

up heavy oil in open freshwater, my bill will take that option off the table to ensure that we will not jeopardize our \$7 billion Great Lakes fishing industry. The Pipeline Improvement and Preventing Spills Act is endorsed and supported by a number of groups, including the Michigan League of Conservation Voters; the Pipefitters, Plumbers and HVAC Techs Local 111; Traverse City Tourism; the Great Lakes Fishing Commission; Michigan Steelhead and Salmon Fishermen's Association; National Wildlife Federation; and the Alliance for the Great Lakes—to name a few.

The Senate committee on commerce, which has jurisdiction over pipeline safety, will be considering pipeline legislation in the next few weeks. I look forward to building support for provisions in my bill. Our country continues to record record highs in domestic energy production, but we must remain vigilant when it comes to energy transportation. Through strong oversight, leadership from the industry, and technological innovation, I firmly believe that we can and we must continue to meet our energy needs in the safest way possible while preserving treasures such as the Great Lakes for future generations.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

PROTECTING AFFORDABLE COVERAGE FOR EMPLOYEES ACT

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate now proceed to the consideration of H.R. 1624, which is at the desk, and that the bill be read a third time and the Senate vote on passage of the bill with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 1624) to amend title I of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act and title XXVII of the Public Health Service Act to revise the definition of small employer.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

The bill was ordered to a third reading, and was read the third time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. If there is no further debate on the measure, the bill having been read the third time, the question is, Shall the bill pass?

The bill (H.R. 1624) was passed.

Mr. MCCONNELL. I ask unanimous consent that the motion to reconsider be made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I wish to say a few words about the Protecting Affordable Coverage For Employees—or PACE—Act.

The PACE Act is smart legislation from my colleague, Senator TIM SCOTT, and my Kentucky colleague over in the House, Congressman BRETT GUTHRIE, that will help protect small- and medium-sized businesses that provide health care to their employees. It would give States more flexibility to define what constitutes a small business for health insurance purposes so as to protect health benefits for workers, lower health premiums, and reduce costs for taxpayers.

So let me repeat that. The PACE Act is a smart health care bill aimed at protecting workers' benefits, lowering premiums, and reducing costs to taxpayers.

I hope colleagues will join me in applauding the bill's lead sponsors, our colleague, Senator TIM SCOTT, and his counterpart over in the House, Congressman BRETT GUTHRIE, for their hard work in developing this very important proposal.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I wish to join the majority leader in complimenting Senator SCOTT, a new Member of the Senate, on a significant accomplishment. It is not that easy to pass a bill in the House and in the Senate. It takes a lot of work, and there is good reason for that. We want to make sure that whatever passes in the Senate has a thorough amount of consideration.

Senator SCOTT has come to the Senate as a member of the HELP Committee. He is one of its most diligent members. I am chairman of that committee. He took this initiative on his own, working with Members of the House, where he formerly served, and he has brought the bill to the Senate, and within a few days he has gotten its unanimous approval. To me, that suggests the kind of U.S. Senator that we need more of—someone who is quiet, effective, scholarly, and gets results.

So TIM SCOTT today, on behalf of the people of South Carolina and this country, has helped workers, has improved benefits, and has lowered premiums. He deserves our thanks. He has certainly earned my respect and the respect of his colleagues on both sides of the aisle by this significant accomplishment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Carolina.

Mr. SCOTT. Mr. President, I wish to thank my cosponsor, Senator SHAHEEN, for working with me on the PACE Act, without any question. I also would like to thank Senator ALEXANDER for his kind remarks and specifically thank our leader, Senator MCCONNELL, for making sure this bill had an expeditious path to the floor of the Senate.

So often we hear in America that we can't get things done in the Senate, and because of your leadership, Senator MCCONNELL, and because of the

good work of Congressman GUTHRIE on the House side, as well as Senator SHAHEEN, we see we are going to have an opportunity to make sure that small business owners all across America are not more negatively impacted by ObamaCare.

The decision we have made today to move this legislation forward actually will save, on average, about 18 percent—18 percent—of higher premiums that will not have to be paid by small businesses owners.

Senator MCCONNELL, thank you for your leadership. Senator ALEXANDER, thank you for working with us on this very interesting process to get it to the floor as expeditiously as we have been able to do.

With that, I thank both Senators for their hard work and dedication to this issue.

Mr. SASSE. Mr. President, I want to thank my friend and colleague Senator SCOTT for his leadership in protecting many Americans and small businesses from more needless suffering under ObamaCare. While I am glad for this outcome, a piecemeal approach to this terrible law is less valuable than a strategic approach. We must help the millions of other victims who are already suffering or will soon suffer from the law's flawed policies but lack an effective lobbying voice. In the future, we should set the stage for a serious repeal and replace debate by delaying Obamacare's onerous burdens, rather than merely working to make a terrible law 12 percent less bad.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2016—CONFERENCE REPORT—Continued

REMEMBERING OFFICER GREG ALIA

Mr. SCOTT. Mr. President, I rise to speak about one of South Carolina's most amazing heroes, Greg Alia. I am here today to recognize that this young man—32 years young—lost his life yesterday. Yesterday morning, Officer Greg Alia was killed in Columbia, SC.

I will tell my colleagues that Greg served his community with distinction. Yesterday afternoon, I had an opportunity to talk with Greg's wife, Kassy. Kassy's strength, as she spoke with someone she has never met about the love of her life—about her husband, the father of her little boy, Sal—was quite remarkable. Her thoughtfulness in this tragic time truly struck a chord with me and brought tears to my eyes as I listened to a wife describe the man she loves, a community leader, and someone who runs into danger when others are running away from danger.

Greg was born and raised in Columbia, SC. He was a Columbia native. He went to high school at Richland Northeast High School. He graduated from the University of South Carolina. If Greg were here, I would say "Go, Cocks" because we understand and appreciate the importance of the University of South Carolina, especially in the Columbia footprint.

More importantly, after high school, Greg wanted to find out what life was about. He had an opportunity to be a production assistant working on movies such as the latest version of “Indiana Jones,” as well as one of my favorite movies, frankly, “Iron Man.” Yes, “Iron Man.”

Greg was offered a job with Marvel, the comic book folks. He had an opportunity to stay out of the State and do amazing things and have a lot of fun, but his heart was beating to come back home to South Carolina, to come back home to Columbia, so that he could serve the people of South Carolina. He wanted to be a police officer. He wanted to help people. Kassy told me that Greg would have had no regrets.

To think about those words from his wife on the day her husband was murdered, Greg would have no regrets because he was doing what he was made to do: Protect people, serve people, sacrifice on behalf of people.

Greg was the embodiment of bravery and heroism. Greg was doing what he was wired to do. His wife was so clear and so passionate about his desire to be the first on the scene, his desire to do everything possible to try to be helpful. Greg, like so many police officers across this Nation and, without question, across the great State of South Carolina, loved serving people. And he did so. He did so with great integrity, with amazing character. He knew his place in the world was making sure that his town, his city, our State, and our Nation are safer because he put on the uniform every single day.

Today, we all stand in salute to Greg and make a promise to his wife Kassy that we will be there with her as she raises her son Sal. Our prayers and our thoughts are with the family.

In closing, I would like to share a story that Kassy told me yesterday afternoon as I had the chance to speak with her. The story brought a tear to my eye, and I hope as my colleagues hear the story, it may even bring a smile to their faces. Greg worked the night shift, and when he would come home in the morning—Sal was around 6 months old and he was learning to sit up, and in the morning when Sal heard the police cruiser of his dad pull into the driveway, he would sit up and he would start smiling. He was feeding, and the milk, because of his big smile, would run down his face.

Think for just a moment of that young man, Sal. He should have the opportunity to walk when he hears the cruiser coming into the driveway. He should have the opportunity to yell “Daddy” when he hears that cruiser coming into the driveway. So for that little boy and his mama, Kassy, and for the Forest Acres community, I stand here today saying thank you for every single thing Greg has done to make our State and our Nation a better place to call home. I say thank you to Greg for making the ultimate sacrifice that will never be forgotten. And I say thank you to Kassy for being such a powerful

and strong woman in this amazing time of her need.

We should pray for Kassy and Sal.

Thank you, Mr. President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri.

Mr. BLUNT. Mr. President, I am glad I got to be here to hear Senator SCOTT talk about that family and that hero and those who protect and defend us. In Missouri we have had over the last year a number of challenges on this front. I was recently meeting with a group of African-American pastors, one of whom was a pastor in Ferguson, MO, and talking about the hard work of being in law enforcement. He said: People who protect us, just like me, want to go home at the end of the day. And more than most of us, people who protect us leave every day with them and their families having the No. 1 focus of getting home at the end of the day. Thank God they are willing to step forward and protect us, especially understanding that this is a challenging job at a challenging time.

VETERANS HEALTH CARE

I wish to speak for a little while about veterans health care, another challenge we face right now. We just, unfortunately, failed to move to debate on a bill that would fund these programs, a bill that would increase funding for our veterans in areas such as health care and benefit claims and processing claims, medical research, and technology upgrades. For whatever reason, we decided as a Senate—and I don't think for a good reason—that no, we are not going to debate that bill because all of these bills somehow collectively don't spend enough money. But we have talked about that, and I talked about it earlier in the day.

Right now I wish to speak for a few minutes about what we do need to be figuring out for our veterans.

We learned a year ago that Veterans' Administration wait times were unacceptable. We learned it was likely that a number of lives had been lost and deaths had been caused because our veterans didn't get to see the doctor they should have gotten to see; they didn't get the health care they earned as veterans and deserved. This summer, after a year of working to make this better, we found out that the wait list of people waiting more than 30 days at the VA system to see a doctor was now 50 percent longer than it was last year. I thought about that a little bit and I thought, well, maybe it was just 50 percent longer than it was last year, because one thing they found out was the wait-list wasn't really reflective of the real wait-list. The kind of progress we hoped to have made we don't appear to be making yet.

Last year the Congress passed a law to give veterans more choice. It was passed on a broad bipartisan basis. The Senate came together, the Congress came together to allow veterans to receive their health care in non-VA facilities if they couldn't get that first appointment within 30 days or if they

were more than 40 miles away from a facility. We tried this legislation this summer to put even more definition to that. Clearly, what the Congress means is 40 miles from a facility that can do what the patient needs to have done. If one needs to have a heart stint put in, just being 40 miles from a facility where they would take your blood pressure isn't good enough. We will continue to work to change veterans health care in a way that gives veterans more choices, I hope.

What we found out is that Alaskan care is just not acceptable. We have to continue to keep focused on this. The bill we provided will create more choices.

Last week I had one of the best conversations I have ever had with anybody at the Veterans Administration when I talked to the Under Secretary of Health—a new person in that job—Dr. Dave Shulkin, who spent his whole life in health care in the private sector managing hospitals outside of the Federal Government. Dr. Shulkin should know what he is doing, and it certainly sounded to me as if he knew what he was doing. He understood the kinds of things the Congress hopes to see for our veterans and the VA system that need to happen.

We talked about the fact that Congress intends for veterans' choice to mean exactly that—not ways for the Veterans Administration to find obstacles to choice but veterans' choice. If you are a Federal Government health care provider, if you take Medicare patients, you ought to be able to take veterans as patients. There shouldn't be some long second process you have to go through to become qualified so that the veteran can see a doctor the veteran wants to see, the veteran can go to a hospital the veteran wants to go to, particularly if the VA can't meet that need.

In fact, the conversation I had with Dr. Shulkin was so good that for a little while, I thought maybe I had gotten the wrong number, that possibly I actually had not called the Veterans Administration, because I have never had a conversation like that where somebody at the Veterans Administration not only knew what needed to be done but wasn't afraid to compete to get the health care needs of veterans met.

I talked to all our veterans groups in Missouri, or many of them—certainly the two big veterans groups—at their meeting this summer. I said: Many of you have had great experience with the VA.

There are a lot of people at the VA who want to do everything they can to serve veterans in the best possible way.

I said: But that is not good enough. All of you need to have had the best possible experience at the VA—not necessarily the best outcome but the best possible outcome.

You know, all of our health care outcomes aren't what we would want them to be, but they ought to be everything they possibly should be.

Veterans shouldn't have to drive past non-VA facilities that are equally capable of providing their health care or more capable of providing their health care, and we are going to continue to work to see that that happens. Competition is a good thing. The best possible place to go for your health care is a good thing.

I want to come back to that briefly in a moment, but before I get there, I received a report on Tuesday from the Veterans Administration's inspector general that frankly just said that the allegations about what was happening at the St. Louis facility, the John Cochran facility, were absolutely true, that a number of files had been changed to indicate that the consultation had been completed before it was ever had. I assume it does a lot for your performance numbers if you check the "completed" box before you see the patient, and that appears to be what was happening. We learned that there is not enough oversight there. We learned that at least one psychiatrist had received performance pay based on productivity data. The only thing wrong with the productivity data was that it wasn't correct. I guess it is easy to look good if you are not backing that up with real facts. It is not acceptable. It is inexcusable.

Then we have a problem with leadership at these facilities. At the John Cochran hospital in St. Louis—the biggest hospital we have in our State—we have had seven temporary directors in 2 years. No matter how good some of those may have been, having seven temporary directors is a lot like not having any director at all. If you know somebody is going to be there for 14 weeks, or however long they are going to be there, and you know somebody else is coming, that obviously is not going to produce a good result, but that is happening. There are 30 veterans centers that don't have permanent directors today. That is about 20 percent of all the facilities in the country. One in five of our VA medical centers doesn't have a permanent director, and we need to do better.

Supposedly the new Administrator of the Veterans Administration came in because he was a great manager. So far, I don't see the results. If he needs more help from the Congress to be a great manager, we ought to figure out a way to give him more help.

I believe competition is a good thing. The VA should be good and really better than anybody else at a few things. Nobody should be better than the VA in terms of dealing with post-traumatic stress. Nobody should be better than the Veterans Administration when it comes to dealing with the results of these IED attacks, the improvised explosive device attacks. Because of that, eye injuries should be something the VA deals with very well. And nobody should be better than the VA at dealing with prosthetics or spinal cord injuries.

Frankly, the Presiding Officer, as a doctor, would appreciate this. I don't

really know why we wouldn't assume the VA would be the best place to specialize in almost anything else. And if it is not the best place to go, it shouldn't be the only place to go.

The VA is probably not likely to be any better or as good as anyplace you would drive by to get your heart stent put in, to take care of your cancer problem, to work with your kidneys that are failing, to get even the basic health care of getting your blood pressure checked. Our veterans deserve more choices.

There are lots of reasons the Congress should be and is concerned about the way the Veterans Administration is working. It is clearly time for the Veterans Administration to get focused not on what is good for the Veterans Administration but on what is good for veterans. We owe it to our veterans.

The report I got this Tuesday unfortunately verifies almost every concern that people have had, and we need to insist that that be better.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Delaware.

PROVIDING FOR OUR VETERANS

Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, I am pleased to follow my colleague and friend from Missouri. I just want to mention—although I didn't come to the floor to talk about what we are doing for veterans, let me take a minute or two to talk about what we are doing that we are actually proud of and then maybe touch on a couple of areas where we can do a better job.

I myself am a veteran, a Navy midshipman out of Ohio State who studied economics for 4 years and went on to become a naval flight officer. I served for 5 years in Southeast Asia as a naval flight officer and then as a P-3 aircraft mission commander for another 18 years until the end of the Cold War. I loved the Navy. I loved serving.

I got an education—undergraduate and graduate school—and feel very privileged. I had the opportunity at the end of my Active-Duty tour to use the VA hospital very close to Wilmington, DE, in northern Delaware. I remember the first time I went there. I was offered some dental benefits, and my dentist—a young dentist who was right out of dental school—told me the morale was pretty bad, and he said they didn't do very good work. It was place where they had 16-bed wards. They didn't do much in the way of outpatient surgery. The pharmacy was a mess.

I said: Wouldn't it be great to be in a position to do something about that and transform this place so it can be a health care delivery facility we can be proud of today?

Do they do everything perfectly? No, they don't.

We have two satellite operations in Delaware. We have one in the Dover area, in the middle of our State, and we have another one in the southern part of the State, in Sussex County, which is Georgetown. I am very proud of those health care facilities. We call them outpatient clinics, CBOCS.

The reason I mention that is because I was also eligible—coming out of the Vietnam war, along with other Vietnam veterans—to get an education, to go to college, and in my case graduate school on the GI bill. In my generation, we received about \$250 a month. At the time, I was happy to have every bit of it. I continued to fly with my Reserve squadron for another 18 years, and it was great to have that benefit.

A couple weeks ago, our congressional delegation—Senator COONS, Congressmen CARNEY, and Governor Jack Markell—sent 300 Delaware National Guard men and women off to Afghanistan. We had a big sendoff ceremony for them. Their families were there. We had about 1,000 people. It was a big sendoff.

As they left, I told them: When you come back, you are going to be eligible for a GI benefit that dwarfs what my generation received.

They won't get 250 bucks a month. If they serve a total of 3 years on Active Duty and serve in Afghanistan or Iraq for a period of time, here is what they will be eligible for: They can come back and go for free to the University of Delaware, Delaware City University, Wilmington University—pretty much any public college or university in America; tuition, books, and fees paid for; and if they need tutoring, that is paid for as well. On top of all that, they get a housing allowance of \$1,500 a month. We received a GI benefit of \$250.

Not surprisingly, at the end of World War II, when my dad and my uncle served—in the Korean war, when my uncle served, and at the end of the Vietnam war, scam artists emerged to take advantage of the GI and tried to separate the GI coming back from combat—tried to separate the GI cash value benefits from the GI and sometimes not to provide them with a very good education but to take advantage of the GI and the taxpayers.

In about 1952, something called the 85-15 rule was passed whereby at least 15 percent of the students enrolled in a for-profit college or university had to be there—their tuition paid for by some source other than the Federal Government. As it turns out, the 85-15 rule became the 90-10 rule, so that 90 percent of those who were enrolled were paid for by the Federal Government, but another 10 percent had to be paid for by someone else other than the Federal Government. Over time, that changed so that 90 percent of the revenues of a for-profit college or university could come from the Federal Government but not the other 10 percent—except for the money that came from the GI bill to a college or university or from tuition assistance for people on Active Duty. That didn't count against the 90 percent. At the end of the day, a for-profit college or university could get 100 percent of its revenues from the Federal Government. I don't think that is a good thing.

The system that was designed early on with the 85-15 rule and later the 90-

10 rule was designed to try to make sure there were market forces that ensured taxpayers and the GIs, the veterans would get a fair deal, get a good education, make sure they were treated the way we would want them to be treated.

There is a huge loophole in the 90–10 rule, and it is a loophole we need to fix. We need to fix it.

My colleagues who talked here earlier today—including my colleague from Missouri—about the quality of VA health care—I want to say that we are providing the best health care by far in the history of our country. For too long, a number of our for-profit colleges and universities and postsecondary-training programs have been taking advantage of GIs, taking advantage of the taxpayers, and it should stop. It should stop.

Having said that, there are a number of for-profit colleges and universities and training programs that do a great job. They are not all bad actors. Some of them wear white hats. For them, good for you, and for those who are not, you need to change your ways.

I didn't come here to talk about that, but in the spirit of making sure we look out for our veterans, I thought I would mention that.

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING

Let's take a look at some of the posters here this afternoon.

The first one looks like my State. It probably also looks like the Presiding Officer's State. It could look like any of the States our pages are from. But this is a traffic jam. It is a traffic jam that occurs almost every day, almost every business day, and frankly a lot of weekends on highways across America from coast to coast. We spend a lot of time sitting in traffic. It is actually quite a substantial cost that inures to our Nation's economy. The cost this year is believed to be about \$160 billion, a hit on our national economy. I will talk in just a second about what that includes.

Part of the waste that is reflected in our Nation's economy is—you see right here it says "82 hours wasted in big city traffic." That is per person, per driver, on average, across the country, big cities, people sitting—pretty much sitting in traffic. They could be in a minivan, they could be in a small car, a large car, they could be in a truck, but we are talking about 82 hours a year just pretty much sitting in traffic.

The average across the country, when you take in the more rural parts of the country and suburban areas, is about 42 hours. That is a whole lot of time. Time is money. So just think about that.

Here is one with a sense of humor. This is not Delaware. I am not sure where this is, but for those who can't read this, it says—the traffic sign that is up here says: "You'll never get to work on time. Haha." It is some kind of construction program. You see the orange cones out there. Someone had a good sense of humor there. My guess is,

the folks who maybe were working on the project had a good sense of humor. My guess is that for a moment it made the drivers smile but not for long, especially if they sat in traffic long enough. Eighty-two hours a year, that is long enough.

Not only is it expensive, a waste of time and money for us as individuals to sit in traffic for a long time, another part of the cost is caused by potholes and other problems with our roads. I think this is probably a bridge. It looks like it might be a bridge, but it is a construction project someplace. Here is a pothole. That is a bad pothole. In other parts—not too much in Delaware—I have seen in other States at least that bad and worse.

What is going to happen, vehicles will come along, they will hit that pothole, and may damage their tires, they may have to replace a tire or two, they may have to get their front end realigned. That costs money. How much? Actually, believe it or not, just like Texas A&M has actually figured out on average we waste 82 hours a year as drivers, somebody else actually spent the time to figure out how much we spend on our cars, trucks, and vans in order to fix them during the course of the year because of potholes like this and other problems, whether it is the surface of the roads we travel on or the surface of the bridges we travel on. It is over \$350. I have seen the range of anywhere from \$350 per year to \$500 per year. Let's say it is just \$350 a year. That is a lot of money. That is part of the cost of the damage to our economy.

The other thing I would say, our economy today, as we all know, is a "just in time" economy. I will give you a good example. We have a port in Wilmington that sits right on the Delaware River. As you come up the Delaware Bay, it becomes the Delaware River. The port that is closest to the Atlantic is the Port of Wilmington. Ships are coming in and out of there throughout the day, nights, and weekends. The ships don't come in and spend a week. Ships don't come into the Port of Wilmington and spend a day. They may come in for 4 hours, they may come in for 6 hours, but they are there and then they are gone, because when a ship is sitting in the Port of Wilmington or any other port, the shipper, whoever owns that boat, that ship cannot make any money. So they want to be in and they want to be out. That is the way they do their business.

It is important for whoever is coming in using a truck to bring goods to put on that ship to send around the world, there may be a very short window of time to get there. If you are stuck in traffic, the kind of traffic we saw early on, you may miss that window when the ship is in the port, whether it is Wilmington or some other port. That is another reason why, in a "just in time" economy, these kinds of delays mean time is money. Again, someone else with a sense of humor—if you cannot read this, it looks like a husband and

wife driving along in their car. His wife says: "Finally someone fixed that pothole." Here is the pothole. There is a car down there. The guy driving looks like he is having a bad day, not just a bad hair day, a very bad day.

A little humor there but not if you happen to be this guy, frankly—probably not if you happen to be this guy, because if you are running over somebody else's car in a pothole like this, the guy is going to spend a lot more than 350 bucks to repair his car and get it going again.

We are not making this stuff up. There is a national association, I think it is civil engineers, people who spend their life's work on transportation projects. Every year for years, they have given us a grade on what kind of shape our roads, highways, bridges, and transit systems are in. They could give an A, A-plus, A-minus, they could give a B, B-plus, B-minus, they could give a C, C-plus, C-minus or they could give a D-plus, D, D-minus. The last couple of years we have been right around D to D-plus. I think we are probably going down rather than going up. So what everybody knows—just about anybody who drives in our country these days knows we are not investing in our roads, highways, bridges, and transit systems the way we need to.

Look around the rest of the world, travel around the rest of the world. You can see in a lot of countries we compete with that they do. One of the components of certain investments we need to make in our country in order to strengthen our economy, to better ensure the jobs are going to be created or preserved—there a lot of things we can do to make sure businesses have access to capital, make sure the cost of energy is affordable, make sure the cost of health care is affordable, make sure we have public safety, make sure the people who are coming out of our schools can read, write, and have the skills that are needed in the workforce.

I know the big one is to make sure we have the ability to move people and goods where they need to go, when they need to go. Here is our current plan. It is pretty well summed up in this sign. It is meant to be funny. I suppose it is. But I like this part of the plan: "Good luck." That is not a plan. That is not a plan that is going to get us where we need to go as a nation.

For those who may be unable to read this, there is a big traffic jam. A lot of people are saying—you see those little bubbles there—"I'd pay to be anywhere but here."

I was Treasurer of Delaware. I studied economics, got an MBA, and was Treasurer of Delaware when I was 29. I had a chance to serve in the house for a while and then as Governor. I was very much involved in the National Governors Association in trying to make sure we invested in our transportation infrastructure across the country. In the Senate, I am on the Environment and Public Works Committee. The last time I was privileged to serve

as chair of the Senate Subcommittee on Transportation and Infrastructure.

So I thought a fair amount about these issues. If you think about the way we pay for roads, highways, bridges, and transit, what we have used for years is a user pay system. The people, the businesses that use our roads, highways, bridges, and transit systems, we pay for them. In some places, we have sort of gotten away from that. There is an unwillingness to ask people to pay for what they want to use. Everybody wants to have better transportation systems. There seems to be a lot of reluctance to pay for that.

When I was Governor of Delaware, three times I asked for modest—very modest—increases, just a couple of cents in the fee for gas and diesel tax. I think out of three efforts, we succeeded one time. Not a whole lot was raised, but we cobbled together some other money from other user fees and we were able to continue to fund transportation funding.

For a number of years in the Nation, we have had a transportation trust fund. Most of the money for that transportation trust fund comes from user fees, and two primary user fees are a gas tax. It has been about 18.3, 18.4 cents since, I think, 1993. It has been a little bit over 18 cents since 1993. It has not changed. The cost of concrete has gone up. The cost of asphalt has gone up. The cost of steel has gone up. The cost of labor has gone up. What has not gone up is the user fee we are asking people to pay to have better roads, highways, bridges, and transit to get people off our roads, highways, and bridges. If we can do that, we can save a lot of money.

We have a tax on diesel—a Federal tax. It has been about 24 cents per gallon. It has been at that level since 1993—since 1993. Again, concrete, asphalt, steel, and labor have all gone up, but in 22 years we have not changed the user fee, if you will, on diesel.

The money we collect from the gas and diesel tax does not go to pay for health care, it does not go to pay for wars, it does not go to pay for agriculture and other things. The money we collect from these user fees goes to pay for roads, highways, bridges, and to some extent for transit systems, to get people off our roads, highways, and bridges so the rest of us will have some extra room to maneuver.

I will go back in time. Thomas Jefferson said a lot of things that are worth remembering. My favorite Jefferson quote is this: “If the people know the truth, they won’t make a mistake.”

If the people know the truth, they won’t make a mistake. The truth is, we are not investing in our transportation infrastructure in this country the way our competitors are and the way we ought to be.

To do so does not mean we have to raise—in some places they have gas taxes or diesel taxes that are \$4 or \$5 a gallon. We don’t have that. It is 18

cents, and 24 cents for gas and diesel combined. If we had increased them by the rate of inflation in the past, the gas tax would be not 18 cents; it may be even closer to twice that. The diesel tax would not be 24 cents; it might be closer to twice that. But we have not changed them.

Here is the way we pay for transportation improvements: We don’t pay for them. We don’t raise anything, in some cases. We just simply go out and borrow money for the transportation fund from the Federal general fund. When the general fund runs out of money, we borrow money from countries around the world like China and other places and replenish the general fund, and use that to replenish the transportation fund.

I think that is pretty foolish, especially to be beholden to the folks in China for our transportation system. It does not make a whole lot of sense to me, maybe it does not to you either. There are other things we do—we have these—I call them cats and dogs, sort of sleight of hand. One of the more recent examples, we do something called pension smoothing, where—I will not get into how that works, but it is just an awful idea to mess with, muck with people’s pensions in order to be able to provide funds for road improvements. That does not make much sense.

Another thing we do is we maybe raise the TSA fees when people want to fly. Instead of using that to make our friendly skies safer, we put a little of that money in roads, highways, and bridges or maybe we sell some of the oil we have in our Strategic Petroleum Reserve. We paid a lot of money several years ago to buy gas, to buy oil when it was expensive. People think it would be a smart thing to sell that oil out of the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, when prices are low, to help pay for roads, highways, and bridges. Remember the old saying “buy low, sell high.” Well, this is really buy high and then put that oil in the Strategic Petroleum Reserve and then sell low. That is insanity.

We can do a lot better than this. For a number of years, some have encouraged us to do what we have been doing for years, to actually be honest and pay for improvements to our roads, highways, and bridges. And that is to raise the user fees—not all at once, not by \$1 or \$2 or anything like that, but by 4 cents a year starting next year for 4 years. Then after that index—then index the fees and the taxes on gas and diesel according to the rate of inflation.

If we did that, I think we would have a combined State and Federal user fee, if you will, for gas. I think it would be at that time 53 cents. It would be about 53 cents. Compared to what? Compared to pretty much any other developed nation in the world, we would have the lowest combined Federal, State, and local user fees on gas and diesel. It is the lowest as far as I can tell. We can actually double that. We are not going

to do that. We could actually double it again—we are not going to do that—from 53 cents to \$1.06 per gallon. Again, I don’t suggest we would do that, but if we did, we would still be among the lowest compared to the rest of the world.

Sometimes we say: Well, 16 cents—what could I buy with that? If I didn’t have to pay 4 years from now an extra 16 cents when I buy a gallon of gas, what would that add up to in a week for the average driver?

I will tell you this—maybe brings it home—basically the price of a cup of coffee a week is the cost that would be incurred by the average driver even after the full increase, the 4 cents times 4 years. That is what it is worth. That would be the out-of-pocket expense for the average driver, the price of a cup of coffee a week.

We saw earlier from some of these charts that, on average across the country, people are sitting in traffic for 42 hours per year. We saw some of the graphics with the pothole and were reminded that the cost of damage to our cars, trucks, and vans is anywhere from \$350 to some estimates as high as \$500. We are learning that for the price of a basic cup of coffee, if we invest that money instead—people can still drink coffee, but if we put that in our roads, highways, bridges, and transit systems, we can have a transportation system we can be proud of. Those four pennies add up over time, and they add up over the next 10 years to \$220 billion to have for investments. So instead of having roads or potholes that look like the one I saw and the kinds of traffic jams we see here from coast to coast, we can have a transportation system again in this country we can be proud of. We just have to have the will to do it.

Again, Thomas Jefferson reminded us that things that are worth having are worth paying for, and if people know the truth, they won’t make a mistake. Roads, highways, bridges, transit—that is what we are paying for. The truth is, it doesn’t have to break us. It doesn’t have to break our banks or our budgets. We can have those roads, highways, and bridges again that we can be proud of. I hope we will do that.

Senator DICK DURBIN of Illinois and I have introduced legislation to essentially do that, to raise the user fees by 4 cents a year for 4 years, at a time when the price of oil is as low as it has been for some time and is expected to stay low for the foreseeable future.

If the Iranians work with us and the other five nations that negotiated the Iranian agreement in order to gradually lift sanctions from their economy, they will be able to start producing oil and selling it across the world as long as they agree not to create that nuclear weapon. We are going to make sure they don’t.

But it turns out that Iran is the No. 4 nation in the world in oil reserves. Think about that. We live in a world that is awash in oil. Very soon, the Iranian oil will be added to the oil that is

available to consumers to use on this planet of ours. All that oil will not push up the price of oil or gasoline or diesel; it will push it down—supply and demand. Let's keep that in mind.

With that, I have spoken for long enough. I see one of my colleagues has been waiting patiently, and I will bid you all adieu. Have a good weekend. Thank you.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

MILCON-VA APPROPRIATIONS BILL

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, I wish to say a few words about the bill that we voted on this afternoon and put it into a broader context. This was the bill to begin the vote and debate on the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations bill, which passed out of the Appropriations Committee in a strong bipartisan vote.

There has been a lot of talk and a lot of stories in the media over the last several weeks about the government running out of money, a government shutdown. In a lot of those stories, the narrative talked about the Republican Party being the one focused on a government shutdown. The media actually loves this narrative, but, like a lot of narratives in the media, they are not always so accurate. So I wanted to give what I think is the much more accurate story, what is really going on here in the Senate.

Many of us are new Senators—the Presiding Officer and myself included—13 of us, actually. A lot of us came to Washington and a lot of us actually ran for the Senate because we were fed up. We thought the American people were fed up; we knew they were fed up with the dysfunction of the Federal Government. There are a lot of examples of that. You know many of them.

In the last several years we have run the debt of our Nation from \$10 trillion to \$18 trillion. Think about that. Looking at these interns here on the floor, that is going to be their responsibility if we don't get ahold of that—\$18 trillion. An economy that can't grow is what we call the new normal here in Washington, 1.5 percent, 2 percent GDP growth. No budget. The previous Senate was not even passing a budget—the most basic function of government. Households do it, businesses do it, and States do it. The Federal Government was not even taking the time to pass a budget. There were no appropriations bills, no spending bills out of the Appropriations Committee. These were all signs of a Federal Government that was not working, that was dysfunctional.

So we came with the new majority, new leadership committed to change this. We meant to change this. We were very focused on changing this, and we have begun in a serious way to do that. What are we doing? First, we passed a budget. It hadn't happened in years, but we did that. It was a lot of hard work. My hat is off to the Budget Committee. We took what was the Presi-

dent's budget, 10-year budget, and slashed that by \$5 trillion to \$7 trillion in terms of spending. We didn't raise taxes.

Then the next step—what the government is supposed to do—we started to work on appropriations bills in the Appropriations Committee. Again, this was very hard work, very bipartisan work, and for the first time in years, the Appropriations Committee passed out 12 appropriations bills to fund our government.

Most of these were very bipartisan. Let me give you a few examples. The Agriculture appropriations bill passed out of the Appropriations Committee 28 to 2. It doesn't get much more bipartisan than that. The Commerce-Justice-Science appropriations bill passed 27 to 3; Energy and Water, 26 to 4. This is strong bipartisan work in the Appropriations Committee with our government getting back to work.

The dysfunction that had previously existed here for many years—none of this was happening—was going away, and we were working. Very importantly, in terms of appropriations bills, the Defense appropriations bill passed out of the committee 27 to 3, and the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs appropriations bill, 21 to 9.

So we passed a budget, passed appropriations bills—so far so good. The Senate is working again. We are back to regular order. We are moving forward in a bipartisan way—very bipartisan. We are doing the work of government. It is what the American people wanted, asked for, and we are starting to deliver on that as part of our promises last fall.

So what is the next step? The next step is to take these appropriations bills and bring them to the Senate floor for a vote. It shouldn't be a problem, particularly because the bills I am talking about are so bipartisan. They came out of committee with bipartisan numbers and support, so that is what we are doing. That is what we have done. That is what we are supposed to do. That is what the American people want us to do.

We started to prioritize. Where should we begin? Turn on the news. I think most people know where we should begin—funding our military, the men and women protecting us, the men and women risking their lives on a daily basis for our freedom.

So we brought the Defense appropriations bill to the Senate floor. Again, we certainly need that. One gets the sense that the world is careening into chaos. We need a strong military. We need to fund our military. It shouldn't be an issue. It passed out of committee with a strong bipartisan vote. Everybody likes to make sure we have a strong military.

So what happened? We brought it to the floor of the Senate and it was filibustered, not one but two times. That is irresponsible—filibustering the defense of our Nation, defunding the support for our troops.

So that brings us to what we did today. We turn to another appropriations bill—Military Construction and Veterans Affairs appropriations—again, a very bipartisan bill. It is very focused, building military infrastructure throughout our country, throughout the world. One of the most sacred responsibilities of this body, of our government is taking care of our veterans.

This is a huge issue for my State. Alaska boasts the highest number of veterans per capita of any State in the Nation, and we need to take care of our best. So what happened today? It seems pretty noncontroversial. The appropriations bill—a very nonpartisan bill—came to the floor, and it was filibustered again.

In the past few weeks, we have had critical votes to fund our military, to fund our troops, to fund our veterans, and we cannot move forward. What is going on here? I really don't know. It is hard to say. I sit on the Armed Services Committee. I sit on the Veterans' Affairs Committee. These are two of the most bipartisan committees in the Senate. I know all of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle truly respect, truly support our troops and our veterans, and truly want what is best for them. I recognize that.

Then why is the other side filibustering the funding of these incredibly important bills, in essence defunding our troops and defunding our veterans? I think the American people deserve answers. I think our veterans deserve answers. I think our troops in harm's way deserve answers.

One thing for sure is the next time the media wants to write a story with a narrative about a government shutdown, they ought to ask those who voted against these bills—to even start debating them—why they are defunding these critical groups and veterans. They need to ask those who are voting against these bills, filibustering these bills, why they are leaving our troops and our veterans in the lurch.

Mr. President, we are doing our job—what the American people asked us to do, demanded from us last November. They wanted us to pass a budget like they do, even though we hadn't done that in years. We did. They wanted us to pass appropriations bills and to work in a bipartisan manner to get these bills through the committee—all 12 to fund the government. We did. And they wanted us to prioritize our spending, our activities, and our focus in terms of government funding on the things that matter most—our military and our veterans. And we did.

I have no idea why our colleagues on the other side of the aisle refuse to move with us in terms of the next step. The American people want the next step. They want the Senate to vote on these bipartisan bills that fund our military and fund our veterans. Today, once again, we are seeing that is not happening. I think the American people need answers, I think our troops

need answers, and I think our veterans need answers on why it is not happening.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

NATIONAL KINSHIP CARE MONTH

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, last night, this body approved a resolution authored by Senator WYDEN and myself designating September 2015 as National Kinship Care Month.

While many may not be aware, there are approximately 2,700,000 children living in kinship care around this country. That means millions of grandparents, aunts, uncles, and other relatives are looking after children in every urban, rural, and suburban county of the United States.

These caregivers have stepped forward, often at great personal expense, out of love and loyalty to care for children during times in which biological parents are unable to do so. They provide safety, promote well-being, and establish stable homes and environments for extremely vulnerable children during very challenging circumstances.

They serve in a time of upheaval and great change for these children, assisting them to recognize their self-worth and potential.

Kinship care also enables the children to maintain family relationships and cultural heritage as they continue residence in the native community of the child.

This resolution sends a clear message that the Senate is proud of and wishes to honor these everyday heroes, kinship caregivers, who throughout the history of the United States, have provided loving homes for parentless children.

It is my hope that National Kinship Care Month can provide each of us with an opportunity to recognize and celebrate the sacrifice and devotion of kinship caregivers. And while there is still a great deal of work we can do to ensure that all children have a safe, loving, nurturing, and permanent family, regardless of age or special needs, kinship care providers exhibit a template of care and sacrifice that should be provided for every child in this great country.

I am very proud of this resolution and this acknowledgement, and I thank my colleagues for giving it their unanimous support.

TRIBUTE TO DAVID WOLK

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I want to take a moment to recognize the achievements and contributions of a remarkable educator, a personal friend, and a celebrated leader in my home State of Vermont.

For decades, David Wolk has successfully distinguished himself as an educator and public servant to the people of Vermont. Now in his 11th year as president of Castleton University, formally known as Castleton State College, David likes to call Castleton "the small college with a big heart." As the longest serving president in its history, he has increased the college's involvement in the community and has expanded the university's commitment to civic engagement and service among students and faculty alike. His personal commitment to his hometown of Rutland, VT, is evidenced through his service as a former State senator and current role as a local justice of the peace.

As David has emboldened Castleton's primary mission to serve Vermonters, the institution has forged new partnerships and expanded its opportunities to reach far beyond its footprint in Rutland County. David's leadership is currently enabling the Castleton Polling Institute, which conducts surveys for Vermont politicians and media outlets, to expand to a national audience. Meanwhile, the Castleton Center for Schools continues to serve hundreds of Vermont educators by offering advanced continuing education opportunities each summer. Under his leadership, Castleton athletics has expanded from 12 sports at his inauguration to 27 varsity offerings, enabling Vermont students to play Division III sports. Most recently, David has provided the vision and guidance for Castleton to undergo its own transformation as the college seeks to grow its prestige and opportunities as newly named Castleton University.

David held a distinguished career in education even before stepping foot at Castleton. He served as chief of policy for former Vermont Governor Howard Dean and as the Vermont commissioner of education. Dedication to his native community of Rutland may also be witnessed by his impressive resume as a school principal, superintendent of the Rutland City Public Schools, a guidance counselor and teacher, and a college instructor. He has also served as a member of numerous boards, including the Vermont Business Roundtable, the Vermont Public Education Partnership, and the Vermont Student Assistance Corporation. In recognition of these achievements, he received the 2009 Eleanor M. McMahon Award for Lifetime Achievement from the New England Board of Higher Education.

If his career is not inspiration enough, David's commitment to family surely is. The proud father of four children, David led his family through the celebration of the life and legacy of his wife, Diane, when she passed away this summer, nearly a decade after being diagnosed with early onset Alzheimer's. A lifelong educator herself, Diane and David, together, gave more to their community than most. And David's compassion and commitment to Diane leaves a lasting impression on those of us who call him a friend. Marcelle and I admire him.

In recognition of David Wolk's service and resiliency, I ask unanimous consent that Terri Hallenbeck's article from the August 26, 2015, edition of Seven Days be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From Seven Days, Aug. 26, 2015]

RESILIENT DAVID WOLK CHAMPIONS CASTLETON UNIVERSITY

Between the playing fields that serve the Castleton Spartans, a marble monument tells the story of the Greek king Leonidas and how he bravely resisted an army of invaders.

David Wolk chose the 22,000-pound stone from a Rochester quarry and had it polished and engraved in Barre. As Castleton's longest-serving president and its cheerleader-in-chief, he hoped the monument's message, titled "Spartan Pride," would inspire students. He installed it six years ago, just after the college football team's inaugural season in a brand-new stadium.

Players quickly made the monument the focus of a new Castleton tradition, stopping to touch it on their way to practices and games. It offers no guarantees of victory on the field but is an apt symbol for the little college's fighting spirit to survive—and make a name for itself—in the increasingly competitive world of higher education.

For the past 14 years, Wolk has labored to transform Castleton from a tiny, isolated college into a growing university with adequate funding, marketable programs and satisfied students. Last month, it got a new name: Castleton State College became Castleton University.

"Not a lot of colleges are planning on increasing their enrollment these days," said Vermont State Colleges chancellor Jeb Spaulding, who oversees Castleton and four other state colleges. "Dave's different. His plan is, 'I'm building something that's attractive.'"

"He's the pied piper of Castleton and Rutland County."

Just as impressive is the fact that 62-year-old Wolk managed to remake Castleton while he waged another, personal battle. Beneath the engraved tale of the Spartan king, there's a hint at that story, too. In small type at the bottom of the rock, it reads, "In honor of Dr. Diane Wolk."

Wolk's life is so intertwined with his work at Castleton that he brought in this monument, at his own expense, not just to create a Castleton tradition, but as a tribute to his wife. Diane Wolk was a longtime teacher, school principal, chair of the State Board of Education and one-time director of student teaching at Castleton. She was diagnosed with early-onset Alzheimer's disease in 2007, on her 57th birthday, four years after she first started noticing symptoms.

David Wolk watched in awe as his wife accepted her fate and even strove to demystify