

Major power companies in Illinois, Maryland, and Massachusetts are already proposing plans to give their customers tens of millions of dollars in relief by lowering the rates they charge for energy. And get this: According to CNBC, a South Carolina electric and gas utility is planning to give a cash payment directly to its customers, averaging \$1,000 per household. More are following suit. In Montana, Louisiana, and Indiana, regulators are already working with utilities to determine how households will benefit from the tax savings. In my own State of Kentucky, the Public Service Commission directed a number of the electric, gas, and water companies to track their savings and make plans to cut rates for consumers.

As any mother or father who has to balance a checkbook and pay bills every month can attest, this is welcome news for middle-class families. These reductions will be especially helpful to the most vulnerable in our society.

According to data from the Department of Health and Human Services, energy costs eat up a significantly higher percentage of household income for poor families than for other families. In other words, for a software engineer in Silicon Valley, a lower heating or air conditioning bill may go unnoticed, but for workers who clean that office overnight, this relief will make a real difference.

A drop in utility bills effectively amounts to progressive tax relief. This is just another example of how the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act is rapidly proving to be a serious asset to poor and middle-class families—precisely the people whom my Democratic friends in the House and Senate loudly claimed would get nothing at all from this bill.

It has been 3 weeks—3 weeks—lower utility bills, 1 million special tax reform bonuses and pay raises, and this is only the beginning.

A Republican majority in the House and a Republican majority in the Senate and President Trump listened to the facts instead of the political spin. I am proud that we passed this historic bill and gave families across America the tax relief they have waited decades to receive.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. COTTON). Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The Democratic leader is recognized.

FUNDING THE GOVERNMENT

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, we have barely over a week to negotiate a broad package of must-pass items, including an extension of government funding, a deal to lift the spending caps

for both defense and urgent domestic priorities, a healthcare package, disaster aid, an agreement to protect the Dreamers, and to provide additional border security.

The path forward on some of these issues is very clear. There are significant bipartisan majorities that would vote to extend CHIP, or the Children's Health Insurance Program, and community health centers. There seems to be a growing consensus on how we can pass the 702 FISA Court program.

I am also confident that we could assemble a disaster aid package that addresses the needs of all of the States and Territories—Texas, Florida, Louisiana, California, the Western States that have been plagued by fires, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands—as well as modifying what the Forest Service does so they don't spend all of their money simply fighting forest fires and not do the job they are intended to do, which is to prevent future forest fires by careful forestry programs.

Even where the path is murkier, the outlines of a deal exist. If we don't lift the spending caps in short order, the sharp ax of sequestration will fall on the military side of the budget and on the domestic side of the budget. That is a scenario everyone wants to avoid.

The majority leader continues to insist that we should raise the budget caps unequally, sparing our military but not critical domestic programs that create jobs, grow our economy, and help the middle class. We Democrats believe we absolutely must provide the resources our men and women overseas need to protect our country. We believe that strongly, but we also know that there are many important issues here at home—combating the opioid crisis, improving veterans' healthcare, shoring up pensions for millions of hard-working Americans who are approaching retirement, and dealing with rural development and rural broadband. These items are all crucial to the middle class.

The deadly scourge of opioid addiction has contributed to the first consecutive-year decline in life expectancy in the great United States of America since the early 1960s. That is an astounding and alarming fact that should rouse everyone in this Chamber to action. It is not occurring in most of our Western country allies.

Some of our veterans have been waiting in line for healthcare at veterans hospitals for over a year. These men and women served our country bravely. We have a solemn responsibility to serve them when they come home, and we are not living up to that responsibility right now.

Over a million Americans paid into pension plans with the expectation that they could retire with basic dignity. For so many of them—teamsters, miners, food workers—pensions have fallen short, and a lifetime of careful savings may be ripped away from pensioners at the last moment. We could

make progress on each of these issues through a budget that lifts the spending caps equally for defense and non-defense.

The Republican majority, which conveniently forgot its long history of opposing deficits when passing a \$1.5 trillion tax bill, cannot, in good conscience, turn around and complain about deficits here. So let's make the investments we all know are essential in both our military and in our middle class.

Even on the most challenging issue we face, the fate of the Dreamers, there appears to be a path forward. Yesterday's immigration meeting at the White House was encouraging for two reasons. First, practically everyone at the table—including some of the most conservative voices on immigration, like the Senator from Iowa—agreed that we must resolve the future of Dreamers by passing DACA protections into law. That is a very positive development.

Second, President Trump appeared to endorse a narrow deal to protect the Dreamers, leaving the thornier issues for a later debate on comprehensive immigration reform—a debate that, personally, I would welcome, the sooner the better.

But first, we have to do this narrow deal. President Trump also backed off his demand that a DACA deal include an expensive and ineffective border wall across the entire length of the southern border. Of course, the devil is in the details. We Democrats have repeated time and again that we are ready, willing, and eager to support an effective, practical border security measure in a deal that enshrines DACA into law. The President yesterday seemed to agree with that. We agree with that. For these reasons, the meeting was encouraging.

Last night, a Federal judge ruled against the Trump administration's handling of the termination of the DACA Program. Let me be very clear. The ruling last night in no way diminishes the urgency of resolving the DACA issue. On this we agree with the White House, which says the ruling doesn't do anything to reduce Congress's obligation to address this problem now. A court case, of course, is no guarantee of lasting security. A higher court can quickly overturn it. Unsurprisingly, the Department of Justice responded to the ruling last night by saying that it "will continue to vigorously defend [this] position, and looks forward to vindicating its position in further legislation." So the fact remains that the only way to guarantee the legal status for Dreamers is to pass DACA protections into law and to do it now. For that reason, a resolution to the DACA issue must be part of a global deal on the budget.

We cannot tolerate delay. Delay is a tactic employed by those who do not wish to see a deal. Let me just say, promises that maybe in the future we will do it—particularly on immigration—have vanished by the wayside.

Unless DACA is on a must-pass deal—a must-pass bill—in terms of a global agreement, people are rightfully skeptical that it will ever happen. Somehow, somewhere, someone will say: I can't do it.

Let's not forget that the House has been a graveyard even for immigration proposals that have had bipartisan consensus here in the Senate. So it must be on a must-pass bill. Otherwise, we are not going to get it.

Congressional negotiators and the valiant group here in the Senate led by Senators DURBIN and GRAHAM are focused on this issue right now. The meeting they had yesterday—I talked to both Senators DURBIN and GRAHAM last night and this morning—provides a clearer picture of the parameters of the deal. The iron is hot. We should strike now. Delay will snuff out the hope of getting an agreement that both sides can live with. Let us press forward. Each side is going to have to give.

I am confident, though, that both sides can come to an agreement on border security. I am convinced now both sides want to find a consensus on DACA. Some will support a deal enthusiastically, others reluctantly, but, nonetheless, an agreement is within reach. We ought to get it done through the Senate, through the House, and onto the President's desk for signature now. So let's get the job done.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

#### ISSUES BEFORE THE SENATE

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, here we are at the start of a new year. Last year, the Republican majority decided to dedicate the year to government by and for the powerful and the privileged, but how about this year, 2018? We pay attention to our Constitution, which starts with that vision of government, not for the powerful, not for the rich, not for the privileged, not for the well connected, not for the wealthy but for the people of the United States. It is a vision where power is distributed, and power comes up from each individual citizen to create policies for their general welfare.

Last year, we saw this complete dedication to trying to wipe out healthcare for 20 million to 30 million Americans in order to provide tax benefits for the richest. How big were those tax benefits? Well, if you add up the provisions that are dedicated to the powerful corporations and those benefits for the wealthiest 10 percent, and most of that goes to the wealthiest 1 percent, those provisions stack up to over \$2 trillion—\$2 trillion.

It is very hard to get your hands around \$2 trillion. Those are not numbers we use in ordinary conversation. Let's take that down to the amount of money per man, woman, and child—per citizen in America. Well, that is about \$6,000—\$6,000 taken from the community funds for every man, woman, and child in America to deliver to the wealthiest Americans. That was gov-

ernment by the Republican majority in 2017. It was not "We the People" but we the powerful and we the privileged.

How about we have a new year's resolution that pays attention to the vision of our Constitution, to that vision of government of, by, and for the people?

Ben Franklin once wrote in his "Poor Richard's Almanac":

Be at war with your vices,  
At peace with your neighbors,  
And let every New Year find you a better man.

Every new year is a chance to recreate and envision where we are headed. Certainly, it is a big vice to use this Chamber, in contravention of our Constitution, to pursue policies for the powerful and privileged rather than for the people. So let's set that vice aside and have a bipartisan year, dedicated to making a foundation for families to thrive and jobs and education and healthcare and a healthier planet.

Right now, we should have an immediate new year's checklist of things to get done, and that checklist starts with the budget. We have just 9 days until funding runs out for the Federal Government, and we all know from experience what that means—parks shut down, medical research stops, passports don't get processed, and businesses can't check in on their I-9 applications for employees. That is the type of conduct that happens in banana republics—basically, in countries that don't have a competent system of government. It should not happen in the United States of America.

We are deep into the financial year, which started on October 1. October passed. November passed. December passed. We are well into January and still the majority leadership of this body is unable to put together a process that addresses just key, fundamental issues. Why is that? Because they were so distracted by delivering trillions of dollars to the richest of Americans and trying to destroy healthcare for millions of Americans that they didn't tend to the fundamentals that need to be tended to. Let's take care of those things now.

The Children's Health Insurance Program. Here we are. It expired on September 30 of last year. Nine million children across America depend on this insurance. This insurance was crafted in a bipartisan manner. It was forged in an agreement between Senator HATCH, a Republican, and Senator KENNEDY, a Democrat, who had very different visions of America but who could agree that families who didn't qualify for Medicaid and weren't affluent enough to buy insurance for their children could still have insurance for their children. These are the working poor of America, the struggling workers of America.

It was forged in a bipartisan manner, but this year my Republican colleagues decided to make these children a bargaining chip for their effort to get more for the privileged and the powerful. That has to end.

When children do not have insurance, they don't get that dental benefit to take care of those cavities. They don't get that medical exam. They don't get those inoculations, those vaccinations. They don't get treatment when they are injured because their parents can't afford to take them to the doctor. They don't get treatment when they are sick for the same reason. Let's take care of children's healthcare.

This is not a partisan issue. It was forged in a bipartisan manner, and it should be so today.

What also expired on September 30 of last year was the legislation authorizing support for our community health clinics. Community health clinics are the front door to healthcare for millions of Americans. It is that friendly place in your rural community, in your urban neighborhood, where you can go through the front door and get assistance.

Talking about millions of Americans who go through those front doors, there are more than 1,400 clinics across the country. These are popular in rural areas. They are popular in urban areas. They are popular in red States. They are popular in blue States. There is nothing partisan about it, but the leadership of this body has no interest, has seen no urgency in reauthorizing the ability for those health centers to stay open.

In Oregon we saw, as a result of the Affordable Care Act, 30 more health clinics established. We saw a lot more resources go into both mental illness and into drug abuse during a period in which the opioid crisis joined the meth crisis and afflicted both rural and urban areas. Lots of folks come to this floor and say: We have to take on opioids. It is not just on the left-hand side of the aisle, but it is also on the right-hand side of the aisle. People base virtually their entire campaigns on taking on opioids. Yet the Republican leadership says this isn't important. Let me tell you, this is important, and we need to get it done.

Then let's turn to the Dream Act. Dreamers are those children raised in our communities, now 16 through their midtwenties. They are productive members of our communities. They have gone through our high schools or are in high school now. They are in college. They are working. They are contributing. They know no other country than ours.

Across both sides of the aisle we hear folks say: We want to take care of them and establish a structure for this, a legal structure for the Dreamers.

The President yesterday hosted a bipartisan conversation at the White House to say: Let's get this done. He expressed his support. In fact, everyone in the room expressed support for getting this done.

Each one of these—the budget, the children's healthcare, the health centers, the Dream Act—are bipartisan efforts. These are things that should have been addressed long ago if my Republican colleagues instead weren't so