With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New York.

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, first, I thank my colleague from Oregon for offering his proposal and am sorry it was rejected. We should be going to conference on the budget, there is no question about it. It is hard for us to understand how, on the other side, people have been railing for 4 years: You do not have a budget. And now we have a budget and they do not want to move forward. But that is not what I rose to speak about today.

FLOOD INSURANCE

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, first, I also want to say to the Senator from California and the Senator from Louisiana, job well done. The WRDA bill is a very good bill, and it will help both the port of New York City—one of the great ports of the world—as well as our Great Lakes ports, which are having their own troubles in terms of dredging.

But there was an extreme disappointment in the bill—no fault of my colleague from California. I am extremely disappointed at the objection some of my colleagues raised to even allowing a vote on the Landrieu amendment to the WRDA bill, and I, along with Senator LANDRIEU and others, will keep fighting until this commonsense amendment passes. I am speaking of amendment No. 888. I was proud to cosponsor it. Very simply, it would delay for 5 years any premium increases resulting from revised flood maps. The purpose of the amendment was to provide FEMA enough time to complete the study it was required to complete over a month ago on the affordability of increased premiums.

Senator TOOMEY is right that we passed a flood insurance reauthorization bill just 10 months ago, but it was always the intent—and many of us worked hard on that—under Biggert-Waters that FEMA would conduct an affordability study before higher premiums would go into effect. That way Congress could review the findings and recommendations and address important issues relating to affordability and neighborhood sustainability.

Senator LANDRIEU's amendment was carefully crafted to give FEMA time to complete its study, then allow Congress 6 months to respond. For technical reasons, she amended it to a straight 5-year delay—I thought that was better—but the purpose was the same. The logic is irrefutable: Why bother to do the study at all if we are going to allow FEMA to charge ahead and start raising premiums all over the country?

I say this to my colleagues—the Senator from Louisiana knows it well, and we know it well in New York—you are going to be finding out across the country that flood insurance premiums are going to rise so high that they will be unaffordable to average middle-class people.

What do you say to the homeowner who is forced into the choice of either paying crushing flood premiums or leaving their home and their neighborhood? Do we say to them: Sorry, we just couldn't get around to thinking about difficult cases like yours just yet.

That is not going to stand. That is not fair. It is not acceptable.

I note for my colleagues who might think this is just a Hurricane Sandy-related issue, it is not. New Yorkers are facing this situation because our flood maps are being revised—a process that was well underway before Sandy. So the increased premiums many New Yorkers could well face will face all of your constituents. As FEMA starts revising flood maps—and they are increasing the number of homes included and increasing the level at which homeowners have to pay—every one of you is going to be facing the same problem we are facing in New York.

Madam President, $9,500 for flood insurance for someone who makes $40,000 or $50,000 and lives in a modest home? Forget it. We cannot have that, and I will tell FEMA right now that will not stand. Something will give because the situation is untenable.

The original bill provided for a study, and then Congress could act on that study and modify the bill. But now we are moving forward without even the study being done. In fact, people in some States are already seeing their premiums rise up to 25 percent a year, and many more States will be covered over the next 2 years.

If you think it is just coastal States, such as my State of New York and the State of Louisiana, it is not. In fact, according to FEMA, my friend Senator TOOMEY's home State is one of the States that rely most heavily on flood insurance. Pennsylvania ranks seventh in the total amount of NFIP payouts, seventh in the number of claims filed since the program began.

So we all have an interest to get this right, that we proceed with eyes wide open in attempts to bring the Flood Insurance Program onto sounder financial footing; that we have the benefit of all the data and analysis we need. My prediction: If we do not change this, there will be no flood insurance or at the very minimum we will let it be optional for everybody and let people decide because to force people between paying an amount they cannot afford and forcing people to leave their homes is a choice this Congress will ultimately not abide for.

It is important to remember that if people cannot afford flood insurance, they are going to drop out of the program. Their communities might not adopt new flood maps when proposed because they know the cost is prohibitive. When future disasters hit, these families and communities will be entirely dependent on Federal aid to help them rebuild, and that will cost the taxpayers even more.

So it is important that we ensure the program is both financially sound and accessible to ordinary middle-class families. Something is very wrong with a program that requires middle-class families to pay over $10,000 a year for a policy with coverage that is capped at $250,000.

You may ask why I am so passionate about this issue. Because I have visited too many families, too many communities in New York City and in upstate New York where the prospect of higher premiums is causing residents to rethink whether they can even afford to remain in the homes in which they have lived, many of them, for their whole lives, whether they can afford to live in the neighborhoods in which they grew up, where their families and friends live, where their children go to school. Families are being forced to make this choice in neighborhoods from Staten Island to the Rockaways to Massapequa and east and upstate in places such as Schoharie County and in the southern tier counties such as Broome and Tioga and in north country counties such as Essex. It would be a shame if we allowed this to happen—all because FEMA did not get around to studying the impact of higher flood rates and Congress did not have a chance to respond.

So I hope that by the time New York's maps are completed and New Yorkers have completed the process of rebuilding in the wake of Sandy, fears of $10,000 flood insurance premiums for middle-class homes will prove to have been incorrect. But right now those fears are very real, and they are putting the future of some of New York's most tightly knit middle-class neighborhoods at risk.

As I noted previously, New York's flood maps were in the process of being revised before Sandy hit. But in the wake of Sandy, it adds insult to injury when families who are spending their entire savings to repair their homes are told that in a year or two they may not be able to afford to live there.

In conclusion, I am disappointed that we did not get a vote on this issue, but I will keep pushing and pushing until this awful situation is rectified. I know Senator LANDRIEU will. I know Senator VITTER will. The issue is too important to too many New Yorkers and too many Americans, and I will not stop until we get a vote and until we ultimately succeed.

I am confident many more of my colleagues will begin to hear from their constituents about the challenges they are facing as flood premiums are increased, and they will see the wisdom of Senator LANDRIEU's amendment and Congress will ultimately act to fix this problem once and for all.

With that, I appreciate my colleagues giving me time, and I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from California.

WATER RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT ACT

Mrs. BOXER. Madam President, I think the Senator from New York is

pointing out an issue Senator VITTER and I agree with, which is that we should have had a vote on the Landrieu-Vitter amendment, which would have definitely moved in the direction of ensuring that people's insurance rates for flood protection do not go through the roof.

It was very disappointing that the Senator from Pennsylvania Mr. TOOMEY opposed having even a vote on this. But you know what, we will have other days in the Sun, I say to my friend, where we will deal with this issue because it is too important to too many people across the Nation.

But I do not want that to dim what just happened in the Senate. I do not want the fact that there was one disappointment to take away from what just happened in the Senate. What just happened is that 83 colleagues—83 strong—voted for the Water Resources Development Act that came out of the Environment and Public Works Committee with a very strong unanimous vote and that Senator VITTER and I, working together for the first time on a big bill such as this, were able to put aside other differences and come together in an area where we both agree; that is, it is essential to have a strong infrastructure in the greatest Nation in the world and in our States. It is essential that people not be worried that bridges will fall; that they will not have good roads; that they will not have their ports deepened so they can accept these big ships that go in and out; that they will be vulnerable to flooding; and that they will not be able to restore wetlands, which are so critical to preventing floods.

This bill is so critical to the infrastructure and to the environment. Anyone who has been to the Everglades knows how critical it is to make sure the Everglades remain. It is a gift from God, and we have the responsibility. Anyone who knows the Chesapeake Bay knows how important it is to ensure it is healthy. We do that in this bill. And we do our best to ensure that the types of flooding we saw in Katrina will be minimized. We made many, many reforms, and I feel good about them.

I really have to say that without the staff, none of this would be possible. Senator VITTER and I are so blessed to have the kinds of staffs we have. They are dedicated. The hours they work have no bounds. The other night we were talking at 11 o'clock. My staff was there. This type of a bill is not easy to get through because every State has its own needs, every State has its own challenges, every State has its own problems. We were able, because of our staffs working endlessly, to meet the needs, I believe, of the whole country, and that is why we have votes from the entire country. We have votes from so many States because this bill is truly reflective of the needs of our communities.

I want to say to Bettina Poirier, my chief of staff and chief counsel, you certainly know how to get a bill through. You certainly know how to manage a staff. And you certainly have made wise decisions in terms of your staff. We have Jason Albritton and Ted Illston and Tyler Rushforth and David Napoliello and Andrew Dohrmann.

These are only 1, 2, 3, 4, 5—6 names that I mentioned, and they handled this bill from, essentially, 100 different Senators pounding on their doors, including this Senator, saying: What and why and how? And you answered it.

I also want to close by thanking some other wonderful staffers of Senator REID: Gary Myrick, Tim Mitchell, Bill Dauster, Alex McDonough, and, I have to say, Tyler Kruzich of the Budget Committee, who helped us, and Reema Dodin, who came in and really helped us make sure we had the votes when we needed the votes.

And I am going to make one thank-you. I know Senator VITTER is going to name his staff. I am not going to mention their names, but he speaks for me when he thanks them. But there is one person, and that is Neil Chatterjee, and I hope I do not ruin his career by thanking him. He works for Senator MCCONNELL. He helped us greatly just to know the lay of the land. He said: This is where we have problems. This is where we can come together.

And I will tell you something. Managing these bills, you just need to know how you stand, and you need to know where you are. So having the support of both Senator REID and Senator MCCONNELL and their staffs has made our world a lot easier.

So we say to the House: This is your chance. Step to the plate. I know Chairman SHUSTER over there really wants a bill. We stand ready to work with him. I think our bill provides a roadmap.

With that, I want to again say to Senator VITTER, it has been terrific to work with him, and I look forward to continuing our collaboration anytime and anyplace we can come together.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Louisiana.

Mr. VITTER. Madam President, I stand to echo all of those thoughts.

Let me start with a lot of overdue thanks. First of all, let me thank a great partner in Chairman BOXER. As she said many times, we do not agree about a lot, including important issues within the jurisdiction of our committee, but we can come together constructively, really productively, on the infrastructure side of our committee—both highway infrastructure and water infrastructure. And that is what we wanted to do from the very beginning on this bill.

The crucial element to any success is the will and the determination to do it. We both had that, but I really thank her for her leadership in that regard and being a great partner.

I certainly echo all of her thoughts about the staff work. I am deeply indebted to all of the staff work, particularly on my side, that went into this bill. The chair and I personally dealt with probably a couple dozen issues and semicrises that would crop up over time.

But if we did that with a couple of dozen, our staffs did that with hundreds and solved those problems to the satisfaction of a huge number of Members. That was reflected in the vote. I thank both staffs, but I am particularly indebted to my staff for all of that hard work, particularly Zak Baig, Charles Brittingham, Chris Tomassi, Sarah Veatch, Rebecca Louviere, Jill Landry, Luke Bolar, and Cheyenne Steel. They all put in enormous hours—of course, Charles much more than anyone else, but they all put in enormous hours. I thank them for their excellent work.

I also want to emphasize what a positive bill this is. I talked a few minutes ago, right before the vote, about the strengths of the bill from a national point of view: jobs, waterborne commerce, reform of the Corps of Engineers. This bill is also very important for my home State of Louisiana. I just want to underscore that in closing.

In three areas it is particularly important. First of all, we have a lot of important flood control, hurricane protection projects. This bill moves a number of those projects forward in a crucial way; projects such as the Louisiana Coastal Area Ecosystem Project, Morganza to the Gulf, which is vitally important to the protection of Lafourche and Terrebonne Parishes and surrounding areas, also the West Shore Hurricane Protection Project. That is right in the middle of where Hurricane Isaac hit. We need to get that done. It is now moving forward, the Southwest Louisiana Coastal Hurricane Protection Study.

Finally, although it is not as far along, there is very important work with regard to Saint Tammany and other coastal parishes achieving flood protection, including a barrier at the lake or near Lake Pontchartrain for Saint Tammany. That concept will move forward because of this bill.

The second big category in the bill is Corps of Engineers reform and accountability. Those of us who lived through Hurricane Katrina saw some of the best and, unfortunately, some of the worst of what the Federal Government has to offer. On the side that needs improvement, we need streamlining and reform at certain agencies, including the Corps of Engineers.

This bill brings that reform to the Corps of Engineers in a number of important areas, such as the proposal Senator NELSON of Florida and I have. It also streamlines and expedites the process, particularly with regard to environmental review. That is very important.

Third, and finally, this bill advances waterborne commerce by dredging our harbors and ports and rivers, and getting that work done, which is vital, which is necessary, if marathon commerce is going to move forward and

help drive the engine of our economy. We have major reforms in this bill with regard to the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund, major reforms in the bill with regard to the Inland Waterway Trust Fund, dredging what we need to dredge, moving forward on key harbors and ports and waterways. That is important for our Louisiana maritime sector, which is a big part of the national economy.

So there are a lot of positives to this bill. That is why I was proud to help develop it and support it. That is why I am very pleased today that it got overwhelming bipartisan support.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

DISAPPEARING MIDDLE CLASS

Mr. SANDERS. Madam President, yesterday the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office, the CBO, estimated that this year's budget deficit will be 24 percent lower than it was projected just a few months ago. That is very good news for our country. Let's not forget that just 5 or so years ago when President Obama came into office in January 2009, he inherited a $1.4 trillion deficit—$1.4 trillion. This was as a result of two unpaid-for wars, huge tax breaks for the wealthy and large corporations, an unfunded Medicare Part D prescription drug program written by the drug and insurance companies and, of course, the terrible recession, which resulted in less revenue coming into the Federal Government.

We experienced 4 straight years of deficits above $1 trillion. This year the CBO projects the deficit will just be $642 billion. Now, $642 billion is a lot of money. It is a large deficit. We have to continue working on that issue. But, clearly, for a variety of reasons we have made substantial progress, and we should be proud of that.

By 2015, the CBO is projecting that Federal deficit will total just 2.1 percent of GDP, exactly what those folks involved with Simpson and Bowles told us we needed to achieve in order to be fiscally sustainable over the long term.

So the good news is that we have made significant progress on deficit reduction. We should be proud of that. However, we must be cognizant that we do not place ourselves in a situation in which the operation was a success but the patient died. The patient I am talking about, of course, is the disappearing middle class, the backbone of this great country.

In other words, while a lot of attention has been focused on deficit reduction, which is important, it is high time we started focusing on what is happening to tens of millions of working families, people who are unemployed, people who are working at very low wage jobs, elderly people who cannot afford their prescription drugs, families who cannot afford to send their kids to college or provide childcare for their young ones.

My main point today is, let's start focusing on the issue of most importance to the vast majority of the American people; that is, creating the millions of jobs we desperately need and making sure people have income they can afford to live on with dignity.

The sad reality is—and we need to focus on these issues—poverty is increasing and in many ways the great middle class of this country, once the envy of the world, is disappearing. Sadly, the gap between the very, very wealthy and everyone else is growing wider and wider.

We must not have an economy where just the people on top, just the multinational corporations do extremely well, while the vast majority of the people are struggling to make ends meet.

Since 1999 the average middle-class family has seen its income go down by nearly $5,000 after adjusting for inflation. Median family income today is lower than it was in 1996. So all over this country people get up in the morning, often husbands and wives, work long hours, and they come back and they find out that they are worse off financially than they were 10 or 15 years ago.

When you ask people, why, what direction, how is the country doing, they think the country is moving in the wrong direction. That is precisely the reason: people are working long hard hours, and they are falling further and further behind.

I understand when we pick up the newspapers they tell us unemployment is 7.5 percent. That is one way of looking at unemployment. But if we look at it in a more accurate way, including those people who have given up looking for work, people who are working part time when they want to work full time, real unemployment in this Nation today is 13.9 percent. It is high time this Congress began addressing that issue. In fact, more than 20 million Americans today do not have a full-time job when they want to be working full time.

Another issue that has not received the attention that it deserves is youth unemployment. Youth unemployment is especially painful because we have young people graduating high school, graduating college, wanting to go out and begin their careers, begin their adult lives, and they cannot find a job. In some cases if they graduate college, they are finding a job which does not require a college degree.

The youth unemployment rate for 16- to 24-year-old workers is 16.2 percent—16.2 percent. For teenagers the overall unemployment rate is 25.1 percent. For African-American teens, the number is 43.1 percent.

Believe it or not, the United States has now surpassed much of Europe in the percentage of young adults without jobs, according to a recent article in the New York Times. We have done well for a variety of reasons in dealing with deficit reduction, but now it is time to turn to those young people throughout this country, kids who are looking forward to getting out on their own, earning a living, and help them get the kind of jobs they need to succeed in life and to start their adult life off in a good direction.

Each and every year when we talk about young people, we should understand that another real tragedy is taking place, and that is because of the disappearing middle class and the high cost of college education. Some 400,000 high school graduates do not go to college, not because they are unqualified but because they cannot afford it. What a tragedy that is, to waste all of that intellectual capital. Who knows what those kids might do if they are able to get a college degree. But now, because of declining incomes for their families and the high cost of college education, they are unable to do it. This is an issue on which we must also focus.

From 1969 to 2009, median earnings for male high school graduates plummeted by almost 50 percent after adjusting for inflation. Let me repeat that. From 1969 to 2009, median earnings for male high school graduates plummeted by almost 50 percent after adjusting for inflation. Men without a high school education have fared even worse. Their inflation-adjusted median earnings have shrunk by nearly two-thirds over the past four decades.

What is that about? Well, what that is about is at one time in this country, when people did not have even a high school degree or just a high school degree, they could go out and get a job. Maybe that job was in a factory. Maybe it was not the greatest job in the world, but if they worked in a factory, and especially if they had a union job in that factory, they could make a decent wage. They could make it into the middle class. But, sadly, those jobs have, to a very significant degree, disappeared. We have lost over 50,000 factories in this country in the last 10 years millions of decent-paying jobs.

What opportunities are there now available for young people who just graduate high school or may not even graduate high school? At best, at best, they are going to work at McDonald's or work at Wal-Mart for inadequate wages. But the truth is that many of those young people are finding it difficult to obtain any kind of job.

There is another issue on which we must focus, and that is distribution of wealth because at the end of the game, the end of the game of economics, we want to know who wins and who loses. Clearly, what has been going on in this country in recent years is the people on top are doing phenomenally well while the middle class is shrinking and poverty is at a very high rate.

According to a report that came out on April 23, 2013, a couple of weeks ago, from the Pew Research Center, all of the new wealth generated in this country from 2009 to 2011 went to the top 7 percent of American households, while