

of revitalization. Because let's remember this: Government programs can sometimes help, but they can't do everything. The 1960s mindset about how to fight poverty needs to change to fit the realities of the 21st century.

I want to share a sentiment I read yesterday from Thomas Vincent, an unemployed coal worker from the very Kentucky county where LBJ launched his big-government blitz 50 years ago. This was his take on the so-called "war on poverty:" What good are all these government programs if they do not get you a job? It is a feeling, the article noted, that is widespread among his neighbors in Martin County.

This is why Republicans say it is time for modernization and new approaches. It is time to give folks such as Thomas real hope. It is time to give them more than just good intentions.

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, the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 12:30, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each and with the time equally divided and controlled by the two leaders or their designees, with the Republicans controlling the first 30 minutes and the majority controlling the next 30 minutes.

The Senator from South Dakota.

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I rise today to discuss amendment No. 2622 I have filed, the Solutions to Long-Term Unemployment Act, that will be before the Senate today.

The bill before the Senate today would extend emergency unemployment benefits for the 13th time since 2008. Let me repeat that. Congress has enacted or extended emergency unemployment benefits 13 times over the past 5 years. At some point you have to start asking yourself: At what point does this no longer become an emergency but it becomes permanent? We have been doing this now for 5 years. This will be the 13th time.

Obviously, there are lots of people in a tough economy who are still hurting. But what this should say to us is that it is time we started not just treating the symptom but fixing the problem we have in America today. And the problem we have is a sluggish economy that continues to sort of stumble along. We have a chronically high unemployment rate with lots of people who have been unemployed for a very long period of time. Over that same period, Congress has pushed through ObamaCare, raised taxes on job creators, while the admin-

istration has pursued aggressive regulations that have done little more than drive up costs for many of our small businesses.

So after 13 extensions of unemployment benefits, expensive new regulations, and higher taxes, what is the result? Well, today over 37 percent of unemployed Americans have been out of work for 27 weeks or longer. That represents over 4 million men and women who have been most impacted by President Obama's failed economic policies.

I applaud my colleagues on the Republican side of the aisle who have offered up commonsense, even bipartisan, ideas to pay for the extension of emergency unemployment benefits. If we extend these benefits once again, I am hopeful we can find an appropriate way to pay for this extension and not pass the bill on to our children and grandchildren. However, I also have to come to the floor today to challenge all of my colleagues to look at solutions to the underlying problem rather than simply treating the symptoms of long-term unemployment for yet the 13th time.

The underlying problem is we have 4 million Americans who have not been able to find jobs for more than 6 months on account of the stagnant Obama economy. That is almost double—double—the amount of long-term unemployed Americans relative to pre-recession levels. So my amendment addresses the underlying problem of long-term unemployment by reducing labor costs, increasing worker mobility, and strengthening Federal worker training programs.

First, my amendment would provide much-needed relief from ObamaCare for any employer who hires an individual who has been unemployed for 27 weeks or longer. As we all know, ObamaCare is full of additional costs and mandates that are stifling economic growth. The ObamaCare employer mandate arguably has the greatest impact on an already weak labor market. The impact of this mandate is so great the administration has unilaterally delayed it until after the next election. Under this mandate, a business with 50 or more employees must provide government-approved insurance or pay an annual penalty of \$2,000 to \$3,000 per employee. For a smaller or medium-sized business, that is a significant deterrent to expanding and hiring more workers.

Under my amendment, if a business decides to hire someone who has been out of work for 27 weeks or longer, that person would be exempt from the ObamaCare mandate for as long as he or she works at that business.

Second, my amendment would further reduce labor costs by providing a 6-month payroll tax holiday for any employer who hires a long-term unemployed worker. Employers currently pay a payroll tax of 6.2 percent of an employee's wages up to a capped amount known as the Social Security wage base. Waiving this tax is an in-

centive for employers to hire those employees often considered to be a higher risk by virtue of the fact they have been out of the labor force for an extended period of time.

Consider a job that is paying an annual wage of \$40,000. The employer payroll tax holiday in my amendment represents a \$1,240 incentive for the employer to hire a long-term unemployed individual. Or take a higher skilled job paying \$80,000 annually. A payroll tax holiday represents a \$2,480 incentive for the employer to hire someone who has been unemployed for 27 weeks or longer. When coupled with the ObamaCare exemption in my amendment, that is an incentive of roughly \$5,000 to hire an individual who has been unemployed for an extended period of time.

Third, my amendment addresses a fundamental problem facing the long-term unemployed by providing relocation assistance to start a job or find better opportunities.

While the national labor market remains weak, there are pockets of prosperity across the country. In my home State of South Dakota, we have an unemployment rate of 3.6 percent. That is second only to our neighbors in North Dakota who are fully embracing the energy renaissance which is occurring in the Upper Great Plains and other parts of the country. Because of South Dakota's low tax and regulatory framework, it consistently makes us one of the best places in the United States to start and grow a business. In fact, one of the biggest issues we hear from prospective business investors is a concern they are not going to have enough workers if they decide to move to my State.

Meanwhile, we have other parts of the Nation that continue to struggle with persistently high unemployment rates. Virginia has an unemployment rate of 8½ percent, and Rhode Island has 9 percent. The number of job openings and hire rates varies from region to region as well. This past summer the rate of job openings in the South was 20 percent greater than in the Northeast. The same trend exists for hiring rates between those two regions.

Part of a dynamic 21st economy is ensuring a mobile workforce that can meet regional demands for good-paying jobs. However, if you have someone who has been living off of unemployment benefits for the past 6 months, that person likely does not have the resources to move to a new State for a new job.

My amendment would provide a low-interest loan of up to \$10,000 for anyone willing to relocate to a new job or move to a new State with better employment opportunities. These loans would have to be repaid within 10 years, but no payments would be required for 1 year while that individual or family gets back on their feet. Additionally, if the new job is eliminated within that first year, through no fault of the employee, the loan could be forgiven.

Finally, my amendment would strengthen and streamline Federal worker training programs. We currently have over 50—50—Federal training programs across 9 Federal bureaucracies. It is a broken morass of programs that isn't helping employers or employees, and it certainly isn't an efficient use of taxpayer dollars. Even President Obama, in his 2012 State of the Union speech, said he wanted to "cut through the maze of confusing [job] training programs" and create "one program" for workers to find the help they need. Unfortunately, like many of the President's promises, that turned out to be more talk than action.

While the President has failed to put forward a real plan to reform our worker training programs, the Republican-led House of Representatives has acted on a plan to accomplish just that. The House-passed SKILLS Act includes several critical reforms that ensure workers receive the training they need for positions that businesses need filled today.

The SKILLS Act would consolidate 35 redundant and ineffective Federal worker programs into a single workforce investment fund that would serve as a single source of support for workers, employers, and job seekers at the State level. This legislation creates much-needed flexibility at the State level and it empowers Governors and local employers to train workers for today's in-demand jobs.

The SKILLS Act cuts through red-tape and eliminates barriers that oftentimes keep workers from receiving the training they need when they need it. For too long we have been throwing taxpayer dollars at a maze of overlapping bureaucracies when we should be providing more targeted assistance directly to job seekers. We need to be training our workers for the high-tech jobs of today and the jobs that will continue to be in demand in the future.

The SKILLS Act accomplishes these goals, which is why I included it in my amendment as a commonsense way to help the long-term unemployed try to find work in today's economy.

There is no one solution to helping the unemployed. However, one thing is clear: We need to find ways to make it more attractive for employers to invest in and hire workers rather than constantly pushing legislation that will raise the cost of doing business in America.

Let's think for a second about the bills the Democratic majority supports or supported in the past. ObamaCare raised the cost of labor, it drove up premiums for millions of Americans and made it more expensive for employers to hire new employees.

Raising the minimum wage will raise the cost of hiring new employees and only worsen the job prospects for the long-term unemployed.

The tax increases pushed by Democrats here in the Senate and the White House apply to millions of small business owners which discourages investment and job growth.

New environmental regulations are driving up the cost of energy and, therefore, the cost of doing business in this country.

I am not suggesting the provisions in my amendment are the only way to make it more economical for employers to hire more workers, but I am suggesting if we want more employment, we need to make it less costly, not more costly, to hire each additional employee. It seems that nearly every policy pursued by the Democratic majority and the White House would raise costs on businesses, especially those small businesses which create the majority of jobs in this country.

We have tried the approach of bigger government, higher taxes, and more regulations for the last 5 years and it has not worked. Let's try something different. Let's have a real debate about how we lower cost and make it easier for employers to go out and hire new employees. Let's focus our efforts on those who need the most help, such as those Americans who have been out of work the longest on account of the lagging Obama economy.

I hope this amendment as well as others that my colleagues will offer will have an opportunity to be heard here on the floor of the Senate and voted on. What we have going on here now in terms of a process doesn't resemble anything like an open process that should allow us to openly debate the big issues that affect the American people. This is a pocketbook issue. This strikes at the very heart of the quality of life, the standard of living, the future economic well-being of Americans all across this country.

I certainly hope the majority leader will allow for an open process which will enable us to enter into that debate, to put forward proposals—mine, among many others—which could be considered and voted on that would actually improve the overall situation of middle-class Americans. It is high time we had that debate. I hope we can, and I hope the majority will give us that opportunity.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BOOKER). The Senator from Georgia.

AFFORDABLE CARE ACT

Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, before I make my remarks, I commend the Senator from South Dakota and underscore what the Senator said regarding the SKILLS Act passed by the House of Representatives.

I am the ranking member of the labor subcommittee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions. Six years ago the Workforce Investment Act expired in its authorization, and for 6 years it has languished in the bowels and in the heart of the Senate and the House of Representatives, going unauthorized.

During that same 6-year period of time between 2008 and today, America has experienced terrible unemploy-

ment, terrible job loss, terrible increases in unemployment, and extensions of that unemployment.

The Senator from South Dakota is exactly correct: If we were doing our job and reauthorizing programs in the law today—such as the Workforce Investment Act—and training people for the skills of the 21st century and the jobs of the 21st century, we wouldn't be talking about unemployment compensation, we wouldn't be talking about the great tragedies of America. We would be talking about America's greatest prosperity. So I commend the Senator from South Dakota for pointing out what is critically important for us to recognize as Members of the U.S. Congress.

I come to the floor, though, to talk about the Affordable Care Act, I will tell a couple real-life stories which came to me by email. But before I do, my job is to do what the people of Georgia want me to do. I have office hours when I am home. I answer my own phone calls. I try to respond to the concerns they have. I try to see that people get referred to the right place.

Since January 1, I have dealt with almost nothing but the Affordable Care Act—or ObamaCare—and the consequences of that act, and what effect it is having on the American people and the people of Georgia—and, in particular, on the two great promises used on the floor of this Senate to sell that legislation to the American people: One, if you like your policy, you can keep it; and, if you like your doctor, you can keep him or her. Both were clear, unequivocal promises.

I will tell two stories today that came to my attention which illustrate how it was not true. And these are just two of many stories. The first is from Jane.

Congressman, This is not my story but my friend's story, Steve. . . . He has suffered with multiple myeloma for more than 10 years. This is a disease that usually kills within 5 years of being diagnosed. But with the excellent health care he has been able to receive through his health care program he has had access to the Mayo Clinic and a myriad of drugs. Now he has been told that his plan will be cancelled since the plan does not meet the minimum standards set forth in the ACA.

Now he can no longer continue his treatments because the various plans have deemed the drugs he needs to stay alive as experimental. WOW! Really that is just awful and not enough is being said about this government take over of our lives is affecting those that are critically ill.

And what about the promise made that if we liked our plan we can keep it? Steve doesn't have a plan, but he still has multiple myeloma.

This story comes about the promise that: If you like your doctor, you can keep them. This is from Felicia in Alpharetta, GA, a story I hear more and more as I travel my State:

My husband and I are both currently paying individual health care policies as he currently has a small business and I used to own one. He is on a Kaiser HMO and I am on a PPO with Blue Cross Blue Shield. We have