking way too much money from American families, and it was making it harder for businesses, large and small, to create jobs, increase wages, and grow. That is why, after months of work, we passed the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act.

This legislation cut tax rates for American families, doubled the child tax credit, and nearly doubled the standard deduction. It lowered tax rates across the board for owners of small- and medium-sized businesses, farms, and ranches. It lowered our Nation's massive corporate tax rate, which, up until January 1 of last year, was the highest corporate tax rate in the developed world. It expanded business owners' ability to recover the costs of the investments they make in their businesses, which frees up cash that they can reinvest in their operations and in their workers. It also brought the U.S. international tax system into the 21st century so that American businesses would not be operating at a competitive disadvantage next to their foreign counterparts.

I am proud to report that the Republicans' economic policies are working. Our economy is thriving. The economy grew at a robust 3.4 percent in the third quarter of 2018. January marked the 11th straight month that unemployment has been at or below 4 percent. That is the longest streak in nearly five decades. The number of job

openings hit a record high in December. Once again, there were more job openings than job seekers. In fact, job openings outnumbered job seekers by more than a million jobs. Think about that. There are more job openings than there are people who are looking for work. It is not just by a little but by a lot—by a million job openings.

The Department of Labor reports that the number of job openings has outnumbered the number of job seekers now for 10 straight months. Wage growth has accelerated. Wages have now been growing at a rate of 3 percent or greater for 6 straight months. The last time wage growth reached this level was in 2009—a decade ago.

A Bloomberg article from yesterday reported:

A strong labor market is proving to be [a] blessing for job switchers as they pocket bigger raises amid record openings. Median wage growth for those who jumped to new positions picked up to 4.6 percent in January from a year earlier—the fastest pace since October of 2007.

Median household income is at an all-time, inflation-adjusted high of \$61,372, and the list goes on.

These are a lot of statistics, but behind those numbers are American families whose lives are improving, thanks to Republican economic policies—American families who no longer have to choose between a car repair and a dentist's bill; American families who now have a little extra every month to put away for the kids' college or for their retirement. Thanks to Republican economic policies, Americans are feeling more optimistic and more hopeful about their futures.

Gallup reports: "Americans' optimism about their personal finances has climbed to levels not seen in more than 16 years, with 69 percent now saying they expect to be financially better off 'at this time next year.'"

There are 57 percent of Americans who "rate the economy as excellent or good," according to Gallup, which is the highest level since January of 2001.

There are 69 percent of Americans who say that now is a good time to find a quality job, which is the highest percentage that Gallup has ever recorded.

There is optimism in this country. There is optimism within families, and there is optimism within small businesses. There is optimism at every level when it comes to this economy and the jobs and the wages that are being created as a result of these economic policies.

When it came time to draft tax reform, we had hoped it could have been a bipartisan endeavor. After all, many of the ideas that we included were the product of both Republican and Democratic proposals. As someone who has been around tax policy for a number of years and had served as a member of the Senate Finance Committee when tax reform was written, I have seen many of the bills that have been introduced.

A few years ago, I led a task force that took ideas from both sides and incorporated them into a document that

we put out there that provided for many of the ideas that were included in tax reform, and some of those were Democratic ideas. What happened, unfortunately, was that the Democrats were not over the 2016 election, and they absolutely refused to collaborate on tax reform legislation. Now they are trying to pretend that the economic progress we have made over the past 2 years doesn't exist.

In a recent tweet, one Democrat Presidential hopeful here in the Senate went so far as to actively mislead Americans about tax reform by falsely suggesting that tax reform raised taxes for the middle class when, instead, it lowered taxes for an estimated 90 percent of middle-class Americans. The Washington Post called her tweet "nonsensical and misleading." Presumably, most Americans are well aware that the size of their tax refunds has nothing to do with the size of their tax bills.

That statement—made by a Democratic candidate for President—peddles a blatantly false narrative in the hopes of scoring political points, and for that statement, she was awarded four Pinocchios by the Washington Post, which is about as big a whopper as you can get. Luckily, no matter how much the Democrats try to pretend that our economy isn't improving, they can't hide the reality that Republican economic policies are making life better for American families.

I am proud of everything we have accomplished so far, and we are going to keep working to ensure that our economy can thrive for the long term and to make sure that every American will have access to a secure and prosperous future.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Ms. SMITH. Mr. President, I rise today to speak on the government funding agreement announced last night. I greatly appreciate the work of Senator SHELBY, Senator LEAHY, and the Appropriations Committee in their efforts to reach a bipartisan agreement. I appreciate the efforts of Senator MCCONNELL, Senator SCHUMER, and our House counterparts, as well, to reach an agreement.

I am glad we will avert another government shutdown and also make critical investments in several areas that are important to my home State of Minnesota; however, there is an important piece of unfinished business that wasn't included in the agreement, and that is to provide backpay for the employees of Federal contractors who were forced out of work for more than a month during the shutdown.

During the longest Federal shutdown in history, thousands of Americans who serve as contractors to the Federal Government lost over a month's pay through no fault of their own, and these are people who work as security guards and clean office buildings, and

they work shoulder to shoulder with Federal employees for all of us. Unfortunately, and this is important, while Federal employees have received backpay—a bill this Chamber passed unanimously—their contractor counterparts have been left out in the cold with no backpay.

I have introduced legislation, which has bipartisan support, which would right this wrong, and it should have been included in the final budget deal, but it appears that the White House blocked it.

I have talked with many of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle here in the Senate Chamber, and I have not found a single person who says contractors don't deserve backpay. We all agree on this, and that is why every Democrat in this Chamber has cosponsored my bill, and that is why several of my Republican colleagues and many others in this room have not only cosponsored but have also expressed support for finding a solution to this challenge.

So why not provide backpay to contractors in the funding bill before us today? Because it appears the White House apparently has said not to do it. But I have talked to the White House just in the last week. I didn't hear any fundamental reasons why our plan couldn't go forward and why challenges couldn't be resolved.

While I don't claim to know the White House's motivation in opposing this bill, I do know there are several misconceptions about this legislation that I would like to address today.

First, some have claimed that the problem is just too complicated to solve or that it would involve an untested process, but that is not right.

My bill would allow Agencies to make what is called equitable adjustment to contract prices to compensate contractors who provide backpay to their furloughed employees. This equitable adjustment process is used regularly by contracting officers and contractors. It has already been used to address other shutdown-related claims, including hundreds of claims for shutdown-related compensation this year alone. This process has already been used to pay contractors, just not for backpay. So my bill would build on the existing processes already in place. These processes are established, and it is just not that complicated.

Second, some have claimed that the administrative costs of the bill would just be too large, and that is simply false.

It is true that Agencies would need to take administrative steps to implement the bill, just as they do with the passage of any legislation. But, again, my bill builds on an existing administrative process that is used regularly and efficiently without large administrative costs.

Let me be clear. If the White House or anyone has suggestions on ways to improve this legislation to make it easier to implement, we are all ears.

We would be happy to accommodate any reasonable suggestion; we just haven't seen any. We haven't received any specific suggestions.

Too often, contractors are invisible to the public, but they suffered greatly during this recent shutdown. Representative AYANNA PRESSLEY and I recently authored an op-ed about this, and it included a story about a woman named Tamela, whom we both met. We wrote in our op-ed:

Tamela was worried that she would fall behind on her mortgage and car payments, ruining the good credit she'd worked so long and so hard to build. And as she spoke, beads of sweat rolled down her face. Was she nervous about speaking in front of a crowd? No. As Tamela explained, she's diabetic and has high blood pressure. Without her regular paycheck, she hadn't been able to afford the co-pay for a doctor's appointment to have her blood pressure tested and her prescription renewed. So she was going without her medicine.

I recently received a letter from Annie, a Federal contractor in Duluth. Annie wrote to me:

I am losing wages that I count on each month to make significant payments towards my student loans and contributions to my savings, (including my retirement savings). I can honestly say I never thought I'd be applying for unemployment, especially as a 31-year-old, but today I did just that.

These employees deserve backpay. They had nothing to do with creating this crisis, and we should all be able to come together in a bipartisan way to make sure these Federal contract employees receive backpay. So I stand here today to say I am going to continue working to get this bill passed, and I look forward to continuing to work with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to find a path forward.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Hampshire.

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, today we hope to vote on a bipartisan, bicameral agreement that will fully fund the government and provide additional measures to strengthen our border security.

I want to applaud all of the members of the conference committee who worked on this agreement. I particularly want to recognize those Senate Members, led by Chairman SHELBY and Vice Chairman LEAHY, for negotiating a bipartisan compromise that will keep the government's doors open. Neither side got everything they wanted—that is why it is called a compromise—but in the end, fully funding the government and keeping it open is what is best for the American people.

What we saw during the 35-day government shutdown was that it took a terrible toll on our Federal workers, and it cost the U.S. economy \$11 billion—including \$3 billion that is gone forever, according to the Congressional Budget Office.

Across the country, Federal workers have been very anxiously waiting to see if we were going to come to an agreement, if they were going to be