

It is no wonder that veterans and providers alike turn their backs on the VA. The system is so complicated, it is impossible to get good health care.

It is time for the VA to implement one—one—non-VA care program for the future. As we now approach the end of this trial period for the 2-year Choice Program, the VA has to use this opportunity to finally get it right on non-VA care. It needs to design a new system that truly meets the needs of our veterans.

I believe that system must have five fundamental characteristics:

First of all, it has to be veteran-centered, with clear eligibility rules so veterans know what they can do and what they can expect and where they can go for what care and how that system works. It also means the experience for veterans trying to use the system has to improve. For example, veterans should never be turned away with a dismissive “We are not taking new patients.”

Secondly, it has to be easy for our providers, with simple and consistent procedures for them to deliver care, report back to the VA, and get reimbursed quickly. The contracting system needs to be simple and clear so that private providers can step in where the VA cannot.

Third, a new system must provide high-quality care that includes effective care coordination, and that requires that electronic medical records be returned to the VA. That includes oversight of the quality of care being delivered in the private sector. We have to know our veterans are being appropriately cared for.

Fourth, the new system has to be flexible enough to compensate for local needs, types of care where VA is deficient, or locations where the VA does not have a presence. Whether working with community providers to increase certain specialty appointments or seeing where the VA needs to move resources to hire more VA staff, the system has to maintain flexibility to adjust to new trends and new needs.

Finally, it has to be cost-effective for the VA and not shift the cost of care onto our veterans. Earlier this year, the VA nearly ran out of money, and they threatened to shut down the health care system. Well, we should invest whatever we need to to make sure our veterans are getting care. The new non-VA care system must be more efficient, and the VA needs to be clear with Congress about what it needs. Without a change, I would not be surprised if next year we don't find ourselves in the same position where we have underfunded the VA and need to come in and transfer funding to keep the VA operating. I will work with anyone and stand behind no one when it comes to getting veterans the funding they need.

Perhaps most important, when implementation begins, it simply must be better than what we saw with the Choice Program. VA staff have to be

trained and proficient, and third-party administrators in charge of the networks of private providers have to be efficient and responsive. Veterans deserve a system that works, not one that is torn apart and weakened over time.

So the answer isn't just to dismantle the VA and leave veterans to fend for themselves, as some proposals would do; the solution starts, finally, with a real conversation about what is going on at the VA, what the problems are, and then pursues an “all of the above” approach that finally strengthens the VA system, uses community providers to fill in the gaps where the VA cannot get the job done, and continues to make the best use of other Federal help programs, such as DOD and federally qualified health centers—all in an effort to truly build a veteran-centered VA health care system.

I stand ready to work with anyone to do this, and I hope my colleagues on both sides of the aisle will join me and not make this a Democratic or Republican issue. Veterans issues have never been partisan, and, in my mind, there is no place for that when we sit at the table to solve a complicated problem. I hope the administration is ready to fundamentally reshape this program. I hope bureaucrats who spend more time defending the broken system are ready to get to work implementing solutions built around the needs of our veterans. And I hope providers—those who work with the VA and DOD and TRICARE, as well as those who currently do not provide care to veterans—play a role to improve veteran care.

The wars may no longer lead the nightly news, but that doesn't mean the cost of these wars is gone too. Our veterans are still there, they still need health care and services, and we will not forget them.

I expect the VA to do better. Our veterans have already sacrificed so much. They should not have to come back and fight the VA to get the care they have earned. Let's act and let's do something that truly honors our Nation's heroes.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, I want to thank the Senator from Washington for her very thorough and passionate explanation of the problems with the VA. It is time we got it straightened out. We have a new director because there was a problem. We gave them more money because there was a problem. We did the Choice Act because there was a problem. I think the VA is kind of fighting the Choice Act because they want to make sure they keep it within their own clutches. But it is time that we got it straightened out and that we got some action.

All of us are getting calls from veterans we should never get. We could go into a variety of them. But I would like to work with the Senator, and I appreciate the comments she just made. I

thought they were very bipartisan and very much needed.

Mrs. MURRAY. I thank the Senator very much.

#### GROWTH IN FEDERAL REGULATIONS

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, it is often said that there are two constants in life—death and taxes—but I would like to add one more for your consideration: regulations. We often talk about the threat that America's growing debt poses to our economy and to our future, but the growth in Federal regulations also poses a serious threat to our Nation's long-term job creation and economic growth.

According to the Congressional Budget Office, or CBO, the potential growth rate of our economy—or the rate of growth that is possible given the education of our workers, the quality of capital equipment, and the business formation rate—averaged 3.3 percent for the period from 1950 through 2014. However, CBO expects that annual rate to fall 2.1 percent in the period of 2015 through 2025. That is a 36-percent reduction in the potential growth rate of the economy. Why is this so critical? According to the President's own Office of Management and Budget, a 1-percent increase in the economy's growth rate will yield more than \$400 billion in new revenues without raising taxes. Yes, that is according to the President's own Office of Management and Budget. A 1-percent increase in the economy's growth rate—we are talking about the private sector, not the government sector; the private sector is where the revenues come from—would yield more than \$400 billion in revenues without raising taxes.

We are always talking about the need for more revenues, but we are doing the opposite. The administration is doing the opposite of what it takes to get that growth to happen. When the growth rate falls, when we grow more slowly than we could and aren't meeting our full potential, government revenues also fail to keep up with budget projections. If we reduce by 1 percent, we lose another \$400 billion in revenues. So what happens when the government revenue comes up even shorter in the face of growing overspending? That results in more borrowing, and it results in bigger overspending and in expanded debt.

Senators from the Western States know all too well the economic effects of regulations coming out of bureaucracy-bloated agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency. Today I want to focus not just on the impact of recent regulations on my home State of Wyoming's economy but the drag they are creating on the economy nationwide. And at the same time, they are hiring ad agencies at billions of dollars to improve their image. They can improve their image just by doing their job without putting more burdens on the American people and eliminating jobs.

The State of Wyoming is the largest coal-producing State in the Nation. Coal represents almost 40 percent of our share of electricity generation across the United States. My county provides 40 percent of all of the coal in the United States. It is abundant, it is affordable, and it is stockpilable. It is the only energy that is stockpilable. This is an energy source which has the potential to power our country for hundreds of years, to support jobs for thousands of people, and doesn't put us at the mercy of unstable regimes overseas, but this administration continues to denigrate and regulate coal out of existence.

Since 2012, two EPA rules—the mercury and air toxic standards rule and the ozone rule—are estimated to have cost in the tens of billions of dollars.

Let me talk just about the mercury and air toxic standards. That is supposed to help save, with benefits—without seeing any scientific evidence where these benefits come from—over a period of years, maybe \$500 million. What is the cost? The cost is \$73 billion a year. Why would anyone go for that small of a benefit at that big of a cost?

We are an inventive country. If we put incentives of just a couple billion dollars out there, people will solve the problem and get those benefits permanently for a very small number, not \$43 billion to \$73 billion a year. Those two rules don't include the billions of dollars lost to thousands more rules imposed by the EPA and other agencies every year.

If all those rules weren't onerous enough, in August the EPA doubled down on its war on coal when it released the final rule on the Clean Power Plan. With an estimated price tag of at least \$366 billion, this rule will not only devastate the coal industry by mandating unrealistic carbon reductions, it will also distress American families by causing double-digit electric rate increases in more than 40 States.

The coal industry in Wyoming is feeling the impact. The coal industry and businesses and the people who work there and rely on it are facing higher regulatory costs at the same time as energy producers are seeing a tougher market than they have in years. This is a bad combination for economic growth and job creation. At the end of July, Wyoming had 15 percent fewer energy industry jobs than it did a year earlier, and these are good-paying jobs. That is according to the U.S. Department of Labor and Bureau of Labor Statistics. Most of those lost jobs are in coal, oil, and gas, and the businesses that rely on them. We forget about that ripple effect. Given that close to half of Wyoming's GDP comes from this sector, and that nearly half of our State is federally owned and much is removed from development activity, we have always been concerned about any unnecessary government intrusion in our economic livelihood.

Why do we provide 40 percent of the Nation's coal? It is because it is a

cleaner coal, lower in sulfur and other chemicals, than any other State in the Nation. We ship coal to other coal States so they can mix it with their coal to meet the clean air standards. But that is not good enough.

The economic impact of the EPA and other Federal regulations is not just hurting Wyoming's economy and costing my State jobs. They are a major reason why the economy nationwide is not operating at its full potential for economic growth, and it has been stuck around 2 percent since the beginning of the so-called economic recovery. We are doing it to ourselves. Remember, a 1-percent reduction in the gross national product is \$400 billion less in taxes.

The onslaught of Federal regulations targeted directly at the coal industry are not just concerns; they are real threats to people's economic livelihood—the ability to support their families, the ability to support education in most of these States, and the ability to support entire communities across the country. With our \$18 trillion in debt, we can't afford to accept the notion that we are in what some are calling a new normal of economic anemic growth. We need to help our economy reach its potential, which will help each and every American. This cannot be done if the number and cost of significant Federal regulations continues to rise.

The Obama administration continues to push Federal regulations, such as the waters of the United States rule, which significantly expands Federal authority under the Clean Water Act. That rule has been taken to three courts already, and in each of those cases, it has been ruled illegal.

They are still pursuing other avenues. The recent National Labor Relations Board rulemaking redefined the meaning of an employer.

These regulations, taken by themselves, have the potential to impose billions of dollars in economic costs—on family farms, ranches, and particularly small businesses—which hinder the growth of America's entrepreneurial spirit, not to mention the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. It sounds like a great entity, but in banks alone, they have had to hire twice as many people to do paperwork as they used to have to have, just to keep from getting fined by an agency that has no control. I tried to get an inspector general to be over the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. After we got him, he said: You know, I don't have any authority to look at any of this stuff.

Where are the fines going?

We don't know. We are not allowed to see that.

That is because they get their money from the Federal Reserve before the money from the Federal Reserve comes from the U.S. Government. We shouldn't have anything as out of control as that.

I was meeting with some community bankers. I said: Well, my wife is kind of

interested in expanding our kitchen in Gillette, and I was thinking maybe we ought to get a loan and do that. The house is all paid for. I was wondering how long it would take.

They said: Well, about 78 days, and then you get 1 week. In case you don't like the deal you made, you can rescind it. I remember the last time we needed to do something in the house before it was paid for. I had to get a second mortgage, and I got it in a matter of a couple of days. They could just write the check so I could go ahead and do it. Now it is 78 days plus another week. That is what government regulations are doing. That doesn't speed up the economy. There isn't a contractor that can go to work until they get an assurance of being paid.

Over the next few months and weeks, I am going to share with my colleagues new information from leading economists that shows there is a real relationship between the growth of regulations and our struggling economy. This is a relationship that is clear to the people who experience the difficulties of complying with more and more regulations that make it harder to succeed. I hope that what is clear to business owners, to their employees, and to the communities across the country can be understood here in Washington.

I will share new statistics and data showing the lost income and jobs due to Federal regulations, the effects of regulation on key industries, the breakdown of how specific Federal agencies are impacting our economy, and the regulatory burden the Federal Government has placed on hard-working Americans in economic sectors in every State. It is crucial for lawmakers and hard-working Americans to understand the true cost of the regulations that are being issued by this administration. Shining a light on these regulations and the burden they impose on each and every American is the only way to hold government accountable and to begin the process of reining in out-of-control agencies so we can halt the flood of regulations choking our economy.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Hampshire.

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#### MIDDLE EAST REFUGEE CRISIS AND UKRAINE

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, 2 weeks ago, I left for Greece with a Senate delegation that included DICK DURBIN from Illinois, AMY KLOBUCHAR from Minnesota, and ELIZABETH WARREN from Massachusetts. In my capacity as lead Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Europe and Regional Security Cooperation, I was honored to head our delegation. We were there to witness firsthand the plight of refugees arriving by sea on the island of Lesbos. In Greece and later in Germany, we received in-depth