Let me just say in closing that I particularly want to thank the chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, Chairman GRASSLEY, for his stewardship of this legislation through the process. As an experienced Member of the Senate, somebody who has been at this a while, he knows better than most how to shepherd legislation—particularly potentially controversial legislation—through this process. He has been masterful in bringing us this far.

I think we owe it to our constituents and to the country to take the lessons we have learned at the State and local level and bring those to benefit the rest of the country. Let's make our criminal justice system, as the name suggests, more just and at the same time more effective. And let's save taxpayers a buck or two in the process.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota.

CENTRAL STATES PENSION FUND

Ms. HEITKAMP. Mr. President, across the United States, hundreds of thousands of workers and retirees are scared. They are scared for the future, they are scared for their families, and they are scared for themselves. These workers and retirees did everything right. They played by the rules. They worked for years, if not decades, often in labor-intensive jobs, and they responsibly planned for the future by putting money into their pensions, only to have their retirement security ripped away.

This is a story happening across North Dakota and across America. Harsh and senseless proposed cuts to Central States Pension Fund—a multiemployer pension fund—could rip away the retirement of workers and retirees in the trucking, UPS package and delivery, and grocery supply industries. These cuts could impact more than 2,000 North Dakota families and 400,000 retirees across the country who could see their pensions slashed up to 60 percent. Many of these workers have been forced to retire because of decades of lifting packages over 100 pounds every day. These jobs took hard tolls on their bodies, but they were able to earn a living, support their families, and put food on the table each night. They knew that because they were saving for retirement through their pensions, they would be taken care of in later years, they would be able to enjoy their later years hunting and fishing with their grandchildren, and they would be able to enjoy their later years by taking care of their family and their loved ones. Unfortunately, that security is evaporating.

I recently met with Teamsters and union workers and retirees in Bismark and Fargo. Quite honestly, their stories were heartbreaking. They couldn't understand how, if they did everything right, their retirement could be taken away from them. They can't live in a country that just enables these workers and retirees to be left behind. They can't understand who was fighting for them.

They and we must stand up and say: This is wrong. We must stand up for hard work, and we must protect their pensions and make sure all North Dakotans have a secure retirement.

I want to tell just a few of their stories today. I will start with Dennis Gainsforth from Jamestown. He worked for UPS for 31 years. He needs surgery on one of his knees because of working decades as a night mechanic. Dennis is also helping financially take care of his son, who had a stroke, and his wife, who needs back surgery. Under the proposed cuts, his pension would be slashed by 50 percent. As a result, Dennis, who is 72 years old, is now back at work driving a public bus in Jamestown.

Tina Kramer from Mandan was a member of the Teamsters. She worked as a secretary for the local union for 25 years, throughout which time she earned a pension. Her husband was a member of the steelworkers union and worked for Bobcat for about 30 years as a forklift driver. He also earned a pension. Several years ago, both of them retired, and soon after, Tina's husband suddenly passed away. Tina lost her husband's pension and now has to rely solely on her pension. Under these proposed cuts, Tina's pension would be cut by almost 60 percent. Tina has just a little bit of savings, which she has already had to dip into every month to pay her bills and for groceries and to pay her property taxes. Under the proposed pension cuts, it could only get worse for Tina.

Bob Berg, from just north of Fargo, worked at UPS for over 30 years delivering packages, many of which could weigh up to 150 pounds. Because of the hard labor of his job, he had surgery on both knees, his hands, five hernia operations, and back problems, forcing him into early retirement. Now his medical bills are skyrocketing. He receives $2,200 a month under the pension plan, but with the cuts, he would receive just $1,150, which is a 50-percent reduction.

Mark Rothschiller from Mandan worked as a UPS driver for 28 years delivering packages to rural communities in North Dakota. Because of the intensity of his job, he had five back surgeries and two rotator cuff surgeries. After the last surgery, Mark's doctor told him to stop working or he might lose his ability to walk. He now walks with a cane. He relies on his pension—the pension that he earned—to help pay his medical bills. Under the proposed cuts, Mark's pension would be cut by more than 50 percent.

You hear these stories about men and women who worked hard all their lives and who did the right thing. They bargained for a pension because they knew the work they did was not work you could do your entire life, and they knew they wanted time in retirement to enjoy their golden years. Yet, today, the benefit they earned and that security is threatened.

I had a man approach me after one of the meetings where I asked people to tell me what the impacts were from the cuts, and many were able to give public testimonials. This man came up to me afterward, and I won't use his name because quite privately he wanted to tell me that he was going to lose his house, that he was going to lose all the security he had in the world, and that he was a grandfather helping to take care of his grandchildren because his daughter couldn't afford daycare.

These pension cuts don't affect just the worker, they affect the worker's family, they affect the extended family, and, quite honestly, they affect our communities. But more than that, they affect our general sense of security, our general sense that you ought to be able to rely on the goodness of your hard work and on the rewards of your hard work. Today, all of that is being threatened.

Some might say: Well, that is just the way it is. Pension funds are in trouble.

I want everyone to remember that many of these workers were basically prevented from managing their pension fund. In fact, the Federal Government took it away, took that pension fund away and gave it to private investment firms that squandered and wasted the principal. These workers wonder why in the world, in a country where we would bail out Wall Street bankers who made bad decisions, they never get listened to.

We cannot let this happen. I have been pressing Treasury Secretary Lew about this issue, and I recently met with Ken Feinberg, the Treasury official overseeing the reconstruction of this pension fund. We have to reinforce this point. We had a good conversation, and I hope the Treasury Department does the right thing by rejecting this devastating proposal and seeking a fairer option. We can and must find a solution that doesn't jeopardize retirement security or present long-term insolvency issues to the Central States Pension Fund.

This deal has threatened the livelihood of so many of my fellow North Dakotans, people who work hard for a living, the kind of people we brag about on floor of the Senate, whom we are here to represent—the hard-working, good Americas who build our country. Yet when this happens, they wonder who is listening to them. Who do we really represent here?

This deal has to be rejected. We have to create an opportunity that enables all North Dakotan and American families to have the secure retirement they have earned. Dennis, Tina, Bob, Mark, and so many other North Dakotans whom I have met deserve as much. They deserve the same kind of consideration and interest that we gave to AIG and all of the organizations we bailed out during the 2008 crisis at a time when we saw record bonuses for Wall Street executives. We wonder all the time why people are mad. We don't

need to look any further than this example to know that sometimes the priorities are just plain wrong.

I urge all of my colleagues to become aware of this problem, to become invested in this problem, and to work with us to solve this problem. The first and most significant and important step we can take is to urge the Department of Treasury to reject the current plan and take this back to the drawing board.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

ACCOUNTABILITY OF CONGRESS

Mr. LEE. Mr. President, of the words the American people frequently use to describe Congress today—at least one of the words that is appropriate to repeat on the Senate floor—one of the most common and accurate is ''unaccountable.''

Year after year, hard-working men and women across this great country bristle under dysfunctional, costly, and burdensome laws made right here in Washington, DC, and day after day, many of them do what Americans have always done when faced with an out-of-touch government. They contact their elected lawmakers to voice their concerns about those laws and to push for change of those laws and the process by which they are made.

Ask anyone who has ever called, written, or emailed their Member of Congress what happens next. It is consistent. It is predictable. Blame is shifted; fingers are pointed; scapegoats of every variety imaginable are brought forth to defend those who are charged with making the laws from the consequences of their own handiwork. This is the very definition of unaccountability, and it pervades the culture of Washington, DC, because Congress has allowed it to infect our laws and our institutions—the very institutions by which those laws are made.

Many Americans assume that they are being lied to when their elected lawmakers blame someone else for the laws that are raising the cost of living, eating away at their paychecks, and generally making it harder for individual Americans and families to realize the American dream. But the truth is actually even more troubling than that. Most of the items on the Federal Government's interminable list of do's and don'ts governing nearly every activity of human life are not in fact written, debated, discussed, and passed by Congress; rather, they are imposed unilaterally by unelected bureaucrats in one of the executive branch's administrative agencies. This is true even for what are called major rules, which are regulations that cost the American people more than $100 million each year in compliance costs.

For instance, look at the Department of Energy, whose appropriations we are currently considering. In a single year, 2015, the costs of the regulations issued by the Department of Energy exceeded $15 billion—$15 billion. In 1 year, it cost the American people $15 billion to comply with the regulations issued by this single bureaucratic agency—by this single Federal Department, the U.S. Department of Energy.

Even if we were to agree with every cent of that very onerous regulatory burden, we should all be able to recognize the danger of allowing one group of people, consisting of individuals who never have had to stand for election, to squeeze $15 billion out of the pocketbooks of the American people. That is why I have submitted this amendment, No. 3856, which would restrict the Department of Energy from spending any funds to implement or enforce regulations whose compliance costs exceed $100 million, unless specifically approved by Congress.

Unfortunately, regrettably, tragically, this amendment was blocked from consideration by one of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle for reasons that appear to be completely unrelated to the merits of this amendment.

Nevertheless, I would like to take a moment to explain how my amendment works. This amendment would have provided immediate, much needed financial relief to the budgets of hard-working families and businesses all across the country. It would protect them from the costs of two major rules recently proposed by the Department of Energy—rules that impose new energy-efficiency standards on ceiling fans and commercial packaged boilers.

Just like the Department of Energy's ban on incandescent light bulbs, under these rules, Americans would no longer be able to buy ceiling fans or commercial boilers that do not adhere to the government's strict new standards. Proponents of the rules think this is a good thing. As former Energy Secretary Steven Chu said about the light bulb ban back in 2011, ''We are taking away a choice that continues to let people waste their own money.''

This government-knows-best approach to regulation is not only arrogant—it is not only off-puttingly paternalistic—it is detached from the economic realities of American life today. Most Americans may buy less energy-efficient ceiling fans than most Washington bureaucrats, not because they are less intelligent or less concerned about saving energy or less concerned about protecting the environment but because it is what they can afford. The additional costs of these energy-efficiency standards are not insignificant. In fact, it is estimated that these two rules would cost American families and businesses more than $3 billion.

Today, the Department of Energy has the power to impose these rules on the public, and there is very little Congress can do about it. But under my amendment, the two rules would not go into effect unless and until Congress voted to approve them—unless and until Congress affirmatively enacted them into law and allowed them to be signed into law by the President. This simple, commonsense reform is modeled on the REINS Act, a bill that requires congressional approval for all major rules issued by all executive agencies across the entire Federal Government.

Last July, the House of Representatives passed the REINS Act by a strong vote of 243 to 165, and it currently has 37 cosponsors in the Senate. Support for the legislation is growing because it is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore the moral and material problems of hiding the regulatory process in the nameless, faceless bureaucracy. Everyone here knows the regulatory burden in America has become untenable. Every single day, each of us hears from our constituents about how stifling government regulations have become.

The data tell the same story. Just today we saw that the first quarter of 2016 was the third in a row in which private domestic investment has shrunk. This is disappointing, but it is not surprising.

According to a recent study by the Mercatus Center, in 2012, ''the economy was $4 trillion smaller than it would have been in the absence of regulatory growth since 1980.'' That works out to about $13,000 of lost earnings for every man, woman, and child in America.

Some of my colleagues may think the costs of our regulatory system are defensible. I certainly don't. But I know there are different opinions out there, and that is exactly the point of the REINS Act. That is exactly the point of this amendment—this amendment which has been improperly blocked.

Under the broken status quo, Members of Congress can claim innocence—and they regularly do—when an executive agency imposes a costly and controversial regulations on the country. In fact, many Members of Congress not only claim innocence, but they claim almost victim status. They behave almost as if we were a victim, as if we were someone being acted upon. We don't even have to debate it. It just kicks into law by itself. It is self-executing. This may be convenient for those of us in Washington, but it is fundamentally and unacceptably unfair to the American people. We don't make the law this way in this country, but that is now how our system is set up. It is time that we change it.

If Congress is ever going to win back the trust of the American people, we must prove that we are in fact trustworthy—trustworthy to do what we are supposed to do and trustworthy to make law—because that is why we exist as a part of our government. The best way to do that is to make ourselves once again accountable for making the laws, passing the laws, and standing accountable for the laws of this country. This amendment would be a significant step toward making Congress accountable again.