

Finally, my amendment would strengthen and streamline Federal worker training programs. We currently have over 50—50—Federal training programs across 9 Federal bureaucracies. It is a broken morass of programs that isn't helping employers or employees, and it certainly isn't an efficient use of taxpayer dollars. Even President Obama, in his 2012 State of the Union speech, said he wanted to "cut through the maze of confusing [job] training programs" and create "one program" for workers to find the help they need. Unfortunately, like many of the President's promises, that turned out to be more talk than action.

While the President has failed to put forward a real plan to reform our worker training programs, the Republican-led House of Representatives has acted on a plan to accomplish just that. The House-passed SKILLS Act includes several critical reforms that ensure workers receive the training they need for positions that businesses need filled today.

The SKILLS Act would consolidate 35 redundant and ineffective Federal worker programs into a single workforce investment fund that would serve as a single source of support for workers, employers, and job seekers at the State level. This legislation creates much-needed flexibility at the State level and it empowers Governors and local employers to train workers for today's in-demand jobs.

The SKILLS Act cuts through red-tape and eliminates barriers that oftentimes keep workers from receiving the training they need when they need it. For too long we have been throwing taxpayer dollars at a maze of overlapping bureaucracies when we should be providing more targeted assistance directly to job seekers. We need to be training our workers for the high-tech jobs of today and the jobs that will continue to be in demand in the future.

The SKILLS Act accomplishes these goals, which is why I included it in my amendment as a commonsense way to help the long-term unemployed try to find work in today's economy.

There is no one solution to helping the unemployed. However, one thing is clear: We need to find ways to make it more attractive for employers to invest in and hire workers rather than constantly pushing legislation that will raise the cost of doing business in America.

Let's think for a second about the bills the Democratic majority supports or supported in the past. ObamaCare raised the cost of labor, it drove up premiums for millions of Americans and made it more expensive for employers to hire new employees.

Raising the minimum wage will raise the cost of hiring new employees and only worsen the job prospects for the long-term unemployed.

The tax increases pushed by Democrats here in the Senate and the White House apply to millions of small business owners which discourages investment and job growth.

New environmental regulations are driving up the cost of energy and, therefore, the cost of doing business in this country.

I am not suggesting the provisions in my amendment are the only way to make it more economical for employers to hire more workers, but I am suggesting if we want more employment, we need to make it less costly, not more costly, to hire each additional employee. It seems that nearly every policy pursued by the Democratic majority and the White House would raise costs on businesses, especially those small businesses which create the majority of jobs in this country.

We have tried the approach of bigger government, higher taxes, and more regulations for the last 5 years and it has not worked. Let's try something different. Let's have a real debate about how we lower cost and make it easier for employers to go out and hire new employees. Let's focus our efforts on those who need the most help, such as those Americans who have been out of work the longest on account of the lagging Obama economy.

I hope this amendment as well as others that my colleagues will offer will have an opportunity to be heard here on the floor of the Senate and voted on. What we have going on here now in terms of a process doesn't resemble anything like an open process that should allow us to openly debate the big issues that affect the American people. This is a pocketbook issue. This strikes at the very heart of the quality of life, the standard of living, the future economic well-being of Americans all across this country.

I certainly hope the majority leader will allow for an open process which will enable us to enter into that debate, to put forward proposals—mine, among many others—which could be considered and voted on that would actually improve the overall situation of middle-class Americans. It is high time we had that debate. I hope we can, and I hope the majority will give us that opportunity.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BOOKER). The Senator from Georgia.

AFFORDABLE CARE ACT

Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, before I make my remarks, I commend the Senator from South Dakota and underscore what the Senator said regarding the SKILLS Act passed by the House of Representatives.

I am the ranking member of the labor subcommittee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions. Six years ago the Workforce Investment Act expired in its authorization, and for 6 years it has languished in the bowels and in the heart of the Senate and the House of Representatives, going unauthorized.

During that same 6-year period of time between 2008 and today, America has experienced terrible unemploy-

ment, terrible job loss, terrible increases in unemployment, and extensions of that unemployment.

The Senator from South Dakota is exactly correct: If we were doing our job and reauthorizing programs in the law today—such as the Workforce Investment Act—and training people for the skills of the 21st century and the jobs of the 21st century, we wouldn't be talking about unemployment compensation, we wouldn't be talking about the great tragedies of America. We would be talking about America's greatest prosperity. So I commend the Senator from South Dakota for pointing out what is critically important for us to recognize as Members of the U.S. Congress.

I come to the floor, though, to talk about the Affordable Care Act, I will tell a couple real-life stories which came to me by email. But before I do, my job is to do what the people of Georgia want me to do. I have office hours when I am home. I answer my own phone calls. I try to respond to the concerns they have. I try to see that people get referred to the right place.

Since January 1, I have dealt with almost nothing but the Affordable Care Act—or ObamaCare—and the consequences of that act, and what effect it is having on the American people and the people of Georgia—and, in particular, on the two great promises used on the floor of this Senate to sell that legislation to the American people: One, if you like your policy, you can keep it; and, if you like your doctor, you can keep him or her. Both were clear, unequivocal promises.

I will tell two stories today that came to my attention which illustrate how it was not true. And these are just two of many stories. The first is from Jane.

Congressman, This is not my story but my friend's story, Steve. . . . He has suffered with multiple myeloma for more than 10 years. This is a disease that usually kills within 5 years of being diagnosed. But with the excellent health care he has been able to receive through his health care program he has had access to the Mayo Clinic and a myriad of drugs. Now he has been told that his plan will be cancelled since the plan does not meet the minimum standards set forth in the ACA.

Now he can no longer continue his treatments because the various plans have deemed the drugs he needs to stay alive as experimental. WOW! Really that is just awful and not enough is being said about this government take over of our lives is affecting those that are critically ill.

And what about the promise made that if we liked our plan we can keep it? Steve doesn't have a plan, but he still has multiple myeloma.

This story comes about the promise that: If you like your doctor, you can keep them. This is from Felicia in Alpharetta, GA, a story I hear more and more as I travel my State:

My husband and I are both currently paying individual health care policies as he currently has a small business and I used to own one. He is on a Kaiser HMO and I am on a PPO with Blue Cross Blue Shield. We have

both received numerous letters with conflicting information regarding changes to our current policies. We are reasonably intelligent people and yet we cannot figure out what is actually happening with our health care nor do we believe the government has any clue what is happening with this new legislation. Also, in comparing an equivalent Obama care policy to my current policy, I have only 10% of the doctors available in network to what I currently have and of course, my doctors are not in network. Please STOP and REPEAL this ridiculous legislation. I DO NOT SEE ANY EVIDENCE that the government can improve our current health care, only EVIDENCE that it has caused much confusion, created wasted time, wasted money, and driven Americans crazy!

These are two emails sent to me out of many more I could be reading. But it is important for us to understand the impact the Affordable Care Act is having on the American people and the people of my State. In fact, I will share my personal experience from just over the Christmas holidays.

In December, I enrolled through the DC health care plan to buy my health care because all of Congress was moved into the DC health exchange to comply with the ObamaCare legislation. I worked hard to try and match the same care I had before under plan 105 Blue Cross/Blue Shield under the government health care. I couldn't find exactly a good enough match of PPO, but I came close—close in everything except premium. The premium went up 20 percent. And I think most of the American people—certainly people of my age—are realizing the same type of experience where premiums are going up and up.

I would suspect the reason for the Executive order to extend next year's open enrollment date beyond the election is in part because the administration suspects what I suspect; that is, the realities of less enrollment than thought, and fewer young people going into coverage than thought is going to mean higher premiums, less access, and less affordability.

But let me share another story which is really poignant. Fortunately, I was able to help, but when I found out, it broke my heart. It is a story about my grandson Jack and his speech therapist.

Jack is a great kid, a highly intelligent kid, but had some speech problems and so had a special speech therapist named Dr. Tim. Over the Christmas holidays I got to meet Dr. Tim, and we were talking about his job, what he does as a speech therapist, and about Jack and all of his improvements.

Dr. Tim turned to me and said: I don't want to burden you with my personal problems, but my youngest daughter has cystic fibrosis and has had it into her teenage years; and I have had health care coverage up until a week ago, when I was notified my health coverage would no longer pay for the drugs it takes to keep her alive.

For anybody in this Senate or in America who understands cystic fibrosis, it is a terrible debilitating disease

of the lungs and people never used to live to the age of 21. But because of medicine, health care, and breakthroughs in pharmaceutical therapy, people live past the age of 21. In fact, we have a Georgian who lived into his 50s before he passed from cystic fibrosis. But they cannot live if they don't have the pharmaceutical therapy. And there are no substitutes and there are no replacements.

This doctor lost his health care reimbursement for pharmaceuticals for cystic fibrosis in part because of the judgments and the applicability of the Affordable Care Act. To his credit and to the credit of the health care system and the insurance industry, he was able to in part replace it but not nearly as close to what he had on the policy before.

These are just a few stories about Americans who are experiencing terrible problems because of the change in our health care system.

The promises we made are not being kept. The promises that were made to sell the Affordable Care Act to the American people and to the Congress of the United States are not being kept. It is important for us to understand that cannot stand. And if what happens next year happens as I think it will, costs will skyrocket again for the American people, access and affordability will go away or will not be nearly as good as it is, and we will have taken a health care system which was the envy of the world and turned it into a health care system that is the biggest problem in the world.

I want things to work. I want to help the American people. I want them to have access to affordable health care. I want them to have access to their doctors and to be able to keep their policy. We need to work toward that as we go through the tragedies of the implementation in 2014 of the Health Care Act—ObamaCare—which today is America's No. 1 personal problem for the average American citizen.

I am grateful for the time, and I yield back the remainder of my time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Indiana.

HEALTH CARE COSTS

Mr. COATS. Mr. President, I come here to speak about a couple items. We are now in a second-day delay as the majority leader and his caucus decide whether Republicans will be allowed to offer alternatives and to offer amendments to the proposal before us, and that is extension of the Unemployment Insurance Act.

I was one of six who voted for the motion to proceed for the very purpose of achieving the opportunity to offer ideas which I have had and to allow others on our side of the aisle to offer their ideas as to how we can improve this program, and how we ought to address it at this point in our continuing effort to struggle out of the great recession now into its fifth year.

Unemployment is still high in my State—over 7 percent—as a number of States, which is unacceptable, and particularly into the fifth year after a recession. The growth has been so anemic and so tepid, we are sort of staggering our way into a better position.

Nevertheless, while some people are finding jobs and getting back to work, there are many who aren't. That is a serious subject and something we ought to be debating and talking about.

Unemployment insurance is one of the programs which has been proposed to help those in need. There are people who are genuinely in need of that help and have made every possible effort to get back to work and, for many reasons, have not been able to do so. But we also know, and it has been documented, that there are many people who have taken advantage of this program and basically said, I don't have to work hard to get back to work because I am getting enough support from the government.

We have to acknowledge the fact that there are policy issues which have to be discussed as we go forward without automatically extending a program where we know reforms would make the program better and would put us in a better position to help people get back to work and to move our economy.

We also know, working now to just pass a budget for the first time here in several years to work off of, the number we agreed on we wouldn't go over is now being violated. The very first legislative piece which has come before this body violates the budget agreement which was agreed to a short time ago. So a number of us would like the opportunity to propose ways to offset the spending if this program goes forward.

The combination of those two things—reforms which will allow us to continue to support those who are genuinely unable to find work from those who are taking advantage of the program and abuse of the program, as well as suggestions as to how we can support efforts toward more full employment through training programs, through any number of initiatives—my colleagues would like to at least talk about, at least debate, and at least have a vote on. We are in the minority here. We are not sure we are going to win any of those votes. Although I think if we make persuasive enough arguments and it makes enough sense, perhaps we will.

Given this 2-day delay in terms of a decision from majority leader HARRY REID as to whether to allow us these opportunities, it appears that through this tactic of supporting the motion to proceed we have literally put the ball in HARRY REID's office and his caucus court as to what they want to do.

We went through the year 2013, and since July, Republicans have been offered a total of only four amendments to all the things done in the last 6