

that people do not want their government to not function. They may want it to function more or less or in some areas and not the others, but they don't want it to be dysfunctional. Indeed, that makes common sense.

What remains an open question is what path the President is going to choose—whether he is actually going to work with the Republican majorities in the House and the Senate. I was somewhat encouraged the President had a meeting yesterday with the incoming majority leader Senator MCCONNELL. It was reported to me they talked about things they thought they could work on together. But we have sort of been led down this pathway before with happy talk, and then the actions did not follow the rhetoric.

Unfortunately, I think the President started off on a bad foot after this election on November 4 by issuing this Executive action order. I realize it is very controversial and we can be frustrated at times with the slow pace of actually getting things done around here. But I have expressed myself previously, and I will say it again: I think the President made a serious mistake in doing it the way he did.

No. 1, I don't think he has the authority to do it, something he himself said he didn't have 22 times in published comments, but it poisons the well at a time when I think there was a lot of hope that maybe we could turn this place around.

It is not just my view; it is the view of a number of my Democratic colleagues too. For example, after the President's Executive action on immigration, the senior Senator from Louisiana said:

We are all frustrated with our broken immigration system, but the way forward is not unilateral action by the President.

I agree with that comment.

Her sentiments were also echoed by the junior Senator from Indiana, who believes President Obama should not be making what he called "significant policy changes" on his own.

The senior Senator from Missouri said similarly, "How this is coming about makes me uncomfortable, and I think it probably makes most Missourians uncomfortable."

The reason they feel uncomfortable is that the President's Executive order represents a direct affront to the constitutional separation of powers. Even if you agree on the substance of what he did, which itself is controversial, how he did it was a direct affront to our Constitution and the separation of powers, and it is unsustainable. It provokes a response from Congress when it feels left out, and, in fact, the President is going to need Congress to work with him to fix our broken immigration system because Congress remains the possessor of the power of the purse.

The Senator from Maine put it this way. He said:

The Framers knew what they were doing, and it doesn't say if the president gets frustrated and Congress doesn't act, he gets to

do what he thinks is important for the country [on his own].

So this is not a partisan issue in the sense that Republicans and Democrats see the world through entirely different lenses. Plenty of Democrats understand that the President's action has made it significantly harder for us to get off on the right foot in the new year on a number of issues we already agree on by and large.

The junior Senator from North Dakota said the immigration order "could poison any hope of compromise or bipartisanship in the new Senate before it's even started." I agree with the sentiment. I hope she is wrong, and I hope we can prove that wrong by saying we are not going to give up and we are not going to let what the President does determine what we do. We have to do our job and we have to function, and then we are going to have to work with the President hopefully to try to move the country forward in a number of these areas.

I hope we can find a way to stop the President from acting on his own and to recommit ourselves to the rule of law and particularly the Constitution and get about the job of addressing our country's biggest challenges, such as those outlined in the comments from the senior Senator from New York, Mr. SCHUMER, who gave a very noteworthy speech at the National Press Club recently. He mentioned issues we should be focused on, such as the needs of the middle class, stagnant wages, mass underemployment, and widespread pessimism about the future of the American dream. The last thing we need is a protracted constitutional crisis, and that is really an unfortunate distraction from what we ought to be doing together.

If we recognize these challenges and the message that was sent on November 4, we ought to be working together to address them. Because of this crisis, it will be more difficult, but we cannot give up. We need to work together to overhaul our job-training programs and give American workers relief from the burden of government that does not work in their best interests. It will be more difficult for us to pass progrowth tax and regulatory reforms, and it will be more difficult for us to do what we need to do to shore up and sustain Social Security and Medicare before they go bankrupt. We have reached this point because of yet another manufactured crisis—a crisis that was completely and totally unnecessary.

I can only hope the President will decide to reverse his desire to do everything unilaterally and to work on a more sensible course—one where he appreciates the possibilities of divided government. Based on the examples I gave earlier, there certainly is reason for hope that divided government can work and address some of our urgent needs. Unfortunately, given his record, it is hard to be optimistic, but I am an optimist by nature, and hope springs eternal.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. BALDWIN). The Senator from Delaware. Mr. COONS. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to enter into a colloquy with my colleague, the Senator from New Hampshire.

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

MANUFACTURING SKILLS ACT

Mr. COONS. Madam President, I come to the floor this morning with my colleague from New Hampshire, Senator KELLY AYOTTE, to talk about what we can do together to invest in America's 21st-century manufacturing workforce. As the Presiding Officer well knows, manufacturing is one of the great areas of opportunity for meaningful bipartisan cooperation that will move our country, our economy, and our working families forward.

Although so many issues here these days seem to fall on partisan lines, Senator AYOTTE and I are here today because we have come together on a bipartisan bill called the Manufacturing Skills Act. The bill has one simple goal, which we share: to spur reforms in manufacturing skills training across our country. That is it. Our bill would create a competitive grant program to help local and State governments design and implement manufacturing job-training reforms that fit their own unique local economic needs. Once proposals come in, a Federal interagency partnership would award the five strongest State proposals and the five strongest local government proposals with funding for 3 years to implement their targeted reforms to improve their manufacturing skills training. The funding doesn't all come from the Federal Government, either. Something Senator AYOTTE and I share enthusiasm for is getting leverage for Federal investment. The local and State government must match Federal support one-to-one.

We are focusing on manufacturing specifically because it plays such a vital role in building communities and strengthening our middle class. Last year, in fact, manufacturing contributed more than \$2 trillion to our Nation's economy. In many ways manufacturing has long been the foundation of our economy. As we know, manufacturing jobs are high-quality jobs. They pay more in wages and benefits. Manufacturing is highly innovative. It is the area that invests the most in R&D of any private sector component. Over the last 3 years manufacturing has started coming back steadily and rapidly, with more than 700,000 new manufacturing jobs created in our country.

This is all good news, and I am convinced the United States is poised to really compete in the manufacturing economy of this century. But we still face key challenges in the job market for manufacturing. There are manufacturers whom I have visited with up and down my State and whom we have

heard from across the country who are ready to hire but cannot fill open positions. The problem is only expected to get worse. By 2020, by some estimates, there may be more than 875,000 unfilled manufacturing jobs. Yet there remains no focused, targeted Federal workforce development program specifically designed to strengthen manufacturing skills. I think part of the reason is we often have an outdated view of manufacturing. It conjures up outdated images of dirty factories and unsafe working conditions and lower skilled labor. That is not the manufacturing workplace of today at all.

I would be curious to hear the thoughts of my colleague from New Hampshire on how manufacturing has changed and how we can work together to strengthen the skills of manufacturing workers in Delaware, New Hampshire, and across our country.

Ms. AYOTTE. I thank my colleague from Delaware. It has really been an honor to work with him on the Manufacturing Skills Act, and we share the goal to ensure that manufacturing remains vibrant and a vibrant source of jobs in our economy.

Training our workforce to have the right skills to address today's 21st-century manufacturing is quite different from yesteryear. Today as we look at manufacturing, we see the skills our workers need: critical thinking and problem-solving abilities, math and writing skills and the ability to communicate, an understanding of the manufacturing process, and an ability to engage workers in improving that process. This wasn't necessarily the case 20 or 30 years ago, but the United States is poised and has an opportunity to be the leader in advanced manufacturing.

We have a talented workforce, but our workers need the type of training that is going to address this new type of manufacturing that is focused on having the right skills and technology, use of technology and problem-solving skills that we know workers in New Hampshire and Delaware are quite capable of if we give them the tools they need.

A reality of today's world is that although our economy is bigger, we are more interconnected than ever before. Job training needs to be customized to the particular business area—the city, the State, the local economy. There is no "one size fits all" model. This is especially true in manufacturing—and I visited many manufacturers in our State—where different companies and places need workers with varying skills.

That is one of the reasons I am so enthusiastic about the Manufacturing Skills Act that Senator COONS and I have introduced together. Rather than prescribe job-training standards or dictate reforms from Washington, our bill allows local officials, business leaders, and workers to come together in local communities to build training plans that fit their needs and help grow jobs

in the community because Wilmington and Newark, DE, have very different workforce challenges, perhaps, than some areas of New Hampshire, whether it is Nashua or Concord or Berlin. We need to ensure that local officials, local employers, and the people of our States are using the grants we are able to provide under this legislation to design new training programs for those localities to really allow those workers to be trained for 21st-century manufacturing skills.

By both targeting manufacturing and giving localities the discretion to design the reforms that fit their needs, we have come together on a bill that could help our country meet some of its most critical economic challenges and opportunities.

I know Senator COONS has a strong background in manufacturing and has worked very closely with employers and workers in Delaware to hear from them about what job-training needs they have to ensure Delaware can have that 21st-century workforce. I would love to hear more about some of the challenges he has heard about from employers and workers in Delaware.

Mr. COONS. Madam President, I would like to thank my colleague from New Hampshire. We are both from small States that are not nationally thought of as being leaders in manufacturing, but both New Hampshire and Delaware have deep, rich, broad manufacturing histories. Manufacturing is commonly thought of by America as being associated with Ohio, Wisconsin, Michigan or Indiana, but there are dozens of companies I have visited in Delaware that are small or medium-sized, with 50 or 100 or 150 employees. Many companies are family owned, many working in particular niches of processing or manufacturing. They are profitable, growing, and looking to hire. Having visited New Hampshire as well, it also has a proud and strong history of manufacturing. Given the regional experience and the base of knowledge and expertise of Members of this body, it is my hope that we can come together with other bipartisan cosponsors to strengthen and build this bill going forward.

Before I got into public service, I spent 8 years working for a manufacturing company in Delaware, a materials-based science company that manufactures over 1,000 different products, all off the same chemical platform. One of the things I did in my work area was I visited the dozens of manufacturing facilities that either the company for which I worked directly operated or many of our partner companies that were licensees or distributors or part of our supply chain.

The plant of today, the shop floor of today bears very little resemblance to that of previous generations. They are the location of rich innovation, an amazing amount of collaboration and teamwork where world-class, cutting-edge quality control and continuous innovation are expected, needed from our

workforce, and thus investment in wages and in skills is also a critical part of our continuing to be globally competitive, as Senator AYOTTE has explained.

As the skills needed for workers vary depending on the product and market segment in the region, we also need training programs that are flexible and meet the exact needs of the region. I will give two examples. I have visited SPI Pharma in Lewes, DE, which manufactures the key component of Maalox and many other antacids, and BASF in Newport, which manufactures pigments. I hear similar challenges even though they are in different areas of manufacturing. Their specific needs are for process operators who are skilled at working at a factory where large amounts of complex suspensions—liquids—are being mixed, moved around, and fashioned into finished products. They need workers who understand programmable logic control systems and can ensure that continuous improvement in quality control is in place. They know that in order to continue to grow, to export and be globally competitive, they need to stay at the top of their game, which means investing in workers and their skills. They are struggling to find young people to replace those who are aging out of their workforces.

Our community college, Delaware Technical Community College, a national leader, is helping and is actively engaged. But as the equipment and processes of today's manufacturing plants become more advanced and computerized, they will need help in keeping up with changing technologies so the skills they train for today are the actual skills that companies, such as SPI Pharma and BASF in Delaware, need in this century.

The Manufacturing Skills Act could be a real help in Delaware to many of the manufacturers I visited, and it will allow local and State officials partnering with our schools, our Chamber leadership, and our manufacturers to build a system that fits our real needs at the local level.

I think it is exciting—whether someone is from New Hampshire, Wisconsin, Delaware or Indiana—to know we are willing to come together in a strong and bipartisan way to lay a pathway forward for America's manufacturing workforce. It gives me some reason for optimism as we begin to conclude this session of Congress and as we look forward.

I wish to close by specifically thanking Senator AYOTTE for being such a positive, forward-looking partner, not only on this bill but on many other issues we have worked on together in the years we have served so far in this body.

I would love to hear more from my colleague from New Hampshire about the manufacturing challenges New Hampshire faces and how this bill might address them and what our path forward is for this piece of legislation.

Ms. AYOTTE. I thank my colleague from Delaware.

As I look at the new Congress coming in, I view our bill—the Manufacturing Skills Act—as an opportunity where we can all work together to help workers and employers across the country meet the challenges of ensuring that manufacturing continues to thrive and grow in this country. These are good-paying jobs where the workers—who are excellent and want the opportunity but just need the skills—need the type of technology training and understanding of process, such as the lean process, and how we can improve our manufacturing.

The bill Senator COONS and I worked on together will allow the local decisionmakers to put together the best training that will help create good-paying jobs, not only in Delaware, New Hampshire, and Wisconsin but across this country.

I hope we can take up this bill very early on in the next session and get behind it.

In New Hampshire, there are 66,000 jobs that are directly connected and related to manufacturing. As I have traveled to visit manufacturing employers throughout our State, I have been hearing about the same issues that my colleague from Delaware has heard; that is, that they are challenged in actually finding the right workforce for excellent-paying jobs and opportunities, but they need partnerships and help to get that trained workforce in place.

New Hampshire, similar to Delaware, has had some strong partnerships among the private sector and community colleges in my State, and we need to do more of that in the future. I believe our bill will allow those local education institutions to partner with private employers and State and local officials so the training is valuable and will ensure that everyone has a stake in the right workforce going forward.

I wish to thank some of the businesses I have had the privilege of visiting in our State. So many businesses have told me—whether it is Burndy in Littleton or Velero in Manchester or Codet in Colebrook or Hypertherm in the Upper Valley—that our private sector is focusing on this issue, and our Manufacturing Skills Act can help companies move forward and ensure that our workers have the right skills so we can grow jobs in this country.

I thank Senator COONS for his leadership on this issue and the work he has done every single day in this body to ensure that the people of Delaware have good-paying jobs and the right workforce training. This is a goal I share with the Senator from Delaware.

I wish to also thank him for his leadership on other issues, including the protection of this Nation and many other issues he has become an expert on in this body.

I hope we can all get behind bipartisan solutions, such as that offered by my colleague from Delaware, and I

hope many of our colleagues will think about joining us on this Manufacturing Skills Act. As we go into the new Congress, I hope this will be a priority for our leadership so we can bring this bill to the floor for a vote right away.

I thank the Presiding Officer, and I thank my colleague from Delaware for his leadership and work on this important issue. I look forward to continuing to work on this until we get it passed.

Mr. COONS. I yield the floor.

Mr. TESTER. Are we in a quorum call?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. We are not.

POSTAL SERVICE

Mr. TESTER. I wish to address the challenges we have at the Postal Service today.

There is an old saying that when you are in a hole, stop digging. Don't make things worse. Don't shoot yourself in the foot. It is actually quite simple advice that all of us need to follow.

Here in Congress we could apply it to a lot of different issues. Our budget and the immigration system come to mind. But that hole grows faster when two parties are digging. When you have two shovels, the walls become higher, the climb out becomes more difficult, and that is what is happening right now with the Postal Service.

On one side we have the Postmaster General and Postal Service leadership actively cutting services and mail delivery standards. They think they can cut their way to fiscal solvency, and quite frankly in this case they are wrong. The answer is not more cuts. In fact, if it wasn't for the prefunding requirement for retiree health benefits, the Postal Service would have made nearly \$1 billion in 2012.

Clearly, the Postal Service doesn't need to keep shutting down facilities and slowing down delivery. What the Postal Service does need is responsible reform legislation, and that is why I am here this afternoon.

All the Postal Service is doing with its shortsighted cuts is weakening trust in the Postal Service. Essentially, Postal Service leadership is cutting the legs out from underneath themselves. They are digging the hole deeper.

But Congress is in the hole with the Postmaster General. There are a lot of folks in Congress who would love to see the Postal Service go out of business, but the Postal Service, whether in urban America or rural America, delivers the goods America needs. It delivers medicine, newspapers, equipment, letters, and even election ballots. It is a critical part of our daily lives. But the Postal Service is preparing to end overnight delivery in all but a few American cities and close 82 mail processing facilities starting in January. These facilities route mail from New York to California, from Seattle to Sarasota, from a grandmother to her grandson.

When these facilities close or consolidate, it costs thousands of jobs, and more importantly it means mail goes to the remaining facilities and it means packages have to travel longer to get to where they are going. When that happens, more folks will not get the mail when they need it. It means more delayed credit card payments. It means more needed medicine sitting in a truck for another day. Come next election it might even mean lost ballots.

The Postal Service has already stopped overnight delivery in large parts of rural America. Even 2-day delivery is now hard to come by. If the Postal Service implements its new plan in January, that will be the case almost nationwide.

Congress has the power to stop these closures, and it would make sense to keep these facilities open while we work to reform the Postal Service in a way that treats its employees and its customers and the general public fairly. But in the Senate, and in the House, too many folks have their shovels out. So far the proposals coming out of this Congress fall far short of what is needed to put the Postal Service on sound financial footing.

We are here today to urge the House of Representatives and this body, the Senate, to include a provision in the government funding bill that will keep the processing facilities open. There is no point in closing mail processing facilities while Congress works on a comprehensive postal reform bill. I know we have trouble passing responsible legislation around here, I get that, but there is painstaking—and I do mean painstaking—work going on around here to pass a Postal Service reform bill.

The bill that passed the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee earlier this year needs work—serious work. It does not preserve strong rural mail standards. It is opposed by folks in rural America, by postal unions, and by mailers. Under the bill—except in the big cities—we can kiss 1-day delivery goodbye. With the cuts it proposes, the bill fundamentally prevents the Postal Service from performing its constitutional duty of keeping this Nation stitched together.

But along with other members of the committee, and some like-minded folks in the House, we are trying to find a way forward. We are trying to reform the Postal Service without putting the burden on rural America. A proposal I am working on will give the Postal Service the flexibility to raise new revenue while reducing the costly mandate to prefund retirement benefits. That requirement is swamping the agency's books.

Other Members of Congress are pushing to allow the Postal Service to continue its crusade against rural America. My effort, on the other hand, is a balanced solution that preserves strong rural mail standards while putting the Postal Service on the path to fiscal solvency.