

sick of it. But I am not going to stop, not while this is happening to my home State of Rhode Island.

I yield the floor.

Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the quorum call be rescinded.

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

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREEMENT—S. 1926

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that following leader remarks on Thursday, January 30, the Senate resume consideration of S. 1926, with the time until 11:15 a.m. equally divided between the two leaders or their designees, with the final 10 minutes equally divided between Senator MENENDEZ or his designee, and Senator TOOMEY or his designee, with Senator TOOMEY controlling the final 5 minutes; that at 11:15 a.m., the Senate proceed to votes in relation to the following amendments: Toomey amendment No. 2707, as modified; Coburn amendment No. 2697; Merkley amendment No. 2709, as modified; and Heller amendment No. 2700; further, that upon disposition of the Heller amendment, the Senate recess until 2 p.m.; at 2 p.m. when the Senate reconvenes, the Senate proceed to vote on passage of the bill, as amended; finally, there be 2 minutes of debate prior to each vote, equally divided in the usual form; and that all after the first vote be 10-minute votes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to a period of morning business with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

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

CONGRATULATING MARVIN H. SIMPSON, SR.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I rise today to congratulate Mr. Marvin Simpson, Sr., on his nearly five-decade service to the United States Senate and the Capitol Hill community.

Marvin began his career 48 years ago in the Office of the Architect of the Capitol as a temporary messenger. He quickly rose to a permanent position as messenger for the Senate Office Building. He held many positions within the Office of the Architect of the Capitol, including laborer foreman and the head of the Furniture Division. In 1998, Marvin was promoted to assistant superintendent, Tenant Services Division where he served with distinction until his retirement.

His leadership overseeing paint, upholstery, wood crafting, masonry, sheet metal and furniture branches has been exemplary. Marvin has been called an ambassador to the Senate of office buildings and has provided Senators, our staffs, and the entire Senate family unmatched craftsmanship.

His institutional knowledge and work ethic will be greatly missed. I join with my colleagues in wishing Mr. SIMPSON all the best in his well-earned retirement.

EQUAL PAY ACT ANNIVERSARY

Ms. MIKULSKI. Mr. President, today I come to the floor to recognize an important anniversary. Five years ago today, President Obama signed the Lilly Ledbetter Act into law. This important law has kept courthouse doors open to allow women to address pay inequality by correcting a misinterpretation by the Court on the statute of limitations when women seek redress. But the fight for equal pay continues, and we need to take action to fix the pay gap, which is what I want to discuss today.

On June 10, 1963, President Kennedy signed the Equal Pay Act into law. This landmark legislation prohibited discrimination on the basis of sex in the payment of wages by employers. The goals of the legislation were groundbreaking. It was the first time Congress acted on this issue, addressing what was a real and growing problem as more women entered the workforce. But it has been over 50 years since the Equal Pay Act became law, and since then, a lot of things have changed.

A recent Pew Research study found that women are the primary earner in 40 percent of households today. Additionally, many of these women are the sole earners. But what is often missed in the discussion about equal pay is the impact the pay gap continues to have on these households who are dependent on the salaries of women.

The pay gap results in \$4,000 less per year for working families, and \$434,000 less over a lifetime. Imagine what these families could accomplish if they simply got what they were owed. With the rising costs for child care, medical care, and filling up the family car, these families are held down by unfair and unjust pay policies.

While these are the day-to-day impacts of the pay gap, there are also even greater consequences over a lifetime. The pay gap affects your income, your pension, and your Social Security. Women's Social Security benefits are only 71 percent of men's benefits. The average income for women from private pensions is only 48 percent of men's. The consequences of our inaction on pay equity are following women out of the workplace and further impacting their lives down the line.

For years I have fought for a solution to this—the Paycheck Fairness Act.

The Paycheck Fairness Act builds on the Equal Pay Act to help close the pay gap. Under the Paycheck Fairness Act, employers will no longer be able to retaliate against workers for sharing information about wages. Right now, if you ask someone what they get paid you can get fired. For years, Lilly Ledbetter was humiliated and harassed because she tried to find out what she was making compared to her colleagues. Women will also no longer be able to only seek back pay when they are discriminated against. Under this legislation they are also able to seek punitive damages.

Under the Paycheck Fairness Act, employers will no longer be able to use almost any reason imaginable to justify paying a woman less than a man. And under this legislation, women will no longer be on their own in fighting for equal pay for equal work. This bill includes education and training so women can strengthen their negotiation skills and learn about wage discrimination.

In this country, they say: Work hard, play by the rules, and you will get ahead. We work hard every day but we find the rules are different for women and men. In 1963, women made 59 cents for every \$1 made by men. And more than 50 years later, we have made an 18-cent gain. In 2012, women made 77 cents for every \$1 earned by men. Fifty-two years and 18 cents—that is not rewarding hard work, and it is certainly not playing by the rules.

Today, on the 5th anniversary of the Lilly Ledbetter Act, I call on my colleagues to join me in stepping up to the plate and fixing the pay gap by supporting the Paycheck Fairness Act. Let's end pay inequity and end the policies that keep women uneducated and unequipped to fight for their fair share.

It is not just for our pocketbooks—it is about the family checkbooks and getting it right in the law books. It is also about the generations of women to come. Let's finish what we started, and let's make sure it doesn't take another 50 years to end pay inequity.

UKRAINE

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, in 1991 the free world cheered as Ukraine and other former Soviet republics gained their independence. Unfortunately, Ukrainian democracy is now under siege, as peaceful antigovernment protests have been met with brutal violence.

Over the past few years, reports of popular protests against oppressive regimes have become commonplace. Yet the frequency of such events does not obviate our moral responsibility to stand shoulder to shoulder with freedom-loving people around the world who seek to throw off unjust and despotic regimes in pursuit of liberty, democracy, and the rule of law.

The United States has been a strong supporter of the Ukrainian people's efforts to create a strong nation, built on

democratic and free market principles. Ukraine made a significant step toward achieving these goals when it adopted its first democratic constitution in 1996. But under the Yanukovich Administration, the basic liberties of the Ukrainian people have been trampled. Recent elections have fallen short of international standards, and the government has used the courts to neutralize opposition leaders, sending former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko to prison for 7 years on trumped-up, politically motivated charges. Meanwhile, President Yanukovich continues to pursue closer ties with Russia, in spite of the Ukrainian people's clear preference for closer ties with Europe.

In addition to the moral imperative we have to support basic human rights, the United States must also recognize that Ukraine—with a population of 45 million and a territory comparable in size to that of France—occupies a unique, sensitive, and strategically important position between Russia and our NATO allies Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania. The future of Ukraine will be determined by what happens in the days ahead, and it will have a direct bearing on U.S. interests for years to come.

On occasion, protesters have clashed with police, with reports of many injuries and several deaths. Although recent reports from Kiev indicated that protesters had seized the Ukrainian Justice Ministry, they voluntarily gave up the building to avoid creating difficulties in negotiations between the Ukrainian Government and the opposition. Opposition leaders have said they will continue pressing for democratic concessions, including free and fair elections and the abolition of sweeping new antiprotest laws. Their efforts to avoid violent confrontation should be encouraged, and their valid demands supported.

It is imperative that the United States send an unequivocal message to the Ukrainian people that we support their efforts to restore democracy and the rule of law. At the same time, we must make clear to President Yanukovich that the only hope for a strong, peaceful, and independent Ukraine lies in building ties with Europe, the United States, and other freedom-loving countries around the world.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

VERMONT ESSAY WINNERS

● Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I ask to have printed in the RECORD finalist essays written by Vermont High School students as part of the Fourth Annual State of the Union Essay contest conducted by my office. These 7 finalists were selected from over 380 entries.

The essays follow:

RAIHAN KABIR, SOUTH BURLINGTON HIGH SCHOOL, GRADE 12 (FINALIST)

How a country collects and allocates its resources takes precedence in outlining the

foundation of equality and general welfare. We as individuals rely on a revenue of both incomes and loans, which makes for a crude economic model of spending. This holds true for our government. As the nation dives deeper into debt and countries around the world experience protests and riots over austerity measures, it is clear that additional tax dollars are necessary to reduce debt, support society, and give rise to the economy.

Tax increases will put the definition of taxation back into its actuality. The United States tax rates are theoretically graduated by income level, meaning that lower income ranges pay a lower rate than higher income ranges. However, those in a higher tax bracket often have more deductions to further equalize their effective rate with that of the middle or lower brackets. A decline in tax rates for the most wealthy is a disproportionate advantage for the already financially capable members of our society, which further instigates the income disparities that threaten our democratic ideals. The top percent of Americans possesses more wealth than the entire bottom 90 percent; the 400 wealthiest Americans have a greater combined net worth than the entire bottom 150 million; and yet, everyone is paying a similar effective rate. Not everyone is currently contributing their fair share to society, and living in a nation with the largest amount of debt in the world, this matter of fact is unacceptable. Tax increases will make the theory of taxes a reality and restore economic equality.

Though our current fiscal path is unstable, increasing taxes will reduce national debt and put us on the right track back to recovery. With a 16 trillion dollar debt that is rising at the rate of 6 billion dollars a day (4 million dollars every minute), every family in America would owe about \$50,000 to various countries around the world if the burden trickled down to the general public. When the government needs money, it sells treasury bills (similar to savings bonds) to investors, who cash them in after an average of ten years for the original amount plus interest. Though a certain amount of debt is arguably helpful for the economy, consistently high deficits force the government to offer higher, more appealing interest rates; investors eventually realize that the country is unlikely to pay back the money it borrows and they stop lending, which crushes the economy, as most recently witnessed in Greece. Our current national debt is greater than the economies of the United Kingdom, Australia, and China, combined. Stopping this vicious economic cycle requires less foreign-reliance and more self-sustenance, which is feasible if and only if we increase taxes.

Tax increases will ensure the funding and availability of certain social programs and necessary expenditures on infrastructure without the need to excessively issue bonds. Taxes currently fund public services of insurance, such as Social Security and Medicare, of welfare, such as the Pell Grant and Food Stamp programs, and of infrastructure, such as the scholastic and interstate highway systems. Nobel laureate of economics Paul Krugman affirms a current necessity for increased taxes in his following statement:

[Regarding] proposals to raise the age of Medicare eligibility to 67 . . . outlays would fall only by \$125 billion over the next decade . . . and even when fully phased in, this partial dismantling of Medicare would reduce the deficit only about a third as much as could be achieved with higher taxes on the very rich . . . don't believe anyone who claims otherwise.

Taxes pay for important programs that go unpaid by spending cuts. The Bureau of Economic Statistics reports that the average

standard of living, determined by comparing adjusted incomes and poverty rates, has increased in years with a higher annual budget and decreased in years on the contrary. According to the New York Times and the Board of Economic Advisors, there is a direct correlation between the amount of money provided to the government in the national budget and the quality of life in the United States, as determined by the rate of poverty. This makes logical sense; our standard of life escalates as we make fiscal contributions to society. Yet we continue to have the lowest tax rate in the world. Taxes are imposed so that roads get fixed, so we get an education, and so people don't invade our country. Taxes are imposed to protect our rights. The government imposes taxes on us for our own benefit, and by raising them, we will improve the living conditions and quality of life in America.

Tax increases will lead to economic growth and prosperity. In 1990 and again in 1993, President Clinton enacted deficit-reduction legislation that raised taxes for high income taxpayers; as a result, economic growth and job creation were strong. Within this period of a sensational economy, capital gain rates were cut, and there was a 20% increase in job availability for a total of 21 million new jobs. However, after the Bush Tax Cuts of 2001 and the Bush Recession, job growth lagged behind GDP growth, there was 0% net job growth, and with continuous population growth, there were record high unemployment rates. Tax increases have helped society and the economy in the past, and they will help again.

In any case of regulatory action, the value to be upheld is the quality of life. By reducing debt, supporting society, and giving rise to the economy, the nation will better ensure a standard of well-being for its citizens. The government of these United States is to assure life, liberty, health, and happiness, in our pursuit of the American dream. Lincoln said it best in his Gettysburg Address: "that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth." The prioritization of tax increases over spending cuts is essential to future policy in the United States of America to sustain the American public.

FIONA HIGGINS, CHAMPLAIN VALLEY UNION HIGH SCHOOL, GRADE 12 (FINALIST)

There are many issues facing the United States. Personally, I believe one of the most critical domestic issues is reproductive rights.

Every step back to pre-Roe v. Wade is sensationalized in the media, and rightfully so. The issue is much more far reaching than pro-life versus pro-choice; it is both a human rights issue and an economic issue.

Firstly, it is a human rights issue. It is a matter of women having control over their own decisions, their bodies, and their lives. Western women strive to liberate women who they view as oppressed, but these same western women don't realize that their freedoms are also disappearing. Women and men alike have the right to decide what happens to their bodies. Restricting access to contraception and health services violates this human right for both genders.

Secondly, it is an economic issue. Children cost money. When parents cannot support their family, they are prone to apply for welfare and other government programs that were put in place to help low-income families. These programs are needed, but the federal government could decrease the need and the cost of these programs if it focused on education and access to contraception. In low-income neighborhoods, people are often not able to access contraception. This takes