doing a good job. I can't find anybody around the country who thinks we are doing a good job. But I say to my colleagues, let's start moving stuff through that actually changes things, that is actually going to make a difference. One does not have to agree. Vote it down. None of these are trick amendments. None of these are meant to be political amendments. They are just straightforward, good-government amendments we ought to consider. If one disagrees, disagree. Fine. But let's not not vote on them and let's not quit making attempts to try to fix what is wrong in our government.

HUD's oversight of housing is a disaster. When we have this many properties year after year on this list, why would we not want to fix that? It is not that we don't want to fix it. It is we do not want to give somebody an opportunity to put out the real reason our country is in trouble. The real reason is us. We have not done our jobs. We have not done the oversight. We have not cleaned up things. We can have great arguments and great discussions and great debates but to not have the debate at all means we deserve every bit of that 85-percent lack of confidence in what we are doing.

Tomorrow, I hope I will be able to offer the rest of these amendments. I will work. I have talked with almost every one of the managers on the amendments. None of them are controversial. Some they may disagree with and want votes on, others can be accepted. But to not move forward and then say it is taking too long to get the bill, when we are here ready to work, is not an excuse the American people are going to buy anymore.

Ms. SNOWE. Mr. President, I am pleased to support the permanent change to interstate weight limits for Maine and Vermont, an issue I have worked on for more than 10 years. I could not be more pleased with the inclusion of this commonsense legislation that puts large trucks back where they belong—on the highway.

Regrettably, the current treatment of truck weights on interstate highways is a glaring example of a provision of law that creates both safety hazards on secondary roads and tangible barriers to job growth at a time when the Nation's unemployment rate remains above 9 percent and Maine's mill towns are struggling to thrive, and I hope this bill is a step towards a solution to this glaring disparity. The Senate's consideration of this remedy is long overdue. The patchwork exemption policy that currently exists has penalized Maine and created a serious inequity that has burdened our commerce with needlessly onerous and costly regulation.

The language included in this appropriations bill mirrors legislation that Senator COLLINS and I have introduced together since 2001. Indeed, this simple change has taken more than a decade to implement. It is my hope that this Congress, and this bill will finally resolve a longstanding inequity that has granted other States the same privilege that Maine requests—the ability to shift truck traffic to conflict-free highways where commercial traffic can efficiently travel without increasing the danger to pedestrians and drivers at crosswalks and intersections.

Maine Department of Transportation engineers have certified on a number of occasions that Maine's interstate bridges are safe to carry 100,000-pound, six-axle trucks. The bridges along the interstate are in good condition, and the impact of fatigue caused by these trucks is likely near zero. The State estimates that a permanent change to weight limits would reduce pavement costs by more than $1 million per year. It would also reduce bridge rehabilitation costs by more than $300,000 per year.

In addition, the pilot program implemented in 2009 demonstrated significant safety improvements when these large trucks returned to the highway. There were 14 fewer crashes—a 10 percent improvement—involving six-axle vehicles, even with increased traffic volume on Maine's interstate system. In fact, there were no fatal crashes on the interstate during the pilot program, and five fewer injuries on secondary roads.

Maine's Department of Transportation collects fatal accident data regarding large trucks, and more than 96 percent are on secondary roads, not the interstate, including the portion of I–95 that has a permanent exemption. Crash rates for Maine trucks on secondary roads are 7 to 10 times higher than on interstate highways.

Trucks belong on the highway, but interstate weight limits are inconsistent across State lines, and shippers are forced to use secondary roads to move goods through States still restricted by weight limits established in the 1950s. For example, in the 122 miles between Hampden and Houlton, ME, a common route for shippers, these legal 100,000-pound trucks are forced to pass by 9 schools, 270 intersections, and more than 3,000 driveways.

Maine's highways are particularly suited for six-axle truck traffic, as most of the interstate system was designed to carry freight—including munitions and heavy equipment—to and from the former Loring Air Force Base. Time and time again, the Maine Department of Transportation has stated that it endorses an increased weight limit, and Maine's roads can safely manage heavier trucks with six axles. If a State's chief highway engineer can certify the safety of a route, and the condition of a road, a State should have the flexibility to change its weight limit on interstate highways.

The significance of this permanent change cannot be overstated. Maine's secondary roads will be significantly safer when trucks are returned to the highway with stop lights and pedestrian interactions. I thank my colleagues for their continued support of this measure.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wisconsin.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. KOHL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent 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.

THE JOBS ACT

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, my colleague from Oklahoma was addressing the frustration that exists on the part of the American public with this Chamber for not doing its job. I must say, on that point, we are in complete agreement. I hear in every townhall, in every conversation with constituents, the question of why is it that when what we need most in this Nation are jobs, this Chamber, the Senate, is unable to hold a debate over a jobs bill? Just last week we had a debate not over a jobs bill but whether to proceed to the jobs bill. Unfortunately, it was defeated, not because the majority did not want to get to the bill but because the minority opposed it and invoked a 60-vote hurdle, a hurdle that was never routinely used in this Chamber in the past.

The fear of debating a jobs bill in this Chamber by my colleagues is irrational. The American people want us to wrestle with creating jobs. Have people not gone out and talked to their constituents? Do they not know the unemployment rate in this Nation? Do they not hear from fathers and mothers who are worried about keeping shelter over their family or worried about their mortgage, their rent, their utilities?

I do not understand how anyone could say: Let's not have a debate about jobs on the floor of the Senate. Yet it was a unanimous ''no'' vote from across the aisle when we proposed having the debate over the jobs bill. I think it is so important that all of us in this Chamber who actually receive a paycheck understand the challenge and the plight of American citizens who either are working part time in multiple jobs trying to make ends meet or who have lost their job and are completely unemployed.

Over the past 10 years, we have lost 5 million manufacturing jobs in this country. Over the last 10 years, we have lost 50,000 factories in this country. Working families are in a tremendous crunch. I thought I would simply share some stories from back home because there does not seem to be many people listening to folks back home and their concern that this Chamber debate and produce a jobs bill and get it to the President.

Jerry from Linn County says:

I was laid off in April, 2009. It took me 2 years and 2 months to find a contracting job. I appreciate having a job, however I have no