

step back and look at that. Because when we look at where we are going to move forward, we need to understand from where we came and how we ended up where we were a few years back in the midst of a recession.

So as I look at these young pages—thinking about how difficult it was for so many years for young people to find employment and that we are now finally seeing hope for young people out in the job market and how we can build what we have got.

So what do we know? We have had 58 straight months of private sector job growth. Our national unemployment is below 6 percent. In fact, in my State it is down to 3.7 percent. Our unemployment rate last year went down faster than in any other year we have seen since 1984. We are now No. 1 in oil. This fall we surpassed Saudi Arabia as the No. 1 oil and gas producer in the world. That is what our country has done because of the work in North Dakota—I see my friend Senator HOEVEN over there—because of the work going on all over this country.

As the President also pointed out last night, we also are increasing our renewable energy in wind. I would add, from the State of Minnesota, that the renewable fuel standard and the fact that we have better gas mileage standards—all of these things have helped to bring down our consumption and to raise our production, bringing these prices down in our country.

I thought one of the most interesting statistics last night was a fact I had never heard before. Since 2010, America has put more people back to work than the combined countries of all of Europe, Japan, and all advanced economies across the world. That shows that our workers are so good—something we know. It shows that our businesses are so good. I think this is an opportunity we now have to finally in this Chamber govern from opportunity, not just be governing from a state of crisis. That is what we need to do.

One of my favorite parts, of course, was Rebekah and Ben Erler from Minnesota, who were mentioned right near the beginning of his speech, sitting right up in the First Lady's gallery in the House, a woman who had gone through some hard times. Her husband had lost his job in the construction industry, but because of the strength of our State and the strength of her family, her personal strength to want to go back to work and go to a community college, her family is now stabilized. As the President pointed out, maybe their big treat is getting together for a pizza on Friday, but the point is that they have gotten through some very hard times, as have so many resilient people in this country.

So the question we now have is this: How do we get ahead? How do we keep going? I am going to go through a few of the ideas that the President discussed last night that are near and dear to my heart.

The first is community college. I would not be standing in the Senate

right now if it wasn't for community college. My grandpa worked 1,500 feet underground in the mines in Ely, MN. He never even graduated from high school. At age 15 he had to quit school. Even though he was getting A's in math, he had to quit school to go and help support his family. Within a few years he was down in those mines. That is where he worked his whole life. He had dreamed of a life at sea. He had dreamed of a life in the Navy. He had dreamed of a life where he could use his education, but he worked in that mine because he believed, more than anything, in the American dream—in his two young boys, in his wife, in his family, in the nine brothers and sisters he raised because both of his parents died. That is why, at ages 15 and 16, he and his brother went to work. They went to work to help their family. When the youngest kid, Hannah, had to go to an orphanage for a year and a half, my grandpa borrowed a car a year and a half after that and went and got her back, as he promised.

So what did he do for my dad? He saved money in a coffee can in the basement so he could send my dad to college, and my dad is a proud graduate of Ely Junior College, a 2-year community college. From there he was able to go to the University of Minnesota, get a journalism degree and interview everyone from Ronald Reagan to Mike Ditka, to Ginger Rogers. That is our family's story.

My sister never graduated from high school. She had some trouble in high school. So what did she do? She was able to get her GED, go to a community college, and move on from there to finalize her 4-year degree and get an accounting degree.

Those stories are all over America. The President's devotion to talking about these 2-year community colleges and using them as a launching pad for kids' careers is the right one.

I am hoping, given the support I have seen from businesses across my State—where we don't have enough welders, we don't have enough people to work the technology in a lot of the factories. I am hoping my colleagues will join us because of the strong business support, because of the need we have in our country to get more people into these jobs.

We have 5 million job openings. We have 8 million people who are unemployed. We need to match those two numbers. And the way we do it, I think, is by doing more with these 1- and 2-year degrees and doing more with kids in high school.

The second topic I appreciated that the President talked about was the middle-class tax cut. We all know the numbers. We all know the facts that due to the widening gap we have seen in income distribution, about 80 percent of families have \$1 trillion less in income than they did during the Reagan time—\$1 trillion less than during the Reagan time. The top 400 people in the country have more wealth

than the bottom half of the country combined. So as we look at where we should be giving tax cuts and who we should be helping, it is clearly the middle class of this country.

That includes help with childcare and childcare credits that the President talked about. We are the only advanced country, as he pointed out last night, in the world that doesn't have some kind of sick leave or paid maternity leave. When I go and talk to women all over my State and I ask them what they most want, so many of them say time. They want time to be able to be with their kids when they are sick. They want time to be able to be with their baby when their baby is born. That is the best thing for our country. So I don't believe the naysayers that say we cannot work across the aisle to start talking about these important middle-class issues.

As the President pointed out, he is not running again, and he has nothing to do but to try to move forward with this country.

I appreciated the words of so many of my Republican colleagues who talked about governance, who said they wanted to get back to the real business of government, which is governing. I also appreciated those who have put out innovative ideas on things such as infrastructure. The simple idea that perhaps we can get some of these foreign earnings that are stuck there overseas that are just sitting there, billions of dollars—why don't we do something to bring that money back and make sure a portion of it goes into infrastructure? No one knows that better than our State. Our State is a State where a bridge fell down in the middle of a summer day—not just a little bridge, an eight-lane highway eight blocks from my house; a highway my family would drive over every single day—down into the middle of the Mississippi River on a summer day. That is infrastructure and that is a problem.

There are 75,000 bridges in this country that have been found to be structurally not efficient, not able to function. That is what is happening in this country right now.

So I truly appreciated the fact that the President talked about, yes, we are going to be defending something, we are going to be arguing about things in this Chamber. That is what this is set up to do. That is democracy. That is government. But there are also some very clear areas of agreement, and one of them is helping the middle class. Let's move. Let's go forward.

Thank you, Mr. President.

I yield the floor.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SULLIVAN). Morning business is closed.

KEYSTONE XL PIPELINE ACT

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of S. 1, which the clerk will report.

The bill clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 1) to approve the Keystone XL Pipeline.

Pending:

Murkowski amendment No. 2, in the nature of a substitute.

Fischer amendment No. 18 (to amendment No. 2), to provide limits on the designation of new federally protected land.

Schatz amendment No. 58 (to amendment No. 2), to express the sense of Congress regarding climate change.

Murkowski (for Lee) amendment No. 33 (to amendment No. 2), to conform citizen suits under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

Durbin amendment No. 69 (to amendment No. 2), to ensure that the storage and transportation of petroleum coke is regulated in a manner that ensures the protection of public and ecological health.

Murkowski (for Toomey) amendment No. 41 (to amendment No. 2), to continue cleaning up fields and streams while protecting neighborhoods, generating affordable energy, and creating jobs.

Whitehouse amendment No. 29 (to amendment No. 2), to express the sense of the Senate that climate change is real and not a hoax.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, we are back again with the Keystone XL Pipeline, S. 1, the bipartisan 60-sponsor bill in front of us. We had a good day yesterday debating three amendments and ultimately disposing of them. We have a half dozen of them in front of us this morning and this afternoon.

I think it is worth noting, there have been several Members who have come to the floor to give comments about the State of the Union last evening delivered by President Obama. It was his sixth official State of the Union Address. It marked the sixth address that he has given to the Congress and the Nation while this project has been under review the whole time throughout his entire administration. Every one of those State of the Union Addresses has happened at a time when the Keystone XL application has been pending. It puts into context how long we have been considering this legislation.

The President didn't really speak much to the demerits or the opposition to Keystone XL—it was basically a quick reference—but he did in a manner attempt to compare this bipartisan, subsidy-free bill to major taxpayer-funded infrastructure projects. Whether it is our highways or bridges, the need is clear. But I think we also recognize those are projects that are taxpayer-funded that will require millions and perhaps billions of dollars a year. What we are talking about with the Keystone XL is something where we don't have any Federal subsidies going in. It is not taxpayer-funded. I think it is important to make sure that we understand the difference.

What we didn't hear last night was how this project could be advanced.

Once again, there was no indicator. I would like to remind everyone that we are sitting at over 2,300 days where we have not had a Presidential decision. I think the good news for us here on this floor is the debate on this issue is not going to last that long, thankfully.

Again, we moved into regular order, and I think it was helpful for Members of the body to not only know that there was a series of amendments that were called up, but that we were able to have debate on them, and then we were able to dispense with them.

The majority of the Senate voted to table two of those proposals, but then when it came to the Portman-Shaheen bill, the energy efficiency provision, we were able to move that by a vote of 94 to 5, demonstrating again a great deal of support for this small energy efficiency provision. I wish it had been bigger, in fairness to the bill sponsors who have been working so hard for years on that. We just advanced a very small piece of that. I think we have more to do in the area of energy efficiency, and I am looking forward to working with them on that.

What we have in front of us now at this point in the process is we have a bill that will approve the cross-border permit for the Keystone XL Pipeline and we will work to deal with some aspects of energy efficiency. I think that is some good progress.

Once again this morning I will encourage Senators. We have called for an open amendment process, but as the leader has reminded us, it is not open-ended. We are not going to be on this bill indefinitely. So move to file your amendments. If you want a vote on them, you need to be filing them now and talking to us now.

We are at 77 amendments that have been filed and that was as of last night. So there is clearly already a line, and my hope is we will be able to dispense with this half dozen today.

Briefly speaking to the measures that we have from each side, we have Senator FISCHER's amendment 18; Schatz amendment No. 58; No. 33 is the Lee amendment; we have Senator DURBIN's amendment 69; we have Senator TOOMEY's amendment 41, as well as the Whitehouse amendment No. 29.

I spoke a little bit on a couple of these measures yesterday, and I will be speaking more this afternoon before we move, hopefully, to votes.

I do want to take a minute before I turn it over to Senator CANTWELL to be recognized and then to Senator HOEVEN. There have been several sense-of-the-Senate amendments that have been filed—presented on the issue of climate change. I think it is important for people to note that in order to approve the Keystone XL Pipeline, as the legislation itself lays out, there is no climate change provision that is required. I find it a little ironic that in neither of the two pending amendments that we have before us—Senator SCHATZ's and Senator WHITEHOUSE's—neither of them actually quotes the

parts of the State Department's final EIS that explains, I think in pretty fair detail, that this project will not significantly contribute to climate change. In fact, the State Department found that without the Keystone XL Pipeline greenhouse gas emissions associated with transporting Canadian oil could actually increase, and the estimate is increasing somewhere between 28 and as high as 42 percent. One might ask, how can that be? The reality is that not only is a pipeline less costly and more efficient, but it has the least environmental impact in terms of any additional emissions.

So I think it is important to recognize that when we are talking about the oil coming from Canada, oil that Canada is producing for lots of different reasons that benefit Canada, that that oil is going to move. So our challenge is, is that oil going to move in a manner that benefits Americans with increased jobs and opportunities? Is it going to help fill our refineries in the gulf coast? Is it going to help from a safety perspective in terms of transporting a product in the safest manner as well as providing the least environmental impact?

The State Department also provided in the EIS that:

Approval or denial of any one crude oil transport project, including the proposed project, is unlikely to significantly impact the rate of extraction in the oil sands or the continued demand for heavy crude oil at refineries in the United States based on expected oil prices, oil sands supply costs, transport costs, and supply and demand scenarios.

I think we are going to have some discussion this afternoon about what is contained in the State Department EIS. At 1,000 pages the full EIS is substantive. There is an executive summary that helps us all out and distills all of this. But I think it is important that Members look at what that report outlines.

I previously mentioned that we have about 77 amendments in front of us that have been filed at this point in time. We have nine, as of this morning, separate sense-of-the-Senate or sense-of-the-Congress amendments relating to climate change.

I have noted that this is the first time we have had an energy-related bill on the floor in a while where there has been an opportunity for debate. You will recall that this same measure was on the floor in December when the Democrats were in charge. The floor was managed at that point in time by the Senator from Louisiana, obviously very passionate in her support of the Keystone XL Pipeline. But in that debate there was no opportunity for amendments. You didn't see colleagues on either side of the aisle able to offer any amendments. We didn't see any amendments on climate. Now we have nine climate-related amendments here. So when you think about the urgency, we are having folks coming down and saying we must act on this now. I will remind people the reason we are able to