every year to quickly calculate what the disasters were last year and jam it against some budget. It is either going to be education that gets gutted or health that gets gutted or agriculture that gets gutted or homeland security. I do not want to have to be the one to call the thousands of Border Patrol agents whom I have helped to fund in my budget or have to call Senator JOHN MCCAIN or Senator KYL and say: I am sorry. We have to lay off all the Border Patrol agents along the border in Arizona for a year or two because we had a big storm in Miami, and I have to send the money to Miami.

Whoever heard of such a thing. That is what the Republicans in the House have sent to us. It should be rejected on its face. There is a better way to move forward, and the way is in the Budget Control Act that our leaders wisely have already agreed to.

So we will have this vote tomorrow. Again, I think I have raised three excellent points about why the House approach is wrong and why our approach is correct. If someone wants to come and debate it, I will be happy to maybe try to explain it a little bit more.

I can understand some on the other side who say: We have to find a way to pay for it, even if we have already negotiated, et cetera, but when the other side refuses to put even a new penny on the table to help with some of these things, it makes it even harder to achieve what we are trying to achieve.

I thank the Presiding Officer. I hope my colleagues will hear these arguments and let me know if there is anything further we can explain on it. But I think the picture says a thousand words.

I will close with this again: No American should have to sit on their roof, while the water rises, and identify an offset to finance their own rescue. We are a stronger nation than that. We are a bigger nation than that. We most certainly can provide the funding for FEMA, for the Corps of Engineers, and other funding in the way our Budget Control Act stipulates in this budget.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

LIHEAP FUNDING

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, I am here to urge that my colleagues in Congress and the Obama administration provide the funding for the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program or LIHEAP. As you know, in Connecticut, LIHEAP provides immediate critical heating assistance for families and seniors in need during these freezing cold winter months.

Last year, more than 45,000 New Hampshire households received LIHEAP funds. That is more than 106,000 individuals. But unfortunately this year, many of those families have been on waiting lists. Funding for the program has been in limbo at a time when temperatures are dropping.

The Department of Health and Human Services here in Washington has released $1.7 billion, but so much more is needed. Making matters worse, the Energy Information Administration projects a 10-percent increase in the price of heating oil this winter. That is the highest average winter price ever predicted.

In New Hampshire, more than half our homes rely on home heating oil. It is one of the highest percentages in the country, and the number of families who need assistance is growing every day. State offices are being forced to change eligibility levels for funding as they grapple with uncertainty over future funds.

There are two things that can be done in order to immediately address this situation before it escalates into an even more serious crisis. First, Congress needs to pass an Omnibus appropriations bill as soon as possible. I am very pleased to see the positive progress on this issue; that there has been an agreement announced on an Omnibus appropriations measure.

Hopefully, we are on track to pass that bill either today or tomorrow. The omnibus includes nearly $3.5 billion in funding for LIHEAP. But we need to get that money out the door. Once Congress has spoken, is that the administration needs to release additional LIHEAP funds as quickly as possible.

The $1.7 billion that has already been released is not enough. But the knowledge that additional LIHEAP funds are pending in the omnibus bill we are about to pass should give President Obama the assurance he needs to release more money. I hope once the budget is passed the administration will release these additional funds as soon as possible, because at this holiday season, what better gift could we provide to those families in need than to make sure they have the funds to keep their houses warm this season.

I know it is difficult to argue for more funding these days because of our deficit. Its challenges are clear. In fact, in the Senate, we have already voted, and I was one of those votes, for more than $1 trillion in cuts to Federal spending this year.

I have continued to call for a comprehensive, balanced, bipartisan plan that looks at both revenue flows and spending. I have been part of the working group, a bipartisan working group, that now has over 40 Senators calling for a $4 trillion deficit reduction proposal over the next 10 years. But when we cut our budget, we need to look at wasteful spending, at duplicative programs, and at subsidies to industries that no longer need our help.

LIHEAP energy assistance for low-income families does not fall under any of those categories. It is not a frivolous program. It is a program that ensures that vulnerable citizens in New Hampshire and across this country are not forgotten and left in the cold this winter.

I have been hearing from people across New Hampshire about the difficulties they are going to face if this funding is not available and available soon. I wish to just share one of those stories. It is the story of Kim Brandolini of Nashua. In 2010, Kim suffered a series of strokes that left her disabled and unable to work. LIHEAP funds covered nearly all her monthly fuel costs last year.

But this year, because of the cuts, she is on the waiting list. She does not know how she is going to pay to heat her home. She already owes the oil company $600, and last year she had to pay $6,000 to replace a broken boiler. Kim is only 44 years old. She is raising a son all by herself. Previously, she served for 14 years in the Army Reserve. Kim does not deserve to be in this situation.

In Nashua, which is one of the warmest parts of New Hampshire, the average nightly low is below freezing for nearly half the year.

If we don't find a way to fund LIHEAP now, Kim and thousands like her will have no way to keep their families safe and warm. We need to act, and we need to act quickly. Already, the delay in funding LIHEAP has prevented States such as New Hampshire from taking advantage of more affordable bulk purchases of home heating oil. The bottom line is, now that we have a budget agreement, we need to release additional funds so that thousands of New Hampshire families stay warm and don't have to make impossible choices between their basic needs this winter. We can't leave families such as Kim Brandolini's out in the cold this winter. I hope we can get this budget passed as soon as possible and that the Obama administration will release additional LIHEAP funds before Christmas and the end of the year.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. WHITEHOUSE). Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Texas.

KEYSTONE XL PIPELINE

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I would like to address the Senate on the subject of the Keystone XL Pipeline, which has been reported to be part of the proposed package that would contain the extension of the payroll tax holiday and the expiring unemployment insurance benefits.

There have been some who have raised questions about the pipeline and some who have said they object to it being included in the package, but I would like to hopefully shed a little light—maybe not so much heat—on the subject, coming from a State such as mine, which is an energy-producing state. We are very familiar with the oil and gas pipelines and the safety measures that need to be undertaken to keep them safe and to keep them from contaminating the environment. This is not some sort of alien technology or something the industry does not have the expertise to deal with in a safe and secure and appropriate manner.

The legislation that is being proposed in the payroll tax holiday would require the Secretary of State to issue a Presidential permit within 60 days of enactment—and this does not take the President out of the equation—unless the President publicly determines this project is not in the national interest. So if for some reason—really beyond my comprehension—President Obama were to determine that building this pipeline was not in the public's interest, he could, under the terms of this legislation, essentially veto it. But once the permit is approved, TransCanada would be able to start construction on parts of the project outside of Nebraska.

Now, why outside of Nebraska? As you may recall, Mr. President, a number of people in Nebraska, including their leadership here in the Senate, had concerns about the route of the TransCanada pipeline, the Keystone XL Pipeline within Nebraska itself, but Nebraska's leaders have taken it upon themselves to come up with a new route, which they will do in order to satisfy concerns about contamination of the aquifer in that State.

The one point I would like to emphasize is that we have been talking for a long time—since the financial crisis in September of 2008—about what we need to do to get our economy back on track and to create jobs. Indeed, there was a lot of discussion back during the passage of the stimulus that we needed shovel-ready jobs. But, as you will recall, there were a lot of things that went into the stimulus that did not include infrastructure development. In fact, infrastructure was comprised only of a very small fraction of what the spending on the stimulus actually did.

First of all, let me make clear what we are talking about. This chart demonstrates the existing Keystone Pipeline. In other words, there is already a Keystone Pipeline, but it goes from Alberta, Canada, and terminates in Illinois. That is the orange line. So what we are really talking about is an extension and expansion of the Keystone Pipeline, and it terminates in Port Arthur and Houston, TX, where we have the refinery capacity to make it into gasoline, jet fuel, and the like. So this is the proposed route, as you can see, of the expansion. It hooks up in Steele City, NE, with the existing pipeline going down to Cushing, OK, but then the expansion would be down into Houston and Port Arthur.

I think this is another educational document. These actually are the crude oil and refined product pipelines that currently exist in the United States. So lest anybody feel as if we are doing something new and novel that has never been done, let me try to disabuse them of that notion.

As you can see, this is a huge spider's web of oil and gas and refined product pipelines throughout the United States. Not surprisingly, you see a lot of them concentrated down in my State of Texas but, importantly, a good portion of that pipeline traffic emanates from our No. 1 trading partner in the world, Canada, which is a friend and an ally and a safe source of oil and gas into the United States. As to some people who perhaps wonder about this pipeline and wonder what it all means, this will help allay any concerns or some concerns they might have that we are somehow doing something novel or risky or that we have not done in the past.

Pipelines are simply one mode of transporting oil and gas. You can do it other ways. You can put it on a tanker truck and drive it down our highways. I happen to think this is a better and safer way to do it than loading up a bunch of tanker trucks to drive down our highways. You can do it through barges, through our inland waterways. But the pipeline is simply the most efficient and safest way of doing it.

Of course, as we all know, these pipelines are by and large buried and more or less unseen. So this is a transportation network for our Nation's oil and gas that most people probably are not even aware of, and I guess that is a good thing, but it is important that people understand what we are talking about.

These pipelines move crude oil from oilfields on land and offshore to refineries, where it is turned into fuels and other products.

You can see down here in the Gulf of Mexico, for example, where we have tremendous reserves of oil and gas. You can see how the pipelines extend even beneath the water out into the Gulf of Mexico.

These pipelines move crude oil to refineries, where it is turned into fuels and other products, and then from the refineries to terminals, where fuels are trucked to retail outlets. One amazing thing about this is this literally happens 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, out of sight and out of mind to most Americans.

Let's talk a minute about safety because this is something on which no one has an exclusive claim when it comes to our environmental and safety concerns. Under the law, any spill associated with one of these pipelines has to be reported—a spill of 5 gallons or more—to the Department of Transportation. There are already a number of Federal agencies that regulate this industry, including the U.S. Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the U.S. Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.

Once this oil gets to the refineries, the U.S. refining sector has invested a lot of money upgrades throughout the country to adapt to the world's changing oil supply, including the increasing percentage of the world's oil that is so-called heavy crude. My understanding is that what comes out of the oil sands in Canada is heavy crude which requires a little different refining capability. But refineries in the U.S. gulf region have long received heavy crude from other countries and are well-positioned to receive and to handle these supplies from Canada.

I think it is important for us to also contemplate not just the economic aspects of this source of oil to be consumed here in America but also that it is not dependent, for example, on imported oil from the Middle East and subject to weather conditions or hostile environments that might otherwise cause economic and national security concerns here in America.

We hear from time to time that Iran, which we know has growing aspirations for regional influence in the Middle East—and now, with the end of America's involvement in the Iraq war, we know Iran is going to rush in to try to fill some of that vacuum there, and I am concerned about it. But more to the point today is that 90 percent of the Persian Gulf's oil exports and 40 percent of the global seaborne oil trade goes through the Straits of Hormuz, which would be a logical first place for the Iranian Government to choke off—should they decide to create havoc—the oil supply through that vital area. The Straits of Hormuz, of course, is very important in a geopolitical sense.

The point I am simply trying to make is that this is not only a matter of jobs—but it is a matter of jobs in America with the construction of this pipeline—it is not just a matter of how we protect our environment, which is very important—how do we regulate this industry in a way that protects the health, safety, and welfare of the American people—but this is a national security issue as well.

It is also very important in terms of simply the price of gasoline. I am not an economist by training, but I do understand that when there is more of something and given that there is stable demand, you will be able to lower the price when there is a greater supply. It is purely a matter of supply and demand.

I looked online at the price of gasoline a year ago. It was $2.98 for the price of a gallon of regular gasoline. Today it is about 27 cents higher. Of course, it has been much higher, as you know. But my point is that this is a stable and secure source of oil used to make gasoline and other refined petroleum products that will help bring down or at least stabilize the price of gasoline for consumers.

We all know that in the current economic environment, people are living under much more constrained circumstances. They are having to make choices that I wish the Federal Government would make more often; that is, what things you have to have today, what things you would like to have but you can put off until tomorrow, and what things you maybe would like to have but you are going to have to end up doing without because you simply cannot afford it.

Well, gasoline is something people need in order to drive their kids to school or drive to work, and the increased price of gasoline because of geopolitical uncertainty, because of concerns about supply, disasters such as we had in the Gulf of Mexico—all of those cause disruptions or concerns about disruptions in supply that cause gas prices to go up. So this is another good reason why I believe we need a stable source of additional oil and, again, from a friendly nation, our No. 1 trading partner, which is Canada.

Let me just quickly go over a few other little factoids that people might find interesting. This is a $7 billion project. As I said, it is the largest shovel-ready infrastructure project in the United States currently. It has been under review by the Federal Government for 3 years. This is not some knee-jerk or impulsive decision we are asking to be made here; this is something that has been carefully reviewed for its environmental impact.

The good news at a time when unemployment remains unacceptably high is that this project is estimated to cause the creation of about 20,000 jobs. We all know that the No. 1 problem in America today is that too many people are out of work, the No. 2 problem in America today is that too many people are out of work, and the No. 3 problem in America today is that too many people are out of work. This would create jobs at a time when we sorely need them, and that is why this project has gained the kind of bipartisan support that gives me great hope that we will somehow knock down the impediments to building this pipeline so we can get people back to work and we can get that stable oil supply and create economic development in the private sector when we need it most. It is estimated this pipeline would ultimately generate about $20.9 billion in new private sector spending. We all know that with the Federal Government revenue down around 15 percent of our GDP because of the recession and slow economy, while spending is up around 25 percent of GDP, we need to do two things: We need to cut Federal spending, and we also need to increase growth in the private sector which will produce additional revenue to the Treasury and help us close that deficit gap and begin to chip away at the debt. This pipeline and the jobs it would create and the tax revenues that would be generated will help do that.

This is also important to our relationship with our trading partner Canada. As the Presiding Officer knows, the North American Free Trade Agreement is a big deal in my State of Texas because of the trade agreements between Canada and the United States and Mexico. But this recognizes that our trading relationship with Canada is literally the most important one in the United States. There is something in it for us as well in that for every dollar the United States spends on Canadian products, 91 cents is returned to the United States. There is a close economic security relationship between the United States and Canada.

This pipeline would also encourage development of additional oil resources in the northern part of the United States. North Dakota currently has I believe somewhere on the order of 3 or 4 percent unemployment. One reason why it does is because they have discovered—I can get a confirmation from Senator HOEVEN, perhaps, but one reason why North Dakota has been booming, in addition to great leadership, has been the fact that the Bakken formation there has been the source of a huge supply of oil. Of course, building this pipeline would help further enhance the ability to develop domestic oil and gas resources and put them in the pipeline and get them to the refinery and get them to market.

This is one of the big dangers I think we also need to highlight: In a world where we are so interconnected and where there are so many options available to our trading partners such as Canada, the fact is if we don't create this pipeline expansion for markets where these products come into the United States, then Canada is going to sell it to China or other parts of the world.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. May I remind the Senator that we are operating under a 10-minute time limit. The Senator has consumed 17 minutes and there is now another Senator on the floor.

Mr. CORNYN. I ask unanimous consent to speak for another 3 minutes.

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

Mr. CORNYN. This is as close to a no-brainer as I think we can identify. But this also particularly benefits my State of Texas, which I am honored to represent. TransCanada's direct investment of about $1.6 million in Texas for the construction and development of the pipeline will lead to gains in business activity in the State of Texas of an estimated $2.3 billion in total expenditures and $2 billion in output. The increased economic activity stimulated by the TransCanadian investment in Texas will generate tax receipts in construction of an estimated $41.1 million to the State and $7.7 million to local taxing entities. Once these facilities are completed, they will have a useful life estimated at not less than 100 years. Using reasonable assumptions regarding valuation and tax rates, these assets are estimated to yield more than $1.1 billion in property taxes to local governments in the State, which are the primary source of funds for public education, among other things.

I recognize the distinguished Senator from North Dakota is here on the floor and I wish to yield to him. I appreciate the opportunity to address this issue. I would point out that this project has strong bipartisan support. I invite my colleagues—who perhaps are not as familiar with the importance of this pipeline project to the economy of the United States and job creation and who may not be aware that this is nothing new; this is something we have done before in a safe and environmentally responsible way—to join us and perhaps reconsider their view so we can get this done and help get 20,000 Americans back to work.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota.

Mr. HOEVEN. Mr. President, I rise to speak on the subject of the Keystone Pipeline. I am pleased to follow my esteemed colleague from the great State of Texas. I think it is only appropriate that I follow him, both because I agree absolutely with his remarks and I think it shows the importance of this project to North Dakota and Texas and across this country. This is an incredibly important project, so I am pleased to be here again today to address it.

RUSSELL EVENMO

First of all, let me say it is nice to welcome Russell Evenmo to the floor on his last day. He has done an outstanding job working for me. He also has my chart, so I am glad we are able to get him on the floor.

The legislation we have authored on the Keystone Pipeline is included in the House package that provides an extension for the payroll tax cut. It is very appropriate that it is in that package, so I come today to talk about some misperceptions I am hearing out there in regard to this legislation. The first is that somehow this is an add-on to the payroll tax holiday extension legislation which some think shouldn't be there. I wish to address that, because it is absolutely where it should be. It is a jobs bill. The extension of the payroll tax cut, the payroll tax holiday, is about helping to create more jobs in this country. It is about helping people who are out there working hard every day. It is about stimulating economic activity. It is a tax reduction to help get this economy going and to help get people back to work.

Keystone is a jobs bill. It belongs in a jobs package. This is a jobs package. This is about creating jobs. It creates jobs without the Federal Government spending 1 penny. In fact, this will generate hundreds of millions of dollars of State and local tax revenues. It will generate private investment, but it will create jobs. This is a jobs package. So I wish to address that misperception I have heard from time to time and respond that this does belong as part of a jobs package. Of course it does. This is how we create jobs.

I appreciate greatly the esteemed Senator from Texas speaking about some of the things that are going on in North Dakota, and he is absolutely right; Texas has a long history with the energy industry. North Dakota is increasingly becoming a stronger and stronger energy player in all types of energy. We have wind; we have hydro; we have biofuels; we have biomass; we have solar. We are now the fourth largest oil-producing State in the country. Next year we will be the third largest oil-producing State in the country behind only Alaska and, of course, No. 1, Texas. But to do that, we need infrastructure. We need to be able to transport our oil—oil that we produce—to the refineries around the country. We will put 100,000 barrels of oil a day that we produce in North Dakota into this pipeline and get it down into the gulf refineries. So this isn't just about moving Canadian crude into the U.S; this is about moving our own domestic product as well.

As the Senator from Texas may have explained, there is a backlog of oil in Cushing right now, which is a hub for oil. But we need to move that oil from Cushing, in Oklahoma, down to the refineries in Texas and Louisiana. This pipeline will move that product to these refineries. So, again, it is not just about moving Canadian crude into the United States; this is about moving product throughout the United States as well where we have serious bottlenecks. When we have those bottlenecks, our producers in North Dakota get less. They face a discount. If the product has to move by rail or by truck, we suffer a discount. That affects not only the oil companies themselves but it also affects the individual producers, the mineral owners who get royalty payments. This is about truly creating economic activity.

The first point I want to emphasize is that this is absolutely—is and should be—part of this jobs package.

The second point I want to talk about for a minute is that the concern has been expressed that somehow we are rushing this process. Somehow we are not taking enough time in terms of approving this pipeline, so maybe that could create an environmental concern. Nothing could be further from the truth. We are taking more time than we did for almost the exact same project that has already been approved.

This red line here on this chart is the Keystone Pipeline. The Keystone Pipeline runs from Alberta, Canada, down to Patoka, IL. It brings product down to refineries in the United States. That pipeline has not only been approved but it has been built. It moves 590,000 barrels a day of oil from the Alberta, Canada area down to our refineries. That has been approved and built, and we are moving almost 600,000 barrels of oil today. This is the Keystone XL project, right next to it—a very similar project.

I want to talk a little bit about the timeline on this as well. I was formerly the Governor of North Dakota. While I was Governor, TransCanada built the Keystone Pipeline and now they are working to build the Keystone XL Pipeline. Let's walk through that timeline for a minute. First let's start with the Keystone Pipeline. That project initially applied for a permit on April 19, 2006. The final environmental impact statement was issued 2 years later—actually less than 2 years later. It was issued on January 11, 2008. So in less than 2 years, this project, very similar—in less than 2 years they got a final environmental impact statement. And amazingly enough, within 60 days after that final environmental impact statement it was signed off on and approved by the State Department. It had final approval. So it all happened within a 2-year process for that project.

Now let's talk about the Keystone XL project. Keystone XL: TransCanada, the same company, is building it. The same company is building both projects. They filed for a State Department Presidential permit in September 2008. That is when they filed for their permit. They went through the whole process. They got a final environmental impact statement on August 26, 2011—3 years.

The first project, the whole project was approved in less than 2 years. This project, we have already been at it for 3 years. So people are saying this is rushing—somehow rushing the project. Almost an identical project, fully approved from start to finish in 2 years, and we are sitting here 3 years later, and we don't even have approval yet, and we are rushing the process somehow.

Furthermore, the Department of State indicated that after all this environmental work—after 3 years of environmental work the State Department said, We are going to have a decision out before year end, meaning now. Before the end of this year, the State Department says, we are going to have a decision.

So myself and others who have been working on this say: Well, that is great. Finally, we are going to get a decision. Then all of a sudden the administration says: No, no, we are not going to have a decision. We are going to need another 18 months. We are going to need another 18 months somehow because there is concern about the route through Nebraska. That was the concern.

So the State of Nebraska then—let's make sure I have my dates right—then said: OK, we are concerned in Nebraska. But we are going to address the problem. We are going to solve the problem. The State of Nebraska had a special session on November 1 of this year, which concluded on November 22. In their special session, they agreed that they would reroute the Keystone XL Pipeline as to the route in Nebraska. The concern was that it went through western Nebraska, what is called the Ogallala Aquifer or the sandhills region. There is a lot of irrigation there. Even though there are other pipelines there, they said: We do not want it in that part, so we will agree to reroute the pipeline in Nebraska.

All this legislation provides, the legislation we have written—and there have been other bills on this—but the legislation included in the House package we are working to get passed in the Senate, here is what it says: 60 days after the bill is passed, the President, through the Department of State, has to make a determination on whether this project is in the national interest. They do not have to say yes. They can say yes or they can say no, but they have to determine whether it is in the national interest—60 days after the bill is passed.

But as to the Nebraska piece, we say, Nebraska's Department of Environmental Quality will work with EPA and the State Department and take the time they need to reroute in Nebraska. Because that was the concern. It does not set a timeline on how fast they have to do it. It says: You have the time you need to reroute and address the concern that was raised.

This legislation is all about solving the concern that was raised so this project can go forward. It does not set a timeline on it. Again, where is this rush that it could somehow create an environmental issue? It is not there.

The point is this: If we do not pursue this project, this oil will still be produced—700,000 barrels a day—700,000 barrels a day of Canadian crude. It will still be produced. But instead of coming down to our refineries in the United States, instead of creating jobs in the United States, instead of reducing our dependence on oil from the Middle East, the oil is going to China. That pipeline, instead of going south, will go west. The product will be put on oil tankers and it will go to Chinese refineries. In the Chinese refineries there will be higher emissions, lower environmental standards. So you are going to have more emissions, more environmental impacts.

Again, I come back to the point: Are we going to create more energy independence for ourselves, are we going to create more jobs here, or are we going to send that product to China? Because that is the choice. That is the real choice. Do you want to deal with reality, real terms? That is the choice we face.

Look, this project is about creating jobs. It belongs in a bill that is about creating jobs. This—and I will wrap up, Mr. President—legislation is about reducing our dependence on oil from the Middle East—700,000 barrels a day—not to mention the product it helps my State of North Dakota, Montana, and others move down to our refineries in Texas and Louisiana.

With this pipeline, we will have better environmental stewardship, not worse. This is a project on which we need to move forward. We have drafted this legislation. We have worked on a

bipartisan basis to get legislation that addresses the concerns. It is time to move forward. I urge my colleagues to support the legislation.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont is recognized.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I want to talk on a number of issues, but I would tell my friend from North Dakota, I very strongly disagree with him about this Keystone XL Pipeline. For those of us who are concerned about global warming, and all of the destruction that is currently taking place because of global warming, and will increase in years to come, this Keystone XL project is exactly what we should not be doing.

EXTENSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the period for morning business be extended until 7 p.m., with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

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

OMNIBUS APPROPRIATIONS BILL

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, before I get to the Keystone issue, I want to suggest that at this particular moment, at the very end of the congressional session, before the end of the year's work, it is a strange moment in Congress because you have, behind closed doors, negotiators from the House and the Senate—Republicans and Democrats—trying to put together large and complicated bills, and the concern I have—and I speak only for myself, but I think other Members in the Senate feel the same way—is we are suddenly going to be given a fait accompli, a complicated and long bill with many implications, many very important provisions, and then we are going to be asked to vote on it with not having had much input into the bill or even the ability to digest it fully and know what it means to our constituents.

Let me touch on some of the issues that concern me, and let me also say that what I am going to be referring to are reports in the media. I do not know what will be in the final product. I am not sure anybody does. But here is some of what the media is reporting that might be in the payroll holiday tax bill—or what might not be in it, for that matter.

One of the issues I believe very strongly about is that at a time when the middle class is disappearing, when poverty is increasing, and when more and more Americans understand that the wealthiest people are doing phenomenally well, and yet their effective tax rate is the lowest in decades—an issue Warren Buffett keeps reminding us about—that it is almost definitely going to be the case that while we continue to cut programs or raise revenue from the middle class and working families, the wealthiest people in this country will continue to avoid paying anymore in taxes. So we have a situation where the effective tax rates on the wealthiest people in this country are the lowest in decades, and yet, once again, as we talk about deficit reduction we are going to cut this program, we are going to cut that program, and yet the wealthy—millionaires and billionaires—are not going to be asked to pay one nickel more in taxes. I think that is wrong, and people should understand that in all likelihood that is exactly what will happen again.

Furthermore, we have major corporations, companies on Wall Street, oil companies that in recent years have made billions of dollars in profit and yet have, in some cases, believe it or not, not paid one nickel in Federal corporate income tax because of a wide variety of loopholes.

We have a situation where we are losing tens and tens of billions of dollars—a hundred billion dollars—a year because of all kinds of tax havens which exist in the Cayman Islands, Bermuda, other countries. Large corporations, wealthy individuals can shelter their money, not pay taxes, and then the result is revenue declines in the United States, and my friends in the Republican Party suggest: Cut this, cut that, go after Social Security, go after Medicare, go after Medicaid, go after education, go after environmental protection. Yet once again—once again—the wealthiest people in this country will not pay a nickel more in taxes, large corporations will continue to enjoy huge tax loopholes.

Second of all, as somebody who believes it is absolutely imperative this country transform its energy system away from fossil fuel, away from greenhouse gas emissions, and moves to energy efficiency and sustainable energy, I am very concerned that in the legislation we will be dealing with today or tomorrow—or Sunday or whenever—there will not be an extension of important programs for renewable energy.

One of the most important is the 1603 renewable energy extender. This is a Treasury grant program which helps provide financing for renewable energy projects by converting an existing tax credit into a grant.

This one program, which costs barely more than $1 billion, has leveraged $23 billion in private investments. It supports 22,000 renewable energy projects in all 50 States of our country. It has created up to 290,000 jobs. If we do not include the 1603 program in legislation, it will expire at the end of this year. What we have seen, time and time again—whether it is wind, whether it is solar—is, if we do not extend these programs, investments in these technologies significantly decline, we lose jobs, we lose our ability to compete internationally in terms of becoming a leader in sustainable energy.

I hope very much what I am hearing in the media and other sources is not correct. I hope, in fact, the 1603 Treasury grant program is included in any legislation that we vote on. That is an issue of major concern to me.

We have today a declining middle class. We have 50 million people who have no health insurance. We have a lot of elderly folks who, despite Medicare, pay a great deal of money out of their own pockets for health care. What I am hearing—again, I do not know what will be in the final package, but what some media reports suggest is, there are proposals out there to increase Medicare income-related premiums by 15 percent, starting in 2017, and also that there are some ideas out there which would decrease the income at which beneficiaries pay these income-related premiums to $80,000 for an individual and $160,000 for a couple. What this would mean is that older people will have to pay more for health care. In some cases they cannot afford to do that. I hope very much that does not happen.

When we talk about Medicare in this country, we have to talk about the overall health care crisis, which is not only that 50 million people are uninsured, it is not only that health care costs for all health insurance companies are soaring—or virtually all of them—but we have to ask why it is in the United States of America we end up spending almost twice as much per capita on health care as do the people of any other country.

Yesterday in my office I had a member of the Australian Parliament. In Australia, all people have health care as a right. Prescription drug coverage is largely covered by the government. Their costs for prescription drugs are much lower because their national health care program negotiates prices with the drug companies. Yet in our country the situation is very different.

What we want to do is not ask middle-income people to be paying more for their health care at a time when many of them are paying already more than they can afford. So the changes in Medicare which I have been reading about are something that concern me very much.

There is another area out there which I think will have profound implications for our economy. The House Republican leadership passed a bill recently as part of this conference negotiation going on now to slash unemployment insurance in half and cut up to 40 weeks of unemployment benefits. If this legislation were to become law—and I certainly hope it will not—it could lead to the loss of 140,000 jobs and hundreds of thousands of unemployed workers, who lost their jobs through no fault of their own, losing their benefits.

Here we have a situation where, in real terms, 25 million Americans are unemployed or underemployed, long-term unemployment is the longest on record, we have more people who are experiencing long-term unemployment than at any other time we can remember, and the solution our Republican