

literally skyrocketing, and the Middle East is in turmoil, we have a President who is up making phone calls trying to block a pipeline here at home. It is almost unbelievable. What we are seeing in Congress this week is a study in contrasts. On the one hand, you have a Republican-controlled House that is about to pass a bipartisan jobs bill that would help entrepreneurs and innovators by getting Washington out of the way, and today we have a Democratic-controlled Senate trying to line up votes against an amendment that would create jobs, and a Democratic President lobbying against the biggest private sector job creation project in our country.

We have an opportunity to work together to create jobs. We can do that with these amendments and we can do that by taking up the bipartisan jobs bill the House will pass later today.

Let me say a word about that. The bipartisan jobs bill the House will pass later today is supported by the President. It is ready to go. I hope that once it gets over to the Senate we will simply take it up and pass it. It is an example of a measure supported by Republicans and Democrats and the President that we believe will clear the House with a very large majority. I think the sooner we pass that here in the Senate and send it down to the President for signature, the better.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION ACT

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I was reminded this morning as I came to the floor about an old standard political joke. When I looked at my papers I had here, my outline of what I was going to say, I was missing a page. That is what the Republican leader and I were joking about here this morning. That is why he went first, because I didn't have my speech. The old political joke, as we have all heard many times—this politician was giving a speech and he is flipping through his pages and he is in the midst of giving it. After he gets wound up in his speech, he is going through the speech and he is waving his hands and shouting and he comes to the third or fourth page of his speech and it says: "You are on your own, you SOB." His speechwriter had had enough of him.

But that is not what happened here today. Phoebe prepared the speech for me and I left a part of it in my office.

I am pleased to say Democrats and Republicans reached an agreement to advance the highway bill that has been before this body for a month. It is a bipartisan bill. As I have said here over this past month, this is a piece of legislation that was prepared the way legislation should be prepared. A very conservative Member, JIM INHOFE from Oklahoma, and a very liberal Member, BARBARA BOXER, managed this bill. They have worked very hard.

Just a little side note; as we were struggling, trying to come up with these amendments, I was happy to hear from BARBARA BOXER. She said to me privately: I have talked to Senator INHOFE and he thinks, as we are coming to this agreement, this is not what should be done.

That was important to me in reaching consensus on how we move forward on this bill. As I have said many times, not everything we do this year should be a big fight. We should be able to move things forward without waiting for a month to get things done. This bill is truly indicative of how we have to get these done and why I appreciate the cooperation of Senators BOXER and INHOFE.

We have a dilapidated system of highways. We have 70,000—I am not misspeaking, not 7,000—70,000 bridges in America that are in dire need of repair—or replacement even. Twenty percent, 1 out of every 5 miles of your roads in America are not up to safety standards. Thousands of pedestrians are killed because they relied on unsafe sidewalks or nonexistent sidewalks.

Every day millions of Americans—a disproportionate number who are low income, minority, disabled, or old—are forced to rely on overcrowded mass transit systems, straining to meet the demands of a growing ridership. America's crumbling infrastructure is a terrible drain on our economy.

A number of years ago when my wife and I took a few days off around Christmas in southern California, rather than fly back I thought why don't we drive back to Las Vegas. We did that. This was a couple of years ago. I hadn't done it in a long time. I-15, this famous road, was jammed. We came to complete stops on a number of occasions coming back from San Diego to Las Vegas. Think about that, a complete stop. There were trucks on that road. Drivers were being paid for their time on the road. The cargo they were hauling needed to get someplace. It is not only someone wanting to take a vacation, coming to Las Vegas; it is what it does to commerce to have these roads that are in a state of disrepair. So this crumbling infrastructure certainly is a drag on our economy.

But rebuilding this infrastructure will have the opposite effect. Investing in our transportation system will save or create almost 3 million jobs. This legislation has to be completed before the end of this month or we have no way of collecting the taxes; when you buy a gallon of gasoline, that funds what we need to do here to repair our roads, bridges, et cetera.

This is not some wild program invented in the last few months here in Washington. This is a program that was initiated by President Eisenhower. This week I received a letter from an organization called I Make America. It is a group of more than 850 businesses and 20,000 individuals who support this transportation bill. Many people across this country, some in this Chamber,

would write off the rest of this Congress, but I am not going to do that. We have a lot more to do and we need to get it done. When we complete our work, we need to look back and say what has happened that is good.

"There is no single piece of legislation now before Congress that will do more to create American jobs and sharpen our global competitiveness" than this legislation said Dennis Slater on behalf of I Make America, the program I just talked about.

We need to push this bill over the finish line and I think the finish line is now in sight. This is one of the most important pieces of legislation we can consider. I indicated earlier why. But even as I recognize the bipartisanship that made this progress possible, I will sound a note of caution. Eighty-five Senators voted to begin on this legislation. Only a handful—it wasn't 15, because we had absent Senators that day—said we should not begin voting on it. Yet it has taken a month to begin voting on the amendments. Republican leaders have wasted weeks of the Senate's time directing this valuable jobs bill to extract purely political votes on unrelated matters, completely unrelated matters. Weeks were wasted on this vital legislation with an iconic attack on women's health.

I suggest to the Republican leader who just left the floor, if it takes more than a month to pass a noncontroversial, bipartisan bill that is supported by almost 90 Senators, how can we ever expect to get anything more done?

We have to. We have much more to do. Americans are not satisfied with the glacial pace of this body and neither am I. Americans are tired of delay tactics and obstructions and so am I. People across the country and in this Chamber would write off this Congress and say we have done enough. I am not going to do that.

When we complete this legislation on the Transportation bill, we have other work to do. We have a score of judges who are waiting, some of whom have been waiting since last year. We have to do something about the post office. The Postal Service in America has changed. People don't pay their bills the way they used to; they don't send letters the way they used to. We have to reorganize the post office. We have to do that.

We had a demonstration in the classified briefing room to talk about what is going on in America and what could go on in America with bringing down our country. The demonstration last night dealt with electricity, but it could be banking. It could be our hospitals. We have to recognize that we now have new enemies in the world, not enemies who are flying airplanes and dropping bombs and shooting us with bullets, but they are prepared to do something that is so damaging to our economy, and we were given that illustration last night.

We have a cybersecurity bill we have to bring to the floor, which is another

bipartisan bill. Senator LIEBERMAN and Senator COLLINS, an Independent and Republican, have acknowledged they want to bring this bill forward, and they have it done, so we will bring it to the floor. We have all our Appropriations bills, and we have to do those. So we have a lot to do to accomplish even a fraction of our to-do list, and it is going to take more cooperation and less conflict. Not everything has to be a knock-down, drag-out fight as it was on this highway bill. To think we wasted 3 weeks on a matter dealing with the health of women in America, but we did. So we stand ready to work with our Republican colleagues.

The Republican leader mentioned the small business jobs bill. We have been trying to do one for a long time. We are going to do a small business jobs bill. The House bill is not perfect. We are glad it is moving forward, and we are going to try to do something here to match so we can get it to conference and get this done.

I am hopeful that when Democrats reach across the aisle, we will find willing partners on the other side for a change.

I thank the Chair. I ask that the Chair announce the business of the day.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will now be a period of morning business for 1 hour, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with the time equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees, with the majority controlling the first half and the Republicans controlling the second half.

The Senator from Washington.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I come to the floor to join my colleagues to mark International Women's Day. This day, which across the globe is celebrated in many different ways, is, at its core, a day to reflect on the achievements of women in politics, business, and society. It is a day to reflect on what a woman's role was in the not-so-distant past and to celebrate how far we have come. But, unfortunately, on this International Women's Day in the year 2012, we cannot celebrate the progress we have made without also acknowledging the unsettling truth that that progress is under threat.

Today a shadow has been cast over this day of celebration by efforts to turn back the clock in Washington, DC,

and across the country, efforts we all must fight against. Only 1 week ago in the Senate, we had a debate on the ability for women across this country to access contraceptives. It is a debate most women believed was settled half a century ago and one we had all hoped was in the past. However, in a scene that was eerily reminiscent of half a century ago, last week one woman brave enough to come forward and give voice to the importance of birth control was targeted. First, her story of a friend's battle with ovarian cancer was purposely left out of a House hearing on women's health. Then, as we have all heard, she was scorned and ridiculed by a rightwing pundit.

It was a galvanizing and eye-opening moment for millions of women in our country. It was a reminder that some still see women as easy targets, and it awakened many women to the fact that the gains we are meant to celebrate on a day such as today could easily be lost to political strategy that preys on women.

For many of those who watched the last few weeks play out, it may have seemed an isolated incident. It could appear to some as a sudden and swift effort by some Republicans—who thankfully have been blocked for the time being—but that is not case. The truth is, women's access to care has rarely been at greater risk. From the moment they came into power, the Republicans in the House of Representatives have been waging a war on women's health.

If you don't believe me, look at the very first bills they introduced when they arrived. They campaigned across the country in the last election on a platform of jobs and the economy, but the first three bills they introduced when they got here were direct attacks on women's health. The very first one, H.R. 1, would have totally eliminated title X funding for family planning and teen pregnancy prevention. The amendment also included defunding Planned Parenthood and cutting off support for the millions of women who count on it. Another one of their bills would have permanently codified the Hyde amendment and the DC abortion ban.

Finally, they introduced a bill that would have rolled back every single one of the gains we made for women in the health care reform bill. That Republican bill would have removed the caps on out-of-pocket expenses that literally protect women from losing their homes or their life savings if they get sick. It would have ended the ban on lifetime limits on coverage, which is so important to everyone. It would have allowed insurance companies to once again discriminate against women by charging them higher premiums than men or even denying women care because of so-called preexisting conditions they had, such as pregnancy. It would have rolled back the guarantee of insurance companies' coverage of contraceptives.

Republicans have shown they will go to just about any length to limit access

to women's care, even shutting down the Federal Government. That may seem extreme to all, but that is exactly what happened 1 year ago when Republicans nearly shut down the Federal Government over a rider that was yet another attempt to go after title X and Planned Parenthood. I remember sitting in those meetings late at night, after months of negotiations over the numbers in the budget, astonished that Republicans were willing to throw all those negotiations away over one issue, and that was their attack on women's health.

The attack on women's rights is not just taking place in the Nation's Capitol. In State after State across the country, legislators bent on putting politics between women and their health care are undoing years of important work. A recently enacted law in Texas not only strips women of their rights but of their dignity. It is a law about which Nicholas Kristof of the New York Times recently wrote a column.

I ask unanimous consent to have the article written by Nicholas Kristof, "When States Abuse Women," printed in the RECORD at the conclusion of my remarks.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

(See exhibit 1.)

Mrs. MURRAY. It is a law that all women across the country should be insulted by and outraged over. Today, nearly 40 years after Roe v. Wade was passed, a woman in Texas who seeks an abortion—one of the most difficult choices a woman and her family can face—is not met with compassion and care but with humiliation, and that is because they have passed a law by Republicans that she is now subjected, against her will, to a vaginal ultrasound. Then she is instructed to listen to a fetal heartbeat, watch the ultrasound and numerous other State-mandated hurdles and then she has to go home and wait 24 hours before she can access a health care procedure that was made a right for women four decades ago.

One would think that after 2 years spent railing against any government involvement in health care, Republicans would not want the State to dictate procedures a doctor must perform on a woman, whether she wants them or not, but then you would be confused because, clearly, when it comes to women and their health care choices, these Republicans are willing to do whatever it takes for them to call the shots—not the women, not their doctors, not their families. The sad part is other States across the country are now contemplating similar laws.

So the threats to women's health care are very real and they are growing. We saw it on a panel on contraceptives in the House that didn't include a woman on the panel. We saw it in a young woman being called horrible names for telling the stories of a friend