

grandchildren, Declan and Delaney O'Shea, and to Joe's many friends in this Nation and in Ireland. May your cherished memories comfort you in this time of sorrow.

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE EXTENSION

Mr. HARKIN. Madam President, today I wish to speak about one of the most important jobs the Senate must do before we go home for the holidays—extend Federal unemployment insurance benefits. This is a program that has helped tens of millions of Americans weather the storm of the difficult economy over the last several years. It has helped workers put food on the table, kept a roof over their heads, and kept millions out of poverty.

But this program is at risk. If Congress fails to extend it, then just 3 days after Christmas on December 28, 1.3 million Americans will be abruptly cut off from their vital unemployment insurance benefits. But it does not stop there: by the end of next year another 3.6 million Americans will be cut off from unemployment insurance. That's a total of 4.9 million Americans—including 35,500 Iowans, who have spent 6 months or more trying to find new work, going out and pounding the pavement day after day, who will now have to spend this holiday season worrying about how they and their families and children are going to survive. How will they pay their heating bill, their rent, or their mortgage, much less afford gifts for their family?

Congress has a moral responsibility to continue the Federal unemployment insurance program to ensure that Americans and their families can survive while trying to get back on their feet and find new work. It is simply unacceptable for us to return to our home States to celebrate the holidays without answering our constituents' call to keep this critical lifeline going. They are depending on us.

Unfortunately, some people seem to think that the misfortune of losing a job means that these hardworking folks are to blame, or that they do not deserve this basic lifeline. But they are not. In fact, participation in the unemployment program requires that workers have a significant work history, which means they have paid into the system and earned these benefits. Collecting benefits also requires workers to have lost their job through no fault of their own, and to be actively looking for work. The fact is times are still tough and jobs are hard to come by. For every job opening there are three job seekers. That is why so many millions of workers have been searching for new work for such a long period of time. Our economy still needs more jobs, and in the meantime, we must make sure that workers who are out of luck in this economy have some basic income to make ends meet. We cannot abandon them now.

These benefits are crucial for keeping households afloat. For many, this is

their last lifeline. If Congress fails to act, millions of people will face real economic devastation. The Council of Economic Advisers found that in 2012 unemployment benefits kept 2.5 million people from falling below the poverty line, including 600,000 children.

By helping families to make ends meet, unemployment benefits are a help not just to jobseekers and their families, but to our economy as a whole. After all, one of the best ways to grow our economy and to create jobs is to support spending power. And that is exactly what unemployment benefits do. When unemployed workers can continue to pay their bills, businesses can continue to make sales and provide services, and the economy grows. The Congressional Budget Office finds unemployment benefits to be one of the most efficient fiscal policies to improve economic growth. If Federal unemployment benefits are extended through 2014, it would increase GDP by 0.2 percent and create 200,000 jobs. Those jobs could be lost if we do not extend this program.

It's important to remember who is most affected by long-term unemployment. Unfortunately, it is older workers. In a cruel state of affairs, those who have been working for decades, but who are not yet at retirement age, have the hardest time finding new work. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, over half of jobseekers between ages 55 and 64 have been searching for work for over 6 months. That is compared to 42 percent of those between 25 and 54. These older workers can't yet afford the luxury of retirement. They need to continue working to support their families and hopefully one day save enough to retire with security.

Congress has a long history of acting to ensure basic security for working people during tough economic times. Over the last 50 years, during seven different economic downturns, Congress has provided Federal unemployment benefit programs to assist workers when unemployment is high. The current program was put in place in 2008 by President George W. Bush when the unemployment rate was 5.6 percent. While unemployment is falling, it is still at a high rate, 7 percent. Long-term unemployment has been at record highs for years. Currently 37 percent of unemployed workers have been looking for new work for at least 6 months. Congress has never allowed Federal unemployment benefits to expire while the long-term unemployment rate was above 23 percent. Our economy is recovering, but we are not there yet. While the duration of Federal benefits has appropriately been scaled back as the recovery has progressed, there is no question that American families are still depending on Federal unemployment benefits, and there is no justification for letting the current program expire now.

We cannot let vulnerable Americans be cut off from their unemployment in-

surance during their time of need. We cannot turn the lights out on millions of Americans. Working families deserve peace of mind and our continued support while they look for jobs during these tough times. I urge the Senate to act to extend unemployment benefits, so that families do not have to wonder how they will survive in the New Year.

MAJOR MEDICAL FACILITY LEASE AUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2013

Mr. INHOFE. Madam President, I am pleased that the Senate is scheduled, hopefully, to pass H.R. 3521, the Department of Veterans Affairs Major Medical Facility Lease Authorization Act of 2013, known as S. 1740 in the Senate, which I proudly cosponsored. The treatment of our country's veterans is of great importance to me, and I believe that it is the government's duty to honor the promises made to our veterans.

My constituents have written to me many times regarding the worsening conditions of the VA outpatient clinic in Tulsa. The building currently lacks the space to care adequately for the large number of veterans that receive their medical treatment at the facility. Due to the size of the facility, services such as the behavioral health services were located several miles away. Additionally, the parking lot capacity was not acceptable. It is because of my constituents that I have worked vigorously to ensure that their voices were heard.

With the passage of this bill, there will be funding to improve and expand this clinic. The new VA outpatient clinic in Tulsa would include primary care, women's health, imaging, specialty care, physical therapy, audiology, optometry, mental health, prosthetics, dentistry, and a pharmacy. The facility would then be able to provide the services that were promised to our men and women who were willing to make the personal sacrifices necessary to serve in the defense of our country.

HOMEOWNER FLOOD INSURANCE AFFORDABILITY ACT OF 2013

Mrs. GILLIBRAND. Madam President, I rise today to join my colleagues from Louisiana and New Jersey—who know as well as anyone about all the struggle of rebuilding after a major disaster—in calling on the Senate to pass the Homeowners Flood Insurance Affordability Act before the Senate adjourns next week. I am deeply dismayed that my colleagues on the other side of the aisle have objected to allowing the Senate to vote on this commonsense and bipartisan bill to help homeowners.

I want to especially thank Senator LANDRIEU for her strong leadership and support for families who took the worst of Superstorm Sandy—a massive storm that claimed the lives of 61 New Yorkers, shattered countless others,